LOUIS ARAGON: THE NOVEL AND POLITICAL COMMITMENT

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ABSTRACT

The problem of the tripartite relationship between the F. C. P., the Soviet Union and the individual communist writer is treated in this thesis. Considering that Louis Aragon spent nearly half a century in the service of a revolutionary cause, accepted social realism, the official aesthetic doctrine of the communist movement, and wrote a number of novels under its influence, the thesis focuses on the relationship between Aragon's literary and political activities. It attempts to show that the historical context, the influence of contemporary historical events and the pressure of politics led Aragon to an unconditional commitment to Marxist ideology which in turn led him into the Stalinist phase of international communism.

Since the private existence of a communist writer cannot be wholly dissociated from his public figure it is plain that the distinction between "life" and "literature" becomes untenable. Therefore, instead of beginning the study with a brief biographical sketch and thereafter concentrating on a purely literary analysis of Aragon's work, the thesis attempts to consider simultaneously each work and the historical and biographical circumstances in which it was written.

A body of literature pertaining to the subject has been investigated: memoirs, articles, reports, historical studies, etc., the main emphasis, however, is on the works of the author himself, of those of his wife, Elsa Triolet and of his former friends and collaborators most of whom have left the ranks of the F. C. P. As far as possible care has been taken to avoid conclusions based on hostile publication, such as those of the extreme right.

The study shows that Aragon passed through important stages in his development; the transformation of the youthful surrealist into the Marxist writer and his subsequent political and organizational involvements; the decisive plunge into party affairs in the thirties and the forties when he distinguished himself for his unflinching orthodoxy. The study further shows an evolutionary movement from total and unconditional support of Soviet policy and the prevalent party line to gradual disengagement until the moment when Aragon took a decisive stand against party dogmatism as well as against the tenets of the socialist realist doctrine. Despite Aragon's disillusionment with the Stalinist phase of communism, changing policies in the party enabled him to retain both his Party membership and the right to pursue his own policy in his review, Les Lettres Françaises. The demise of this review dealt the final blow which explains the deep pessimism of his latest writings.

Aragon is an unusually difficult writer to assess and to explain. His life and his works are closely intertwined and much of his work is important for a deeper understanding of political and cultural currents in twentieth century France.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A.E.A.R.	Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires.
C. du C.	Cahiers du Communisme.
C.N.E.	Comité National des Ecrivains.
C.P.S.U.	Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
F.C.P.	French Communist Party.
L.F.	Les Lettres Françaises.
N.R.F.	La Nouvelle Revue Française.
T.M.	Les Temps Modernes.
O.C.	Oeuvres romanesques croisées d'Elsa Triolet et Aragon.
O.P.	L'Oeuvre poétique.
P.C.F.	Parti Communiste Français.
R.A.P.P.	Russian Association of Proletarian Writers.

Note: The Library of Congress table is used for transliteration of original Russian texts.

FOREWORD

Certain writers seem to be mysteriously attracted to a country other than their own. Stendhal's attachment to Italy, the fascination exercised on André Gide by Africa, the influence of Germany on the writings of Mme de Stael, Diderot's and Voltaire's interest in Russia: all these are literary history. In our time the Soviet Union has cast a spell on some, ever since the birth, out of the former Russian Empire, of the first socialist state in November 1917, with the subsequent formation of communist parties in various countries of the world.

Among contemporary French writers whose fortunes have been closely linked with the Soviet state, Louis Aragon is perhaps the best known. A member of the French Communist Party since January 1927 and a candidate member of its Central Committee since 1950,[1] Aragon, the party's most outstanding literary figure, was, until the late sixties, not only the foremost propagandist for his party's literary policies, but also its chief link with Soviet literary circles.

The number of studies devoted to Aragon's work is already considerable. Some critics have tried to give a

[1]Aragon became permanent member of the Central Committee in 1954.

general view of his output, others have discussed only a particular facet of it: for example, its surrealist aspects, its love themes, or its style. Yet, despite Aragon's political activity, comparatively little attention has so far been given to his political commitment and its influence on his imaginative writings.

Certainly, there are many valid critical approaches to Aragon's work, but it seems to us that no matter which one is chosen, it is well nigh impossible to discuss adequately its literary aspects while still ignoring the author's political activity. The reason is simply that, as a member of the F.C.P. Aragon was obliged to adhere to its literary policies. What is more, for three decades Aragon himself refused to make a distinction between his political activity and his creative work. In 1946, in a speech delivered on the 45th anniversary of Zola's death, he declared: "pour moi, il n'y a pas l'écrivain d'une part, et d'autre part, le politique. C'est un seul homme."[2] It is only in statements of later years, when, after Stalin's demise and subsequent events, Aragon tried to dissociate himself from Stalinism, that we encounter such declarations as: "On s'est beaucoup trompé sur moi. Je ne suis pas, à aucun moment de ma vie je n'ai été un homme politique; je suis d'abord un écrivain qui a été amené à penser politique-

[2] Louis Aragon, "Actualité de Zola," Les Lettres Françaises, 4 Oct. 1946, p. 3. See also: Louis Aragon, "L'exemple d'Emile Zola," in La culture et les hommes (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1947).

ment."[3] For, in spite of the occasional such statement, the very fact that Aragon belonged to the higher echelons of the F.C.P. made it necessary that his literary output be oriented in the direction of Marxist ideology. In other words, one must expect to find that Aragon was, for the most part, the champion of his party's policies, not the least of which was the literary doctrine of socialist realism.

From the very beginning of socialist realism, Aragon proclaimed himself a socialist realist writer. Even after Stalin's death, and notwithstanding some important revisions of the basic principles of the doctrine, he stubbornly declared his continued adherence to it. This insistence on saving face invites an examination of his novels from the point of view of socialist aesthetics.

Because the doctrine was first elaborated in the Soviet Union and only subsequently adopted by communist writers in other countries, our analysis of Aragon's commitment would not be complete without reference to Soviet literary policies and to the close links which the F.C.P. maintained with the Soviet state. This tripartite relationship between the party, the Soviet Union and the individual communist writer has already been mentioned, with reference to Aragon's Le Monde Réel, by Pierre Daix: "il existe la liaison entre ces ouvrages et l'effort de la littérature soviétique, la concordance avec une direction

[3] Claude Sarraute, "Propos sur 'Les Poètes,'" Le Monde, 15 Oct. 1960.

permanente de l'action du P.C.F. auprès des écrivains."[4] It is clear that any critic of Aragon's work must keep in mind the historical context in which it was written and, above all perhaps, take into account the shifts in the party line. Aragon himself was conscious of the influence on him of contemporary historical events. "Les hommes croient inventer seuls leur pensée," he wrote. "Ils ignorent le plus souvent que ce qui soulève leur coeur, ce qui les entraîne dépend moins de leurs goûts, de leurs tendances personnelles, que de ce climat social où ils ne peuvent s'isoler."[5]

The purpose of this essay is, then, to situate Aragon's novels in the historical context in which they were written, and to attempt to show how historical events, the policies of the Soviet state and those of the F.C.P. have influenced his imaginative writing. Our study makes no claim to be either a definitive or an exhaustive analysis, especially since some important documents--the minutes of party meetings, Aragon's and his wife's memoirs and diaries, as well as their correspondence--are for the most part inaccessible to researchers. Furthermore, notwithstanding a number of recent critical studies on the author we know little about Aragon's life and even less about his intimate

[4]Pierre Daix, "Une domestication des écrivains d'aujourd'hui," L.L.F., 8 September, 1949, p. 3. Pierre Daix, a former communist and Aragon's collaborator on L.L.F.

[5] Louis Aragon, Littératures soviétiques (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1955), p. 219.

thoughts. Most of the available information has had to be gleaned from Aragon's published work, where the frequent use of masks, mirrors, and "hommes doubles" indicates the probable existence of discrepancies or at least divergences, between the author's public statements and his private convictions. The reader of Aragon's work must thread his way through a labyrinth of ambiguity.

It goes without saying that Aragon's literary output is the product of more than his Marxist conception of the world. His middle class background, his childhood, which witnessed a number of traumatic personal experiences, his artistic and psychological make-up: all these things played a part in the formation of his sensibility. Nevertheless, we hope that this essay, which focuses on the relation between his literary and his political activities, will contribute in some measure to the understanding of Aragon's work.

The study follows the course of Aragon's life from the moment of his adherence to the F.C.P. in 1927 up to January 1976, and concentrates mostly on his novels.

INTRODUCTION

> . . . Ce n'est pas dans les cendres du temps,
> mais dans les dangereuses flammes de l'événement
> que naissent les images valables de l'homme,
> dût celui qui a l'audace de les y arracher s'en
> brûler affreusement les mains . . .
>
> Oeuvres romanesques croisées
> d'Elsa Triolet et Aragon

"Un créateur ne s'évade pas de lui-même, quoi qu'il fasse."[1] This statement, penned by Elsa Triolet, Aragon's wife, is particularly true of her husband, who consciously gave personal experience a central role in his literary work. "Et je peux bien raconter l'histoire d'autrui, c'est toujours la mienne," he wrote.[2] In Aragon's case, this personal experience included an unconditional commitment to Marxist ideology and led him into the tragic Stalinist phase of international communism with its unfortunate legacy of bitterness and despair. For over twenty years, Aragon promoted Stalinist policies and glorified the Soviet state. As a follower of his party's communist aesthetics he became the champion of socialist realism and wrote a number of novels under its influence. When the Stalin myth began to crumble, Aragon's attitude too started to change, but this slow change was not immediately apparent because of Aragon's continuing loyalty

[1] Elsa Triolet, La Mise en mots (Geneva: Albert Skira, 1969), p. 89.

[2] Louis Aragon, Théâtre/Roman (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 28.

to the Soviet Union and to the F.C.P. It was only in the sixties, after a long series of painful episodes had proved irrefutably the real character of the Soviet regime, that Aragon finally and reluctantly abandoned his pro-Soviet position and began to point out the shortcomings and injustices of the existing regime. This change in attitude and position towards the Soviet Union was accompanied by a reappraisal of the concept of socialist realism and led finally to Aragon's renunciation of the Soviet doctrine.

Any attempt to establish definite dividing lines between the various phases of Aragon's career is, to a certain extent, arbitrary. However, for the purposes of analysis we will do so, because this division may help, we believe, to appreciate more clearly the consistency of Aragon's work.

There have been four broad periods in the author's evolution since his adherence to the F.C.P. The first period spans the years 1927-1932 and includes four major events: Aragon's adherence to the party in 1927, his trip to the Soviet Union in the fall of 1930, his final break with the surrealist group in 1932, and his subsequent indoctrination in the Soviet Union. Although Aragon joined the party at the beginning of 1927, for nearly five years his participation in party activities was marginal and intermittent. Following his first trip to the U.S.S.R., Aragon tried to reconcile the two mutually exclusive ideologies of Marxism and liberal democracy and the equally dissimilar

aesthetics of socialist realism and surrealism. When the party increased its pressure, Aragon realized that reconciliation was not possible and he opted for communism. His second trip and his work in the Soviet Union completed his integration into the F.C.P.

The year 1933 marks the beginning of the second period, which can be called the Stalinist period, and which lasted until Stalin's death in March 1953. This period included many major events in French and world history and can be subdivided into three parts. The second half of the thirties saw the interlude of the Popular Front, the Spanish Civil War and the growing menace of fascism. 1939 and the early forties brought the "Phony war"[3] and the defeat and occupation of France, all traumatic experiences for Aragon. Then came the years of the Resistance, an exhilarating time for Aragon. Years later, Elsa wrote: "La résistance et la libération brillent dans notre passé, parées de ce que l'homme a de meilleur en lui, de ce qui nous porte vers l'homme de l'avenir."[4] The post-war period saw a growing disenchantment. During the war, any future for France had seemed impossible without the participation in the government of the communist party--"le parti des fusillés," and, indeed, after the Liberation, the F.C.P. took its place in

[3] The name given to the period extending from the moment of the declaration of war until the German attack on France: September 1939-May 1940.

[4] Oeuvres romanesques croisées d'Elsa Triolet et Aragon, XXII (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1966), p. 141.

the government of the nation. However, its cooperation with other political parties did not stand up to the pressure of events. The exclusion of communist parliamentarians from the government was followed by a period of isolation of the F.C.P. and of extreme hostility towards its cause on the part of the public. It was during this second period that Aragon wrote all his socialist realist novels. The first three novels of Le Monde Réel,--Les Cloches de Bâle, Les Beaux Quartiers and Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale--were written before the war;[5] Aurélien, written during the war, was published only in 1944, and the last novel of this series, Les Communistes, was written after the war, when Zhdanovism was at its height. Zhdanovism in literature was characterised by a sterile dogmatism and a suspicion of experimentation. It demanded, moreover, an unrestrained glorification of the party and the Soviet Union, as well as an expression of hatred of all the enemies of communism.

The second period also had some tragic consequences for Aragon. When, in 1946, Zhdanov reiterated the principle of "partiïnost'"[6] in literature and denounced apolitical, cosmopolitan and bourgeois nationalist writers, Aragon, who was the most influential literary figure in the F.C.P., played a decisive part in the implementation of the literary policy laid down by the party. Together with

[5] Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale was completed just as the war broke out.

[6] See p. 189.

Kanapa, Casanova and other high-ranking party officials, he was responsible for implementing stiff intellectual and artistic regimentation. In the later phase of Stalinism, it was not enough for members to admit and to justify the crimes of Stalin on the grounds of "historical necessity"--one had to believe in the infallibility of the Stalinist line and the party used Aragon's polemical skill to convince the public. When other intellectuals refused to co-operate, the F.C.P. entrusted Aragon with the task of propagandizing the party's position, as in the case of the Lysenko affair.[7] The Lysenko affair demonstrated how the party used the author as "une bonne à tout faire," as Edgar Morin expressed it,[8] and it showed the absence of scruples on Aragon's part. This page in Aragon's career earned him many another unflattering epithet as well.

The decade following Stalin's death can be regarded as a transitional period in the author's evolution. Although Aragon's attitude shifted from year to year, a clearly defined development can be discerned over the whole period, as Aragon moved from his early confusion to a later attempt at disengagement. Destalinization, which had started in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death, did not gather momentum

[7] Lysenko, a Soviet biologist, developed a theory about the transmittance of acquired characteristics, which was questioned in Western scientific circles, and which was later condemned by Soviet authorities themselves.

[8] Edgar Morin, Autocritique (Paris: Aux Editions du Seuil, 1965), p. 112.

in the F.C.P. until some time after the Twentieth congress in 1956. Aragon's first reaction to destalinization was to join dogmatic traditionalists within the party, who for several years refused to accept any liberalizing trend; later, however, he showed an unmistakable desire to extricate himself from this dogmatic position.

The process of disengagement began around 1955 when a certain ambivalence became noticeable in Aragon's attitude towards the official party line in literature. Thus, certain passages by Aragon in Littératures soviétiques indicate that, despite this book's conformity to ideological requirements, Aragon was moving from compulsory socialist realism towards more liberal trends in literature. Then came the Twentieth congress, with its revelations about the Soviet regime, closely followed by the uprisings in Poland and Hungary. The disillusionment which accompanied these events led to the publication of Aragon's autobiographical poem Le Roman inachevé. It seems that at this point the author became concerned with the future fate of his imaginative writings and the image which posterity was to retain of their creator. The evidence suggests that he decided that this image would be better served if he presented himself as a living symbol of fidelity: fidelity in love, fidelity to his party, fidelity to the Soviet Union. This last feature became exceptionally apparent when Aragon came forward to defend the Soviet system in his Histoire de l'U.R.S.S. (1962).

A corollary of the events which took place in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death was the disrepute into which the socialist realist doctrine fell even within the Soviet orbit. The trend towards artistic freedom was, for a time, even encouraged by Soviet authorities, and the rules of socialist realism were somewhat neglected in literary works. As a result, Aragon first wrote La Semaine Sainte, then, in his collection of speeches, published under the title J'abats mon jeu, he took the offensive by attacking the dogmatism of the F.C.P., as well as the tenets of the socialist realist doctrine, which he had only recently promoted. This period also witnessed the high point of Aragon's career. In 1957, on the occasion of his 60th birthday he was awarded the Lenin prize for peace. (This prize was, by the way, regarded by some as the reward for Aragon's unconditional support of Soviet intervention in Hungary).

The fourth period opened with Aragon's endorsement of Roger Garaudy's essay D'un réalisme sans rivages, which was published in 1963 and which represented, among other things, a clear repudiation of the doctrine of socialist realism. From this time onwards, Aragon tried to undo what he now felt was the harm he had perpetrated in the past. He rewrote Les Communistes, his most outspoken socialist realist novel, removing from it all passages dealing with events his interpretation of which was now proven to be wrong, as well as those passages which had damaged his

reputation. With Elsa Triolet, he published their Oeuvres romanesques croisées wherein he presented his imaginative writings as a harmonious entity. In addition, he put out articles and essays in which he stressed the unpremeditated character of his writings and, as evidence of his change of heart, he wrote a number of novels in a style reminiscent of his surrealist days.

This period also saw the gradual worsening of Aragon's relationship with the Soviet Union. The tension caused by his defence of certain victims of the Soviet regime--Siniavski, Daniel and Solzhenitsyn, for example--culminated in an open break after the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the consequences thereof. This split with the Soviet Union, and the deteriorating position of international communism as the result of inner strife within the communist camp, had an adverse effect on Aragon personally, greatly diminishing as it did his influence and prestige. His recent novels contain an examination of his past and a reappraisal of his political and aesthetic views. Extremely bitter, they testify to the errors of unconditional commitment and they carry a tragic warning to Aragon's reading public.

PART ONE

THE LURE OF THE EAST

CHAPTER 1

INITIATION

> L'état de communiste n'est pas un effet de naissance comme d'être femme, bossu ou "Poissons". On le devient.
>
> A. Kriegel: Le Parti Communiste français

Nothing in Aragon's early writings indicates that he took much notice of the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia. According to his own account he was first drawn to communism in the early twenties and along with André Breton attempted to join the French Communist Party immediately after its formation in December 1920. This attempt seems to have been motivated by emotional rather than ideological considerations, for Aragon admitted that what characterized him at that time was "une parfaite absence de connaissances politiques."[1] Recollecting the emotion caused in him by the appearance of Clara Zetkin at the Tours Congress of 1920, he wrote:

> Cependant, au milieu du brouillard d'idéologies et de contradictions où nous nous débattions, de Dada au surréalisme, il fallait des années pour que la conscience me vînt, et à la plupart de mes amis, que ce n'était pas là simple affaire d'exaltation, mais une part de notre tâche propre d'écrivains que de travailler à renverser ce monde qui nous révoltait.[2]

[1] Aragon parle avec Dominique Arban (Paris: Seghers, 1968), p. 42.

[2] Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste (Paris: Editions Denoël et Steele, 1935), p. 50.

Even at a later date his ideological position was not clear-cut. On the one hand, he favoured the revolution--"nous sommes bien décidés à faire une Révolution--";[3] on the other hand, he exhibited a negative attitude towards the Soviet Union. In November 1924, he declared to Bernier, one of the collaborators of Clarté:

> La révolution russe, vous ne m'empêcherez pas de hausser les épaules. A l'échelle des idées, c'est au plus une vague crise ministérielle. . . . Je tiens à répéter dans Clarté même que les problèmes posés par l'existence humaine ne relèvent pas de la misérable petite activité révolutionnaire qui s'est produite à notre orient au cours de ces dernières années. J'ajoute que c'est par un véritable abus de langage qu'elle peut être qualifée de révolutionnaire.[4]

Aragon's direct participation in politics in the years 1925-1927 was restricted to collaboration in the publications of communist intellectuals, for instance in Clarté. However, Aragon's activities at this period of his career must not be divorced from those of the surrealist group, to which he belonged, nor from the general tendency of this group to seek an accommodation with the communists. The evidence of a sort of collective adherence by the surrealists to the F.C.P. bears this out.

[3]Maurice Nadeau, Histoire du surréalisme suivi de Documents surréalistes (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 219 (Déclaration du 27 janvier 1925).

[4]Aragon's letter to Bernier dated November 25, 1924, and published in Clarté in December 1924. Reproduced in Histoire du surréalisme, p. 205.

Aragon himself became an official member of the party on January 6, 1927. After that there followed a period of hesitation until the date of his split with the surrealists in 1932. "Je revois les longues étapes de sa [Aragon's] rééducation. Ah! cela n'a pas été sans peine, il a eu ses retours, ses rechutes," Aragon confessed.[5]

When he joined the party, he had a very confused notion of conditions in Soviet Russia. "Que savais-je, il y a vingt-cinq ans de la réalité gigantesque d'où venait cet homme? [Mayakovsky] de ce pays couvert de clameurs contradictoires, . . . qu'en savais-je, à part quelques livres, des images, et Le Cuirassé Potemkine?" Aragon wrote later.[6] He knew even less about the principles of party organization, of the party's daily practices, or even of its ideological position.[7] In 1946, looking back on his life, he remarked:

> J'ai mémoire du chemin parcouru, et je vous assure que j'ai considéré longtemps comme essentiels au communisme des traits qui lui étaient parfaitement étrangers.[8]

[5]Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, p. 55.

[6]Louis Aragon, Littératures soviétiques (Paris: Denoël, 1955), p. 19. Le Cuirassé Potemkine was a Soviet film which enjoyed great vogue in the twenties.

[7]Aragon stated that in 1926 "Breton m'a vivement reproché de ne pas lire les auteurs soviétiques, de ne pas donner plus d'importance à la lecture de Lénine ou de Trotski, ou de Zinoviev, ou de Boukharine, [all Russian revolutionaries], entre lesquels d'ailleurs, ni lui ni moi ne faisions alors grande différence, étant fort peu au courant de ce qui se passait en U.R.S.S. . . . Aragon parle . . ., p. 89.

[8]Louis Aragon, L'Homme communiste, 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), p. 17.

Two events, in particular, show to what extent Aragon was not yet committed to communist ideology at the time of his adherence to the communist party. The first was his attempt to commit suicide in September 1928, for suicide was an act which the party considered a betrayal of the people whom a communist must serve. The second was the publication (under the pseudonym of Albert de Routisie) of Le Con d'Irène, the eroticism of which is inconceivable in the writings of a party militant, even though much in vogue among surrealists. It should also be mentioned that, until his trip to the Soviet Union in 1930, Aragon's activity in the communist party remained on a somewhat irregular basis. The statute of the communist party stated explicitly that only those who participated in party activities and who paid their party dues regularly could be considered active members.[9] For several reasons Aragon did not fall into this category. First of all, his activities still had as their focus the surrealist group; secondly, personal preoccupations, such as his liaison with Nancy Cunard and his frequent trips abroad, did not permit him to carry on the work of a party militant; and, thirdly, he neglected to pay his dues.

In 1930, when Aragon decided to make a trip to the Soviet Union, he discovered that according to the letter of

[9]Article 2 of the Statute of the Communist Party (until 1943) reads: "Peut être membre du parti quiconque accepte le programme et les statuts de l'Internationale communiste et du parti communiste, s'engage à y travailler activement, à se conformer à toutes les décisions de l'Internationale communiste et du parti et acquitte régulièrement ses cotisations." J. Fauvet, Histoire du Parti Communiste français, I, p. 277.

the party statute he could not claim party membership. André Thirion, who had the task of recuperating those comrades who strayed from the fold but who were not in disagreement with party policies, offered to reinstate Aragon, as well as Sadoul, who was in a similar situation. Thirion registered Aragon at the Plaisance cell and issued a party card with stamps for 1929 and 1930. This procedure was judged irregular by the party authorities and Thirion was reprimanded.[10] However, in later years, Aragon and the party preferred to forget the incident and Aragon's adherence to the F.C.P. is officially dated from January 1927.

At the time when Aragon joined the party, the latter was still in its formative period. Although the stalinization of the F.C.P. began as early as 1924, the full effect of it was not felt for a long time. In the early years discipline was more relaxed and Aragon was able to remain in the party despite only an intermittent participation in its activities.[11] The membership was small, there were few intellectuals and they were viewed with suspicion.

[10]Thirion writes that to show those who returned to the party that the past did not count, it was customary to supply all the missing stamps for 1929 and 1930. Nevertheless, the party's file on Thirion contains the following note: "il a été par son rayon, frappé d'une suspension de six mois pour avoir délivré indûment des cartes du parti à deux de ses amis." A Thirion, Révolutionnaires sans Révolution (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1972), p. 325.

[11]Several hours before Aragon's and Sadoul's departure from the Soviet Union (1930), they signed a declaration in which they acknowledged their errors. One of them was "Ne pas avoir milité d'une façon constante dans les organisations de base du parti." André Thirion, op. cit., p. 300.

Aragon writes: "Il y régnait . . . un ouvriérisme indiscutable, un anti-intellectualisme, . . . et en même temps, une incompréhension totale de ce que pouvaient être des gens comme nous."[12] He appears to have suffered from this anti-intellectualism and incomprehension:

> Et que ceux-là vers qui j'allais avaient
> d'autres chats à fouetter
> Et qu'ils me regardaient du haut de leur supériorité
> Oui j'ai pleuré mais dans tes bras cette indifférence
> inhumaine [13]

Yet not only was the party to undergo transformation, but Aragon's own personality as well.

> Elégant, dandy, romantique, beau garçon, caustique, fugace, éblouissant, Aragon intriguait les hommes qui craignaient son intelligence, la vivacité et le mordant de ses reparties et séduisait les femmes qui raffolaient de l'aura de mystère dans laquelle il se déplaçait. Pour garder ses distances, il se servait avec maîtrise d'une sorte de politesse glacée, dans le meilleur ton du XVIIIe siècle, ce qui ne l'empêchait pas d'être sensible et fraternel avec ses amis.[14]

This portrait of Aragon by one of his surrealist friends indicates the distance separating Aragon from other party members. He himself admitted the difficulties which the aspiring communist was bound to encounter. Discussing J.-R. Bloch's career Aragon wrote:

[12] Aragon parle . . ., p. 90. The "nous" included Aragon, Sadoul, Unik, Buñuel, Alexandre and Thirion.

[13] Louis Aragon, Le Roman inachevé (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), p. 183.

[14] André Thirion, op. cit., p.140.

> Mais une chose est l'acceptation politique. . . une autre est la transformation d'un homme. . . l'homme, qui en accepte, pour ainsi dire de la tête, l'existence, les principes, combien lui faut-il de temps, pour que ces principes, cette existence, soient organiquement les principes, l'existence de la vie même? Est-ce que cela peut se faire par une simple opération de l'esprit? Est-ce qu'un simple acte d'intelligence peut reviser tout ce que l'homme était, apportait en lui, mêlé à tout le passé de sa jeunesse, mais aussi aux traditions d'une culture, qui s'est développée dans les conditions de classe de la domination bourgeoise?

He concluded: "Non. Cela ne se fait pas du jour au lendemain."[15] The study of Aragon's life shows that he needed at least five years to become an orthodox communist and this makes one wonder if his membership in the F.C.P. would have been sufficient for his transformation if it had not been reinforced by frequent contacts with the Soviet Union.

To understand the importance of these contacts it would perhaps be useful to consider what the Soviet Union represented in the eyes of communists and sympathizers around the world at that time.

From the moment of the birth of the U.S.S.R. in 1917, liberal intellectuals saw in the Soviet Union a humanist ideal, a model state where social justice had become a reality. Anatole France, in his article "Salut aux Soviets," published in l'Humanité to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the October Revolution, invited all

[15]Louis Aragon, L'Homme communiste, 11, p. 68.

liberally minded people to salute the revolution:

> S'il est encore en Europe des amis de la justice, qu'ils saluent avec respect le cinquième anniversaire de cette Révolution, qui, après tant de siècles, apporta à l'univers le premier essai d'un pouvoir qui gouverne par le peuple, pour le peuple.[16]

André Gide voiced the opinion of other humanists when he declared:

> Là-bas une expérience sans précédents était tentée qui nous gonflait le coeur d'espérance et d'où nous attendions un immense progrès, un élan capable d'entraîner l'humanité tout entière. . . . Dans nos coeurs et dans nos esprits nous attachions résolument au glorieux destin de l'U.R.S.S. l'avenir même de la culture.[17]

This faith in the humanist ideal and the conviction that one country incarnated it in all its purity, were common to humanists and communists alike. However, for the communists the U.S.S.R. was most of all the centre and the guide of the world communist movement around which the forces of the revolutionary camp were grouped. Even after the Twentieth Congress, which discredited the Soviet system in the eyes of the world, Maurice Thorez, Secretary General of the F.C.P., stated:

> Notre attachement très profond à l'U.R.S.S. est précisement conditionné par le fait qu'il s'agit du premier pays socialiste, de la base du mouvement ouvrier international.

[16]Quoted in an article entitled "Le Parti Communiste français, la culture et les intellectuels," Cahiers du Communisme, 39, Nos. 1-2. (1963), 168.

[17]André Gide, Retour de l'U.R.S.S. suivi de Retouches à mon 'Retour de l'U.R.S.S.' (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), p. 13.

> On ne peut pas utilement travailler dans le mouvement ouvrier international si l'on n'est pas attaché à la Révolution soviétique. La cause de l'U.R.S.S. est la cause du mouvement ouvrier international.[18]

The very existence of the Soviet Union was an important, and probably a determining factor in the development of communist parties in other nations. It set an example, it prepared the cadres (the leaders and the most important functionaries) and it lent its support to communist movements all over the world.

Because the dictatorship of the proletariat was the aim of all communist parties, and because the Soviet Union was the only country in the world in which a communist party actually held power, the other communist parties accepted direction from Moscow both on the interpretation of Marxist doctrine and on the main lines of political strategy to be pursued for their common purpose. In their organization all communist parties conformed strictly to the Soviet pattern and the Comintern was the organ which correlated various communist parties and the Soviet state and so insured a uniform ideological and political direction.

In the first years after the October Revolution, the Soviet Union had faced many problems: civil war, intervention of foreign powers, cession of some territories which formerly were part of the Czarist empire, famine, typhus

[18]Maurice Thorez, "Intervention de Maurice Thorez, Session du Comité Central 9 mai, 1956," Cahiers du Communisme, 32, No. 6 (1956), 776.

epidemics, and general disorganization throughout the country. However, from the early twenties, when a certain stability had been attained within the U.S.S.R., the Comintern concentrated on creating cadres of trained communists who could provide leadership for the communist parties abroad. For this purpose, a network of Institutes of Marxism-Leninism was set up, as was also the Lenin International School, which was the chief central school for party functionaries, particularly for those from Western communist parties.[19] At these institutions many leading foreign communists were enrolled in special training courses in order to equip them for future leadership in their own countries, under Soviet guidance. Many more underwent long periods of indoctrination before attaining positions of prominence in the various national communist parties.[20] It

[19]Annie Kriegel, a former member of the communist party, noted that between 1927 and 1930, when repression and internal problems in the F.C.P. had prevented the functioning of party schools in France, students were sent to the Lenin School in Moscow where the length of the study period was, at the time, two and a half years. Les Communistes français (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), p. 187.

[20]Among French leaders, Waldeck Rochet was a student at the Central School of the C.P.S.U. for three years. Maurice Thorez was also indoctrinated in the Soviet Union during his numerous and lengthy visits there. Pierre Sémard was sent to Moscow in November 1932 for "reeducation." In addition, Marcel Cachin, Vaillant-Couturier, J.-R. Bloch, J. Fréville, Paul Nizan, to mention only a few intellectuals, all received at least part of their ideological training in the U.S.S.R. Jean Fréville, a communist historian, wrote that he went to Moscow in 1927 "afin d'étudier sur place pendant six mois les réalisations des masses ouvrières et paysannes. Je souhaitais aussi élargir mes connaissances théoriques, me plonger dans les oeuvres de Marx, d'Engels, de Lénine, élucider quelques-uns des problèmes qui se posaient aux communistes russes et à l'Internationale. "M. Thorez, l'ami fraternel au coeur généreux," Cahiers du Communisme, Nos. 4-5 (1965), p. 154.

would not be an exaggeration to say that there was hardly a leading communist who, at one time or another, did not receive some training in the Soviet state. In his study of the F.C.P., the trade-unionist, A. Barjonet, states explicitly: "Les plus jeunes d'entre eux mis à part, tous les dirigeants du parti ont été formés à Moscou."[21]

The training of party functionaries was not the only facility offered to foreign communist parties. Several others must be mentioned. The Soviet Union was the meeting ground of all communists. The main questions pertaining to the political line of the communist movement were debated at congresses and other international gatherings in Moscow, where declarations were formulated and common courses of action decided upon. The Soviet Union also provided a forum from which communist propaganda could be disseminated, an advantage which was to prove particularly valuable during World War II--at that time, from August 1941 to November 1944, the French communist, J.-R. Bloch addressed his countrymen two or three times a week on the Soviet Radio, encouraging partisans in their fight against the occupants and vaunting the Soviet leader "le grand Staline, à qui les peuples de l'U.R.S.S. ont donné le nom superbe de père. . . ."[22]

[21]A. Barjonet, Le Parti Communiste français (Paris: Les Editions John Didier, 1970), p. 177.

[22]Louis Aragon, L'Homme communiste, 11, p. 34. Other communists who spent the war years in the Soviet Union, such as Ramette and Thorez also broadcasted on "Radio-France" set up for propaganda purposes.

The ideological aspect alone, however, does not explain the relationship between the leaders of the various national communist parties and the Soviet Union. Many tangible advantages were enjoyed by leading communist functionaries. In case of persecution, foreign communists found refuge and a comfortable existence in Russia.[23] Such "grands proscrits" as the Chilean writer Pablo Neruda, or the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet, found a permanent home in the Soviet Union, as did many Spanish communist exiles after the Spanish Civil War. The U.S.S.R. also provided free medical care and recreation facilities for the leaders of "partis-frères" of other countries. Communist leaders had at their disposal the best medical institutions of a powerful state. The best sanatoria and rest-homes and the playgrounds of the Crimea were always ready to welcome foreign

[23]Some examples taken from the history of the F.C.P.: M. Thorez, who was condemned to a 6 months prison term for the "Provocation des militaires à la désobéissance," fled to the Soviet Union in 1927. He sought refuge there once more when he deserted in October 1939. (E. C. Delgado, a member of the Central Committee of the Spanish Communist Party, tells us that Thorez lived in a magnificent country house in the vicinity of Moscow, sported a beard and was called Ivanov, the only "Ivanov" who did not speak Russian, according to the author. J'ai perdu ma foi à Moscou, p. 51). Another leading communist, Jacques Duclos, escaped to the Soviet Union in 1932 when he was indicted for economic espionage. See: A. Kriegel, Les Communistes français, p. 221. Georges Sadoul, condemned to a 3 months prison term, thought it wise to leave for the Soviet Union. G. Sadoul, "Une femme, un homme," Europe (Feb.-March 1967), 107. J.-R. Bloch, who was being hunted by the Gestapo, fled to Russia where he remained from 1941 to 1944. Many leaders of the F.C.P., such as André Marty, Raymond Guyot, Ramette, M. Thorez and Jeanette Vermeersch-Thorez spent the war years in the U.S.S.R.

party leaders if they needed them.[24]

All these privileges would not be sufficient to explain the nature of the ties existing between the Soviet government and the foreign party functionaries if we did not take into account the purely psychological and emotional aspects of the relationship--the general atmosphere in which foreign communists basked in "le pays de Staline." At home, they were often on the defensive: they had to rebuff malicious attacks by their adversaries, and they frequently suffered from lack of prestige and found themselves isolated from the rest of society. In the Soviet Union, foreign communist leaders were met with traditional Russian hospitality, wherein easy cordiality was blended with a feeling of solidarity uniting fighters for a common cause. The prestige of a vast and mighty country gave the illusion of power (a power which foreign communists did not possess in reality, since the condition of their own power was

[24]Thorez, Barbusse, for example, were cared for in Soviet medical institutions. Aragon praised "l'incroyable dévouement" of those who treated Maurice Thorez during his stay in Russia after he had been stricken with hemiplegia in October 1950. L'Homme communiste, 11, p. 297. (Soviet government sent a special plane to bring Thorez to the U.S.S.R. where he received medical treatment until April 1953). Aragon himself also enjoyed the privilege of receiving medical treatment in exclusive Soviet medical establishments. In 1934 during the Congress of Soviet Writers he suffered from "une serie de crises vésiculaires" and was sent to Essentuki--"le 'Vichy' soviétique." Aragon, L'Oeuvre poétique (Paris: Livre Club Diderot, 1975), V, p. 140. In the summer of 1936 he was again treated in one of the rest-homes near Moscow. Littératures soviétiques, p. 377. Incidentally, E. C. Delgado, who was treated in one of the sanatoria, wrote that the Comintern paid 150 roubles a day at a time when a worker's pay was about 300 roubles a month. J'ai perdu ma foi à Moscou, p. 119.

obedience to communist doctrine and to Soviet leadership),[25] and this illusion was strong enough to engender a feeling of euphoria on contact with the proletarian state. This feeling towards the Soviet Union was well expressed by the Yugoslav communist, Milovan Djilas:

> . . . a Soviet plane took us to the Soviet Union--the realization of our dreams and our hopes. The deeper we penetrated into its gray-green expanse, the more I was gripped by a new, hitherto hardly suspected emotion. It was as though I was returning to a primeval homeland, unknown but mine.[26]

Like many of his comrades, Aragon enjoyed numerous contacts with the Soviet state.[27] Between 1932-1936 he received a considerable part of his ideological training while working in the U.S.S.R. as one of the editors of Littérature Internationale (1932-1933), and as a Moscow correspondent of the party's daily l'Humanité (1936). On other occasions, as his party's cultural envoy, he participated in congresses and conferences of Soviet and international writers. When in the late forties the Soviet Union began its drive for peace, he took an active part in the Soviet sponsored Peace Movement and attended its congresses in the Soviet Union and elsewhere.

[25]On this question see Philippe Robrieux, Maurice Thorez: vie secrète et vie publique (Paris: Fayard, 1975).

[26]Milovan Djilas, Conversations with Stalin (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1962), p. 21.

[27]Aragon admitted that from "l'automne 1930 à l'été 1936, nous avons passé là près de deux ans en plusieurs voyages, Elsa Triolet et moi." Roger-H. Guerrand, L'Art Nouveau en Europe. Prefaced by Aragon. "Le 'Modern style' d'où je suis. . ." (Paris: Plon, 1965), p. xvi.

His extensive travels within the Soviet Union allowed him to appreciate the gigantic construction projects that were taking place in the country. Aragon and Elsa also spent several vacations in the "homeland of socialism." Aragon learned to speak Russian fluently and had many friends among the Soviet cultural elite and high-ranking party officials. From 1930 on, with the exception of the period 1936-1945, there was hardly a year during which he did not visit the Soviet Union or one of its satellites. So close, indeed, were his ties with this country, that he used to refer to it as his "second motherland."[28] But at the time when Aragon joined the party all this was still in the future. He had no exact knowledge of the links existing between the party leadership and the Soviet government. He needed a direct contact with the country, and a lengthy period of work as a party militant before he became one of the "permanents,"[29] with all the privileges and responsibilities that this title implied.

Yet it would be wrong to say that Russia was completely unknown to Aragon in the earliest years of his communist affiliation. He was already acquainted with Russian literature and he had met several individuals of Russian origin, such as Mayakovsky, Lili Brik and Elsa

[28]A. Isbakh, Zhizn' i tvorchestvo Aragona (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1962). See also Aragon's article "S.S.S.R.--nashe otechestvo," (U.S.S.R.--Our Fatherland) Literaturnaya Gazeta, 23 July 1932.

[29]The name given to the inner core of party members and candidate members of the Central Committee, the Political Bureau and the Control Commission.

Triolet.[30] We do not know what first aroused Aragon's interest in Russia, but the first indication of his interest can be found in a short story Quelle âme divine, written, according to the author, at the age of six, in which the protagonists make a trip from Saint-Petersburg to Siberia. At the age of ten, Aragon developed a liking for Russian literature and avidly read the Russian classics:

> Ma mère aimait les romans russes, et quand elle me trouva plongé dans un Tourgueniev, elle me parla de Tolstoï, et me prêta les Récits de Sébastopol, et La Sonate à Kreutzer. Je n'avais pas dix ans. Je lus coup sur coup Tarass Boulba, Crime et Châtiment, Le Manteau, Souvenirs de la Maison des Morts. . . .[31]

At about the same time, Aragon became interested in Gorky, but was forbidden to read him. When finally, at the age of twelve, he read some of Gorky's works, he found in them "les plus hauts sentiments" and "la pureté du coeur." He asked himself: "Pourquoi cela m'était-il interdit? Les miens étaient-ils donc du parti de ceux qui font le mal?"[32] Gorky's description of his childhood days made Aragon feel ashamed. His own way of life appeared luxurious by comparison. Thus, it seems that Gorky was the first writer to make Aragon conscious of social injustice. Aragon admitted:

[30]Lili Brik, Elsa Triolet's sister.

[31]Louis Aragon, Littératures soviétiques, p. 247. Tarass Boulba, Le Manteau by Gogol; Crime et Châtiment, Souvenirs de la Maison des Morts by Dostoyevsky.

[32]Ibid., p. 248.

> J'avais cessé de croire en Dieu peu après ma première communion, mais il me restait dans le coeur une certaine ardeur religieuse inemployée. Ce fut peut-être Gorki qui l'orienta. Peut-être pas tout seul, mais il y fut certainement pour beaucoup.[33]

Later, Aragon met Gorky, who befriended him and introduced him into the official circles of the state. The Russian writer apparently appreciated Aragon's talent. He seems to have praised the poem Front Rouge (1930) since Aragon mentions "l'indulgence que lui apporta Maxime Gorki."[34] Four years later, in his closing address to the First All-Union Soviet Writers' Congress (1934), Gorky referred to Aragon as an exceptionally gifted author and a severe critic of the French bourgeois society.[35] It was also Gorky to whom Aragon used to go for advice as a young socialist realist writer.[36] During the difficult times after Stalin's death, it was in Gorky's writings and in the memories of that old man that Aragon sought to quell his doubts:

> Mais quand je reprends les livres de Maxime Gorki, que j'entends sous les mots sa voix, qu'une façon de faire voir des personnages me rappelle son regard pesant sur moi, son sourire, je retrouve à la fois ce frisson de la lecture d'enfance, et les interrogations de ma jeunesse, mes inquiétudes d'homme, et toute l'amère expérience des années, les espoirs, les raisons de devenir qui je suis

[33] Ibid., loc. cit.

[34] Louis Aragon, O.P., V, p. 151.

[35] Maksim Gor'kii, O literature (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1953), p. 733.

[36] Louis Aragon, Littératures soviétiques, p. 249.

> devenu. . . . Rien, comme Gorki, ne me fait croire à ce chemin que j'ai pris. Et cela n'est pas inutile: Tout homme, en plein midi, peut douter du jour, s'il ne voit pas sa lumière.[37]

Much about the Aragon-Gorky relationship remains obscure, but it is perhaps not without significance that it was Aragon and Elsa whom Gorky wished to see before his death.[38] Even if we admit that many of Aragon's pronouncements on Gorky were destined for Russian consumption, the fact remains that Aragon knew Gorky personally and that Gorky was in a position to influence Aragon's development.

The name of another Russian writer, Vladimir Mayakovsky, often appears in the pages of Aragon's work. At a time when Aragon was eager to please his Russian friends, he ascribed to Mayakovsky's influence his conversion to the communist creed, but retracted this statement in later writings. On several occasions, Aragon told his readers how his meeting with Mayakovsky, on November 5, 1928, in one of the cafés of Montparnasse had changed the course of his career--"cette minute qui devait changer ma vie."[39] Years later, recollecting Mayakovsky's invitation

[37]Louis Aragon, Littératures soviétiques, p. 249.

[38]The cause of Gorky's death remains a mystery. An official communiqué in Pravda (March 3, 1938), charged Dr. L. Levin, Yagoda, the chief of secret police, and Professor D. Pletnev with Gorky's "medical murder." Aragon attended Gorky's funeral and gave a description of it in La Mise à mort and in Littératures soviétiques.

[39]Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, p. 52.

to join him at his table, Aragon once more described the encounter as a turning point in his life: "Je m'assis à cette table, avec tout ce romantisme au coeur, et l'ignorance vertigineuse de Paris. J'ignorais que, de ce fait, ma vie allait changer de fond en comble."[40] It is worth noting, however, that at that time Mayakovsky's poetry was unknown to Aragon and that he could not communicate with the Russian poet who did not speak French; furthermore, when Aragon met Mayakovsky, he had already been a member of the F.C.P., at least nominally, for nearly two years.

When Aragon discovered Mayakovsky's poetry, it was primarily the author's avant-garde style which attracted him. The meeting between Aragon, the French poet in whom surrealism and communism struggled to coexist, and Mayakovsky, the Russian futurist who welcomed the Russian Revolution, was, in an intellectual sense, fraternal. Mayakovsky's avant-gardism was close to that of the French poets of the twenties and what Aragon wrote about Mayakovsky, the futurist, was, to some degree, also applicable to Aragon, the surrealist:

> . . . le futurisme de Maïakovski présentait certains caractères communs à tous les avant-gardismes artistiques: le goût de l'image paradoxale, la négation du goût établi, une révision des valeurs artistiques, une forme provocante. . . . Dans la poésie futuriste de Maïakovski, plus que le futur à proprement parler, c'est le modernisme qui règne. Le modernisme l'engage dans une bagarre sans merci contre tout ce qui est le passé . . . Son modernisme l'oppose à la poésie jusqu'alors admise: aussi Maïakovski entend-il faire

[40]Louis Aragon, Littératures soviétiques, p. 19.

> prédominer comme beaux, comme poétiques, des éléments jusqu'alors exclus de la poésie. A la poésie de la rose et du rossignol, la poésie traditionnelle, idéalisation de la vie rurale, il oppose la poésie urbaine, la rue, le macadam, les machines, les objets industriels.[41]

This appreciation recalls the visions of Apollinaire and Lautréamont, whose shadow, Aragon tells us, "hanta ma jeunesse et n'a guère cessé de m'accompagner malgré des années."[42] Moreover, the use of collage and other affinities in their literary practice were bound to draw Aragon and Mayakovsky together but their friendship was destined to be short. When Aragon visited Guendrikov Pereulok in Moscow, where Mayakovsky used to live with Lili Brik, Elsa Triolet's sister, the Russian poet was no more.[43] The following lines express Aragon's sorrow and voice a question which has remained unanswered until this day:

> A Guendrikov pereoulok nous étions tous ensemble assis
> Autour de la table dans la pièce commune comme si
> Dans l'encadrement de la porte il allait à l'instant paraître
> Trop grand pour les meubles-jouets comme un soleil pour les fenêtres
> . . . . . .
> Hélas il est vraiment parti Pourquoi Le saura-t-on jamais[44]

[41] Ibid., pp. 308-309.

[42] Louis Aragon, "Lautréamont et nous," L.F., 1 June, 1967, p. 5.

[43] Mayakovsky committed suicide in April of 1930.

[44] Louis Aragon, Le Roman inachevé, pp. 184-185. Nadezhda Mandelstam, in her memoirs observed that in Demian Bedny's view Mayakovsky had died because he had trespassed on political territory to which he was a stranger. Hope Against Hope, p. 27. Demian Bedny was a Russian poet.

Thus, although Mayakovsky's influence on some of Aragon's poetry may be admitted, it is questionable whether Mayakovsky played any real part in the latter's political development. We should add that, having himself largely created the legend of his relationship with Mayakovsky, Aragon later began to play down the friendship. After the Twentieth congress, when he found it desirable to soft-pedal his close ties with the Soviet Union, he revolted against "l'interprétation simpliste" of Mayakovsky's influence, and stated in Pravda that the F.C.P. alone was responsible for his communist conversion.[45]

Far more important than the meeting with Mayakovsky was Aragon's encounter with another Russian in the autumn of 1928. That year, in a Parisian cafe, Aragon met an attractive young woman, Elsa Triolet, who was to become his lifelong companion and whose influence on Aragon's destiny cannot be underestimated. Elsa entered the author's life shortly after a serious emotional crisis which involved the burning of his novel La Défense de l'infini and an attempt at suicide. Recollecting this period Aragon wrote:

> Tant de femmes y passèrent en si peu de temps que je n'en ai guère gardé l'image, les images. Cependant, dans cette démence physique, et cela ressemblait après tout à ce que fut une grande part de ma jeunesse. . . . il se faisait pourtant jour d'un désir. . . . de quelque chose de plus profond, de plus grave, et de contradictoire avec l'avenir immédiat que je me proposais.[46]

[45] Pravda, 8 January 1958.

[46] Louis Aragon, O.P., V, p. 50.

In November 1928, Elsa too was at a crossroads. Thirty-two years old and separated from André Triolet, her future was uncertain. Unsuited by temperament for Bohemian life, she was, as many of Aragon's friends were to remark, a born "homemaker." Aragon's former women companions had been indifferent to his talents whereas Elsa admired not only Aragon the man but also Aragon the author of Le Paysan de Paris. This new attachment, which was to prove lasting, gave to Aragon the emotional stability he so desperately needed. His later writings would frequently depict the emotional disorder which preceded his encounter with Elsa and would always stress the stabilizing role she played in his life.

Despite the fact that Elsa accepted both Aragon's talents and his weaknesses, her common sense and her realistic temperament made her indifferent to the more extravagant claims of surrealism; as A. Thirion has noted, she neither liked nor understood the aspirations of the surrealist group. In her opinion the childish behaviour of Aragon's surrealist friends brought nothing but misery. "Ne voyait-on pas que le surréalisme ne menait à rien, qu'il était en dehors de tout, qu'il ne servait à amuser que quelques snobs lesquels, en retour, étaient bien décidés à laisser les surréalistes sécher sur pied?" she asked Thirion.[47] It is more than probable that Elsa's

[47]André Thirion, op. cit., p. 336.

influence was a prime cause of Aragon's estrangement from surrealism. According to Aragon himself Elsa "supportait mal les impératifs du milieu surréaliste. . . ."[48] But if Elsa had no use for surrealism, her sympathies were not with the Russian revolution either, at least not in 1929: "Comment pouvez-vous être communiste, cher Thirion. La révolution est un phénomène épouvantable. Peut-être changeriez-vous d'avis si vous aviez vécu, comme moi, une révolution. En 1917, je détestais les bolcheviques, maintenant, je ne les aime pas beaucoup plus."[49] Later on, like Aragon and many others, Elsa was impressed by the pace and scope of socialist development, but her writings continued to demonstrate a certain cautious attitude towards the Soviet Union. Elsa never joined the F.C.P., and even after the Liberation, when the F.C.P. enjoyed unquestionable prestige and many intellectuals flocked to its ranks, she remained outside the party. If she participated in communist sponsored activities, it was more out of Russian patriotism and personal loyalty to Aragon, who as a high party official was deeply involved in them, that she did so.

It was not Elsa's attitude towards surrealism or to the Revolution that was an important factor in Aragon's development, but rather her position in Russian cultural

[48]Louis Aragon, Aragon parle . . . p. 95.

[49]André Thirion, op. cit., p. 169.

circles. Elsa came from a family of Jewish intellectuals who belonged to the Russian cultural elite. Her circle of friends included such important writers as Vladimir Mayakovsky, Ilya Ehrenburg, Maxim Gorky, Victor Shklovsky and Boris Pasternak, to name but a few. Thus, during his first encounter with the Soviet Union, Aragon came in contact with some of the best minds the country had to offer. In 1930, this talented group still enjoyed considerable freedom of expression and tremendous authority, and had not yet suffered the devastating effects of Soviet cultural policies. As Elsa's intimate friend, Aragon was welcomed in their midst and this fact conditioned to a great extent his first impressions of the Soviet Union.

CHAPTER 2

THE TIME OF DECISION

> Il ne s'agit pas de choisir son époque, mais de se choisir en elle.
>
> J.-P. Sartre: Qu'est-ce que la littérature?

In the fall of 1930, Aragon made his acquaintance with the Soviet state. In his later writings, he represented his first trip to the Soviet Union as a purely personal undertaking largely prompted by Elsa Triolet's wish to revisit her native land and to show it to him. There are indications, however, that the F.C.P. or at least some of its members, such as André Thirion, was interested in Aragon's activities. We have seen that Thirion had helped Aragon to renew his membership in the party before his departure to the Soviet Union. He also informed the party secretariat of Aragon's forthcoming trip and outlined the political advantages the party could draw from it. Aragon and Elsa left for Russia in the middle of August, 1930, and Georges Sadoul, feeling himself threatened by imprisonment,[1] joined them in October. Their visit coincided with the Second International Conference of Revolutionary Writers which took place in Kharkov and to which Aragon and Sadoul had received an

[1]For having written an insulting post-card to one of the graduates of the Military Academy at Saint-Cyr.

invitation. According to Aragon

> . . . l'idée vient aux initiateurs d'un Congrès qui allait se tenir à Kharkov en novembre, d'inviter ces deux Français, puisqu'il s'agissait d'un Congrès international d'écrivains et qu'on n'avait pas d'autres Français sous la main.[2]

It would appear that at this period the Soviets began to take interest in the surrealists who were seeking an accommodation with the party. In the spring of 1930 André Breton received a telegram which read: "Bureau International Littérature Révolutionnaire prie répondre question suivante laquelle sera votre position si impérialisme déclare guerre aux Soviets." Breton and Aragon sent the following answer: "Camarades si impérialisme déclare guerre aux Soviets, notre position sera conformément aux directives Troisième Internationale position membres du Parti communiste français."[3] It seems, however, that the communists did not place much trust in the surrealists. In the course of a conversation with André Thirion, Maurice Thorez, who was to be the leader of the F.C.P., said of Aragon: "Ah, oui, le type qui a écrit un Traité sur le style. Je l'ai lu. En effet, c'est assez bien," and added: "Mais crois-tu que ces gens-là soient vraiment proches du parti? Ne sont-ils pas

[2]Louis Aragon, O.P., V, p. 141. Elsa gives a different version: ". . . puis ce fut le Congrès International des écrivains révolutionnaires à Kharkov où je les avais fait inviter, Louis et Georges, car la France n'y était pas représentée et que l'on jugea qu'après tout, pourquoi pas ces deux-là? Les organisateurs du congrès étaient Bruno Jasenski et sa femme . . . or Jasenski, un "occidental" savait fort bien qui était Aragon, et le surréalisme, et Le Paysan de Paris." Elsa Triolet, "Je n'ai pas d'autre azur que ma fidélité," L.F., 18 October, 1967, p. 14.

[3]André Thirion, op. cit., p. 276.

avant tout des intellectuels bourgeois?"[4] The Second International Conference of Revolutionary Writers presented an opportunity for party leaders to observe at least two members of the surrealist group and they could hardly avoid noticing that the latter had certain qualities which could be exploited in the interests of the party. After all, both Aragon and Sadoul were members.

In 1930, Aragon was already known in France as a writer. He had published a dozen books which enjoyed a high reputation among the literary elite.[5] Since 1918, he had collaborated on a number of periodicals. Such organs as Littérature and La Révolution Surréaliste were created by Aragon and his surrealist friends. Paris-Journal was transformed by Aragon from a "bulletin-programme du théâtre" into a literary weekly. Aragon's taste for excess, the violence of his reactions, his readiness to take part in all the "bagarres" of his time, marked him as an excellent potential agitator. His penchant for polemics, his ability to wield a pen, could be very useful to the party. Perhaps, also, as André Thirion believes, the communists were impressed by Aragon's performance during the Conference:

> Les Russes étaient sensibles au charme et au talent d'Aragon, plus encore au brio avec lequel il avait mené son opération de commando, car, après tout, en septembre personne ne pensait à lui. En quelques jours, ce diable de Français s'était fait inviter au congrès de

[4]André Thirion, op. cit., p. 276.

[5]"Aragon s'est déjà classé parmi les plus remarquables écrivains de l'heure actuelle," stated L'Information d'Extrême-Orient, 28 Jan. 1924 (Saigon). See: O.P., II, p. 205.

> Kharkov, s'y était vu confier un rapport, avait multiplié les interventions, conquis des supporters et déposé des conclusions. . . . Le tableau de la littérature française, brossé avec des couleurs fournies par Aragon, plaçait le surréalisme au premier rang de la littérature révolutionnaire en France.[6]

Thirion adds that Aragon and Sadoul "se conduisaient bien, leur orthodoxie était méritoire, ils multipliaient les déclarations bien pensantes," and that in the text which they were asked to write for broadcast in French, they praised "l'oeuvre admirable de salubrité publique faite par la Guépéou" and joined the Soviet workers in their demand "qu'on fusille les saboteurs."[7] It is not astonishing that the Russians were impressed. They were, however, cautious, since from their point of view Aragon's behaviour was not without blemish, as the following incident will illustrate.

At the Kharkov Conference, there were discussions on proletarian literature, a subject which engendered much controversy during the late twenties and early thirties. Aragon also participated in the debate, saying that reports sent in by the rabcors (worker correspondents) to communist papers were the only valid source of proletarian literature. "La seule base," he declared, "que l'on puisse et doive proposer à une organisation de la littérature prolétarienne

[6]André Thirion, op. cit., p. 299.

[7]Ibid., p. 300.

est le développement systématique du travail des rabcors."[8] Aragon was rebuked by a representative of the Comintern, a certain comrade Gopner, who pointed out that "affirmer . . . 'que les rabcors constituent la seule source de la littérature prolétarienne, c'est formuler une assertion extrêmement gauche mais qui n'en est pas moins droitier et opportuniste!'"[9] It seems to us almost obvious that if the Soviet authorities were impressed by Aragon's performance, they must have harbouring doubts about Aragon's fitness for the work as a communist propagandist. Was it only by chance that, upon the return of the two surrealists to France, it was Sadoul rather than Aragon who was given a position with l'Humanité, the communist daily? In any case Aragon was passed over in this first important move towards the total integration into the party of a communist intellectual.[10]

As well as attending the official sessions of the

[8]Quoted by Thirion, op. cit., p. 298. Aragon's intervention at the Conference seems to indicate that he did not quite grasp the situation. Rabcors were not professional writers but workers who contributed articles to local and national newspapers reporting events at their place of work. They represented a source from which some literary talents could emerge. Alongside the rabcors there existed the organization of professionals--the Proletarian Writers--whose ties with the socialist labour activities were limited to occasional visits to factories, construction sites and villages where they gathered materials used in their literary works, but who, nevertheless, were the real creators of proletarian literature.

[9]Ibid., p. 299.

[10]Sadoul entered l'Humanité in September 1931. In 1975 Aragon revealed that upon his return to France, he was "sous le coup de l'accusation." "En janvier, je venais d'être mis en procès dans ma cellule, on suspectait ce voyage,

Conference, the participants from various foreign countries were wined and dined with the usual Russian generosity; they were also taken to see some of the gigantic projects of the five-year plan, which were under construction at that time, among them the famous Dneprostroi, "où l'on emmenait le congrès entier," according to Elsa.[11] During this visit Aragon met many Russian writers "dans la petite boutique des écrivains, dans la Tverskaia qui ne s'appelait pas encore la rue Gorki."[12] There he was presented to Leonid Leonov who at the age of thirty-one was already "un grand écrivain, reconnu comme tel."[13] At the same time, Aragon met Alexandre Fadeyev: "At Kharkov nous sommes devenus des amis inséparables."[14] Fadeyev accompanied the Aragons to Dneprostroi and upon their return to Moscow offered them his hospitality, for in those days Moscow did not yet have the network of hotels it later had. Elsa relates:

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qu'est-ce que j'avais été faire là-bas, qui m'avait autorisé d'y aller? . . . Pendant neuf mois, c'est-à-dire jusqu'en octobre 31, j'ai été pratiquement, sinon officiellement, mis à la porte de mon parti." O.P., V, p. 143. "Les manoeuvres, à un plus haut niveau, se poursuivaient pour me faire renier mon passé, ce que j'avais écrit et les miens, et cela s'étendait aux six ou sept autres écrivains ou cinéastes, qui, surréalistes, avaient adhéré au parti." Ibid., p. 301.

[11] Elsa Triolet, "Alexandre Fadéev," L.F., 17 May 1956, p. 1.

[12] Louis Aragon, "Pour saluer Léonov," L.F., 29 March 1956, p. 1.

[13] Ibid., loc. cit.

[14] Elsa Triolet, op. cit., loc. cit.

> Fadéev nous logea, Aragon et moi, chez lui, dans une toute petite chambre qu'il avait dans les dépendances de la maison Herzen, alors Maison des Ecrivains. Dans cette chambre, un lit de camp, une table, une chaise et une vague possibilité de se laver, Sacha Fadéev s'en fut coucher ailleurs.[15]

Thus began for Aragon his long association with many Russian writers.

The 1930 trip to the Soviet Union had at least three important consequences for Aragon: the deterioration of his relationship with the surrealist group and his subsequent break with surrealism; the publication of Le Front Rouge, a poem written to express the enthusiasm generated in him by his encounter with the Soviet state; and, finally, what Aragon later defined as "la prise de conscience" that oriented his life towards an unconditional commitment.

The story of Aragon's break with the surrealists has been told many times and in great detail and need not be recounted here.[16] We shall mention only the facts essential to our study. On December 1, 1930, Aragon and

[15] Ibid., p. 1. Apparently, it was Fadeyev's duty to accommodate visiting foreign writers. John Dos Passos, the American novelist, who visited the Soviet Union in 1928 writes: "Back in Moscow in October I had trouble finding a room. Fadyeev (sic!) and his wife kindly put me up in their large apartment." He adds: "Fadyeev's friends could speak freely about all sorts of topics. No danger of having what you said reported to the Gay Pay U. This was the Gay Pay U." The Best Times (Toronto: The New American Library of Canada Limited, 1968), p. 214.

[16] See: Maurice Nadeau, Histoire du surréalisme (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964); André Breton, Entretiens (Paris: Gallimard, 1952); André Thirion, Révolutionnaires sans Révolution.

Sadoul signed a letter addressed to the French Section of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers, in which they disavowed surrealism. This action caused a great deal of indignation among the members of the surrealist group.[17] Upon his return to France, Aragon tried to find a compromise, to reconcile his communist and his surrealist positions--"de me plier aux exigences de l'un et de l'autre monde."[18] He took part in surrealist manifestations in 1931, signed appeals at the exhibition of Colonial Art (such as "Ne visitez pas l'Exposition coloniale"), organized l'Exposition Anticoloniale in which many surrealists took part and sought a modus vivendi with the surrealists on the basis of their anti-religious propaganda. He stated that:

> Quand, dans une confusion extrême de nous tous, mes amis et moi, nous sentîmes l'irréparable entre nous, et que pourtant nous avions encore le souci de tenter une conciliation qui permît de ne pas nous séparer en tout, c'est dans le domaine de l'irréligion, de l'athéisme, que les surréalistes crurent trouver un instant le pacte qui permît de demeurer ensemble.[19]

[17] It should be mentioned that Aragon and Sadoul accepted the invitation to the Conference because they considered that "nous dérober à l'invitation . . . c'était lâcheté, refus d'une occasion unique de défendre ici le surréalisme, d'y faire connaître l'évolution en cours vers le parti communiste français, de ceux dont on parlait ici avec une blessante désinvolture. . . ." Louis Aragon, O.P., V, p. 142. Yet, in the Soviet Union they endorsed the resolution of the Congress which spoke of the errors of the Second Surrealist Manifesto. See: André Thirion, op. cit., pp. 302-303.

[18] Aragon parle . . . p. 95.

[19] Louis Aragon, Les Collages (Paris: Hermann, 1965), p. 16.

Aragon's desire to reconcile communism and surrealism is evident in his article "Le surréalisme et le devenir révolutionnaire" which he concluded by saying:

> Il est impossible de considérer le devenir du surréalisme indépendamment de celui du matérialisme dialectique, et il est également impossible de considérer le devenir des surréalistes en dehors de celui du Prolétariat, et on peut donc considérer comme un fait accompli le passage des surréalistes aux côtés du Prolétariat dans sa lutte révolutionnaire contre la bourgeoisie, la trahison à leur classe d'origine des surréalistes qui tendent à ruiner par cette "trahison" la position idéologique de cette classe d'origine.[20]

This article was, according to the author,

> . . . une tentative désespérée, la dérnière, de concilier l'attitude qui avait été la mienne, pendant des années, et la réalité à laquelle je m'étais heurté. Au-delà de cette tentative c'est assurément le travail social qui m'a sauvé de la rechute dans le monde ancien, dans le monde de nuées où mes amis de naguère prétendaient à grands cris, à force d'injures me retenir.[21]

That the surrealist group wished to retain Aragon is certainly possible, but it could not accept Aragon's constant vacillation between the two camps. The final break came on March 23, 1932, when Eluard wrote his famous "Certificat."[22] Aragon gave his own version of the break in the course of a conversation with Dominique Arban in 1968:

[20] Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution, No. 3 (Dec 1931). Quoted by Aragon, O.P., V, p. 285.

[21] Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, pp. 16-17.

[22] Maurice Nadeau, Histoire du surréalisme, pp. 363-364.

> Quand, en 1932, il m'a été montré qu'en réalité le compromis était un faux compromis, puisqu'il n'effaçait pas des arrière-pensées, et que je pouvais à n'importe quel moment me trouver devant une rupture, dont je n'aurais pas eu l'initiative, j'ai pris cette initiative au simple nom de la franchise.[23]

It is the word "franchise" that is suspect here, because Aragon had no choice if he wished to remain in the F.C.P. The position of the party was unequivocal; in its search for fellow travellers, the party could accept surrealists in the communist camp and it was prepared to exploit the surrealist revolt against bourgeois society and bourgeois values, for its own propaganda purposes. However, a surrealist who joined the party was accepted on one condition; that he submit to the absolute hegemony of the party leaders and the strict party discipline. When during the Second International Conference of Writers in Kharkov, Aragon repudiated the Second Surrealist Manifesto "dans la mesure où il contrarie le matérialisme dialectique," when he denounced Freudianism as an idealist ideology and Trotskyism as an "idéologie social-démocrate et contre-révolutionnaire," when he took upon himself the task of bringing the literary activities of the surrealist group under party control,[24] it is evident that he had already accepted the yoke of party discipline. Moreover, it is clear from Sadoul's statement

[23] Aragon parle . . . pp. 86-87.

[24] Aragon stated that "en séance nous avons présenté une thèse concernant l'organisation possible des écrivains révolutionnaires sous le contrôle du Parti." O.P., V, p. 272.

that "Aragon a estimé qu'il fallait en passer par là si nous voulions . . . pouvoir travailler dans les organisations culturelles du parti,"[25] that Aragon understood what he was doing. Whatever the causes of Aragon's parting with the surrealists, the break marked a crucial step in his career. From 1932 on he was to devote his life and his talents to the service of the French Communist party and, indirectly, of the Soviet Union.

The second direct consequence of Aragon's visit to the Soviet Union was the publication of his poem Front Rouge, which expressed his feelings in 1930. The work is "un poème de circonstance," composed "sous le coup de l'enfantine (l'indistincte) admiration provoquée par le premier contact avec l'Union soviétique.[26] It celebrates the glory of the Soviet state and mirrors the policies of Soviet leaders. At the same time it denounces bourgeois society and appeals to the French proletariat to unleash its revolutionary force.

Three aspects of Soviet policy referred to in the poem should be mentioned here: the campaign directed against the Social Democratic Party, the subject of anti-religious propaganda, and the trials of "enemies of the people." The policy of cooperation with social democrats, adopted by the Komintern in 1921, had been abandoned in 1928 at the 6th Congress of this organization. As a result, Soviet

[25]André Breton, op. cit., p. 165.

[26]Aragon parle . . ., p. 85.

definition of its immediate enemies had changed radically. Social democrats were now seen as the dangerous enemies of the communist cause, and the communists launched a campaign against what they called "social fascism." Aragon followed this lead and in Front Rouge attacked the social democrats and their leaders:

> Feu sur Léon Blum
> Feu sur Boncour Frossard Déat
> Feu sur les ours savants de la social-démocratie [27]

At this stage in its development, the Soviet state had not yet conceived the idea of establishing the Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church and of placing it under state direction. Anti-religious propaganda was carried on vigorously in the country, and numerous churches were demolished. Aragon gave advice to those who wished to follow the Soviet example:

> Le plus beau monument qu'on puisse élever sur une place
> la plus surprenante de toutes les statues
> la colonne la plus audacieuse et la plus fine
> l'arche qui se compare au prisme même de la pluie
> ne valent pas l'amas splendide et chaotique
> qu'on produit aisément avec une église et de la dynamite
> Essayez pour voir [28]

[27] Louis Aragon, "Front Rouge," Persécuté Persécuteur (Paris: Editions Surréalistes, 1931), p. 12. Aragon admitted that Persécuté Persécuteur was written on order from the Soviets, O.P., V, p. 146.

[28] Ibid., p. 14. Aragon's attitude to anti-religious propaganda changed in later years. In 1965 he wrote: "Je pris honte des mots, écrits d'abord en toute tranquillité, sachant bien que pour eux on ne jetterait pas bas le Beau Dieu de Chartres, on ne crèverait pas la toile de la Vierge de Fouquet. Et puis, certainement, l'excès réel, je veux dire par exemple la destruction effective de cette merveilleuse chapelle à l'entrée de la Loubianka, à Moscou, ou bien le spectacle de la vie de gens devenus des suspects pour leurs

Another aspect of the Soviet regime which was to become a permanent feature of the Soviet system began to emerge in the late twenties. This was the public trial of "enemies of the people." During the years 1929 and 1930, the trials of certain scientific and technical specialists (for instance, engineers and physicians) were taking place in Moscow. Aragon's reaction is expressed in the following lines:

> L'éclat des fusillades ajoute au paysage
> une gaîté jusqu'alors inconnue
> Ce sont des ingénieurs des médecins qu'on exécute
> Mort à ceux qui mettent en danger les conquêtes d'Octobre
> Mort aux saboteurs du Plan Quinquennal [29]

In later years, Aragon often remarked that he considered this poem mediocre--written "précisément en ce temps de ma vie où se confrontèrent étrangement poésie et politique--"[30] stating that in it he was trying to depict a type of reality which was absolutely new to him. Good or mediocre, the poem nevertheless met the criteria for party propaganda, and as

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croyances . . . avait pour moi donné tout autre sens aux écrits naguère. Si bien que je me souviens, quand les surréalistes yougoslaves. . . donnèrent dans la revue qu'ils faisaient, interprétation directe de la phrase: . . . une poignée de fanatiques saura faire disparaître etc. . . . au moyen d'une très belle photographie, . . . montrant des ouvriers démolissant une église orthodoxe, . . . je mesurai le terrible mécompte d'écrire et de faire, je fus pris d'une sorte de honte que je n'ai jamais oubliée." Les Collages, pp. 17-18.

[29] Le Front Rouge, p. 14.

[30] Louis Aragon, O.P., V, p. 14.

such was much appreciated by the Soviets.[31] To Russian eyes, Front Rouge was an indication of Aragon's potential value as a party propagandist.

Finally, the visit to the Soviet Union was also an occasion for deepening Aragon's political awareness: "C'est là, devant ce rebrassement de toute chose, dans la misère et le labeur surhumain, que je compris d'où je déplongeais, que je compris notre monde,"[32] he tells us. The nature of Aragon's previous expectations of the trip can be discerned from this passage:

> Dans la seconde moitié de 1930, le surréaliste Aragon, la tête bourrée d'images lyriques, mais assez ignare après tout des choses de la Révolution, s'en fut ainsi à Moscou sans autre idée que d'un nouveau voyage, et avec, sur l'importance des voyages, une idée bien arrêtée, du genre sceptique, agnostique et supérieur.[33]

Three months in the Soviet Union were sufficient to show Aragon what a change contact with the Soviet Union could operate in a person accustomed to the norms of capitalist society:

[31]The poem was published in the review Littérature Internationale, in Literatura mirovoi revolutsii, No. 1, 1931; in Molodaia Gvardiia, No. 7, 1931, and in a number of other periodicals. It was also published in a special edition. Krasnyi Front (Moscow-Leningrad: Goslitizdat, 1931). Later, it was included in Persécuté Persécuteur which continued the propaganda line and contained poems written to glorify the Soviet state police--G.P.U., etc.

[32]Louis Aragon, Littératures soviétiques, pp. 21-22.

[33]Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, p. 15.

> l'U.R.S.S. est, pour le voyageur qui vient de nos pays, un Biélomorstroï intellectuel. J'entends que celui qui en revient, pour peu qu'il ait de la leçon de l'U.R.S.S. retenu la necessité d'un certain travail, ne peut plus être l'homme fabriqué suivant les recettes du monde capitaliste, avec toutes les révoltes qu'on voudra, qu'il était pourtant à son départ.[34]

Aragon wrote that it was in the Soviet Union that he encountered "une bouleversante bonté" and learned "l'amour sans fin de l'humanité."[35] He did not realize at the time that the public trials and executions, which he celebrated in his poem, were hardly compatible with the infinite love of humanity.

Aragon's conversion to realism seems also to have coincided with his first trip to the Soviet Union. He wrote:

> C'est à l'automne de cette année-là que je fis le voyage par quoi j'éprouvai le choc d'une réalité, qui me mit sur le chemin de la réalité, d'un réalisme dont je portais en moi, de longue date, l'instinct confus.[36]

That Aragon's experiences in the Soviet Union had impressed him is not surprising. Most visitors to the Soviet state reacted similarly. Raymond Lefebvre, who edited the column "Chronique de la vie intellectuelle en France" in Clarté, claims that his own visit to Soviet Russia was a revelation:

> Un révolutionnaire français se sent au coeur, ici, au spectacle de tout ce que suppose d'ordre et de génie une révolution sociale. Le voyage en Russie, seul, peut faire entrevoir à un révolutionnaire de chez nous l'énormité de

[34] Ibid., loc. cit. Belomorstroï--a canal joining the White and the Baltic Seas--was presented by the Soviet authorities as an example of the reeducation of criminals by work.

[35] Louis Aragon, Littératures soviétiques, pp. 22-23.

[36] Louis Aragon, Les Collages, p. 15.

> notre insuffisance intellectuelle et l'obligation où nous sommes de laisser là . . . une tradition de phraséologie sonore . . . pour inaugurer une ère d'action et de préparation à l'action.[37]

Likewise, Louis Fisher, an American journalist and former communist, recalls his first impressions of the Soviet Union: "The entire Soviet Union felt inspired in the presence of this spectacle of creation and self-sacrifice. I too was swept away by it. . . . A whole nation marched behind a vision."[38] Clearly, in this regard Aragon was not alone.

In recent years, Aragon has become reluctant to talk about his ties with the Soviet Union. Replying to Dominique Arban's question on the length of his first sojourn in Russia, Aragon said, with some annoyance: "Cette fois-là, trois mois, la seconde fois j'y suis resté un an. Mais, enfin, ne reprenons pas le détail de ces choses."[39] He also saw his first trip to the Soviet Union as a time "où je n'étais en fait passé que d'une secte à l'autre--qu'on me le pardonne--et de l'avant-garde littéraire à l'utopie sociale."[40] But Aragon's statement in 1968 does not change the fact that in 1930 he felt compelled to express sentiments

[37]Raymond Lefèbvre, Clarté, No. 44, 4 December, 1920, p. 4.

[38]Louis Fisher, Men and Politics: An Autobiography (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941), p. 189.

[39]Aragon parle . . ., p. 92.

[40]Ibid., p. 93.

which he later had cause to regret. After his first visit to Russia, his enthusiasm was boundless. He sang praises of the new state and proclaimed his desire to serve its cause:

> On sait . . . qu'en 1930 j'ai été en U.R.S.S. et qu'à mon retour je n'étais plus le même, plus l'auteur du Paysan de Paris, mais de Front rouge. Oui, il m'avait paru que le plus pressant, que la seule chose digne de l'homme et du poète était de crier la gloire du monde nouveau.[41]

Although Aragon's first encounter with the Soviet Union might not have been a truly decisive one, there is no doubt that it affected him deeply and brought him one step further along the road to total commitment.

When, after the exhilarating experience of their trip to the U.S.S.R., Aragon and Elsa returned to Paris, they were obliged to face the unpleasant reality of their situation in France. The position of the surrealist group was not promising. France had a right-wing government and the surrealists found no favour with it. The French press avoided mentioning them, and publishing houses refused to print their books.[42] Aragon himself, who in Front Rouge, attacked social democrats and called for the murder of their leaders, was accused, by Tardieu's ministry, of provocation to murder and prosecuted by the French government. Further-

[41]Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, p. 53.

[42]Publishers refused to accept two of Aragon's manuscripts and the monthly payment of 1,000 francs which he was promised "for life" by his editor was withdrawn at the beginning of 1931. Louis Aragon, O.P., V, p. 300.

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more, Aragon's personal position within surrealism was uncertain. Despite his talents, he did not occupy the first place in the surrealist movement, and it is quite possible that André Breton's domineering personality had a repressive effect on him. Such was the opinion of Elsa, at least, who declared: "Breton détruira Louis. . ."[43] Aragon's behaviour in the Soviet Union did not help to raise his stature in the eyes of his surrealist friends, and his relationship with the group deteriorated steadily.

Aragon's literary career was now at its lowest ebb. In 1928, he had published Le Traîté du style. According to Thirion with this publication Aragon "accrut une notoriété qui sans atteindre encore 'le grand public' dépassait déjà le petit monde des lettres et des arts." But, even while paying tribute to Aragon's talent, the surrealists were also asking themselves: "Que diable pourra-t-il écrire après Le Traîté du Style?"[44] And, indeed, no major work of surrealist inspiration appeared under Aragon's name after this date.[45]

After Aragon met Elsa, he found emotional stability, but his life still lacked a solid financial foundation and

[43]André Thirion, op. cit., p. 336.

[44]Ibid., p. 140.

[45]In 1929, Aragon published a collection of poems, but a number of them had been written in 1927-1928. In 1930, he published La Peinture au Défi which served as preface to a catalogue for the exhibition of "collages" organized by the Gallery Goëmans.

his future as a writer remained uncertain. The early thirties proved to be difficult years for the couple. With her usual frankness, Elsa wrote:

> Ah, que la vie était donc devenue difficile, tous nos moyens d'existence effondrés d'un coup. Alors j'ai inventé de faire des colliers pour la Haute Couture, que tu allais vendre dans les maisons d'exportation.[46]

Sadoul, after his visit to the Soviet Union, had been awarded a position with the communist newspaper l'Humanité, but Aragon, who was still trying to reconcile communism with surrealism, was unable to secure employment worthy of his talents, and he was forced to sell jewellery made by Elsa. When Aragon finally broke with the surrealist group in March 1932, he and Elsa decided to return to the Soviet Union. Georges Sadoul, in his account of Aragon's difficulties, hastens to add that Elsa's work assured them of a comfortable existence and that when they made their second visit to the Soviet Union it was not because of their financial plight, but primarily because both Elsa and Aragon were suffering from "le mal du pays."[47] It is certainly possible that Aragon, and even more so, Elsa, was nostalgic for Russia, but the Soviet Union was, even then, not a country where a Western visitor could travel at will. Moreover, the fact that Aragon, during his stay in the U.S.S.R., became one of

[46] O.C., I, p. 29.

[47] Georges Sadoul, "Une femme, un homme," Europe (Feb. - March 1967), 110.

the editors of the Littérature Internationale allows us to posit the thesis that either he volunteered for the position, or, as is more probable, he was sent to the Soviet Union by the party.[48] In a letter to André Gide Aragon admits: "je suis un partisan qui ne dispose pas lui-même de son temps, et du lieu où il se trouve."[49] After Aragon's definitive break with surrealism, the party may have found it desirable to expose him to the further influence of the Soviet state. But we should not lose sight of the fact that Aragon's return to the Soviet Union was also a return to journalism. It was also an escape from the financial difficulties which had beset him and Elsa in France, for by this time Elsa had become bored with her jewellery-making ventures.[50]

[48]Anne Kriegel, speaking of the means available to Soviet authorities for the indoctrination of the greatest possible number of foreign communists, remarks that to the names of those who studied at the Lenin International School should be added those of the representatives of the Komintern. The latter comprised journalists, editors, translators, experts on colonial affairs, trade-union specialists and permanent correspondents of l'Humanité. Since the incidence of rotation was fairly high, many communists could in this way be exposed to the influence of Soviet ideology. Les Communistes français (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), Ch. XII. Aragon's version is that "de retour à Moscou, comme on m'avait proposé de prendre la direction de la revue Littérature Internationale ou tout au moins de son édition française et comme d'ailleurs nous ne savions pas trop comment nous vivrions en rentrant à Paris, sans travail. . . Elsa m'avait persuadé de rester l'hiver à Moscou." O.P., V, p. 334.

[49]Letter to André Gide of November 1932 quoted in O.P., V, p. 338.

[50]"Du jour au lendemain," according to Aragon, who added: "Mais après cela la vie devint assez difficile." Ibid., p. 52.

As editor of the Littérature Internationale, Aragon became an official of an international review. Foreign communists working in the Soviet Union enjoyed certain privileges such as: free living accommodation, access to special dining-rooms and special shops. Furthermore it was customary to offer to the arriving communists some hard cash for immediate needs.[51] The Soviet state also had a way--quite ingenious--of providing visiting writers with funds. Arthur Koestler gives us the following account of the procedure. Upon his arrival in a city, he would go to the local Writers' Federation. The Secretary of the Federation would put him in touch with editors of various magazines and the State Publishing Trust. An editor would then declare that he wanted to publish a story by Koestler. Here is what happened then:

> I handed him a copy of a story, published some time ago in Germany; and the same day a check for two or three thousand roubles was sent to my hotel. The director of the State Publishing Trust asked for the privilege of publishing a . . . translation of the book I was going to write; I signed a printed agreement form and was sent another check for three or four thousand roubles. (The salary of the average wage-earner was at that time 130 roubles per month). I thus sold the same short story to eight or ten different literary magazines . . . and sold the Russian, German, Ukrainian, Georgian and Armenian rights of my unwritten book against advance payments. . . . . And as I did all this with official encouragement, and as other writers did the same, I could wholeheartedly confirm that Soviet Russia was the writer's paradise and that nowhere else in the world was the

[51] Pierre Herbart, La ligne de force (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), p. 86.

> creative artist better paid or held in higher esteem.[52]

Koestler adds that at that time he had not published a single book, and that his name was completely unknown to those who paid for the story. What explained the treatment he received was the fact that he was a foreign communist who intended to write a book about the Soviet Union. Koestler's story is corroborated by another communist who writes:

> Les militants les plus en vue recevaient les roubles en quantité en se faisant payer leurs articles dans la presse soviétique: or le système était fructueux, puisqu'un même article paru à Moscou dans l'organe central du parti ou dans celui des syndicats (Trud) pouvait souvent être reproduit jusqu'à quatorze fois dans les journaux de province: et certes, les militants étrangers ne pouvaient pas "sortir" cet argent de Russie, mais certains tournaient la difficulté en se faisant payer en dollars.[53]

André Gide, in his Retouches à mon 'Retour de l'U.R.S.S.' also mentions the astronomically high royalties he received from the State Publishing Trust.[54]

It is evident that Aragon's stature as a writer was not comparable to that of Gide at the time, nor are we suggesting that Aragon enjoyed the same financial ease as Koestler and some party militants. Still Soviet treatment

[52]Arthur Koestler et al., The God That Failed, Editor Richard Grossman (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 65.

[53]Philippe Robrieux, op. cit., p. 106.

[54]André Gide, Retour de l'U.R.S.S. suivi de Rétouches à mon 'Retour de l'U.R.S.S.' (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), pp. 161-162.

of writers, even were we to disregard its more lucrative aspects, seems to have offered a good many attractive features to an ambitious writer, who would no doubt be happy to see his work published in a country with several million potential readers.[55] The following quotation indicates that Aragon was fully conscious of the privileged position of the writer in the Soviet state:

> Quel est dans cette Commune triomphante [U.S.S.R.] le sort des écrivains, le sort des poètes, le sort de ces ingénieurs des âmes dont nous parlions? Sous des formes diverses, cette question passionne les esprits, et il est bien certain que la réponse à cette question est pour beaucoup une pierre de touche de l'excellence du régime soviétique, une preuve historique de la valeur de la méthode prolétarienne de reconstruction du monde.[56]

When Aragon arrived in Moscow in 1932 two important developments had taken place since his first visit in 1930: his decision to throw in his lot with the communist movement, and a change within the communist party in its attitude towards intellectuals. When Aragon had joined the party in 1927, it had had little use for intellectuals. After Stalin had declared that writers were "engineers of human minds," the party discovered the usefulness of left wing authors and fellow travellers. Although the attitude of the communist party towards intellectuals was subject to fluctuation,

[55]Just how advantageous this situation could be to Aragon can be seen in the fact that Le Front Rouge was, immediately after its composition, published in the Soviet press.

[56]Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, p. 24.

the party began to attach greater importance to the presence of intellectuals in the party and it tried to attract them into its ranks.[57]

In Western society writers had been accustomed to being considered either a luxury or a nuisance, but they now had the illusion of playing a vital role in society. They were called together in Congresses, they signed appeals, they headed up various cultural organizations.[58] The attitude of the Soviet Union towards non-Soviet Writers also changed. It flattered them and invited them to visit the Soviet Union, where their books were widely published and they themselves royally received. The number of French writers who visited the Soviet Union in the thirties is impressive, and includes some illustrious literary fig-

[57]In his book Communism and French Intellectuals, David Caute has shown that from the party's point of view, the "intellectuel de métier" may serve one or more of five functions, which he calls principles of utility. They include: prestige which reflects favorably on the party; professional excellence, and here the primary object is to influence politically other intellectuals; political agitation for short-term objectives, within professional bodies or through front organizations and the party press; political journalism; and, finally, guidance of the political and cultural attitudes of the masses. Because writers could serve several of these principles at one time they were seen as particularly useful to the party. David Caute, Communism and French Intellectuals (London: André Deutsch, 1964).

[58]That this was an illusion was demonstrated by certain writers in their post-Stalin era publications. See: Vercors, PPC (Paris: Albin Michel, 1954); Louis de Villefosse, L'Oeuf de Wyasma (Paris: Julliard, 1962); Pierre Hervé, Dieu et César sont-ils Communistes? (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1956). Hervé observed: "En dehors de leur activité spécifique, ils seraient appelés à signer des manifestes et à figurer sur les tribunes; dans la mythologie stalinienne, ils représentent la Conscience, qui donne sa bénédiction aux habiletés de l'appareil [F.C.P.]," p. 14.

ures.[59]

Because the leaders of the communist party in the Soviet Union attached great importance to the sojourn of foreign intellectuals in the U.S.S.R., they did not spare any effort to give a favourable impression of the socialist country. Nizan, who spent the year 1934 in the Soviet Union, related his impressions to Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. The latter recounts them in La Force de l'âge:

> 'Ç'a été un séjour extrêmement corrupteur' . . . Il nous parla des grands banquets où la vodka coulait à flots, des vins capiteux de Géorgie, du confort des wagons-lits, de la splendeur des chambres d'hôtel: sa voix négligente suggérait que ce luxe reflétait l'énorme prospérité du pays.[60]

André Gide, who spent several months in the U.S.S.R. in 1936, also talks about Russian hospitality:

> Jamais encore je n'avais voyagé dans des conditions si fastueuses. En wagon spécial ou dans les meillèures autos, toujours les meilleures chambres dans les meilleurs hôtels, la chère la plus abondante et la mieux choisie. Et quel accueil! Quels soins! Quelles prévenances![61]

But Gide's enthusiasm was modified by what he saw. He was troubled by the lack of equality in this proletarian state:

[59]Among the visitors of the thirties were Romain Rolland, Barbusse, Gide, Malraux, Georges Duhamel, Nizan, Aragon and Dabit.

[60]Simone de Beauvoir, La Force de l'âge (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 212.

[61]André Gide, op. cit., p. 163.

> Certes, il me paraissait naturel que l'on cherchât à recevoir aussi bien que possible un hôte, à lui présenter partout le meilleur. Mais ce qui m'étonnait c'était, entre ce meilleur et la part commune, un tel écart; le privilège si excessif auprès de l'ordinaire si médiocre ou si mauvais.[62]

Soviet authorities hoped that their visitors would approve of everything they saw, or at least would not disapprove of anything in public. The stir created by the publication of Retour de l'U.R.S.S. and the condemnation of this work by the communists and their sympathizers are common knowledge. Gide's case demonstrates that Soviet efforts were not always successful. Aragon, too, condemned Gide's outcry, but in 1934 he himself attended a sumptuous dinner for some hundred persons in Gorky's "oussadba,"[63] this at a time when the Russian people endured poverty and want in the name of the future.

The change in the Soviet attitude towards intellectuals had a considerable influence on Aragon's fortunes. As we shall see, 1932 was the year the communist party inaugurated a new literary policy, the implementation of which required devoted and enthusiastic writers in foreign communist parties. Aragon seemed well suited to the task.

During this stay in the Soviet Union, Aragon spent several months in Moscow editing the French issue of the Littérature Internationale, studying Russian, and undergoing

[62] Ibid., p. 160.

[63] Louis Aragon, La Mise à mort (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 42. "Oussadba" is a sort of country estate.

the process of indoctrination which was to enable him to emerge as a communist steeped in Soviet orthodoxy. He was also allowed another glimpse of socialist construction. As a member of the International brigade, which consisted of six persons--four writers,[64] Elsa, who acted as an interpreter, and a Russian official,--he went to the Urals. In the course of this journey, which lasted about forty-five days, the group visited factories, construction sites and children's camps in the principal centres of the region: Zlatoust, Chelyabinsk, Sverdlovsk, as well as many smaller cities and villages, where the party stopped for from two to six days. Elsa realized that this trip was in no way like the one Aragon and she had made in 1930. This time they saw the very heart of the Soviet Union in process of industrialization. She was enthusiastic, and wrote to Sadoul:

> Le travail dans l'Oural est formidable. Plus on voyage, et plus on peut se rendre compte que ceci est vraiment un pays prolétarien. Cette fois-ci, ça y est!

Aragon continued the letter:

> J'aurais voulu te voir chez les pionniers, près de Tcheliabinsk, ou à Sverdlovsk dans la maison où a été exécuté Nicolas, sa dame et ses petits cochons. Sans parler de la construction du socialisme: notre voyage d'il y a deux ans m'a l'air d'un jeu d'enfants . . . L'enthousiasme joue un grand rôle dans la construction, mais la construction n'est

[64] Other writers were: Jef Last, a Dutchman, Planter, an American Jew and Barta, a Hungarian. Although exact information about the trip is lacking, it is possible that Elsa and Aragon were included in the party on suggestion from General Vitali Primakov whom Elsa's sister, Lili, married after Mayakovsky's death and who was at the time stationed in the Urals.

pas seulement affaire d'enthousiasme. . . .[65]

During this trip, Aragon took notes which he later destroyed, but he published the account of his impressions in Littérature Internationale[66] and wrote a book of poems Hourra l'Oural which appeared in 1934. The aim of the book is summed up in the following lines:

> Chantons les nouvelles romances
> d'une nouvelle passion
> en gardant les travaux immenses
> nés de la Révolution[67]

The poems are dedicated to the past and the present of Russia. They contain references to certain historical events: the war with Japan, the revolutionary struggle, the execution of the Czar and his family. Some of the titles,--"Valse du Tcheliabtraktrostroi," "Magnitogorsk," "Chanson pour le Sovkhose"--reflect Aragon's enthusiasm for the industrialization and collectivization taking place in the Soviet Union. Other poems express Aragon's socialist orthodoxy. In the poem "Réponse aux Jacobins," for example, he dispenses with the Marseillaise, France's national anthem, and urges French workers to adopt the communist hymn, the International:

> Je salue ici
> l'Internationale contre la Marseillaise
> Cède le pas ô Marseillaise
> à l'Internationale car voici

[65]Georges Sadoul, "Une femme, un homme," Europe (Feb. - March 1967), 111.

[66]Littérature Internationale, No. 2, 1933.

[67]Louis Aragon, Hourra l'Oural (Paris: Denoël et Steele, 1934), p. 93.

l'automne de tes jours voici
l'Octobre où sombrent tes derniers accents [68]

The last lines in this book of poems are an indirect salute to Stalin, in the form of a "collage":

Et dans le ciel de six heures il y avait
un grand écriteau rouge où l'on lisait
Salut au Parti Bolchévik
VKP
b
et à son chef le camarade Staline [69]

Besides its obvious propaganda content what strikes the reader of Hourra l'Oural is Aragon's thorough knowledge of the methods by which the industrialization was carried out. This can be seen in the following passage where a Soviet citizen, Comrade Fideleyev, is addressed by an adversary:

Camarade Fideleiev pourquoi travailler comme un fou
Camarade Fideleiev tu n'as déjà plus de jeunesse
Camarade Fideleiev ta femme est morte l'autre été
Camarade Fideleiev il n'est plus de patron qui tienne
Camarade Fideleiev encore des réunions
Camarade Fideleiev laisse donc là leur politique
Camarade Fideleiev ne vois-tu pas qu'ils font de toi
un esclave une bête de somme avec leurs plans leurs
contre-plans
leurs contrats d'émulation socialiste
leurs systèmes de talons pour les ouvriers de choc
et le drapeau rouge à la meilleure brigade [70]

Elsewhere, Aragon relates the following feat of the workers:

A l'usine de tracteurs de Tcheliabinsk,
pendant la construction de cette usine,
plusieurs fois les brigades de bétonneurs
ont organisé des soirées d'émulation socialiste
au cours desquelles il s'agissait de remplir
et vider le mélangeur de béton au lieu de
140 fois, comme c'est la normale d'une journée,

[68] Ibid., p. 137.

[69] Ibid., p. 148.

[70] Ibid., p. 98. The name is significant. Fideleyev is derived from "fidèle."

> 200 fois et plus. Une large assemblée assistait à ce spectacle qui se poursuivait au son d'un orchestre jouant des airs de danse et des chansons. Une brigade arriva à fournir en une nuit le chiffre incroyable de 1.200 mélangeurs.[71]

As we can see, Aragon did not question Soviet practices. In fact, he glorified them in his poem "Valse de Tcheliabtraktrostroi." That much of the workers' enthusiasm was artificially created, that the "soirées d'émulation socialiste" represented a kind of exploitation which would have been unthinkable in French society with its network of trade-unions to protect the interests of the working class, all this was of secondary importance. What was important was the new attitude to work. Surrealists rejected the principle of work at the same time as they rejected the whole of capitalist society.[72] By contrast, in the socialist world, work became the principal ethical value.--"C'est que le travail ne soit plus / dans le monde socialiste . . . / une honte un poids comme il fut." It became "une affaire d'honneur / et de vaillance et d'héroïsme."[73] We can therefore see why Soviet authorities were appreciative of Aragon's book of poems and why they saw in it a definite step away from surrealism.

[71] Ibid., p. 23, note.

[72] Thirion stated the surrealist position as follows: "Presque tous les supports matériels étaient condamnés: le travail était méprisé et les activités journalistiques ou para-artistiques étaient assimilées à la trahison." Révolutionnaires sans Révolution, p. 99.

[73] Hourra l'Oural, p. 103.

Over five years had passed since Aragon had joined the F.C.P. His integration into the communist world had been slow and painful:--"On entre en quelques minutes dans le Parti, mais il est vrai que cela peut prendre très longtemps pour qu'on soit à proprement parler un communiste."[74] Aragon moved toward the Soviet position gradually because the communist party, to use the communist definition, "n'est pas un parti comme les autres." As one former communist observed:

> L'engagement dans le Parti débordait infiniment l'idéologie, l'accord sur des actions politiques déterminées, sur des mesures d'ordre économique. . . . Il comportait l'acceptation d'une conception du monde définitivement formulée, d'une morale (celle du dévouement inconditionné au Parti), d'une discipline s'étendant à la vie entière . . .[75]

It is doubtful whether Aragon realized at the time that he was engaging his life in an adventure which he would pursue to the bitter end, yet many years later François Billoux, another party member, wrote:

> Même dans la période infantile du Parti, sans se laisser rebuter par ses défauts, des camarades intellectuels sont devenus des membres du Parti à un tel point que leur vie elle-même se confond avec celle du Parti. Je ne citerai ici que les noms de deux hommes . . . pour souligner qu'il en est bien ainsi . . . Georges Cogniot . . . et Louis

[74]Louis Aragon, L'Homme communiste, 1, p. 17.

[75]Henri Lefebvre, "L'exclu s'inclut," Les Temps Modernes, 14, No. 149 (1958), 236.

Aragon . . .[76]

For, in the second half of 1932, Aragon's choice was made. He was ready to begin his party career, and the party, which had to struggle on many fronts--political, economic, social and cultural--needed specialists in all branches of its activities. And so it welcomed Aragon and other intellectuals into its ranks.

[76]François Billoux, "Réflexions sur l'histoire du Parti Communiste Français," Cahiers du Communisme, 41, No. 1 (1965), 66.

PART TWO

COMMUNIST AESTHETIC DOCTRINE

CHAPTER 3

SOCIALIST REALISM IN THE U.S.S.R.: THE DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

> Literature cannot develop in between the categories of 'permitted' and 'not permitted,' 'about this you may write' and 'about this you may not.' Literature that is not the breath of contemporary society, that dares not transmit the pains and fears of that society, that does not warn in time against threatening moral and social dangers--such literature does not deserve the name of literature; it is only a façade.
>
> A. Solzhenitsyn, Open Letter to the Fourth Soviet Writers' Congress

Socialist realism, the official aesthetics of the Soviet state, did not come into being with the October Revolution but was elaborated much later in order to make literature and art the tools of ideological indoctrination. The formation of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1932 and the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers which was held in 1934, represented two important steps in the imposition of state control over literature and arts in the U.S.S.R.

When the first socialist state had overcome the difficulties assailing it after the Revolution, its first concern was, as we have seen, the political organization of communist parties around the world, and the education and indoctrination of their members. The cultural development of the country continued with few restrictions. The immediate post-revolutionary period saw a remarkable revival in the domains of theatre, cinema and literature. It was a time of

heated discussion, of feverish intellectual activity and of unhampered experimentation. A vivid sense of this creative fervor is conveyed by the activity of Meyerhold, Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Mayakovsky, who produced some of the great works of socialist society during those early days.

In the early twenties, the communist party took little interest in art and literature. A number of literary groups enjoyed relative freedom of expression and carried on lively polemical discussions with each other about literary doctrine and practice and the role of the writer.[1] Three main groups of Soviet writers expressed the reality of Soviet life of this period: the modernists, the proletarian writers and the traditionalists.

Before the October Revolution, Russian literature, reacting against nineteenth-century realism, had gone through a period of ferment which brought forth several new literary movements. The most influential of them was that of the Symbolists.[2] Two other important movements born as a reaction to Symbolism were those of the Acmeists[3] and the Futurists.

[1]In Moscow alone there existed some thirty different literary groups. See: D. F. Markov. Genezis sotsialisticheskogo realizma (Moscow: "Nauka," 1970); N. L. Brodskii and N. P. Sidorov, eds., Ot simvolizma do "Oktiabria," Moscow: "Novayia Moskva," 1924. Gleb Struve, Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin 1917-1953 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971).

[2]Its leading figures were Valeri Briusov, Viacheslav Ivanov, Alexander Blok and Andrei Bely. The hallmark of Symbolism was a certain other worldliness: Symbolist poetry was often a vehicle for mystical insights which could be hinted at in symbolic language.

[3]The most outstanding of the Acmeists were Nikolai Gumilev, Osip Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova. Their aim was

The latter espoused modern technology and urbanism and in their poetry they were distinguished by their penchant for neologisms, slang and words of their own invention. The most prominent among the Futurists were Velemir Khlebnikov and Vladimir Mayakovsky. Temperamentally attracted to revolution, most Futurists were avant-garde in politics as well as in art. Largely for this reason, Futurism was the only modern literary movement to survive the October Revolution. In 1923 the Futurists created the so-called Left Front (LEF) and claimed to be the only true voice of the new order. They tried to continue their experimentation within the framework of the new socialist society, believing that Soviet revolutionary literature should be completely new. Mayakovsky, when discussing Russia's literary past used the image of a ship's cargo: even Pushkin was to be dumped overboard.

Proletarian writers, gathered around the Proletkult[4] and later around the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (R.A.P.P.) founded in 1925, contested the Left Front's contention to be the only true voice of the new regime. Though few members of the R.A.P.P. were proletarian by origin, they asserted that the chief role of literature

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to restore the autonomy of poetic language. They rejected mysticism and strove for precision and clarity in the use of words.

[4]Proletkult (Sovet proletarskikh kulturno-prosvetitel'nykh organizatsii), founded in 1917, existed until 1920 when, on the decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, it became part of Narkompros (Narodnyi Komissariat Prosvechsheniia).

must be to serve the interests of the proletariat, as the new ruling class, and to reflect its ideology. These writers, among them Leopold Averbakh and Alexander Fadeyev, exalted revolutionary ideas and socialist construction and saw as their mission the creation of a genuinely new revolutionary culture.

Finally, writers firmly anchored in the pre-revolutionary tradition sought to develop a new realism based on the Russian literary tradition of the nineteenth century. The most outspoken figure supporting this point of view was Maxim Gorky, later joined by certain members of the "Serapion Brothers,"[5] a group which included among others V. Kaverin, Mikhail Zoshchenko and Konstantin Fedin. Gorky asserted that proletarian culture required the absorption of world culture with Russian realist literature occupying its rightful place within the whole. Gorky's thesis that a just trial required honest witnesses indicated his concern for the truthful representation of reality. Soviet literature, he thought, could properly develop only on the basis of the Russian realist tradition.

These different trends in Soviet literature were

[5]The group "Serapion Brothers" was formed in February, 1921. It ceased to exist in the middle twenties. Many of its former members joined the positions of the party. Although Gorky was not a member of the group, he took great interest in its literary activities. He helped the young writers and influenced their ideas on creativity. See: K. D. Muratova, M. Gor'kii v bor'be za razvitie sovetskoi literatury (Moscow-Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk S.S.S.R., 1958).

given official sanction in the summer of 1925, when the Central Committee of the Communist party issued a resolution stating its policy on literature.[6] The resolution encouraged the existence of various groups and trends and declared that the monopoly of any single group or literary organization in publishing and literary activity was unacceptable.

The party thus admitted that the time was not yet ripe for a party monopoly in literature and that it was prepared to make concessions to literary fellow travellers.[7] In the years that followed, the communist press claimed that this resolution was meant to curb the activity of the "proletarian writers" by forcing them to share their leadership with writers from other groups. In reality, the party was not motivated by the desire to defend writers, but it recognized that the proletariat had not as yet had time to draw up a canon of aesthetics and had to rely on the "qualified specialists of literary technique" and to "support free competition between the various groupings and movements." In this way the party assured the fellow travellers creative freedom and material support. In 1929 the period of the

[6] "On Party Policy in the Realm of Literature." Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union published in Pravda, 1 July, 1925.

[7] Left-wing writers and artists of the Czarist era who saw the Revolution as the fulfillment of their dreams and who welcomed the abolition of social and academic conventions, but who never completely identified themselves with the Soviet regime were classified by the party as "fellow travellers."

comparative freedom was at an end. R.A.P.P. assumed dictatorial powers over literature. Its leaders welcomed the rigours of the First Five Year Plan and Collectivization. Fellow travellers and independent writers came under attack and had to follow policies laid down by the R.A.P.P.

In 1932, the C.P.S.U. decided to tighten its control over the cultural organizations. The R.A.P.P. was among the first to suffer. It was accused of trying to introduce centralization in publishing and of imposing its political opinions on readers. A decree of the Central Committee dissolved the R.A.P.P. and a multitude of other literary groups. The abolition of the R.A.P.P. purported to be a step towards liberalization, but in fact it was the expression of an urge towards uniformity. I. Ehrenburg's observation is not without interest here:

> R.A.P.P. was disbanded; a lot was written about the need for diversity in literary trends, but at the same time a close watch was kept on writers to see that they all followed a single literary road; individual paths were looked upon as deadends.[8]

In the same year a single writers' organization was created under direct party supervision--the Union of Soviet Writers. The decision to set up this body, which supplanted all existing independent literary groups, indicated, first of all, a movement from internationalism to nationalism, and a new emphasis on "Soviet" instead of "proletarian" writers. In the second place, the establishment of a single writers'

[8]Ilya Ehrenburg, Memoirs, VI, p. 164.

organization was favourable to the formation of a literature tied completely to the socialist way of life and serving the communist cause. Finally centralization ensured absolute control by the party which, posing as the champion of independence and freedom of expression, could effectively control all literary activity in the nation.

According to Article 1 of the Constitution of the Writers' Union, the requisite condition for the progress of literature and a high artistic level is the close and direct link between the literary movement and the actual problems of party policy and Soviet power. A consequence of this link is, of course, the deep and careful study of reality, with participation by the writers in the construction of socialism. The constitution stated further that the Writers' Union must aim at the creation of works of a high artistic level reflecting the heroic struggle of the proletariat, the pathos of the victory of socialism and the great wisdom and heroism of the Communist Party. The exact definition of socialist realism was published in Pravda and reads as follows:

> Socialist realism, being the basic method of Soviet fiction and literary criticism, demands from the artist a truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. At the same time, truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction of reality must be combined with the task of the ideological remoulding and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism.[9]

[9] Pravda, 6 May 1934. Quoted in Marxism, Communism and Western Society: A Comparative Encyclopedia, VIII. Editor C. D. Kernig (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), p. 5.

The reorganization was followed by the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers which opened in Moscow in the fall of 1934. Officially, the purpose of the Congress was the formulation of a body of doctrine (which in fact had already been formulated) to be assimilated by the writers, but the other and more important aim of the Congress was to make a demonstration of solidarity before the fascist danger. Of this event, Ehrenburg wrote in his memoirs:

> The Congress met on the eve of an extremely difficult decade. We saw the bared teeth of Fascism. However great our aesthetic dissensions and, at moments, the hostility they engendered, we demonstrated to all those who were willing to comprehend that standing shoulder to shoulder in battle was for us no abstract notion.[10]

The Congress opened in an atmosphere of excitement and expectation. "I was preparing myself for the Congress of Soviet Writers like a girl for her first dance . . ." Ehrenburg observed, "the Congress remained in my memory as a great and marvelous festival."[11] At the Congress such personalities as Zhdanov, Gorky, Radek and Bukharin dominated the scene.[12] Many Soviet and foreign writers also participated in the discussions. Among foreign authors present, Bloch, Malraux, Pozner, Nizan and Aragon represented

[10]Ilya Ehrenburg, Memoirs: 1921-1941 (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1966), p. 275.

[11]Ibid., p. 270.

[12]A. A. Zhdanov, member of the Politburo and close associate of Stalin. He acted as Stalin's lieutenant in cultural matters; the writer M. Gorky is considered the founder of Socialist realism in Russia; Karl Radek was a leading communist; N. I. Bukharin was a Bolshevik theorist and a member of the Politburo from 1918 to 1929.

the A.E.A.R. (Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires) and the Vigilance Committee of the Antifascist Intellectuals of France.

The tone of the Congress was set by Zhdanov, whose speech had all the characteristics of an official edict. The disintegration and decay of the capitalist system, Zhdanov said, led to the triumph of mysticism and clericalism and infatuation with pornography, the rotten fruits of bourgeois culture. By contrast, Soviet literature overflowed with enthusiasm and heroism, and was optimistic by its very essence as the literature of the proletariat, a class in the ascendant. Zhdanov also discussed the obligations imposed on writers by the definition of them as "engineers of human minds." Breaking with romanticism of the old type, Soviet writers had to be anchored in the materialistic conception of the world. They could, however, accept romanticism of a new, revolutionary type. It was their duty to assimilate critically the literary heritage of the past and to use many kinds of styles, genres and forms of literary creation in order to improve the language and quality of their writing.

Radek discussed contemporary world literature and the tasks of proletarian art. Taking his cue from Zhdanov's speech, he denounced bourgeois literature. His appreciation of Proust and Joyce indicates the tone of his harangue. In Proust, he said, the old world, like a scabby old dog incapable of moving, lay outstretched in the sun, unable to

do anything but lick its wounds, while Joyce's work was a manure heap teeming with worms and photographed through a microscope.

In the Soviet Union the October Revolution had created a new literature, but the revolutionary proletariat of the world needed a literature which would help it to comprehend its struggle. The proletariat must take under its control the literature which aspired to serve it, it must regard it as a weapon of struggle. Proletarian art should take in all spheres of human life. It should reflect the main processes which were going on in society and it must master artistic forms, Radek said.

Bukharin, in his speech on socialist realism and poetry, tried to define the characteristics of socialist realism. He pointed out the significance of the two terms: "realism" means that the doctrine deals with reality, while "socialist" indicates that it represents the point of view of proletarian society. Taking Zola as an example, Bukharin showed how ideology guides the writer and is reflected in his style. In his view, Zola's naturalism reflected the positivism of A. Comte.[13] In the Soviet state, he said, the philosophical foundation of socialist realism is dialectical materialism, which is translated into the language of literature and art. Bukharin added that the doctrine does not necessarily mean that the primary requirement of a good

[13]Auguste Comte, French mathematician and philosopher.

poet is to be a good philosopher.[14] Bukharin elaborated on Gorky's conception of "social romanticism" which he defined as confidence in life and in men and the realization that the socialist way of life was not founded on an individual conscience believing in abstract ideals, but on the solidarity of all.

Gorky, who presided at the Congress, stressed the fundamental value to be exalted by Soviet art and literature--the labour of the masses. He rejected metaphysics and warned against the nihilism of Dostoyevsky, whose philosophy he described as an evil "par excellence." Literature, he continued, should inspire a feeling of responsibility on the part of the individual toward the community, because such a sentiment, he said, is the very touch-stone of socialist ethics. Gorky particularly stressed the idea that literature has as a function to educate men in the spirit of socialism.

The precise definition of socialist realism as it was given in the Statute of the Union of Soviet Writers, was confirmed at the Congress and socialist realism was accepted as a method to be used by all Soviet writers. The formula[15] was sufficiently simple and flexible to allow

[14] Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei. Stenograficheskii otchet (Moscow: Gos. izdat khud.lit., 1934). Incomplete English version: Problems of Soviet Literature (New York: International Publishers, 1935).

[15] See p. 65.

a variety of interpretations and broad enough in its application to embrace in its references a considerable number of artists and writers outside the Soviet Union. However, its ultimate aim, the triumph of socialism, was never lost sight of: an author could not restrict himself to writing disinterested novels or poems, he must also help in the dissemination of socialism. Thus the doctrine indicated the intimate relationship which was to exist between ideology and literature, between political rulers and the writer. Because of the tendentious character of the doctrine, Soviet authorities avoided naming it an aesthetics, and even the initiators of socialist realism called it "the basic method."

Several of the most important concepts making up the doctrine should be mentioned here: ideational content--ideïnost', folk-mindedness--narodnost', optimism, which is closely linked with "social romanticism"; the concept of "positive hero"; and above all--although not spelled out explicitly--party-mindedness or partiïnost'. The concept of narodnost' was derived from Lenin's writings on art, wherein he stated that art belonged to the people, that it must penetrate with its deepest roots into the very midst of the labouring masses. It must be intelligible to these masses and be loved by them. It must unite the feeling, thought and will of these masses and it must elevate them. The principle of partiïnost' was also laid down by Lenin in 1905, in his pamphlet "Party Organization and Party

Literature" in which he declared that literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat.[16] Calling for partiinost', Lenin nevertheless qualified his remarks in a way that would not inhibit artistic creativity:

> Everyone is free to write and say whatever he likes, without any restrictions. But every voluntary association (including the party) is also free to expel members who use the name of the party to advocate antiparty views. . . . There is no question that literature is least of all subject to mechanical adjustment or levelling, to the rule of the majority over the minority. There is no question either that in this field greater scope must undoubtedly be allowed for personal initiative, individual inclinations, thought and fantasy, form and content.[17]

Despite his acknowledgement of a writer's need for a certain freedom of expression, however, Lenin asserted that a truly free and diverse literature can only be one that is openly bound to the proletariat. This identification of freedom with party control makes Lenin's writings a fertile source for citations justifying divergent viewpoints. How the concept of partiinost' was understood by Soviet writers was made clear by Fadeyev at the Second Writers' Congress which took place in 1954.

> . . . when we speak of the partiinost' of Soviet literature, we have in mind the historical fact that Soviet writers, both

[16] Some students of socialist realism, Lukacs among them, think that Lenin had in mind only party literature and not other imaginative works and that his views were misrepresented by the Soviet authorities.

[17] Quoted in Jürgen Rühle, Literature and Revolution (New York: F. A. Praeger, 1969), p. 133.

> party and nonparty, recognize the correctness of the Communist Party's ideas and defend them in their work, and therefore naturally acknowledge the guiding role of the party in literary affairs.[18]

Thus, the doctrine envisages the representation of reality only in a manner acceptable to the party. "Positive" literary heroes are to be created in order that they may be imitated: the negative characters must be portrayed in such a way that they will be condemned by the reader. The optimistic perspective is to be maintained and truth viewed in the light of the ideal; Soviet writers never neglect to proclaim their firm belief in the final victory of communism.

These principles reveal that one of the fundamental contradictions of socialist realism lies in the claim that the work must portray reality truthfully but must at the same time contain a political lesson; in other words, it must depict situations and characters as they are and, at the same time, as they ought to be. The doctrine is also hostile towards everything that fails to fit into a predetermined mold.

These contradictions did not escape the attention of congress delegates such as Ilya Ehrenburg, Boris Pasternak, and Michael Koltsov. There was considerable and outspoken resistance to the idea of art and literature being subjected to absolute political control. Ehrenburg expressed his

[18] Quoted by H. Swayze in Political Control of Literature in the U.S.S.R., 1946-1959 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1962), p. 15.

doubts on the value of collective efforts, and observed that artistic creation does not resemble the construction of a steelworks. If a steel foundryman loses his daughter, twenty pages cannot be devoted to the description of the foundry and only two lines to the girl's death. He doubted whether an artist's work should be universally accessible, and he found it inexcusable that literary criticism should have a direct effect upon an author's position in society. Boris Pasternak warned his colleagues not to sacrifice themselves and their creative individuality to the ambition of becoming literary dignitaries; while Koltsov rose in defence of satire, a literary genre whose voice, he believed, should be raised more often. Their warnings, however fell on deaf ears. . .

French writers also participated in the discussions. J.-R. Bloch called for a broad anti-Fascist front and argued that dogmatic inflexibility in literary matters could easily antagonize those whose faith in communism was not sure. Malraux declared that the Soviet Union was inaugurating a culture from which new Shakespeares would emerge, Aragon, "youthful and inspired, with his head thrown back," recalled for his colleagues the heritage of Rimbaud and Zola, Cézanne and Courbet.[19]

Aragon never accepted the idea that the concept of socialist realism was imposed on the writers from above and

[19]Ilya Ehrenburg, Memoirs, 1921-1941 (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1966), p. 274.

was not a genuine expression of the will of the Soviet writers and artists.[20] Even as late as 1955, in Littératures soviétiques, he repeated the official statements, insisting that it was the members of the Writers' Union themselves who had together defined the new method of creation--socialist realism--and that the Union of Soviet Writers had been formed to protect Soviet authors from the tyranny of the Proletarian writers.[21]

Even if one could agree with his assertion that the writers had participated in the formulation of the definition, it was not the concept of socialist realism as such which was destructive, but the application of it: Socialist realism having been declared the only literary method capable of expressing and realizing the achievements of the revolution, it seemed obvious that any one who departed from it deserved to be censured. Insofar as the Soviet "defence" of writers is concerned, there exists some curious testimony.

In 1954, at the time of the Second All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, several writers of the group "Slovo" in New York, sent a telegram to the Congress in which they

[20]Aragon seems not to have attached any importance to the fact that out of four main speakers, three were political rather than literary figures.

[21]Louis Aragon, Littératures soviétiques, p. 49. In 1975 Aragon observed: "Comment aurais-je pu comprendre que cela [the dissolution of the R.A.P.P.] se trouvait lié au retour de Gorki . . . et qu'on avait voulu se servir de son patronage, de son autorité, pour donner caractère libéral aux décisions prises . . . . J'allais le comprendre seulement deux ans plus tard [1934]." O.P., V, pp. 328-329. Although Aragon understood Soviet manoeuvres, he never revealed this fact prior to 1975.

congratulated the participants and asked for information about 223 Ukrainian authors. The telegram stated that in 1930 the works of 259 writers had been published by the Soviet press, whereas after 1938 only 36 of these authors were still being published. Having received no reply from the Congress, the members of the group "Slovo" then made public to the world what had happened to the missing writers: 17 had been shot, 8 had committed suicide, 175 were in concentration camps, 7 had died, 16 had vanished without leaving a trace.[22] Similar tragic evidence came to light in 1956, when the progressive English magazine, Jewish Clarion, published a translation of an article which had first appeared in Yiddish in the Polish communist magazine Folk sztyme. This article reported the tragic consequences of the "cult of personality" and told the story of the liquidation of 24 Jewish writers in the Soviet Union.[23]

In Littératures soviétiques, Aragon celebrated

[22] Jouri Lavrinenko, Rosztriliane Vidrodjennia (Munich; Instytut Literaski, 1959), p. 1. Regarding the protection afforded to Soviet Writers by their Union, see Solzhenitsyn's letter to the Writers' Union in which he stated that the Union not only had never defended its members but through its own governing body had contributed to the persecution of those of its members who were the targets of insult and slander. He recalled that the Union docilely handed over to imprisonment or deportation more than six hundred absolutely innocent writers. "Solzhenitsyn's open letter to the Fourth Soviet Writers' Congress, May 16, 1967." Leopold Labedz, Solzhenitsyn: A Documentary Record (London: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 106-112.

[23] "L'Union soviétique devant le problème juif," T.M., 14, Nos. 147-148 (1958), 2113-2114. See also: N. Mandelstam, Hope Against Hope.

"la littérature libre" of the Soviet Union.[24] Yet, insofar as "liberty" is concerned, Bukharin, at the First Congress, had categorically rejected the suggestion of the poet-propagandist, Surkov, that the writers' organization should not accept the tutelage of the party. He had stressed the fact that the party was determined to impose its will and to ensure that Soviet writers not stray from party direction.

From this time on, the writers of the Soviet Union had to forsake their earlier credos and conform to the dogma of socialist realism. The press being in the hands of the state, and all publication being impossible without the authorization of the political powers, the writer found himself forced to write what pleased the authorities. Arthur Koestler remarked that

> . . . in a country where all publications are State-owned, editors, publishers and literary critics become ipso facto part of the Civil Service. They will make or break a writer according to orders received: the publishers, by printing vast editions of his new book or by pulping all his previous works; the critics, by calling him a new Tolstoy or a depraved cosmopolitan vermin, or both within an interval of a few months.[25]

Indeed, if the writer deviated from the accepted formulae and ideas, he had either to renounce the publication of his works, or to rewrite them. The number of novels which have been rewritten by their authors as a result of the criticism to which they have been subjected is impressive. Even

[24] Louis Aragon: Littératures soviétiques, p. 13.

[25] The God That Failed, pp. 57-58.

Aragon had to admit that Sholokhov, Fadeyev, Grossman and Kazakevich rewrote their novels. If Fadeyev, long-time president of the Union of Soviet Writers and member of the Central Committee, if Sholokhov, considered by many to be one of the best Soviet writers, had to yield to the demands of the Soviet authorities, what must have been the situation of other Soviet writers? Naturally, Aragon considered that Fadeyev "n'a récrit partiellement son livre, que parce qu'il a trouvé les critiques 'justes.'"[26] We have already seen from the example of Jewish and Ukrainian writers what could happen when authors disagreed with the official line.

Some lucid minds, however, did not fail to discern the real character of the doctrine. When Be la Illes, secretary of the International Organization of Revolutionary Writers, invited Romain Rolland to give his opinion on the proposed statute of the Union of Soviet Writers and the method of socialist realism, Romain Rolland wrote in his diary:

> Malgré leurs intentions exprimées d'échapper au sectarisme politique des débuts de la Révolution,-malgré leurs protestations préliminaires que "le réalisme socialiste n'est pas un dogme, un recueil de lois limitant la création artistique, réduisant toute la diversité des recherches et des formes à des commandements littéraires",-ces bons croyants identifient en fait le "réalisme socialiste" avec "une exposition qui soit au service de l'éducation et de la transformation des masses laborieuses, dans l'esprit du socialisme". Et cet esprit se trouve être, obligatoirement, celui de l'école marxiste-léniniste. Car si l'on proteste,

[26]Louis Aragon, Littératures soviétiques, p. 46.

> encore une fois (pour la forme) qu'il n'est naturellement pas question de "contraindre l'écrivain à se rendre maître de la philosophie marxiste, comme d'une condition préalable de la création",-on ajoute, immédiatement après, avec une naïveté dont le comique leur échappe: "Mais exiger de l'écrivain qu'il s'élève au niveau de la culture contemporaine, c'est là une exigence obligatoire. (Or) le marxisme-léninisme est l'expression la plus conséquente de la culture contemporaine. L'écrivain doit donc posséder la philosophie de Marx, d'Engels, de Lénine, de Staline, la plus haute sagesse de l'Humanité, . . ." Jamais le catholicisme, au temps de sa plénitude dominatrice sur toutes les forces de l'esprit humain, ne s'est exprimé avec un plus candide un plus aveugle absolutisme.-Il est, je crois, impossible de discuter, c'est un "Credo". La raison libre n'a rien à y voir.[27]

That Gorky, initiator of socialist realism, was sensitive to the dangers inherent in centralization can be surmised from his final remarks to the First Congress. Referring to Sobolev's speech, in which the latter noted that the party and the government had given the writer everything and had taken away only one thing--the privilege of writing badly--Gorky observed:

> Well said! But it must be added that the party and the government are also taking away the privilege of giving each other orders, leaving us only the right to teach each other. To teach means only a mutual exchange of experience. Only this, only this, and no more than this.[28]

[27]Romain Rolland, Journal 1934. Quoted by J. Pérus in Romain Rolland et Maxime Gorki (Paris: Les Editeurs Français Réunis, 1968), pp. 309-310.

[28]Quoted by Irwin Weil in Gorky (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 125.

After making this statement, Gorky is reported to have burst into tears.[29] Although his words and reaction are subject to more than one interpretation, these sentences seem to imply that from then on the party,--or the government--reserved for itself the privileges it had taken away from the writers. In spite of the mournful note struck by the spectacle of Gorky's tears, the participants of the Congress were full of great expectations: "it was a good period and we all thought that in 1937, when, according to the rules, the Second Congress of Writers was due to meet, we should be living in a paradise." Thus wrote Ehrenburg in his Memoirs.[30]

During the twenty years following the First Congress, the doctrine was interpreted, commented upon, elaborated and codified to become finally a conglomeration of concepts, theories and rules which guided all literary and artistic activity among Soviet writers and artists. The writers depicted life according to the party line and glorified the socialist state as the state of the future. Writers exalted the leaders of the Soviet Union and the party, because only these were capable of leading the proletariat to communism. They stressed the absence of conflict in the Soviet society. If a conflict was depicted it was between the good and the better, because failure was thought to be impossible in a socialist state. If it came to the worst,

[29] Irwin Weil, op. cit.

[30] Ilya Ehrenburg, Memoirs: 1921-1941, p. 278. The Second Congress did not take place until twenty years later, after Stalin's death.

the hero died but the cause triumphed.[31] The result was that after many years of existence in the Soviet Union and subsequently in People's Democracies, socialist realism emerged as a doctrine which was conservative, inflexible and hostile towards everything original and imaginative.

It is interesting to note that long after socialist realism had been canonized as the basic method of Soviet literature, few writers could say exactly what socialist realism meant beyond the fact that it was "fulfilling the party's program for literature or 'partiïnost'." Even Soviet writers whose works are held up as outstanding examples of socialist realism have not found it easy to explain what the doctrine means. When, during his trip abroad in 1958, Mikhail Sholokhov was asked to define socialist realism, he is reported to have said that his explanation would be that "socialist realism is that which is written for the Soviet Government in simple, comprehensive, artistic language." Before giving this straight forward answer, however, he cited a remark which his friend and colleague, the late Alexander Fadeyev, had made: "If any one should ask me what socialist realism is, I should have to answer that the devil alone knows."[32]

[31]See; Abraham Tertz, On Socialist Realism (New York: Vintage Books, 1960).

[32]New York Times, 11 May, 1958.

CHAPTER 4

SOCIALIST REALISM IN FRANCE: RECEPTION AND GENERAL PRACTICE

In the preceding chapter we have tried to indicate the circumstances surrounding the birth of the socialist realist doctrine and its subsequent evolution in the Soviet state. If socialist realism had remained the literary doctrine of the Soviet Union alone, it would have been of incidental interest to the world in general, but its teachings spread beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union into the People's democracies as well as into capitalist countries, where communist writers adopted the method as their own. Socialist realism, thus, became one of the great options open to western writers, and historically may be seen as a movement which was potentially, if not actually, of as great importance as other literary schools of our time, such as surrealism or existentialism.

In France, socialist realism was accepted by certain writers and artists because they saw in it the aesthetic expression of a political regime which they considered exemplary. They presented socialist realism as a source of renewal in art and literature, and as a necessity dictated by changing historical circumstances: by the existence of a large working class, by new political forces in the capital-

ist states, by the menace of war and similar manifestations of social change. Socialist realism was considered to be a powerful weapon in the struggle of new political forces against the established order. Those writers accepting it rejected the claim that socialist realism was impossible in France because France was a capitalist country, and they cited the example of Gorky, who under the czarist regime had written works now considered socialist realist writings, notably his novel Mother.

These same writers understood, however, that socialist realism in the Soviet Union had its roots in the past history of that country and that it contained new elements peculiar only to Soviet society. They saw that the doctrine could not be accepted in its totality outside the U.S.S.R. even by communist writers and that certain modifications of it would be necessary in other countries.

To illustrate: in the Soviet Union communist ideals were expressed through the use of new literary subjects of which there was no lack in the new society. Soviet writers could draw their material from the experience of Soviet life, from the various kinds of creative activity which were springing up in every corner of the country. Collectivization, the Civil War, the reeducation of Soviet youth, Soviet patriotism, and a host of other topics were treated by Sholokhov, Fadeyev, Makarenko and Ostrovsky, to mention only the best known Soviet writers.

It is obvious that few of the themes treated by

Soviet authors were suitable to the conditions of bourgeois society. Other subjects had to be found, such as strikes, elections, the struggle for power, the growing consciousness within the proletariat of its social role, and the defence of peace. Nevertheless, the most important political aspects of socialist realism--devotion to the communist ideal, unflinching allegiance to the communist party, fidelity to the party line--were possible subjects under any government. Furthermore, because communist writers followed policies developed in the Soviet Union, and because the Soviet position in the domain of art, culture and literature had to be popularized, the field of possibilities was broad enough to occupy the talents of many a communist writer. Aragon had no doubt that socialist realism could be practised in France. He wrote:

> J'ai toujours défendu le point de vue que l'existence même de l'Union Soviétique pouvait donner et donnait aux écrivains de chez nous la perspective du socialisme, et que cela suffisait à changer de fond en comble les conditions de la création littéraire, bref que la réalisme socialiste était possible en pays capitaliste, si seulement l'artiste, l'écrivain, ayant fait sienne l'idéologie de la classe ouvrière montante, savait pratiquer avec cette perspective, un art réaliste, basé sur la connaissance historique, scientifique, de son propre peuple, de sa nation.[1]

The F.C.P. welcomed the doctrine of socialist realism which, it felt, might help the party to use literary forces in the service of specific political tasks. What the party

[1]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 182.

expected of its writers is expressed in a lecture delivered in 1935 to Moscow writers by George Dimitrov, General Secretary of the Communist International. He was surprised, he said, that the proceedings and materials of the Leipzig trial were not studied and utilized by communist writers. He lamented the fact that many authors who sympathized with the revolutionary cause and who were willing to help the working class and the revolutionary movement, were unable to find suitable subject matter for their writings. They should observe, he said, the class struggle, strikes, demonstrations and other manifestations suitable for propaganda purposes. "Où sont dans notre littérature, les héros du mouvement prolétarien . . . où sont les modèles que pourraient imiter les millions de travailleurs?" he asked. He then appealed to all communist writers:

> Aidez-nous, aidez le Parti de la classe ouvrière, aidez l'Internationale communiste, donnez-nous sous une forme artistique vers, romans, nouvelles, une arme tranchante de lutte; aidez par votre production littéraire, à former les cadres de révolutionnaires.

He concluded his speech by pointing out that the bourgeoisie knew how to utilize literature. Demanding a proletarian Cervantes, he exclaimed:

> N'est pas écrivain révolutionnaire qui se borne à répéter: 'Vive la révolution!' Pour être écrivain révolutionnaire, il faut contribuer à la radicalisation des masses ouvrières, les mobiliser pour la lutte contre l'ennemi . . . . Il faut que la littérature serve le grand idéal révolutionnaire des millions de travailleurs.[2]

[2]George Dimitrov, Speech delivered in Moscow in 1935, published in L.F., 7 July 1949, under the title "Le rôle du roman," p. 5.

This appeal was heeded by many communist writers who thus dedicated their talents to the service of the party.

Among the first French communist writers to accept socialist realism as a literary doctrine were Nizan and Aragon. Paul Nizan, a philosopher, joined the communist party after his return from Arabia where he had been disgusted with colonial life (described in his book Aden-Arabie).[3] His social and political concerns are evident in his pamphlet, Les Chiens de Garde, directed against Brunschvicg and attacking bourgeois philosophers for the vagueness of their ideas. Nizan insisted that it was time to ask the philosophers about their specific view on certain political and social issues, such as colonialism, unemployment, suicide and abortion.[4] In the same year as the publication of Les Chiens de Garde (1932), Nizan, along with Aragon, began to play a leading role in the Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires (A.E.A.R.), a group modeled on the Association of Soviet Writers.[5] When the

[3]Simone de Beauvoir observed in her memoirs: "Nizan dans Aden-Arabie s'insurgeait contre ce précepte d'Alain qui avait marqué notre génération: dire non; il voulait dire oui à quelque chose, et c'est ainsi qu'en revenant d'Arabie, il s'était inscrit au P.C." La Force de l'âge (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 84.

[4]Paul Nizan, Les Chiens de Garde (Paris: Rieder, 1932). Many of these topics were to be discussed in Aragon's first socialist realist novel, Les Cloches de Bâle.

[5]The Association was founded as an anti-fascist organization with Vaillant-Couturier, a well known communist, as Secretary of the organization.

Association's monthly journal Commune was founded in the summer of 1933, Aragon and Nizan became its editorial secretaries.[6]

Like Aragon, Nizan spent a year in Russia (1934) preparing the French edition of Littérature Internationale, the organ of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers. While there, Nizan, together with other French writers, including Aragon, attended the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers where the principles of the socialist realist doctrine were presented. Subsequently, he made a journey to Soviet Asia, during which he was deeply impressed by the economic advances made in the country and by the cultural changes which had taken place in Soviet society. This enthusiasm is evident in his article "Sindobod Toçikiston," published in Europe.[7]

After the Soviet authorities had officially introduced the doctrine of socialist realism, Aragon and Nizan became the main apologists for socialist realism in France. Both wrote articles in which they tried to popularize certain aspects of the doctrine and demanded a kind of literary art which would be essentially political and capable of serving the revolution. Nizan made

[6]The first issue of Commune appeared in July, 1933.

[7]Paul Nizan, "Sindobod Toçikiston," Europe, No. 38 (1935). Partially reproduced in Paul Nizan, intellectuel communiste: 1926-1940. (Paris: François Maspéro, 1967), pp. 175-196.

known his views on literature in an article published in Vendredi under the title "Une littérature responsable." In it, he stated that he would like to see a type of literature

> . . . qui se soucierait de formuler en termes forts et définis le scandale de la condition faite à l'homme. Mais elle se perdrait si elle s'en tenait à des refus, à un exercice de la pensée et de l'écriture qui fussent uniquement négatifs: elle ne parviendrait pas à la responsabilité qui constitue sa principale ambition. Il y a des dénonciations sans issue...Il ne faut pas enseigner le désespoir mais, au-delà du tableau intolérable de notre monde, dégager les valeurs impliquées par l'action de la colère des hommes qui veulent bouleverser leur sort. Cette littérature jouerait plus sur l'avenir que sur le présent, sur des volontés que sur des constatations . . ., un rapport de responsabilité l'unirait à des lecteurs; elle s'occuperait plutôt d'accroître leur conscience d'eux-mêmes que de leurs procurer des plaisirs.[8]

It is worth noting that Nizan himself wrote in accordance with the principles he advocated, whereas Aragon avoided committing himself fully. In 1933, Nizan published Antoine Bloyé,[9] a veiled account of his father's life, and hailed by Aragon as a work of socialist realism. In his next novel, Le Cheval de Troie,[10] Nizan, in good socialist realist tradition, described a Popular Front counter-demonstration against a fascist rally, during the course of

[8]Paul Nizan, "Une littérature responsable," Vendredi, No. 1, 8 November 1935. Quoted in Paul Nizan, intellectuel communiste, op. cit., p. 123.

[9]Paul Nizan, Antoine Bloyé (Paris: Grasset, 1933).

[10]Paul Nizan, Le Cheval de Troie (Paris: Gallimard, 1935).

which the left-wing demonstrators were mowed down by mounted guards. In the same novel, Nizan, complying with his duty to illustrate the current party line, demonstrated the success of the Popular Front policy by depicting the local peasantry helping to feed the urban workers. The action of Nizan's last novel La Conspiration[11] takes place in the late twenties and deals with the launching of a magazine La Revue Marxiste under the fictitious name of Guerre Civile. The novel depicts the contradictions within the group of Parisian anarchist-revolutionary intellectuals. In this work, Nizan, using one of his protagonists as porte-parole, also indicated the reasons that had compelled many intellectuals to join the party:

> Des gens . . . ne voient dans le communisme qu'un système d'idées parmi tous les autres . . . Le communisme est une politique, c'est aussi un style de vie . . . . Je suis communiste depuis le Congrès de Tours, pour des quantités de raisons mais il n'y en a pas de plus importante que d'avoir pu répondre à cette question: avec qui puis-je vivre? Je peux vivre avec les communistes. Avec les socialistes non. Les socialistes se réunissent et parlent politique, élections, et après, c'est fini, ça ne commande pas leur respiration, leur vie privée, leurs fidélités personnelles, leur idée de la mort, de l'avenir. Ce sont des citoyens. Ce ne sont pas des hommes.[12]

Although the final note of the novel is a pessimistic one, La Conspiration demonstrates that revolutionary activity is impossible without doctrine, discipline and self-sacrifice,

[11] Paul Nizan, La Conspiration (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).

[12] Ibid., pp. 172-173.

which are, of course, the principal demands of the communist party on its members. Thus Nizan, during the short time which he followed the precepts of socialist realism,[13] came close to creating a socialist realist novel. Ironically, because of his break with the party in 1939, his name was erased from the party's annals.[14]

Like Nizan, Aragon expressed his views on socialist realism in a number of speeches delivered shortly after the First Congress of Soviet Writers held in 1934, and which he had attended as an active delegate. In a speech delivered on April 4, 1935, in La Maison de la Culture in Paris, Aragon discussed the new role of writers in the Soviet Union, those "ingénieurs des âmes," to use Stalin's expression (which Aragon qualified as "géniale"), and he urged French authors to study the Soviet experiment:

> Rien n'est désirable comme une étude approfondie de la vie, des méthodes des écrivains soviétiques, de leurs oeuvres. Rien ne serait plus profitable aux écrivains français, par exemple. C'est pourquoi, à l'heure qu'il est, l'histoire de Maïakovsky, de Pasternak, de cent autres, est plus propice à méditer, si grande que soit l'oeuvre de Rimbaud, que la biographie de Rimbaud et sa fuite au Harrar.[15]

In a message to the Congress of John Reed Clubs, which took

[13] Nizan died during the Battle of Dunkirk in 1940.

[14] Nizan did not accept the Stalin-Hitler Pact signed in August 1939. He, however, did not break with the party before the Soviet occupation of Poland. At that time he sent a letter of resignation to J. Duclos and published it in L'Oeuvre.

[15] Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, p. 26.

place in New York at the end of April 1935, Aragon invited all writers to follow the example of their Soviet counterparts in accepting the socialist realist doctrine:

> L'expérience des écrivains de l'U.R.S.S. est pour tous les écrivains véritables une expérience fondamentale pour la littérature de demain . . . Nos camarades de l'U.R.S.S. en ont défini la méthode, le réalisme socialiste. Qu'attendons-nous pour travailler avec cette arme nouvelle?[16]

Aragon himself did not wait long to use this "arme nouvelle" and he shortly wrote several novels which we shall discuss later.

It should be stated that the situation of a Western writer who accepted the doctrine of socialist realism was vastly different from that of his Soviet counterpart. In the early thirties, the F.C.P. was small and isolated and did not possess any means of coercion. The Western writer was under no threat to his life, and his adherence was entirely voluntary. In the Soviet Union the regime was specific in its demands that the novel follow a particular line or the direction of the moment, that it pursue some immediate practical political aim.[17] No such compulsion existed in the F.C.P. The writer was free to deviate from the party line without any fear of the consequences. As a result, in the years before the war the output of socialist realist novels in France was not abundant and the orthodoxy of the novels often questionable.

[16]Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, p. 57. The use of military metaphor was common in communist jargon.

[17]See Chapter 3.

After the war, the F.C.P. acquired enough political influence to be able to dictate its cultural policies. It used its writers for the purpose of resolving particular, urgent problems, in an effort to break or weaken the forces of the opposition. The majority of socialist realist writers appeared at this period, and became particularly active during the Cold War years. Pierre Courtade, Pierre Daix, Jean Laffitte, André Stil, Roger Vailland, André Wurmser and a host of others, all experimented in the socialist realist manner. In their novels, socialist realist writers generally pursued two objectives laid down by the party: the long-term goal was to accept the responsibilities of the Marxist writer and to make every effort to increase the general political awareness of the working class; the short-term objective was to try to reduce literature to its immediate social function according to the political tactics of the moment. Most of this literature was opportunistic and utilitarian in both its subject matter and its timing. It followed closely political and social events and offered an immediate response to the problems the party encountered in its everyday struggle with its adversaries. The novels of Courtade, of Daix, of André Stil, of Roger Vailland and Hélène Parmelin offer excellent illustrations of the short-term objectives.

Since the defence of the Soviet Union was one of the prime tasks of every good communist, in Courtade's novel Jimmy (1951)[18] an American visitor to Paris asks a French

[18]Pierre Courtade, Jimmy (Paris: Les Editeurs Français Réunis, 1951).

communist whether they had not been forced to follow the example of one hundred million Russians who had signed an anti-bomb manifesto. The communist replies that he does not think so, but that even if it were true, it would mean that the U.S.S.R. was against the bomb; whereas in the U.S.A. the situation was quite the reverse, since Truman was not forcing his people to sign. Because anti-Americanism was at its peak in France at that time (1951-1952), the novel also attacks the vices of the American political system. Governor Dewey, Judge Medina and the whole "police-state" apparatus are depicted as villains dedicated to the destruction of the progressive movement in the United States. The author denounces the anti-semitism of American society and draws a parallel with Nazi Germany. The Cominform campaign against Tito is not forgotten either, and in a single sentence Yugoslav communism is equated with fascism.

Another example of the immediate connection between the novel and the party line is offered in the writings of André Stil. The struggle for national independence from the U.S.A., which became an obsessive theme of French socialist writing, is depicted in Stil's prize-winning novel, Le Premier Choc.[19] This work has as its theme the struggle of dockers in an Atlantic seaport against the American "occupation." In the novel, the Americans are

[19]André Stil, Le Premier Choc (Paris: Les Editeurs Français Réunis, 1951). Awarded the Stalin Prize in 1951.

the embodiment of all possible vices. They rape the local women, incorporate former Nazis into their forces, create unemployment, dispossess villagers of their houses, supply France with arms in preparation for a war against the U.S.S.R.; all this with the support of the French governing clique and its hirelings,--the police. The novel also pays homage to the memory of Danielle Casanova, a victim of Auschwitz, and in this way reminds the French public that the Communist Party is the party of the martyrs, "le parti des fusillés."

As the Cold War hardened, leaving the F.C.P. isolated and on the defensive, communist writers became anxious to justify what had been the party's attitude in 1939-1940 and which they had never been able to explain satisfactorily. Thus trying to justify the party's approval of the Stalin-Hitler Pact, which had proved to be disastrous for France, Aragon, in Les Communistes, pleaded that the Stalin-Hitler Pact was vital for the Soviet Union to gain time before Hitler attacked.[20] In an effort to deny the Communist attempt to seek "rapprochement" with the occupant, Pierre Daix describes, in his novel Classe 42, the soul-

[20]The same explanation can be found in Courtade's novel La Place Rouge where we read: "Quand les Russes ont vu que le gouvernement français ne voulait pas d'une vraie alliance militaire, ils ont compris qu'ils resteraient seuls et que Hitler leur tomberait dessus. Il fallait gagner du temps pour se préparer ". La Place Rouge (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1970), p. 96. Courtade also tried to explain away the French Party's commitment to Stalinism by arguing that "en criant 'Vive Staline ', ils avaient voulu signifier: "Vive le communisme ", "Vive l'Armée Rouge ", ou même: "Vive la France ". Ibid., p. 278.

searching that took place during the first weeks of the occupation on the question of whether the party should enter into relations with the Germans, and he finally depicts the idea being dismissed as immoral.[21]

Many other communist writers reacted in their work to the major political events of the time. Thus the communist response to American involvement in Korea was Roger Vailland's Le Colonel Foster Plaidera Coupable. Vailland showed how the partisans defied the imperialist war machine and depicted an American humanitarian, Colonel Foster, caught in the vices of the American social system. Hélène Parmelin in her novel Noir sur Blanc tried to prove that South Korea was the aggressor in the Korean war. Courtade's novel Elseneur had as its aim to convince the skeptics that the evidence in the Rajk's trial was genuine.[22]

It goes without saying that much of this literary production was carried out on the order of the Party. We have Auguste Lecoeur's statement, for example, that Jean Laffitte was solicited to write a novel on the Resistance.[23]

[21]Documentary evidence provided by several ex-communists shows clearly that the party did seek cooperation with the Occupation authorities. See: Auguste Lecoeur, Le Parti Communiste Français et la Résistance (Paris: Plon, 1968).

[22]Rajk, a Hungarian communist and member of the Politburo, was arrested in June 1949, accused of espionage and executed. He was officially rehabilitated in May 1956.

[23]Le Parti Communiste Français et la Résistance, p. 46.

Aragon relates how he received papers containing written testimony of the hostages of Châteaubriant: "Il y avait avec les documents un mot bref: 'Fais de cela un monument '. Un mot bref pour moi. Un ordre," he writes.[24] On another occasion, speaking of Paul Eluard, Aragon remarked:

> . . . cette influence du trésor, de l'héritage français sur Eluard ne peut vraiment se comprendre si l'on ne le situe pas dans ces années, où, dans la France libérée, Paul Eluard approfondit ce qui a fait de lui un communiste, et si l'on ne remarque pas que, de même que ses poèmes de la Résistance, que ses poèmes politiques illustrent directement les mots d'ordre du Parti communiste français, de même ses anthologies sont l'illustration de la politique nationale du parti, sa politique de reprise de l'héritage culturel par la classe ouvrière.[25]

Whatever the literary quality of the works written in the service of the party may be, the number of writers who subscribed to the doctrine of socialist realism and the number of works published demonstrate that socialist realism became a fact in France's literary life and cannot be dismissed lightly. Moreover, socialist realist writings show that after the Second World War the party had successfully subordinated to its political interests most of the art and literature produced by its members. As party whip in cultural affairs, Aragon was to a considerable degree responsible for this success. He promoted the writings of

[24] Louis Aragon, L'Homme Communiste, 1, p. 102. Oddly enough, Aragon at first addressed several writers asking them to write the story and he wrote it himself only after their refusal.

[25] Ibid., II, p. 160.

socialist realist authors by opening to them the pages of Les Lettres Françaises, for example, by writing favourable reviews of their works, by publishing their novels in the party's publishing houses and by disseminating their writings during the "Bataille du livre" campaign.[26]

[26]Aragon's position in the F.C.P. was frequently compared to that of Fadeyev, president of the Writers' Union of the U.S.S.R., and that of Ehrenburg, Soviet representative for cultural affairs in the West.

PART THREE

ARAGON AND THE SOCIALIST REALIST NOVEL: LE MONDE RÉEL

CHAPTER V

LES CLOCHES DE BÂLE

Je n'étais alors possédé que d'une passion.
Celle de servir.

Aragon. Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, Déc. 1968.

We have seen that Aragon remained indifferent to the Russian revolution in its initial stages when it was identified with the vision of universal freedom and happiness, and rallied to the revolutionary cause only when nationalism and personal dictatorship were replacing revolutionary ideals. Although traces of the degeneration of the Russian revolution must have become noticeable to an objective observer during the whole course of events after Lenin's death, Aragon does not seem to have noticed these developments or to have grasped their implications. Full of admiration for the socialist state, he appears in general to have over-looked the many disquieting features of the Soviet regime.

In 1933, when Aragon returned to France after a year in the Soviet Union, fascism was rapidly emerging as a significant factor in European political life. Under these circumstances, many intellectuals turned hopefully to communism because it condemned fascism and to the Soviet Union in which they saw the only force capable of stopping

fascism's advance. "Si une guerre survenait nous devons savoir que nous n'avons qu'une patrie: l'Union Soviétique. Notre place est dans les rangs de l'Armée Rouge!"[1] André Malraux proclaimed, whereas André Gide wrote in his diary: "Et s'il fallait ma vie pour assurer le succès de l'U.R.S.S., je la donnerais aussitôt. . ."[2] It is not surprising, therefore, that the rise of fascism strengthened Aragon's attachment to the communist cause.

His first overtly political appointment on returning from the Soviet Union was that of correspondent of the party's daily newspaper l'Humanité. To those who are not familiar with party methods, Aragon's work with this paper does not mean much. But the party rules are simple. A communist, and particularly one who is being prepared for a position of leadership, is first subjected to indoctrination in the Soviet state and is then given a position in which he must prove his value to the party. The end result of this program is the promotion of those militants who have proven their worth to the cause:

> Les cadres se créent par la sélection dans le travail. Cette sélection exige un temps assez long. Elle ne peut se faire que par une épreuve continue dans la lutte. . . . L'organisateur communiste doit être élevé

[1]Ilya Ehrenburg, Duhamel, Gide, Malraux, Mauriac, Morand, Romains, Unamuno, vus par un écrivain d'U.R.S.S. (Paris: Gallimard, 1934), p. 201.

[2]André Gide, Journal: 1932-1939, IV (Rio de Janiero: Americ-Edit., 1943), p. 40.

> dans l'idée qu'il ne s'occupe pas de la révolution comme d'un passe-temps mais qu'il est voué entièrement à la lutte révolutionnaire, qu'il est entièrement à la disposition du Parti.[3]

Thus, we find Aragon "dans ce cadre enfumé et sans jour. . . les bureaux de l'Humanité rue Montmartre" where he reports "les chiens écrasés."[4] The tone in which Aragon confided his situation leaves in one's mind no doubt that the much admired author of Le Paysan de Paris and Libertinage suffered from the humble role he was obliged to play. At the same time, as a militant communist he was obliged to participate in various activities which brought him into contact with the proletariat.

However, Aragon's talent was too exceptional to be wasted on general news items. Consequently, when in July 1933, Paul Vaillant-Couturier was authorized to found the periodical Commune, the organ of the Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists, Aragon became one of its collaborators. Among the first poems published in this journal was Aragon's "La prise du pouvoir," which illustrates his orthodoxy at that time.

[3]"La Bolchevisation et le problème des cadres," Cahiers du bolchevisme, No. spécial (May 1925). And Aragon observed: "Ah, comme nous avions la passion de servir! Seulement, d'abord, il fallait prouver qu'on en était digne. Louis Aragon, "En mon, en notre nom," L.L.F., 18 Oct. 1967, p. 11.

[4]Aragon parle. . ., p. 56.

Allô
Allô
Radio
Paris
Prolétaires de tous les pays unissez-vous
Allô
Allô
La parole au représentant du Parti Communiste
Camarades
Au nom du Parti Communiste. . .[5] etc.

Aragon also became director of the Maison de la Culture in Paris which gathered together in one group several organizations of intellectuals. The Maison de la Culture, as well as the Ciné-Clubs, the Pen-Clubs, La Société des Amis de l'U.R.S.S. and other cultural organizations, were widely exploited by the party for propaganda purposes. They are often referred to as Front organizations, because many uncommitted intellectuals were chosen to head them up. A network of such organizations ensured a wide dissemination of ideas, and permitted the formation of a core of activists, and the recruitment of sympathizers and new members for the party. In his capacity as secretary of the Association des Maisons de la Culture, Aragon prepared lectures, organized exhibitions, delivered talks and performed many other tasks which the party requested of him. However, while serving his party, Aragon did not abandon his aspiration to become a novelist.

According to Aragon's testimony, his interest in the novel form dated from the publication of Anicet ou le

[5] Commune, July 1933, p. 50.

Panorama, roman.[6] The novel, he tells us, did not please the surrealists, who tended to object to it as a form of literary expression--"le roman passait à leurs yeux surtout pour une des formes de l'ambition littéraire, d'un certain arrivisme."[7] Seeing the impossibility of reconciling surrealism with novel writing, Aragon abandoned the genre entirely for a time. The novelist in him could not be suppressed, however, and in 1923, he began another novel, La défense de l'Infini, which he wrote "en cachette."[8] The scope and final fate of this novel are described by Aragon in a conversation with Dominique Arban:

> Avec La Défense de l'infini, mon ambition était d'un roman hors mesures. Énorme, étymologiquement parlant. J'y ai travaillé pendant près de quatre ans, et l'ai détruit à la fin de l'automne de 1927.[9]

The reason for this wilful destruction is still unknown. In an interview given to Fernand Séguin, Aragon indicated the incompatibility of that form of literary activity with surrealist ethics--"Je l'ai anéanti parce qu'il ne me satisfaisait pas par rapport aux questions qui étaient posées par moi, par un monde qui était le mien, par les amis qui étaient profondément mes amis."[10] Some fragments

[6] Anicet ou le Panorama, roman (Paris: La Nouvelle Revue Française, 1920).

[7] Blanche ou l'oubli, p. 364.

[8] Aragon parle . . ., p. 55.

[9] Ibid., p. 50.

[10] F. Séguin rencontre Louis Aragon (Montréal: Les Editions Ici Radio Canada, 1969), p. 63.

of La Défense de l'Infini were published in Revue européenne under the title of Cahier Noir.[11] It appears, however, that the surrealists who were against the novel as a literary genre forbade any further publication on the pretext that the content of the novel was too literary.[12]

It should be noted that the destruction of the novel followed rather closely the occasion of Aragon's joining the F.C.P., but it is uncertain whether or not this fact had any bearing on his decision to burn the novel.[13] It is evident, however, that the author's political orientation influenced his attitude towards creative writing, for six years passed before he was able to publish another novel. He has this to say about these years of silence:

> Et vint le temps où je ne pouvais plus écrire une chose appelée roman . . . Le temps où devant cette étrange impuissance, il me fallut essayer de comprendre pourquoi je ne pouvais écrire un roman, et apprendre donc, pour cela, ce que c'était qu'un roman.[14]

His inability to write a novel seems to have been directly related to certain growing pains which afflicted Aragon, as a new communist. We must not forget that the years between the destruction of La Défense de l'Infini and the

[11] Revue européenne, February-March 1926.

[12] T. Balashova, Tvorchestvo Aragona (Moscow: "Nauka," 1964), p. 30.

[13] Aragon joined the party on January 6, 1927; he destroyed his novel about ten months later, in November of the same year.

[14] Aragon parle . . ., p. 55.

publication of Les Cloches de Bâle were the years in which Aragon made the transition from surrealist writing to socialist realism, and, as he once remarked, no one can imagine "la gravité du passage, pour un écrivain, du surréalisme au réalisme."[15] His wife, Elsa, observed the painful transformation, and wrote perceptively:

> Je te voyais ne rien écrire, immobile et frénétique comme quelqu'un de pressé qui aurait perdu son chemin. Tu étais un riche qui a lui-même mis ses biens sous séquestre, par crainte de les dilapider en de vaines entreprises. Un autre avait grandi en toi, ta littérature ne pouvait faire autement que de suivre cet autre--on n'écrit pas en dehors de soi--or, tu ne trouvais pas le chemin pour te rejoindre toi--même.[16]

As we have already stated, for a communist the novel is not primarily an expression of individual thought, a field of linguistic research or an exercise in style, but a weapon in the fight for a new type of society. The responsibility of the communist writer is the education of the working masses and the expounding and dissemination of communist ideas. Neither surrealist ideals nor their mode of expression were acceptable to communism. Hence, Aragon had to search for a new context which would answer the requirements of communist ideology and for a language which could be grasped by party militants.

By 1933 the transitional period was over. Speaking

[15]Louis Aragon, "L,auteur parle de son livre". J'abats mon jeu (Paris: Les Editeurs Français Réunis, 1959), p. 92.

[16]Elsa Triolet, O.C., V, p. 13.

of the genesis of Les Cloches de Bâle, Aragon stated that it was in 1933, when he was a correspondent with l'Humanité, that he decided "coûte que coûte"[17] to write a novel. The circumstances seemed propitious. Having broken once and for all with the surrealists, Aragon felt free to express himself as he wished; he was also sufficiently indoctrinated to follow the party line unwaveringly. At last he could apply to himself the rigid formula of the Communist party "on est communiste 24 heures sur 24".[18] Moreover, one should not overlook the fact that a year spent in the U.S.S.R. had given Aragon new horizons, and had made him aware of the existence of a vast potential audience. During his stay in the Soviet Union, Aragon had witnessed the eagerness with which the Soviet authorities accepted for publication the writings of foreign intellectuals. Even those works which did not reflect Marxist ideology but were either neutral or sympathetic to the Soviet régime and could be exploited in the interests of anti-capitalist propaganda were welcomed by the Soviet state. During the time Aragon was editor of the French page of Littérature Internationale, Soviet authorities had been willing to translate Eugène Dabit's Faubourgs de Paris and Dabit had been solicited by Vaillant-Couturier to send the proof-sheets to Aragon.[19] The Soviets were interested in adapting

[17] Aragon parle. . ., p. 56.

[18] Annie Kriegel, Les Communistes français, p. 33.

[19] Eugène Dabit, Journal Intime 1928-1936 (Paris: Gallimard, 1939), p. 122.

to the screen André Gide's Les Caves du Vatican, and Aragon, anxious to please his Soviet friends, suggested in a letter to Gide that the latter should consent to "la liberté politique d'interprétation" of his novel by the Soviet authorities. Gide declined the invitation.[20]

It is also possible that Aragon's desire to write a novel at this particular time was motivated by the fact that he was forced to play "un rôle subalterne" at l'Humanité. Deeply conscious of his potential (he referred to himself as "un homme comme moi"), he may well have needed to engage in creative writing in order to maintain his self-esteem. According to his own admission, "écrire c'était me mettre d'accord avec moi-même."[21]

Considering Aragon's political affiliation, it was inevitable that he should espouse the communist literary doctrine accepted by the French Communist Party, namely socialist realism. In a later comment on the genesis of his first novel written in the socialist realist manner, Les Cloches de Bâle, Aragon admitted: "C'est de ce livre pourtant que date mon premier essai d'adapter le réalisme moderne à l'idéologie dont je me réclame."[22] And, indeed, the novel represents a conscious attempt to link ideology with literary invention.

[20]André Gide, Littérature engagée (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), p. 31.

[21]Aragon parle. . ., p. 92.

[22]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 143.

At the beginning, Aragon met with some difficulties. After having read Diane, the first section of the novel which contains an account of sordid machinations among some representatives of the French bourgeoisie involving the beautiful Diane de Nettencourt, Elsa Triolet asked: "Pourquoi écris-tu cela? Qui cela aidera-t-il?" Aragon later claimed that this remark made him change the orientation of his work.[23] That Elsa, who admired in Aragon the author of Le Paysan de Paris, was less than enthusiastic about Diane is not surprising, but it would appear that another incident was not without influence on the change in orientation. Having completed a section of the book, Aragon showed it to André Marty, one of the communist leaders, whose reaction Aragon describes as follows: "Quand j'ai cru pouvoir lui montrer la première fois des feuilles des Cloches de Bâle, André Marty m'a ri au nez, très exactement."[24] These lines were written long after André Marty had been expelled from the party and when party ethics demanded a negative attitude to Marty's opinions. In 1933, however, André Marty was a hero of the Russian Revolution, a man for whom the Soviet state named tractor factories and co-operatives, and whom Aragon described as "l'organisateur glorieux des Brigades",[25]

[23]Ibid., p. 74.

[24]Aragon parle. . ., p. 92.

[25]André Marty was in charge of the International Brigades during the Civil War in Spain.

"le glorieux mutin de la mer Noire."[26] Thus, in 1933, when Aragon was writing his novel, André Marty's views had to be reckoned with. Unfortunately, his opinion indicated very clearly that the novel, as it then stood, could not be appreciated by his communist colleagues, and a change in orientation was mandatory. This change is evident in the parts of the novel which follow Diane. In them the emphasis is on ideology.

According to the teachings of Marxism, human society inevitably marches towards communism, passing through different stages. To reflect this movement, the action of Les Cloches de Bâle takes place in different milieux; bourgeois, anarchist, socialist and, by anticipation, communist. Each milieu has its own socially determined characters. Diane and her entourage belong to the bourgeoisie, Catherine is a social rebel in search of her identity, Victor is a representative of social-democratic ideology and Clara Zetkin ushers in a new era of social revolution.

The action of the novel takes place before the First World War and the historical background of the plot is carefully filled in: The Russo-Japanese war of 1905, the electoral campaign of 1906 in France, the struggle between the anarchists and the socialists, the "Panther" affair, the suicide of Paul and Laura Lafargue in 1911[27]

[26]Louis Aragon, Front Rouge, p. 12.

[27]Paul Lafargue, Marx's son-in-law and well-known revolutionary.

and many other historical events recreate the pre-1914 atmosphere of France. The novel is thereby situated in a definite historical context.

In addition to an apt and historically true setting, many other features of the socialist realist doctrine are incorporated when they can be applied. For instance, in order to focus attention on the world's first socialist state, certain events of Russian history are woven into the fabric of the plot: the assassination of Alexander II, the revolution of 1905, and the assassination of Plehve, minister of Nicolas II, by a socialist-revolutionary. In order to show the oppressive character of the czarist regime, mention is also made of political and economic conditions under the Czar, such as the exile of political figures to Siberia, the unrest among the workers of the gold-fields of the Lena River and the strikes in the mines of Feodosia in the Crimea. Another requisite of socialist realism--the glorification of party leaders--plays an essential role in the ideological education of the masses. For this reason Aragon introduced into the novel a number of revolutionaries among them Lenin, Kollontai and Clara Zetkin. Lenin and Kollontai are shown in attendance at Lafargue's funeral and the author could not resist the temptation to reproduce in Les Cloches de Bâle part of Lenin's address delivered at the funeral in the name of the Russian Social Democratic Party. It is of course standard communist practice never to miss an opportunity

to quote the party leaders.

We may recall that strikes were recommended as a desirable subject for socialist realist novels. According to Marxist ideology, strikes represent the most potent weapon of the working class in the struggle against its oppressors. From the point of view of a communist writer, strikes, besides having an educational value, afford an opportunity to show police brutality, the ignominious behaviour of the proprietors and the misery of the striking workers. Thus two strikes are depicted with great detail in Les Cloches de Bâle: the strike at the watch factory in the mountain village of Cluses in Savoy and that of the Paris taxi drivers.

As we have mentioned in our discussion of socialist realism, communist writers of the early thirties were interested in writers' attitudes towards certain specific social problems such as suicide, abortion and unemployment. Suicide is a prominent feature of Les Cloches de Bâle. Several characters in the novel for instance Pierre de Sabran, Blaise Jonghens, Solange Lefrançois-Heuzé and her husband, Soudy's sister, Paul and Laura Lafargue, all take their own lives, and Catherine Simonidze attempts suicide. Aragon depicts the stunned reaction of French socialists to the news of Lafargue's self-inflicted death. The official communist line on suicide is that militant communists have no right to take their own life and thereby deprive the Revolution of its cadres.[28] One of the

[28]Nadezhda Mandelstam observed: "Anyone who killed

characters in the novel clearly expresses this view:

> J'ai tout le respect qu'on voudra pour Paul Lafargue: ça a été un militant du mouvement ouvrier, qui a donné toute sa vie à notre classe et qui ne l'a jamais trahie. Mais il ne nous a pas donné sa mort. Sa mort n'a rien à voir avec la lutte des ouvriers.[29]

Because suicide occupies a disproportionate place in the novel it merits some comments. Aragon does not seem to be consistent in his attitude to the question. On the one hand he condemns the taking of one's own life as contrary to communist ideology, on the other hand he tries to justify the suicide of Paul and Laura Lafargue. He makes a distinction between the suicide of ordinary members of bourgeois society and that of Paul and Laura Lafargue, the Marxists. The suicide of the two young bourgeois, Solange and her husband, is nothing more than the inevitable end of a stupid drama, the result of an illicit trade in drugs. The death of Blaise--"maquereau, mais lâche avec ça"[30]--is the result of his fear of imprisonment. The suicide of Paul and Laura Lafargue, on the other hand, is "réfléchi, raisonnable,"[31] "une assurance

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himself was regarded as deserter--we could not possibly admit that there might be cases of desertion in the beautiful army of the builders of socialism." Hope Abandoned, p. 168.

[29]Louis Aragon, Les Cloches de Bâle (Paris: Denoël, 1934), p. 288. At the time Aragon was writing his novel, a Soviet writer Nicholas Ostrovsky was held up as an example of communist stoicism. Paralyzed and blind, he nevertheless served his country by writing novels of great propaganda value.

[30]Les Cloches de Bâle, p. 202.

[31]Ibid., p. 274.

mutuelle contre la décrépitude, la déchéance des vieux jours."[32] It seems that Aragon's attempt to elaborate on the theme was deliberate. The condemnation of the young bourgeois can be viewed as a desire to pass judgment on his own unsuccessful attempt to take his life in Venice. It should not be forgotten that self-criticism is one of the features of communist ethics.

Aragon also expressed his views on abortion. His delineation of the story of Judith Romanet and of her death as the result of a clandestine abortion is a direct condemnation of this practice, and of any society that permits it.

In Les Cloches de Bâle, Aragon's portrayal of characters is largely inspired by Marxist thinking. This is made clear by an article in La Nouvelle Critique.

> Dans Les Cloches de Bâle, je voulais en premier lieu montrer le passage d'une partie de la bourgeoisie dans le camp des travailleurs ou tout au moins le désir d'y passer, c'est-à-dire, comme historiquement ce désir apparaissait d'abord. J'avais été frappé par une phrase, dans le Manifeste de Marx et Engels, qui dit qu'un moment viendra où la meilleure partie de la bourgeoisie passera aux côtés de la classe ouvrière.[33]

Catherine Simonidze is given as an example. The author shows the consecutive steps in her political development: first individualism, then political awakening during the

[32] Ibid., p. 271.

[33] Louis Aragon, La Nouvelle Critique, No. 8, July-August 1949, 82. Quoted by Garaudy in L'Itinéraire d'Aragon, p. 297.

strike at the watch factory and the revolt against social injustice. Afterwards, Catherine comes into contact with the anarchists and then with the socialists. During the strike at the watch factory Catherine finds herself at a crossroad. She revolts against her social class and against the position that she, as a woman, occupies in society. She refuses to be "la femme d'un homme", to be "définie par l'homme"[34] and she frequently changes lovers. But, as one of the protagonists remarks, "le mouvement ouvrier n'a que faire des prostituées."[35] Her life is thus presented as a failure--"cet avortement de sa déstinée."[36] In the epilogue, Catherine appears to have freed herself from parisitism and prostitution, but her destiny is uncertain.

It seems that at this period of his life Aragon sympathized very deeply with the plight of women who were unjustly relegated to an inferior position by bourgeois society. Three of the principal characters of Les Cloches de Bâle are women, and the cases of Diane, Catherine and Judith dramatize the position of women in capitalist society: prostitution, clandestine abortion, death--such is their fate. For propaganda purposes, Aragon deplored the fact that the Czar "maintenait en Russie . . . ce

[34] Les Cloches de Bâle, p. 148.

[35] Ibid., p. 246. This was the point of view expressed by Lenin. See p. 171.

[36] Ibid., p. 280.

servage des femmes"[37] and he seems to have sincerely believed that "la révolution, c'était sa place enfin faite à la femme. Les premières mesures révolutionnaires seraient l'abolition du mariage, l'avortement légal, le droit de vote aux femmes."[38] His belief was partly justified by the fact that after the October Revolution Soviet authorities did in fact legalize abortion, introduce laws facilitating divorce and give women the vote. Aragon could not have known at the time that the Soviet government would later pass laws which were to abolish the right to abortion and to make divorce difficult. Nor could he foresee that in later years Stalin would pass a law prohibiting marriages between Soviet citizens and foreigners even when the latter were subjects of other socialist countries.

Aragon first leads his heroine to a meeting of "le cercle catholique" where her encounter with its members allows him to carry on the indispensable anti-religious propaganda and to discredit the aims of the "syndicalisme chrétien." When Catherine, some time later, joins a circle of anarchists, her association with them permits the author to show that anarchism does not represent a valid revolutionary philosophy; and that in fact contact with anarchism may discourage a potential revolutionary

[37] Ibid., p. 151.

[38] Ibid., p. 152.

from taking part in the revolutionary movement.[39] Besides the purely ideological aspect of Aragon's condemnation of anarchism as a political movement, personal considerations played a role in his reasons for this attack. One must bear in mind that the writing of Les Cloches de Bâle coincided with that period of Aragon's political evolution when he was devoting a considerable part of his journalistic writings to denouncing his former views. Speaking about these views, the author remarked:

> Longtemps cette révolte garda pour moi la forme de l'anarchie, et longtemps l'ancien dadaïste ne sut qu'applaudir à des mots, sans comprendre où étaient ses vrais alliés, ceux qu'il devait rejoindre. Waldo Frank se souvient sans doute d'une soirée folle où je l'entraînai chez les anarchistes, moi qui pensais alors que le geste de Germaine Berton tuant Marius Plateau était tout ce qui pouvait s'imaginer de plus beau, de plus grand. C'est qu'alors j'ignorais le prolétariat, sa tâche de tous les jours.[40]

This autobiographical note seems to indicate that, by condemning anarchism in the novel, the author was trying to rectify the errors of his dadaist days.

Having settled his account with anarchism, Aragon went on to portray the social democratic movement. When Aragon depicts Catherine's relationship with the socialists, it is evident that he is more sympathetic to

[39]Anarchism is regarded by communists as the worst enemy of Marxism. The annihilation of anarchists by the communist forces in Spain during the Spanish Civil War is an example of the communist attitude towards them.

[40]Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, pp. 50-51.

socialists than to anarchists, but he does not fail to show the discord existing within the ranks of the Socialist Party and the harm which this disagreement causes to the workers' movement. Aragon's remark that Catherine could not reconcile herself to the fact that socialists did not reject bourgeois culture in its entirety--"un morceau de musique [Chopin's Funeral March] remettait pour elle tout en cause, elle doutait d'un parti qui enterre les siens au son de marche de Chopin"--[41] deserves attention, for it indicates that at the moment Aragon was writing his novel he still had no knowledge of the fact that the Communist International was reversing its old policies and inaugurating new ones, such as the policy of "la main tendue," a return to nationalism and the policy of "reclaiming" the bourgeois heritage.[42]

[41] Les Cloches de Bâle, p. 315.

[42] It was the time when Aragon referred to Lamartine and Chateaubriand as "ces autres emmerdeurs" and to Maurice Barrès as "un salaud de notre pays." Pour un réalisme socialiste, pp. 64-65. Aragon also wrote his poem Aux Enfants rouges, which was conspicuous for its internationalism:

Les trois couleurs à la voirie!
Le drapeau rouge est le meilleur!
Leur France, Jeune Travailleur,
N'est aucunement ta patrie. . .

as well as for its anti-religious propaganda and its condemnation of social democracy. Aragon wrote later that at the end of 1933 Thorez pointed out to him that he was publishing texts which "ne répondaient aucunement à la véritable politique du parti." He advised him to stop anti-religious propaganda. Aragon states that he understood what Thorez meant only in February of 1934 when the party began to practise the policy of "la main tendue." He adds: "Ces changements s'exprimeront avec en 1936, le discours de Thorez où fut rendue publique la politique dite de la main tendue, le caractère national de 'notre' politique (Jeanne d'Arc, l'héritage culturel de la France, le drapeau tri-

Another important character in the novel is Victor, a socialist. His story is "un petit roman de formation" and was intended to be educational. It is the typical life-history of a young proletarian, who is not beset by the original sin of most intellectuals, namely that of belonging to the bourgeois class. Victor's childhood and youth are depicted in detail. He grows up in poverty and is prepared for future struggles by numerous street fights. Then comes work in the garage and military service and, of course, the study of the history of the workers' movement. Victor becomes the militant of his class, one of those who are "rompus dès la jeunesse à la parole et à l'action",[43] a member of the Socialist Party and an avid reader of l'Humanité. He is contrasted with Catherine in the novel: firmly rooted in his milieu, he knows the path he must follow and he experiences no disturbing self-doubt.

In the epilogue, the author introduces a new character,--Clara Zetkin, the famous German revolutionary, who is portrayed as a woman who has found her political bearings and knows her social duties. She is a zealous fighter for social justice. "Je prends Clara Zetkin comme un exemple, mais tout me ramènerait invinciblement à elle,"[44] Aragon declared. Unfortunately, the section of

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colore, le refus du salut au point levé, le Rot Front des Allemands, etc.). O.P., V, pp. 405-406.

[43]Louis Aragon, Les Cloches de Bâle, p. 292.

[44]Ibid., p. 426.

the novel where Clara appears is in no way integrated with what precedes and it is like a sort of coda. Moreover, carried away by his own enthusiasm, the author describes the course and proceedings of the International Congress against the war,[45] and then, suddenly remembering his heroine, he returns to the story of Clara Zetkin in order to wind up the novel with the declaration: "La femme des temps modernes est née, et c'est elle que je chante. Et c'est elle que je chanterai."[46]

It seems that after writing his book Aragon recognized its weaknesses, as can be seen from the following observation:

> On dira que l'auteur s'égare, et qu'il est grand temps qu'il achève un livre où c'est à désespérer de voir soudain surgir, si tardivement, cette image de femme qui aurait pu en etre le centre, mais qui ne saurait venir y jouer un rôle de comparse. On dira que l'auteur s'égare, et l'auteur ne le contredira pas. Le monde, lecteur, est mal construit à mon gré, comme à ton gré mon livre. Oui, il faut refaire l'un et l'autre, avec pour héroïne une Clara, et non point Diane, et non point Catherine.[47]

A rhetorical precaution, perhaps, which did not deter critics from reproaching Aragon for the weak structure of the novel. Aragon himself admitted that "Ce livre est moins achevé que ceux qui suivirent Aurélien par

[45] The International Congress Against the War took place in Bâle in November 1912. Such prominent figures as Jaurès, Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin were among the delegates.

[46] Ibid., p. 441.

[47] Ibid., p. 427.

exemple. La construction en est assez baroque, avec des parties séparées, très différentes de ton. . . ."[48]

In 1933, when Aragon was writing Les Cloches de Bâle, it would have been unthinkable for him to declare that he wrote his novel "à partir de l'incipit,"--a dangerously surrealist idea,--which would also mean that there was no premeditation on the part of the author; nor did he mention anywhere that contradiction was the basis on which the novel was constructed, as he claimed some thirty years later.[49] There is no doubt that Aragon's intention was to implement the precepts of socialist realism in his novel. Indeed, he was very proud of his achievement. In his "Message au Congrès des John Reed Clubs", he stated:

> Je me sens aujourd'hui, vous parlant, un homme entièrement nouveau, animé d'une énergie nouvelle . . . L'homme que j'ai été m'apparaît comme un être des ténèbres. Je revois les longues étapes de sa rééducation. Ah! cela n'a pas été sans peine, il a eu ses retours, ses rechutes. Mais le voilà aujourd'hui guéri de sa maladie sociale. Regardez-le, camarades, et dites-moi, n'ai-je pas raison d'être fier de moi?[50]

Then he continued:

[48]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 92.

[49]Louis Aragon, Je n'ai jamais appris à écrire (Geneva, Skira, 1969), passim.

[50]Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, pp. 54-55.

> Pour moi, qui fais ici devant vous mon
> rapport comme un ouvrier devant son usine,
> je pose devant vous mes deux derniers livres,
> les poèmes de Hourra l'Oural et mon roman
> Les Cloches de Bâle, et je vous demande:
> "Camarades, est-ce bien ainsi?"[51]

Despite Aragon's self-satisfaction, the novel was not altogether in line with party policies. The first objection which can be made about it is its deliberate escape into the past. Because Aragon based his novel on incidents preceding the First World War, he was able to avoid all the contemporary issues which agitated the party in the early thirties. Yet that was a crucial period in the history of France and the F.C.P. The elections of 1932, which the communists confidently expected to win, were a complete failure for them. The party lost 30% of the votes it had received in 1928. Even the party leaders, Marty, Duclos and Cachin, were not re-elected. On the international scene, the rise of fascism, the Reichstag Fire,[52] and the trials of German communists all had awesome implications for the future existence of France. None of these events and preoccupations finds its way into the novel. Compared to such explosive topics, the general tone of Les Cloches de Bâle, with its decadence, prostitution and idleness, would seem to indicate that Aragon had wholly missed the point. As we have already

[51] Ibid., p. 57.

[52] The Reichstag fire occurred in March 1933 and was promptly blamed upon the communists.

indicated in our discussion of woman's place in society, Aragon's projection into the future did not stand the test of time. Aragon also lacked insight into the true character of the Soviet regime. He did not realize, for instance, that because of Stalin's concentration camps any discussion of political exile was forbidden in communist circles.[53] He also failed to notice the change in communist policies.[54]

Yet, in spite of these weaknesses, the hostility of Aragon towards the ruling classes and the political message of the book were clear enough, as was his desire to incriminate the French regime. All these are evident in the description of the accidental killing of the young man during the strike at the watch factory, in that of the old woman run over by a rich industrialist, or in the scene of the attack on the crippled anarchist leader, Libertad, who is beaten by police while attempting to defend himself with his crutches, and who later dies the victim of this brutality. The description of these incidents demonstrates how well Aragon as early as 1933, understood that the task of the communist writer is to "gagner les

[53]Aragon's situation was similar to that of Pierre Daix. The latter, in his novel La Dernière Forteresse, described his experience in Hitler's concentration camps, not imagining that his "positive heroes"--the inmates of Hitler's camps--were destined to appear before the stalinist tribunals as "traitors."

[54]See note on page 116.

cerveaux et les coeurs au communisme."[55] The party also took into account the fact that in the novel Aragon was venturing into almost virgin territory, and decided to acclaim the work.[56]

Les Cloches de Bâle was also well received in the Soviet Union, where Aragon's effort was rewarded by a translation into Russian. It should be mentioned, however, that the text was not published in its complete form. Elsa Triolet, who did the translation, complained: "on me 'rédigeait' mon texte, comme c'est l'habitude en Union Soviétique, on coupait dedans sans consulter ni l'auteur ni le traducteur. . ."[57] Political and literary journals of the Soviet Union printed only those passages of Les Cloches de Bâle whose propaganda value was unquestionable.

[55]Raoul Calas, "Les hebdomadaires communistes fédéraux: Une arme de propagande précieuse entre les mains des organisations du Parti," C. du C., 32, No. 10 (1956). In it we read: "nos hebdomadaires . . . savent aussi utiliser les informations, les faits divers pour en dégager la leçon politique et sociale en faisant appel à la fois au coeur et à la raison du lecteur." The party organ also commented on the article in the communist paper La Voix de l'Est: "Sous le titre 'Une brave femme', nos camarades évoquent la mort solitaire et navrante d'une vieille femme de soixante-cinq ans, et saisissent cette douloureuse occasion pour faire le procès d'un régime qui laisse les vieux à l'abandon après les avoir durement exploités." p. 1032.

[56]A curious appreciation of the novel can be found in Courtade's La Place Rouge: "Une version un peu modernisée du luxe tel que peuvent le concevoir des garçons qui à vingt ans n'ont jamais mis les pieds ni dans un grand hôtel, ni dans un manoir (habité), et qui ne connaissent la grande vie que par Balzac, Proust et, depuis cette année, [1934], par Aragon." La Place Rouge, p. 10.

[57]Elsa Triolet, O.C., I, p. 31.

One part of the novel, describing the shooting of a youth during a strike in Cluses, was particularly appreciated by the Soviet authorities and published as a separate brochure.[58]

To indicate the place held by Les Cloches de Bâle in Aragon's socialist realist work, we can thus say that this novel is significant in that it was written about the time Aragon became a communist functionary with l'Humanité, the official organ of the F.C.P. and was inspired by the desire to serve his party. The imperfections of the novel can be considered largely due to his lack of experience in the application of the doctrine of socialist realism: moreover, it would seem that the novel was very hastily composed. Les Cloches de Bâle satisfied the requirements of the party's long range policy by its indictment of French society and by its intention to develop political awareness among members of the bourgeoisie. It contained numerous incidents having direct propaganda value, but it failed in the short-range objective, which was to mirror concrete political events of the time and to promote the political tactics of the party regarding these events.

[58]"Selenie Kliuz." Otryvok iz romana Bazel'skie kolokola, Per. IE. Triole (Moscow: Zhurgazob'edinenie, 1935), 48 pages.

CHAPTER 6

LES BEAUX QUARTIERS

> . . . cet autre miroir de moi-même, le roman que j'ai fini d'écrire en juin 1936 et que je vois aujourd'hui avec des yeux différents.
> Aragon, La Mise à mort.

Aragon's next novel, Les Beaux Quartiers, which earned him the Prix Renaudot, was published in 1936. It took the author a little over two years to write this formidable volume.

Before attempting to analyze the novel, we shall consider briefly the political climate of the years 1934-1936, the circumstances in which the novel was written, and the trends in socialist realism during the period in which Aragon was composing his novel.

The political scene of the world in the months during which Aragon was writing Les Beaux Quartiers was dominated by two main developments: the steady advance of fascism in Europe and the counter-action of the anti-fascist forces. In February 1934, there was a fascist demonstration in Paris. Although the disturbances accompanying it had no serious consequences, they raised the spectre of civil war. The following year, 1935, was a turning point in the life of France. In March of that year, Hitler had reestablished compulsory military service,

while the Italian government was preparing for the conquest of Ethiopia. The Soviet Union was aware that international fascism represented a threat to itself, and decided that nationalism and patriotism, far from being pernicious influences, were necessary for the preservation of the Soviet state. In May 1935, the Franco-Soviet Treaty signed in Moscow between Pierre Laval and Stalin consecrated the concept of mutual national defence.[1] The signing of the pact also meant a reversal of communist policies with regard to socialists. Social democrats who were formerly relegated to the position of enemies of the proletariat became allies in the fight against fascism. Men and slogans long discredited were restored to power and socialists and communists found themselves united under the Popular Front which was intimately tied up with the Franco-Soviet alliance. The leaders of the parties that had, until recently, been enemies, walked side by side to the Place de la Bastille on July 14 1935. When the Popular Front became a dominant fact in French political life, the F.C.P. became a nationalist and patriotic organization. The communists claimed the "Marseillaise" as their own, and Aragon, who once wrote:

[1]Before 1935, the communist view was that there could be no national defence for the proletariat under the capitalist regime. See: L'Humanité, 31 mars 1920. Marx's statement "en régime capitaliste les ouvriers n'ont pas de patrie" was used by all communists. See: A. Barjonet, op. cit., p. 18.

> Mon pays, remarquez bien, que je déteste, où tout ce qui est français me révolte à proportion que c'est français. . . Un Français, vous me prenez pour un Français. Je me lève pourtant en face de cette idée locale, la bouche débordant d'imprécations. J'arrache de moi cette France qui ne m'a rien donné que de petites chansons et des vêtements bleus d'assassins.[2]

and who terminated his Traité du style with "j'ai bien l'honneur, chez moi, dans ce livre, à cette place, de dire que, très consciemment, je conchie l'armée française dans sa totalité,"[3] now began to write "des articles tricolores."[4]

The new policy of nationalism and patriotism received support from wide sectors of the French populace and in the spring of 1936, in the May elections, the Popular Front won an assured majority. The victory of the Popular Front in France and the solidarity among various groups in the face of Fascist aggression, as well as the emergence of the Popular Front in Spain, created the illusion that Fascism could yet be beaten.

On the cultural front, the intellectuals of the entire world were promptly mobilized for the fight against Fascism. The movement for "la Défense de la Culture" was

[2]This was written at the time of the Moroccan War (1925) which incensed Aragon and other surrealists. Quoted by Alain Huraut in Louis Aragon: Prisonnier politique. (Paris: André Balland, 1970), p. 21.

[3]Louis Aragon, Le Traité du Style (Paris: 1928), p. 236.

[4]Simone de Beauvoir, La Force de l'âge (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 273.

inaugurated and Aragon, together with such writers as Romain Rolland, André Gide, Henri Barbusse, Malraux, Nizan and many other outstanding personalities, found himself among the organizers of the anti-Fascist Writers' Congress[5] which was held in Paris in June 1935.

As far as Aragon's personal position in those years was concerned, it was defined by the author himself: "Il avait coulé de l'eau sous les ponts de 1930 à 1935, on sait que je n'étais plus le même homme."[6] Indeed, during these years the Soviet Union offered him the tempting image of a writer employing his talents in the cause of social justice; furthermore, the fight against fascism gave him an honorable place in the anti-fascist movement, and the outspoken orthodoxy of his journalistic work consolidated his position within the F.C.P. Reporting on the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers to which he was sent as the official representative of the party, he proudly declared:

> Je n'étais en 1930 qu'un invité qu'on consulte, au Congrès international des Ecrivains à Kharkov. A Moscou, en 1934, au Congrès des Ecrivains soviétiques, j'étais déjà l'interprète d'une masse d'hommes pour qui il était important qu'à la tribune de la Salle des Colonnes, devant Gorki, Cholokhov, Pasternak, je parlasse des choses de notre pays, de notre héritage dans le domaine de la culture, de la grande tâche qui est devant nous.[7]

[5]Known in France as Le Congrès International des Ecrivains pour la Défense de la Culture.

[6]Louis Aragon, Les Collages (Paris, Hermann, 1965), p. 88.

[7]Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, p. 54.

It was in this climate of general optimism and great expectations that Aragon wrote his second novel Les Beaux Quartiers.

Aragon had already commenced work on the first part of the novel, "Sérianne," when in the summer of 1935 he paid another visit to the Soviet Union. In Moscow, Elsa Triolet's translation of Aragon's first socialist realist novel Les Cloches de Bâle was just appearing on the shelves of Soviet book-shops. Soviet authorities suggested that Aragon write a scenario of Les Cloches de Bâle for Odessa Movie Studios. Aragon was reluctant, he tells us, to embark on this enterprise and he needed a good deal of persuasion. However, in the end, he agreed, and Elsa and Aragon spent the autumn and part of the winter of 1935-1936 on the shores of the Black Sea.[8]

While he was writing the scenario based on Les Cloches de Bâle, Aragon was also working on his new novel Les Beaux Quartiers. Apparently the fact that Aragon was writing the novel concurrently with the scenario was not without effect on his second novel of the cycle Le Monde Réel. Some years later, Aragon wrote:

> Maintenant que j'y songe, il m'apparaît que cette absurde entreprise sans lendemain m'a, en réalité, rendu un inappréciable service: elle m'a forcé chemin faisant à une sorte sans précédent de critique du roman écrit,

[8]"Entreprise folle," according to Aragon, "dont il ne sortit rien, ce qui évita un navet dont j'eusse porté la responsabilité entière." Le Roman inachevé, p. 250, note.

> dans ses détails comme dans sa signification, dont bénéficia le roman à écrire où je n'avais fait encore que m'engager.[9]

The attempt to write a scenario was a failure,[10] but certain practical implications of the doctrine of socialist realism became clear to Aragon. He learned that "l'art demande des couleurs tranchées." Furthermore, his work on the scenario gave him an insight into the possibility of exploiting cinematographic techniques in the novel. He felt "un besoin d'ouvrir les fenêtres, de laisser entrer l'air d'ailleurs, d'apercevoir le paysage des provinces, le pays."[11] To this should be added that in the summer of 1935, in Moscow, Aragon was able to follow a lively discussion about literature and art. The offensive of Naturalism was beginning. With its academic forms, decorum, simplification, photographic conventionality, and claim to

[9] O.C., XI, p. 13.

[10] It is quite apparent that Aragon did not understand the motives of the Soviet authorities in commissioning him to write the scenario of Les Cloches de Bâle. He decided to put the main accent on Catherine's family, the economic conditions in the Caucasus and the life of workers in Baku under the Czars. The Soviets, on the other hand, were quite capable of creating propaganda films depicting their own country; furthermore, living conditions had not appreciably changed since the Revolution. What the Soviet authorities needed was a film about the miseries of the French working class presented by a Frenchman. Thus, the Soviets asked Aragon, "avec beaucoup de gentillesse, mais pas moins de fermeté, de renoncer à tout ce côté russo-géorgien du scénario" and to concentrate on the French side of the story. "C'est là-dessus que les choses finalement cassèrent," Aragon remarked. Ibid., p. 12.

[11] Ibid., p. 13.

precision of detail, it tried to pass itself off as a true reflection of life. A campaign against "formalism"[12] was being conducted in the Soviet press. Articles appeared calling for a struggle against formalism and a fight for precise rhythms in poetry and a classical development of the subject in the novel. The critics demanded "simplicity" and "popular appeal" in literary works. There is no doubt that Aragon took note of this discussion while he was engaged on his new work.

After his unsuccessful venture in Odessa, the author returned to Moscow where he continued to work on the novel, and he wrote "cet exercice de style qui est le premier chapitre de Paris."[13] However, to continue writing about the French capital, he felt, one had to be in Paris: and so Aragon and Elsa returned to France.

As Aragon was always engaged in a number of projects, early in June 1936 the Congress of Anti-Fascist Writers brought him to London. He was finishing his novel in the British capital when an unexpected telegram from M. Koltsov, a Russian friend, made him rush to Moscow to visit Maxim Gorky, who on his death-bed had expressed a desire to see Aragon and Elsa. Les Beaux Quartiers was completed on board the Soviet ship "Felix Dzerzhinski", bound for Leningrad, and the Postscript to the novel was

[12]The Soviets categorized nearly all modern trends in art and literature under the label of "formalism."

[13]Louis Aragon, O.C., XI, p. 20.

added to it upon Aragon's arrival in Moscow.

Let us now deal with the novel from the point of view of content and style. It should be recalled that the national tradition, discredited after the October Revolution, returned to favour around 1935. The new political orientation of international communism meant a revival of nationalism and this led to a more positive attitude towards the cultural heritage of the nation. In accordance with this orientation, Les Beaux Quartiers follows well-established French literary tradition insofar as it depicts the story of a family in which the contrasting development of the two brothers Barbentane is shown.[14] After a brief chapter which introduces the reader to Sérianne-le Vieux,--"chef-lieu de canton"--the setting of the first part of the novel, there follows a description of several families, who represent various groups of provincial society. Aragon neglects no aspect of their lives. He investigates morals, business practices and political intrigues, and at every stage shows the hypocrisy and the corrupt nature of this society. Against this background, we witness the long and painful process of Armand Barbentane's emancipation from his milieu.

The didactic intention of the author is obvious.

[14]Many critics find a resemblance between Armand Barbentane and Jacques Thibault of Les Thibault by Martin du Gard as well as between Armand and Marc Rivière of L'Ame enchantée by Romain Rolland. See: A. Isbakh, Louis Aragon (Moscow: Izd. Znanie, 1957).

In Paris, where the action of the second and third parts of the novel is set, Armand Barbentane emerges as the positive hero of the story, while his brother, Edmond, sinks into parasitism. There, as in Sérianne, the accent is on the finer residential districts--"les beaux quartiers"--of the capital. Edmond, who has gone to Paris to study medicine, is attracted by luxury and the life of leisure typical of the fashionable districts of the city. He abandons his studies to seek his place in this Paris of the rich, and uses women as a means to achieve his goal. Armand, on the other hand, having severed all ties with his family, finds another Paris--the city of the humble and the underprivileged, of the "clochards" and the drunks who suffer from hunger, cold and police brutality. Armand's experiences in the French capital cause a profound change in his outlook on life. He renounces his class, repudiates the existing order of society and asserts his solidarity with the proletariat.

In Les Beaux Quartiers, we encounter many themes which had already been developed in Les Cloches de Bâle, such as strikes and their consequences, the evolution of the individual, the squalid conditions of proletarian life, prostitution, suicide and police brutality. In his new novel Aragon pays more attention to elections, a subject recommended by the legislators of socialist realism, and he adds several more personal themes, such as the question of "les hommes doubles" or the topic of the all-pervading

power of money, a theme which he was to develop further in later novels.

The theme of the duality of man deserves special consideration here, since, it reappears in one form or another in all subsequent novels of the author. Les Beaux Quartiers contains much autobiographical detail and the author has admitted that his protagonists Armand and Edmond depict two aspects of the same man: "les deux frères du livre, Armand et Edmond, n'étaient qu'un seul et même personnage dédoublé, pour les commodités du roman, c'était moi, celui qui peut plaire et celui qui ne plaît pas, moi récrit au mal séparé de moi récrit au bien."[15] But "l'homme-double" par excellence of Les Beaux Quartiers is the industrialist, Joseph Quesnel, who explains to Edmond: "Nous sommes comme les autres, des êtres doubles. Nous vivons à une époque historique qui se caractérisera peut-être un jour par là: le temps des hommes-doubles."[16] Here are Aragon's comments on the above passage:

> . . . dans mon livre, Quesnel, sa dualité n'était pas locative, elle se situait en lui-même, dans chacune de ses pensées. Il avait deux manières de considérer toute chose, sans pouvoir jamais en préférer l'une à l'autre, deux conceptions contradictoires et coexistantes, aussi bien devant son verre à dents, que devant l'amour ou la guerre. Il était deux hommes antagonistes et pourtant inséparables.[17]

[15]Louis Aragon, O.C., XI, p. 17.

[16]Louis Aragon, Les Beaux Quartiers, p. 242.

[17]Louis Aragon, La Mise à mort, p. 86.

This comment suggests the problems which Aragon had to face from the moment he became an orthodox communist: the need to reconcile the personal and the collective, the necessity to have a double standard of values and the desire to reconcile art and ideology. Many other communists were conscious of these same dilemmas and sought the underlying cause of duality in the historical context of the times. Pierre Hervé, Aragon's former comrade, wrote:

> Dans des conditions historiques déterminées, l'intellectuel doit nécessairement devenir un être double . . . l'orthodoxie stalinienne a été et est encore tellement étouffante que rares sont les intellectuels communistes qui n'ont pas distingué deux vérités: l'une officielle et l'autre officieuse; l'une à l'usage du peuple et l'autre à l'usage des initiés.[18]

Aragon's position as a writer can best be understood with the aid of a quotation from the Memoirs of his friend I. Ehrenburg:

> . . . I tried for my own satisfaction, to link justice with beauty and the new social order with art. The two Ehrenburgs in me seldom lived at peace with one another; often the one would subjugate and even trample on the other; there was no duplicity here but the uneasy fate of a man who made a great many mistakes and yet passionately abhorred the idea of treachery.

Ehrenburg, of course, recognized that his experience was common to many communist writers, for he added: "In

[18]Pierre Hervé, Dieu et César sont-ils communistes?, p. 132. N. Mandelstam also observed: "leading a double life was an absolute fact of our age, and nobody was exempt." Hope Against Hope, p. 203.

extenuation I may say that inner inconsistencies and contradictions of this kind have equally affected many of my contemporaries: they would appear to be inseparable from our particular epoch."[19]

As far as the delineation of French society is concerned, Aragon conformed to the prescribed laws of novel writing. Life in Sérianne, and later in Paris, is depicted in true socialist realist style. The predominant symbolic colours are black and white, the black reserved, of course, for the members of the ruling class. The abundance of minute naturalistic detail, so reminiscent of Zola, the biting irony in the portrayal of characters, the classical structure of the novel--all reflect the specific demands of socialist realism.

As in Les Cloches de Bâle, the action of the novel takes place in the pre-war period, and that allows the author to avoid discussion of contemporary political issues. Nevertheless, an attentive reader can discern certain elements in the work which reflect the party policies of the time, such as the shift from internationalism to the national and patriotic line which occurred in the F.C.P.

[19] I. Ehrenburg, Memoirs, VI, p. 331. Lukacs, viewing the problem from the point of view of dialectical materialism, wrote: "C'est à l'intérieur d'une seule personnalité qu'apparaissent très souvent ces transferts et ces mutations (antagonistes), non seulement comme les phases successives d'une évolution, mais au même moment du temps et chez le même homme, comme cette contradiction interne qui révèle de la façon la plus caractéristique le niveau actuel de son développement selon une règle toujours valable pour la connaissance de l'histoire et de la société. Signification présente du réalisme critique (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 22.

at the time the novel was being composed. In Les Cloches de Bâle, the emphasis was upon internationalism; the author depicted the International Congress in Bâle and extolled the leading international revolutionaries--Lenin, Kollontai and Clara Zetkin. In Les Beaux Quartiers, the stress is on the national aspect of political events, such as French elections and the accompanying struggle for power. Furthermore, to cement national solidarity in the face of Hitler's aggression, the Socialist Party, the former international enemy, is made a fellow-traveller of the French communists, who suddenly began to find a common language with the socialists. The reflection of this reconciliatory mood is discernible in Les Beaux Quartiers:

> . . . et puis, dans la lutte pour la Proportionnelle, on avait fait l'épreuve d'une étrange aventure, qui avait à ses heures quelque chose de réconfortant: on avait vu des hommes qu'on croyait des ennemis jurés, des socialistes et des conservateurs, s'entendre tout à coup sur un point.[20]

The exalted revolutionary hero now is not an internationally known founder of communism but the leader of the French Socialist Party,--Jaurès.

The patriotic line adopted by the party after the conclusion of the Franco-Soviet alliance is also evident in numerous references to the history of France. Armand Barbentane, Aragon's "positive hero," reflects this line. It is Armand's imagination "qui avait peuplé le haut

[20]Louis Aragon, Les Beaux Quartiers, p. 87. The F.C.P. did not exist at that time, hence in the novel the reconciliation is with the Conservative Party.

Sérianne de chevaliers et de princesses, de demoiselles et d'écuyers" and which had evoked the memories of Raimbaud d'Orange, of Louis XI, Marguerite de Provence, of Charlemagne and of the Paris Commune. The arch-nationalist Barrès, who only recently has been called "le vieux Barrès tricolore" and "un salaud de notre pays" suddenly becomes worthy of study.[21] Elsewhere, the text is punctuated by "Vive la France," and echos of "La Marseillaise." Towards the end of the novel the same Armand Barbentane discovers the solidarity of the working class and refuses to be a strikebreaker. He begins to understand the ethical value of work and expresses an ardent feeling of patriotism: "Armand comprend enfin ce que c'est vraiment que la France, et ce qu'a voulu dire Jaurès, et ce que ce sera que le combat de l'avenir, pour une France forte, libre, heureuse."[22]

The confidence of the party after its electoral victory in the spring of 1936 is also registered in Les Beaux Quartiers. The optimistic note on which the novel ends is not only a concession to the requirements of socialist realism but it also reflects the general mood of that period.

[21]Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, p. 65.

[22]Louis Aragon, Les Beaux Quartiers, pp. 461-462. "Pour une France forte, libre, heureuse" was the slogan of the Popular Front.

If, in the novel, only a few veiled allusions here and there permit us to discern a reflection of contemporary events, in the postscript we find a direct reference to the current political situation. In it Aragon states that the novel is a prélude à d'autres qui rendent problématiques ces craquements sourds dans la vieille demeure, et le bruit des revolvers qui s'arment dans la poche des factieux et les clameurs proches de la guerre étrangère."[23] In fact, the postscript is an important document from the standpoint of Aragon's development. It stresses the author's definitive break with the past--"cette oeuvre de nuages que je laisse derrière moi"[24]--and states explicitly his desire to "marcher les pieds sur le sol"[25] by giving to the cycle of his novels the title of Le Monde Réel. It is from this time onward that Aragon uses this title to indicate his adherence to socialist realism.

In France, Aragon's novel was warmly acclaimed and earned him a literary prize, but in the Soviet Union the reception given to the new work was cool. The Soviets had approved the first socialist realist novel, Les Cloches de Bâle and, indeed, saw in it another argument for calling

[23]Louis Aragon, Les Beaux Quartiers, Postface, p. [465.]

[24]Ibid., loc. cit.

[25]The break with the past is already evident in Aragon's essay Pour un réalisme socialiste in a reference to his surrealist friends: "mes amis qui tenaient davantage aux nuages et qui ne comprenaient pas que je voulusse marcher les pieds sur le sol." p. 54.

the author one of their own. Despite the fact that Les Beaux Quartiers represents a stinging attack on bourgeois society, no such approval was given to the second novel. Even Aragon's programmatic declaration in the postscript does not seem to have impressed Soviet authorities. Several reasons for their unfavourable attitude can be suggested.

In the first place, Aragon's previous novel had contained many elements which were welcomed by the Soviets. Among the most important were the presence in the novel of such internationally known revolutionaries as Lafargue, Lenin and Clara Zetkin, the reproduction of Lenin's speech at Lafargue's funeral, and the description of the International Congress against the War held in Bâle in 1912. Les Beaux Quartiers, Aragon's second socialist realist novel, contained fewer references having direct propaganda value; and the novel's message--the awakening of a revolutionary consciousness in Armand, submerged as it is in a multitude of detail,--was not sufficiently obvious in Soviet opinion.

Secondly, in Les Beaux Quartiers, Aragon, in step with the new party line, concentrated on the delineation of the French scene, and on many aspects of French life such as the French parliamentary system, French electoral laws or the controversy over the introduction of the law extending military service from two to three years. These aspects of French politics were too foreign and of little interest to the Russian reader.

Thirdly, the inclusion of a number of love scenes and the portrayal of sexual perversion did not suit the prudishness of the Stalin era.[26] In addition, Aragon's excessive preoccupation with medical jargon made reading more difficult for party militants, and the author's proclivity for the morbid made the novel less optimistic. All these aspects probably deterred Soviet authorities from publishing the novel. One can also speculate as to the effect on the publication of Les Beaux Quartiers of Aragon's disagreement with the Soviets concerning the scenario of Les Cloches de Bâle. Whatever the reasons were, the novel did not reach Soviet readers in Russian translation at the time of its publication in France.

To sum up what we have said, Les Beaux Quartiers could be considered yet another step in the struggle for socialist realism. Shortly before writing the novel, Aragon stated that the task of those authors who believed in the socialist cause was "de travailler à renverser ce monde qui nous révoltait."[27] The novel is intended as an indictment of the French ruling classes and an attempt to serve the interests of an historically ascendant class--the proletariat.

[26]Even after Stalin's death one part of the scene portraying the murder of a police inspector was deleted due to its sexual overtones, when the Russian translation of Les Beaux Quartiers was prepared for publication in 1958. See: Aragon, Sobranie Sochinenii. Bogatye Kvartaly (Moscow, Gos. Izd. Khud. Lit., 1958).

[27]Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, p. 50.

Another aspect of Les Beaux Quartiers which attracts the attention of the reader is the shift of Aragon's programmatic declarations from the novel proper to the postscript in which his commitment is explicitly stated and, where, in fact, he reiterates ideas expressed in his collection of speeches published in 1935 under the title of Pour un réalisme socialiste. In contrast to Aragon's usual manner of explaining his writings in retrospect, the postscript of Les Beaux Quartiers is a document contemporary with the composition of the novel and thus expresses, in our view, the thought and convictions of the author at this particular historical moment. Although Aragon came to communism by a tortuous path--"un long débat, que j'ai traversé,"[28] at this juncture he did not seem to have any doubts as to the justice of the cause which he served. He had been conditioned to see events in the light of communist ideology.[29]

Despite Aragon's orthodoxy, his second socialist realist novel was not published in the Soviet Union until 1958.[30] If Aragon had hoped that the Soviet Union was

[28]Louis Aragon, Les Beaux Quartiers, Postface, p. [465].

[29]Aragon himself provides us with an example which demonstrates how ideology influenced his judgment, making him see even a "fait divers" in the light of the class struggle: "J'avais, le 6 Février [the date of Fascist demonstrations in Paris] assisté à la terrasse de ce café [Gaufres] à un assassinat demeuré par la suite mystérieux. . . . J'étais alors à l'Humanité, je m'étais persuadé . . . que les événements auxquels j'avais assisté devaient être des épisodes de la lutte de clans rivaux pour la maîtrise d'un monopole particulier." O.C., X, p. 21.

[30]An edition of Aragon's work (11 volumes) was published in 1957-1961.

to provide him with a vast reading audience, he must have been bitterly disappointed.

CHAPTER 7

LES VOYAGEURS DE L'IMPÉRIALE

After completing Les Beaux Quartiers, Aragon once again plunged into his journalistic work and party activities and did not begin another novel until the fall of 1938. The Spanish Civil War, which broke out in July, 1936, opened a new page in the fight against fascism and, for a while, drew Aragon's attention towards Spain. French intellectuals who espoused the Republican cause sought to assist Spanish Republicans and a handful of them fought on the Republican side. Unlike André Malraux, who organized the International Squadron of the Republican Air Force and took an active part in the combat, Aragon did not participate in the action of the International Brigades but contributed to the Republican cause in other ways. In October and November of 1936 he travelled to Spain to deliver gifts from the Association Internationale des Ecrivains pour la Défense de la Culture. He toured the Spanish front in a loudspeaker van reading poetry to militiamen. He also wrote fiery articles encouraging the freedom fighters and extolling Dolores Ibarruri, La Passionaria, as a symbol of revolutionary Spain.[1]

[1]Among the articles written by Aragon at that period were: "La jeunesse d'Espagne et notre jeunesse." Regards, 17 Dec. 1936; "Ne rêvez plus qu'à l'Espagne, Europe, No. 167, 1936.

In 1937 Aragon participated in the Second International Congress of Writers, which took place in Barcelona, claiming to be the porte-parole of the Spanish Republicans and denouncing André Gide's "treason," which consisted in the publication of his book Retour de l'U.R.S.S., wherein Gide allowed himself to criticize various aspects of Soviet society. Gide's "treason" had certain implications for Aragon. As we have mentioned earlier, in 1933, when Aragon was working in Moscow, he had acted as a go-between when the Soviets decided to film Les Caves du Vatican. As has so often happened during Aragon's political career, his intuition failed him. He had no psychological insight into Gide's character and mistook Gide's infatuation with the Soviet Union for a bona fide conversion to communism. In 1935 Aragon made the following reference to Gide:

> Tous ne choisissent pas leurs destinées; les uns avant les autres savent reconnaître et le mouvement de l'histoire et la véritable liberté qui est l'acceptation de ce mouvement, l'identification de nos désirs individuels avec la réalisation du devenir humain par la classe montante, le prolétariat héritier de toute la culture de l'humanité. L'exemple précieux entre tous qu'a su donner André Gide dans ces dernières années reste encore parmi les écrivains une position d'avant-garde.[2]

One year later, in the summer of 1936, Aragon's sojourn in the U.S.S.R. coincided with Gide's visit there, and during that time Aragon "corrected" the eulogy Gide had composed on the occasion of Gorky's death and delivered from the top of the Lenin Mausoleum in Moscow. From the

[2]Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, p. 25.

Soviet point of view. Aragon's association with the "traitor" would be sufficient to suspect him of a "lack of vigilance" at the very least. Aragon's public denunciation of Gide was thus a political move on his part.

However, the party apparently still had confidence in Aragon, for in March, 1937, he was given another important appointment as a full-time professional party functionary. He became co-editor of Ce Soir and was placed in charge of the column "un jour du monde". In his capacity as co-editor of the newspaper, he devoted himself to the defence of French nationalism and Stalin's totalitarian state.[3]

Towards the end of 1937 the political climate in France and elsewhere began to change. The heyday of the Popular Front was over. The phase of unprecedented enthusiasm when the communists believed that the future belonged to them was finished. Fascism again took the offensive. In 1938 Austria was transformed into a province of Greater Germany. Then the occupation of the Sudetenland became an urgent objective of National-Socialist policy. On September 9, 1938, the four-power conference agreed to Hitler's demand that Germany occupy the Sudeten regions, and the truncated Czechoslovak state received a guarantee

[3]The other editor of Ce Soir was J.-R. Bloch. Aragon remained at this post until the newspaper was suppressed by the French government in August, 1939. The office of Ce Soir became the meeting place of "Le Comité d'aide aux intellectuels espagnols," which was created after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

that its revised frontiers would be respected. However, the guarantee soon proved hollow (and hypocritical), and by March, 1939, the Czechoslovak state was a fiction and German domination a fact. The situation in Eastern Europe was aggravated by the defeat of the Republican forces in Spain. Despite the presence of Russian experts, tanks and planes, and the efforts of the International Brigades, the Spanish Civil War ended with the defeat of the Republic in March, 1939.

Sinister developments were also taking place in the Soviet Union. The Moscow trials of 1937-1938 raised many questions. Old revolutionaries, who in the past had risked their lives and withstood Czarist persecution, confessed to crimes whose absurdity was often obvious. These trials severely jolted many friends of the Soviet Union, and the liquidation of a generation of revolutionaries aroused indignation everywhere. Only the communists either were silent or actively supported the Soviet authorities. They tried to justify the trials by declaring that "en condamnant les traîtres à la solde du fascisme international, l'U.R.S.S. sert la paix." Aragon wrote in Commune:

> Que se taisent donc les scandaleux avocats de Trotski et de ses complices! Ou qu'ils sachent bien que prétendre innocenter ces hommes, c'est reprendre la thèse hitlérienne par tous ses points. . . Ils sont les avocats d'Hitler et de la Gestapo.[4]

[4]Quoted in A. Kriegel, Les grands procès dans les systèmes communistes (Paris, Gallimard, 1972), p. 135.

Aragon's personal life was not exempt from the rumblings heard from the Soviet Union. A relative of Elsa's was arrested in Moscow.[5] Then, in November 1937, M. Koltsov was suddenly recalled from Spain and subsequently disappeared in the wastes of Siberia.[6] Koltsov was a longstanding personal friend of Aragon and a man whose loyalty to the Soviet state was above suspicion.[7] Bewildered, but recalling that such authors as Gorky and Romain Rolland were credited with having helped some writers in disfavour with Soviet authorities, and evidently considering himself in the good graces of the Soviet government, Aragon went to the Soviet embassy to plead the cause of Koltsov, only to be told, in polite terms, that he was interfering with the internal affairs of the Soviet state. This unsuccessful mission and the general political development in the Soviet state seem to have indicated to Aragon that caution was necessary in his relationship with the Soviet Union.[8]

[5]After the death of Mayakovsky, Lili, Elsa's sister, married general V. Primakov, Deputy Commander of the Leningrad military district. The Aragons visited him in Leningrad in the summer of 1936. He perished during Stalin's purges.

[6]Mikhail Y. Koltsov, Soviet journalist, correspondent and editor of Pravda, was arrested in 1938, and presumably died in a forced-labor camp in 1942. He was rehabilitated in 1954.

[7]Aragon recounted his bewilderment at this event and the action taken by him on Koltsov's behalf in the pages of La Mise à Mort.

[8]It was in the second half of the thirties that Aragon changed the pattern of his travels. Beginning in 1930, he had assiduously frequented the Soviet state, but

It was obviously not the moment to indulge in apologetics in his imaginative writings.

It is against this general background that Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale should be viewed. In 1936, after the publication of Les Beaux Quartiers, Aragon announced that he wished to "écrire bientôt un livre français sur la France, basé sur la réalité française et qui soit vraiment alors illisible aux ennemies du peuple français, comme un beau film soviétique est pour eux intolérable et aveuglant."[9] Instead of the projected book, Aragon wrote Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale which, apart from its length, had nothing intolerable or "aveuglant" to the French bourgeoisie. On the contrary, the novel is the most apolitical of all the works belonging to the cycle Le Monde Réel. It seems, in fact, to represent a deliberate escape from the contemporary scene, an attempt to weather the storm. It reflects the profound pessimism which succeeded the

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after his visit to Russia in the summer of 1936, he did not return to that country until 1945. Besides the events described above, Aragon himself called attention to the incident at Gorky's funeral where, apparently, he became the object of an intended frame-up by the N.K.V.D. men, the purpose of which Aragon was unable to explain. Moreover, he must have wondered what it was that Gorky wanted to communicate to him and which had been urgent enough for Aragon to be summoned by a telegram to Gorky's bedside, and whether the two incidents had any connection. Aragon also knew that foreign communists were not immune from persecution once they found themselves in the Soviet state; the arrest of Alexander Weissberg and many others bore testimony to this.

[9]Louis Aragon, L'Humanité, December 17, 1936. Quoted by Garaudy, L'Itinéraire d'Aragon, p. 324.

shallow optimism of the Popular Front victories and it is not illuminated by any ray of the optimism that was evident in Aragon's previous novels. It is also the most ambiguous of his socialist realist writings.

Aragon gives more than one version of the motives which led him to write Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale. According to the 1949 version, his purpose was to follow Les Beaux Quartiers with yet another picture of the decadence of the French bourgeoisie, and to show that individualism leads to the degradation of the human being and to collective crime.[10] However, in 1966, in the course of preparing a new edition of the novel, he tried to present the cycle of Le Monde Réel as a well-thought out program and he declared that Les Voyageurs. . . was written to create a suitable background for the whole cycle and elsewhere he states that he was motivated by the desire to write the story of his maternal grandfather. That Aragon had afterthoughts becomes evident when we examine the Russian edition of Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale, which, on the author's request, constitutes the second volume of Le Monde Réel, rather than the third as is the case in the French edition. We shall have more to say about this change later.

The decision to write Les Voyageurs de l'Impéraile was made by Aragon after Munich, he tells us. However,

[10]Louis Aragon, "Aragon répond à ses témoins." La Nouvelle Critique, No. 8 (July-August 1949), 83.

he must have toyed with the idea before that, since the first two chapters describing the exhibition of '89 and the history of the families of Mercadier and his wife were written three months earlier. The place occupied in the novel by the real story of Aragon's grandfather is discussed by the author in his preface to the Oeuvres Croisées version of Les Voyageurs. . . and need not be repeated here. We shall limit ourselves to the discussion of the circumstances of the composition and publication of the novel.

The novel was begun in France and was fairly well advanced when Aragon decided to go abroad. Since the U.S.S.R., his favorite foreign country, was becoming a vast expanse of dangerous quicksands where people disappeared without leaving a trace,[11] Aragon turned his attention to the United States, and shortly before the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, he and Elsa paid a visit to the American continent.[12] They were invited to the Congress of American Writers, which was scheduled to take place in New York. Accustomed to travel in the Soviet Union, where the invited guests always travelled and lived at the government's expense, Aragon was able to state that the treatment he received in the United States did not resemble Soviet hospitality: " Nous étions dans

[11]It is, perhaps, not an accident that a part of the novel deals with quagmire: a description of it and an outline of the dangers connected with venturing into it.

[12]Aragon and Elsa left France in June 1939.

le principe invités par les écrivains américains pour leur Congrès à New York. Mais cela n'impliquait ni le voyage ni l'hôtel ni les repas."[13] Aragon felt rather bitter, the more so as his attempt to publish a part of the manuscript of Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale was unsuccessful and he was obliged to accept the hospitality of his friends.

Aragon took two copies of the manuscript of the novel with him in the hope of finishing it in New York, but, as he observed: "La découverte de l'Amérique est peu compatible avec le travail du romancier."[14] Back in Paris, he was continuing his work on the manuscript when, in August, 1939, the news of the conclusion of the Soviet-Nazi Pact reached Western Europe. Aragon, who was the co-editor of Ce Soir failed to understand the intricate manoeuvres by which the U.S.S.R. was furthering its aims, approved the Pact and spoke of the triumph of Stalin's policy. This reaction to the pact led to the suppression of Ce Soir, and Aragon, fearing for his life, sought refuge in the Chilean Embassy.[15] It was there that

[13] O.C., XV, p. 23. The Aragons planned to stay six weeks, but in six days found themselves without funds.

[14] Ibid., loc. cit.

[15] Aragon's choice of the Chilean Embassy as a place of refuge is strange, to say the least, since in 1939 Chile had a fascist-oriented government. Apparently, Aragon considered the Soviet Pact with the Nazis a sufficient guarantee of his safety.

he wrote the last part of the novel.

The story of the publication of Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale is too complicated to be discussed here in detail.[16] We should mention only that four versions of the novel are known to exist. One version was published in the United States in Hannah Josephson's translation under the title The Century Was Young.[17] It is a truncated version in which entire chapters are omitted and numerous deletions are made in the others. Another version which was tampered with by someone who apparently wished to create the impression that the book was anti-semitic, makes Captain Dreyfus look guilty, was published in Paris under the German occupation in 1942.[18] The third version was published in 1947 by Gallimard and contains the mention "édition définitive," which seemingly indicates that the novel was restored to its original form. Aragon vigorously objected to this mention and rewrote the novel for the Oeuvres croisées edition. This last version was rewritten, according to the author, "de fond en comble."[19] However, the comparison of the two versions shows that it is certainly exaggerated to represent it as rewritten

[16]Aragon gives an account of the publication in the preface to the O.C. edition of Les Voyageurs; the Russians offer a different one in the bibliographical note accompanying the Russian edition of Aragon's works.

[17]Louis Aragon, The Century Was Young, translated by Hannah Josephson (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941).

[18]Louis Aragon, O.C., XV, p. 27.

[19]Ibid., loc. cit.

completely, for there are comparatively few changes and these are mainly of a stylistic character.[20]

Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale is a story of a man whose life is ruined because of an ill-chosen career. One of the descendants of a race of adventurers, Pierre Mercadier, the protagonist of the novel, takes up a profession which is in conflict with his temperament and inclinations. Mercadier is a teacher of history in provincial "lycées." He is also a stock market gambler and the author of a short article on John Law, the Scottish financier. Mercadier's stock market operations reveal to him the power which money wields in society. All human relations appear to him as ties regulated by pecuniary considerations. Money creates responsibility to one's family and to the society in which the stock market is the barometer of social stability. He decides to refuse this responsibility by abandoning his family and his profession. Mercadier sets out on a tour of adventures: he travels to exotic countries, falls in love with a beautiful spy and ends up in a brothel. The result of Mercadier's refusal to assume responsibility is his alienation from society and his physical and moral deterioration. His revolt is an "acte gratuit," because man cannot escape either society or his human condition and Mercadier

[20]That is, if the comparison is made with the 1947 version which bears the mention "édition définitive." The 1942 version published under the occupation is not available to us.

is forced to renew former ties. His return to his family is symbolized by his encounter with Jeannot, his grandson, and a letter to his family.

Having written two-thirds of the novel dealing with Mercadier and the members of his family, Aragon, apparently conscious of the apolitical character of the manuscript, introduced a multitude of new characters: the Méré family, Mme Buzelin, M. Frédéric, the inmates of the brothel, "Les Hirondelles," among others. The delineation of the Méré family gave the author the opportunity of depicting the interior of a working class home, of showing the ravaging consequences of unemployment, the proprietors' attitude towards the trade-unions and similar social issues. The introduction of "Les Hirondelles" allowed Aragon to show how closely prostitution is linked with the governing classes. Thus, by introducing political and social issues, the author tried to repudiate the existing order.

Many already familiar themes, such as suicide or police brutality, reappear in the novel. Some other themes can also be mentioned. The pages of the novel reflect, for instance, what became one of the dominant preoccupations of the security forces in the second half of the thirties, particularly in the Soviet Union: the obsession with espionage as well as the hunt for spies. Already, in Les Cloches de Bâle, the spy theme had been present, but the role of the spy was to carry on the

surveillance of political leaders such as Jaurès and Clara Zetkin. In Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale, published after the execution of Soviet marshals and high commanding officers for high treason, the theme of military and economic espionage became more relevant.

One unusual aspect of the work is the presence of numerous children. Although children were not absent from Aragon's other novels, their presence was used mainly for reasons of composition or ideology. Thus, in Les Cloches de Bâle, little Guy is used as "un incipit"--the starting point of the novel--and also as a means to show the negative influence of bourgeois society on the child's development. In Les Beaux Quartiers Armand's childhood is depicted mainly to characterize Esther Barbentane, his mother, and for the purpose of anti-religious propaganda. In Aurélien, Marie-Victoire's presence is used to further the development of the plot. In Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale, on the other hand, many pages are devoted to the portrayal of children: Jeannot, Pascal, Jeanne, Susanne, Ivonne and their playmates from the village. It seems that, in addition to the desire to depict some aspects of his own childhood, this manifestation of Aragon's interest in children reflects his own preoccupation at this particular period.[21]

[21]During the Spanish Civil War, Aragon's friend M. Koltsov and his wife Maria adopted a Spanish child. The Aragons also decided to adopt one, but were prevented from doing so by the French authorities.

As is usual in Aragon's writings, autobiographical detail is found dispersed throughout the novel. We are offered a description of the family pension where Aragon spent his early childhood years. His medical training is perceptible in many descriptions of illness in the novel. Aragon's account of "les amours enfantines" which he recounted some thirty years later in terms reminiscent of those used in Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale also has autobiographical accents.

The background against which Mercadier's case is presented is fin de siècle France and the period preceding the First World War. The author pointed out that there seemed to be an undeniable kinship between the post-Munich period and the time which preceded the War of 1914. "Les Voyageurs n'avançaient pas. C'était trop ressemblant à ce qui mûrissait là, sous nos yeux."[22] Thus, Aragon transposed the mood of appeasement which prevailed in French society before the signing of the Munich accord in describing public reaction to "Fashoda" and "Panther" episodes which occurred before the First World War.[23]

[22] O.C., XV, p. 24.

[23] "Fashoda" represents an incident in the French-English struggle for the domination of Africa. In 1898 Captain Marchand hoisted the French flag at Fashoda, where the White Nile parallels the Abyssinian border. With the control of the Upper Nile region at stake both nations drifted dangerously close to a war mood, but the crisis passed when the French agreed to recall Captain Marchand. The "Panther" incident occurred in Morocco. In 1911 French forces occupied Fez, the chief city of Morocco. The German government dispatched the warship, "Panther," to the Moroccan port of Agadir as a protest. For several months the threat of war hung over Europe.

Viewed from the standpoint of communist doctrine, Mercadier's case represents the unequivocal condemnation of individualism, which is depicted as a destructive force. Marxist theory supposes that the defeat of individualistic tendencies in the individual is the prerequisite for social commitment and for the emergence of a positive hero. According to this logic Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale should have been the first, and not the third, novel in the whole sequence of Le Monde Réel. It seems that on completing the work, Aragon realized this lack of consistency and endeavoured to correct it, to some degree at least, by requesting that Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale appear as the second volume in the Russian edition of his work.[24]

It should, however, be noted that the refusal of individualism as such does not mean an automatic political commitment. Although, during the last days of Mercadier, the word "politics" is the only one frequently repeated by the dying man, this apparent obsession cannot be taken

[24]The author motivated his request by declaring that chronologically and thematically the novel's place is after Les Cloches de Bâle. Aragon's request raises another interesting point, namely, his evaluation of Les Cloches de Bâle. If Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale was meant as a background to the cycle, it should have constituted the first volume of the cycle. Aragon's request would seem to imply that Les Cloches de Bâle, although nominally part of Le Monde Réel remains in fact outside the cycle. Indirectly, Aragon admitted that such was indeed his view when he spoke of "l'époque du passage, qui sera pour moi terminée quand j'aurai écrit Les Cloches de Bâle." O.C., IV, p. 14. He also wrote: "J'ai écrit dans la période qui va de 1930 à 1935, des choses fort mauvaises. Ce sont des textes de passage, et leurs défauts m'apparaissent fort clairement." J'abats mon jeu, p. 92.

as necessary indication of his interest in the society he had abandoned. Throughout the entire length of the novel, the author stresses the fact that Mercadier has made it a rule to keep out of politics and that he has always managed to change the conversation when it verged on serious political discussion. Politics begins to occupy Mercadier only at the moment when his mental state is unknown to us: we wonder whether his interest in politics is dictated by a change of heart or if it is a symptom of delirium. This ambiguity, which in varying degrees has always been characteristic of Aragon's writings, is found elsewhere in the novel. Let us consider just two instances: Aragon's treatment of anti-semitism and the essay on John Law.

The fact that many of Aragon's friends were of Jewish descent and that Elsa had a Jewish background,[25] would seem to make any suspicion of anti-semitism ludicrous. We believe that the introduction of the Dreyfus Affair and of some Jewish characters, such as the Meyer family, into the novel was meant as an indictment of Nazism, for all anti-semitic utterances are ascribed to the negative characters in the novel. Yet, because the statements with anti-semitic overtones are allowed to go unchallenged, the reader is left with a feeling of malaise and of uncertainty about the author's intention. It was this ambiguity, it seems, which permitted Aragon's views

[25]Elsa belonged to a family of Jewish intellectuals. Her maiden name is Ella Kahan.

to be misrepresented in the first edition of his novel.[26]

Another case of ambiguity concerns Aragon's introduction into the novel of the Scottish financier, John Law, and of his economic theories. The exposition of Law's views misled Jean Paulhan into believing that Aragon was attempting to carry Marxist propaganda into the pages of the novel. Aragon vehemently denied that such was his intention, claiming that he wished no more than to show the disastrous consequences of extreme individualism. And later he stated: "Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale . . . était en 1939 une entreprise de liquidation de l'individualisme, ce monstre ébouriffé que je rencontrais alors (je pense au Comité des Intellectuels antifascistes), c'est-à-dire dans les années du Front Populaire, comme l'adversaire têtu, l'inconscient barreur de routes . . ."[27] Yet his intention was misinterpreted by a friend who was familiar with Marxist ideology.

Thus, viewed within the total picture of Le Monde Réel, Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale represents a step backward as compared with the two preceding novels[28]

[26]Incidentally, the feeling of malaise reappeared during the so called "doctors' plot," when, in 1952, a group of Kremlin doctors, mostly Jewish, were accused of trying to poison some Soviet leaders. (They were all released after Stalin's death). At the time of their arrest, Pierre Hervé published articles condemning the Jewish doctors, and he published them in Ce Soir, which was directed by Aragon. Aragon's friends absolved him from all responsibility for this on the grounds that he was in the Soviet Union at the time of the publication of Hervé's articles.

[27]Louis Aragon, O.C., XV, p. 27.

[28]Les Cloches de Bâle and Les Beaux Quartiers.

and has less ideological content than those which followed. Despite the author's wholehearted condemnation of individualism and the strict adherence to a Marxist interpretation of the historical context, despite the unsavoury picture of the corruption of a certain stratum of the French bourgeoisie, the essential message of the socialist realist writer, the superiority of the proletariat and the necessity of the revolution, does not come through. The condemnation of individualism and some references to the proletariat are not sufficient to place Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale among the socialist realist novels. If we recall the sentiments expressed by the author in the postscript to Les Beaux Quartiers and his declaration in l'Humanité,[29] the novel appears to be a retreat from his earlier, more radical positions. This retreat was, we believe, the reflection of the historical circumstances in which the novel was written, and it did not pass unnoticed by either the Soviet authorities or the F.C.P. When the novel appeared in print for the first time, the Soviets limited themselves to the publication of a short note stating that the novel was published in the United States under the title The Century Was Young and giving a brief résumé which can be found in Internatsional'naya literatura, No. 11, 1942. The novel was not translated into Russian before the year 1958. In France, the first

[29]See pp. 138, 148.

edition published in 1942 was suppressed almost immediately. The next edition did not appear until 1947 and drew a negative reaction in communist circles. After Aragon's fiery resistance poetry, the novel, which reflected the pessimistic mood of 1939, seemed out of step with the aggressive spirit prevailing in the F.C.P. at the time of the "cold war." It was only after the publication of Les Communistes, in which Aragon's orthodoxy was unmistakably that Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale was reluctantly included in the list of novels accepted as Aragon's contribution to socialist realism.

CHAPTER 8

AURÉLIEN

Mon roman préféré.
Aragon.

Although the principal subject of Aurélien is love, the purpose of this chapter is not to discuss Aragon's conception of love, for that has already been done by Jean Sur.[1] Our purpose is rather to situate Aurélien in the historical context in which it was written and to indicate how it fits into the scheme prescribed by socialist realism.

When, after the armistice following the tragic defeat of France by Hitler Aragon was demobilized,[2] he found himself in a hitherto unknown situation. Previously used to perpetual activity and little leisure, he was now condemned to long days of relative idleness. The exhilarating period of the Resistance had not yet arrived. "We had received order not to do any local job, not to come in touch with local party members, and so on," Aragon wrote to his friend, the writer Malcolm Cowley.[3] Nice,

[1]Jean Sur, Aragon: Le réalisme de l'amour (Paris: Centurion, 1966).

[2]Aragon was demobilized July 31, 1940.

[3]Aragon, Poet of Resurgent France: Edited by Hannah Josephson and Malcolm Cowley. (London: The Pilot Press Ltd., 1946), p. 15.

where the Aragons had lived since the end of December 1940, was not an exciting place for the couple. The time dragged slowly; Elsa tells us what those days were like:

> Ces longs après-midi, ces soirées à passer. Michel Eymer était dans sa gloire, nous allions écouter son orchestre dans un café bondé . . . Nous flânions dans l'acétylène et les lampions d'une foire aux carrousels géants . . . des attractions périlleuses attiraient des badauds, les tirs claquaient et me tuaient de tristesse. . . . Je te lisais tous les jours un chapitre du Cheval blanc. Ça te rendait heureux. Tu a commencé à écrire Aurélien.[4]

The unhappiness of those days was augmented by the shock of Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union and the swift advance of the Wehrmacht into the heart of Russia. As the fall of 1941 came, the news from the Russian front became worse and worse. The struggle for Moscow reached its highest point in early December 1941. Aragon wrote:

> Il faut comprendre que ce début de l'hiver 1941-1942 m'a laissé dans la gorge et les poumons un sentiment de brûlure comme lorsqu'on a avalé une trop grande bolée d'oxygène. C'étaient peut-être pour moi les jours les plus noirs de l'occupation, les Allemands devant Moscou, Léningrad assiégée il fallait avoir le coeur bien chevillé pour croire à un renversement du destin.[5]

Aragon's suffering was further aggravated by the fact that no imaginative writing occupied his thought at this period. In 1939, he had completed Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale, and during the war he made some notes, which he later used in his novel Les Communistes, but at this

[4]Elsa Triolet, O.C., XVII, pp. 16-17.

[5]O.C., XIX, p. 19.

time of disaster it took "a great deal of courage to write without knowing what will happen to one's work," Aragon confessed in a letter to a friend.[6] Besides, the party did not encourage imaginative writing during that period of the party history:

> . . . un temps où mes amis, mes compagnons, mes complices dans cette grande conspiration de nos ténèbres exigeaient le plus généralement qu'écrire fût, et uniquement, une part de cette conspiration, je veux dire l'expression directement, apparemment utile de cette conspiration, de ses buts immédiats, le reflet des tâches à entreprendre, l'encouragement à cela et à rien d'autre.[7]

Aragon, of course, complied with his party's demands by inventing a certain type of poem which answered the needs of the time, but the novel was in a different category:

> . . . l'idée même du roman, d'un roman, revêtait pour moi le caractère de l'impossibilite . . . reprendre ce genre de travail . . . supposait à mes yeux que . . . le monde eût repris sa place. . .[8]

Towards the end of 1941, during this time of his "inquiétudes secrètes," Aragon met Henri Matisse who lived above Nice in Cimiez. Finding inactivity oppressive, he first thought of writing about Matisse. "J'avais eu la tentation de reprendre le rêve," he said.[9] This dream did not

[6] Aragon: Poet of Resurgent France, p. 12.

[7] O.C., XIX, p. 20.

[8] Louis Aragon, Henri Matisse, roman (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), V. 1, pp. 16-17.

[9] Ibid., I, p. 16.

go beyond an article entitled "Matisse ou la grandeur" in which Aragon thought to counterbalance the humiliation of the defeat and the sufferings caused by the war and exodus with the greatness and optimism of Matisse's painting, while at the same time cautiously avoiding any involvement in political questions.[10]

By the end of the winter of 1941-1942, Soviet troops had driven the Germans from Moscow, but the military situation was still critical. Aragon tells us that it was then, in the spring of 1942, that he began to write Aurélien. As became usual in later years. Aragon ascribed his decision to start work to Elsa's influence. According to him, it was her courage that made him begin the novel. "J'ai écrit, effectivement, Aurélien quand j'ai vu Elsa commencer à écrire Le Cheval Blanc. C'est ce spectacle, pour moi extraordinaire en 1941-1942, qui m'a donné le courage d'entreprendre autre chose que les poèmes directs de la période dans laquelle nous étions."[11] Contradictory testimony comes, however, from Peter Rhodes, Aragon's friend, who, in an article written in 1946, states: "Elsa Triolet had plunged into the writing of her first long novel, Le Cheval Blanc, and Aragon was busy completing

[10]Louis Aragon, "Matisse ou la Grandeur," Poésie 42, No. 1, published under the signature B. d'Ambérieux.

[11]Louis Aragon, O.C., XIX, p. 16.

his novel Aurélien which he had begun in Carcassonne."[12] Whether Aragon started writing his novel in Carcassonne or in Nice, one thing is certain. It was begun when a defeatist mood prevailed in the ranks of the F.C.P.

Aragon was still working on the novel, when on November 11, 1942, Italian troops occupied Nice and Elsa and Aragon were obliged to go underground, where they remained until the Liberation. Forced to interrupt his writing of Aurélien temporarily, Aragon resumed his work on the novel towards the end of November in a hideout in the mountains near Comps above Dieulefit and he continued it in the couple's refuge at Saint-Donat. The book was finished in the spring of 1944 before the Allied landing in Normandy. The epilogue must have been added shortly afterwards, since the first edition of the novel was published in 1944.

Aurélien's main theme is the love of Aurélien, a young Parisian, and Bérénice, a native of the south of France who is visiting Paris. The reader may wonder why the author chose this particular topic, so removed from current events and so at odds with the requirements of the party at this time in its history. We can only speculate about the reasons for Aragon's choice. It would seem that, at the time, when on Aragon's own admission

[12] Aragon: Poet of Resurgent France, p. 101. The Aragons remained in Carcassonne from August to December 1940.

"il fallait avoir le coeur bien chevillé pour croire à un renversement du destin,"[13] a love story probably had more chance to survive than a political pamphlet or a novel written to glorify either the party or the Soviet state. Secondly, Aurélien fitted into the general pattern of Aragon's then-current preoccupation with love, for it was in the early forties that Aragon deliberately set out to cultivate love poetry.[14] The discussion of the theme of love in Aragon's work is beyond the scope of this study. It is interesting, nevertheless, to meditate on Aragon's statement:

> De toute chose naturelle, imitation de main d'homme donna surenchère, et l'on inventa le verre incassable, et des roses qui n'avaient pas d'odeur, et cela s'appelait le 'progrès', mais quant à l'amour durable cela semblait toujours chimère, on n'en trouvait pas le métal, il y avait toujours paille à la fonte . . .[15]

Perhaps, it was the search for "l'amour durable" or "l'amour absolu" that motivated the author's choice of subject.[16]

[13]Louis Aragon, O.C., XIX, p. 19.

[14]Although Aragon denied that his love poetry was a mainly literary phenomenon, it was only in the late thirties and early forties that he began to pay particular attention to love lyrics. Elsa had entered his life long before, in 1928.

[15]Louis Aragon, Le Fou d'Elsa (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 364.

[16]It is noteworthy that the party carefully cultivated the concept of "the couple." D. Desanti writes: "Au P.C.F., Maurice (Thorez) a institué le culte du couple conjugal et de la famille. Au couple "Maurice-Jeannette" correspondait dans l'ordre littéraire le couple "Aragon-Elsa" (ou "Louis-Elsa" pour les initiés), dans l'ordre politique le couple "Laurent-Claudine" . . . Les Staliniens, p. 53.

Perhaps, in the dark hours of defeat it was also a sort of "rendez-vous clandestin" with his past, an escape to les Années Folles for the presence of nostalgic elements in the novel is undeniable.

Since Aurélien constitutes part of Le Monde Réel, which is commonly accepted as Aragon's major literary contribution to socialist realism, it is necessary to see what aspects of the official doctrine can be found in it. One must understand at the outset that the search for love has nothing to do with socialist realism. The reasons for this are to be found first of all in the dissimilarity of the literary traditions of France and Russia. Secondly, the character of Marxism and the personal opinions and attitudes of its founders influenced the particular way the doctrine was formulated, and neither of these factors really encouraged the inclusion of love themes in literary work. And, thirdly, the tastes and opinions of the rulers of the Soviet Union dictated the type of treatment accorded to love themes when the latter did find their way into communist-inspired literature.

In considering the Russian literary tradition, we have to bear in mind that two centuries of Tartar domination and the influence of the Greek Orthodox religion, brought from Constantinople, oriented Russia towards the East. The Russian literary tradition contained nothing comparable to the love literature of the French Middle Ages, that Golden Age of love poetry. It knew neither

the "trouvères" nor the "troubadours," who sang of their love and the virtues of the beloved. Russian literature experienced little of the influence of the Renaissance or of Petrarch's lyric poetry, and it knew neither the idealism nor the refinement of the later era of "préciosité". At the time when, in France, the "précieuses" were discussing in the "ruelles" "la Carte du Tendre," Russian women were shut up in the "terems."[17] Under Peter the Great, the Russian woman emerged from her seclusion, but this emancipation affected mainly the ladies of the court. Russian women of humble origin, although not sequestered, were serfs and as such were regarded more as beasts of burden than as human beings.[18] This attitude towards women is reflected in Russian folklore where we find such proverbs as "A hen is not a bird, a woman is not a human being," or "Love your wife as your soul, shake her as a pear tree." These remarks do not imply, of course, that love did not exist in Russia, or that it did not occupy any place in literature. The nineteenth-century Russian novel produced such unforgettable heroines as Natasha Rostoff and Anna Karenina;[19] in spite of these instances, however, the cult of woman is not an essential part of the

[17]Living quarters where women were kept prior to the reign of Peter the Great.

[18]The emancipation of the serfs took place in 1861 when Alexander II introduced a law abolishing serfdom.

[19]Characters in War and Peace and Anna Karenina by Tolstoy.

Russian literary heritage or one which could be easily incorporated into the doctrine of socialist realism.

To the nineteenth century belongs also Maxim Gorky, the initiator of socialist realism, whose views are still highly respected among contemporary Russian writers. Gorky's view on love was expressed in the following passage:

> Ce que l'homme a réussi de plus intelligent, c'est de savoir aimer la femme, s'incliner devant la beauté: c'est de l'amour pour la femme qu'est né tout le beau de la Terre.[20]

But at the same time Gorky considered the sentiment of love to be a highly personal matter. In a conversation with Alexander Blok, the Russian poet, he admitted that:

> . . . les problèmes du sens de la vie, de la mort, de l'amour sont des problèmes strictemment personnels, intimes, des problèmes pour moi seul. Je n'aime pas les porter dans la rue, et, s'il m'arrive involontairement de le faire; c'est toujours maladroitement, gauchement.[21]

One can see the abyss which separated Gorky's conception from that of Aragon, who thought "que c'est lâcheté et faiblesse de craindre porter son amour au pavois."[22]

Literary tradition was not the only element that influenced socialist realist writings. In Marxist ideology there is very little place for love. Love being by its

[20] Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Editions Hier et Aujourd'hui, 1956), xv, p. 100.

[21] Quoted by J. Pérus in Romain Rolland et Maxime Gorki (Paris: Editeurs Français Réunis, 1968), p. 153. Note.

[22] Louis Aragon, "Arma virumque cano. Préface", Les yeux d'Elsa (Paris: Seghers, 1959), p. 31.

very nature an individual experience, Marxist ideologists found it difficult to integrate love into their picture of the collective destiny of all citizens. This explains partially why so little space is devoted to love in Soviet literature. The personal opinions of the founders of the Soviet state were also not without influence on many Soviet writers. Lenin's views on love were expressed in a letter to the writer Inessa Armand, and in a conversation with Clara Zetkin, the German revolutionary. At the beginning of the Revolution the principle of "free love" was often advocated, but by free love Lenin did not mean promiscuity but personal relationships free from social, religious or economic considerations. To Inessa Armand Lenin wrote: "Je vous conseille de supprimer le passage de la revendication par la femme de l'amour libre. C'est une exigence qui n'est pas prolétarienne, mais bourgeoise."[23] In his conversation with Clara Zetkin, he expressed the opinion that promiscuity was a poor weapon in the political struggle and the revolution. He observed that he had as little faith in the political effectiveness of a woman who mixed her personal life with politics as in that of a man who chased every skirt.[24] It is obvious that for Lenin, love was a purely personal

[23]Quoted by Gilbert Mury in "Famille du xxe siècle," C. du C., 37, No. 2 (1961), 301.

[24]Clara Zetkin, Reminiscences of Lenin (New York: International Publishers, 1934), p. 50.

matter.

After Lenin's death, much depended on the tastes and even the mood of one man--Stalin.[25] Stalin's attitude to love can be judged by his reaction to love poetry. Zhdanov reported Stalin's observation on a book of love poems by K. Simonov: "they should have published only two copies--one for her, and one for him."[26] Consequently in the U.S.S.R. love themes had all but disappeared from lyric poetry.

Official policies of puritanism and asceticism in the Soviet Union also dictated the attitude towards love in Soviet fiction. In Fadeyev's novel The Rout, for example, love scenes were eliminated in order to satisfy the prudishness of the Stalin era.[27] Ilya Ehrenburg, in a conversation with Simone de Beauvoir, remarked that in Moscow all intellectuals who knew French had read Les Mandarins and had commented favourably on it, but had found superfluous the love story depicted in the novel. One of the reasons why the book could not be translated in the U.S.S.R. was, he observed, "la pudibonderie littéraire traditionnelle en Russie."[28] Adolf Rudnicki,

[25] I. Ehrenburg reports that Umansky, one of the high Soviet officials remarked: "You remember what Stalin had to say about Shostakovich's opera? And then there's Zhdanov. And their taste is compulsory for everybody else." Memoirs, V, p. 104.

[26] Milovan Djilas, Conversations with Stalin (New York, Harcourt Brace & World Inc., 1962), p. 158. According to another version it was Akhmatova's book of poems that caused this reaction.

[27] See: J. Rühle, op. cit.

a Polish journalist, also commented on the puritan character of art and literature in satellite countries:

> Le film, le théâtre, les livres ne reconnaissent pas, chez nous, l'existence de la femme en tant que femme. . . . Le sexe, chez nous, est morne et menaçant. . . .[29]

and he concluded:

> Dans nos oeuvres, les sentiments n'ont pas d'autonomie, de forme achevée; . . . ils ne font que servir une formule sociologique éternellement obtuse, de carton-pâte.[30]

If one examines the endless discussions on socialist realism, one becomes conscious of the negligible place given therein to love.[31] In Soviet literature the emphasis is on social and political problems which tend to exclude normal human relationships, ignore human emotions and stress labour and technology. The foregoing discussion will thus indicate that Aurélien, as a love story, does not fit the prescribed canons of socialist realism. The only concession to the doctrine is the absence of erotic scenes.

[28]Simone de Beauvoir, La Force des choses, p. 348.

[29]Adolf Rudnicki, "Voyage en Occident," T.M., 14, Nos. 150-151 (1958), 314.

[30]Ibid., p. 318.

[31]Aragon criticized Paris-Match for having stated that after thirty years (sic) of socialist realism Ilya Ehrenburg was the first socialist realist writer who, in his novel The Thaw, dared to speak of love. However, Aragon did not offer more than one example in support of his contention that the theme of love had not disappeared from Soviet literature. This example was the novel La Moisson, by G. Nikolayeva. See: Littératures soviétiques.

Besides the quest for the absolute in love, there is in the novel another theme foreign to socialist realism. Like many other characters in French literature of the twentieth century, such as Gilles or Chéri,[32] Aurélien belongs to the "lost generation." From the very beginning of the novel, Aurélien is portrayed as a man who "ne s'était jamais remis tout à fait de la guerre,"[33] who "n'avait jamais retrouvé le rythme de la vie."[34] Having lived during the war years "dans le provisoire," Aurélien acquired "l'habitude du provisoire" and he needed many years to adjust to civilian life. Yet, because of Russia's particular historical circumstances the theme of the "lost generation" had never become part of socialist realist doctrine.

Love and the fate of the post-war generation are not the only themes of Aurélien. Many other topics already familiar to Aragon's readers were treated by the author, such as parasitism, prostitution, suicide, art and "les hommes doubles."[35] To the themes so far

[32]Drieu la Rochelle, Gilles (Paris: Gallimard, 1939); Colette, La Fin de Chéri (Paris: Fayard, 1921).

[33]Aurélien (Paris: Gallimard, 1944), p. 10.

[34]Ibid., p. 11.

[35]The latter theme reappears in the presentation of Bérénice by Aragon, particularly in the portrait of Bérénice by Zamora who shows two different aspects of the young woman, painting her with her eyes closed and with her eyes open "pour qu'on vît les deux êtres qui se battaient dans son visage. . ." Ibid., p. 122.

mentioned should be added the author's reminiscences of the Dada and Surrealist periods, which occupy a considerable place in the novel, and his recollections of the war years.

As far as the characters in Aurélien are concerned, the emphasis is on representatives of the demi-monde and the middle classes. Many already familiar faces reappear. It is in the house of Edmond Barbentane, one of the protagonists of Les Beaux Quartiers, who is now married to Blanchette, the daughter of the industrialist Quesnel, that Aurélien meets Bérénice. The latter is Edmond's cousin, who is paying a short visit to her relatives. Adrien Arnaud, Barbentane's friend, and prominent in Les Beaux Quartiers as the organizer of a fascist-type group "Pro Patria" in Sérianne-le-Vieux, plays an important part in the development of the plot of Aurélien. Through the continued delineation of these characters, Aragon depicts the business practices and love affairs of the society he knew so well. Against this background the reader follows the development of the romance between Aurélien and Bérénice. Their love is doomed from the beginning, for, while Bérénice seeks the absolute in love, Aurélien's love is poisoned by his former experiences of libertinage and by the loose morals of bourgeois society.

We see, therefore that the content of Aurélien was not determined by the nature and demands of party policy at a given moment. If we consider the fact that every

socialist realist novel is obliged to justify itself ideologically, and that literary work is accepted or rejected by the party according to whether the content can or cannot help to instill a socialist consciousness in its readers, Aurélien does not seem to comply with the requirements of the socialist realist doctrine. The scene of the encounter between Riquet, a Paris worker, and Aurélien at the municipal pool is, perhaps, dictated by ideological considerations. The shame which Aurélien feels at the uselessness of his life, acknowledging that: "tous les Riquet du monde avaient raison contre lui, bien entendu. Il songeait à sa propre force perdue, inemployée,"[36] as well as his observation: "C'est drôle: on ne remarquait pas qu'on ne faisait rien, puis un beau jour cela devient insupportable,"[37] reflect the uneasiness of a bourgeois intellectual conscious of his inferior position. The scene of the attack on Negro sailors, with its implied denunciation of racism and its hint of anti-Americanism also has ideological overtones. So has Aurélien's decision to commence working, work being one of the fundamental ethical principles extolled by socialist realist writers. The above mentioned episodes, however, occupy a negligible place in the volume and the overall

[36] Aurélien, pp. 283-284.

[37] Ibid., p. 367.

impression is that of an apolitical novel.

The epilogue which Aragon added to the novel appears at first glance to be superfluous and tacked on almost as an afterthought. In reality, it represents a strongly felt necessity to introduce political content into the work. We have seen that Aragon began his novel in a somewhat defeatist mood. By the time he had finished the manuscript, fortune had changed in favour of the Soviet Union and the West. In February 1943, Russian troops broke the resistance of the besieged German garrison in Stalingrad and turned the tide of the war. The Allied landing in Normandy, in June 1944, sealed the fate of the enemy. The epilogue reflects the return to optimism, the confidence in the power and strength of the Soviet and Allied troops, and the hopeful anticipation of the approaching Liberation--"cet épilogue est écrit au moment où l'on voit le bout du tunnel,"--Aragon wrote.[38] In this way the epilogue links the novel to contemporary events and gives Aurélien a political relevance which it would otherwise have lacked.

Aragon claimed further that he intended to portray in Aurélien certain traits of his former friend, the French novelist Drieu la Rochelle who became a Nazi collaborator under the German occupation. "Et moi j'ai donné à Aurélien un autre avenir. Il est devenu un homme de Vichy dans

[38] O.C., XIX, p. 22.

cette partie des Communistes que je n'ai pas écrite."[39] If this was indeed the author's intention, the epilogue provided him with the opportunity to show Aurélien's political development to the right.

In the epilogue the protagonists of the novel, Aurélien and Bérénice, meet during the last days of the French campaign of the Second World War after eighteen years of separation. They find themselves at the opposite ends of the political spectrum. Bérénice is associated with the Left: she protects the unhappy victims of Spanish fascism and does not accept the capitulation of France, blaming it on the ruling powers. Aurélien, who eighteen years earlier "éprouvait le vide absolu de sa vie,"[40] has finally found himself. Married, the father of two children and a successful director of a thriving business, he becomes a supporter of Marshal Pétain and accepts the Armistice as inevitable. The reader is led to believe that the frustration of what had been a great love at the time of the protagonists' youth was caused by the basic incompatibility of their ideological orientations, an incompatibility of which they were not, of course aware at the time of their first encounter. The gulf which separated them becomes obvious now: "Il n'y a vraiment plus rien de commun entre vous et moi, mon cher Aurélien,

[39] Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 36.

[40] Aurélien, p. 297.

plus rien. . ."[41] Although the epilogue ends on a tragic note, the optimistic perspective is not lost sight of entirely. Bérénice is killed by a stray German bullet, but her attitudes to war and the Spanish refugees announce the Resistance era.

Viewed from the ideological stand point, Aurélien contains very few elements which have political overtones, and the ideological content of the epilogue is not sufficient to place Aurélien in the foreground of socialist realist fiction. As one of the writers observed "Aurélien est le personnage classique d'un très beau roman qui aurait pu être écrit au xlxe siècle."[42] It is understandable, therefore, that the F.C.P. did not appreciate the novel and accused its author of the desire to "faire de la littérature bourgeoise."[43] It goes without saying that Aurélien did not meet with the approval of the Russian authorities, either, and was not published in Russia prior to the year 1958.

[41] Ibid., p. 515.

[42] Michel-Antoine Burnier. Les Existentialistes et la politique (Paris: Fallimard, 1966), p. 187.

[43] It is interesting to note that when J. Thorez-Vermeersch, member of the Political Bureau of the F.C.P., speaking on the occasion of forty years of Aragon's membership in the party, praised him for his socialist realist writings, she omitted to mention Aurélien and Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale. "Les Quarante ans de parti du poète Aragon," C. du C., 43, Nos. 2-3 (1967), 245.

CHAPTER 9

LES COMMUNISTES

During the thirties, Aragon, who occupied several positions of trust in the F.C.P. hierarchy, was no more than just another functionary who enjoyed the confidence of his party. In the war years he suddenly rose to prominence. His wartime decorations[1] earned him wide consideration and his resistance record consolidated this esteem.[2] Towards the end of the war, Aragon, whose wartime poetry was full of national and anti-German inspiration, came very close to becoming the national poet of France. Speaking of the influence which Resistance poetry had on many young intellectuals, D. Desanti, who became an ardent communist, observed: "C'est à Aragon et à Eluard, que nous devions nos visas pour la foi."[3]

The Resistance years count as perhaps the happiest period of Aragon's political career. We may recall that Elsa wrote: "La résistance et la libération brillent dans

[1]Aragon received two decorations: a Croix de Guerre and a Médaille Militaire.

[2]A detailed account of Aragon's Resistance activities given by the Left press can be found in: Aragon, Poet of Resurgent France. Edited by Hannah Josephson and Malcolm Cowley.

[3]D. Desanti, Les Staliniens, p. 39.

notre passé, parées de ce que l'homme a de meilleur en lui. . . ."[4] Despite the dangers of his underground work, and the many difficulties Elsa and he had to encounter, Aragon, as a French patriot, was at last at peace with his conscience. The Resistance years represented a period during which the interests of the F.C.P. coincided with those of the Soviet Union, and the F.C.P., for a time, ceased to be the party of double patriotism. Jean Dutourd observed in Les Taxis de la Marne:

> En 1943, patriotisme et doctrine communiste marchaient du même pas et je n'ai jamais vu les communistes heureux comme ils le furent sous l'occupation. On les pourchassait, on les fusillait, mais ils étaient réconciliés avec leur coeur, ils n'étaient plus en conflit avec leur mère.[5]

After the liberation the Aragons found themselves "entourés, choyés, fêtés,"[6] in France and elsewhere. Abroad they were cordially received with honour and respect. They were elated at the thought of travelling again. Aragon wrote:

> Quel extraordinaire moment de notre vie! Après ces années de geôle, cette peau de chagrin de l'univers diminuant sous nos pieds, voilà tout d'un coup on pouvait ouvrir la fenêtre, sortir. . .[7]

[4]Elsa Triolet, O.C., XXII, p. 141.

[5]Quoted in P. Daix, Lettre à M. Nadeau. Réflexions sur la méthode de Roger Martin du Gard suivi de Lettre à Maurice Nadeau et autres essais (Paris: Les Editeurs Français Réunis, 1957), p. 134.

[6]Elsa Triolet, O.C., IX, p. 14.

[7]Louis Aragon, "Grandeur nature," L'L.F., 20 Jan. 1966, p. 1.

In the summer of 1945, at the invitation of General de Lattre de Tassigny, the Aragons visited his headquarters on Lake Constance. In a sumptuous Mercedes which the General put at their disposal, they toured the occupied zone. "Il y avait des fêtes, des illuminations, spectacles et feux de joie. Nous roulions de Q.G. en Q.G., de déjeuner en dîner, de général en général avec leurs invités. . ."[8] In the autumn of the same year Aragon and Elsa were in Berlin, then they visited the U.S.S.R., Poland and Czechoslovakia, where they were received by President Benes. Elsa Triolet described their arrival in Moscow thus: "Amis, représentants officiels, photographes, micro. . . On nous entraîne sans formalités ni douane, on nous fourre dans une vaste voiture: les bagages suivront, les passeports suivront et les amis, et le micro. . ."[9] During their stay in Moscow Aragon and Elsa spoke before various cultural organizations "et à la splendide Salle des Colonnes, la plus grande salle de conférences, de concerts et de fêtes de Moscou. ..." Aragon spoke about literature and recited his poems. "Ils connaissent Aragon, on apprend à le connaître dès l'école,"[10] Elsa observed proudly.

[8]Elsa Triolet, O.C., IX, p. 18.

[9]Elsa Triolet, "Quatre capitales," L.F., 3 Nov. 1945, p. 1.

[10]Ibid., p. 3.

After this visit came another triumphant trip to the Soviet Union and the countries of the communist bloc:

> Et cet autre voyage, en 1946, à travers les démocraties populaires--Yougoslavie, Hongrie, Bulgarie, Roumanie, Tchécoslovaquie, Pologne--plus l'U.R.S.S., partout, les foules, et des acclamations. . . . On nous recevait mieux qu'un couple royal . . . Un voyage de grandes vedettes, dont je n'éprouvais ni étonnement ni fierté, tant nous faisions étrangement partie de ce qui nous entourait.[11]

Of course life was not all pleasure. After the war, the scope of Aragon's political activity was considerably enlarged. The F.C.P. which had emerged triumphant from the struggle now possessed a number of periodicals and reviews that needed Aragon's collaboration. There also appeared several new Front organizations such as the C.N.E. (Comité National des Ecrivains) and later the organizations of the Peace movement in which Aragon was active and where he could have, and indeed did have, a considerable influence on many French intellectuals. Aragon also continued to write poetry and published several books of poetry in which the political overtones were unmistakable.[12] For a time the novel form remained neglected, perhaps due, in part, at least, to the party's condemnation of the two novels he had published after the the war.[13] The public had to wait until 1949 to welcome

[11] Elsa Triolet, O.C., XIII, pp. 11-12.

[12] La Diane française (Paris: Seghers, 1945); Le Nouveau Crève-coeur (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).

[13] See pp. 161, 179.

Aragon's new novel Les Communistes.

The publication of Les Communistes was hailed by the communist press as an outstanding event in the literary history of France. The communists claimed that it was the first time that the communists and their party had found their legitimate place in the novel. Actually, Aragon was not the first to introduce communists in a literary work. In 1938, Paul Nizan, a member of the F.C.P., depicted in his novel La Conspiration a group of young communist intellectuals trying to publish a review. In 1947, another communist writer, Laffitte, published his novel Ceux qui vivent, which was reviewed by Aragon himself in an article entitled "Il chante au soleil qui se lève." He acclaimed the novel as a testimony to the Resistance movement. Aragon rejoiced that the author was presenting a new type of protagonist, the French communist, and that for the first time a true image of this new type of man was being presented.[14]

However, although Aragon did not blaze the trail, his novel was extremely important for the party leadership, because it could serve as a weapon in the struggle for communism. The novel was also welcomed as an example of socialist realist writing. André Wurmser was warmly enthusiastic and exclaimed: "Le réalisme socialiste le

[14]Louis Aragon, "Il chante au soleil qui se lève," L.F.,6 June 1947, p. 4.

voilà, le romantisme révolutionnaire, le voilà."[15]

To understand the jubilation of the communist press, it is necessary to situate the novel in its historical context. During the "phony war" and the occupation period, there was a remarkable cohesion among the forces opposed to German occupation. Liberals, Catholics, Socialists and Communists fought together against the occupant, but this solidarity was the result of events, not of principles,--unity was based on nationalism and on patriotism which brought together "Celui qui croyait au ciel. Celui qui n'y croyait pas."[16] Aragon expressed this feeling of patriotism well when in response to Paul Claudel's remark: "Je hais tout ce que vous défendez," he observed: "sa phrase oubliait simplement la France, qui était entre nous un lien."[17]

When the occupants were driven out of the country, ideological differences inevitably separated the former allies. The separation, however, did not occur immediately. It was not until two or three years after the Liberation that the credit the F.C.P. had accumulated during the Resistance began to be dissipated. At the Liberation, the F.C.P. was triumphant; it had never been so strong, so

[15]André Wurmser, "Aragon romancier de l'honneur," L.F., 16 March 1950, p. 3.

[16]Louis Aragon, "La Rose et le Réséda," a poem dedicated to Gabriel Péri shot by the Nazis. La Diane française (Paris: Leghers, 1945), p. 16.

[17]R. Etiemble, "Aragon et Claudel," N.R.F., 8, No. 95 (1960), 881.

respected and so popular. As a result, in the elections that followed the Liberation, the F.C.P. gained more votes than any other political party. Despite this electoral success, the numerical strength of the communists was not sufficient to form a government,[18] and they were obliged to form a bloc with socialists. In 1945, the two parties had an absolute majority in the National Constituent Assembly elected in October of that year, and communists held several important portfolios in the government. Unfortunately, the prestige of the F.C.P. was subsequently diminished because of its stand in the Vietnam war.[19] The F.C.P. pronounced itself against the war, and when in November 1946 Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu ordered the bombardment of Haiphong, it was difficult to see how the communist parliamentarians could agree to it.[20] The

[18]Certain historians believe that the revolutionary potential of the Resistance was thrown away because the U.S.S.R. supported General de Gaulle in order to stabilize its own sphere of influence. See: David Caute, Communism and the French Intellectuals; F. Fejtö, The French Communist Party and the Crises of International Communism (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1967).

[19]Communists voted for military expenditures until their elimination from the government. On December 21, 1946, the Communists Deputies joined in the unanimous vote of the National Assembly in which the Assembly saluted "les combattants d'Indochine et'leurs efforts pour maintenir en Extrême-Orient, la présence civilisatrice et pacificatoire de la France'." Gilbert Guilleminault et al, Les lendemains qui ne chantaient pas (Paris: Edition Denoël, 1969), p. 319, note.

[20]Dominique Desanti gives the following explanation of the communist attitude: "Envers le Viêt-nam on trouvait au Parti deux attitudes. À la base, des anticolonialistes convaincus se sont dès les débuts opposés à la 'sale guerre' d'Indochine. Par contre, même de bons esprits

war in Indochina and the intensification of the Cold War made their position in the government untenable. Finally, the communists voted against the government on a vote of confidence, and left it in May 1947.

The international situation was also unfavourable to the communists. The war ended with the greatest good will towards Russia on the part of the capitalist powers. It took a year of continual aggression on the part of Stalin to alienate his former allies in the West. When the Russian leader saw that the United States was not prepared to continue its policy of appeasement, he decided to apply the first pressures of the cold war against the Western democracies. The threat of a third world war was used as a pretext for the organization of the peace movement which was Russian-dominated and in many respects a front for the Russian propaganda machine. The F.C.P. aligned its policies with those of Soviet Russia; it pronounced itself against the Marshall Plan, it carried on a vigorous anti-American propaganda campaign and took an active part in the World Peace Movement launched under the auspices of the Soviet state.[21] By 1949, the "Cold

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espéraient voir bientôt l'avènement d'une démocratie populaire en France. Alors l'Indochine de Hô Chi Minh aurait un rôle semblable à celui de l'Ukraine en U.R.S.S., république à la fois indépendante (représentée à l'O.N.U., par exemple) et pourtant fédérée au nom de l'internationalisme prolétarien." Les Staliniens, p. 46, note.

[21]According to Aragon, for the F.C.P., the period extending from 1946 to 1953 was "la période de la lutte pour la paix contre l'ingestion américaine." L'Homme communiste, II, p. 18.

War" had spread from newspaper articles to State Treaties and into everyday life. The struggle between the communists and the anti-communists was growing in violence.[22] The Cominform campaign against Tito,[23] the series of trials in the satellite states, complete with confessions,[24] Kravchenko's book and the subsequent Kravchenko trial,[25] as well as David Rousset's articles in the press about millions of people in concentration camps and similar atrocities became some of the issues in this struggle.[26]

[22]It was in that year that the North Atlantic Pact was concluded and the division of Germany became an accomplished fact.

[23]Tito, the leader of the Yugoslav Communist Party, tried to find his country's own way to socialism and was condemned for it by the U.S.S.R.

[24]Rajk, a Hungarian communist, Minister of the Interior, then of Foreign Affairs, was arrested in June 1949, confessed espionage and was executed. In May 1956, Rajk was officially rehabilitated. Kostov, a Bulgarian communist, Deputy Prime Minister, was tried for treason in December, 1949. He first confessed, then repudiated his confession. He was executed in spite of this repudiation. On Kostov's trial see D. Desanti, Les Staliniens (Paris: Fayard, 1975).

[25]Victor Kravchenko, former Soviet official, defected to the West and wrote a book entitled I Chose Freedom, in which he described some aspects of the Soviet system. On November 13, 1947, L.F. accused Kravchenko of having signed the book written by the State Department of the U.S.A. Kravchenko sued its editors for libel. The lawsuit occupied French public opinion for many months and proved the truth of the statements in his book.

[26]Rousset, a French journalist, published in Le Figaro Littéraire several articles about the existence of forced labour camps in the U.S.S.R. There was enough supporting evidence in the Soviet Criminal Code, in the memoirs of former NKVD officials and in the testimony of many witnesses at the Kravchenko trial to confirm Rousset's allegations. The party struggled to deny the evidence, and

On the cultural front there was a shift towards stricter party control over cultural matters as a result of certain developments in the Soviet Union. During the war years, there was little interference in the processes of creative activity in Russia. The year 1946 marked the beginning of more rigorous enforcement of the party line in literary and artistic matters. On August 14, 1946, the Central Committee issued a decree on literature[27] which was followed by two resolutions pertaining to the theatre and the cinema.[28] The decree, together with its elaboration in two speeches by Zhdanov, set forth the policies that were to prevail during the post-war era. Zhdanov's speeches represented a vigorous reassertion of the principles

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Pierre Daix, member of the F.C.P., published an article in L.E. entitled "Pourquoi David Rousset a-t-il inventé les Camps Soviétiques?" Rousset was accused of being a "flic" and American agent, but L.E. was forced to publish Gorky's article about the re-education of prisoners who built the Belomor canal. "La rééducation des détenus qui bâtirent le canal, Blanche-Baltique," L.E., 23 June 1950.

[27] In 1946 Zhdanov denounced Akhmatova, Zoshchenko, Pasternak and other writers for attempting to poison the minds of Soviet youth by their decadent, apolitical and "vulgar" writings which had been published in the literary magazines Zvezda (Star) and Leningrad. By the decree of August 14, 1946 (Resolution on the Journals Zvezda and Leningrad), Leningrad was closed and Zvezda was ordered to correct its editorial policy and close its pages to Akhmatova and Zoshchenko.

[28] "On the Repertoire of the Dramatic Theaters and Measures for Its Improvement." August 26, 1946; "On the Moving Picture 'Bolshaya Zhizn'," September 4, 1946. See: H. Swayze, op. cit.

of ideïnost' and partiïnost' in literature and contained an attack on "obsequiousness to the West" and "cosmopolitanism." These speeches were widely commented upon by the communist press and led to increasing Stalinization of intellectual life within the F.C.P. The review, La Nouvelle Critique, with Kanapa--"le sous-Jdanov français"--as its director[29] was created specially to promote Zhdanov's policy.

In the wake of all these developments, the political climate in France changed considerably. The communist vogue of the early forties was over.[30] The Resistance was now a thing of the past and the communists lost much of their popularity. The public remembered the party's hesitancy after the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, and the attitude of the communists in 1940, when they favoured fraternization with German soldiers.[31] More and more the party appeared as "le parti de l'étranger" forced to accept Stalin's policies. In addition, certain Western writers such as Hemingway, Koestler and Malraux, whose writings were critical in their appraisal of the communists and the Soviet Union, contributed to the diminution of the communist prestige, as Aragon pointed out, not

[29]Dominique Desanti, Les Staliniens, p. 247.

[30]The change in the attitude to communists is shown convincingly in Elsa Triolet's novel Les fantômes armés, published in 1947.

[31]See: A. Lecoeur, Le Parti Communiste français et la Résistance.

without bitterness.[32]

One consequence of this change in public mood was a new ferment among the intellectuals. Certain dissenting voices began to be heard among communist sympathizers and even among party members. Jean Paulhan, founder and director of Les Lettres Françaises, disagreed with the purges of those French authors who collaborated in various Nazi-oriented publications. He particularly objected to "la liste noire" compiled by the Comité National des Ecrivains and which Aragon, who became the official Secretary General of the C.N.E., was rigorously enforcing.[33] Paulhan was dropped from the review's roster and from the C.N.E. Jean Cassou, after his trip to Czechoslovakia, accused the F.C.P. "d'être une église qui prohibe le libre examen et, pour plus de sûreté, étend son autorité à tous les domaines y compris la biologie, la peinture et, sans doute, le cirque et le jardinage."[34] A stir was created by the publication of two articles by Pierre Hervé, a former communist deputy, who revolted against "l'hégémonie d'Aragon." Apparently Aragon's orthodoxy had a disquieting effect on many party intellectuals. Hervé tried in his articles to distinguish between Zhdanov's directives and the application made of them by Aragon. Hervé refused

[32]Louis Aragon, L'Homme communiste, I, p. 24, note.

[33]See Pierre Daix, Aragon; une vie à changer.

[34]André Wurmser. "Réponse à Jean Cassou," L.F., 29 Dec. 1949, p. 1.

"une condamnation à priori par le Parti communiste de certain moyens d'expression," insisting that "une conception du monde communiste qui doit s'exprimer dans l'art" was sufficient. "Je m'attaquais publiquement aux prétentions d'Aragon, qui voulait courber sous sa férule la république communiste des lettres et des arts," he wrote.[35]

These summary indications of the party's position in the second half of the forties and early fifties show that the political climate was not favourable to communists. The waning influence of the party compelled the leadership to look for ways to combat public opinion and to offer explanations of its past positions. According to A. Lecoeur, literature was one of the means to which the party turned in its desire to defend itself.[36] D. Desanti also remarked that the communist slogan had become "Le livre est une arme" and socialist realism "une vertu de parti."[37] Various writers were solicited to produce literary works about the party. Thus, Jean Laffitte was asked to write a novel about the Resistance, Auguste Copin was commissioned to write the history of the strike at

[35]Pierre Hervé, Dieu et Cesar sont-ils communistes?, p. 25. The details of the conflict can be found in D. Desanti, Les Staliniens, pp. 70-72.

[36]Lecoeur wrote: "A la belle époque du 'réalisme socialiste' des 'écrivains' en service commandé ont largement contribué à répandre toutes sortes de légendes." Le Partisan (Paris: Flammarion, 1963), p. 149.

[37]D. Desanti, Les Staliniens, p. 172.

Pas-de-Calais[38] and Madeleine Riffaud wrote the biography of Debarge, a communist leader at Pas-de-Calais. These are but a few examples of the fairly extensive communist effort.

We have no evidence that Aragon was asked to write a novel, but the general atmosphere prevailing in the party at that time compelled the author to offer his readers a highly political work in line with Communist party demands. Elsa Triolet observed:

> C'était l'époque de la chasse aux sorcières; le sang et les larmes n'étaient pas encore secs que déjà on commençait à traquer les communistes... C'est l'air de cette époque qui l'a [Le Cheval Roux] fait naître comme il t'avait fait écrire Les Communistes.[39]

We also have Lecoeur's testimony that when Aragon began to write the novel, he was requested to include at least one episode of importance to the party in his work.[40]

[38]As the communists were censured for their pacifism before Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, the history of the strike at Pas-de Calais, which took place in May-June 1941, permitted the F.C.P. to claim that it promoted the resistance against the occupant before that date. Lecoeur, using documentary evidence, shows that although there were cases of resistance before June 22, 1941, they were the result of local initiative and not the result of F.C.P. directives. Le Parti Communiste Français et la Résistance, p. 46.

[39]Elsa Triolet, O.C., XXI, p. 14.

[40]Lecoeur stated: "J'ai appris par la suite dans quelles circonstances Aragon avait effectivement 'promis' d'écrire cette page. Lors d'une conférence fédérale, présidée par Jeannette Vermeersch, le militant syndical en question, malgré l'opposition de certains délegués, avait été imposé comme candidat au comité central par la femme du secrétaire général [Thorez]. C'est pour le réhabiliter par le biais du roman qu'Aragon avait obéi à l'injonction de Jeannette Vermeersch." Le Partisan, p. 150, Note.

Furthermore, the comments of several communist writers show clearly that Aragon's novel was regarded as a weapon in the defense of the party. André Stil remarked: "une oeuvre comme Les Communistes peut être dans les mains d'une nation une arme importante pour le combat qui déborde largement le cadre littéraire."[41] Aragon himself was fully conscious of the importance of his work. He declared in 1948: "J'écris un roman intitulé Les Communistes. C'est, pour un communiste, une tâche qui prime toutes les autres."[42] Indeed, at the time of the "cold war" the novel was useful in order to boost party morale and to try to win public favour. André Wurmser saw the work as an appeal to the country at large:

> Le roman s'adresse à tous: ce n'est pas au lecteur qu'Aragon s'adresse, c'est aux passants, dont toute la fraternelle compréhension vient de ce qu'ils appartiennent à ce monde réel, qui leur posa nos problèmes, qui nous infligea . . . de communes angoisses. . . . Le roman est un documentaire sur les communistes, leurs pensées, leur activité à l'heure où les communistes sont calomniés, à l'heure où on veut les effacer de l'histoire.[43]

Apart from the prologue, which depicts the exodus of the republicans from Spain, the six volumes of Les Communistes deal with the period from February 1939 to June 1940. The main attention is given to the delineation

[41]André Stil, "Au rendez-vous de la Grange-aux-Belles. Un livre devant ses témoins," L.L.F., 23 June 1949, p. 1.

[42]Reported by D. Desanti in Les Staliniens, p. 109.

[43]André Wurmser, "Voilà 'Les Communistes,'" L.L.F., 12 May 1949, p. 3.

of politics, the military campaign of 1939-1940 and the social and economic background of the period. The acknowledged aim of the first volume of Les Communistes, published in 1949, was to explain some of the more embarrassing aspects of Soviet policies during the years 1939-1941 and the F.C.P.'s reaction to them. "Le héros central du premier livre, c'est le pacte germano-soviétique," declared Wurmser,[44] who praised Aragon for treating "avec tact le pacte Hitler-Staline et la désertion de Maurice Thorez."[45] The author set out to prove that the party leadership was absolutely correct in its policies at the time, particularly in its acceptance of the Nazi-Soviet pact and in its attitude to the war before Hitler attacked the Soviet Union.[46] He also tried to justify in full Stalin's policies during the pre-war period.

Volumes two, three and four deal with the time of the "phony war"--September 1939--to May 1940. They were regarded by the communists as an attempt to "se dresser contre les falsifications de l'histoire,"[47] by offering a

[44]André Wurmser, "Voilà 'Les Communistes,'" L.F., 12 May 1949, p. 3.

[45]After being mobilized, Thorez deserted his unit and escaped to Belgium, and some months later, found his way to the Soviet Union where he spent the war years.

[46]The communists pursued the implausible line that the Stalin-Hitler Pact was beneficial to peace. L'Humanité greeted the pact as a triumph for peace and demanded that Daladier fly immediately to Moscow and join the peace pact.

[47]André Wurmser, "'Les Communistes' ou le romancier contre la falsification de l'histoire," L.F., 20 Oct. 1949, p. 3.

communist interpretation of the "phony war" period. The tragedy of France, the national demoralization and the defeat and capitulation had puzzled the country, and after the Liberation there appeared a voluminous literature dealing with the war. Members of the government and military figures related their experiences and gave their explanations of the defeat. Communists were also eager to present their own interpretation of events and Aragon chose to do so in the form of a novel which would allow him to describe past history in a light favourable to his party. The following passage concerning the "phony war" illustrates the kind of interpretation he imposed:

> Dès le premier jour, à la fin d'août, les communistes ont dit que le Gouvernement ne ferait pas la guerre à Hitler, qu'il ne décrétait la mobilisation et ne jouait la comédie d'une fausse guerre que pour en finir avec le Front Populaire, décapiter le mouvement ouvrier, retrouver les mains libres pour ses affaires. . .[48]

Aragon depicted the plight of the communists following the dissolution by decree of the F.C.P. on September 26, 1939, after the Russian invasion of Poland. He dealt with the communist proposal for a peace settlement,[49] which led to the denunciation of the communists as traitors and defeatists, the subsequent withdrawal of the privilege

[48]Louis Aragon, Les Communistes, V, p. 180.

[49]The proposal was expressed in the famous letter to Herriot asking that he call Parliament in order to discuss the Soviet-German peace proposals after the collapse of Poland.

of parliamentary immunity for communist deputies,[50] and finally, the wholesale arrest of these deputies and their trial in 1940 (March 20-April 3).

The persecution of the communists is shown against the social and economic background; the increasing demoralization in the country, the bitterness against the French government, particularly against profiteering in French heavy industry and the worsened economic conditions of the workers. The author shows the clandestine activities of the communists during the "phony war," and their fight against the "imperialist war," and presents the communists as the only viable political force in France.

In subsequent volumes the author tried to show the dark hours of France; the exodus and the suffering of the civilian population, the collapse of the Maginot line, the loss of the best French troops in Belgium, the tragedy of Dunkirk, the confusion and incompetence of the military command and the pathetic heroism of the fighting troops. Throughout the narrative the author draws attention to the growing political consciousness, not only among communists, but also among characters who, though non-communists, were "honnêtes," that is moving towards communism and the acceptance of Marxist ideology.

In 1969, when Aragon wished to be seen in a different light, not as an apologist of Stalin and the Soviet

[50]Except those who were in the Army. They, too, were arrested later.

Union, not even as an apologist of the F.C.P. and its leaders, but as a nationalist and a patriot, he described his novel as an attempt to show the changes which took place in French society in general, and in the thinking of the workers in particular. He wished, he said to recreate the ideological climate of the period:

> Il s'agissait d'une transformation de l'homme, d'un changement, d'un bouleversement de la pensée traditionnelle dans le mouvement ouvrier français, et pas seulement chez les communistes, marqué 'verbalement' avant la guerre de 1939, à la veille de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, par la réévaluation du sentiment national, et devenu un 'fait' à partir de la prise de conscience que furent avant tout le retour de la guerre, la défaite française, l'occupation et la Résistance. C'est-à-dire l'établissement de la notion moderne de nation dans le peuple français.[51]

One can only remark that as far as the F.C.P. was concerned, it was not the Second World War (with the exception of the Resistance period when the interests of the Soviet Union and those of France happened to coincide) but precisely the year 1968 and the events in Czechoslovakia that finally brought about the reevaluation of its patriotic stance. It was after these events that the F.C.P. ceased to be "le parti 'd'un double patriotisme', français et soviétique," to use Barjonet's expression.[52]

[51] Louis Aragon, Je n'ai jamais appris à écrire (Geneva: Skira, 1969), p. 109.

[52] A. Barjonet, Le Parti Communiste français, p. 13.

The reaction of the party leadership to Aragon's novel was predictable. The party "permanents" were jubilant: "Enfin! Tu viens de prouver que nous avions raison de te faire confiance!"[53] This "enfin" after some twenty years of untiring activity on behalf of the party deserves an explanation. The common reproach addressed to intellectuals by the communist party was their tendency to separate their political activity from their creative pursuits. Laurent Casanova, member of the Central Committee, complained that

> . . . des camarades portent toujours en eux la nostalgie d'un état des choses où les domaines distincts de la pensée théorique, de l'activité scientifique, littéraire, artistique, et de la politique seraient sans aucune communication entre eux.[54]

Pierre Courtade, a communist novelist, depicted the dilemma more vividly when he wrote:

> Il y avait chez certains intellectuels communistes une espèce de réticence intérieure à l'égard des tâches que leur proposait le Parti, et surtout dans leur spécialité précisément. "Ils veulent bien coller des affiches et ramasser des signatures . . . Mais si on leur demande d'écrire un roman utile. . . un roman qui les engage. . . un livre de militant. . . ils crient comme des écorchés![55]

Up to the time of the publication of Les Communistes, Aragon was precisely one of those who refused to write

[53]Louis Aragon, O.C., XXVI, p. 300.

[54]Laurent Casanova, "Le Parti Communste Français et les Intellectuels," C. du C., 34, No. 4 (1958), 554.

[55]Pierre Courtade, La Place Rouge (Paris: René Julliard, 1961), p. 263.

"un livre de militant." All Aragon's novels of the cycle Le Monde Réel contained certain elements of socialist realism which saved him from the reproach of being a bad communist. However, none concerned itself with contemporary events and important political issues. By placing the action of the novel in the pre-war period, or between the two World Wars, Aragon successfully avoided committing himself fully to the creation of propaganda, to which he preferred to dedicate only his journalistic activities. In fact, the vehemence of his political journalism contrasted sharply with his novels. It seems that the very violence of Aragon the publicist, shielded Aragon, the novelist. However, apparently unable to withstand the constant pressure of politics, Aragon, in Les Communistes, abandoned for the first time all prudence and resorted to "clichés," stereotyped images, positive heroes and all the paraphernalia of socialist realism, including undisguised communist propaganda. As P. Daix observed "tous les autres romans étaient nés du besoin de romanesque, qu' Aragon transmuait en commande sociale. Ici, la commande sociale est tout."[56]

It is understandable, therefore, that the leadership was elated to see that this time Aragon's commitment went far beyond the usual journalistic violence and that it had engaged the most sacred part of his being, that of the creative artist. In 1966, in his postscript to the Communistes, Aragon indicated that he understood very well

[56]Pierre Daix, Aragon: Une vie à changer (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 364.

what had so enchanted his political friends: "les raisons des louanges ne me paraissaient que trop évidentes, et ce n'était pas cela que j'avais cherché. . . ."[57] He claimed that it was the praise itself that made him abandon the full novel sequence he had planned. It is noteworthy, however, that the praise was bestowed on the author after the publication of the first two volumes in 1949, yet he quietly continued to work and produced four more volumes before abandoning the novel. One is inclined to agree with Pierre Daix who stated that "Aragon reste critique et esprit fort devant les rites du parti, mais il lui accorde sa foi, au point de ne pas entendre que ce dont on le félicite, ce n'est pas seulement d'avoir donné du parti une image honorable, mais surtout d'avoir enfin pris comme moteur de son roman la commande politique."[58] The party hastened to reward the author, who was elected candidate member of the Central Committee of the F.C.P. in 1950,[59] Thereby the party demonstrated its complete faith in Aragon's fidelity.[60]

[57]Louis Aragon, O.C., XXVI, p. 301.

[58]Pierre Daix, op. cit., p. 365.

[59]We may recall that André Stil, after writing Le Mot mineur, camarades, became a member of the C.C. and a chief editor of L'Humanité.

[60]The party's action can also be explained by the fact that Aragon's loyalty contrasted with the hesitant attitude of many party intellectuals at this period of party history. On the subject of elections to the Central Committee, the following information given by Jean Baby, a former militant, is not without interest: "On sait que

Les Communistes also revived Soviet interest in Aragon's imaginative work. While the three preceding novels[61] were not published in Russia until 1958, a fragment of Les Communistes was immediately translated and published in Ogonyok under the title "Raoul Blanchard."[62] Then the first two volumes were translated into Russian, and several other ethnic languages of the Soviet Union, and appeared in print in 1953. So highly did the Soviets value Aragon's contribution to the communist cause that Alexander Fadeyev, President of the Soviet Writers' Union and official spokesman of the Soviet government on literary matters,[63] wrote Aragon an enthusiastic letter expressing his appreciation of the novel.[64]

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la direction générale du Parti est assurée par le Comité Central, élu par le Congrès, qui choisit en son sein le Bureau Politique et le secrétaire général. En fait, le C.C. n'est pas réellement élu par le Congrès, il est choisi par une Commission Politique qui reçoit elle-même des propositions élaborées par le secrétaire général avec l'aide de quelques dirigeants qui ont sa confiance. Cette liste dûment arrêtée est ensuite approuvée à l'unanimité par le Congrès. Les membres du Comité Central savent parfaitement qu'ils n'ont pas été choisis par le Congrès, mais sous la direction du secrétaire général, par un tout petit nombre de camarades, le secrétaire à l'organisation en particulier, qui ont examiné leurs qualités de militants, et aussi, sans doute en premier lieu, leur "bon esprit." Critique de base (Paris: Editions Maspéro, 1960), pp. 150-151.

[61] Les Beaux Quartiers, Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale, and Aurélien.

[62] Ogonyok, Nos. 3, 4, 1950: Literaturnaya Gazeta also published Aragon's article dedicated to Les Communistes, on June 16, 1951.

[63] It was the same Fadeyev who, in August of 1948 at the "Congrès mondial des Intellectuels pour la Paix" in Wroclaw, referred to Sartre as "cette hyène dactylographe, ce chacal muni d'un stylo." See D. Desanti, Les Staliniens, p. 115.

[64] Elsa Triolet, "Alexandre Fadéyev, L.F.,

In 1951 Aragon completed the sixth volume of Les Communistes, which dealt with May-June 1940. The volume carried the announcement that "la publication de la série suivante [des Communistes] (juin 1940-janvier 1943) commencera dans l'année 1952," but this plan was abandoned. Asked whether the remaining sections would be published and at what time, Aragon replied: "Peut-être jamais. . . . L'histoire contemporaine est particulièrement difficile à traiter, vous savez. Peut-être avais-je trop présumé de mes forces. . . ."[65] As Aragon can scarcely be said to suffer from excessive modesty, his decision to abandon the novel is of considerable interest, particularly if we recall how well it was received by the party leaders.

Three main reasons which led to Aragon's decision to discontinue the novel can be suggested: the criticism to which the novel was subjected by the rank and file of the party and the bourgeois press; the internal tensions in the party and their consequences for the communist writer, and the change in party policies.

After the publication of the first two volumes of Les Communistes, Aragon attended a meeting with a group of workers at la Grange-aux-Belles, where the novel was

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17 May 1956, p. 1.

[65]Gabriel d'Aubarède, "Rencontre avec Aragon 58," Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 15 Jan. 1959, p. 4.

discussed. The party welcomed this encounter of the author with his readers as a great event in French literary life, and a great turning point in the consciousness of the working class in regard to literature. The discussion centered mainly on the political aspect of the novel,--the German-Soviet Pact, but there were also some critical remarks which proved rather irritating for the author. The novel, it was said, dealt with many topics which had no relationship to the working class. It also became apparent that the French workers did not appreciate the concept of the positive hero for they complained of the fact that only positive traits of workers were depicted by the author. Is it necessary to insist that Aragon, who according to his own admission, had "l'amour-propre mal placé"[66] could not appreciate "critiques et suggestions qui lui avaient été adressées?"[67]

Curiously enough, in 1966, when Aragon was rewriting the novel, he omitted all mention of this criticism and spoke of triumph, praise and a general mood of exaltation:

> J'ai souvenir d'une soirée, donnée en mon honneur à la Grange-aux-Belles, où des hommes et des femmes, qui avaient lu les deux premiers volumes du roman, vinrent à tour de rôle,--et la plupart d'entre eux

[66] Louis Aragon, Le Roman inachevé, p. 94.

[67] André Stil, "Au rendez-vous de la Grange-aux-Belles: Un livre devant ses témoins," L.F., 23 June 1949, p. 4. D. Desanti reports that Aragon even threatened to commit suicide "à l'occasion d'une critique faite aux Communistes." Les Staliniens, p. 112.

> étaient gens de coeur, de bonne foi, parlant simplement,--apporter leur témoignage touchant la vérité des faits, me remercier d'avoir écrit cela.

However, the ironic implication of these words could not escape Aragon who knew that the veracity of many a passage of Les Communistes had been questioned by the communists themselves and that certain incidents had been proven false. He, therefore, added:

> Précisément parce que j'avais pour ces gens-là, presque tous, ce sentiment profond qui était né des dangers communs, des années terribles, de la solidarité d'un combat encore proche, précisément parce que cela venait d'eux, l'erreur, la mienne, la leur, m'en fut pareille au poignard. Je ne crois pas de ma vie avoir été aussi triste que ce soir-là, qui avait eu des airs de triomphe.[68]

There was also criticism voiced by the bourgeois press. Before the publication of Les Communistes, bourgeois critics had been less hostile to Aragon than he has sometimes led one to believe. He had, after all, received the Prix Renaudot for Les Beaux Quartiers. His novel Aurélien had been commented upon favorably by many critics. The first volume of Les Communistes, on the other hand, was first received in silence, and then according to Aragon, the critical press "avait crié très fort à la décadence, la décheance, voire au décès de l'auteur."[69] If we recall the evident pleasure with which Aragon accepted the

[68] O.C., XXVI, p. 301.

[69] Ibid., p. 300.

praise bestowed on La Semaine Sainte, we can understand his bitterness at the reception accorded to Les Communistes.[70]

The second factor contributing to Aragon's decision to abandon the novel is related to the position of the party in the early fifties. At the beginning of this chapter we discussed the events which led to the isolation of the F.C.P. Following Aragon's completion of the sixth volume of Les Communistes in 1951, this position was aggravated by new developments in the communist orbit. Two in particular deserve mention here: the Slansky trial and the Doctors' plot.

Slansky, a leading Czech communist, was accused of "conspiring against the state," as many others had been in previous years.[71] French communists, whose confidence in the Soviet Union and in the direction of the F.C.P. had been absolute until now, did not fail to condemn the accused. It happened, however, that this time one of the defendants at the Slansky Trial was Arthur London. London's bonds with the F.C.P. were very strong; he had spent years working and fighting for the party. His wife, Lise London, was the sister-in-law of Raymond Guyot, a member of the Politbureau of the F.C.P. She herself was a militant

[70]Many remarks of Elsa Triolet relating to this period indicate that both she and Aragon suffered from the changing attitudes of the public towards them personally and towards the ideals in which they believed. See: O.C., IX, XV.

[71]Slansky was executed in December of 1952 together with Clementis, former minister of Foreign Affairs, whom Aragon knew well.

member of the F.C.P. and National Secretary of the Union des Femmes Françaises. Their devotion to the party ideals was above suspicion. Yet London was accused of espionage and kept incommunicado by the Czech Internal Security.[72]

Then came the revelation of the Doctors' Plot. On January 13, 1953, Pravda announced the arrest of a group of "Saboteur Doctors" allegedly responsible for the death of Zhdanov and Shcherbakov, both well-known party officials. It was also claimed that the arrested men had confessed their intention of killing Soviet marshals and other Soviet leaders. Those accused included nine well-known medical men, six of whom were Jews and this led to a widespread purge of Jewish citizens in the last months before Stalin's death.[73] The news should not have surprised Aragon: as early as April 1949 he and Elsa, disturbed by the wave of anti-semitism which was sweeping the Soviet Union, sought clarification of the term "cosmopolitans," a frequent Soviet euphemism for Jews. When Ilya Ehrenburg,

[72]London was freed and rehabilitated after Stalin's death. He published a book, L'Aveu (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), in which he described how confessions were extracted from the prisoners. Aragon reviewed the book. He wrote: "Ce livre ainsi ferme une époque. Il semble, au moins, qu'après lui certaines choses épouvantables qui furent possibles devraient cesser de se reproduire, du fait seulement d'avoir été dites, nommées, écrites, ineffaçablement." L.F.,12 Feb. 1969, p. 4. We know that Aragon's optimism did not stand the test of time.

[73]Among the victims of Soviet anti-semitism were 24 Jewish writers and artists executed in August 1952. See: N. Mandelstam, Hope Against Hope, and I. Ehrenburg, Memoirs, VI.

who was a reliable source of information on Soviet matters,[74] arrived in Paris to take part in the World Peace Congress, the Aragons invited him to the restaurant "Méditerranée" and tried to find out the meaning of the term "cosmopolitan" as well as the reason for the disclosure of the pseudonyms of Jewish writers by the Soviet authorities. Ehrenburg was evasive and the fact that Aragon did not receive the desired information must have considerably augmented his uneasiness.[75] In the autumn of 1952, after participating in the World Peace Congress in Vienna, Aragon and Elsa visited Moscow. There, according to Pierre Daix,

> Elsa et Aragon découvrirent le Tout-Moscou de leurs amis écrivains et intellectuels plongé dans la terreur d'une campagne "anticosmopolite" d'une grossièreté et d'une brutalité tout hitlériennes. Chacun pensait à un regain des purges, comme en 1937. Les violences de la presse, sur tous les registres de la calomnie et de la diffamation, l'infâme déréliction des autocritiques dépassaient tout ce qu'on avait connu."[76]

Many staunch communists who hitherto had had absolute confidence in their party and the Soviet Union began to ask themselves about the meaning of these events. "A partir de quel moment me suis-je demandé s'il n'y

[74]French communists spoke of the "clan Aragon-Ehrenbourg," See D. Desanti, Les Staliniens, p. 123.

[75]Ehrenburg observed: "They were my own people, I had known them for a quarter of a century, but I could not answer their questions." Memoirs, VI, p. 134.

[76]Pierre Daix, Aragon: une vie à changer, p. 370.

avait pas 'quelque chose de pourri dans le royaume de Danemark'? Pas avant l'année 1950," Pierre Hervé wrote in a book dedicated to the examination of his position in the F.C.P.[77] In later years, Aragon also confessed: "Eh bien, dans ces années . . . où j'écrivais Les Communistes [1948-1951] . . . et encore les années tout de suite après, j'étais la proie en même temps de cette certitude qui était ma vie et d'un doute affreux, qui me venait je ne sais d'où. C'est cette contradiction qui me faisait écrire."[78] We can see that contrary to Aragon's assertion that he did not know the source of his doubts, he had ample reason for suspicion.

Although Aragon's reaction to his doubts may seem incompréhensible, it was not unusual among party members. Edgar Morin writes: "Le parti était ma citadelle et ma geôle. J'y trouvais de tels motifs de désespérer que pour ne pas désespérer totalement mon ultime ressource était de m'accrocher désespérément à lui.[79] It is no doubt ironic that the summit of Aragon's political career was reached at the very time when his faith in the infallibility of the party line began to erode.

It would not be too much to suggest that Aragon's doubts had a certain influence on his decision to abandon Les Communistes, but they might not have been sufficient

[77]Pierre Hervé, Dieu et César sont-ils Communistes? p. 13.

[78]Louis Aragon, O.C., XXVI, p. 303.

[79]Edgar Morin, Autocritique, p. 161.

if they had not been aggravated by personal tribulations. On March 5, 1953, Stalin, the man to whose adulation some passages of Les Communistes were devoted, was dead. The party was disoriented. François Fejtő spoke of the "worried stupefaction, the near panic that gripped the French communist leaders at the news of the death of Stalin,"[80] and Simone de Beauvoir recalled in her memoirs: "Un jour, Sartre devait déjeuner avec Aragon; il le vit arriver chez lui, avec une heure et demie de retard, bouleversé, pas rasé: Staline était mort."[81]

The official reaction of the party to this death was immediate and in line with the previous attitude to Stalin. Jacques Duclos called Stalin "notre maître bien-aimé,"[82] while Aragon declared: "La France doit à Staline son existence de nation," and finished his article with the following words: "Merci à Staline pour la France hier sauvée du fascisme, et pour la France de demain!"[83]

Upon receiving the news of the Russian leader's death, Aragon asked Picasso to contribute to the issue of Les Lettres Françaises, which was to announce Stalin's death. Picasso, who had never seen Stalin and had little time before the review was due to appear, made a drawing representing Stalin as a young peasant-type lad. On

[80] F. Fejtő, op. cit., p. 31.

[81] Simone de Beauvoir, La Force des choses, p. 312.

[82] Jacques Duclos, C. du C., 29, No. 3 (1953), p. 267.

[83] Louis Aragon, "Staline et la France," L.F., 12 March, 1953, p. 2.

seeing it Elsa Triolet remarked: "Et j'ai su aussitôt que nous allions vers un drame."[84] Indeed, the publication of the drawing in Les Lettres Françaises resulted in a controversy within the F.C.P. The drawing shocked and displeased the party, which found that the "Staline de Picasso manquait de majesté,"[85] The party condemnation was given wide publicity in l'Humanité and Aragon was obliged to reprint the text in Les Lettres Françaises,[86] which he himself directed, and to open the columns of his journal to those readers who felt that the portrait did not resemble Stalin. Later, the party modified its original position, and some party representatives apologized to Picasso. As for Aragon, no such apology was forthcoming, and he was obliged to do public penance in the form of an "autocritique."

What had particularly shocked Aragon and Elsa in this episode was the realization that behind the façade of adulation and obsequiousness to which the couple was accustomed, there lay a long-contained resentment which had erupted on this occasion: "Ne dirait-on pas un festival de haine délivrée . . . tous les voiles arrachés,

[84] O.C., XIV, p. 11. Aragon, on the contrary, did not seem disturbed by Picasso's design. "Aragon me dit qu'il était heureux de la démarche de Picasso. Elle serait appréciée du parti," Daix reports in his Aragon: une vie à changer, p. 372.

[85] D. Desanti, Les Staliniens, p. 263.

[86] "Sur un portrait de Staline," L.F., 19 March 1953, p. 1.

toutes les arrière-pensées au grand jour," Elsa Triolet wrote.[87] So vicious was the attack on Aragon that the latter threatened to commit suicide. Elsa wrote: "Tu avais failli payer de ta vie le fait d'avoir en toute innocence commis un crime de lèse-majesté, celui d'avoir insuffisamment assimilé le 'culte de la personnalité'."[88] Finally, Laurent Casanova, member of the Politbureau, found it necessary to intervene on his behalf through Maurice Thorez, who was at the time convalescing in the Soviet Union. "Il faut intervenir, sinon Aragon va se trouver déshonoré, et le Parti a tout à y perdre."[89] The "affair" was over, but it left a bitter taste, as can be seen from Elsa's remark:

> De tous les mauvais jours que nous avions vécus côte à côte, c'était probablement--jusque-là--les pires. La bourrasque faisait tournoyer nos convictions essentielles, le ciel changeait de couleur, les arbres profondément enracinés pliaient, les amis n'avaient plus la même tête, le vent soulevait les nappes et faisait apparaître de vieilles tables rouillées.[90]

This painful incident, it seems, dampened considerably Aragon's enthusiasm for the apologetics of the F.C.P. Moreover, to personal disillusion were added the ominous

[87] O.C., XIV, pp. 12-13.

[88] Ibid., p. 14. D. Desanti also stated that "Aragon--Elsa Triolet le fit savoir à Casanova par téléphone--parlait de suicide." Les Staliniens, p. 263.

[89] Philippe Robrieux, op. cit., p. 412.

[90] O.C., XIV, p. 13.

tidings arriving from the Soviet state about the character of Soviet justice.[91] Under the impact of all these events, Aragon's novel Les Communistes, which was written in accordance with socialist realist principles and was characterized by tendency to manicheism and apologetics, appeared in a new light.

But perhaps the most important reason was the change which had occurred within the F.C.P. between 1948-1952. We should recall that the second part of the Communistes was to deal with French Resistance to Nazi occupation--a genuinely nationalist movement in which communists played a leading part. But in the interval 1948-1952, the F.C.P., in a frantic effort to prove to Moscow the party's vigilance, began relentlessly destroying its own ideals and consuming its own faithful of the Resistance period. For instance: in 1950 the party Congress at Gennevilliers eliminated many former Resistance fighters from the Central Committee, such as Auguste Havez, who had organized the resistance in the Mauthausen camp, or Jean Chaintron, who had commanded armed detachments during the Resistance. In 1951, Georges Guingouin, hero

[91]After Stalin's death, a secret meeting held by the leaders of communist parties with membership in the Cominform, convened from July 12-14, 1953 in Moscow under the chairmanship of Malenkov, Molotov and Khrushchev. On this occasion the representatives of the C.P., among them Jacques Duclos, were informed of most of the accusations that were to appear in Khrushchev's secret report at the Twentieth Congress in 1956. See Ph. Robrieux. Op. cit., p. 420.

of the Resistance and mayor of Limoges, was expelled from the party. Then Marcel Prenant, a professor at the Sorbonne, a biologist and former Resistance fighter, became the object of attack and was eliminated from the Central Committee because of his refusal to accept Lysenko's theories without sufficient proof. Later, in 1952, it was the turn of Charles Tillon, the acknowledged leader of the Resistance group known as Francs-Tireurs et Partisans and a universally acclaimed hero of the Resistance: he was demoted.[92] These examples are sufficient to show that the presentation of the Resistance period presented some problems. If Aragon, true to France's past, had chosen to depict the Resistance movement and its heroes, who were by now censured by the party and sometimes even represented as "police agents," he would have inevitably found himself in conflict with his party. If, on the other hand, he had chosen to avoid mentioning the outstanding members of the Resistance and their exploits, he would have betrayed his own nationalist ideal by falsifying the country's resistance record of which he was so proud, and would have negated the period which according to his own admission had been the most satisfying time of his life: "Jamais la route devant nous n'avait été plus claire, jamais nous n'avions mieux eu devant nous le but qu'en ce

[92]See: Louis Couturier. Les "grandes affaires" du Parti Communiste français, Paris: François Maspéro, 1972.

temps désespéré."[93] Although Aragon maintained that "longtemps je ne crus que remettre de poursuivre l'écriture du roman,"[94] he apparently did not find the solution to his dilemma and decided to stop the publication.

It should also be mentioned that Aragon did not succeed in clarifying party positions in his novel. The declared purpose of the Communistes, we may recall, was to show that the political activity of the party between the signature of the Hitler-Stalin Pact and the capitulation of France in June 1940 proved the complete independence of the party from outside pressures. It intended to show that party policies were always determined by national interest and that the line adopted by the party was the only one possible under the circumstances. However, the novel was used to demonstrate the contrary. The case of Roman Zimand, a Polish journalist, may serve as an illustration. Zimand published in Pô Prôstu, a Polish student weekly, an article entitled "l'Internationalisme." The article asserted that in the late thirties, the Comintern had become a simple instrument for the transmission of orders from the U.S.S.R. to other communist parties.[95]

[93]Louis Aragon, "En mon, en notre nom," L.F., No. 1204, 18 Oct., 1967, p. 1.

[94]O.C., XVI, p. 300.

[95]This opinion is shared by many historians, among them Alexander Werth who writes: "In fact, the Comintern had gradually become nothing more than part of the Soviet

To prove his point of view, Zimand referred to Aragon's novel. He writes:

> Le lecteur attentif du tome III des Communistes d'Aragon peut se convaincre facilement que le Parti communiste français, en automne 1939 et au printemps 1940, se prononçait contre la guerre à l'hitlérisme, qu'il appelait à la conclusion de la paix avec le IIIe Reich. . . . (Le Parti communiste de Grande-Bretagne avait adopté une attitude analogue.)[96]

The F.C.P. condemned the method used by Zimand, that is, the use of the novel as a source of reference concerning the policies of the F.C.P. in 1939-1940, and Pierre Villon, a French communist, rose to the defence of the party and of Aragon saying:

> Car il n'existe pas un livre d'histoire qui décrive mieux que ce chef-d'oeuvre littéraire la réalité de la société française pendant "la drôle de guerre". Mais . . .

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government. . . . . The Comintern's almost sole purpose was to give orders to the various communist parties abroad--orders which were determined exclusively by what was most important to the Soviet Union and often quite regardless of the interests of the foreign communist parties to which these orders were given." Russia: the post-war years (London: Robert Hale & Company, 1971), p. 39. As the most famous example of this total disregard, Werth mentions the orders given by the Comintern in 1939 to the French communists to sabotage as far as possible the "imperialist war," since Stalin thought it in Russia's interest to do nothing that might antagonize Hitler. It was a case for the French communists of sacrificing themselves for Russia against their own national instincts and better judgment.

[96]Roman Zimand, Jerzy Kossak and Ryszard Turski. "L'Internationalisme," Pô Prôstu, 28 Oct., 1956. The article was reproduced in T.M., 12 (1957), 1409-1422. For the quotation see p. 1414.

> pour mettre en accusation la politique du Parti communiste français pendant cette période, et pour apprécier les rapports instaurés entre le Parti communiste de l'U.R.S.S. et les autres partis au sein de l'Internationale, l'auteur a fait preuve d'une irresponsabilité scandaleuse en ne cherchant pas à se procurer l'ensemble des documents émanant de notre Parti.[97]

The objection was, of course, fully justified. Nevertheless, the case explains why Les Communistes failed to achieve its aim. The novel that had as one of its objectives to eliminate all vestiges of doubt over party policies led, in fact, to interpretations contrary to the interests of the party.

Furthermore, because the novel was written to serve party interests, it contained references which were later proved false by former members of the party. Auguste Lecoeur revealed some of them in his book Le Partisan, about which he writes:

> Dans Le Partisan, j'ai démontré de quelle façon Aragon, dans sa fresque qu'il voulait grande, mais qui a tourné court et qui s'intitulait Les Communistes, avait accumulé bon nombre de contre-vérités. Il était espéré, par la direction, que l'anecdote romancée, signée d'un nom aussi prestigieux des lettres françaises, aurait plus facilement permis d'avaliser une version des faits réfutée par l'histoire.[98]

[97]Pierre Villon, "Les exigences de l'internationalisme et notre politique en 1939-1940," C. du C., 33, No. 5 (1957), p. 692.

[98]Auguste Lecoeur, Le Parti Communiste français et la Résistance, p. 46. In Le Partisan, Lecoeur reports the following incident: "Il [Aragon] vint un jour me demander quelques renseignements sur la lutte des mineurs dans le Pas-de-Calais, à laquelle il consacrait un chapitre important.

These were, in our opinion, some of the reasons which influenced the author's decision to abandon the publication of the novel, although there were no doubt other factors which might have contributed to it.

To conclude: confronted with hostility and isolation, the F.C.P. was desirous of counteracting the negative attitude of the public and of saving the communists' efforts of the past from oblivion: "Les gens deviennent indifférents. Ils oublient," complained Pierre Courtade.[99] The party decided to revive memories of the Resistance, of the Liberation and of the immense sacrifice of the French communists in their fight against the Nazis. Many authors participated in this work of revival. Aragon, among others, had the task of writing the history of the period. He did not portray the proletariat as a whole, but its avant-garde, the Communist Party and its sympathizers. Aragon's intention was to show the communists as a progressive section of society,

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Il me lut même un passage qui mettait en scène un militant syndical connu. Comme je lui indiquais qu'à cette époque le militant dont il parlait avait déserté son poste et avait fui lâchement en zone non occupée en un moment où les cadres faisaient le plus défaut; 'Comme c'est ennuyeux!... J'ai promis de le faire. . . !' J'étais convaincu qu'Aragon allait modifier le passage en question. Quelle ne fut ma surprise, quand parut le roman, de retrouver le texte qu'il m'avait lu." pp. 149-150. The fact that Aragon has rewritten the novel and removed certain passages from it, seems to indicate the validity of Lecoeur's assertions.

[99]Pierre Courtade, La Place Rouge, p. 232.

to rehabilitate France and put all the blame for the defeat on the ruling class. As far as sympathizers were concerned, he portrayed a number of individuals who struggled to erase all traces of the bourgeois past from their consciences and who re-educated themselves under the guiding influence of the party.

Events occurring in the Soviet sphere and within the F.C.P. raised grave doubts, however, among fellow-travellers and many party members as to the integrity of the party's political line. Aragon himself was not exempt from doubt, and that made the apologetics of the party and the Soviet Union increasingly difficult for him. The attitude of the party leadership towards Aragon personally in the "affair of the portrait" also angered the author. The elimination of many former Resistance fighters from the governing bodies of the party and the expulsion from the F.C.P. of a number of Resistance heroes made it impossible for him to depict the Resistance period without having to face grave consequences. Aragon could not fail to notice, either, that the socialist-realist "clichés" and half-truths contained in the text did not enhance his work. Thus, Aragon abandoned his initial intention of producing a "roman fleuve" after the publication of the six volumes of the novel.

PART IV

THE CRISIS

CHAPTER 10

LE ROMAN INACHEVÉ

> Le temps fait la lessive des hommes,
> l'ordure ne survit pas, le grand vent de
> l'Histoire ici passe et purifie . . . il
> ne restera rien de tout cela que la musique,
> que la divine et profonde musique de
> l'amour.
>
> Louis Aragon. La Semaine Sainte.

We have seen that the F.C.P. had emerged strong and highly respected from the ordeals of the Occupation period. The political power which it wielded during the post-war years reflected favourably on the personal position of the party's outstanding members. It is not surprising then that the cult of personality became an accepted feature of party life and was encouraged by party members. Aragon, too, became the object of a cult, and he did not shy away from encouraging its growth. As one of his comrades remarked: "Du moment qu'il est sacré poète national, il a droit au culte. Aragon se constituera une cour, une clientèle, où régnera désormais le caprice d'Elsa."[1] His friends and comrades quoted his works like a Bible, and the communist press did not spare any effort to

[1] E. Morin, Autocritique, p. 112. Even a poet like Guillevic declared that he practised the cult of two persons: Maurice Thorez and Aragon. Les Staliniens, p. 110.

represent Aragon as "the" best and "the" greatest writer of France: "Il n'y a pas deux grands critiques aujourd'hui; il y a Aragon . . ." declared Les Lettres Françaises.[2] The publication of Les Communistes had further enhanced Aragon's position with the party. Although at this time Aragon's contribution to communist prose was limited to Le Monde Réel, he was, nevertheless, hailed as the best living author.

When Aragon was elected a candidate member of the Central Committee in 1950 he became a member of the ruling group within the party. Whether the party had no knowledge about the doubts that assailed Aragon during this period,[3] or whether it was desirous of retaining in its ranks such a valuable propagandist and the party's most outstanding writer,[4] troubled by doubt though he might be, is of course, a matter of conjecture. What is certain is that, whatever Aragon's intimate thoughts may have been, he was careful not to publicize them. He did not make

[2]Jean Kanapa, "Critique de la Critique," L.F., 27 May 1948, p. 3.

[3]See p. 209.

[4]D. Desanti thus described Aragon's position: "Il était déjà patron des Editeurs français réunis, et en fait, de tout ce qui se faisait de 'large', 'd'élargi' au P.C. F. dans l'ordre de l'art. Seul écrivain d'imagination membre du C.C., ami personnel des Thorez qui lui vouaient une admiration sans mélange, il était sacré au '44' [Offices of the F.C.P.] comme à Moscou. C'était notre figure de proue que la bourgeoisie pouvait haïr, mais non négliger." Les Staliniens, pp. 108-109.

public his decision to discontinue the Communistes,[5] and he set out to prove by his "life" his fidelity to the party and its cause. In 1953 he produced the second volume of L'Homme communiste, which used as an epigraph a quotation from Stalin's works, and which contained an encomium of the two most powerful men in the F.C.P., Maurice Thorez and Jacques Duclos. A year later, in 1954, Aragon published a collection of poems under the title Les Yeux et la Mémoire in which he glorified the party, and in June of the same year he began his address to the Thirteenth Congress of the party by enumerating the books, brochures and articles he had written in the four years since the last Congress: "Je dis ceci parce que mes livres sont des livres du Parti, écrits pour lui, avec lui, dans son combat."[6]

By this time Aragon had become a permanent member of the Central Committee and had, finally, come to occupy a position of power. Although he could not exercise any influence upon the party's policies in important matters, since they were not elaborated by the governing body of the party but were dictated by the Communist party of the Soviet Union, his personal position within the party, as the executive arm of these policies, particularly in the domain of literature, was powerful indeed. That can be

[5]It was in 1966, when Aragon decided to rewrite Les Communistes, that he revealed the circumstances in which the novel had been abandoned.

[6]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 198.

seen from the following observation by a former fellow-traveller who was at one time closely associated with Aragon:

> Dans les années 1955, j'en étais tout de même venu, en songeant à Aragon, à me demander quel chef d'entreprise capitaliste, au moins dans un domaine comparable pourrait détenir un pouvoir si absolu et si étendu. N'a-t-il pas sous la main tous les moyens de production et tous les leviers de commande? Sa maison d'édition, son hebdomadaire, sa publicité, le contrôle de la critique littéraire de toute une chaîne de journaux, les organismes de diffusion et de distribution du Parti. A quelques exceptions près, les romanciers et journalistes communistes que je connaissais, comme Gamarra ou Pierre Daix, lui manifestaient le respect mêlé de crainte qui s'attache à l'infaillibilité du pontife autant qu'à la toute-puissance du patron.[7]

Jean de Beer also commented upon Aragon's position:

> Il exerce sur la gauche poétisante une fascination quasi-papale. Une invitation d'Aragon, un sourire d'Aragon, un coup de téléphone d'Aragon, sont comptabilisés comme autant de faveurs, étalées aux yeux des amis pour se poser, sinon pour se placer.[8]

Aragon was painted, sketched and sculptured by numerous artists in France and abroad.[9] His poetry was set to music by many musicians, among them Poulenc, Auric, Brassens and Léo Ferré. It is obvious that Aragon had much to lose

[7]Louis de Villefosse, L'Oeuf de Wyasma, p. 209. See also page 222 of this thesis, note 4.

[8]Jean de Beer, "Marginalia Aragonaises," Europe, Nos. 454-455 (Feb.-March 1967), p. 181.

[9]He was sketched by H. Matisse, painted by B. Taslitzky, sculptured by N. Nikogosian (the reproduction of Aragon's statue by this sculptor can be seen in Iskusstvo, No. 7 (1958), p. 28) to name but a few.

from any unfavourable change in the F.C.P.'s position.

After Stalin's death the Soviet Union quietly began a process of destalinization. The F.C.P. did not follow the Soviet example. If anything, it was suspicious of the changes that were taking place in Soviet society. As a result, the party was not prepared for the shock caused by Khrushchev's decision to reveal the facts of Soviet life, and was caught unawares by it. It was the reaction to this shock that made Aragon write his lengthy autobiographical poem Le Roman inachevé.

Aragon had once declared that:

> Il n'y a pas de poésie, si lointaine qu'on la prétende des "circonstances", qui ne tienne des circonstances, sa force, sa naissance et son prolongement. . . . Et comment voulez-vous entendre le chant, si vous ne faites pas autour de lui renaître ses circonstances?[10]

Le Roman inachevé provides a classic example of a poem written in response to a certain historical event and cannot be fully understood outside its historical context. We shall, therefore, give a short description of the period under discussion.

On January 18, 1956, the Central Committee of the F.C.P. met in Paris and celebrated the election victory of January 2nd, when five million six hundred thousand Frenchmen had voted for the F.C.P. But within a few weeks a drama was to begin which would deal a resounding blow not only to the French communists but to the entire

[10]Louis Aragon, Chroniques du bel canto (Geneva: A. Skira, 1947), pp. 24-25.

communist movement of the world. It started with the Twentieth Congress of the C.P.S.U., which opened on February 14, 1956, and was followed by a secret session which took place on February 24. Aragon gives the following account of this session:

> Le 24 février . . . à six heures du soir, a lieu une séance à huis clos. Khrouchtchev y prononce un discours intitulé: Du culte de la personnalité et de ses conséquences. . . . Suivant une tradition qui remonte à Lénine, les matériaux des débats à huis clos n'étant pas rendus public, il en a été ainsi du second rapport Khrouchtchev. Le texte qu'on en a donné à l'étranger n'ayant aucun caractère officiel, on ne saurait s'y référer. . .[11]

In March, 1956, the communist party journal Cahiers du Communisme published the text of the speech delivered by Khrushchev at the regular session, but did not breathe a word about his speech at the secret session where he denounced the crimes of Stalin. This silence was unfortunate for the communists. Although the main indictment of Stalin was delivered in closed session where foreign communists were not admitted, the anti-Stalin campaign had already been launched in the open session by Mikoyan, Deputy Prime Minister, and the allegations were soon known, provoking a violent reaction.[12]

[11]Quoted by P. Daix in Aragon: une vie à changer, p. 396.

[12]One of the first papers to report on Khrushchev's speech was the Sunday Worker of New York, which as early as March 18, 1956, engaged in public discussion of the "personality cult." On March 28, 1956, the British Daily Worker in an article "Lessons from the Stalin question" dared to ask why the re-evaluation of Stalin had been

In 1950 the revelations at the Kravchenko trial[13] about the existence of the concentration camps and the violation of the Soviet legal system had been dismissed by the communists as bourgeois propaganda, after Stalin's death in 1953, the facts of life in the Soviet Union could no longer be concealed. Rehabilitation of former prisoners was under way in the Soviet state and former inmates of the camps gave information about them. Yet, the communists persisted in refusing to accept the evidence. The reason for this disbelief was indicated by Pierre Daix:

> . . . j'avais refusé de croire à l'existence de camps de concentration en Union soviétique. Si cela avait été, ma déportation à Mauthausen la mort de tant de mes camarades au combat n'auraient plus eu de sens. Sans doute avais-je choisi de m'aveugler de peur de ne plus pouvoir vivre désormais avec l'idée que le communisme avait conduit à cet opprobre.[14]

Khrushchev, in his secret speech, confirmed the existence of the camps, of mass arrests and deportations involving many thousands of people, and of executions without trial or normal investigation. He revealed that these procedures had not been a matter of accident or of excess, but a systematic violation of the Soviet legal system. Torture had been used as a normal and essential means of extorting

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delayed until then. Another article under the title "Why the Stalin Revaluation Takes Place at This Time" appeared on April 10, 1956, in the same paper.

[13]See p. 188, note 25.

[14]Pierre Daix, Ce que je sais de Soljénitsyne, p. 11.

false confessions and of obtaining desired information.[15] Khrushchev also made known the unjustified extermination of many Party members.[16]

On March 8, 1956, Jacques Duclos, who was in the eyes of many people the second most powerful man in the F.C.P., made the Party's first public comment on Khrushchev's speech at a meeting held in the Salle Wagram. This comment was published in the official party organ l'Humanité,[17] but it did not go even as far as the statement of the public session of the Twentieth Congress.[18] The party continued to eulogize Stalin and to claim that despite his errors Stalin's general political approach had been right because it permitted the construction of

[15]It should be remembered that communists regarded the confessions of the accused as an undeniable proof of their guilt.

[16]Thus of 139 permanent members and candidates of the Party's Central Committee who were elected at the Seventeenth Party Congress, 98, i.e. 70% had been arrested and shot in 1937-38. The majority of the delegates to the same Congress met the same fate. Out of 1966 delegates with either voting or advisory rights, 1,108 persons were arrested on charges of anti-revolutionary activity. "Report of N. S. Khrushchev at the secret session of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU." The Anti-Stalin Campaign and International Communism, A Selection of Documents (Columbia University Press, 1956).

[17]Humanité, March 10, 1956.

[18]Four French Communist leaders were present at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU: Thorez, Duclos, Pierre Doize and Cogniot. It is now known that Thorez, as well as the leader of the Italian Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti, received the text of the secret speech twenty four hours after its delivery. See Ph. Robrieux, op. cit., p.452.

socialism in the U.S.S.R. Dismissing Khrushchev's assertion that Stalin had perverted Leninism, Thorez exclaimed:

> Comme si la critique nécessaire de certaines erreurs pouvait rien enlever aux mérites historiques de Staline! Staline a défendu et fait progresser l'héritage théorique et pratique de Lénine. Il a impulsé sur un sixième du globe la réalisation des plans quinquennaux et la construction du socialisme. Il a joué un rôle déterminant pour battre tous les groupes d'ennemis du Parti.[19]

This line of conduct was harmful to the party, particularly in its relationship with intellectuals both in and out of the party, the more so as the party leadership was forced to admit that "Il serait enfantin de dire que les erreurs judiciaires, par exemple, étaient simplement la volonté d'un homme, ou de quelques hommes. Les choses sont beaucoup plus compliquées."[20] To utter such remarks was to cast doubt on the very nature of the Soviet regime. Aragon summarized it well when he observed: "Il y avait eu aussi un coup formidable porté à l'esprit de certitude, que l'on résume par le nom du XXe Congrès."[21] However, the party persisted in hiding Khrushchev's speech from the

[19]Maurice Thorez, "Quelques questions capitales, posées au XXe Congrès du Parti communiste de l'Union soviétique," C. du C., 32, No. 4 (1956), 392.

[20]Maurice Thorez, "Intervention de Maurice Thorez," C. du C., 32, No. 6 (1956), 775.

[21]Louis Aragon, Les Collages (Paris: Hermann, 1965), p. 22.

party militants.[22] Thorez, speaking in Arcueil, stressed that "l'essentiel pour nous, est de ne rien cacher de nos défauts à la classe ouvrière"[23] and suppressed the information.[24] Party intellectuals were not deceived by this line of conduct as can be judged from the following testimony:

> Nous avons même toutes raisons de croire que l'équipe dirigeante du Parti communiste français était informée, non seulement des faits relatés dans le rapport Khrouchtchev, mais encore d'autres faits analogues: puisque les personnalités éminentes de cette direction non seulement n'ont pas fourni la moindre explication, mais encore ont minimisé les faits et tenté de les dissimuler, nous sommes en droit d'en conclure

[22]Ph. Robrieux reports a conversation which took place between Jean Pronteau, a member of the C.C. and Thorez. Pronteau, who returned from Poland, brought a copy of the text of the secret speech and informed Thorez that he had read it. "Alors, si tu l'as lu, parlons-en; tu vois, ce rapport, pour moi, il n'existe pas et bientôt il n'aura pas existé," Thorez observed. "Mais le rapport va être publié," ventured Pronteau, and Thorez replied: "On dira que c'est un faux." Op. cit., p. 466.

[23]Maurice Thorez, "Intervention de Maurice Thorez," C. du C., 32, No. 6 (1956), 772.

[24]The reluctance to accept Khrushchev's revelations was thus explained by Ph. Robrieux in his biography of Thorez: "Accepter 'Le rapport Khrouchtchev', c'était pour lui obligatoirement remettre en cause toute sa vie. Le document évoquait les hommes innocents sur lesquels il s'était acharné, le caractère médiocre, bas et crapuleux de Staline qu'il avait vénéré. Des brumes du passé émergeaient les compagnons qu'il avait estimés ou admirés et abandonnés à leur triste sort:. . . les mensonges qu'il avait faits siens, les méthodes douteuses qu'il avait reprises à son compte, les efforts pénibles, les humiliations, les sacrifices qu'il avait consentis. . . et il aurait fallu admettre qu'il avait fermé les yeux, qu'il s'était laissé entraîner, qu'il s'était sali, traîné dans la boue, en vain." Op. cit., p. 453. Much of this appreciation is, of course, applicable to many party intellectuals.

> que ces personnalités approuvaient en toute connaissance de cause les méthodes staliniennes.[25]

Finally, the party's hand was forced by the publication, early in June 1956, of the secret speech by Le Monde.[26] On June 18, the Political bureau of the F.C.P. issued the following declaration:

> La presse bourgeoise publie un rapport attribué au camarade Khrouchtchev. . . . Le Bureau politique regrette cependant qu'en raison des conditions dans lesquelles le rapport du camarade Khrouchtchev a été présenté et divulgué, la presse bourgeoise ait été en mesure de publier des faits que les communistes français avaient ignorés.[27]

The declaration also stated that "le Bureau politique a demandé au Comité Central du Parti communiste de l'Union Soviétique le texte de ce rapport, dont les adhérents de certains Partis communistes et ouvriers ont eu connaissance."[28] This declaration damaged the party image even more, since considering the close relationship among the communist parties of the world, it seemed inconceivable that the leaders of the F.C.P. did not know the facts that

[25]Pierre Hervé, Dieu et Cesar sont-ils communistes? p. 152.

[26]Le Monde was the first paper in France to publish Khrushchev's secret report to the Twentieth Congress made public by the State Department. There was no denial from the Soviet Union.

[27]"Déclaration du Bureau politique du Parti communiste français au sujet de la publication du rapport attribué au camarade Khrouchtchev," C. du C., 32, Nos. 8-9 (1956), 926.

[28]Ibid., p. 927.

were common knowledge in other communist parties.

We have dwelt at length on these developments because Aragon was not only deeply involved in party's affairs but also because he was, as a member of the Central Committee of the F.C.P., responsible, at least in theory, for the party's policy: the defence of Stalin and the concealment of the truth. This leads us to the following question: How did Aragon, who had unwaveringly followed the Stalinist line, and who had often dealt out harsh treatment to recalcitrant intellectuals in previous years, accept the revelations of the Twentieth Congress?[29]

Caught unawares by the disclosures,[30] Aragon was completely disoriented for the moment, then he wrote Le Roman inachevé, "la seule autobiographie que j'aie écrite,"[31] "pour dissiper en moi l'amertume."[32] Roger Garaudy, a member of the Political bureau, defined Le

[29]Aragon himself raised this question in La Mise à mort: "Comment est-ce qu'il a pris toute cette histoire de Staline, le méd.-aux?" p. 292.

[30]It must be emphasized that it was not the content of Khrushchev's speech, but the public disclosure of the facts, that shocked the party leadership. Thorez reacted to the revelations by declaring in private: "Que de boue ce Khrouchtchev a fait retomber sur nous tous! Il a sali un passé éclatant, lumineux, héroïque. Quelle honte! Ph. Robrieux, op. cit., p. 461.

[31]Louis Aragon, O.C., XVI, p. 20.

[32]Le Roman inachevé (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), p. 21. We encounter the same reference to this bitterness years later when Aragon recalls "cette amertume qui était la mienne (la nôtre !) cette année-là." Blanche ou l'oubli (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 435.

Roman inachevé as "un poème déchirant et déchiré comme l'est notre monde,"[33] and the Russian writer, I. Ehrenburg, Aragon's friend, who considered Le Roman inachevé to be Aragon's best book of poetry, called it "un poème tragique."[34] And indeed the author's life is presented in its pages in a highly dramatic light.

Le Roman inachevé allows us a glimpse of Aragon's "passé désemparé" and shows

> Celui que je fus à l'orée
> Celui que je fus à l'aurore[35]

We see in the poem "cet enfant toujours effaré,. . . ce gamin qui n'était que songes," the young man "aux lèvres de vent dévorées," and the old man who complains sadly:

> Je me sens étranger toujours parmi les gens
> J'entends mal je perds intérêt à tant de choses
> Le jour n'a plus pour moi ses doux reflets changeants[36]

With remarkable capacity for adjustment to changing circumstances, Aragon, putting aside his pride, presents himself as

> Cette pitoyable apparence
> Ce mendiant accaparé
> Du seul souci de sa souffrance[37]

[33]Roger Garaudy, "Le Roman inachevé d'Aragon," C. du C., 33, No. 3 (1957), 415.

[34]Ilya Ehrenburg, Cahiers français (Paris: Fasquelle Editeurs, 1961), p. 29.

[35]Le Roman inachevé, p. 10.

[36]Ibid., p. 168.

[37]Ibid., p. 9.

He speaks about his failures and his mistakes, about his bitterness and pain, and remembering his dreams of the future, the author remarks:

> On sourira de nous comme de faux prophètes
> Qui prirent l'horizon pour une immense fête
> Sans voir les clous perçant les paumes du Messie
> .....
> On sourira de nous d'avoir aimé la flamme
> Au point d'en devenir nous-mêmes l'aliment
> .....
> On sourira de nous pour notre dévouement[38]

Aragon's reminiscences and complaints intermingle with love poetry and recollections of historical events: the rise of fascism, the Spanish Civil War, workers' rallies in Paris, the Second World War and other happenings. The general tone of the poem leaves no doubt that Aragon's purpose was to show the anguish, the humiliation and the heart-rending suffering he had experienced as a result of the revelations at the secret session of the Twentieth Congress. The title of the passage "Parenthèse 56," in which allusions to contemporary events are obvious, is intended to dissipate any possible doubt as to the topical nature of the work.

> Et le pis est qu'à tous les pas je heurte contre ce que j'aime
> et le pis est que la déchirure passe par ce que j'aime et que c'est dans ce que j'aime que je gémis dans ce que j'aime que je saigne et que c'est dans ce que j'aime qu'on me frappe qu'on me broie qu'on me réduit qu'on m'agenouille qu'on m'humilie qu'on me désarçonne qu'on me prend

[38] Ibid., p. 232.

en traître qu'on fait de moi ce fou ce perdu cette
clameur démente[39]

The almost hysterical tone of this confession gives rise to several questions to which we shall return shortly. It did not remain unnoticed and drew a pertinent comment from Edna Werfel, a Polish journalist who, discussing the moral implications and the conflict of conscience resulting from the Twentieth Congress and the Hungarian Revolution, remarked:

> La tragédie que vivent les communistes n'a probablement pas d'égale dans l'histoire, et l'analogie avec l'Inquisition, à laquelle ont si souvent recours les écrivains, ne la traduit pas bien, ne serait-ce que parce que les victimes de l'Inquisition n'aimaient pas leurs inquisiteurs.[40]

Despite the utter despair that cries out from Aragon's poem, the desire to proclaim his solidarity with his party is unquestionable. As Nizan once observed, "les fidélités du parti sont plus puissantes que les fidélités de la mort et du sang."[41] Before the eyes of a public in disarray Aragon emerges in the role of a redeemer:

> . . . que ce soit moi du moins qui flambe et grille
> et me torde écartelez-
> moi je vous en supplie moi seul écorchez-moi
> laissez-moi souffrir pour ce que j'aime.[42]

Curiously enough, this desire to assume the sins of his

[39]Louis Aragon, Le Roman inachevé, pp. 54-45.

[40]Edna Werfel, "Défense de la Grenouille," T.M., 13, No. 132-133 (1957), 1343.

[41]Paul Nizan, La Conspiration, p. 171.

[42]Le Roman inachevé, p. 55.

party goes hand in hand with complaints about the persecution to which he is subjected and an appeal to his adversaries:

> Laissez-moi Pourquoi me jetez-vous l'un après l'autre la pierre
> Pourquoi faut-il toujours discuter tout remettre en question
> Est-ce que je ne connaîtrai la paix que dans le cimetière
> Est-ce que vous me poursuivrez jusqu'à ce dernier bastion
> Est-ce que seul je n'ai pas le droit de m'asseoir dans ma poussière
> .....
> Est-ce que seul je n'ai pas le droit d'avoir en moi ma douleur[43]

What comes as a surprise after so many lamentations is the sudden volte-face in a return to a certainly unwarranted optimism:

> Au plus noir du malheur J'entends le coq chanter
> Je porte la victoire au coeur de mon désastre
> Auriez-vous crevé les yeux de tous les astres
> Je porte le soleil dans mon obscurité[44]

Were these verses a concession to the official party line, or to the precepts of socialist realism? In any case, the hopeful note of optimism did not impress the critics, who judged the poem pessimistic. Aragon's appeal for sympathy and understanding, on the other hand, was noticed and did not remain unheeded. André Blanchet wrote in Etudes:

> Qu'il se rassure! Nous ne ferons pas payer de vieilles dettes au directeur des Lettres françaises, quand il se présente à nous comme un homme fourbu, harassé par la lutte quotidienne . . .[45]

[43] Ibid., p. 51.

[44] Ibid., p. 233.

[45] André Blanchet, "Aragon et son 'Roman inachevé'," Etudes, 90, No. 294 (1957), 20.

and he continued:

> Renié aujourd'hui par la plupart, vieilli, durci, boucané par la lutte, le voici qui passe de nouveau sous nos fenêtres, chantant cette fois le "roman" de sa vie; . . . Qui l'accueillera avec des pierres?[46]

Appealing to others Blanchet wrote:

> Ne nous moquons pas de ce couple, condamné à l'optimisme officiel, quand il s'avoue vieilli et réduit à lui-même, quand il a le courage de laisser percer une détresse simplement humaine, quand il mendie une pitié dont, au vrai, tout homme a besoin.[47]

He finished his article by exclaiming: "Salut, Aragon, vieux Compagnon de la Marjolaine!"

This solicitude on Blanchet's part might have pleased Aragon, but the indirect invitation to the enemy camp which it contained could hardly have been a welcome tune to the ears of the party. Even before the publication of Blanchet's article, the party was conscious of the effect the poem had produced in bourgeois circles, and Roger Garaudy, as a member of the Politburo, hastened to publish an article in the party's theoretical organ Cahiers du Communisme where he wrote:

> Pessimisme! . . . Aragon serait donc pessimiste pour avoir vécu, pour avoir senti plus profondément que d'autres et pour avoir dit ce déchirement de l'homme dans des vers où perlent les gouttes de sang du Golgotha?[48]

[46] Ibid., p. 22.

[47] Ibid., p. 30.

[48] Roger Garaudy, "Le 'Roman inchevé' d'Aragon," C. du C., 33, No. 3 (1957), 415.

Although the Christian image used may surprise the reader, it depicts well the situation of the communist intellectuals at that moment in the history of the party.

Aragon, it will be noted, was not alone among communist writers who regarded the revelations of the Twentieth Congress as a betrayal of their ideals.[49] The events forced Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet, to declare: "Je ne suis pas de ceux qui reviennent de la lumière"[50] and to speak about the death of truth under Stalin in his "Sonata critique." Nazim Hikmet, a Turkish poet, who spent a considerable part of his life in the Soviet Union reacted in a similar manner, as can be seen from the following lines:

> C'est bien regrettable peut-être
> Mais le plus beau des mensonges
> ne peut plus me faire illusion. . .
> Maintenant la lâcheté de l'ami ne me surprend plus
> Quand il m'enfonce le couteau en me serrant la main
> Maintenant la provocation de l'ennemi ne me touche plus
> Je suis passé par des forêts d'idoles
> En y abattant ma hache
> Comme elles s'écroulaient facilement![51]

[49]"Quel désordre, mon Dieu, quel désordre! Il n'y a pas que moi qui ai perdu mon image. Tout un siècle ne peut plus comparer son âme à ce qu'il voit. Et nous nous comptons par millions, qui sommes les enfants égarés de l'immense divorce," Aragon wrote in La Mise à mort, p. 58.

[50]Pablo Neruda, "Sonata critique," Mémorial de l'Ile Noire (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 275.

[51]Nazim Hikmet, "Malgré la grande nuit," L.T.M., 13, No. 141 (1957), 859. According to Aragon, Nazim Hikmet "fut de ceux qui de plus haut dirent, le drame dont nous fûmes habités, lui comme moi, l'énorme tromperie qui eut nom 'Staline'." "Présence de Nazim Hikmet," L.L.F., 1o Dec. 1964, p. 9.

Le Roman inachevé poses certain questions. Why was Aragon so stricken by the revelations of Khrushchev at the Twentieth Congress? Was the poem a spontaneous response to the events, or was it a well calculated move? Before trying to answer these questions some reflections on Khrushchev's report itself may be in order.

In spite of the fact that the report produced a stir in the West, it contained little that was not known to the citizens of the Soviet Union. There were many families in the Soviet state of which at least one member had been either arrested, exiled or shot.[52] The disregard of the legal system, the fabrication of the trials, the existence of concentration camps, the adulation of Stalin, the deportation of the kulaks and of the national minorities were common knowledge. It is not what the report revealed, but what it did not mention that had the greatest significance. Khrushchev depicted Stalin as an ogre devouring all those who stood in his way, but to exterminate millions of people an enormous organization was necessary.[53] Stalin and Beria alone could not serve to explain all the misdeeds of the Soviet regime. How is it, for instance, that Hitler's totalitarian regime saw several attempts on Hitler's life while no one tried to remove the evil

[52]Robert Conquest estimates the number of the victims of the Stalin era at no less than 20 million. The Great Terror (London, Macmillan, 1969).

[53]Some idea of the size and scope of this organization may be obtained from a reading of Solzhenitsyn's Gulag Archipelago.

embodied in the person of Stalin? How did Khrushchev himself manage to survive? It is worth noting that Khrushchev, in his secret speech, paid particular attention to the harm done to the C.P.S.U. He did not condemn Stalin's methods as such, but only their use in the ranks of the ruling class. It is evident that the disclosure of Stalin's crimes was not dictated by "social humanism," but by fear of the continuatin of Stalinist practices, or a return to them, which could menace the existence of party leaders and of Khrushchev personally. It was at the moment when Khrushchev felt that his own position was endangered that he decided to reveal the practices which he himself had been following for years. Otherwise, why did he wait three years before announcing to the world the crimes of the Stalin regime? Such, at least, was the question asked by political commentators.[54]

Many of the facts contained in the secret speech were known also in the West. There was plenty of information available on conditions in the Soviet Union. The trials of the thirties had already aroused suspicion. Had not André Gide, as early as 1936, written these prophetic words:

> . . . camarades, vous commencez d'être inquiets, avouez-le; et vous vous demandez avec une angoisse grandissante (devant les procès de Moscou par exemple): jusqu'où nous faudra-t-il approuver? Tôt ou tard, vos yeux s'ouvriront; ils seront bien forcés de s'ouvrir. Alors

[54]See: p. 226 , Note 12.

> vous vous demanderez, vous les honnêtes:
> comment avons-nous pu les maintenir fermés
> si longtemps?[55]

The testimony of the witnesses at the Kravchenko and Rousset trials,[56] although dismissed by the communists as a lie, was subsequently corroborated by the documentary evidence of the Soviet Penal Code. Many former communists, such as Koestler or Edgar Morin, the author of Autocritique, acknowledged that certain facts were known to them. Morin conceded that he knew most of the facts, although not all of them.[57] In The God That Failed, Koestler observes that the communists could not "claim starry-eyed ignorance of the goings-on in Russia . . . Every single one of us knows of at least one friend who perished in forced labor camps, was shot as a spy or vanished without trace."[58]

We should also mention that many communists deplored the fact that Khrushchev had made public the details of Stalin's crimes, not because they were hitherto unknown, but because he authenticated facts which had been denied as ignoble anti-Soviet calumnies and so gave a potent weapon to the bourgeois press in its fight against

[55]André Gide, Retour de L'U.R.S.S. suivi de Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S., p. 108.

[56]David Rousset, a French journalist, who investigated the question of forced labor camps, was accused by the communists of anti-Soviet propaganda. Rousset filed a lawsuit. On Kravchenko see p. 188, note 25.

[57]Edgar Morin, Autocritique, p. 199.

[58]The God That Failed, p. 71.

communism. The communists would have preferred to see many facts buried behind the thick walls of the Kremlin. Barjonet observes that "dans l'ensemble, les dirigeants français furent cependant atterrés et considérèrent que la façon dont la 'déstalinisation' avait été effectuée par Khrouchtchev constituait une très grave erreur."[59]

Aragon could not claim ignorance of the facts either. His travels in the Soviet Union and in the regions which were officially closed to other visitors had made possible some first-hand observations of Soviet life. Nor could he claim that he had been misled by the Potemkin villages which had been shown to him during his visits to Russia, for he had spent lengthy periods of time working in the Soviet state. He knew the language of the country and, in any case, had a faithful interpreter in the person of Elsa Triolet. He had many friends among the upper echelons of party officials and among the literary and artistic elite of the country. Personal experiences such as the disappearance of his friend, M. Koltsov, or the arrest of one of his wife's relatives, should have enlightened him.[60] In 1966 Aragon did admit in retrospect

[59] A. Barjonet, op. cit., p. 174.

[60] N. Mandelstam wrote in her Memoirs: "Only let him not pretend that he suspected nothing. He knew everything from all the cannibal talk he heard in the houses of his wife's relatives. The only people who knew nothing were those who did not want to know--and that's no excuse." Hope abandoned (New York: Atheneum, 1974), p. 139. D. Desanti also commented on Aragon's position: ". . . les communistes, Aragon en tête, s'opposaient à ce que l'on blâmât l'U.R.S.S. (Pour Aragon, la situation était d'autant

that he had been beset by doubts but did not know their source.[61] Anatole France's remark that one does not "doubt" without reason, one only "believes" without it comes to mind.[62] But if Aragon had doubts, no indication of them had appeared in his writing. On the contrary, not only had he written his most orthodox novel, Les Communistes, just a few years earlier, but in June 1954 he saluted his party with the lines: "Salut à toi Parti ma famille nouvelle/ Salut à toi Parti mon père désormais/ J' entre dans ta demeure où la lumière est belle comme un matin de Premier Mai."[63] This rousing salutation is surely singularly out of tune with later confessions about his doubts.

Indeed, what surprises the reader of Littératures soviétiques, published as late as 1955, is the persistence with which Aragon continued to support communist orthodoxy. At the time when the death of Stalin had inaugurated a "thaw," when the Soviet authorities were rehabilitating not only the inmates of the concentration camps but also

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plus étrange qu'en même temps dans un poème tragique: Le Roman inachevé, il pleurait sa foi bafouée, lui qui, par les amis de Maïakovski, par sa belle-soeur Lili Brik, avait toujours su tant de choses)." Les Staliniens, p. 351.

[61] See p. 209.

[62] Anatole France, Penguin Island. Trans. A. W. Evans (London-New York: John Lane Company, 1909).

[63] Louis Aragon, Les Yeux et la Mémoire (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 85.

the writings of many Soviet authors such as Tynianov, Prichvin, Ilf and Petrov, Aragon defended socialist realism[64] and continued to write about "le pays de Staline," "la celèbre déclaration de Staline," and to quote Stalin's dictum "Ecrivez la vérité."[65] No one demanded from Aragon all these references to Stalin, at a period when the leaders of the Soviet Union were debunking its former hero. It is evident that Aragon was following the Stalinist faction of the F.C.P. whose attitude was expressed by the political commentator, Raymond Aron, in the following passage:

> During his lifetime Stalin was deified by millions. Three years after his death he was described by his closest companions as a bloodthirsty despot on the borderline of madness. Did the Communist intellectuals abjure their faith, confess their errors, proclaim their remorse at having served a tyrant and stood surety for lies? Not at all. Hardly any of them were troubled by these revelations or afflicted with doubts about their faith. . . .[66]

[64]It may seem incredible, but Aragon even rebuked Sholokhov, a well-known Soviet writer, for having said at the Second All-Union Writers' Congress, held in Moscow in 1954, that Soviet writers did not produce anything of value during the war years. Such pronouncements, Aragon claimed, were grist to the mill of anti-sovietism. Littératures soviétiques, p. 55. In the same work Aragon stated that if Goethe had lived in our times, he would have welcomed Soviet literature as "la rayonnante exaltation de la vie, de la transformation de l'homme et du bonheur." Ibid., p. 18.

[65]Ibid., p. 24, p. 25.

[66]Raymond Aron, The Opium of the Intellectuals (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967), p. xvi.

Why, then, did Aragon show such distress in Le Roman inachevé? We can suggest several reasons.

When, in their youth, Aragon and Eluard were in Switzerland, they felt "horriblement responsables" when they learned about the existence of "une bagne française à Poulo-Condor."[67] Now, his own responsibility for a tragedy which was not only that of the Soviet Union but of the socialist movement of the entire world, was brought home to Aragon by Khrushchev's revelations. As a member of the Central Committee of the F.C.P., Aragon was more acutely and more personally affected by the questions raised in 1956, than were the rank and file of the party. Moreover, he apparently realized that the disaster of the Stalin era was not only collective, but also personal--"Le drame de Guatémala comme ta propre tragédie/ Entre à tout bout de champ dans ton poème semant la panique. . ."[68] Considering his support of the Soviet Union during the trials of 1937-38 and the late forties, and his refusal to permit any doubts about even the most obvious causes of injustice (the hounding of Nizan, the treatment of the intellectuals in the Lysenko case and the attitude in the Rajk's trial are three obvious examples), Aragon must have felt that he was morally implicated.

Another cause of Aragon's distress, it seems, was

[67]Louis Aragon, Blanche ou l'oubli, p. 368.

[68]Louis Aragon, Le Roman inachevé, p. 56.

the realization that he failed to assess the political situation correctly. Aragon's uneasiness was caused, not by the fact that he had no knowledge of the crimes, but by his unwillingness to know about them. Years later, commenting on the book by the American poet, E. E. Cummings, written after his trip to Moscow, a trip from which Cummings returned disillusioned, Aragon admitted that his friend saw things "que je n'avais pas voulu voir."[69] After Stalin's death and the period of the "thaw" which followed it, Aragon could have modified his orthodox position. Instead, he loyally refrained from any criticism and published some of his most orthodox works.[70]

Finally, Aragon must have been concerned with the effect that the secret report was bound to have on his position in French intellectual circles. We should not forget that Aragon's main value to the party lay in his political journalism and his work with the Front organizations.[71] His task was to make communism socially acceptable in French literary, scientific and artistic circles, and

[69]Louis Aragon, Blanche ou l'oubli, p. 466.

[70]Such as: L'Homme communiste, 11; Le Neveu de M. Duval (Paris: Editeurs Français Réunis, 1953); "L'Art du parti en France," C. du C. (June 1954), reproduced in J'abats mon jeu, pp. 196-223.

[71]Organizations dominated by the communists, such as: Comité National des Ecrivains, L'Union des Arts plastiques, l'Université Nouvelle. See also p. 101.

to bring intellectuals into the communist camp.[72] Aragon's dogmatic inflexibility in the years which preceded the Twentieth Congress had already antagonized many sympathizers and even some of his party comrades.[73] Their reaction to Khrushchev's secret speech was predictable,--Aragon found himself isolated and sneered at.

While the reasons for Aragon's distress are obvious, those which must lie behind the action he took to neutralize the hostility of the intellectuals are less so. It is clear, however, that Aragon felt that the time had come to try to change his image. In this context, Le Roman inachevé can be seen as a clear attempt to explain Aragon's position and to erase the orthodox communist image associated with his name: "A faire ce qu'il faut pour être bien compris."[74] To achieve this Aragon tried to reach all his adversaries. He wrote:

[72]That Aragon was successful at times can be seen from the following declaration: "De tous les poètes que j'ai connus, Aragon est celui qui a eu le plus raison, raison contre des monstres--et raison contre moi. Il m'a montré le droit chemin; il le montre encore aujourd'hui à tous ceux qui n'ont pas compris que lutter contre l'injustice, c'est lutter pour leur propre vie, pour une vie fleurie d'espoir et pour tout l'amour du monde." Paul Eluard, "Les poètes que j'ai connus," in Pouvoir tout dire. Quoted by Alain Huraut in L. Aragon, Prisonnier politique (Paris: André Balland, 1970), p. 28.

[73]In his speech at the Thirteenth Congress of the F.C.P., Aragon castigated communist writers for breach of party discipline--" l'absence non légitimée, sans lettre d'excuse, sans délégation de vote, de plusiers des écrivains communistes les plus connus, à la dernière assemblée générale du C.N.E." J'abats mon jeu, p. 201.

[74]Louis Aragon, Le Roman inachevé, p. 19.

Il faut compter avec les sourds les ahuris
Il faut compter avec ceux-là que tout installe
Dans l'idée à priori qu'ils se font de vous . . . [75]

He was not sure, however, of the reception that would greet Le Roman inachevé--"Je ne sais trop comment l'on entendra ma plainte . . ."--and he contemplated the possibility that not all of his readers would accept the poem as a bona fide expression of his thought:

Ils pensent que comme eux mesquinement je pense
Ce que je dis pour eux je le dis pour l'effet . . . [76]

Therefore, he did not spare any effort to touch the hearts of the public and to present himself as an innocent victim of adverse circumstances--"Je suis le boeuf qu'on expose à l'étal. . ."[77]

Once before early in his career, at the time of his break with surrealism, Aragon had been forced to change his image. Desiring to erase his surrealist past, he had insisted that a man should be judged by his present and not by his past and stressed the importance of "le point d'arrivée de quelques hommes, et non leur trajectoire . . ."[78] The development of this theory of the "correctif postérieur" cannot be ascribed to Aragon. It was part of the communist doctrine and was used by many party members. The same argument, for instance, may be found advanced by

[75] Ibid., loc. cit.

[76] Louis Aragon, Le Roman inachevé, p. 19.

[77] Ibid., loc. cit.

[78] Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, p. 26.

Pierre Courtade:--"Ce que les gens ont été. . . ça ne compte pas beaucoup. . . c'est ce qu'ils deviennent."[79] The importance which Aragon attached to the "correctif postérieur" is evident in his comments on Mayakovsky[80] and also in his article on Jean-Richard Bloch, his communist colleague.[81] In La Semaine Sainte Aragon was to go even further. Speaking about Berthier he observed: "Mais l'injuste, c'est de regarder un homme d'alors, ou avec les yeux d'alors, ou avec les yeux d'aujourd'hui, les yeux d'une autre morale. . ." It was necessary, according to Aragon, to see him not only as others saw him but "comme il se voyait lui-même. Et le juger pas seulement dans ces huit jours où nous le rencontrons, même à la lumière de son passé, mais avec ce dernier coup de fion que l'avenir, son bref avenir va donner à son image."[82]

[79]Pierre Courtade, La Place Rouge, p. 99. As late as 1975 Charles Tillon wrote: "Ce qui est grave ce n'est pas d'avoir été stalinien, c'est le demeurer quand on sait ce qu'est le stalinisme." Louis Couturier, Les "grandes affaires" du Parti Communiste français (Paris: Maspéro, 1972), p. 86.

[80]Louis Aragon, Littératures soviétiques, pp. 297-358.

[81]Speaking about the relationship between Romain Rolland and J.-R. Bloch, Aragon remarked: "était-il bien utile . . . de publier sans esprit critique tout ce qui a passé par la tête, par la plume de Romain Rolland en ce temps-là, et par exemple ce qu'il a pu penser de Jean-Richard sans le correctif de leurs rapports postérieurs, par example?" L'Homme communiste, 11, p. 44.

[82]Louis Aragon, La Semaine Sainte (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), p. 423.

Once again in the dark days of the Twentieth Congress, as in those distant days of his break with surrealism, Aragon found himself confronted by a dilemma. For nearly thirty years he had glorified the Soviet state and its leaders and had promoted Soviet policies in France. Despite a certain caution which he had exercised in his novels (except Les Communistes), his commitment had been without reserve. Now, he had to decide what was "récupérable" in his work as well as in his image. The first logical step was to portray the suffering, humiliated but still faithful Aragon--"qu'importe Il te faudra chanter jusqu'au bout dans le ciel glacé."[83] The feeling of defeat epitomized by this image, which contrasts so pathetically with the habitual "lendemains qui chantent" had not been seen in Aragon's writing prior to Le Roman inachevé. As a matter of fact, never before had a French communist writer appealed to his readers to show compassion and understanding.

Was Aragon suscessful in his appeal? It seems that his tactics were of no avail in his relationship with former communists as many of their writings have demonstrated.[84] The impact of the poem on others can be judged by

[83] Le Roman inachevé, p. 57.

[84] See: Edgar Morin, Autocritique; Auguste Lecoeur, Le Partisan; Dominique Desanti, Les Staliniens.

the reaction of persons of different political orientation. André Blanchet's reaction was favourable, as we have seen. His verdict was that "this time" Aragon was sincere. Simone de Beauvoir wrote in her memoirs that she was touched by "la voix d'Aragon, directe et nue, telle qu'on l'entend parfois dans le Roman inachevé."[85] Jean de Beer admitted that "Le Roman inachevé a éclaté en moi comme une bombe. La justification de tout le reste s'est faite d'un seul coup."[86] Etiemble, who, on his own admission, had not spoken to Aragon for twenty years, wrote, after the publication of La Mise à mort:

> Dès le Roman inachevé, comment ne pas déchiffrer les thèmes de la Mise à mort. L'aveu des erreurs. La souffrance de qui se sait détesté . . . . Les belles chansons de ce Roman inachevé . . . nous avouèrent un peu, un peu seulement . . . de ce qui lui coûta la puissance et la gloire. Nul en effet ne règne innocemment. Aragon ne règne plus: il aime. De nouveau, je puis donc l'aimer.[87]

In general, the critics seemed to think that the poem constituted the beginning of an independent conscience and the first sign of an independent literary tendency.

In reality, the reaction to the events in Moscow

[85]Simone de Beauvoir, La Force des choses (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 488.

[86]Jean de Beer, "Marginalia Aragonaises," Europe, 45, Nos. 454-455 (1967), 182.

[87]R. Etiemble, "Préface à 'Le Roman inachevé' en format de poche." L.F., 9 June 1966, p. 3.

was, we believe, not a spontaneous outpouring of Aragon's heart, but a well calculated move,[88] which does not mean, of course, that the initial impact of the events did not produce some sincere reaction. The poem expressed the shock, the dismay, the rage and the humiliation of the party leaders who, without having been consulted, had to suffer the consequences of Soviet policies. They were exposed to the ridicule of world public opinion and they saw their former idol crumble into dust. There is, however, a considerable body of evidence suggesting that, besides expressing Aragon's genuine distress at the events (not so much at the revelations themselves, as at the manner in which the Russians chose to divulge them), the immediate aim of the poem was a dramatic appeal to Aragon's foes with a manifest desire to modify his public image, both in France and elsewhere.

Aragon knew, of course, that the past could not be obliterated in one stroke, that a good deal of effort

[88]Despite Aragon's manifest distress, his actions were in contradiction with the emotions he displayed. Immediately after the writing of Le Roman inachevé, this "cri de coeur," he endorsed (as a member of the Central Committee of the F.C.P.), the Soviet military intervention in Hungary. While Sartre declared that "Le socialisme au nom duquel les soldats soviétiques ont tiré sur les masses en Hongrie, je ne le connais pas," ("Le Fantôme de Staline," T.M., Nos. 129-31, 1957, p. 673), Aragon was not disturbed by the fact that the workers of the "socialist countries" were killing one another.

would be necessary to persuade the public that the past was of no importance. From 1957 on he did everything in his power to change his image from that of a hard-core Stalinist to that of the benevolent figure of a great humanist: he commented on his earlier writings in a series of prefaces and postscripts which constitute "le dossier pour la défense," to use Aragon's own expression; he qualified some of his publications as "textes de passage"; he rewrote Les Communistes and composed several new works in support of his new image. Two years after the publication of Le Roman inachevé, he wrote:

> . . . le passé, le passé! . . . Comme si l'homme n'était pas la négation du passé, ce qui en sort pour n'y jamais revenir, comme si la mémoire même n'était pas une transformation du passé, une image corrigée, suivant les désirs profonds qu'on porte en soi![89]

Aragon's desire to obliterate the past was no doubt genuine, but the achievement of this goal proved more difficult than the author had contemplated.

One may ask: and what happened to socialist realism in the process? It was swept aside as if it had never existed. Leaving the familiar shores of Soviet-inspired doctrine, Aragon embarked on a journey which was to take him into the deeper waters of Roger Garaudy's D'un réalisme sans rivages.[90]

[89]Louis Aragon, La Semaine Sainte, p. 579.

[90]Roger Garaudy, D'un réalisme sans rivages (Paris: Plon, 1963).

CHAPTER 11

LA SEMAINE SAINTE

> Ce qui se passe au-dehors de lui, et où son sort est en jeu conditionne l'homme, qu'il le sache ou non.
>
> Aragon. "La Fin dû Monde Réel," O.C.

> L'histoire a le pas sur l'histoire littéraire qu'en réalité rien n'est écrit, chanté, pensé ou peint, en dehors de la brutale histoire commune à tous les hommes.
>
> Aragon. La Culture et les hommes.

Two years after the publication of Le Roman inachevé Aragon produced another major work--La Semaine Sainte. This time he chose as his subject an event from the history of France--the flight of Louis XVIII and of his court before the approaching armies of Napoleon who, after slipping away from Elba and landing at Cannes, on March 1, 1815, started for Paris on what proved a veritable tour of triumph.

The publication of La Semaine Sainte astounded Aragon's readers and critics as well as his party friends. The critics, surprised that he did not caricature the princes, the marshals or the king, acclaimed the novel as an example of objectivity. The party comrades, on the other hand, "souhaiteraient que les choses soient

plus simples, plus tranchées, plus immédiates."[1] Commenting on this reaction to the novel, Aragon remarked:

> Ce qui m'étonne, c'est l'étonnement manifesté par la critique à me voir entreprendre un sujet tel que celui de La Semaine Sainte, et le traiter comme je le fis.[2]

To understand both the bewilderment of the critics and Aragon's remark, it is necesaary to examine the social and historical background of the period during which the novel was composed.

The two years which separate the publication of Le Roman inachevé from that of La Semaine Sainte saw a considerable worsening of the position of the F.C.P. The historical background was characterized by the confusion created by the revelations of the Twentieth Congress of the C.P.S.U., and this confusion was further aggravated by subsequent events in eastern European countries. If the revelations made at the Twentieth Congress were for the old party militants "le plus terrible choc de notre vie,"[3] the events that followed the Congress were even more tragic. French communists had hardly had time to

[1]Jean Marcenac, "Aragon, témoin du parti," C. du C., 37, No. 1 (1961), 207. Some adverse criticism came from the satellite countries and from Pekin. The Chinese regarded the novel as revisionist and saw in it an accommodation with reactionary forces in power. "'La Semaine Sainte' vue de Pékin," L.F., 26 August 1965, p. 1.

[2]G. d'Aubarède, "Rencontre avec Aragon 58," Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 15 Jan. 1959, p. 1.

[3]Roger Garaudy, Le grand tournant du socialisme (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 128.

recover from the blow when another crisis was precipitated by events in Poznan. In June, 1956, workers in this Polish city began a strike which was savagely suppressed by the state police.[4] The echo of Poznan was still reverberating when Soviet intervention in Hungary took place (Oct. - Nov. 1956) and caused considerable soul-searching among communist intellectuals and fellow-travellers. "Quel communiste n'a pas senti en lui tout chanceler comme dans un séisme?" wrote Garaudy, referring to this period.[5] The F.C.P. justified the intervention on the ground that "le gouvernement hongrois fit appel à l'armée soviétique et que les soldats soviétiques luttaient pour empêcher l'instauration du fascisme dans ce pays, et pour consolider le pouvoir socialiste."[6] The non-communist French left did not accept this explanation and a group of writers signed a protest against Soviet interference in Hungary's affairs. Sartre, who was close to the F.C.P. at this period, condemned Russian intervention without reservation and stated that "l'intervention russe devait être dénoncée au nom même du socialisme qu'elle prétendait défendre."[7]

[4]The communist press reported that there were 53 dead and 300 wounded, many of them among the security forces. "Chronique des événements," C. du C., 32, Nos. 8-9 (1956), 920.

[5]Roger Garaudy, "Une epopée moderne 'Le fou d'Elsa'," C. du C., 40, No. 2 (1964), 145.

[6]"Déclaration du Bureau Politique du P.C.F.: Le pouvoir populaire est rétabli en Hongrie," C. du C., 32, No. 11 (1956), 1102-1103.

[7]Aimé Césaire, poet and deputy from Martinique, the

Tristan Tzara, who was by this time a full-fledged member of the Communist party, declared upon his return from Budapest that the Petöfi Circle[8] expressed the views of the majority of the Hungarian people and asked Aragon to publish his opinion in Les Lettres Françaises. Aragon, who supported the Stalinist faction of the party, categorically refused Tzara's request.[9]

Disillusionment with Soviet policies and a sense of betrayal caused several defections among intellectual sympathizers, even among party members of long standing. Confronted with the hostility and the desertion of former militants, Maurice Thorez was forced to admit the existence "d'un certain trouble, des hésitations, la défection de quelques éléments faibles et chancelants."[10] Outside the party there were further threats. Hostility towards the F.C.P. manifested itself in a number of physical attacks on the offices of party organizations, such as l'Humanité and the Central Committee of the party. Similar attacks

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writers Claude Roy, Roger Vailland, J.-F. Rolland and Claude Morgan joined Sartre and Vercors in protest against the Soviet intervention in Hungary. The protest was published in l'Observateur. Simone de Beauvoir, La Force des choses, p. 382.

[8]The Petöfi Circle, an organization of Hungarian intellectuals, was created in December 1955 in Budapest and fought for liberalization in Hungary.

[9]David Caute, Communism and the French Intellectuals, p. 227.

[10]M. Thorez, "La Force de l'unité du Parti," C. du C., 32, No. 12 (1956), 1454.

were carried out against many party buildings in the provinces. Referring to the position of the Communist Party during this period, Sartre remarked: "Jamais, en Occident, les communistes ne se sont trouvés plus isolés, jamais leur désarroi n'a été plus grand, jamais la droite n'a triomphé si bruyamment."[11]

The party took stock of the situation and decided it was time to ease the pressure, particularly in intellectual circles. In his speech before the Central Committee, Thorez declared that the party had no intention "de régenter les intellectuels" and stated that:

> La pratique du Comité central a toujours consisté à leur faire confiance, à leur laisser la plus large initiative en tant qu'ils sont des créateurs . . . Beaucoup d'écrivains, d'artistes, d'hommes de culture qui sont dans nos rangs savent d'expérience comment le Comité central conseille et encourage les intellectuels.[12]

He pointed out that it was the party which had stopped all campaigns directed against the intellectuals, that it was the leadership of the F.C.P. that had "désapprouvé la condamnation brutale portée contre un dessin de Picasso, et par la même occasion contre le journal Lettres Françaises

[11] J. P. Sartre, "Le Fantôme de Staline," T.M., 12, Nos. 129-131 (1956), 631. J.-F. Rolland, a communist, also observed: "Le parti n'a jamais été aussi isolé; et la brutale et servile prise de position dans le drame de Budapest va accentuer cet isolement." Quoted by Fauvet in Histoire du Parti Communiste français, 11, p. 294.

[12] M. Thorez, "Discours de Clôture," C. du C., 32, No. 12 (1956), 1470-1471.

et son directeur Aragon."[13] In the same speech, Thorez stated that the party demanded only one thing from its intellectuals--to defend the interests of the working class while pursuing the great communist ideal. The choice of appropriate means to do it was, he said, left up to the intellectuals themselves. What is of interest to us is this declaration is the fact that the party was forced by events to loosen its grip on those intellectuals who supported it.

In this discussion of the context in which La Semaine Sainte was written, we cannot underrate the importance of the changes which were taking place in the cultural sector of Soviet life itself. The confusion which was evident in the communist ranks was reflected in Soviet attitudes to literary matters. A year after Stalin's death, the Soviet public could read The Thaw, a novel by I. Ehrenburg, published in 1954. Although the work was criticized, it represented a definite step in the direction of liberalization. Its title, as well as

[13] Ibid., p. 1471. These assertions were contrary to historical truth. During the incident of Stalin's portrait, Aragon was humiliated beyond measure. It seems that it was the Soviets who came to Aragon's rescue. Thorez also conveniently forgot the treatment the party accorded to those whom it considered "non récupérables." For example: after A. Lecoeur left the party in 1955, he wished to speak at a socialist meeting. He was physically assaulted by the communists, kicked and beaten and left unconscious on the premises. So brutal was the attack, that the Left-wing intellectuals protested in L.T.M. against "ce recours à la méthode des groups de choc, la violence pure." "Les procédés inadmissibles," L.T.M., 12, No. 126 (1956), 192.

the mere fact that it was published, were significant. In 1956 Yevtushenko, "le poète maudit de la Place Rouge,"[14] published his poem Zima Junction, which was immediately attacked by Komsomolskaya Pravda. However, the same paper expressed a desire to publish other poems by Yevtushenko; such an action would have been inconceivable under Stalin. In 1957, the discussion of Dudintsev's book Not by Bread Alone began at the Writers' Union. The author was hailed as a new Leo Tolstoy. Yet, at a later meeting Dudintsev was no longer seen as a Tolstoy but as an imperialist agent.[15] Nazim Hikmet's play Ivan Ivanovich did he exist?, a satire on the personality cult and on Soviet bureaucracy, published by the Soviet review Novy Mir, was performed in a Moscow theatre, as well as in Czechoslovakia and East Germany. The Moscow theatre was criticized by Sovietskaya Kultura for having performed it.[16] One finds many examples of such disorientation in the Soviet press of the period. These fluctuations testify to the confusion which reigned in Soviet literary circles after Stalin's death. They also point to a growing reaction against socialist realism in literature and art.

[14]The name given to Yevtushenko by Paris-Match. E. Yevtushenko. "A Precocious Autobiography," The Saturday Evening Post (10-17 August, 1963), p. 66.

[15]Ibid., loc. cit.

[16]For a translation see: T.M., 14, Nos. 143-148 (1958) 1721-1799. The heresy is evident in the question: "Doit-il y avoir nécessairement un héros positif dans une oeuvre d'art?"

Some Soviet artists, such as the painter Yurii Vassiliev and the sculptor Ernst Neizvestny rejected outright both socialist realism and the stuffy academic tradition of Soviet art. Yevtushenko, who thought that "it [was] wrong to confuse differences in artistic style with differences in ideology," expressed his ideas about realism in painting, thus:

> . . . realism as I understand it has hundreds and thousands of facets, and it need not be representational. I see as realism whatever is genuinely begotten by life and moves the human spirit, even if there are no images of people, houses or trees . . . My idea is that we should redefine realism and abstractionism.[17]

Similar ideas were current in Soviet society of the post-Stalin era, and the Soviet government was forced to modify the method of socialist realism that had been in vogue for more than twenty years. At an East-West meeting organized by the European Society for Culture in Venice in March of 1956, Fedin, the Secretary of the Moscow Writers' Union, declared: "At this moment, the task of the Soviet writer is to perfect his art, and without dogmatism; he is free in his choice of forms and literary trends, and if we talk of socialist realism, it means that our culture has its roots in a society that has founded socialism."[18] In February, 1957, the first Congress of the Artists of

[17] E. Yevtushenko, op. cit., p. 66.

[18] Quoted in Giovanni Grazzini, Solzhenitsyn (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1973), p. 73.

the Soviet Union was held in Moscow. At this Congress, D. Shepilov, Secretary of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. delivered a speech entitled: "Pour un nouvel épanouissement de l'art soviétique." After having rejected the idea that the inferior quality of artistic works in the Soviet Union was the consequence of the application of the method of socialist realism, he introduced certain modifications to the doctrine. He stated:

> Le réalisme socialiste est incompatible avec une quelconque étroitesse, un quelconque dogmatisme . . . Le Parti est pour l'idéologie communiste, pour le réalisme socialiste en art. Mais nous pensons que, dans le cadre et sur la base du réalisme socialiste, peuvent et doivent s'épanouir des écritures artistiques différentes, des formes multiples, des individualités créatrices diverses, si l'artiste, avec toute son individualité, sert par ses oeuvres les grandes idées de libération, la création d'un régime authentiquement human et harmonieux, s'il aide à l'éducation esthétique du peuple, s'il apporte au trésor intellectuel de la société des valeurs véritables . . .
>
> Certains critiques d'art simplifient à l'excès la question du lien de l'art avec la politique, avec la vie. Il serait erroné, par exemple, de considérer le seul fait qu'un artiste choisisse des sujets actuels comme une preuve incontestable que son art est lié avec la politique et avec la vie. . . .
>
> De par sa nature même, le réalisme socialiste exige une lutte hardie et résolue pour "la multiplicité des formes" dans l'art, pour "la richesse" des phénomènes artistiques, des procédés, des écritures, des styles, à condition qu'ils servent les intérêts du peuple, à condition que l'artiste nous fasse don d'oeuvres qui "enrichissent" et "embellissent" la vie du peuple. . . . Il ne faut pas craindre la diversité des écritures artistiques, la dissemblance de manière des différents

artistes, mais s'en réjouir. . . .[19]

Shepilov's speech indicated that the extreme enslavement of the creative intellect in the Soviet Union had been attenuated. It permitted, and even encouraged experimentation and invited the artist to exploit the past. The F.C.P., hard pressed to placate its intellectuals, hastened to endorse the new line and published Shepilov's speech in its theoretical organ Cahiers du Communisme. Clearly, all these developments would not be lost on Aragon when he was writing La Semaine Sainte. He admitted that in this novel "je voulais exprimer la même chose par d'autres moyens . . . contredire par La Semaine Sainte . . . une 'formule' donnée du réalisme . . ."[20] Commenting on the critics' surprise at his choice of a theme taken from French history, Aragon observed: "Sans doute est-ce pour certains critiques une 'nouveauté' que le réalisme socialiste puisse trouver matière dans l'histoire nationale d'avant le XXe siècle, ou, à plus brutalement parler, d'avant octobre 1917."[21]

[19]Shepilov's speech was published in Pravda (3 March, 1957). It was translated and published in the theoretical organ of the F.C.P., C. du C., 33, No. 4 (1957). For the quotation see pp. 569-570.

[20]Louis Aragon, Je n'ai jamais appris à écrire (Geneva: Skira, 1969), p. 109.

[21]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu (Paris: Les Editeurs Français Réunis, 1959), p. 91.

It is worth mentioning that Aragon's interest in France's past was not a direct consequence of Shepilov's declarations, for as early as January 1956 he had begun to write a novel about Napoleonic times. At that time, however, the work was abandoned after publication of its first chapter in the Lettres Françaises.[22] Now, his party's needs revived Aragon's interest in French history. The Twentieth Congress confirmed the theory of peaceful co-existence. Communist parties were told that they could arrive at socialism by taking a national path and it became essential to demonstrate the party's attachment to the traditions of the past and to give the Marxist interpretation of the history of France. Aragon declared: "j'entrepris cet énorme travail, combattre les images sommaires de l'histoire de France telle qu'on l'enseigne. . . ."[23]

We should now consider certain themes of the novel which reflect the historical context of Aragon's own time. One which might be singled out is the choice of one's path in life. Such a theme was of capital importance to the F.C.P. at the time when Aragon was writing the novel. The party had to choose between its dependence on the policies of the Soviet Union, the so called "suivisme," and an independent road to socialism. The personal implica-

[22]Louis Aragon, "Les Rendez-vous romains," L.F., 5 Jan. 1956, pp. 1, 2, 3.

[23]Gabriel d'Aubarède, op. cit., p. 4.

tion for each party member was obvious. Géricault's question: how does one choose one's way? The motives that make him engage in La Maison du Roi, the previous experiences responsible for his decision,--all reflect Aragon's and his party's preoccupations during this period of the doctrine of peaceful coexistence.

A related theme which attracts the attention of the reader is the theme of one's loyalty to the chosen cause. Apparently the idea of leaving the party never entered Aragon's mind. In an interview recorded in l'Express[24] he stressed the fact that during his lifetime he had belonged to only one political party and that he did not envisage the possibility of any change in this regard. At the most crucial moments in the party's history, after the Twentieth Congress and the events in Poland and Hungary and in spite of the bitterness that is obvious in many of Aragon's writings, he remained loyal to his party. "C'est drôle, il ne se l'était jamais demandé jusque-là. Jamais, pour lui, cela n'avait été un problème. . . Celà allait de soi."[25] This observation of his protagonist seems to reflect the author's thoughts. The reasons are not difficult to discern. Considering the nature of the communist organization, adherence to the party means a total dedication to its cause by the member and also total

[24]L'Express (22 Déc., 1958).

[25]Louis Aragon, La Semaine Sainte, p. 264.

acceptance by the party of a member whose usefulness and loyalty are evident. Conversely, exclusion from the party also marks its member for life. Henri Lefebvre wrote:

> La démission n'était pas admise: pas d'intérmédiaire entre l'acceptation totale et l'exclusion. L'exclu était frappé d'interdit, considéré comme mort par les membres du Parti. Il perdait d'un coup sa qualité absolue. . . . Sur la pente fatale, il était destiné à glisser à partir de la faute initiale vers la sinistre condition du renégat. Il tombait nécessairement dans les "poubelles de l'histoire."[26]

How could Aragon, accustomed as he was to praise, admiration and the companionship of the "famille," accept the isolation, the hate, the disdain, the attacks and the insults of his former comrades which he was certain to face in case of desertion? Nor was Aragon unaware of the advantages that his desertion would give to the enemies of communism: the triumph of "the right," the sneering of some, the solicitude of others. So, what was left for a communist who left the party ranks?

> Ceux qui avaient connu les plus grands déchirements avant l'adhésion craignaient la rechute. Fallait-il tout remettre en question? Fallait-il à nouveau se retrouver dans le désert, et dans quel désert?[27]

observed A. Morin, who finally left the party. It is also possible that in the most tragic days of the F.C.P. Aragon

[26]Henri Lefebvre, "L'exclu s'inclut," Les Temps Modernes, 14, No. 149 (1958), p. 236.

[27]A. Morin, Autocritique, p. 103.

could not allow himself to abandon his comrades. Many communists found it inconceivable to leave the party in a moment of disaster: "Quitter le parti en pleine guerre froide...N'était-ce pas quitter le navire menacé par la bombe atomique, comme un rat!"[28] Had Aragon left the party at this particular period he would have acted like Nizan, whom he had castigated for abandoning the party in 1939 at the time of the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, when the party was in need of the support of all its members. Certain passages in La Semaine Sainte appear to be a deliberate attempt to explain Aragon's position. Géricault's thoughts on desertion are revealing:

> Déserter. . . il n'avait peur ni du mot ni de la chose: mais cela dépend de ce qu'on déserte, et à mesure pourtant qu'il se sentait plus lointain de ses compagnons d'armes, prêt à les condamner socialement, à mesure il sentait croître envers eux un sentiment de solidarité qui n'avait rien à faire avec l'armée, le Roi, les serments. . . un sentiment humain qui rendait impossible d'abandonner, non point ce corps de cavalerie, cette compagnie à quoi il était lié par une sorte d'obligation, dont il eût été aisé de faire fi à chaque respiration, mais ces hommes, ... ces hommes pourtant sur qui pesait à chaque pas un peu plus, physiquement et moralement, le malheur. . .[29]

We should also recall that despite Aragon's disillusionment fidelity was to be the corner-stone of his new image. Several years after the publication of La Semaine Sainte,

[28] Ibid., p. 159.

[29] Louis Aragon, La Semaine Sainte, p. 467.

in January 1967 when the F.C.P. celebrated forty years of Aragon's membership in this organization, Jeannette Vermeersch, member of the Political Bureau of the party praised "cette fidélité d'Aragon depuis quarante ans à la cause du socialisme." In his reply to this comrade's speech Aragon went so far as to declare:

> Jeannette Vermeersch m'a aidé grandement à dire ce que je vais dire, en montrant ce qui est vrai, que je ne suis pris ici que comme un symbole. Un symbole pour lequel je suis heureux d'être pris: celui de la fidélité au parti. Utilisez-moi comme tel. Je ne puis qu'en être heureux.[30]

This theme of fidelity is reflected in the novel:

> Ce qu'il entend par-dessus tout, Théodore, dans ce discours-là, en ce temps qui est celui des perpétuelles girouettes, c'est la voix d'une longue fidélité, et la question pour lui n'est pas de savoir si M. Joubert, en tout, dans le détail, a raison, mais ce qu'il ressent, lui, de ces paroles, c'est cette fidélité que l'orateur exprime. Lui pour qui là est l'honneur, même quand la fidélité est gardée à ce qu'on ne croit pas.[31]

This reference to loss of faith and unwavering fidelity reappears in another passage:

> Tout est mensonge. Pourquoi mon père a-t-il donné sa vie? Pour que ceux-là mêmes qui étaient ses camarades mettent leur main dans la main du bourreau. J'ai peut-être tort, mais je ne le supporte pas. On me dira que je n'entends rien aux raisons de l'intérêt général. Peut-être . . . . Je ne le supporte pas, voilà tout. Voilà des années que je travaille pour "l'organisation." Aveuglément.

[30]Louis Aragon, "L'Ouverture et l'avenir," C. du C., 43, Nos. 2-3 (1967), 247.

[31]La Semaine Sainte, p. 331.

> Et si c'était là mon erreur? Mais qu'y faire? Le meilleur de moi-même. . . je ne peux pas supporter de voir vivre les gens de ce pays comme une marchandise. . . Il y avait dans ma vie cela, ma fidélité à "l'organisation" . . .[32]

Considering Aragon's loyalty to his party, is it surprising that the reader is inclined to regard this passage as an expression of the author's own thought?

Another important theme in the novel is the question of nationalism. "Les problemes que soulève, je l'espère La Semaine Sainte portent sur cette chose grave qu'est le sentiment national,"[33] Aragon observed. The party claimed that it had always pursued its own national policy. To show the continuity in party policies with regard to the national path to socialism, Aragon drew the attention of the critics to the place that national feeling occupies in his two novels, Les Communistes and La Semaine Sainte. According to the author, his aim in Les Communistes was to show the reevaluation of national feeling in the people confronted with the war, the defeat, the occupation and the resistance. In La Semaine Sainte, his purpose was to show the birth of this feeling in the space of eight eventful days which offered a particularly favourable climate for its appearance. This "rapprochement" of the two novels was no doubt intentional. As we have stated in our chapter on Le Roman inachevé, Aragon was concerned with

[32]Ibid., p. 376.

[33]Gabriel d'Aubarède, op. cit., p. 4.

the creation of a new public image of himself, an image which La Semaine Sainte continued to nourish, but he was not prepared to write off Les Communistes and, at this moment, the idea of rewriting the latter apparently had not yet occurred to Aragon. It was necessary, therefore, to show the continuity in all his work. To tie the two novels together, Aragon used his favorite device--"le collage." He recopied two paragraphs from Les Communistes in order to describe in La Semaine Sainte a farm on the Belgian frontier. It was the same farm in which Jean de Moncey, the protagonist of Les Communistes, had found himself in 1940. In this way the author established a tangible link between the two novels.

The theme of the personality cult also occupies an important place in La Semaine Sainte. The choice of Napoleon as one of the protagonists of the novel is surely not without significance, since a parallel can be established between him and the ruler of the Soviet Union. Napoleon's and Stalin's first concern was their personal power. The French people under Napoleon lost their political liberty, just as the peoples of the Soviet Union were deprived of it under Stalin. Both rulers created their own cult. Napoleon, "ce tyran amoureux de lui-même," urged his court painter, Gros, to make him the central interest of many paintings, and to exclude generals and marshals of whom Napoleon was jealous. "Et ce n'était jamais assez pour la gloire de cet homme, qui lors du

Sacre avait fait circuler dans Paris une statue monumentale sur un char, une statue de lui-même, nu et lauré."[34] Stalin demanded that his artists eliminate all those whom he had destroyed.[35] Napoleon wished to leave his imprint on everything: "Et partout sa lettre, l'N comme un sceau mis aux monuments, aux hommes, à l'histoire."[36] Stalin strived to engrave his image on the memory of his subjects by exhibiting portraits and statues of himself in all public places. André Gide, commenting on this common feature of Soviet life, wrote:

> . . . je n'ai pu entrer dans une chambre habitée, fût-ce la plus humble, la plus sordide, sans y remarquer un portrait de Staline accroché au mur . . . Adoration, amour ou crainte, je ne sais; toujours et partout il est là.[37]

And Nazim Hikmet, the Turkish poet:

> They made him of stone, of bronze, of plaster and of paper, from two inches high to several yards; in all the city squares we were under his boots . . .[38]

[34]Louis Aragon, La Semaine Sainte, p. 84.

[35]It is well known that the Soviet painter Isaak Brodsky, President of the Leningrad Academy of Fine Arts had to repaint the collective portrait representing the meeting of the Ministry of Defence under the chairmanship of K. Voroshilov eliminating all those who perished during the purges.

[36]Louis Aragon, op. cit., loc. cit.

[37]André Gide, Retour de l'U.R.S.S. suivi de Retouches à mon 'Retour de l'U.R.S.S.', p. 64.

[38]Quoted by I. Ehrenburg in Memoirs, VI, p. 271.

Thus, Aragon's condemnation of the cult of Napoleon gives the impression of being a denunciation of Stalin's own personality cult.[39]

La Semaine Sainte also recreates the atmosphere of the historical period in which it was written, although one may doubt if Aragon was always conscious of this fact. We know that he refused to consider La Semaine Sainte as a purely historical novel, and he claimed that he had the right to "introduire les données de mon experience sous un nom historique dans un personnage."[40] Indeed, the reader of La Semaine Sainte is amazed to find that the novel, which apparently deals with events distant from the contemporary scene, reflects so well the general confusion which reigned in the ranks of the party militants after the Twentieth Congress and the Hungarian Revolution and that it offers a surprising parallel between "l'état d'esprit" depicted in the novel and that of Aragon and his party. Such topics as treason, rehabilitation, and an atmosphere of political confusion, seem to reflect Aragon's own experience. Let us consider several examples.

At a time when seemingly limitless faith in the Soviet Communist Party and in its leaders had been shaken,

[39]The implicit equation between the Stalin era and the Napoleonic period is also found in P. Courtade's novel: "le temps viendrait . . . où une discussion sur Staline et sur le culte dont il avait été entouré ne soulèverait pas plus de passions dans le public qu'aujourd'hui un débat d'historiens sur Napoléon." La Place Rouge, p. 272.

[40]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 88.

when the former idol of the French communists was disgraced, the party militants were asking themselves if Stalin had not betrayed Marxism. Aragon wrote: "Il y avait une telle confusion en toute chose: tel qui était un héros la veille, le lendemain on le tenait pour un traître."[41] When thousands of former prisoners were returning from concentration camps in the Soviet Union, one could certainly exclaim: "tant de traîtres, ce n'est pas possible."[42] And the feeling of doubt, "ce coup porté à l'esprit de certitude" about which Aragon spoke later,[43] was it not in evidence when the author asked: "Et ceux qui changeaient de camp étaient-ils vraiment des traîtres?[44] Faced with numerous defections from the communist camp, Aragon had good reason to ask: "Qui allait trahir?"[45] The author's observation "Voilà comment la France avait été trahie"[46] evokes the image of both the Soviet Union and the F.C.P. When Aragon asked: "Est-ce qu'on avait fait la Révolution pour se faire détester par les peuples?,"[47] when he exclaimed: "La Révolution. . .

[41] La Semaine Sainte, p. 25.

[42] Ibid., loc. cit.

[43] Louis Aragon, Les Collages, p. 22.

[44] Louis Aragon, La Semaine Sainte, p. 25.

[45] Ibid., p. 57.

[46] Ibid., p. 56.

[47] Ibid., p. 93.

Toutes les idées généreuses et grandes . . . et pour aboutir à quoi? A ce bain de sang. A ces crimes,"[48] or when he spoke about "la légende qui avorte,"[49] he voiced the questions and the conclusions expressed by many in connection with the years of Stalin's rule and the events which followed his death.

The last chapter of La Semaine Sainte, "Demain Pâques," the symbolism of which is only too obvious, reflects the mood of the party intellectuals. In the atmosphere of the thaw which followed the denunciation of Stalin's crimes Aragon could express a hope for liberalizing tendencies within the party. This hope is mirrored in the following passage:

> Nous avons compris que notre sort était dans nos mains, que nous nous sommes mis à discuter démocratiquement. . . démocratiquement. . . du parti à prendre, il y a eu quelque chose de changé dans la vie. Nous cessions d'être des hommes pour qui on décide, qui n'ont qu'à exécuter, qui vont où on leur dit.[50]

It should be recalled that in the past the party militants had often been bewildered when the changing political climate required the reversal of party policies, but they always submitted to the rule of blind obedience to party discipline. Now, when the same men who had glorified Stalin and endorsed his criminal policies were attempting

[48] Ibid., p. 512.

[49] Ibid., p. 189.

[50] Ibid., p. 560.

either to preserve the status quo or to implement a partial liberalization within the party, the time had come for party intellectuals to re-evaluate their former position. The question of how to resolve the contradiction between this blind obedience to party discipline and the exercise of free will apparently occupied Aragon's thoughts a good deal. "Un soldat ne pense pas, ne juge pas, ne décide pas. Ou c'est un rebelle," his fictional protagonist observed, adding: "Je me sens une uncroyable propension au métier de rebelle, et au bout du compte aucune au métier de soldat."[51] It seems that the author finally found his own solution to this problem. Using Géricault as his porte-parole, he remarked:

> Il sait ce qu'il veut, il marche vers un avenir qu'il imagine, il entend prendre sa part à la naissance de cet avenir. . . changer le monde. . . c'est un soldat et c'est un rebelle. Voilà. Comment marier les deux choses? Être le soldat ni d'un roi ni d'un général, mais d'une idée. C'est peut-être cela, la liberté. . .[52]

This statement seems to reflect Aragon's personal position. Whether or not it really does, is open to conjecture, but it is significant that after the publication of La Semaine Sainte Aragon never reverted to his former orthodox position.

The reflection of so many contemporary issues in La Semaine Sainte leads the reader to forget that he is

[51] Ibid., loc. cit.

[52] Ibid., p. 561.

reading a novel about Napoleonic times and to ask: is it really France of 1815 that I am reading about? Aragon has contributed to his readers' confusion by stating:

> Parce qu'enfin tout ceci, ce n'est pas la vie de Théodore, c'est la mienne, ne la reconnaissez-vous pas? Rien de tout cela n'a pu se passer en 1815, voyons. Les sources en sont évidentes. Ma vie, c'est ma vie. Pas seulement Voelklingen en 1919, pas seulement. Toute ma vie. L'expérience de toute ma vie . . . Je vous dis que Géricault, lui, il n'y a que les chevaux qui l'intéressaient et le clair-obscur, les oppositions. Vous voyez bien que c'est moi qui rêve, en plein XXe siècle, de désillusions en désillusions, ce sang versé, ce n'est pas celui. . . Fallait-il que Napoléon fit tuer les Républicains? Ce sang versé, mes camarades, mes camarades. Et tant de choses évidentes toujours remises en question. On s'est trompé, on se trompera encore. On se déchirera, on frappera les siens, sa propre chair. Où est la place du coeur? Où poignarder? Parce qu'il y a la haine, mais aussi la honte. Ah, je mêle tout, mais c'est bien moi qui rêve, en plein XXe siècle, dans ce peuple divisé et pas le petit Moncorps . . .[53]

Even if this passage did not amount to a confession, La Semaine Sainte, although more serene than Le Roman inachevé, retains certain accents which recall the poem. The novel appears as a repository of Aragon's sorrows and disillusionment, it offers, as well, a reflection of the tense atmosphere in which the F.C.P. was living during the cruel times that followed the Twentieth Congress and the Hungarian Revolution, and it expresses hope in a brighter future to come.

[53]Louis Aragon, La Semaine Sainte, pp. 340-341.

Critics praised the novel for its "objectivity." Aragon observed that he was no more objective in La Semaine Sainte than in Les Communistes. Indeed, propaganda is not absent from the novel. Many pages are devoted to descriptions of the evils of the Napoleonic era, such as: the enslavement of the workers or the exploitation of children forced to labour 13-14 hours for starvation wages. The attention of the reader is drawn to the lot of peasantry, to "l'exploitation des gens des campagnes et à l'emploi qu'on en fait contre l'intérêt des tisserands dans les villes drapantes."[54] Mention is made of the Marxist axiom: "Ce qu'il y a, avec les machines, c'est qu'elles changent ces rapports entre les hommes et par là les hommes mêmes,"[55] and so on. The principle of "la haine nécessaire au combat" is obeyed in La Semaine Sainte as well as in his earlier novel. The attack on the character called H. is justifiable,[56] but the fact that Aragon also attacks all of his descendants makes it sound as if Aragon were persecuting a personal enemy. The description of "le roi podagre" and of his "entourage" is a mixture of irony and contempt. If Aragon does manifest sympathy for Berthier, if he does attempt to rehabilitate him and a

[54] Ibid., p. 271.

[55] Ibid., p. 274.

[56] Aragon did not condemn rape when it occurred in the Soviet-occupied zone after the defeat of Germany.

handful of others,[57] the reasons are obvious. The arrival from the concentration camps of thousands of "traitors" of the Stalin era, the posthumous rehabilitations of Rajk, Kostov, Slansky and others gave cause for much thought at this particular period. Morever, the rehabilitation of Berthier fitted very neatly into Aragon's general plan to attenuate the impact made on the public by Aragon the Stalinist. In his appeal on behalf of Berthier, who had come down in history as a "traitor," Aragon emphasizes the frailty of human knowledge. Berthier, Géricault, Richelieu can scarcely be judged severely for the acts committed under social and historical circumstances when it was still impossible to foresee all the consequences. The echo of this appeal can be heard in Aragon's declaration of 1959:

> La vérité ne m'a pas été révélée à mon baptême, je ne la tiens ni de mon père ne de la classe de ma famille. Ce que j'ai appris m'a coûté cher, ce que je sais je l'ai acquis à mes dépens. Je n'ai pas une seule certitude qui ne me soit venue autrement que par le doute, l'angoisse, la sueur, la douleur de l'expérience. Aussi ai-je le respect de ceux qui ne savent pas, de ceux qui cherchent, qui tâtonnent, qui se heurtent.[58]

[57]That it was indeed an effort at rehabilitation follows from Aragon's remark: "Ne craignez rien pourtant, je n'irai pas jusqu'à chercher à réhabiliter à vos yeux Marmont, Duc de Raguse." La Semaine Sainte, p. 425.

[58]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 134.

Aragon concluded his plea for Berthier, Géricault and Richelieu saying: "Ayons donc, avant de les juger, l'élémentaire charité de nous dire: 'Ils ne savaient pas ce qu'ils faisaient!' Ayons à leur égard, je vous en pris, une attitude un peu plus. . . chrétienne!"[59] Coming from a communist-atheist, this reference to Christian charity underlines the profound need for solicitude which the author experienced at the time. The defence of Berthier is only too clearly the defence of Aragon himself and of his comrades in the party.[60]

A few words should be said about the concepts of socialist realism in the novel. Without disclosing the reasons for certain modifications in the doctrine of socialist realism, Aragon stated that Les Communistes and La Semaine Sainte

> . . . relèvent d'une même méthode celle que pour plus de commodité l'on appelle le réalisme socialiste. . . . Précisément, nombreux sont ceux qui ont applaudi à La Semaine Sainte parce que, s'étant fait du réalisme socialiste une certaine idée à eux, laquelle le leur rend haïssable, ils ont cru trouver ici un renoncement, un abandon de cette méthode, et que cela les a réjouis.
>
> Je regrette vivement de les décevoir ainsi, mais ils se sont entièrement trompés. La Semaine Sainte n'est pas un abandon de la méthode du réalisme socialiste, mais un développement de celle-ci.[61]

[59] Gabriel d'Aubarède, op. cit., p. 4.

[60] In La Mise à mort Aragon observed: "On ne peut pas se mettre à faire le témoin de ce qu'on n'avait pas compris," p. 44.

[61] Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 80.

For the reader familiar with both novels it is obvious that the change from one to the other was tantamount to the dismissal of the doctrine of socialist realism in Zhdanov's terms. La Semaine Sainte contains no usual communist "clichés" and no deliberate distortion of truth in order to promote party interests, as was the case in Les Communistes. The subsequent rewriting of Les Communistes offers tangible proof of this dismissal. However, the acknowledgement of the fact would have meant the repudiation of a considerable body of Aragon's work, and this he was not prepared to undertake.

In La Semaine Sainte, as some critics have rightly observed, Aragon achieved an equilibrium unknown to him either before or after the publication of this novel. It is the only novel in the huge body of Aragon's work which met universal acclaim in France, although for different reasons. The Communist Party, despite the reservations it had voiced previously, and perfectly conscious of the fact that any homage paid to Aragon reflected favourably on the party, acclaimed and congratulated the author:

> Quelle satisfaction profonde pour notre Parti de voir l'un de ses militants s'imposer à tous comme le peintre incomparable des grandes heures de l'histoire nationale, comme le romancier de la France! Le Comité central a traduit les sentiments de chaque communiste, de chaque homme de progrès en exprimant au camarade Aragon son admiration fraternelle et chaleureuse.[62]

[62] M. Thorez, "L'Oeuvre d'Aragon," C. du C., 35, No. 5 (1959), 536.

One may have doubts about whether Napoleon's return and the subsequent flight of Louis XVIII can be counted among the "great hours of national history," but the party jubilation was evident. While the F.C.P. was congratulating itself that the novel "a forcé les ennemis les plus acharnés du communisme à rendre justice à Aragon,"[63] the bourgeois press, conceding the literary value of the novel, was rejoicing that Aragon had abandoned his ideological position, that "l'écrivain révolutionnaire avait mis son drapeau dans sa poche, qu'il avait tourné le dos aux problèmes d'aujourd'hui."[64] Emile Henriot went so far as to declare: "Je pensais de la remarquable Semaine Sainte d'Aragon, où il n'y a que du talent, sans un seul mot de politique."[65]

All this ambivalence did not seem to trouble Aragon. In many of his subsequent writings he manifested an unrestrained and almost childish joy in reproducing the praise that had been lavished on La Semaine Sainte. It must have seemed to the author that in this novel he had achieved the goal he had set for himself in Le Roman inachevé--the creation of a new image, that of Aragon the humanist. In order to prolong the echo of the acclaim, he went to great lengths to explain and defend the views

[63] Loc. cit.

[64] Loc. cit.

[65] Emile Henriot, Le Monde, 1958. Quoted by Elsa Triolet in O.C., IX, p. 13.

expressed in La Semaine Sainte and to reveal his "secrets de fabrication."[66]

The writing of La Semaine Sainte coincided with the greatest event in Aragon's life. In 1957, on the occasion of his 60th birthday, he was awarded the much coveted Lenin Peace Prize. To receive the prize he and Elsa went in 1958 to the Soviet Union, where the award was presented in the Kremlin. That event, and the standing ovation given to him on the occasion, were undoubtedly the highlights of his political career. Everything seemed to indicate that Aragon was moving in the right direction.

To conclude; La Semaine Sainte demonstrates once again Aragon's amazing adaptability to change, but it shows also that he was not a rebel. His rejection of socialist realist "clichés," which had been so unfortunately overdone in Les Communistes, was clearly in accordance with Aragon's personal thinking, but it had been made possible by the shift in Soviet cultural policies and their subsequent endorsement by the F.C.P., and by the general relaxation in the political climate. The novel reflects the preoccupations of the F.C.P. and the general atmosphere of the post-Twentieth Congress and Hungarian Revolution era, as well as Aragon's personal tribulations. He had every reason to declare: "Je n'aurais pu écrire

[66]Louis Aragon, "Secrets de fabrication," J'abats mon jeu, pp. 45-69.

La Semaine Sainte si je n'avais ... été communiste."[67] After the negative reaction of the bourgeois critics to his previous novel, Les Communistes, Aragon was exhilarated by the praise bestowed on La Semaine Sainte, which seemed to consecrate his talent and to justify his party's reference to him as "le grand compagnon fidèle et sûr dont la présence et l'oeuvre sont pour notre mouvement une parure d'un très rare éclat."[68]

[67]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 89.

[68]Jean Marcenac, "Aragon, témoin du parti," C. du C., No. 1 (1961), 206.

PART V

FROM SOCIALIST RÉALISM TO D'UN RÉALISME SANS RIVAGES

CHAPTER 12

J'ABATS MON JEU

> Il y aura dans deux semaines dix ans qu'a eu lieu à Moscou le "XXe Congrès," dont les échos ont été profonds par le monde entier comme en U.R.S.S. L'assimilation de ses enseignements n'a pas été immédiate, et la période qui l'a suivi a été, pour tous les esprits sérieux marquée par des réflexions, lesquelles forçaient des millions d'hommes à réexaminer leurs jugements sur plusieurs dizaines d'années de leur vie.
>
> L.F., 27 janvier, 1966.

In the preceding chapter we have seen that La Semaine Sainte met with an unprecedented success, but it also gave rise to certain questions: was Aragon abandoning the doctrine of socialist realism? Was he taking an independent position with regard to the F.C.P.? To answer these questions Aragon published several articles and delivered a number of speeches in which he attempted to explain his position. To make sure that his voice would reach a non-party audience, he published a collection of these articles and speeches under the resounding title J'abats mon jeu.[1]

[1]The theme of "jeu" became a sort of cliché after the Twentieth Congress and appears in works of other communist writers: "Je n'ai pas changé. Ce sont les autres qui ont changé. On m'avait donné des cartes. J'ai joué loyalement avec ces cartes et ça n'était pas toujours marrant. Puis, brusquement j'apprends que les cartes étaient truquées, qu'est-ce que je dois faire? Ce n'était pas ce qu'on nous avait dit? Bon. Je me retire du jeu. Je ne joue plus, c'est tout." Pierre Courtade, La Place

The publication of this volume caused some raised eyebrows, and some critics went so far as to accuse the author of literary heresy. Certainly the views expounded were very different from those advanced by Aragon earlier, and indeed the volume would have caused a sensation had it been published in the thirties or forties. Viewed, however, in the context of the period, it fitted very well the requirements of the changing tide. A short discussion of this context will be useful at this point.

Even before Stalin's death, the idea of liberty of artistic expression was present in the minds of Soviet writers.[2] They deplored the communist idealization of reality and resented the party's dictates in literature and art. Stalin's death and the Twentieth Congress brought about a change in the political climate in the Soviet Union which made it possible to challenge the party's right to control imaginative works. A whole series of articles critical of certain aspects of socialist realism appeared in Soviet periodicals.[3] The years after the Twentieth

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Rouge, p. 271. In Aragon's work, the theme reappears in Théâtre/Roman: "A présent je ne joue plus. . .," p. 52.

[2]See: Avrahm Yarmolinsky, Literature Under Communism: the literary policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from the end of World War II to the death of Stalin (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1960); I. Ehrenburg, Memoirs; N. Mandelstam, Hope Against Hope.

[3]See: Vladimir Pomerantsev, "Ob iskrennosti v literature," (On Sincerity in Literature), Novy Mir, No. 12 (1953); A. Khachaturian, "O tvorcheskoi smelosti i vdokhnovenii," (On Creative Audacity and Inspiration), Sovetskaya muzyka, No. 11 (1953).

Congress, in particular, were characterized by upheavals in Soviet literary circles. The party continued to demand ideological orthodoxy of its writers and artists; at the same time, these writers and artists were now challenging its authority over aesthetic aspects of their work. More and more they began to object to any doctrinaire attitude towards imaginative works, to abandon the strict Zhdanov line, and to demand greater freedom of expression. Writers questioned even such key concepts as partiinost', ideinost', the demand for positive heroes, and the optimistic imperative. On the creative level they produced plays, novels and poems which indicated their yearning for truthfulness and sincerity.[4]

Finding that intellectuals could no longer be coerced into full conformity but unwilling to abandon the principle of an official doctrine, the party tried to find ways of modifying the latter. Aragon's friend Simonov, a well known Russian writer, spoke for many communist officials when he wrote about the need "to rehabilitate the method of socialist realism in the eyes of all who in a fit of bewilderment or bitter disappointment were rashly inclined to renounce it."[5] As a result, in

[4]V. Dudintsev, "Not by Bread Alone," Novy Mir, Nos. 8, 9, 10 (1956); S. Kirsanov, "Seven Days of the Week," Novy Mir (1956); M. Aliger, "The Most Important Thing," Oktyabr, No. 11 (1956); N. Hikmet, Ivan Ivanovich Did He Exist? (See: p. 260, note 16), and others.

[5]Quoted by Harold Schwayze in Political Control in Literature in the U.S.S.R.: 1946-1959, p. 151.

Shepilov's speech early in 1957 some modifications were introduced into the method of socialist realism.[6] Kommunist, the official organ of the Central Committee of the communist party of the Soviet Union, also dealt with the main trends in Soviet literature. While not explicitly encouraging unorthodox party writers, Kommunist went so far as to say that absolute conformity of style and approach was not required under the rules of socialist realism. This was understood as a tacit acknowledgement of the artist's right to choose his own form of expression and to use unconventional formulae.

When one considers the close ties that existed between the Soviet state and the F.C.P. it is not surprising that Soviet literary policies had an effect on the F.C.P.'s own attitude to official doctrine. However, for a time at least, the party moved cautiously. Even though the validity of the doctrine of socialist realism was now undergoing scrutiny in Soviet literary circles, the F.C.P. was reluctant to follow the new trend. This cautiousness engendered discontent among those members of the Central Committee, for example Casanova, Servin, Kriegel-Valrimont, Pronteau, who were in favour of more liberal policies. According to Robrieux, a communist, the members were showing interest in the new tendencies "qui se dégageaient alors en France: le cinéma et le roman 'nouvelle vague' derrière lesquels [ils] discernaient les indices

[6]See: p. 262.

d'une mutation profonde au sein de la société française, en même temps que les ferments d'une révolte de la jeunesse."[7] Certain articles in J'abats mon jeu reflected the attitude of these partisans of change.

In attempting to trace the steps which led Aragon to the publication of J'abats mon jeu, we find that in 1954 he was still following the party line closely and was not yet prepared to dismiss socialist realism. At the Thirteenth Congress of the F.C.P., (June 1954), he recalled all literary practitioners to their duty to follow the party line. Communist intellectuals, he declared, must abide by the policies laid down by the party in their particular field of endeavour. Objecting to "l'instauration d'un libéralisme sans principe," he proclaimed:

> Faisons le point: les intellectuels communistes doivent connaître les principes d'organisation du Parti et s'en tenir strictement à ces principes. C'est la condition première d'un travail sain, profitable au Parti, de tout travail de parti, par conséquent même d'un art de parti, pour passer ici dans le domaine qui est celui de la création.[8]

In December of 1954 he participated in the Second All Union Writers' Congress which took place in Moscow. An atmosphere of change was much in evidence there, but Aragon seemed unwilling to take a stand against the official doctrine. Rather, he hedged somewhat, by discussing

[7]Ph. Robrieux, op. cit., p. 523.

[8]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 203.

socialist realism in poetry, by pointing out his own contribution to Resistance poetry, and by drawing attention to his own effort to cultivate socialist realism in his latest collection of poems, Les Yeux et la Mémoire.

One year later, as a kind of postscript to the Second Congress of Soviet Writers, Aragon published Littératures soviétiques. In this essay, he denied that the Soviet Union was suffering from literary starvation. In fact, he defended socialist realism in no uncertain terms, stating that the works of many Soviet writers bore testimony against "la légende de réalisme socialiste stérilisateur." Socialist realism, he claimed, was "une conquête," "la méthode nouvelle, sur laquelle tout l'art soviétique naît et grandit."[9] It is true that while defending Soviet literature Aragon showed a strong desire to dissociate French socialist realist writings from the doctrine practised in the Soviet state. He pointed out that in France authors refused to see socialist realism as "une chose fixée, à laquelle on peut s'habituer, avec laquelle on peut composer, qui est affaire de clefs à mettre dans la serrure pour l'ouvrir, comme un système dans lequel on s'inscrit."[10] Nevertheless, he was far from questioning the universal validity of communist teachings on literature. When some of the Soviet writers, notably Constantin Fedin,

[9]Louis Aragon, Littératures soviétiques, p. 26.

[10]Ibid., p. 124.

seemed to minimize the importance of the official doctrine, Aragon was the first to regret "cette tendance à considérer les oeuvres comme supérieures à la théorie." Indeed, he stated categorically that socialist realism was not only a reflection of a given society or epoch, but also the basis on which all literary science was founded:

> . . . c'est notre tendance de penser du réalisme socialiste, ce que . . . nous pensons du marxisme par rapport aux systèmes philosophiques qui le précèdent. C'est-à-dire que nous considérons le réalisme socialiste non pas comme un mot d'ordre passager, mais comme la conception enfin trouvée à partir de laquelle commence la science littéraire. Que nous le croyons susceptible de ce genre d'évolution dont la science donne le spectacle, mais que nous le croyons la base définitive de l'art. Que les oeuvres de l'art changent continuellement, que celles qui s'appuient sur le réalisme socialiste sont et seront d'une diversité que rien ne limitera, cela est certain; mais pas moins certain que cette diversité se fondera sur les principes du réalisme socialiste. Qu'il n'est par conséquent pas, disons l'art de la période stalinienne, mais l'art de tout l'avenir.[11]

This attempt to salvage the socialist realist doctrine by giving it a firm, scientific, Marxist foundation, thus preventing it from being discredited as an outgrowth of Stalin's arbitrary policies, was followed by an indication of what the socialist realism of tomorrow might be:

> Il faut s'attacher à l'approfondissement du réalisme socialiste, non pour éclairer les oeuvres produites, que l'on peut unir sous son nom, mais pour frayer la voie aux oeuvres nouvelles et imprévisibles, qui seront le réalisme socialiste de demain, et sans aucun

[11] Ibid., p. 125.

> doute pas seulement par imitation des oeuvres déjà faites, mais aussi par invention, par l'invention de moyens de liaison toujours nouveaux, toujours plus étroits avec la réalité mouvante, la vie, l'histoire des hommes.[12]

Three years later, Aragon tried to put his theory into practice. He wrote La Semaine Sainte, in which, on his own admission, he wished to "contredire une formule donnée du réalisme," and to "exprimer la même chose par d'autres moyens."[13]

The success of La Semaine Sainte encouraged Aragon to pursue a liberal line. Furthermore, the continuing confusion with respect to socialist realist doctrine and the policy of moderation still pursued by the Soviet authorities created suitable conditions for a retreat from Aragon's former doctrinaire position. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Aragon found it a convenient moment to publish J'abats mon jeu (1959) in which he asserted his position vis-à-vis his Soviet friends:

> On me dira que tel ou tel trait, caractère, de mon livre [La Semaine Sainte,] l'oppose à des choses qui ont été écrites en U.R.S.S. touchant le réalisme socialiste. Encore faudrait-il se reporter aux textes, mais pourtant je veux bien en convenir. Sans doute. Qu'est-ce que cela peut bien me faire? Et même si le réalisme socialiste a tout d'abord pris figure là-bas. Aurait-on la simplicité de croire que moi j'ai la simplicité de tenir toute thèse

[12] Ibid., p. 126 .

[13] Louis Aragon, Je n'ai jamais appris à écrire, p. 109.

> énoncée en U.R.S.S., et pour cette raison, touchant la littérature et l'art, comme la loi et les prophètes? Il n'y a qu'à se reporter à tout ce qui a été écrit là-bas en quarante ans pour y voir quelles contradictions on y rencontre, et parfois quelles sottises ont été dites. Je ne redoute aucunement de me trouver, moi non plus, en contradiction sur les sujets de mon art avec tel ou tel écrivain, critique soviétique, voire personnage politique. Il s'agit là de confrontations intérieures dans le réalisme socialiste, et personne n'a jamais dit que le réalisme socialiste était une église où les voix vont à l'unisson.[14]

If we recall that only three years earlier Aragon could write: "J'affirme qu'aucune littérature du monde, quels que soient les noms que tel ou tel pays puisse aligner, n'est en mesure de se comparer à la production littéraire des écrivains soviétiques,"[15] that he had claimed that "dans l'exemple des écrivains soviétiques, il y a plus à apprendre aujourd'hui que dans toute la littérature antique," we can gauge the distance which now separated Aragon from his former position.[16]

It is interesting to observe, however, that despite this bold statement, Aragon tried not to antagonize either the Soviets or the F.C.P. He pointed out that criticism of socialist realism originated in the Soviet Union, and his own criticism of it was accompanied by a declaration of his deep attachment to Soviet literature. He wrote, in

[14]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 81.

[15]Louis Aragon, Littératures soviétiques, p. 18.

[16]Ibid., p. 25.

the introduction to J'abats mon jeu:

> On s'étonnera peut-être de la place que tient, dans mon jeu, la littérature soviétique. Il m'arrive aussi de m'en étonner. Une littérature n'est pas faite que de chefs-d'oeuvre, je n'aime pas tous les écrivains de là-bas, leurs oeuvres sont inégales. Comment expliquer que, lorsque je les envisage dans leur ensemble, elles soient si proches d'un coeur qui a bien d'autres amours?[17]

He reminded his Russian friends of the important role he had played in the popularization of Soviet literature in France and in combatting the negative attitude of the West towards Soviet literature, even among left-wing intellectuals and party members:

> Depuis des années, je m'emploie à vaincre ce genre de préjugé, et parmi ceux que l'anti-soviétisme maintient dans l'ignorance d'oeuvres importantes, humainement parlant; et aussi parmi d'autres qui pour l'essentiel pensent comme moi, mais qui en littérature ont des préjugés analogues, inversement dirigés, et exigent des écrivains que ceux-ci partagent leurs idées.[18]

In his attempt not to alienate the party, Aragon used the authority of Thorez, secretary general of the party. Aragon's most severe criticism of the dogmatism of the party was expressed in his address to the Organization of Communist Youth (Les Jeunesses Communistes),[19] at a conference which took place in April 1959. Aragon invited Thorez to

[17] Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 9.

[18] Ibid., p. 275.

[19] Published in J'abats mon jeu under the title "Il faut appeler les choses par leur nom."

preside over the conference, thus creating the impression that his own address had been approved by the latter. Then, having thus protected himself in advance, he "mit en pièces le jdanovisme et le sectarisme pour dessiner une vision ouverte et audacieuse de l'évolution de la culture et de l'art du temps, ainsi que du rôle des communistes."[20] Thorez was caught off guard,[21] but, since Aragon was enthusiastically acclaimed by the audience, the secretary general, no doubt conscious of the changing mood within the party, abstained from openly displaying his annoyance.[22] To further mollify the party Aragon included in J'abats mon jeu the text of his two most orthodox speeches, which had been delivered at the XIIIth Congress of the F.C.P., (June 1954), and at the Congress of Soviet Writers, (December 1954).

Taken in its entirety, J'abats mon jeu represents Aragon's withdrawal to a defensive position. In Littératures soviétiques his effort had been aimed at salvaging

[20]Philippe Robrieux, op. cit., p. 523.

[21]In fact Thorez was unaware of the precise content of Aragon's speech. Robrieux, the author of Thorez's biography, reports that on the eve of the conference Thorez was asked by Paul Laurent, leader of Les Jeunesses Communistes, about the content of Aragon's speech. Thorez replied: "mais je ne sais pas ce qu'il va dire." Ibid., loc. cit.

[22]Thorez's reaction to Aragon's address was commented upon by Robrieux who observed: "Dans l'enthousiasme général suscité par le succès énorme du meeting, bien peu d'observateurs relevèrent le décalage entre le discours de Thorez et la conférance du grand poète." Ibid., Loc. cit.

the reputation of socialist realism by denouncing abuses, by giving it a scientific Marxist basis, and by claiming that socialist realism was capable of a greater degree of diversity than it had actually manifested in recent years. In J'abats mon jeu Aragon went a step further and tried to dissociate himself from the Soviet brand of socialist realism.

In particular, three aspects of the book retain the reader's attention. The first is Aragon's attempt at disengagement by redefining the concept of socialist realism and by emphasizing the spontaneous, unpremeditated nature of his writings. The second is his evident desire to rehabilitate his hitherto disregarded surrealist writings by incorporating them into the mainstream of his work. And the third is his effort to appeal to the young generation.

Aragon's discussion of socialist realism had a two-fold purpose; to explain his own position to his critics and readers, and, secondly, and perhaps more importantly, to start a debate with those of his party friends who were unwilling to accept new trends in socialist realism.[23] Aragon invited his critics to regard socialist realism, not as a doctrine imported from the Soviet Union,

[23]It has to be remembered that the publication of La Semaine Sainte had caused some uneasiness among the orthodox ideologists of the F.C.P. It was only when Roger Garaudy, a member of the Politburo, undertook the defence of the novel before the Central Committee that it met with party approval.

but as one which could have an independent development, which could be rooted in the French realistic tradition and yet be at the same time oriented towards the socialism of the future. It should be noted that as early as 1937 Aragon had tried to show that, although socialist realism was a peculiarly Russian creation, it took a different form in each country, plunging its roots into local and national realities.[24] But previously the stress had been on the role of the national literary heritage; now Aragon attempted to show the "avant-garde" character of the doctrine and the importance of "invention" in socialist realism.

After stating "Je me réclame d'une conception de l'art réaliste, qui correspond à ma conception générale du monde, le socialisme," Aragon proceeded to explain how socialist realism should be understood:

> Mais le réalisme socialiste, pour l'appeler par son nom, n'est pas une conception de l'art fixée une fois pour toutes, qu'on peut apprendre, qui répond à des recettes. Le réalisme socialiste, tel que je l'entends, n'est pas nécessairement ce qu'ici l'on appelle ainsi, ni non plus ce que chaque écrivain soviétique nomme de ce nom.[25]

[24]Louis Aragon, "Réalisme socialiste et réalisme français," La Nouvelle Critique (May 1949), p. 39. Report of the speech delivered in October 1937. First published in Europe. See: Bibliography.

[25]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 137.

To appreciate the change in Aragon's views this statement has to be compared with his declaration of 1948:

> Pas un mot de cette définition [Zhdanov's definition of socialist realism] n'est pas de hasard. Un seul des éléments exigés de l'écrivain par le réalisme socialiste, s'il manque, suffit à enlever à l'oeuvre le caractère réaliste-socialiste, pour la ramener au naturalisme, au populisme, à la vulgarisation sociologique, en ruiner en fait le caractère d'oeuvre d'art.[26]

In 1959, continuing the exposition of his views on socialist realism, Aragon pointed out the difference between socialist realism in the Soviet Union and in France. After claiming for years that the socialist realist doctrine was the creation, not of the political authorities, but of Soviet writers themselves, Aragon conceded that

> . . . le socialisme étant doctrine d'Etat, le réalisme socialiste est en U.R.S.S., au départ, basé sur l'accord de l'art et de la classe dirigeante, alors qu'en France le réalisme socialiste, dans les conditions sociales présentes, ne peut être qu'un art d'opposition.[27]

According to Aragon, the new approach did not mean that Soviet experience should be neglected. But neither did it mean that certain theses accepted in the Soviet Union should be regarded as "proven" and valid for French writers. Aragon went so far as to state that a "contradiction" between the two concepts of Socialist realism was even possible:

[26]Louis Aragon, "Réflexions sur l'art soviétique: Parenthèse sur les Prix Staline," Les L.F., 10 April 1952, p. 10.

[27]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 166.

> De même qu'un concept comme le réalisme socialiste peut et doit passer les frontières, nulle part un tel concept ne saurait être arrêté à une définition intouchable: . . . j'estime nécessaire le constant ré-examen du réalisme socialiste non seulement à la lumière de ses principes et de ses produits, mais à celle des expériences qui lui sont extérieures, voire contradictoires . . .[28]

After presenting this revised view of the party's literary policies, Aragon introduced a much broader conception of socialist realism than that practised dogmatically in the Soviet Union and even in France.

> Le réalisme socialiste est la conception organisatrice des faits en littérature, du détail de l'art, qui interprète ce détail, lui donne sens et force, l'intègre dans le mouvement de l'humanité, au-delà de l'individualisme des écrivains. . .[29]

According to Aragon, the purpose of socialist realism "n'est pas de faire triompher un style, mais de faire triompher une conception du monde."[30] This rather general definition was followed by a statement of Aragon's personal position with regard to socialist realism:

> J'ai du réalisme socialiste, pour ma part, une conception ouverte, non dogmatique, qui permet à l'artiste qui s'en réclame de s'enrichir, d'enrichir son art non pas sur un pré réservé, mais partout où il trouvera sa pâture, sous la réserve critique de ses conceptions.[31]

[28] Ibid., p. 167.

[29] Ibid., p. 173.

[30] Ibid., pp. 139-140.

[31] Ibid., p. 140.

Although Aragon's conception of the world as expressed in his Dadaist and surrealist writings was very different from the one evident in his socialist realist novels, the modification in the political climate apparently made Aragon decide that the time was ripe for the rehabilitation of his earlier writings. Forgetting that there had been a time when he regarded surrealism as retrograde and reactionary, a time when he had tried to dissociate himself from his surrealist friends, he claimed that he had always defended "le ciel de ma jeunesse."[32] He recalled his friendship with André Breton and regretted that justice had not been done to the latter's work. Having thus paid lip-service to the past and still apparently oblivious of the fact that he had once regarded his surrealist writings as an aberration,--"J,étais comme eux, [the surrealists,] je préférais l'erreur à son contraire. On trouvera la trace de cet état d'esprit dans un livre que j'ai écrit, qui est bien caractéristique d'une époque de ma vie, qui s'appelle Le Paysan de Paris"[33]--he tried to promote the sale of his earlier works. "A propos, est-ce que vous avez lu Anicet?" he asked, indicating that 3,800 copies of the book were awaiting the purchaser and would be available at his stand at the Vél' d'Hiv' during the next book sale. Then he mentioned that Le Libertinage would be reedited by Gallimard

[32]Ibid., p. 29.

[33]Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, p. 18.

in May, 1959.[34] The paragraphs dealing with surrealism and Dadaism and Aragon's writings of that early period thus appear as a harbinger to the re-incorporation of that part of Aragon's work into the larger body of his complete works. At a later date, when he came to publish Les Oeuvres romanesques croisées, Aragon would disregard ideological considerations entirely and consider his work as an entity, despite the vacillation in the political and aesthetic views expressed at different periods.

The third theme of J'abats mon jeu, the defence of the young generation, clearly reflects the period when N. Khrushchev preached tolerance towards young Soviet writers. However, Aragon's defence of young writers had much broader implications. On the one hand it demonstrated Aragon's rejection of dogmatism within the party; on the other, it revealed that he was courting the young, who knew very little of the past and who, he hoped, would now see him as a humanist in the broadest sense. It is clear that if Aragon were concerned with the image which he as an artist and a communist was to leave to posterity, it was to the young generation that he now had to appeal. Therefore, Aragon showed himself to be the champion of the young writers, and he defended them against those party members who tended to censure both him and the young writers in the name of "des droits idéologiques."[35]

[34]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, pp. 120-121.

[35]Ibid., p. 18.

Aragon singled out two young writers for comment.[36] He denounced the ideological intolerance of the party leadership and warned his party comrades:

> Craignez de suivre cette voie, et de perdre par là le contact avec la jeunesse qui vient, et qui efface les jugements passionnels, et donne souvent son accord à ce que vous prétendez maladroitement lui interdire. Craignez de vous faire vainement ici censeurs et pédagogues. Je ne vous demande pas d'épouser les goûts qui se forment en dehors de vous, d'abandonner vos principes pour revêtir les oripeaux dont s'amusent les jeunes gens. . . . Non. Je vous dis seulement que vous allez consommer une rupture, par quoi tout pouvoir vous sera ôté d'agir sur ceux-là qui, seuls, parleront d'ici quelques années. Votre critique subira le sort des doctrinaires.[37]

On a personal level, Aragon tried to appeal to French youth by playing on the theme that he too had once been young and that, after all, there was not so much difference between the generations of the thirties and the fifties. Admitting that the image he presented to the public contained contradictions, he hastened to add that he was not ashamed of his various transformations. And the latter were indeed spectacular. Aragon, who in 1953 had denounced the perfidious influence of Vichyist writers,[38]

[36]Michel Zéraffa, the author of Les Doublures and Philippe Sollers, the author of Une curieuse solitude.

[37]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 19. A prophecy that came true in 1968.

[38]Louis Aragon, L'Homme communiste, II, p. 12.

now refused to condemn the author of Flora d'Amsterdam[39] for "cet attrait pour les gens de Vichy, comme d'un domaine interdit." According to Aragon, "leur liberté aux garçons qui avaient dix-huit, dix-neuf ans à la Libération consiste à jouer avec ce feu-là,--c'est leur dadaïsme."[40]

Besides the three aspects which we have pointed out, a considerable part of J'abats mon jeu contains discussions of La Semaine Sainte and Les Communistes. These discussions make it clear that in 1959 Aragon did not yet envisage the rewriting of Les Communistes, for he devoted considerable effort to showing that there was no basic difference, insofar as objectivity was concerned, between the highly praised La Semaine Sainte and the much decried Les Communistes.

Viewed as a whole, J'abats mon jeu has a clearly polemical character. It is, in fact, a public expression of the literary divergency between Aragon and the leaders of the more dogmatic wing of the F.C.P. Moreover, the impression that J'abats mon jeu leaves with the reader is that in 1959 the author was attempting to steer a course between the danger of alienating the Soviets and the F.C.P., and the necessity of extricating himself from the aesthetic positions of Stalinism. It seems that he was under the

[39]F. R. Bastide, Flora d'Amsterdam (Paris: Le Seuil,1957).

[40]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, p. 123.

illusion that the crisis of communism was over, that the revelations of the Twentieth Congress were a thing of the past. He seems to have believed, as did many other communists at that time, that it was enough to acknowledge one's mistakes, to be frank (as the title J'abats mon jeu indicates), to explain one's position, to exhibit a modified attitude to many aspects of the past, and that a new leaf would be turned over, a new page could begin and the past would merely fade away. It was to achieve this end, we believe, that the book was published. At the same time, J'abats mon jeu represented a step in the direction of total disengagement.

CHAPTER 13

ARAGON'S PREFACE TO R. GARAUDY'S D'UN RÉALISME SANS RIVAGES

> The question is this: can writers who claim to represent the most advanced and progressive socio-political movement of their time really afford to be satisfied with a literary style and philosophy which evolved in the age of the steam engine?
>
> David Caute. The Illusion.

In the years following the publication of J'abats mon jeu the process of liberalization proceeded rather haltingly in the Soviet Union. The attitude of the party towards its writers and artists was ambiguous and the relationship between the party and creative individuals was constantly fluctuating. Nevertheless, Khrushchev indicated some willingness to relax control over the work of writers and artists, and the proceedings of the Twenty-second C.P.S.U. Congress in October 1961 showed that he was even willing to allow debate in a forum which for decades had not permitted any divergence of opinion.[1]

Many discussions on socialist realism were taking

[1]Delegates to the Twenty-second Congress included a record number of thirty-two writers (out of 5,000) delegates. To the forum of the congress they carried a veiled debate on the literary situation in the country. On the proceedings of the congress, see the special issue of C. du C., 37, No. 12 (1961).

place in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. Authors fought for the recognition of their right to portray the truth as they perceived it. Foreign writers, too, participated in public discussions on socialist realism. In the summer of 1962, at the World Peace Congress in Moscow, a new definition of socialist realism was suggested by Stefan Hermlin, a German writer and translator of Eluard's poetry. According to him "est réalisme socialiste tout ce qui appartient à la culture humaine, tout ce qui est antiréactionnaire."[2] In 1963, in Leningrad, during the course of a discussion on the novel, Sartre expressed the opinion that the prototype of true realist writing was Solzhenitsyn's Matryona's Place.

One of the significant literary events of the period was the conference on Kafka. In the Soviet Union, Kafka had previously been considered a decadent capitalist writer, and in 1948, when Zhdanovism became particularly virulent, his works had been strictly prohibited. It was not until 1957 that the first studies of Kafka began to appear in Prague.[3] On May 27, 1963, communist scholars and writers from Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, France and Austria met at Liblice in

[2]Despite the objections of Kurt Hager, member of the C.C. of the Socialist Unity Party of the German Democratic Republic, Hermlin refused all "auto-criticism." M.-A. Burnier, Les Existentialistes et la politique (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 155.

[3]However, when the Atria Publishing House of Prague issued an illustrated volume of old Prague with appropriate references to Kafka's writings, its catalogue contained a short note: "For export only."

order to discuss Kafka's work and to revise the orthodox communist judgments already passed on it. Several communists, among them Roger Garaudy and Ernst Fisher, emphasized the topical significance of Kafka not only in the capitalist world but also in the socialist sector. They pointed out that social alienation had not been erased, either economically or politically, by worker expropriation of the means of production.[4]

The importance of this conference cannot be overestimated. In an unprecedented open debate, communists were able to discuss the problems that were troubling them. As Pierre Daix remarked, to be able to speak about Kafka meant to have the right to discuss the most pressing problems of the day: the meaning of life and the meaning of socialism. One more rehabilitation had been effected.[5] It was no accident that Roger Garaudy's article dealing with the conference appeared under the title "Kafka et le printemps de Prague."[6]

After the conference, Garaudy gave an interview in which he criticized Stalin's Dialectical and Historical Materialism as being obsolete, a closed system of the laws of dialectics. He noted that Stalin's and Zhdanov's concept

[4]See: Ernst Fisher, Art Against Ideology (London: the Penguin Press, 1969); Jaroslav Drester, "Kafka and the Communists," Survey, No. 36 (April-June 1961).

[5]Pierre Daix, Ce que je sais de Soljénitsyne.

[6]Roger Garaudy, "Kafka et le printemps de Prague," L.F., June 1963, pp. 1, 10.

of realism started from a static definition of art abstracted from the practices of the nineteenth century. Neither Kafka nor Picasso fitted such a definition, and that meant that either these artists and their works must be rejected or else socialist realism must be redefined to include them.[7] This redefinition of socialist realism can be found in Garaudy's essay D'un réalisme sans rivages, in which he deals with the works of Kafka, Picasso, Pignon and others.

Another important development related to Garaudy's book was the publication in Paris of Solzhenitsyn's One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich translated into French and prefaced by Pierre Daix. The publication of the novel resulted in a confrontation with that element of the party which did not wish to destalinize. There was a violent discussion at the Politburo, of which Garaudy was a member. The dogmatic wing of the party considered the publication of the novel in the Soviet Union an aberration, its translation a mistake, and Daix's preface a provocation.[8]

Aragon's attitude to the affair can be judged by the publication of a special issue of the Lettres Françaises which included Elsa Triolet's article on Solzhenitsyn

[7]Reported in Survey (October 1965), p. 95.

[8]Pierre Daix, Ce que je sais de Soljénitsyne.

entitled, significantly, "Pour l'amour de l'avenir."[9] The issue also carried interviews with three visiting Soviet writers who freely expressed their opinions on the literary situation in the Soviet Union.[10]

As can be seen from these developments, the publication of D'un réalisme sans rivages was the culmination of a long discussion which reflected the new orientation among those party intellectuals who were prepared to fight on the side of modernists against the accepted principles of socialist realism. The choice of Picasso as a subject of discussion in Garaudy's essay was not accidental. The inclusion of several pages dedicated to the paintings of Pignon was no mere coincidence either. The French exhibition of 1961 in Moscow provoked a regular outcry in the Soviet press. Pignon's canvas "The dead workman" was unanimously condemned: the worker could not be "seen." The social subject was thus condemned on account of its form.[11] Soviet critics went so far as to lecture the two communist artists on their duty to France. To choose Picasso and Pignon for discussion meant to disregard Khrushchev's violent outbursts against modern art, it meant

[9] L.L.F., Special issue, 6 Dec. 1962, pp. 1, 4.

[10] The writers were: Paustovsky, Nekrasov and Vosnesensky. N. Khrushchev denounced the interviews and rebuked the Lettres Françaises for interference in Soviet internal affairs.

[11] Such masters as Picasso, Archipenko, Epstein have been repudiated in the Soviet Union as "formalistic," as manifesting Western decadence and individualism that has no contact with the masses.

another step in the direction of complete emancipation from the party and Soviet dogmatism. An additional reason for the choice of Picasso might have been Garaudy's desire to defend the artist against the allegations of the Socialist press.[12]

Considering the stand which Aragon took in J'abats mon jeu, namely that "l'esthétique est sujette à révision," it was not at all surprising that he hastened to endorse the views expressed by Garaudy in the latter's essay D'un réalisme sans rivages. In the preface he wrote to Garaudy's essay, Aragon stressed the fact that Garaudy was dealing with both political and literary issues. He began by saying:

> Je tiens ce livre pour un événement. Pour ce qu'il dit et pour l'homme qui le dit. Pour le moment où il paraît et comme gage de l'avenir. Comme aboutissement et comme point de départ. Pour ce qu'il brise et ce qu'il permet. Le refus et l'ouverture.[13]

Aragon's political message was clear. The very fact that

[12]About 1955, an Italian journalist, Giovanni Papini, wrote an imaginary interview with Picasso which was subsequently published in Le Livre noir. In it Picasso allegedly confessed that he was "un amuseur public qui a exploité de son mieux l'imbécillité, la vanité et l'avidité de ses contemporains." The report was repeated by several publications of the Soviet bloc. Pierre Daix published an article in which he invited the publishers to prove their allegation. Several diplomats of the socialist bloc presented themselves at Daix's office with the explanation that the information had been received from the Soviet Union and could not be checked. Pierre Daix, Ce que je sais de Sojénitsyne, pp. 48-56.

[13]Roger Garaudy, D'un réalisme sans rivages, Prefaced by Aragon, p. 11.

the essay had been written by a member of the Political Bureau of the F.C.P., in fact by an established communist theoretician, and that it had been prefaced by a member of the Central Committee of the party, heralded the shift in the orientation of the intellectuals of the party away from dogmatic party positions and towards greater liberty of expression for creative party members.

Furthermore, the preface was a profession of faith in that a clear stand was taken on the Stalinist past. The initial communist reaction to the Twentieth Congress had been one of disbelief and denial:

> Il n'y a pas eu de stalinisme: cette expression appartient au vocabulaire de nos adversaires. Il s'est produit, en dépit d'une politique juste, fondée sur les principes du marxisme-léninisme, en éloignement de ces principes, dans des conditions historiques données. Ces conditions sont aujourd'hui révolues.[14]

After the Twenty-Second Congress (1961), at which Khrushchev's allegations were repeated and enlarged upon, the defence of Stalinism was no longer possible. The party accepted the view that the Stalinist period represented a departure from Marxism, that it had been a phenomenon alien to the spirit and practice of socialism, one which should not be repeated in the future. Such a conviction is expressed by Aragon in the preface:

[14]Maurice Thorez, "Discours de Clôture," C. du C., 32, No. 12 (1956), 1472.

> . . . je sais bien que les égarements ou les crimes n'ont pas, ne peuvent pas trouver place naturelle dans le marxisme, qu'ils en sont dénaturation, trahison, détournement.[15]

Thus Aragon was looking at the present "comme aboutissement et comme point de départ," and regarding Stalinism as a tragic phenomenon of the past.

The signs of a new era did indeed seem encouraging. The publication of One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, which depicted life in a concentration camp,[16] a topic previously considered unacceptable in Soviet literary works, appeared as irrefutable proof of the irreversible nature of destalinization in the Soviet Union. It seemed an indication of the start in the direction of "socialism with a human face," and the eagerness of the Soviet Embassy in Paris to see the novel in print in France seemed to support this point of view.[17] The fact that Kafka had been rehabilitated by a socialist country also restored confidence in socialism.

Insofar as the aesthetic content of the essay is concerned, Garaudy's thesis was that all expressions of authentic art could be set in a framework of realism and that realism should not be understood in a restricted sense. From the party's point of view, this thesis was revisionist because it re-interpreted the orthodox Marxist

[15]R. Garaudy, op. cit., p. 13. The same conviction was expressed in Aragon's Histoire de l'U.R.S.S. published in 1962.

[16]It was published in Novy Mir (November, 1962).

[17]Pierre Daix, Ce que je sais de Soljénitsyne.

theory of superstructure generally accepted by the party. Orthodox marxists had claimed that such activities of the human intellect as art and literature are no more than a superstructure upon the underlying productive forces which form the base of any social system. Seen from this point of view, socialist realism was an attempt to trace works of imagination back to social realities alone, to regard them purely as a reflection of social conditions.[18] In opposition to this theory, Garaudy stated explicitly that "le rôle de l'artiste n'est pas celui du philosophe ou de l'historien: il n'est pas tenu, par exemple, de refléter la totalité du réel."[19] He observed that "une oeuvre peut être un témoignage très partiel, très subjectif même, sur le rapport de l'homme au monde à une époque donnée, et ce témoignage peut être authentique et grand."[20] To demand in the name of realism that a work of art reflect the events of a given period or that it indicate the march of humanity towards the future is a philosophical and not an aesthetic requirement, he concluded. The essay was also revisionist insofar as it urged a return to such

[18]Since Marx and Engels did not elaborate any aesthetic theory, there was considerable confusion in the minds of communist leaders on this subject. It should be mentioned however that Engels admitted the relative independence of the superstructures, which, in his opinion, could even act on the underlying productive forces. See: Letter to Conrad Schmidt of October 27, 1890 in Les Lettres sur 'le Capital' (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1964), pp. 366-372.

[19]R. Garaudy, op. cit., p. 245.

[20]Ibid., loc. cit.

essential values as creative freedom in literature and arts. The general thrust of Garaudy's work was in fact towards a revision which made the concept of socialist realism meaningless. It was the ultimate dissolution of all that the concept of realism meant for the party. As such, it also represented an explicit challenge to Soviet authority in literary and artistic matters. Moreover, considering the fact that party discipline limited public expression of personal views by party members to discussion within party organizations and the party press, Garaudy's book carried the conflict of opinion beyond the limits accepted by the party and, therefore, implicitly expressed a desire for democracy within the party.

Aragon endorsed Garaudy's thesis without reservation, and came out clearly against all regimentation of creative individuals. He declared: "est un non-sens ... la tendance à l'unification de la pensée créatrice, à sa soumission aux canons."[21] Both Aragon's and Garaudy's loyalties to the party were, however, strong enough to make them try persuasion rather than didacticism. A conciliatory note can be heard from the outset in the quotation taken from Apollinaire, "Nous ne sommes pas vos ennemis. / Nous voulons vous donner de vastes et d'étranges domaines." But if the leaders refused to be persuaded, the authors were ready to take up the challenge,

[21] Ibid., p. 18.

as can be seen from Aragon's statement:

> Il ne s'agit pas d'une révision du marxisme, mais au contraire de sa restitution. Et d'en finir avec la pratique dogmatique, dans l'histoire, dans la science, dans la critique littéraire, l'argument d'autorité, la référence aux livres sacrés qui ferme la bouche et rend la discussion impossible.[22]

It is no wonder that the book met with incredulity among Soviet literary critics, who at first remained silent, then censured this unexpected deviation from socialist realism.[23]

To those who remembered the doctrinal intransigence of Aragon's articles in the Lettres françaises and other communist reviews, in which he had promoted Zhdanov's canons of socialist realism, the preface provided a striking illustration of the reversal of his position. By endorsing such ideas as "le réalisme se définit à partir des oeuvres, pas avant elles," the author had now reversed the view formerly expressed in Littératures soviétiques, wherein he had professed to regret "cette tendance à considérer les oeuvres comme supérieures à la théorie" and to regard

[22] R. Garaudy, op. cit., Preface, pp. 13-14.

[23] Garaudy's essay was not translated into Russian and was not sold in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the public was invited to judge it. During a session at Gorky's Institute, the essay was denounced by the director of this organization, I. Anisimov. An analysis of the discussion was published in several journals: Literaturnaya Gazeta, Znamia, Voprosy literatury. Garaudy was accused of wishing to abolish the notion of decadence, to stretch indefinitely the limits of realism, to deny the scientific basis of art and of promoting similar "heresies." Garaudy's attempt to deny these allegations was to no avail. See: Jean Cathala "A propos d'une discussion sur l'esthétique," L.F., 9 July 1965, pp. 1, 5.

socialist realism as "la conception enfin trouvée à partir de laquelle commence la science littéraire," "la base définitive de l'art."[24] But contradictions never seem to have disturbed Aragon, who claimed that "dans une seule vie, on peut fort bien se trouver en contradiction avec soi-même."[25] However, those critics who rejoiced to see Aragon finally take a position against Soviet doctrine were due for a surprise. A master of ambiguity and equivocation to the end, Aragon, after stripping the doctrine of socialist realism of all its significance, finished his preface by proclaiming "C'est comme réaliste, et ne vous y trompez pas: comme réaliste socialiste, que je salue sa [Garaudy's] tranquille audace."[26]

This profession of allegiance to an empty phrase has to be understood, it seems to us, in the light of Aragon's preoccupation with the fate of his own work. Clearly, he had learned a lesson from the past when, in his desire to serve, he had renounced his surrealist writings. This time he was not prepared to renounce anything. And so, by claiming that he remained a socialist realist, he avoided having to repudiate his socialist realist writings. These latter were particularly important to him, for at that time, in 1963, he had not yet written

[24]Louis Aragon, Littératures soviétiques, p. 125.

[25]Louis Aragon, J'abats mon jeu, pp. 104-105.

[26]R. Garaudy, op. cit., p. 18.

La Mise à mort and the novels that followed it.

To conclude: Garaudy's essay was a political work addressed especially to communist leaders and in which he tried to impress upon them the advisability of reorientation. It also attempted to reach those communist writers who felt concerned about freedom of expression. The choice of Picasso and Kafka as subjects of discussion was a direct challenge to Soviet authorities who had rejected both, and it signified categorical refusal of the official aesthetics of the party.

The importance of Garaudy's essay for Aragon's personal fortunes cannot be overestimated. The essay reflected the end of an epoch and provided Aragon with the opportunity to recuperate his surrealist and dadaist works. If the definition of realism could be extended to cover the works of Joyce, Jarry, Kafka or Picasso, previously considered as decadent, then there was no reason why Aragon's surrealist writings could not find their legitimate place in the cultural heritage of the nation. Thus, Garaudy's book prepared the ground for the publication of the Oeuvres romanesques croisées and Aragon's later writings.

PART VI

THE RE-ASSESSMENT

Peut-être que rien ne vaut rien. Que tout est
à effacer. Cela, d'autres en jugeront, et
qu'ils soient au besoin injustes. Car il
n'y a pas de vraie justice.

Aragon. L'Oeuvre poétique,
v. 1.

CHAPTER 14

LES COMMUNISTES ONCE AGAIN. . .

> Le temps parfois s'exprime comme un peintre
> Il change la couleur. . . .
>
> Aragon. Les Chambres.

> Le souci de légitimer après coup les étapes de leur pensée est chez les écrivains une tendance infiniment respectable, mais qui les retient souvent d'apprécier à sa juste valeur ce qui fait le prix de leur évolution.
>
> Aragon. Pour un réalisme socialiste.

When Aragon endorsed Roger Garaudy's essay, D'un réalisme sans rivages, there was hope that a salutory change was taking place in the Soviet Union and that some sort of socialist humanism was possible. The mood of the leading communists was thus described by Pierre Daix:

> Ce qui me frappe, c'est notre ton à tous, l'espèce de bonheur, dans les interviews, que l'art du socialisme redevienne de l'art, avec, au bout, un socialisme qui en mérite enfin le nom. L'espèce de plénitude de cette attente enfin comblée. . .[1]

But the events of the year 1964 shattered the last illusions. Already in 1963 Khrushchev had tried to slow down the process of liberalization, and in 1964 Soviet authorities concluded that any further display of tolerance in the arts and literature would be tantamount to political suicide. The Soviet regime returned to its policy of

[1]Pierre Daix, Ce que je sais de Soljénytsine, p. 48.

persecution of the literary elite; "comme si la leçon des errements du stalinisme n'avait servi de rien," it treated its writers once again "en éléments pernicieux, remplaçant seulement l'assassinat tout court par l'assassinat littéraire ou artistique, la coercition ininterrompue, la menace psychiatrique, voire l'organisation étatique de la misère matérielle."[2] Such authors as Nekrasov, Pasternak and Brodsky were denounced and persecuted, while the work of others was banned from Soviet publication. In February 1966 the staging of the Siniavsky and Daniel trial revived the most obscurantist policies of the Stalin regime.[3]

The trial caused protests in left-wing circles and in several communist parties outside the Soviet orbit. Among the protesters was the F.C.P. and Aragon was apparently authorized by the party to prepare a declaration condemning the treatment of Siniavsky and Daniel. Published in l'Humanité, the declaration contained the following sentence: "Qu'on les prive de leur liberté pour le contenu d'un roman ou d'un conte, c'est faire de délit d'opinion un crime d'opinion, c'est créer un

[2] Ibid., p. 7.

[3] Siniavsky-pseudonym of Abraham Tertz, sentenced to 7 years of hard labour; Daniel-pseudonym of Nicolas Arzhan, who received 5 years. Both were accused of anti-Soviet activity because of the contents of their books (which were published abroad).

précédent."[4] However, as is well known, this "precedent" had been common practice in the Soviet Union and in the past had always been supported by the F.C.P. and its leadership. The condemnation of the trial by the party could only mean then at this time that the hardening of official Soviet cultural policy had brought about a re-appraisal of the position of the F.C.P. vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. It would seem, indeed, that after having manifested tendencies of independent thought and critical expression, the party cultural elite was not prepared to return to the repressive policies of the Stalin era. Certainly the behavior of such leading communists as Garaudy, Daix and Aragon, indicated that they were determined to combat dogmatism in the F.C.P. and to pursue a more liberal line in cultural affairs.[5]

This determination became particularly apparent during the proceedings of the Seventeenth Congress of the F.C.P. which took place in the summer of 1964. The party took note of the mood of its cultural elite and displayed an unprecedented liberalism in its approach to literary and artistic creativity. Waldeck Rochet, General Secretary of the party, declared that creative activity was inconceivable without experimentation and stated that as far as

[4]The declaration was also printed in L.F., "A propos d'un procès: Un communiqué du C.N.E." L.F., 17 Feb. 1966, p. 3.

[5]See: R. Garaudy, D'un réalisme sans rivages; J. Baby, Critique de base (Paris: Editions Maspéro, 1960).

creative individuals were concerned "le Parti leur donne au contraire la possibilité de déployer leur initiative, leur imagination, leur goût sans imposer à tous les mêmes formes."[6] Two years later, in the course of the debates dealing with ideological and cultural problems, the party reaffirmed its liberal cultural policies. A resolution of its Central Committee contained the following statement:

> L'héritage culturel se fait chaque jour, il a toujours été crée au présent. . . . C'est pourquoi l'on ne saurait limiter à aucun moment le droit qu'ont les créateurs à la recherche. C'est pourquoi les exigences expérimentales de la littérature et de l'art ne sauraient être niées ou entravées, sans que soit gravement porté atteinte au développement de la culture et de l'esprit humain lui-même.[7]

This shift in the F.C.P. cultural policy was so striking that some authors spoke of the party's renaissance and welcomed the change as a happy event in the party's history.[8]

It was in this political climate that Aragon and Elsa began the publication of the Oeuvres romanesques croisées. For Aragon this was an undertaking of crucial importance, since after the Twentieth congress of the C.P.S.U.

[6]Waldeck Rochet, "Rapport du Comité Central presenté par Waldeck Rochet," C. du C., 40, Nos. 6-7 (1964), 88.

[7]"Résolution sur les problèmes idéologiques et culturels," C. du C., 42, Nos. 5-6 (1966), 270-271.

[8]Georges Lavau, "Renaissance du P.C.," Esprit, 34, No. 10 (1966), 485.

he found himself in a rather unenviable position with regard to his writings of both the surrealist and socialist realist periods. The time had come, he felt, to reassess all his imaginative works and to present them afresh to the public in such a way as to maintain unimpaired his reputation as a writer of the first rank.

Many years before, in a moment of enthusiasm for Marxist ideology and the first proletarian state, he had implicitly denounced his surrealist works by declaring:

> Il est temps d'en finir avec le genre m'as-tu-vu de la douleur, les hallucinations à un ou à plusieurs, le pas donné au subconscient sur la vue, l'ouïe, l,odorat, le goût et le toucher, la sexualité comme système et le délire comme représentation, il est temps d'en finir avec le baroque, le modern style et la foire aux puces, suprêmes ressources de l'ennui mondain et du pessimisme des loisirs.[9]

In place of these surrealist aberrations, the author urged a return to reality and welcomed "comme une parole joyeuse le mot d'ordre de la littérature soviétique, le réalisme socialiste."[10] Without wasting any time, he set to work "avec cette arme nouvelle"[11] and produced the series of novels of Le Monde Réel. But history played a trick. After 1956 Aragon discovered that his socialist realist writings were in danger of being discarded because "un discrédit d'un genre nouveau est jeté sur le réalisme,

[9]Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, p. 81.

[10]Ibid., p. 85.

[11]Ibid., p. 57.

et naturellement sur le réalisme socialiste, expression que, dans le monde entier, des jeunes gens ne prononcent plus sans l'associer aux entreprises monstrueuses."[12]

We have seen how earlier Aragon tried to extricate himself from his dogmatic positions in J'abats mon jeu and how his endorsement of Garaudy's theses in D'un réalisme sans rivages was motivated by his desire to reconcile two vastly different aesthetics and to save his work from oblivion--as he so poignantly wrote, "tout homme a dans le secret de lui-même cette ambition, que quelque chose de lui demeure, lui survive, laisse de lui trace."[13] There can be no doubt that one of the reasons for the publication of the Oeuvres romanesques croisées was precisely the desire to ensure this survival. It was yet another attempt to present Aragon's work as a coherent whole stretching over a span of nearly half a century, and to reconcile two seemingly incompatible worlds.

However, when Aragon decided to republish the whole body of his imaginative work, one of the novels, Les Communistes, presented some problems. The novel had come to be regarded as an outstanding example of a work written according to the precepts of socialist realism. It had been written in the service of the party and contained

[12]Louis Aragon, Les Collages, p. 22.

[13]R. Garaudy, D'un réalisme sans rivages, p. 14.

many facts and interpretations which in 1967 were already dated due to a reappraisal of recent party history. Moreover, left untouched, the novel would have been a constant reminder of the author's servility and would have hampered Aragon in the creation of a new image for himself.[14] Such was at least the author's opinion. Thus, despite the enormous effort which the task required, Aragon decided to rewrite the novel.

Knowing too well that this action would elicit unwanted commentaries, he tried to forestall criticism by explaining his motives in the postscript to the second version of the novel:

> . . . ce que je semblais avoir dit peut n'être aujourd'hui plus perçu ou l'être différemment de ce que j'entendais dire, ou ne l'être désormais qu'en fonction des faits nouveaux, qu'à la lumière de ces faits nouveaux, qui en font varier les ombres. Alors, pourquoi ne pas retoucher, comme les peintres leur tableau, un ou des romans, qu'ils aient au large de moi, ne serait-ce qu'une change sur cent mille de ne pas sombrer?[15]

As one shall see, the two main preoccupations of the author were: to save his work from oblivion, as the quota-

[14]That the Stalinist image was not flattering can be judged from the fact that in the classification of different types of communists given by Charles A. Micaud, Aragon, together with André Wurmser and Pierre Courtade was placed in a subcategory of "the Beria type," Charles A. Micaud. Communism and the French Left (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), p. 116. The judgment of others was no more charitable. Victor Serge referred to Aragon as a "decorated-tricolored-lyric Stalinist-G.P.U." "French Writers, Summer 1941," Partisan Review (Sept.-Oct. 1941), p. 387.

[15]Louis Aragon, O.C., XXVI, p. 297.

tion suggests, but also to efface the image of Aragon the Stalinist author.

A detailed comparison of the two versions of the novel is beyond the scope of this study. We shall, therefore, confine ourselves to a brief discussion of some principles and considerations by which the author was guided in rewriting the novel and give a few examples of the deletions and additions which were made, indicating their significance. We shall also try to evaluate how successful Aragon was in his endeavour to refashion his public image.

In the postscript to Les Communistes, after a general statement that he had completely rewritten the novel, Aragon singled out three main areas of change, namely: style, characters and interpretations, the latter changes being prompted, he claimed, by "l'esprit de responsabilité." Commenting on the change of style he remarked that the first version of Les Communistes was written in the tradition of the 19th century novel with the narration in the past tense. In rewriting the novel he substituted the present tense, because, he said, of the influence of cinematographic techniques and of the old tradition of the "chansons de geste" which were written entirely in the present tense. The result of this change, he claimed, was a phenomenon resembling the wide screen effect of the cinema. It would seem that other considerations also played a certain role in the change of style. The novel was too long, overloaded with non-essential

details and repetitions. Aragon tried to streamline the narration, omitting the superfluous and simplifying the grammatical structure of sentences. These changes reduced the length of the text (the elimination of some characters also helped), from the six original volumes to four in the second version.[16]

The second area of change concerned the elimination from the novel of numerous characters. This change was dictated by various considerations, some of which are mentioned by the author. In the first version, for example, Aragon depicted "parallel" types, very often a character from real life and a parallel fictional figure who shared some of the latter's traits. Such was the case of George Politzer, the party's philosopher and Feltzer, a fictional character, whom Aragon endowed with certain of Politzer's traits. In retrospect, he found that this method was unsatisfactory and he deleted certain fictional characters and their respective families. Other characters, according to the author, were removed from the novel because their presence was justified only by events which would have taken place in that part of the novel which Aragon had planned but had never actually written. When he abandoned the novel their presence became of course superfluous.

[16]The larger format of the second version is due to numerous reproductions of paintings, drawings and maps which were not included in the first version.

Political considerations dictated the elimination of some others. Paul Langevin's case demonstrates this point. Langevin, a well-known French physicist, who appeared in Les Communistes under the name of Baranger, joined the F.C.P. in 1944 and remained a faithful follower until his death. However, at the time of the conclusion of the Soviet-German Pact in 1939, he disagreed with the party's acceptance of the pact and even signed a manifesto condemning it.[17] In the first volume of Les Communistes, where Aragon dealt with the question of the Soviet-German Pact, he spoke disparagingly of Baranger (Langevin), referring to "tous ces gâteux comme Baranger,"[18] and depicted him as a weakling, a snivelling intellectual, a "traître," who "ferait mieux de s'occuper de ses éprouvettes."[19] In the second version of the novel, all passages referring to Baranger were deleted on the ground that "la vie exemplaire du grand savant que fut Langevin a rendu de peu d'intérêt la nature même de désaccords de quelques jours."[20] It may be observed, however, that Langevin's life was just an exemplary in 1948 when Aragon was writing the first volume as in 1966 when he was rewriting the novel,

[17] On August 29, 1939, the Union des Intellectuels Français issued a statement expressing stupefaction before the Pact which reconciled the Nazis and the Soviet Union. It was signed by Frédéric and Irène Joliot-Curie, Langevin, Jean Perrin and others.

[18] Louis Aragon, Les Communistes, 1, p. 109.

[19] Ibid., p. 13.

[20] Louis Aragon, O.C., XXVI, p. 309.

but party policies had, of course, changed.[21]

Some other deletions of characters, which the author does not mention, are not devoid of interest. They can be divided into two groups: deletions dictated by the complex interplay of party politics and those motivated by the requirements of Aragon's personal image building.

The deletion of André Marty falls into the first category. Marty, who had incited French forces at Odessa to mutiny during the October Revolution and whom Aragon depicted as "le glorieux mutin de la mer Noire,"[22] had been a communist hero for years. At the Tenth Party Congress of the F.C.P. which took place in June, 1945, Maurice Thorez, in his address to the Congress, saluted him with these words:

> André Marty, toujours dévoué aux grandes causes nationales, symbole de l'amitié franco-soviétique et qui, en Espagne, avec les Combattants des Brigades, sauva l'honneur de la France . . .[23]

In 1952, however, André Marty had the misfortune to fall out with the party. He was expelled and became a "renegade"

[21]It should also be noted that Aragon's delineation of Langevin was at variance with the image of this scientist presented by Florimond Bonte in his book, Le Chemin de l'honneur (Paris: Les Editeurs Français Réunis, 1949). In Bonte's work Langevin appears as a witness at the trial of the Communist parliamentarians and is presented as a man who shared communists ideals of social justice. His courage in appearing to give his testimony was highly praised by Bonte.

[22]Louis Aragon, Front Rouge, p. 12.

[23]Quoted by J. Fauvet, Histoire du Parti Communiste français (Paris: Fayard, 1965), II, p. 155.

and an "unmasked police agent."[24] After his fall from grace, and following the communist practice of removing a "renegade's" name from all communist publications, the tribute to André Marty was deleted from Thorez's address when it was reproduced in 1963.[25] In similar obedience to party rules, Aragon deleted all passages in Les Communistes in which Marty's name appeared in an ideological context.[26]

When history did not permit the elimination of a character, the author tried to reduce to a minimum all references to him. Molotov's case may serve as an illustration. Having become, together with Kaganovich, Malenkov and some others, a member of the anti-Party group, Molotov, although not destroyed physically, was removed from his post in the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs and deprived of all influence. In conformity with party practices Aragon deleted his name whenever possible.

An example of a change motivated by both personal and political considerations is provided by the elimination from the novel of Patrice Orfilat, in whom many historians and writers recognized Paul Nizan. Nizan, a communist party functionary and editor of the international newspage in the party's daily Ce Soir, was for many years a faithful

[24] Resolution of the Central Committee of the F.C.P. C. du C., 29, No. 3 (1953), 398.

[25] J. Fauvet, op. cit., p. 174.

[26] In the second version of the novel the name of Marty appears only once without any identification of the character.

interpreter of party policies in this paper. When the news of the Soviet-German Pact reached Paris, Nizan was deeply shocked. However, he waited until Stalin marched his troops into Poland before making a final break and sending his letter of resignation to Jacques Duclos. What particularly enraged the communists, was the fact that he made his decision to leave the party known to the world by publishing his letter in a right-wing publication L'Oeuvre, an offence which was regarded by the party as unforgivable. According to communist practice, Nizan was immediately branded "a police agent," and although he was later killed at Audrùicq the party continued to vilify his memory. The French historian, J. Fauvet, wrote: "les communistes le [Nizan] poursuivront de leur haine vigilante; malgré sa mort, à Dunkerque, il restera officiellement 'policier.' Aragon se chargera de la légende."[27] Simone de Beauvoir also spoke of "la haine dont Aragon poursuivait Nizan" and wrote in her memoirs:

> Dans son roman, Les Communistes, il l'avait peint sous la figure d'un traître . . . Orfilat était chargé comme Nizan de la politique extérieure de l'Humanité; comme lui philosophe, il avait, comme lui, réglé leur compte à Brunschvicg et aux idéologues bourgeois; comme lui, écrit une étude sur un philosophe grec (sur Héraclite; Nizan c'était sur Epicure); de lui, comme de Nizan les non-communistes disaient; "C'est le seul marxiste intelligent, le seul avec qui on puisse causer." L'ayant ainsi campé, sans équivoque, Aragon montrait Orfilat-Nizan,

[27] J. Fauvet, Histoire du Parti Communiste français, II, p. 74.

> après le pacte germano-soviétique sanglotant d'épouvante à l'idée de partir pour le front, puis s'en allant quémander un emploi au ministère des Affaires étrangères où un honnête libéral lui faisait honte de sa trahison. La nullité littéraire de ce portrait n'en atténuait pas la perfidie.[28]

It should be added that Aragon not only represented Nizan as a traitor and a coward, but he also depicted his wife, (Edith in the novel), in a rather unpleasant light.[29]

In his treatment of Nizan, Aragon subscribed to the "for us or against us" principle, which always distinguished the hard-core stalinists from the others.[30] The deletion of Orfilat-Nizan was dictated by the desire to acquire a new look, as Aragon's harsh and inflexible attitude to his former collaborator of Ce Soir was not in harmony with the image of a great and tolerant humanitarian which the author was eager to project.

[28]Simone de Beauvoir, La Force des choses (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 221. See also; Paul Nizan intellectuel communiste, presented by Jean-Jacques Brochier (Paris: Maspero, 1970), and "Le Cas Nizan," L.T.M., 3, No. 22 (1947), 181-184.

[29]Considering that Aragon could never accept graciously any criticism of his work one wonders if Nizan's unfavourable opinion of Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale did not contribute to Aragon's attitude to his former colleague. (Nizan observed: "Le roman d'Aragon devient bien emmerdant.") No sign of hostility towards Nizan can be discerned prior to the year 1939. As late as December 1938 Aragon praised highly Nizan's latest novel La Conspiration in his article "Le roman terrible," Europe (December 1938), 433-452.

[30]This principle is stated in the observation: "Il fallait être avec Romain Rolland, Barbusse, Langevin, Baranger, ou l'on était contre eux." Les Communistes, 1, p. 150. (Deleted in O.C. edition).

There was another aspect of the Nizan case which clashed with the humanitarian image, namely, the light which Nizan's ideological deviation threw on the concept of socialist humanism. It demonstrated clearly that the Communist party expects its militants to put fidelity to the party ahead of family loyalties. As one of the former communists observed: "Idéalement, le Parti devait nous être plus proche et plus précieux que le compagnon le plus aimé."[31] A communist is expected to denounce any member of his family who is found guilty of any deviation from the party line.[32] In Les Communistes this concept of

[31] D. Desanti: Les Staliniens, p. 205. In January 1953 when André Marty was expelled from the party, his wife left him. "Vous avez pu, . . . m'enlever ma compagne de quinze ans de lutte," Marty remarked. Quoted by J. Fauvet in Histoire du Parti Communiste français, II, p. 257. Note.

[32] In 1933, the Soviet Union published a decree which made a whole family responsible for any act of treason committed by any one of its members; informing, even by children on their parents, was made compulsory; failure to inform even on husband or wife was punished with great severity. See: C. A. Micaud, Communism and the French Left (New York: F. A. Praeger, 1963). A spectacular demonstration of this principle took place during the Slansky Trial in Prague, when the wife of Art ur London, one of the defendants in the trial, asked that her husband be punished as a traitor. The case had its repercussions in France, as London's wife happened to be related to Raymond Guyot, member of the Political Bureau of the F.C.P. The affair caused a discussion in the French National Assembly on December 13, 1952 and aroused a great deal of indignation. See: A. Werth, France 1940-1955. A similar case was reported at the show-trial of the Industrial Party, in November, 1930, in Moscow. The daughter of one of the accused, Professor Ramzin, was compelled under threat of exile to demand her father's death and his wife had to denounce and divorce her husband to save her own life. See: Ph. Mosely, "1930-1932. Some Vignettes of Soviet Life," Survey (April, 1965), p. 52. Incidentally, it was in connection with the trial of 1930 that Aragon clamored:

loyalty to the party is portrayed in the party's reprobation of Orfilat-Nizan's wife, who refuses to denounce her husband and to leave him.[33]

It should also be mentioned that Nizan's case undermined one of the party's favourite myths, namely the concept of the party as a family. "C'est, dans le langage familier des communistes l'habitude d'appeler le Parti, la Famille," Aragon stated in L'Homme communiste.[34] Indeed, such phrases as "le parti était ma patrie, Le parti était ma famille"[35] are often encountered in the writings of French communists. Nizan's case revealed the fallacy of this concept. It was valid only as long as all the rules of the game were observed. Once accused of deviation, the militant ceased to be a member of "the family." Thus, Aragon had every reason to eliminate Orfilat-Nizan from the novel.

The third and most important area of change was in the domain of politics. These changes were dictated by the modification of Soviet and F.C.P. policies after

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Mort à ceux qui mettent en danger les conquêtes d'Octobre
Mort aux saboteurs de Plan Quinquennal
Louis Aragon, Le Front Rouge, p. 14.

[33]It is also reflected in the attitude of Langevin's daughter, a communist, who shows her contempt for her father's inability to understand the Hitler-Soviet Pact.

[34]Louis Aragon, L'Homme communiste, 1, p. 32. Note.

[35]Edgar Morin, Autocritique, p. 160.

the Twentieth congress. They can be divided into three groups. The first group embraces such party problems as the personality cult, the attitude towards socialists, the relationship between the party leadership and the militants, and similar issues. The second group deals with the party's interpretation of political events and the third concerns the practical application of the socialist realist doctrine.[36]

We shall begin our discussion of the first group of changes with some observations on the personality cult. Until the Twentieth congress the cult of personality was an indispensable element of the communist way of life. It was also one of the essential traits of socialist realism, since glorification of the leaders was supposed to help in the construction of socialism. In France the frenzy of the personality cult which characterized the last years of Stalin's life, communicated itself to the F.C.P. and affected many individuals in the party, but above all its Secretary General, Maurice Thorez. Although the cult of Thorez never became as unrestrained as that of Stalin, it was, nevertheless, extensively practised by the party membership.[37] The note which French communists sent to

[36] They often overlap.

[37] J. Fauvet, a French historian, observed that "le culte de la personnalité du secrétaire général atteint au lyrisme, peu avant et après sa maladie." (Thorez had been stricken with hemiplegia in October, 1950). Histoire du Parti Communiste français, II, p. 260.

Thorez during his convalescence in Moscow demonstrates the extent to which the party could go in the fostering of the cult. It reads:

> Ta présence donne un visage à l'espérance de tous. Et nous te sentons présent en chacun de nous. . . . Nous sommes ici des centaines qui avons conscience, à cette heure, que tu as donné à notre vie personnelle son sens et à notre parti le style de la grandeur. . . . Selon ton exemple, nous avons appris à aimer l'Union soviétique, à aimer Staline de cet amour dont on aime l'avenir lorsqu'il apparraît sous son visage le plus rayonnant...Sous ta direction, nous remplirons notre tâche avec honneur, car nous avons la volonté de te dire au jour éclatant de ton retour: grâce à tes enseignements et à ton exemple, nous avons su forger un parti et une France dignes de toi.[38]

Aragon, who considered that "Thorez était indispensable au pays, comme l'air pour respirer" contributed significantly to the creation of an aura around the party leader. Such terms as "le parti de Thorez," "les disciples de Thorez," "l'enseignement de Thorez," "l'esprit thorézien," "un professeur d'énergie nationale" (which incidentally evokes the memory of Aragon's infatuation with Barrès), appear constantly in Aragon's writings.[39] Aragon's articles on Thorez published under the headings "Maurice Thorez"[40] and "Maurice Thorez et la France"[41] are veritable eulogies of the French communist leader represented as "un héros d'un type nouveau, un héros réel." Aragon's personal

[38] Quoted in Fauvet, II, p. 260.

[39] L'Homme communiste, passim.

[40] Louis Aragon, L'Homme communiste, II, pp. 239-244.

[41] Ibid., 1, pp. 223-235.

relationship with Thorez may be surmised from the following lines which appeared in Ce Soir in November of 1944:

> Me comprendra-t-on si je dis qu'à chacun de mes actes, à l'heure du danger comme à l'instant d'écrire, je me suis toujours demandé: "Que penserait Maurice Thorez de tout cela?" et que je n'ai eu qu'une idée, être digne de lui pour être digne de la France?[42]

To welcome Thorez on his return from the Soviet Union in April 1953, Aragon published in l'Humanité a poem entitled Il revient--" ce poème où j'ai, sans craindre d'être 'cocasse,' mis le meilleur de mon coeur--"[43] which even the members of the Political bureau found excessive. Lecoeur tells us of their reaction:

> Malgré la coutume, ce poème indisposa les plus enclins à l'encensement. Nous en discutions un jour, à midi, entre membres du Bureau politique, en présence de Benoît Frachon et de Jacques Duclos. L'un de nous déclara "que l'auteur avait dépassé les bornes," un autre "n'avoir jamais été d'accord avec une telle façon de procéder," un autre encore "Bah! il n'en croit pas un mot."[44]

E. Morin also remarked: "La poésie d'Aragon saluant le retour de Maurice Thorez [faisait] rire en coulisses."[45] It would seem that in democratic France it was not necessary

[42] Quoted in L'Homme communiste, II, pp. 298-299.

[43] Ibid., p. 332.

[44] A. Lecoeur, L'Autocritique attendue (St.-Cloud: Editions Girault, 1955), p. 12. Lecoeur's testimony is corroborated by Ph. Robrieux, who reports that at the meeting of the Central Committee which took place in May 1956 at Arcueil Aragon's poem was severely criticized by Benoît Frachon. op. cit., p. 466.

[45] E. Morin, Autocritique, p. 109.

to toe so slavishly the Soviet line of the personality cult.[46] Aragon's acquiescence is a sign of the degree to which he was imbued with "l'esprit de parti."

After the Twentieth Congress the Secretary General decided that such expressions as "le Parti de Maurice Thorez" or "l'attachement inconditionnel à l'U.R.S.S." were not suitable and should disappear from the party vocabulary.[47] Attentive to the voice of the leader, Aragon toned down many references to Thorez and even stopped capitalizing the word "Parti" in the second version of Les Communistes. The same approach was used in reference to Stalin, whose name was deleted from the second version whenever possible.

One case of Stalin's cult has been singled out by Aragon himself and deserves our attention. The incident is taken from the author's own experience and concerns the

[46]The situation in the Soviet Union is well illustrated by Y. Yevtushenko. This Russian poet, in his autobiography, relates how the editor-in-chief of Soviet Sport was deeply disturbed to discover that there was no mention of Stalin in Yevtushenko's poem written for May Day. But not being able to contact the poet, the editor added four lines to the poem. Yevtushenko commented on the incident: "I soon had a thorough understanding of the rules; For a poem to go through there had to be a few lines devoted to Stalin. This even began to seem perfectly natural to me." Y. Yevtushenko, op. cit., p. 58.

[47]"Intervention de M. Thorez," C. du C., 32, No. 6 (1956), 776. According to Ph. Robrieux when the unsuitability of the expression "le Parti de Maurice Thorez" was discussed at the meeting of the Central Committee in April 1956, Aragon was the only member of the C.C. who protested against its elimination from the party's vocabulary, op. cit., p. 466.

Short Course of the History of the C.P.S.U.[48] which Aragon characterized as:

> . . . le célèbre abrégé . . . dû à Staline lui-même, qui a depuis été l'objet d'une très sévère critique là-bas, en tant que falsification de l'histoire et véritable bréviaire du "culte de la personnalité".[49]

In Stalin's time, the Short Course was regarded as an indispensable volume in the library of every communist. Castro Delgado, a Spanish communist, remarked:

> Les protestants one la Bible, les catholiques les saintes Ecritures, les fascistes Mein Kampf, nous avons, nous, l'Histoire du parti communiste (bolshevik) de l'U.R.S.S.[50]

The famous Short Course was shown to Aragon during the second World War by the driver of his sanitary unit, who explained to him the universal validity of the book. In Les Communistes Aragon transposes this incident in a scene where Raoul Blanchard, one of his positive heroes, explains to Jean de Moncey, a fellow soldier who claims not to understand the political situation, "c'est parce qu'il te manque un bon livre comme celui que j'ai là. . . Avec un bouquin comme ça. . . tu comprends toujours ce qui se passe."[51] Elsewhere in Les Communistes the author

[48]The History of the C.P.S.U.: Short Course was published in 1938, and until Stalin's death it was the basis of all political indoctrination. At first Stalin was proclaimed to be the author only of Chapter 4 (On Dialectical Materialism), but in the post-war years he was credited with having written the whole of it.

[49]Louis Aragon, O.C., XXVI, p. 310.

[50]Castro Delgado, J'ai perdu ma foi à Moscou (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), p. 65.

[51]Louis Aragon, Les Communistes, IV, p. 20.

stresses again the reverence with which Stalin's Short Course was treated and also indicates the importance the party attached to the study and the distribution of the book:

> Mais je n'oublie pas que si le Parti se tient comme ça, [courageously,] c'est parce qu'il a étudié l'exemple des Bolsheviks . . . On a eu de bons professeurs. Tu te rappelles, comme la direction a insisté, dans l'Huma, en mai, juin, pour la vente de masse de l'Histoire du Parti Communiste de l'URSS? Les camarades, ils voyaient loin . . . on dit que c'est Staline lui-même qui l'a écrit, ce livre-là . . . il ne s'agissait pas de le laisser en stocks pour les argousins à Daladier, peut-être.[52]

The inclusion of these passages about Stalin's Short Course, was, we believe, not accidental. It was dictated not only by the desire to show communist attitudes as the author witnessed them during the Second World War, but also by the party line of the late forties when Aragon was writing the novel. When in the summer of 1948 Tito was accused of Trotskyism, many communists began to have doubts about the correctness of the Kremlin's line. Alarmed by the defections and the ideological ferment in the communist parties, the Soviet authorities issued instructions via the Communist Information Bureau urging all party organizations to study the Short Course. A campaign to this effect was begun by all communist parties. Thus German communists published the decision of the Central Committee under the title "Uber die Verstärkung des Studiums der Geschichte der KPdSU."

[52]Louis Aragon, Les Communistes, IV, p. 219. Deleted in 1967.

> Wie Peitschenhiebe gingen Anordnungen zum Studium der Geschichte der KPdSU auf die Partei nieder. Allen Functionären wurde sur Pflicht gemacht, den Kurzen Lehrgang zu studieren,[53]

wrote Wolfgang Leonhard. Hence Aragon's particular interest in the Short Course.

Aragon of course was not alone in his praise of the Short Course. Veneration of the work and faith in its universal validity became a socialist realist cliché everywhere, as can be judged from the following passage taken from V. Il'enkov's novel The Great Highway:

> Father Degtyarev brought in a small volume and said: "Everything is said here in the fourth chapter." Vikentii Ivanovich took the book and thought: "There is no book on this earth that contains everything that a man needs. . ." But Vikentii Ivanovich typical sceptical intellectual, soon realized that he was wrong and accepted Degtyarev's view, which was that of all advanced people. This book contains everything that a man needs.[54]

It is understandable that after the official debunking of Stalin, the author should have wondered whether the references to the Short Course should be retained. He tells us about his decision:

> Les choses se sont passés comme je l'avais écrit, elles n'avaient pas alors les couleurs qu'elles ont prises depuis. Et, depuis, combien d'hommes qui pensaient comme moi sont-ils morts devant les fusils allemands avec à la dernière minute aux lèvres le nom de Staline? C'est là une des plus affreuses

[53]Wolfgang Leonhard, Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder (Cologne-Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1955), p. 536.

[54]Quoted in Abraham Tertz, On Socialist Realism (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), p. 158.

> tragédies du monde moderne. Je n'ai pas cru devoir ici vernir la vérité. Mais pouvais-je laisser penser qu'à l'heure où je republiais Les Communistes en 1967, rien de ce que je pensais, moi, de Staline en 1940 n'avait changé? . . . J'ai ajouté à cela, au texte tel qu'il fut écrit, simplement: "C'est beau la confiance."[55]

In the postscript to Les Communistes, Aragon claimed that he revised the passage guided by "l'esprit de responsabilité." The quotation indicates, however, that personal considerations weighed heavily in the change. It must also be pointed out that by adding "C'est beau la confiance," Aragon changed the original meaning of the passage and undermined the image of his positive hero, Raoul Blanchard, since the reader tends to extend the author's scepticism to his hero and the slightest doubt about the infallibility of the Short Course was tantamount to treason and incompatible with the image of the true communist militant.

Another passage which displayed the author's intention to glorify Stalin is also worth mentioning. In the book, a prisoners' convoy happens to be in the vicinity of the approaching German troops. Aragon wrote:

> L'escorte, craignant que les prisonniers ne profitent de la pagaille pour s'échapper, avait collé les hommes contre un kiosque à musique et les avait fusillés. Le commandant ne racontait pas cela pour ce fait, somme toute banal: mais c'étaient des communistes, la plupart, et vous savez ce qu'ils criaient en mourant? Vive la France! Vive Staline![56]

[55]Louis Aragon, "La fin du 'Monde Réel,'" O.C., XXVI, p. 310.

[56]Louis Aragon, Les Communistes, VI, pp. 57-58.

In 1967 the attitude to Stalin required some modification; thus, the second version contains a sentence added to the above quotation: "Il y a des choses comme cela, qui prendront sens, diversement, par la suite."[57]

An important number of revisions resulted from the change in the party's attitude towards socialists. One of the objectives of the first version was to discredit the socialist party and above all its leaders. Hostility of the F.C.P. towards socialists was reflected in all communist publications of the years 1939 and 1940. Maurice Thorez wrote in an article in 1939 of the socialist leader, that

> . . . abandonnant ses contorsions et ses sifflements de reptile répugnant, Blum donne désormais libre cours à ses instincts féroces de bourgeois exploiteur qui a tremblé un moment pour ses privilèges. . . il aboie à plein gueule contre la classe ouvrière, l'Union soviétique, le communisme. . . . Le chacal Blum prend la tête de la meute hurlante déchaînée contre le communisme, contre l'Union Soviétique.[58]

Similar language was used by many other leading communists. Although Aragon denied that he showed any personal hostility

[57]Louis Aragon, O.C., XXVI, p. 78. In La Mise à mort the inspiration of Stalin during the war is described in similarly tragic terms: "D'autres, devant les fusils, quand ils avaient si peu de temps, si peu de mots à leur dernière bouche, juste la place d'un cri, leur pays, trouvèrent encore à jeter aux bourreaux ce seul défi, Staline. . . comme tout est amer, amer . . .," p. 58.

[58]Maurice Thorez, "Portrait: Blum, tel qu'il est," L'Internationale communiste, No. 2 (1940). Quoted by Fauvet in Histoire du Parti Communiste français, II, p. 35.

towards socialists in the novel, a passage such as "et les grandes queules socialistes. Ce Blum! . . . Son article de ce matin, L'atroce événement. . . quel crocodile!"[59] indicates certain linguistic affinities with the above mentioned quotation. Indeed the hatred of socialists was so strong that communists preferred the fascists to them, as can be judged from the following tirade: "Mais indiscutablement, entre le Colonel [leader of the French pro-fascist group] et Leon Blum, il Barbentane préférait le Colonel."[60]

In the post-Stalin years the concept of peaceful co-existence brought about a reversal of communist policies with regard to socialists. The Soviets demonstrated a conscious and persistent effort to prove that the enmity of yesterday no longer shaped party policies. The F.C.P. followed suit. Aragon, in conformity with the new line, deleted the above and many other references to Leon Blum, as well as sentences of the type: "C'est leur truc! Un Laval fait celui qui s'entend avec les Russes, puis un socialiste s'arrange pour que ça n'ait pas de suites:

[59]Louis Aragon, Les Communistes, II, p. 120. A. Rossi, in a book published in 1951, attributed the authorship of Thorez's article to Aragon. Although whether or not Aragon was responsible for the anti-Blum article is not important, he could not have avoided knowing that it was attributed to him. That would be one more reason why he should delete it.

[60]Ibid., III, p. 187. This sentence was also deleted.

rien à dire, c'est un socialiste."[61] Moreover, to make quite sure that his attitude to socialists would not be misunderstood, the author introduced a number of passages indicating the conciliatory attitude of the communists towards their adversaries. We read, for example, in the revised version:

> C'était de sa faute, ce mouvement qu'il avait eu contre Clodius. C'est une maladie, un socialiste, et tout de suite, nous, on crie! Évidemment, les socialistes, on en a gros sur la patate avec eux. Mais eux avec nous? Ça vous échappe, on dit n'importe, et puis le fossé se creuse un peu plus. . .

And a little further:

> Il disait ça, Blanchard, puis il se rappelait tout à l'heure Clodius. . . c'était bien le moment . . . à parler du Populaire! Il s'en voulait. Personne ne le lui dirait. Mais il était impardonnable. Les socialistes, bien sûr, c'est les socialistes. Mais qu'est-ce qu'on peut faire sans eux . . .[62]

This tolerance was, of course, inconceivable at the time when socialists joined other parties in the French Assembly demanding the death penalty for communist parlamentarians.[63] If one bears in mind that one of the essential precepts of socialist realism is the demand to show a "typical" communist and that intolerance was one of the salient features of every communist, one might observe that by changing Blanchard's attitude towards socialists Aragon removed one

[61] Les Communistes, 1, p. 222.

[62] Louis Aragon, O.C., XXIII, pp. 123-124. Le Populaire-official organ of the Socialist party.

[63] See: Florimonde Bonte, Le Chemin de l'honneur.

of the traits that made Blanchard "typical." The game of politics made the pure practice of socialist realism a difficult task.

The changes in the text concerning socialists demanded the deletion from the novel of François Chasseigne, a former communist who later joined the Socialist party. In the original version of Les Communistes Aragon was particularly severe in his delineation of Chasseigne and not without reason. When the communists were accused of anti-patriotic activities, in 1939, it was Chasseigne who declared:

> Ce que nous aurions voulu . . . ce que j'ai réclamé en vain du Gouvernement, parce que je connaissais, pour être passé à l'intérieur de la maison, certains secrets, c'est qu'au début de la guerre, on prit la mesure qui s'imposait et que, sans autre forme de procès, il y eut pour certains d'entre eux [the communists] le coup de pistolet derrière la nuque.[64]

Aragon presented Chasseigne as an "expert en trahison, dénonciateur de ceux qu'il connaît bien," but having shown tolerance to socialists in general and possibly considering that the treatment which François Chasseigne advocated with regard to communists was too reminiscent of the Soviet methods used under Stalin, he deleted most of the passages dealing with this character.[65]

Certain parts of the novel dealing with the party

[64] F. Bonte, Le Chemin de l'honneur, p. 120.

[65] Les Communistes, III, pp. 304, 305, 306, 312, 313.

leadership and party relationship with the Soviet Union were also revised by the author. Many historiographers and former communists pointed out that at the beginning of the war the party leadership was less effective than it might have been since many leaders were imprisoned or mobilized or else had gone into hiding.[66] Hence, the deletion of sentences of this type: "les dirigeants effectifs de ce grand corps, dont la présence était partout sensible. . .";[67] or of this:

> A qui demander conseil, à qui parler? Si seulement Marguerite savait où atteindre Pierre Cormeilles..[one of the communist leaders who was in the army] Il lui expliquerait le pacte, lui. . . Elle saurait quoi répondre.[68]

The last passage also reveals the fact that communist militants were not guided by personal appreciation of current events but waited for party pronouncements in order to adjust their opinions to the party line.

Further minor changes concerned certain references to the Soviet Union such as: "il ne croyait pas une minute que son parti était dirigé de Moscou, recevait des ordres et de l'argent de Staline."[69] This sentence

[66] See: J. Fauvet, Histoire du Parti Communiste français; A. Lecoeur, Le Parti Communiste français et la Résistance.

[67] Les Communistes, III, p. 272.

[68] Ibid., 1, p. 141.

[69] Ibid., II, p. 183.

was deleted; others were modified by an afterthought. In the first version, for instance, Aragon wrote:

> Tu sais, le soir: on attrape Moscou.
> Non! qu'est-ce qu'ils disent? Tu sais,
> sur la guerre ici, pas grand-chose. Mais
> hier, tiens, ils ont parlé des mines, là-bas
> de Donbass. . . ils ont raconté un mineur,
> comment il a inventé pour augmenter
> l'abattage. . .[70]

This piece of information obviously had little to do with France, nevertheless every mention of the first socialist state was considered so important that even in the second version of the novel Aragon instead of deleting it simply added: "C'est peut-être pas tout à fait d'actualité, mais. . . ."[71]

The next group of changes concerned the party's interpretation of political events, particularly of the Soviet-German Pact and its consequences. To understand Aragon's motives in revising his text it is necessary to sum up briefly the circumstances leading to the signing of the pact and its nature.

The documents, which became available after Germany's defeat,[72] show that as early as October, 1938, Hitler's

[70] Ibid., VI, p. 35.

[71] Louis Aragon, O.C., XXVI, p. 62.

[72] After the collapse of Germany, the archives of the German Foreign Office fell into the hands of the Allies. The documents concerning German-Soviet relations between March, 1939, and June, 1941, were published by the American government under the title: Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941 (Washington: 1948). A large number of documents produced at the Nuremberg trial were also published under the title: Nazi Conspiracy and Agression (Washington: R. W. Barrett and W. E. Jackson, publisher n.d.). The Nuremberg files were opened in 1948.

principal problem was to solve the question of Danzig and the Corridor in agreement with the Poles by offering them a share in the partition of the Ukraine, which Germany was planning to seize. Meanwhile, international communism campaigned violently against the "criminal" plans of the Hitlerite fascists. In 1939, however, Stalin began to seek an accommodation with Hitler. He declared publicly that all reports of Germany's plans for Poland and Russia were malicious rumours spread by Anglo-French and American agents who wished to stir up trouble between Germany and the U.S.S.R. This statement was made during a speech on Soviet foreign policy delivered to the Eighteenth Congress of the Bolshevik Party on March 10, 1939. The speech also carried a direct appeal to Germany in a sentence in which Stalin stated that he had decided not to allow the Soviet Union to be drawn into conflicts by warmongers who are accustomed to get others to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them.[73] These opening moves in a "rapprochement" with Germany were quickly followed up. In May 1939 Stalin clearly indicated the change in his foreign policy by dismissing Litvinov, who favoured co-operation with France and England, and by appointing Molotov Commissar for Foreign Affairs.[74] The explanation of

[73] J. Stalin, Report on the Work of the Central Committee to the XVIIIth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (London: Modern Books [1939]).

[74] On June 15, 1939, Astakhov, the Russian Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin, informed Draganov, the Bulgarian minister in Berlin, that the Soviet Union was trying to

the change in policy was given by A. Zhdanov in an article published in Izvestia in June, 1939, in which he wrote:

> I believe that the British and French governments have no wish for an equal treaty with the USSR. . . It seems to me that the British and French desire not a real treaty acceptable to the USSR, but only talks about a treaty in order to play upon public opinion in their countries about the supposedly unyielding attitude of the USSR and thus to make it easier for themselves to make a deal with the aggressors.[75]

The "rapprochement" led to the conclusion of a non-aggression pact and finally to the secret agreement, the "secret protocol," which contained a definition of the political and territorial interests of Germany and the Soviet Union. In the "secret protocol" the two contracting parties fixed the line of demarcation between their spheres of interest. Thus the non-aggression pact was in reality a deliberate smoke-screen since the main issue between Germany and the Soviet Union was not the preservation of peace between the two countries but the joint settlement of the status of Eastern Europe.[76]

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make up its mind on which of three courses to follow: "the conclusion of the pact with England and France: a further dilatory treatment of the pact negotiations; or a 'rapprochement' with Germany." He added, that this last possibility "was closest to her [Russia's] desires." A. Rossi, The Russo-German Alliance, p. 8; See also: G. L. Weinberg, Germany and the Soviet Union: 1939-1941 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954).

[75]For full text see: Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy (London: Jane Degres, editor, 1953).

[76]For the text of the "Secret Protocol" see: A. Rossi; The Russo-German Alliance (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1951), pp. 40-41.

In Les Communistes, Aragon took his clue from Zhdanov's article,[77] represented the Franco-Anglo-Soviet negotiations for a collective security pact as a comedy and defended the right of the Soviet Union to protect her interests:

> La comédie durait, on n'avançait pas. . . A Moscou, des envoyés sans pouvoir amusaient le tapis. . . Est-ce que ce n'était pas le droit d'un gouvernement d'assurer, dans ces conditions, la sécurité de sa frontière, par un pacte de non-agression avec un voisin dangereux, auquel d'autres méditaient de le jeter en proie, pour le détourner de ses ambitions occidentales? puisque ces autres-là ne voulaient pas donner les moyens de se défendre à ceux dont ils feignaient de rechercher l'alliance.[78]

In fact, Stalin's invitation to the British and French Governments to send military missions to Moscow, was inspired by the interests of the Soviet Union. France and England had nothing to offer Stalin, but negotiations with them allowed him to exert pressure on Hitler and raise the price of his co-operation with Germany, in return for which the Soviet Union was assured control of the Baltic states, of Eastern Poland and of Bessarabia.

As far as the interpretation of the German-Soviet Pact itself was concerned it was regarded by many, including the socialists, as a military alliance. Communists presented it as a non-aggression pact and hailed the occupation of the Baltic countries by the Soviet Union as an act of liberation. Hence we read in Les Communistes:

[77] Zhdanov's view was accepted by all foreign communist parties.

[78] Les Communistes, 1, p. 224.

> Ils ont dit, les Russes ont fait un traité militaire avec Hitler. Là-dessus, les Russes flanquent les gros propriétaires à la porte de la Lettonie, de l'Esthonie et tout le bazar, ils établissent leur armée devant celle des Nazis. . . vous ne ferez pas un pas de plus. . . la guerre n'ira pas plus loin. . . et Molotov, il dit: une stricte neutralité...non, pour Blum et Compagnie, il faut à tout prix qu'il y ait une alliance militaire germano-soviétique, pour qu'ils n'aient pas menti, eux, les enfants de choeur, et qu'on continue à arrêter ici les communistes. . . les seuls qui avaient raison.[79]

At the time of the conflict Aragon welcomed the partition of Poland. "Aragon n'est pas déconcerté par l'action de la Russie en Pologne, puisqu'il considère chaque victoire de l'URSS comme une victoire de l'humanité" wrote one of his compatriots.[80] However, when Aragon was rewriting the novel, he admitted that in 1940 "les choses . . . n'avaient pas alors les couleurs qu'elles ont prises depuis."[81] He deleted the above quoted references to the pact and a number of others related to Poland and the Finnish-Soviet war.[82]

As far as reaction to the pact was concerned, Aragon claimed in Les Communistes that party members accepted the German-Soviet pact and showed a considerable understanding of Stalin's policies--"dans l'ensemble, les gars ne

[79] Les Communistes, II, p. 342.

[80] Stéphane (Roger), Chaque homme est lié au monde (Paris: Editions du Sagittaire 1946), p. 20.

[81] Louis Aragon, O.C., XXVI, p. 310.

[82] Les Communistes, II, p. 104; III, pp. 155, 392; IV, p. 76.

trouvaient pas qu'il avait eu tort, Staline."[83] This opinion was not shared by other communists who conceded in later years that the pact came as a shock to communists and anti-communists alike. Auguste Lecoeur wrote in Le Partisan: "Aux yeux de la majorité le pacte représentait une trahison des intérêts nationaux en laissant à Hitler les mains libres pour attaquer la France."[84] Similar testimony came from many other sources.[85] Hence, the deletion of passages dealing with the acceptance of the pact.

Other changes related to the Soviet-German pact concerned the trial of communist parliamentarians accused of acting on behalf of the Third International. Though the details of this conflict are beyond the scope of our study, a brief mention of its essential features might be useful. First of all we should note that the F.C.P. changed its interpretation of the conflict between France, England and Germany no fewer than three times.[86] There was no

[83] Ibid., II, p. 112.

[84] Auguste Lecoeur, Le Partisan, p. 106.

[85] Pierre Hervé, a former communist, stated: "Lorsqu' éclata en 1939 le coup de tonnerre du Pacte germano-soviétique . . . je pus me rendre compte du désarroi qui s'empara des milieux intellectuels communistes et communisants. . . . Dans les milieux de gauche, on maudissait l'Union soviétique. Dieu et César sont-ils communistes? p. 18. It should be mentioned that twenty-one communist parliamentarians out of seventy-three and one senator out of two openly broke with the party in protest against the pact.

[86] J. Fauvet, Histoire du Parti Communiste français; A. Kriegel, Les Communistes français; Ph. Robrieux, op. cit.

mention of the "imperialist war" before October, 1939. At the beginning of the conflict, the war was anti-fascist and the communist Parliamentary Party voted for the military credits at the sitting of September 2, 1939. The war became "imperialist" when Germany and the Soviet Union began their campaign for immediate peace. In a joint declaration published on September 29, 1939, the Soviet and German governments stated that France and England would be "responsible for the continuation of the war" because they "had persuaded Poland to refuse an amicable settlement of the Danzig question."[87] This peace campaign brought the F.C.P. directly into play. On October 1, 1939, communist parliamentarians sent a letter to President Herriot urging him to bring the war to an end.[88] Subsequently the party continued to agitate for peace all through the period of the "phony war," never ceasing in its attacks on England and France, which were branded as "aggressors and imperialist warmongers."

Whether the communists contributed to the collapse of the French Army and to the defeat of France by their "intensive and systematic efforts to spread defeatism," as has been suggested by A. Rossi,[89] is a question of

[87] Pravda, 30 Nov. 1939. English-language broadcast from Radio Moscow, Nov. 29, 1939.

[88] The letter was sent by Florimond Bonte and Arthur Ramette in the name of the "Groupe Ouvrier et Paysan Français." For the text see F. Bonte, Le Chemin de l'honneur.

[89] A. Rossi, The Russo-German Alliance, p.103.

opinion. It is clear, however, that German-Soviet collaboration in economic and political matters influenced the F.C.P. policies during the "phony war." The position adopted by the F.C.P. induced the government first to deprive communist parliamentarians of their parliamentary provileges and later to institute proceedings against them. They were accused

> . . . d'avoir, à Paris, ou sur le territoire français, entre le 27 septembre et le 5 octobre 1939, dans tous les cas depuis temps non prescrit, en participant à la constitution et au fonctionnement du Groupement dit "groupe Ouvrier et Paysan Français," notamment à la rédaction et à la diffusion d'une lettre en date du 1er octobre, 1939, adressée à M. le Président de la Chambre des Députés, et prônant la paix sous les auspices de l'Union Soviétique, participé à une activité ayant directement, ou indirectement pour objet de propager les mots d'ordre émanant ou relevant de la IIIe Internationale Communiste et d'organismes contrôlés en fait par cette IIIe Internationale.[90]

The trial, which took place in March and April of 1940, resulted in the conviction of the communist parliamentarians.

The third and final position of the F.C.P. was adopted in June 1941 when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union. In the wake of this development the war became "anti-hitlérien" and the communists joined whole-heartedly in the struggle against the occupants.

The period discussed in Les Communistes coincided with the "imperialist" phase which was characterized by the pacifism of the F.C.P. One of the protagonists of

[90]Florimonde Bonte, La Chemin de l'honneur, p. 144.

the novel, the communist leader Billoux, states clearly:

> Les communistes sont pour les guerres de libération et d'indépendance. Si vous voulez prendre cet argument du programme de l'Internationale Communiste, alors c'est que c'est bien une guerre impérialiste qui se mène actuellement.[91]

In Les Communistes anti-German propaganda is conspicuous by its absence. The chief propaganda targets are the French and English "imperialists" and the French government.[92] German cruelty and bestiality, which had a prominent place in communist propaganda after June, 1941, were played down in Aragon's novel, with the exception of the German treatment of Moroccan troops.

Aragon deleted a considerable portion of the text dealing with the trial of the communist parliamentarians. The considerations by which the author was guided are not difficult to discern. Firstly, the events leading to the trial and communist behaviour during its course had become a subject of controversy among leading French and foreign historians.[93] The destruction and falsification of certain

[91]Louis Aragon, Les Communistes, IV, p. 111.

[92]Roy A. Medvedev in his book Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), states: "Stalin did not merely stop antifascist propaganda in the Soviet Union. In plain violation of the resolutions of the VIIth Comintern Congress, he sent a directive to all Communist parties demanding curtailment of the struggle against German fascism, naming Anglo-French imperialism as the basic aggressive force, which was to become the main target of Communist propaganda.", p. 443.

[93]Even such a left-oriented historian as Alexander Werth was compelled to admit: "But whether important or

documents pertaining to communist activities did nothing to clarify the party's position. The bias of Aragon's original account was too obvious not to arouse some scepticism. Secondly, many communist adversaries at the trial had been socialists and were treated severely by the author in the first version, and the new line of the F.C.P. demanded a benevolent attitude towards them. Thirdly, the persecution of the communist parliamentarians had been represented by Aragon as a result of a wanton hatred of them by the governing classes, whereas the actual motivation was, at least partially, a response to the attitude adopted by the communists against the war.[94]

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unimportant, Communist propaganda about the 'imperialist war' did, in some measure, however small, contribute to a disaster which was not in the interests of the Soviet Union, and which ,indeed, might have led to its annihilation but for England's refusal to surrender after the fall of France." France - 1940-1955. (London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1956), p. 189. According to Werth, Stalin played on the loyalty of the F.C.P., sacrificed the French Communists and condemned them to years of persecution.

[94]Once again it was Roy Medvedev who observed: "At that time they [the communists parties] were considered sections of the Comintern, obliged to submit to discipline. Thus the Comintern's declaration that France and Great Britain were the aggressors, while Germany wanted peace, put the French and British Communists in an especially difficult position. The logic of the directive required Communists in those countries to take a defeatist stand, or at least to refuse support to the military efforts of their bourgeois governments. . . . But in France, where the Party was strong, this antiwar position markedly weakened national resistance to German aggression, and facilitated a government ban on the Communist Party," Op.cit, p. 443.

Finally, it could be argued that in his representation of the trial and of events leading to it, the author, instead of arousing the reader's indignation at the treatment received by the French parliamentarians, invited him to make comparisons between parliamentary democracy and the arbitrary character of the Soviet judicial system as revealed by Khrushchev.[95]

In general it is evident that Aragon's representation of the Hitler-Stalin pact and the events that followed its ratification did not reflect the historical truth.[96] This failure must be seen as the key to many revisions in the second version.

The last set of changes that merits comment concerns the elimination or attenuation of socialist realist clichés. These changes fall into two categories. The first group concerns clichés relating to the concept of the "positive hero," the second deals with communist semantics.

Although Aragon has claimed that his novels have no positive heroes, several of his protagonists in Les

[95]Apparently to avoid unnecessary comparisons, the author also deleted many passages dealing with police brutality, a theme which had hitherto occupied a prominent place in Aragon's novels. See: Les Communistes, III, pp. 113, 114, 116.

[96]There is every reason to believe that at the time of the composition of the novel (1948-1951), Aragon was familiar with at least part of the available evidence: one must remember that Nazi-Soviet Relations was published in 1948, and that Elsa Triolet attended some of the sessions of the Nuremberg trials.

Communistes, among them Raoul Blanchard, Cesbron and Guillaume Vallier, are clearly intended as exemplary, possessing such common popular qualities as cordiality, simplicity, modesty, and vigilance. Here is Aragon's delineation of Armand Barbentane, one of the positive characters in the novel:

> Armand éprouve à chaque instant cette nécessité de devenir exemplaire, de dresser sa dénégation muette devant l'image fausse que tous autour de lui doivent avoir de nous . . . muette, n'est pas le mot. . . il y a des façons différentes de parler, et l'une d'elles est d'être précisément ce que l'ennemi s'efforce de démontrer que nous ne sommes pas.[97]

One addition to the delineation of Armand in the second version of the novel demonstrates the extent to which a communist intellectual is always conscious of his position with respect to the working class which, according to communist theory, always possesses a sound judgment of historical situations. When Armand is offered the chance to escape from German captivity, his first reaction is: "Non, je vous remercie. Cela ferait de moi un déserteur."[98] To this the author added:

> Il n'a pas plus tôt dit cela, qu'il rougit jusqu'aux oreilles comme un écolier pris en faute. Ne vient-il pas de céder à un prejugé de sa classe, de sa classe d'origine. Jamais un ouvrier n'aurait rejeté ainsi pour une idée toute faite, la possibilité de continuer la lutte, autrement, d'échapper aux mains

[97] Les Communistes, II, p. 37.

[98] Ibid., VI, p. 124.

> de l'ennemi, de l'ennemi de classe. . . Il profitera de la première occasion. S'il a laissé échapper celle-ci c'est peut-être simple lâcheté, plus simple de rester à l'abri, dans l'église, que de sortir dans ce no man's land où les balles arrivent de n'importe où. . .[99]

Another of Aragon's heroes, a communist deputy and member of the Central Committee, Cesbron, is represented as an unassuming, sympathetic character well-liked by his superior, a medical doctor

> . . . que ça amusait d'avoir un député communiste outre que Cesbron lui avait bien plu, pas bruyant, ne renâclant pas au travail: Il [the doctor] allait à Paris comme de rien faire avec sa petite auto, et pendant ce temps-là, le méd.-aux, [Cesbron], veillait à tout, il n'y aurait pas d'ennui, c'était un garçon sérieux. . . enfin le médecin-chef, qui s'ennuyait ferme dans ce coin perdu de l'Aisne, aurait bien gardé ce dangereux révolutionnaire.[100]

The exemplary loyalty of the rank and file to their leaders and their vigilance are stressed in the behaviour of Guillaume Vallier:

> Alors, Cesbron. . . oui, il avait des démangeaisons de lui parler au camarade Cesbron. Ici, pas question. Même s'il allait s'embêter à s'arracher les poils de nez, Guillaume savait bien qu'il ne devait pas le compromettre, un député, et puis de CC encore. . . Il veillerait seulement sur lui de loin.[101]

[99] Louis Aragon, O.C., XXIV, p. 125. The incident has autobiographical accents considering that Aragon wrote: "Je lui [Armand] donnerai plus tard, dans Les Communistes, une vie qui ressemble à la mienne (politiquement)." O.C., XI, p. 18. We also know that Aragon himself escaped from German captivity.

[100] Les Communistes, II, p. 124.

[101] Ibid., p. 185.

Communist sensitivity to the plight of comrades and unshaken faith in the party are reflected in Raoul Blanchard and his wife Paulette. When Raoul learns that two communist parliamentarians, disabled servicemen of the First World War, are in prison where they receive harsh treatment, his reaction is depicted as follows:

> Il y avait une grosse larme au coin de l'oeil de Raoul. . . Paulette la lui enleva. Elle dit, avec sa petite voix décidée: Mais tu sais, le Parti. . . ils n'auront pas le Parti!"[102]

All these quotations demonstrate clearly that the author followed the narrow path of orthodoxy, and so he deleted them and similar passages from the novel. Other clichés were attenuated by the author by added reflexions. For example; while on leave, one of the protagonists finds his wife changed and asks her who was responsible for the change. The first version reads: "Elle s'appuya contre lui, abondonna sa tête contre son épaule, et ses yeux se perdirent. Elle murmurait comme un aveu: 'Le Parti'."[103] In the second version, the author changed the last sentence to: "Elle aurait bien murmuré: 'Le parti', " and added: "mais" . . . .[104]

Aragon's orthodoxy was not less obvious in his use of language. It has been pointed out by many historians that in his use of the written and spoken word every com-

[102] Ibid., III, p. 223.

[103] Ibid., II, p. 192.

[104] Louis Aragon, O.C., XXIII, p. 259.

munist author is a polemicist: language is an important weapon in his arsenal. The initial use of language as a weapon in the struggle against the adversary dates from 1900 when Lenin, in his conflict with the Social Democrats, stressed the value of verbal attack on party enemies and favoured the "most offensive and contemptuous mode of expression" against party opponents.[105] Verbal violence became particularly accentuated in Stalin's time and venomous abuse of the adversary became part of the Marxist tradition.

Beside verbal abuse, the language used by the communists acquired an added characteristic--conventionality, which required "la lecture entre les lignes."

> N'importe quel militant y est exercé à cause de la tradition de "secret" dans le Parti, mais aussi plus simplement à cause du langage codé, convenu, employé rituellement dans les organes de presse. Les temps de verbe, les adjectifs, les adverbes tout était codé, par exemple dans le bulletin du Kominform. Si la "classe ouvrière" de tel pays "entrait en lutte. . ." on savait que c'était un encouragement: le combat demeurait faible. Si le bulletin employait le futur c'est que la "conscience des masses" (c'est-à-dire le P.C. local) était sans emprise. Si un mouvement se trouvait dans les mains d'"irresponsables" ou d'"aventuriers" qui "tentaient de fourvoyer les masses" c'est qu'une grève ou une action s'était déclenchée sous direction trotskiste, anarchiste ou en tout cas échappant au contrôle du P.C.

Thus wrote a former party member.[106] Party militants were

[105] V. I. Lenin, Selected Works (New York: International Publishers, 1943), III, p. 495.

[106] D. Desanti, Les Staliniens, p. 188.

expected to use this language of convention. For instance, in 1952, when Leon Mauvais, a French communist leader, asked for the expulsion of André Marty from the F.C.P., he pointed out that in the last document which Marty addressed to the Political Bureau "il a évoqué les trotskystes, non en parlant de la 'racaille trotskyste' ou du 'groupe de policiers trotskystes' qui est notre langage habituel et naturel à l'encontre de ces individus, mais a parlé au contraire de 'l'internationale trotskyste' et même d'un 'parti trotskyste.'"[107]

Since one of the objectives of Les Communistes in its first version was to portray the evil characteristics and actions of the adversary, Aragon made wide use of verbal violence and of conventional communist language. Political groups opposed to the F.C.P. were represented as "indicateurs," "liquidateurs," "bonzes," "salauds," "toute cette racaille à Daladier." Parliamentarians of the French Assembly who were hostile to communism were compared with "la meute" which "gronde" and similar unfavourable objects. Individuals regarded as enemies of communism were not treated with more consideration. In his desire to strip his antagonists of human dignity, Aragon used the vocabulary he deemed suitable. Such expressions as "un petit espion," "un sale petit bonhomme,"

[107]"Le rapport de Léon Mauvais au Comité central du Parti Communiste français," L'Humanité, 10 Dec. 1952. Reported by Cohn-Bendit in Le Gauchisme (Paris: Seuil, 1968), p. 194.

"ce petit rat . . . qui est notoirement impuissant," characterized the antagonists. The list could be continued indefinitely, but the sample is sufficient to demonstrate the pattern. In his attempt to make his polemical style more acceptable, Aragon deleted most of the references to individuals as well as many a disparaging remark about groups and government bodies.

To the main bulk of revisions should be added some peripheral changes such as the deletion of readily identifiable biographical details, direct propaganda quotes taken from Marxist classics, and some changes of an apparently personal character.[108]

In this chapter we have tried to show some of the revisions made by the author and to indicate the reasons for the deletions and modifications. It must be understood of course that the many specific reasons which we have mentioned in our discussion do not exclude a host of other considerations which may have guided Aragon in the revision of the novel.

[108] As for instance, the curious change in the colour of Cécile's eyes. In the first version Aragon speaks of "ses yeux bruns," in the second version they become "ses yeux bleus." O.C., XXIII, p. 37. A lapse of memory or the cult of Elsa? One wonders. . .

Space does not permit a more detailed analysis, but even a partial examination of the texts allows us to draw the following conclusions: A comparison of the contents of the two versions reveals that they stand for two different phases of official party policy towards certain aspects of political life and towards literary representation of the period, and that the re-writing of the novel was dictated by the change in the historical context. Most of the revisions made by the author were concerned with various political aspects of the novel. The last volumes, which are less concerned with politics and more with military operations, contain few modifications except those of style.

The change in the historical context had two main consequences. Firstly, the author felt it necessary to "revise" certain attitudes the party had held in the past in order to satisfy the political exigencies of the present, and he wished to update statements which had been refuted by history. Secondly, historical circumstances were now forcing Aragon to re-examine his own past and to try to improve the image which for years had been associated with his name.

The first version of Les Communistes reflected faithfully the atmosphere in party circles around 1939-1940; it revealed the acute hatreds that had developed between socialists and communists, the relentless persecution of the party's adversaries, as well as F.C.P. official

policies and beliefs. In short, the novel reflected the historical period, and as such is important for the comprehension of the F.C.P. at that stage in its development.[109]

From the point of view of the socialist realist doctrine the first version represented, to borrow Pierre Daix's expression, "le mensonge politique organisé du réalisme socialiste officiel."[110] In his treatment of adversaries Aragon did not stop even at falsehood, whereas he represented his communists as having all the virtues expected from a party militant.

The second version, although it still claims to depict the period of 1939-1940, actually reflects the manner of thinking and the attitude of the F.C.P. during the post-Stalin era and thereby indicates the extent of the change which had occurred in party policies. After the Twentieth congress the party tended to deemphasize its peculiar characteristics in the interest of fostering alliances with other political groups. Gone are the personality cult, its determined hatred of the Socialist party, the reference to events refuted by history, the stereotyped communist vocabulary and the traditional

[109]It is no accident that the historian Guy Rossi-Landi directs the reader to the first version of the novel with the remark that "les références perpétuelles à l'actualité, certains chapitres, sur la vie aux armées ou la situation politique, l'évocation très complète du dilemme communiste, en font un indispensable document." La Drôle de Guerre (Paris: Armand Colin, 1971), p. 247, note.

[110]Pierre Daix, Ce que je sais de Soljénytsine, p. 34.

socialist realist clichés. Although, in the revised version of Les Communistes the party members are still idealized, Aragon's positive characters lose much of their appeal from the party's earlier point of view. In this version, they even display such alien qualities (for an orthodox communist) as scepticism and tolerance towards the enemy. But what is above all striking in the second version of the novel is that Aragon does not hold out any promise for the future. The optimism of the official line of "les lendemains qui chantent" has given place to despondency and now shows clearly Aragon's rejection of the optimistic perspective of socialist realism. By the time Aragon was rewriting his novel his former hopeful views had changed considerably, as can be judged from the following confession:

> J'ai longtemps essayé de penser de moi-même que j'étais optimiste, je me suis forcé à le croire. J'aurais voulu l'être. J'ai sacrifié ma vie à le prétendre. . . . Pour les autres. J'ai vécu trop longtemps pour "garder la pose". Pardonnez-moi. . .[111]

It is, therefore, not surprising to read in the epilogue of Les Communistes:

> Le merveilleux optimisme qu'on a au fond de l'enfer terrestre! au fin fond. C'est comme l'enthousiasme, ça ne se garde pas. Ou mieux, certains vins, à consommer sur place. L'espérance supporte très mal le transport. Et pis encore celui du temps.[112]

[111] Louis Aragon, Henri Matisse, roman, I, p. 285. Marginal note dated 1969.

[112] Louis Aragon, O.C., XXVI, p. 265. Some years later Aragon wrote: "Je ne connais rien de plus cruel en ce bas monde, que les optimistes de

We have dwelt at length on the Communistes for several reasons. Firstly, the novel itself is extremely long.[113] Secondly, Les Communistes is the only novel written by the author in strict conformity with the requirements of the socialist realist doctrine. Finally, the act of rewriting provides more insight into the meaning of socialist realism than any discussion about the doctrine. Every time the author tried to bring an incident closer to truth or reality he transgressed some rule of the socialist realist doctrine, thus demonstrating its basic fallacy.

Insofar as the attenuation of the author's image is concerned, our discussion cannot be terminated without a commentary on the post-script of the novel, which, according to the author, "peut être inscrit à la minute du grand procès que l'on intente aujourd'hui au réalisme dans son ensemble, comme une pièce qui doit figurer; précisons. . . dans le dossier de la défense."[114] In this "dossier" the author strikes the already familiar note of Le Roman inachevé. He presents himself as a

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décision. Ce sont les êtres d'une méchanceté tapageuse et dont on jurerait qu'ils se sont donné pour mission d'imposer le règne aveugle de la sottise." "La valse des adieux." L.F., 11 October 1972, p. 3.

[113] About as long as the four preceding volumes of the cycle Le Monde Réel.

[114] Louis Aragon, O.C., XXVI, p. 293.

great idealist and, what is somewhat surprising, mentions his doubts:

> J'appartiens à une catégorie d'hommes qui ont cru, comment dire pour marquer d'un mot l'espoir et le malheur: qui ont toute leur vie cru désespérément à certaines choses; qui ont été comme le nageur qui se noie, mais toujours au-dessus de lui de la dernière force de ses bras élève l'enfant qu'il veut sauver contre toute vraisemblance. . . J'appartiens à une catégorie d'hommes qui ont tant et si bien regardé toute leur vie la lumière que parfois ils sont devenus aveugles de l'aimer. . . Eh bien, dans ces années que je dis, où j'écrivais Les Communistes, peut-être pour cela même, et encore les années tout de suite après, j'étais la proie en même temps de cette certitude qui était ma vie et d'un doute affreux, qui me venait je ne sais d'où. C'est cette contradiction qui me faisait écrire.[115]

We do not wish to question Aragon's beliefs, but his remark that he did not know the source of his doubts is strange to say the least. As we have shown earlier, Stalinism entered its terroristic heyday between 1948-1953, that is, at the time of the composition of the novel and the years immediately following its publication. It was at this particular period that many of the most tragic political events took place.[116] Pierre Hervé, the party's outstanding polemicist, observed that "après 1950, ce fut une telle avalanche de coups que bon gré mal gré je fus obligé de me

[115] Ibid., p. 303.

[116] Such as Tito's excommunication, the Kravchenko and Rousset trials, the Lysenko affair, the Slansky, Rajk and Kostov trials and the Doctors' plot, to name only a few.

réveiller et de faire fonctionner ma cervelle."[117] Indeed, Aragon had every reason to have doubts.[118]

And yet, while some communists and fellow travellers were voicing their misgivings, Aragon never hesitated to side with the party on every particular issue. At the very moment when he apparently was stricken by doubt he was promoting Zhdanovism in France.[119] He demonstrated a blind refusal to accept any fact detrimental to the Soviet Union, and wrote about "le mensonge à la Kravtchenko,"[120] knowing only too well of the existence of concentration camps in the Soviet state. He glorified the Soviet Union, representing it as

> . . . la société où a disparu l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme, où se sont épanouies les cultures nationales en même temps que l'esprit de l'internationalisme prolétarien, où l'homme n'est plus un loup à l'homme, mais s'est donné pour tâche à la fois sa propre transformation et celle, de la nature

[117] Pierre Hervé, op. cit., p. 13.

[118] It is interesting to note that Aragon dates his doubts from the years 1948-1953 and not from 1936-1939, whereas in La Mise à mort he indicates his bewilderment at the conduct of his friend Koltsov and the events at Gorky's funeral where, harrassed by provocators, he escaped from the funeral procession passing between the horse's legs of the mounted police observing: "J'avais envie de sangloter. Je pensais aux marins du bateau, en venant, sur la Baltique, les chansons dans la nuit, et à tout, le Front populaire en France, . . . et en général, à ce grand pays, ici, qui travaillait, travaillait. . . pour quoi, pour ça?" La Mise à mort, p. 53.

[119] According to Pierre Daix, "Aragon s'identifiait d'autant mieux à la position de Jdanov qu'elle correspondait à sa propre pensée." Aragon: une vie à changer, p. 355. See also Aragon's article "Jdanov et nous," L.L.F., 9 Sept. 1948, pp. 1, 5.

[120] Louis Aragon, Hugo, poète réaliste (Paris:

> . . . une société basée sur la vérité et non sur le mensonge, qu'elle n'a rien à cacher, rien à déformer, rien à mutiler pour subsister. Parce qu'elle est la seule société vraiment humaine.[121]

He showed no moderation in his language, qualifying his adversaries as "ces raves, ces loustics ravalés, ces rats vains."[122] Aragon's conduct certainly gave no hint of his doubts. On the contrary, it demonstrated an unwavering support for party policies. Indeed, by trying to justify himself in the postscript, Aragon has achieved the opposite result to the one he was seeking for he makes the reader doubt his credibility.

Another item in the postscript deserves consideration. Aragon's claim that he rewrote Les Communistes in the name of "l'esprit de responsabilité" or objective truth is surprising. Communism is the belief in an historical process which carries humanity towards a classless society. This process is seen as an "historical necessity" in the name of which communism rejects all moral

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Editions Sociales, 1952), p. 12.

[121]Louis Aragon, "De Pétrarque à Maïakovski," L.F., 26 April 1951, pp. 1, 4. This description should be compared with those given by Roy A. Medvedev in Let History Judge, by A. Sakharov in Sakharov Speaks, by A. Solzhenitsyn in all his writings and by N. Mandelstam in Hope Against Hope.

[122]Louis Aragon, Hugo, Poète réaliste, p. 8.

or intellectual absolutes. Lenin, in his address to the Third congress of Communist youth, declared:

> La lutte de classes continue et notre devoir est de lui subordonner tous les intérêts. Nous y subordonnerons notre morale communiste. Nous disons: est moral ce qui contribue à l'union de tous les travailleurs autour du prolétariat, bâtisseur de la nouvelle société communiste.[123]

Thus, a falsehood is to be accepted, even encouraged, if it serves the communist cause. Pierre Hervé, after leaving the F.C.P., admitted that during the Rajk and Kostov trials[124] Courtade, a French communist writer, who was covering the Rajk's trial,

> . . . savait qu'il faisait partie du "montage" du procès . . . de Rajk, de la même manière qu'en me rendant à Sofia je savais par avance que j'allais rassembler les éléments de vraisemblance du procès pour persuader mes lecteurs de la culpabilité de Kostov.[125]

Auguste Lecoeur reported in Le Partisan that Pierre Sémard's letter written before his execution and addressed to transport workers, was fabricated by J. Duclos.[126] And Aragon himself, did he not include in the text of Les

[123] Quoted by Henri Lefebvre in La Somme et le reste (Paris: La Nef de Paris Editions, 1959), I, p. 530.

[124] See p. 188. Note 24.

[125] P. Hervé, op. cit., p. 138.

[126] Pierre Sémard, a French communist executed by the Nazis. Incidentally, this letter was mentioned by Fauvet as a touching example of communist faith. J. Fauvet, Histoire du Parti Communiste français, II, p. 105.

Communistes an episode the inclusion of which was important to the party, although he was warned by A. Lecoeur that this episode was not true?[127]

Aragon has repeatedly warned against interpreting the past in the light of today's knowledge. In 1958 he wrote in La Semaine Sainte: "Rien n'est absurde comme de juger, d'expliquer le passé d'après le présent. Rien n'est plus faux ni plus dangereux."[128] Yet, in the second version of Les Communistes, he tried to retouch the past in the light of changed circumstances. Moreover, it could be argued that whatever Aragon's opinion of Stalin might have been in 1966-1967, for all those who died with Stalin's name on their lips there was no Twentieth congress, no "correctif postérieur;" they did believe in Stalin and in all he stood for. It seems it was not so much a sense of justice and historic truth that motivated the author as the desire to show his own change of heart.

If we try now to assess Aragon's effort in rewriting Les Communistes, we can make the following observations; significant as the changes in the novel were, they do not contribute a great deal to erase the Stalinist image of Aragon. Despite numerous deletions the novel still represents an attempt to filter the events of the period

[127]See p. 188. Note 98.

[128]Louis Aragon, La Semaine Sainte, II, p. 167. See also, J'abats mon jeu, p. 81.

through the lenses of the F.C.P. The revised version eulogizes the F.C.P. and the Soviet Union. It justifies Stalin's policies during the pre-war period, the Soviet occupation of Poland and the Baltic states and the war against Finland. The political aims of the French government are shown as anti-national and selfish, and these aims determine the personal qualities of the politicians. The revised novel gives a milder picture of party adversaries, particularly French socialists, but not a more charitable interpretation of their motives. In short, Les Communistes is rewritten in conformity with the new party line. It seems that despite the change in Aragon's attitude to certain events of the past, the legacy of the party remained. . . Nearly forty years of political conditioning and the reactions it aroused in him apparently prevented the author from seeing that by changing certain parts of the novel he was still following the accepted communist convention. Aragon's "dossier de la défense"--the postscript,--is even more damaging, as it forces the reader to doubt the author's sincerity.[129] In the light of the above observations, one cannot escape the conclusion that Aragon's image would have been better served if he had left Les Communistes untouched.

[129]For example, when the author states that he was as objective in Aurélien as in Les Communistes, or when he declares that he did not know what made him doubt.

CHAPTER 15

LA VALSE LENTE DES ADIEUX

> Ce qu'il m'aura fallu de temps pour tout comprendre. . .
>
> Aragon. Le Roman inachevé.

The development of Aragon's thought after the endorsement of Garaudy's essay D'un réalisme sans rivages led to his abandonment of the socialist realist doctrine and brought him into conflict with his former friends in the Soviet Union. His political commitment entered a new phase obvious in both his polemical and imaginative writings.

The development away from the rigours of socialist realism was reflected in Les Lettres Françaises, the journal directed by Aragon and the organ of the Comité National des Ecrivains.[1] For a decade it had been a faithful servant of the party and its essential task had been to attract uncommitted intellectuals. An illuminating confession is to be found in the writings of a former fellow-traveller, who observed: "Ce que je lisais attentivement, fidèlement, c'était Libération, Action, Les Lettres Françaises.

[1] Les Lettres Françaises was founded by Jacques Decour and Jean Paulhan in 1941. Twenty issues appeared clandestinely during the Occupation. The publication was resumed after the Liberation.

C'est à travers cette presse que se formait mon interprétation des événements."[2]

Aragon, who for many years had acted as the party's watchdog on the review and had influenced its policies behind the scene, became its official director in 1953.[3] In later years he claimed that after becoming director of Les Lettres Françaises he depoliticized the journal. In reality the decision to change the orientation of the review was made by the F.C.P. prior to Aragon's appointment. Daix, Aragon's collaborator on the journal stated: "Il [Thorez] avait déjà donné ses directives pour la création d'une nouvelle formule des Lettres Françaises dont Aragon devait devenir le directeur en titre. Elles seraient un hebdomadaire indépendant placé sous sa direction personnelle."[4] However, the stormy incident of the Stalin portrait

[2]Louis de Villefosse, L'oeuf de Wyasma, p. 84.

[3]Aragon was credited with the organization of the Comité National des Ecrivains (C.N.E.) of the "zone sud." After the Liberation, it joined the C.N.E. of the "zone nord." On February 10, 1946, at the meeting of the C.N.E. Aragon was elected member of the "comité directeur" and secretary-general of the C.N.E. Since that time the C.N.E. had its "page" in L.F. But, as D. Desanti observed: "Il ne régnera sans partage sur les Lettres françaises, qu'après en avoir écarté Claude Morgan (its official director). Les Staliniens, p. 108.

[4]Pierre Daix, Aragon: une vie à changer, p. 370. L.F. was indeed regarded by the communists as Aragon's private domain. André Stil's remark "Je sais bien que je vais vous gêner en parlant de vous dans ce journal qui est le vôtre" is rather revealing. André Stil, "Un instant plus grand que l'écran." L.F., 2 Feb. 1967, p. 11.

retarded the depoliticization.[5] It was only after the Twentieth Congress that the new formula began to be rigorously applied. Then, however, the reversal of the journal's policies was spectacular, as David Caute has explained:

> Les Lettres Françaises, a cultural weekly sponsored by the French Communist Party and edited by Louis Aragon, was, in the post-war era, a terrible blunt instrument of Zhdanovist vituperation. In its pages the latest philistine banality of Zhdanov, Fadeyev or Stalin himself jostled for prominence with shabby reproductions of Ukrainian collective farmers frozen into stone. Camus? A neo-fascist. Sartre? 'A servile executor of a mission confided to him by Wall Street' . . . Yet today Les Lettres Françaises is the most entertaining and instructive journal of its kind in France. Read all about yesterday's demons! German expressionists, French surrealists, Jarry, Joyce, Henry Moore, Cocteau, Beckett, Virginia Woolf, Georges Bataille, Faulkner, Kafka, Eliot, Robbe-Grillet, Butor, the new novel, the theatre of the absurd, the new structuralist criticism, Godard, the new cinema. You name them, we buy them.[6]

After 1963 Aragon found himself in a privileged position because, in his fight against dogmatism, he had at his disposal a means whereby his own and other dissenting voices could make themselves heard. Yet, despite the fact that Aragon asserted his independence by refusing to

[5]See pp. 210-212.

[6]David Caute, The Illusion: An Essay On Politics, Theatre and the Novel (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972), p. 122. Even such authors as Paul Morand whom Aragon qualified as "un auteur pour boursiers et wagons-lits," or Koestler, Aragon's political enemy, found their way into the journal.

accept the dogmatic positions of the F.C.P. and even voiced some criticism of Soviet literary policies, his attitude to the Soviet Union did not change, at least outwardly. He continued to popularize Soviet and East European literature and art. There was hardly an issue of the review which did not contain one or more articles on Soviet and satellite writers, artists and movie producers. It would seem, however, that Aragon intended to show the Russians that he was serious in choosing a position in favour of a different brand of realism and that he was not afraid of recrimination.

On January 7, 1965, the Lomonosov State University in Moscow conferred on Aragon the honorary degree of Doctor of Philology. He chose this occasion to assert his independence. In the presence of numerous high Soviet dignitaries, Aragon, after paying tribute to Roger Garaudy, the author of D'un réalisme sans rivages, declared:

> . . . les doctes critiques qui ne sont pas d'accord avec le livre de Garaudy . . . semblent presque partout à cette occasion vouloir pratiquer un curieux "distinguo": pour des raisons qui m'échappent, ils tiennent essentiellement à me désolidariser d'un texte qui, à leur subtil odorat, semble fleurer dangereusement le soufre. . . Dans plusieurs pays, où le tonnerre de la critique s'est fait entendre, des gens, apparemment bien intentionnés à mon égard, ont ouvert au-dessus de ma tête folle un parapluie de bonne volonté. . . on essaya de me tirer d'affaire, de prouver que ce que dit Garaudy c'est une chose, et ce que je pense une tout autre.

Then, having mentioned that for those who are afraid of criticism, it would have been a marvelous opportunity to

dissociate themselves from Garaudy's text, he continued:

> Mais, pour moi, il en va autrement; je n'ai jamais aimé les parapluies. . . Et pour ce qui est du tonnerre, il ne m'épouvante pas: . . . L'idée de pratiquer entre le livre de Garaudy et la préface que j'en ai écrite une discrimination qui rejette le livre en enfer, mais ne ferme pas tout à fait la porte du paradis au préfacier, peut-être avec l'arrière-pensée qu'un petit séjour au purgatoire ne lui ferait pas de mal, me paraît relever d'une charité chrétienne que mes convictions ne me permettent pas de partager. Je crains bien d'avoir écrit ma préface dans un dangereux état de conscience claire.[7]

It must have been a matter of considerable disappointment to the Russians to see such a loyal friend take a critical view of their pronouncements, and in public at that, but despite the content of Aragon's declaration and the ironic tone of his speech, the Soviet authorities chose to disregard Aragon's address, nor did they react to the publication of this acceptance speech in the Lettres Françaises. However, Aragon was clearly on a collision course.

Upon his return from Moscow, he continued publishing articles which reflected the liberalizing trend and reported every encouraging sign of destalinization in the Soviet orbit.[8] Nevertheless, in general, commentaries on the

[7]Louis Aragon, "Le discours de Moscou. 'Puisque vous m'avez fait docteur' . . ." L.F., 14 Jan. 1965, p. 5.

[8]Such as Aragon's note on the biography of M. Koltzov, published by Izd. "Molodaia Gvardiia", Moscow. See: Pierre Daix, "L'héritage des combattants d'Espagne," L.F. 8 Sept. 1966, pp. 3, 4.

Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc countries became less abundant in the Lettres Françaises. The character of the information also underwent a discernible change. Most of the commentaries concerned Soviet liberal intellectuals and Soviet dissenters. As time went on, criticism of Soviet literary policies became more frequent. Thus, at the time of the Siniavsky-Daniel trial, (1966), when these two Soviet authors were accused of anti-Soviet activities and sentenced to several years of forced labour, Aragon openly expressed his disapproval.[9] Soviet reaction was quick and predictable. It came from the leading Soviet novelist, M. Sholokhov, who declared:

> Aragon ne devrait pas se mêler des affaires de la littérature soviétique; il ferait mieux de s'occuper de la littérature française, car nous sommes mieux placés que lui pour résoudre nos propres problèmes.[10]

Despite this rebuke Aragon continued to publish articles where one could find such views as "l'art ne doit pas servir des idées préconçues. Il doit être libre dans son expression pour avoir justement une efficacité sociale . . . la politique et l'art sont deux domaines séparés: l'un ne doit pas se mêler du domaine de l'autre. . ."[11] or:

[9] See pp. 320-321.

[10] Le Monde, No. 6630, 7 May 1966.

[11] Dusan Makaveyev, a movie producer from Belgrade, in an interview given to Marcel Martin which appeared under the title "L'homme n'est pas un oiseau: Le Conflit entre l'intimité et la vie collective," L.F., 6 April 1967, pp. 24, 25.

"on voit qu'une direction autoritaire des arts même lorsqu'elle propose un programme simple, même lorsqu'elle présente tant de séductions aux artistes, aboutit à un échec doré."[12] Needless to say, such statements were utterly at variance with the principles of socialist realism.

The new line adopted by the Lettres Françaises was welcomed by intellectuals both inside and outside the party, as can be judged from the following observation:

> Vivant, l'hebdomadaire avait le mérite de favoriser l'expression de ceux qui, chez les intellectuels communistes, voulaient parler . . . Des voix individuelles se faisaient entendre, fermes et nuancées tout ensemble, souvent talentueuses, qui captaient avec sympathie jeunes et moins jeunes, membres ou non du Parti.[13]

Soviet authorities, on the other hand, watched the latest development with disapproval.[14] In the summer of 1968 the review was refused access to the Soviet Union. As Pierre Daix observed: "Il fallait resserrer le blocus idéologique, faute de pouvoir se battre sur le terrain des idées."[15]

In August 1968 came the disaster of Czechoslovakia. Aragon, who had defended the Soviet occupation of the

[12]Pierre Descargues, "Le siècle de Louis XIV," L.F., 25 May 1967, p. 37.

[13]René Minguet, Nouvelles Littéraires, 13 August 1973, p. 15.

[14]Although the Lettres Françaises had only a limited circulation in the Soviet Union, the review was spreading heretical thoughts among the intellectuals.

[15]Pierre Daix, Ce que je sais de Soljénitsyne, p. 118.

Baltic countries in 1939, claiming that the Red Army never entered any country without invitation--"Je ne connais pas de cas où l'Armée Rouge soit entrée dans un pays, en étant l'agresseur, et pour autre chose que pour mettre fin à l'agression"[16]--was forced to admit the evidence. When Soviet troops occupied Czechoslovakia the F.C.P. reacted by expressing "reprobation" while Aragon declared his deep sympathy for the occupied country suffering under foreign occupation.

Like many others, Aragon now became an object of denunciation in the Soviet press. Moscow complained in the pages of the Pravda that some foreign communists did not understand the necessity for the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia. It did not mention any names at the time, but Literaturnaya Gazeta accused Aragon personally of "political myopia" for his reaction to the Soviet occupation. Aragon hastened to reply. His answer to the Soviet accusation appeared in the Lettres Françaises under the title "J'appelle un chat un chat."[17] In his article he pointed out that he did no more than follow the party line and that Literaturnaya Gazeta did not always represent the facts correctly. He recalled that during the occupation of France the same paper, in its characteristic eagerness to accuse friends, had hastened to announce to its readers

[16]Louis Aragon, "Chronique de la pluie et du beau temps," Europe, Nov. 1948, 98.

[17]Louis Aragon, "J'appelle un chat un chat," L.F., 17 Sept. 1968, p. 1.

that Aragon had become a collaborator and had joined Marshal Pétain. He added that this hardly qualified Literaturnaya Gazeta to pass judgment on others.

Bitter as Aragon must have felt, he continued his policy of friendship towards the Eastern bloc, but the weekly which, according to his own admission, he tried to keep out of politics, acquired unmistakable political overtones. In October he denounced, once again, Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia;

> Nous qui avons vécu toute notre vie les yeux sur l'avenir, pour l'avenir. . . et ce que nous avons sacrifié de nous-mêmes, déchiré de nous, de notre passé, est impossible à évaluer, mais nous le faisions pour l'avenir des autres. Et voilà qu'une fin de nuit, au transistor, nous avons entendu la condamnation de nos illusions perpétuelles. Que disait-elle cette voix d'ombre? . . . Elle disait que l'avenir avait eu lieu, qu'il ne serait plus qu'un recommencement. Cette voix qui depuis ne se tait plus, qui impose d'appeler vertu le crime, qui appelle aide au peuple de Tchécoslovaquie l'intervention brutale par quoi le voilà plongé dans la servitude. Cette voix du mensonge qui prétend parler au nom de ce qui fut un demi-siècle l'espoir de l'humanité.[18]

In January 1969 another article published in Les Lettres Françaises contributed to the further deterioration of Aragon's relations with the Soviet Union. The article criticized the confiscation of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's archives by the secret police and the ban on the publication

[18]Louis Aragon, "Ce roman que je tiens pour une oeuvre majeure," L.F., 9 Oct. 1968, p. 3.

of his work in the U.S.S.R.[19] Such defiance of Soviet policies could not continue much longer with impunity. Soviet authorities had to take measures which would strike dissident communists and Aragon personally. They were powerless to suppress l'Humanité, which was subsidized by the party, but they could influence the fortunes of the review directed by Aragon. Thus, the Soviet Union terminated its association with the Lettres Françaises and withdrew its financial support, which had been in the form of subscriptions.[20]

Soviet action, however, did not silence communist dissidents. When in November 1969 Alexander Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Writers' Union, a decision which raised a storm of protest at home and abroad, they publicly voiced their indignation. This event demonstrated the extent of Aragon's disengagement. When, in October 1958, the All-Moscow meeting of Writers had accused Pasternak, one of the best Soviet poets, of anti-Soviet activities, had deprived him of the name of Soviet writer and had expelled him from the Writers' Union, Aragon had failed to come to his defence. This time, however, the Comité National des Ecrivains, in which Aragon played such a prominent role, published a declaration condemning the

[19]Pierre Daix, "L'affaire Soljénitsyne," L.F. 15 Jan. 1969, p. 3.

[20]Les Lettres Françaises did not disclose the number of copies sent to the U.S.S.R. but mentioned the necessity to acquire 1,000 new subscribers. "A nos lecteurs," L.F., 5 Feb. 1969, p. 3.

action of the Writers' Union. Pierre Daix observed on this occasion that "on y décèle clairement l'inspiration d'Elsa Triolet et la main d'Aragon."[21] The declaration read:

> L'exclusion de Soljénitsyne de l'Union des écrivains soviétiques, annoncée, puis démentie, et enfin confirmée, suivant une technique téléguidée dont nous commençons à prendre l'habitude, constitue aux yeux du monde entier une erreur monumentale, qui ne se borne pas à nuire à l'Union soviétique, mais contribue à confirmer l'opinion du socialisme qu'en propagent ses ennemis. . . . Faut-il vraiment que les grands écrivains de l'U.R.S.S. soient traités comme des êtres nuisibles? Cela serait parfaitement incompréhensible si l'on ne voyait d'évidence qu'en eux, avec la complicité singulière de certains de leurs confrères, ce sont non seulement les écrivains dans leur ensemble, mais, de façon plus générale, les intellectuels qu'on cherche à épouvanter, à dissuader d'être autre chose que des soldats marchant au pas de parade.[22]

It recalled the execution of a number of Soviet writers and continued:

> Comment aurions-nous pu croire qu'aujourd'hui, dans la patrie du socialisme triomphant, ce que n'avait même pas songé à faire Nicolas 11 contre Tchékhov, publiant librement son Sakhaline, serait le sort de l'écrivain le plus caractéristique de la grande tradition russe. . .

The declaration then appealed to Soviet Writers:

[21]The declaration of the C.N.E. signed by Aragon, Elsa Triolet, Vercors, Sartre and a number of others was published in L.F., 19 Nov. 1969.

[22]Quoted by Pierre Daix in Ce que je sais de Soljénitsyne, p. 129.

> Faut-il dire à nos confrères soviétiques, à ceux qui se taisent ou qu'on force à parler, comme à ceux qui attachent aujourd'hui leur nom à des actes en lesquels comment ne voient-ils pas le reflet d'un passé récent, qu'ils devraient se rappeler que la signature de certains de leurs devanciers, confirmant des exclusions semblables, a été trop souvent le blanc-seing donné au bourreau?[23]

Finally, the statement expressed the hope that among the leaders of the people to whom the world owed "l'aurore d'Octobre" and the defeat of Hitlerism, there would be found men capable of realizing the wrong that had been done and of putting it right. Similar reactions to Solzhenitsyn's expulsion came from other Western intellectuals and from the International Pen Club.[24]

Soviet authorities, in the person of Konstantin Fedin, president of the Writers' Union, declared that the Writers' Union regarded such declarations as an unprecedented interference in the internal affairs of the Writers' Union.[25] Fedin informed the press that the resolutions and appeals signed in the west were shameful provocations by the enemies of the people. Thus, after many years of devotion to the Soviet state and of unconditional commitment to its cause, Aragon found himself in the camp of the "enemies of the people."

[23]Allusion to the time of Stalin when the signature of the president of the Writers' Union, affixed to the resolution to expel a writer from the Union, was, in many cases tantamount to the physical destruction of the writer.

[24]See: Solzhenitsyn: A Documentary Record, edited by Leopold Labedz (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

[25]Fedin's telegram to David Carver of November 1969. Ibid.

When in October 1970 Solzhenitsyn was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the Soviet press declared that this action had purely political aims and was, in its essence, a provocation.[26] The Lettres Françaises, once again, rallied to Solzhenitsyn's defence, declaring that the choice of the author justified the existence of the Nobel Prize for literature.[27]

Even more, the Lettres Françaises, which in Stalin's time was well known for the orthodoxy of its political pronouncements, began to tamper with Marxist ideology. Commenting on writers' responsibilities, the editorial, written on the occasion of the trial of Basque Separatists, denounced injustice in the following terms: "il ne faut jamais accepter l'injustice . . . la fin ne justifie jamais les moyens . . . il n'y a pas de compromis possible avec le crime d'Etat."[28] This statement represented a complete reversal of the Marxist theoretical postulate of historical necessity, which identifies personal morality with the historical needs of a given society.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Pierre Daix, "Au plus grand écrivain russe vivant," L.F., 14 October 1970, pp. 1, 3, 4. L'Humanité, the official organ of the F.C.P. also stated in an article signed by the communist, André Wurmser, that there could be no doubt that the 1970 Nobel Prize for literature had gone to a real writer, faithful to his vocation to speak the truth as he saw it. L'Humanité, 9 October 1970.

[28] "Burgos," (Editorial), L.F., 16 Dec. 1970, p. 1.

Unfortunately for Aragon, the review, despite its new orientation, was faced with a steadily diminishing readership. It should be mentioned that at this particular juncture of Aragon's political career, his relationship with the F.C.P. rested on a compromise. When the party, after its denunciation of the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, sought the "normalization" of its relations with the Soviet Union, Aragon thought that his dream of rejuvenation for the F.C.P. would never be fulfilled. However, instead of leaving the party, which was the course taken by some of his former comrades, he decided on a compromise. The party was to exploit his name and prestige and Aragon was given the freedom to pursue an independent policy in his review.[29] But the party was not prepared to finance the journal and did not come to Aragon's rescue in the hour of need. The Lettres Françaises was forced to close down its office.

The political nature of the journal's demise did not escape the attention of the reading public. Pierre Seghers observed:

> Dans ce bouillonnement qui est la vie même,
> une constante s'affirmait à chaque numéro:
> l'homme à défendre, son droit de choisir,
> sa liberté d'agir et de s'exprimer dans un
> univers où les totalitarismes, les racismes
> s'affrontent alors que les fascismes de droite
> et de gauche bouclent leurs ceinturons.
> A cette ligne de conduite, Les Lettres

[29]Pierre Daix. Aragon: une vie à changer, p. 419.

> Françaises n'ont point failli. La condamnation explicite du coup de Prague, la défense de Siniavski et Daniel et de Soljénitsyne, les prises de position les plus clairvoyantes--et les plus osées--furent le fait de ce journal. Qu'on me permette, dans ce numero d'adieu, d'exprimer une opinion strictement personnelle: Les Lettres sont tombées, non pas entre les colonnes du Doit et de l'Avoir, mais sur le front de leur combat. . . .[30]

For Aragon, the disappearance of the Lettres Françaises meant waning influence and prestige as well as the loss of tangible advantages.[31] It was on this occasion that Aragon issued this pathetic statement:

> Depuis des mois et des mois, je savais à quoi m'en tenir, je connaissais le fond de l'abîme. . . . Ces dernières semaines, j'étais isolé du monde. Par le mal qui se niche ici ou là dans l'homme, et en devient la grande affaire, si bien que le temps n'a plus de poids, que les jours passent, et les nuits. Tout prend le caractère équivoque des rêves. Des rêves? Il n'est même pas si sûr qu'il s'agisse des rêves. Cela ressemble à la vie. Une longue histoire. Et puis pas seulement: à la vie en général. A la mienne. A ma vie, cette vie dont je sais si bien le goût amer qu'elle m'a laissé, cette vie à la fin des fins qu'on ne m'en casse plus les oreilles, qu'on ne me raconte plus combien elle a été magnifique, qu'on ne me bassine plus de ma légende. Cette vie comme un jeu terrible où j'ai perdu. Que j'ai gâchée de fond en comble.[32]

[30]Pierre Seghers, "Ainsi le rosignol s'est tu. . ." L.F., 11 October 1972, p. 7. A similar view had been expressed by Pierre Daix: See: Ce que je sais de Soljénitsyne, p. 229.

[31]Such as: free publicity for his work, preliminary publication of parts of his works to be published, publicity given to all events in which Aragon participated, favorable criticism of his writings, all of which contributed to keep him in the lime-light.

[32]Louis Aragon, "La Valse des adieux," L.F., 11 October 1972, p. 3.

An ironic postscript to the demise of the Lettres Françaises was added by the Soviet Union. While Aragon was taking leave from the review to which he had devoted many years of his life, the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. was bestowing on Aragon the Order of the October Revolution, to mark the author's 75th birthday. The award was generally regarded as a tribute to Aragon's past contributions to the Soviet cause and as a compensation for the loss of the review. It would be interesting to know whether Aragon understood the likely reason behind the Soviet action, namely the desire to demonstrate to the world "the normalization" of its relations with Aragon after the rift caused by his denunciation of the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, a reconciliation which would enable the U.S.S.R. to continue to use the author's name and prestige for Soviet propaganda purposes.

With the disappearance of the Lettres Françaises yet another chapter of Aragon's life closed, a chapter whose legacy was the profound bitterness and pessimism so characteristic of the author's latest writings. It was also Aragon's farewell to his "second motherland"--the Soviet Union.

CHAPTER 16

AND BEYOND . . .

> L'activité d'un individu, seule la mort en arrête le développement.
>
> Aragon. Le Traité du style.

A few words remain to be said about Aragon's latest writings. The modification in Aragon's thinking, quite evident in his policy with regard to the Lettres Françaises, is also apparent in his recent novels, which differ in tone and substance from his earlier works. Aragon's novels of the cycle Le Monde Réel had been based on the author's life experience, but on the whole these works deal with the collective destiny of bourgeois society. La Mise à Mort, Blanche ou l'oubli and Théâtre/Roman, by contrast, display highly individualistic and subjective tendencies and seem to be inspired by moral rather than ideological considerations, despite some lengthy developments concerning political events.

These novels were written at a time when hope had given place to a sobering process and to gradual disillusionment. From the late fifties on, the F.C.P. had to accept the evidence that whatever improvement the Soviet

system might represent as compared to the capitalist system, it did not embody the ideals for which western communists were fighting. As P. Daix observed: "Il nous est loisible, en Occident, de considérer que tout socialisme authentique doit avoir un autre point de départ et, surtout, une autre évolution que le socialisme soviétique."[1] Moreover, the party had to face the disastrous consequences of its former policies, which became evident during the student uprising in May, 1968, when students repudiated the leadership of the F.C.P., and refused all future cooperation. Their slogan was "Pas de récupération!" It was obvious that some kind of adaptation to the changed social situation was necessary:

> Il faudra désapprendre, inventer de toute pièce une machinerie humaine inhumaine qui se substitue à l'idée ancienne des jeux spectaculaires, aux traditions d'entre quatre murs et trois murmures, à tous les châtelets sons et lumières, aux discours pompeux comme à l'imitation du pain quotidien, pour changer le ventre du monde et les coeurs esclaves.[2]

Aragon, who participated so prominently in all spectacular manifestations of his party's life and was a member of the Party's Central Committee, was more gravely affected than the rank and file members of the party and wrote of this

[1]Pierre Daix, Ce que je sais de Soljénitsyne, p. 69.

[2]Louis Aragon, Théâtre/Roman (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 287. The description fits perfectly the F.C.P. with its spectacular Party Congresses, the secrecy of the meetings of its governing bodies--the Politburo and the Central Committee--the subservience of its militants, and its imitation of the practices of the great "parti-frère" of the Soviet Union.

"grand vent qui va se lever, balayer tout, détruire ce qui fut ma vie, et plus que ma vie." It was not surprising that he should ask "Mais par où prendre l'avenir, comment trouver sa main, se jeter dans ses bras terribles?"[3]

As a socialist realist writer, Aragon had toiled to show the moral superiority of socialism; now, historical circumstances compelled him to re-examine his views on the novel. In the thirties and forties Le Monde Réel had been a vehicle for the propaganda of socialist ideas: after 1963, the novel became "un instrument pour la connaissance de l'homme."[4] It did not escape the attention of many critics that the main object of investigation was the author himself. André Maurois wrote of La Mise à mort that the novel was "surtout, un roman pirandellien, le roman de l'homme double, ou triple, qu'est le romancier."[5] The same could be said about Blanche or Théâtre/Roman, where the protagonist declares: "Je n'ai rien à dire que moi-même."[6]

Aragon has never minimized the importance of biographical elements in his novels. In a conversation with Dominique Arban, he admitted: "Vous savez, je me suis

[3]Théâtre/Roman, p. 287.

[4]Blanche. See the jacket.

[5]André Maurois, "La Mise à mort," L.F., 13 Jan. 1966, p. 3.

[6]Théâtre/Roman, p. 427.

toujours servi dans tous mes livres, poèmes, romans de détails qui sont de ma biographie."[7] The biographical element was early evident in Les Beaux Quartiers where, as Aragon later stated, the two brothers Barbentane "n'étaient qu'un seul et même personnage dédoublé, pour les commodités du roman, c'était moi . . ."[8] As time went on, the urge to recount his successive misfortunes and emotional tribulations became stronger. Other contemporary writers in similar circumstances, such as Ilya Ehrenburg, chose the straight forward memoir form to relate their experiences, but Aragon, who was still a member of the Central Committee of the F.C.P., preferred the novel, claiming that "la forme la plus haute du mensonge c'est le roman, où mentir permet d'atteindre la vérité."[9] By creating fictional chracters, whom he often endowed with his own traits, the author tried to cover his traces and don a mask, but despite all transpositions, disguises and mystifications, Aragon's tragic life experience filters unmistakably through the pages of his fiction. However, the use of the novel as a medium of expression was bound to create a certain ambiguity, which of course never troubled the author. As some critics have remarked, ambiguity was characteristic of all Aragon's work but in

[7] Aragon parle. . ., p. 10.

[8] La Mise à mort, p. 150.

[9] Ibid., p. 125.

the case of his last novel this ambiguity was, we believe, intentional. We shall return to it later.

The most important facets of the novels written after Aragon's endorsement of Garaudy's essay, D'un réalisme sans rivages, those which are of particular interest for the understanding of the author's evolution, should be mentioned briefly. They are: the thematic content with its increasing emphasis on suffering and solitude, the ideological dimension which reveals the implications of Aragon's political commitment, and the literary aspect of the works.

The already familiar themes such as the plurality of man, alienation and love reappear in the novels. To those are added such themes as jealousy, the passage of time, some long developments on the principles of novel-writing, experimentation with the language and the all-pervading theme of solitude. It could even be argued that Aragon's last novels are not only an instrument of investigation but also a means of escaping loneliness--"une machine à briser la solitude, à surmonter la nuit, à rompre le silence."[10] Blanche was the prelude to this theme--a novel about "un homme seul avec ses chimères,"[11] and in which Marie-Noire was invented to banish solitude "histoire de peupler l'air et de se trouver de pseudo-compagnons."[12] In Théâtre/Roman Aragon goes even further.

[10] Théâtre/Roman, p. 365.

[11] Blanche, p. 345.

[12] Ibid., p. 391.

"Est-ce qu'on peut raconter le silence, les jours devant soi de solitude absolue, est-ce qu'il y a possibilité de faire du vide un récit?"[13] he asks, demonstrating brilliantly that the feat is indeed possible. All through the novel, "le colloque muet," a silent exchange between Denis-Romain Raphael, the actor,--"celui que j'avais inventé pour cesser d'être seul,"[14] and the author is carried on interrupted only by poetical interludes, while "le vieux," the invisible but menacing presence of Romain Raphael's future, lurks in the shadows. With Elsa now gone, the solitude becomes absolute and an anguished voice calls out to us from a page in the novel: "Dites-moi qu'elle n'est pas morte. N'importe quoi, mais qu'elle n'est pas morte."[15] But the supplication remains unheeded, the novel seems the only remedy against loneliness:

> Maintenant que j'étais seul, dramatiquement seul, tout m'était devenu comédie. La conversation des autres. La mienne. Tout ne m'était vraiment plus que théâtre, un théâtre dérisoire. . . . J'étais pris entre l'atrocité du temps vide et l'obligation de l'emplir. L'emplir de mots inutiles.[16]

Solitude leads to alienation from the world:--"Je marche dans un monde étranger Je ressemble/A l'inconnu. . ."[17]

[13] Théâtre/Roman, p. 393.

[14] Ibid., p. 390.

[15] Ibid., p. 39.

[16] Ibid., p. 285.

[17] Ibid., p. 52.

"Il s'est, entre le monde et moi, je ne sais à partir de quand ni comment, établi une étrange démesure de toute chose, . . ."[18] remarks the protagonist. A nostalgic note is struck in a reference to the past, to "la raréfaction progressive de ce qui était d'abord . . . mon pain quotidien, j'entends le monde, l'entourage, l'atmosphère de mon existence."[19] Aragon's resentment at being considered a relic of a past era is also unmistakable in the novel,-- "Pour bien des gens, je suis d'avoir été," the actor exclaims angrily.[20] Thus solitude, nostalgia and resentment permeate the pages of the latest novels, reflecting Aragon's personal tragedy and disillusionment.

From the ideological standpoint, the novels represent an agonizing reappraisal of Aragon's former

[18] Ibid., p. 423.

[19] Ibid., p. 394.

[20] Ibid., p. 106. An illuminating description of this past is given by a fellow traveller who described the famous "samedis" of the Comité National des Ecrivains which brought together intellectuals for the exchange of ideas, but where one had the impression of being received by Aragon and Elsa, to attend "leur samedi." "Un curieux protocole présidait aux relations des invités et du Maître. Bien qu'il circulât volontiers parmi le vulgum pecus, Aragon ne laissait pas venir à lui n'importe qui. Il restait généralement debout dans le passage entre les deux salons sans rien perdre de ce qui passait à droite et à gauche, surveillant 'son monde' d'un oeil d'épervier s'amusant des travaux d'approche de ses courtisans, les décourageant ou les stimulant du regard." Louis de Villefosse: L'Oeuf de Wyasma, p. 208.

positions:--"Toute la vie en question remise."[21] "Les idées. . . on vit pour ses idées, on meurt parfois pour elles. Et puis ce qu'elles deviennent," he remarks bitterly.[22] The novels contain undisguised criticism of the Stalinist period and, what is more significant, state explicitly that Soviet society as seen by its Western admirers is no more than a social utopia.

Aragon's reevaluation goes hand in hand with a search for truth--"'la quête bouffonne et farouche d'une conscience. . .'"[23] It seems that the author felt the need to find out at what point and for what reason the tragedy that was both personal and collective had occurred and to this end he tried to analyze his own attitudes to past events and his involvement in them. Hiding behind fictitious characters, he discusses his reactions to political and social events across the years. Aragon ponders the meaning of an incident at Gorky's funeral, his bewilderment at events in Indonesia, the student demonstrations in Paris in 1968, and many other events of the past. From this investigation emerges a sombre picture which shows the gradual evolution of Aragon's thought.[24]

[21] Blanche, p. 371.

[22] La Mise à mort, p. 174.

[23] Blanche, p. 515. The evocation of the past must have been a painful experience for Aragon. As the epigraph to the second part of Blanche, he chose the sentence from Flaubert; "On ne saura jamais combien il a fallu être triste pour entreprendre de ressusciter Carthage."

[24] Elsewhere Aragon wrote: "Quand je relis aujourd'hui

One aspect of this evolution manifests itself in the author's desire to assess his own rôle in the tragedy revealed by the Twentieth congress. In La Mise à mort one can discern Aragon's intention to dissociate himself from the errors committed by the Soviet state, by asserting his ignorance of the true character of the Soviet system: "on ne peut pas se mettre à faire le témoin de ce qu'on n'avait pas compris."[25] It becomes obvious that this incomprehension was the result of ideological indoctrination. Speaking about the resemblance between the G.P.U. agents and the men of Doriot (the French fascists), Aragon remarks: "A l'époque [during the occupation] en tout cas, je ne me posais pas la question, j'aurais trouvé inimaginable des analogies de ce genre, puisque la 'forme' pensais-je n'est plus la même si le 'contenu' [socialist] est différent."[26] In Blanche, Aragon's meditation on Hölderlin's Hypérion contains the admission: "En 1956, la lettre à Diotima sur la prise de 'l'antique Lacédémone' avait pour nous un sens de fureur et de larmes. . . . Hölderlin' parlait pour moi, je comprenais, ah comme je comprenais ce deuil et cette honte!

La Peinture au défi, je mesure les différences de ma pensée d'alors et de celle d'aujourd'hui, je vois comme sur une carte géographique le chemin parcouru. On se tromperait gravement à m'attribuer aujourd'hui certaines affirmations d'alors." Les Collages, pp. 15-16,

[25] La Mise à mort, p. 44.

[26] Ibid., pp. 51-52.

[27] The year of Khrushchev's revelations, of Posnan and Hungary.

Les faits sont autres, mais non pas les sentiments."[28] The author's statements: "Il n'y a pas que celui qui tue pour être un meurtrier" and "il est d'autres formes du meurtre, au fond de l'homme, et qu'on ne lui reprochera jamais"[29] seem to indicate that Aragon gradually came to accept his share of responsibility for the plight in which the F.C.P. found itself. In Théâtre/Roman, the protagonist no longer tries to justify his actions or to claim extenuating circumstances; he admits: "J'ai/Glorifié le meurtre avec la langue coupée. . . ."[30] In a thinly disguised description of the students' unrest of May, 1968, he accepts with unusual humility, the judgment of the young generation:

> L'étrange était de se sentir soumis à ce jugement dernier, de le considérer comme le fait d'une justice acceptée, de n'en éprouver aucune indignation, d'accepter la sentence on ne sait où et par qui prononcée, cette dégénérescence collective, cette disqualification de tout ce qui avait été notre vie, ma vie, sa dignité, sa raison d'être.[31]

Using one of his favorite devices--the "éclairage" by another literary work, in this instance, King Lear,-- the protagonist states:

[28] Blanche, pp. 435-436.

[29] Ibid., p. 513.

[30] Théâtre/Roman, p. 315. One can consult Aragon's poem Le Front Rouge to appreciate the justice of these lines.

[31] Ibid., p. 299.

> J'acceptais qu'on me crève les yeux. Avec une sorte de frémissement sacré, j'acceptais la reconnaissance de tous les crimes que j'avais sans doute incarnés, représentés. J'en convenais, ma vie était finie, et il me fallait payer du prix de son effacement le surgir des autres, l'instauration d'un désordre nouveau.[32]

But the judgment of others matters less than one's own. Evaluating his own role in the historical process, the protagonist of Théâtre/Roman sees himself as "un citoyen de ce temps passé, honteux maintenant de sa vie, de n'avoir rien su, rien compris, rien prévu. Incapable d'ailleurs de se justifier à ses propres yeux."[33]

The literary interest of the novels lies largely in "la mise à mort" of socialist realism and the exposition and implementation of the precepts of "un réalisme sans rivages."

> Entre nous, l'histoire d'un homme qui a perdu son image, est-elle compatible avec le réalisme? Anthoine voit bien comment un pareil "thème" risque de faire dire qu'il est au moins infidèle à son esthétique. À moins qu'on change la définition du réalisme, qu'on en recule les berges. Comme le propose ce philosophe marxiste, vous savez.[34]

Aragon ridicules certain principles of socialist realism such as: the positive hero, the typical, the actuality of the topics, and above all authorial objectivity. He

[32] Ibid., p. 300.

[33] Théâtre/Roman, p. 306.

[34] La Mise à mort, p. 25.

passes judgment on socialist realism, pointing out the fundamental fallacy of the doctrine:

> La grande difficulté du réalisme d'aujourd'hui . . . ne tient pas du tout à ce que les règles qu'on a cru pouvoir en édicter sont absurdes, mais en ce qu'elles ne sont pas applicables. . . . La grande difficulté du réalisme dans son développement tient à ce que, pour que ses règles deviennent valables, ce n'est pas la cervelle du romancier qu'il faut changer, mais le monde. L'étrange est justement que ce soient les hommes qui voulaient changer le monde qui aient cru pouvoir commencer cette opération par la cervelle des romanciers. . . . Et ce serait justice que les écrivains reprochent avec âpreté aux hommes politiques de ne pas avoir assez organisé la production des hommes positifs dont ils ont besoin comme modèles à leurs romans. . . . Mais les hommes politiques au contraire mettent en accusation les écrivains qui ne fournissent pas le peuple de héros à imiter.[35]

Considering that Aragon was one of those "hommes politiques" who promoted socialist realism in France and who so proudly declared in one of his public lectures: "Permettez qu'ici je le rappelle, que je me suis fait le défenseur du 'réalisme socialiste'," [36] the statement implies that he has come to negate the principles of which he had been considered such a forceful exponent only some twenty years before.

For several decades, the question foremost in Aragon's mind was "pour qui il écrivait," that is the social

[35] Ibid., pp. 404-405.

[36] "Réalisme socialiste et réalisme français," Europe (March 1938), 290.

implications of his writing. Now, as in his distant surrealist days, "le comment de l'écriture" became a prime concern: "ah, voilà de ces mots qui se couplent dans le muet de ma bouche, d'une façon tout automatique!"[37] Hence, his particular interest in linguistics. We might even suggest that one of his motives in writing his recent novels, was the desire to exercise his "vocation secrète" and to demonstrate his talents in this domaine. Blanche and Théâtre/Roman are particularly striking from the linguistic point of view. In Blanche, Aragon's immense culture permits some excursions into linguistic areas not too familiar to most European polyglots, such as the dialects of Borneo and Java. The author stirs the imagination of his reader and dazzles him with this display of erudition. In Théâtre/Roman the performance is pushed to its utter limits. Poetry and prose appear in alternating sequences, and, as if wishing to discover how far one could go before language loses its value as an instrument of communication, Aragon dismembers words, plays on homonyms and phonetic spelling of words, and generally turns upside down the accepted usage of the language. In doing so, he adds another dimension to the "équivoque," "car, si le langage est pareillement douteux dans les mots qui le constituent, que penser des créatures échafaudées avec les mots eux-mêmes?"[38]

[37] Théâtre/Roman, p. 237. Elsewhere Aragon wrote: "J'aime le langage, le merveilleux langage, le délire du langage." "Qu'est-ce que l'art, Jean-Luc Godard?" L.F.

The composition of Aragon's novels also changes its pattern. Instead of the linear representation common to the novels of Le Monde Réel, where we can follow the vicissitudes of the life of an individual in a recognizable social setting and in a more or less chronological order, La Mise à mort and Blanche, have a structure which has been compared to a labyrinth, in which the author obviously wishes his reader to go astray. But if in Blanche there is a semblance of a plot, Théâtre/Roman dispenses with all pretext of regular development:

> Et moi, ce que j'écris tourne autour du sujet comme un interminable ruban qui s'embrouille, je ne coupe pas, je ne jette pas, le portrait à la fin est la somme de ce que j'ai pensé, du modèle, et aussi de mille choses quand je lève les yeux vers la fenêtre ou le téléphone. . .[39]

Written about Henri Matisse, roman,[40] this description applies perfectly to the tangled progression of Théâtre/Roman.

Everything in Aragon's recent writings seems to suggest a desire on the part of the author to confuse and

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9 Sept. 1965, p. 1.

[38] Blanche, p. 316.

[39] Henri Matisse, roman, 1, p. 48.

[40] Despite its title the book is not a novel but a collection of articles on Matisse's work composed at different times in the forties, and to which Aragon added a number of prefaces, postscripts and parentheses as well as some writings of a later period.

disconcert his reader. He has himself claimed that annoyance with the tendency of modern critics and university professors to equate imaginary characters with their creator inspired him to write Théâtre/Roman with a view to "désorienter l'analyse et l'interprétation."[41] We believe, however, that it would be highly unfair to the author, who for many years had fought for communist ideals, to accept this claim and to deprive his recent novels of all social significance, regarding them as mere introspection, complaints about his changed fortunes, an exercise in linguistics or the desire to confound his critics. They are all of this, of course, and no study can do justice to the variety of themes, of moods and of styles in Aragon's recent writings, but we should not forget that it was precisely in the year La Mise à mort was published that Aragon also stated:

> Si j'ai fait seulement que quelqu'un ait entendu dans cet ensemble disparate d'écrits que je lui propose, au-delà des mots, des sujets traités, le tragique de notre destinée. . . alors, j'aurai peut-être servi à quelque chose. . . .[42]

One cannot escape the conviction that in this period of spiritual uncertainty and withdrawal Aragon had a message to convey and a warning to sound.

In Le Monde Réel Aragon's message had been reasonably clear: the capitalist system was decadent and had to be

[41] Théâtre/Roman, p. 408.

[42] Les Collages, p. 23.

destroyed. Marx had shown the way to a new type of society where the workers by transforming the world would also create a new type of man. "J'ai été de ces braves gens qui ont cru dur comme fer qu'il suffisait de changer le système de distribution des biens pour que disparaissent les vols, les assassinats, les malheurs de l'amour, que sais-je?"[43] The Twentieth Congress revealed that a change in the system of distribution of wealth did not necessarily mean escape from hunger, torture, concentration camps and other horrors. Such a change guaranteed neither human dignity nor happiness nor the right of the people to self-determination. Aragon, who had expressed such great confidence in the virtues of scientific materialism, was compelled in the end to admit its limitations:

> Je crois à l'extension illimitée des connaissances humaines, mais je sais, je sais que ces connaissances ne feront jamais qu' accroître le domaine de la souffrance, qu'elles pourront éclairer celui-ci, mais ne permettront jamais par exemple, à l'homme d'acquérir la certitude d'être aimé.[44]

Aragon's blind faith in Soviet leadership and the values represented by the Soviet Union resulted in his being "Un des papillons que l'histoire brûla."[45] Now, confronted with doubts, not only about the meaning of history but

[43] Blanche, p. 474.

[44] La Mise à mort, p. 125.

[45] Le Roman inachevé, p. 18.

also about the significance of human life, he re-examined his attitudes. An eloquent revelation of his present views is contained in a long digression on the novel, wherein we read: "Je lis des romans pour cela, pour retrouver cette avidité de connaître, pour cesser de me satisfaire de l'arithmétique élémentaire qu'on m'a enseignée. . . ."[46] And he continues, a little further on:

> J'entends que mon livre ne me quitte pas, qu'il me force à penser au-delà de la lecture, que je dois continuer à m'interroger et à me répondre. En ce sens, le livre aura été une machine à modifier l'homme.[47]

"Ainsi," Aragon remarks, "j'entretiens d'un lecteur à l'autre cet esprit d'enfance, qui ne se contente jamais de ce qu'un esprit borné lui répond. . . ."[48] The author's message is spelled out clearly: the aim of his novels is to "[rendre] ceux qui me lisent à ce principe de toute science, le doute, dont il ne faudrait guère que vous me poussiez bien brutalement pour que je dise qu'il est aussi le principe même de la vie."[49]

Not only in plain statements of this type is Aragon's message conveyed, but also in his deliberate cultivation of ambiguity, "un mot à quoi notre Antoine donnait un sens très particulier dans son vocabulaire théorique."[50] The reader is kept in perpetual doubt as to

[46] Blanche, p. 437.

[47] Ibid., p. 438.

[48] Ibid. , p. 439.

[49] Ibid., loc. cit.

[50] La Mise à mort, p. 22.

the true character of the protagonists and the events. Who is the principal character of La Mise à mort? Is it Antoine Célèbre (or Anthoine), Alfred, or Indifférent? the reader asks himself. Is it the author who hides behind his fictitious characters? And in Blanche. . . Is it Marie-Noire who imagines Geoffroy, the linguist, (created shortly after Aragon proclaimed his "vocation secrète"), or vice versa?

> Et de deux choses l'une: ou Marie-Noire n'a de réalité que dans l'esprit de Geoffroy Gaiffier, elle est une image de sa rêverie, et il n'y a pas à lui adresser la parole pour la faire rentrer dans la voie que Gaiffier lui imagine, ou c'est Gaiffier lui-même qui sort de la tête pensante d'une Marie-Noire réelle. . . .[51]

And who is Blanche? "Parce que Blanche, elle, n'est pas, n'est pas un personnage de roman, une Marie-Noire. Je ne l'imagine pas, je vous dis, je ne l'invente pas. Je la cherche à tâtons dans mes ténèbres."[52] Is it Aragon's own past that is portrayed, a past which had once seemed so pregnant with "les lendemains qui chantent" but which had in reality brought misery, lies and oppression? And what of the second term of the title--"l'oubli"? Does it, too, refer to the author's own past that he tried vainly to forget? The reader is inclined towards this interpretation when he reads, after a reference to the Stalinist period, Gaiffier's remark: "Oh, je ne veux pas

[51] Blanche, p. 316. Aragon's "vocation secrète" was his interest in linguistics.

[52] Ibid., p. 351.

parler de cela, que j'oublie, que j'essaye d'oublier, pour quoi je m'efforce à croire que l'homme a inventé le merveilleux mécanisme de l'oubli."[53] And what are we to think of the child Avenir, with his symbolic name, and dead almost immediately after his birth? We should recall that Aragon wrote in La Mise à mort, in a passage "J'ai rêvé d'un pays qui avait mis au monde un enfant infirme appelé l'avenir. . ."[54] It does not seem improbable that the story of the strangling of Marie-Noire provides a parallel with Russian history, where revolutionary ideals were strangled by Stalin's totalitarian rule and all possibility of a radiant future was annihilated in the process. But in any case the reader is kept in everlasting uncertainty and Aragon points out that the ambiguity is intentional: "Une des caractéristiques de Blanche ou l'oubli c'est le doute qui règne sur l'existence des personnages du roman, sur la personnalité du (ou des) narrateurs."[55]

Théâtre/Roman continues to cultivate this ambiguity and the theater is eminently suitable for the purpose.-- "Tout théâtre est d'abord un doute . . . ."[56]

[53] Blanche, p. 208.

[54] La Mise à mort, p. 200.

[55] Louis Aragon, O.C., XXXVIII, p. 193.

[56] Théâtre/Roman, p. 33.

> Je ne sais qui je suis. Ou je feins au moins d'être. Changeant de costume et de destinée. Et vous m'appelez pour cela du nom que je porte, l'Acteur, alors que je n'ai jamais paru sur autre scène que moi-même, et si je vous crie aujourd'hui que je ne joue autre rôle que le mien, ne secouez pas vos têtes! Ecoutez-moi: ceci n'est pas le Théâtre où je parais, mais le temps de ma sombre vie . . . .[57]

To sum up: Aragon's latest novels demonstrate his changed outlook and reflect his personal tragedy. Written "dans ces temps où rien ni personne ne peut combler l'abîme qui s'est fait en moi, dans ces jours, ces semaines, ces mois, ces années où rien ne peut plus peupler ma vie, . . ."[58] they reveal the bitterness and the profound pessimism of the author, his evident desire to hide behind fictitious characters and his deep unwillingness to yield too much of his inner tormented world to the judgment of the public. Yet, after those bitter experiences of the Stalinist era, Aragon seems to have come to the conclusion that doubt and interrogation are the vital principles of life. Using a great variety of disguises, the author invites his readers not to seek particular biographical details in his novels, but to try to "atteindre la vérité"--the tragic consequences of an unconditional commitment,--and warns them not to put too much hope in the future--"l'avenir, le rêve mensonger que vous appelez l'avenir."[59]

[57] Ibid., pp. 329-330.

[58] Ibid., p. 167.

[59] Blanche, p. 352.

CONCLUSION

J'ai payé très cher le vertige soviétique.
Aragon. L'Oeuvre poétique.

We have traced Aragon's career as a novelist committed to Marxist ideology from the moment when as a young man of twenty-nine he joined the F.C.P., until the time of publication of Théâtre/Roman-- "mon dernier roman." Whether Aragon produces another novel or not, it is unlikely that the basic premises of his present position as a novelist will change to any appreciable degree. Thus, the present situation allows us to consider his career as a whole and to attempt to assess the consequences of his unconditional commitment.

As we have indicated, the first consequence of Aragon's commitment was his endorsement and subsequent practice of the Soviet-inspired aesthetic doctrine of socialist realism. To assess Aragon's contribution to socialist realism in France one has to bear in mind that the three main criteria for estimating the merit of a socialist realist literary work are: its party-mindfulness in the portrayal of reality, its didactic merit and its intelligibility to the masses. Aragon himself stressed the requirements of the doctrine, pointing out that one of the essential characteristics of socialist realism is its insistence on the ideological and educational

role of literature,--"son caractère éducatif, sa volonté de former les hommes."[1] He claimed that, having chosen the side of the working class, he wrote to provide this class with means to combat the bourgeoisie.

However, despite the fact that he was the most outspoken advocate of socialist realism in France, and never forgot the dictates of the party, the novels of the cycle Le Monde Réel, with the notable exception of Les Communistes, rarely correspond to the officially proclaimed goals of socialist realism. The first two novels Les Cloches de Bâle and Les Beaux Quartiers were obviously dictated by ideological considerations. They contain numerous elements of socialist realism and certain reflections of contemporary issues can be found in their pages. In Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale and in Aurélien Aragon makes only occasional concessions to the requirements of the official doctrine. All four novels deal with the past. The author presents studies of bourgeois society where every detail is situated in Marxist historical perspective. He depicts mainly the negative aspects of French society and the general atmosphere evoked is one of idleness, escape from responsibility and parasitism. Marxist principles such as the notion that man while working transforms the universe and himself are only rarely indicated. The working class appears sporadically in these

[1]Louis Aragon, Littératures soviétiques, p. 189.

novels and the positive characters do not represent genuine "positive heroes" as envisaged by socialist realism. In contrast to other novels of Le Monde Réel, Les Communistes is a work written in strict conformity with the canons of socialist realism. It is a history of our times and deals with contemporary issues. The ideological content of Les Communistes is more explicitly established than is the case with earlier works. The novel also evokes more stereotyped responses. Two facts, however, diminish the value of the novel from the party's standpoint. Firstly, the work has remained unfinished, a fact that has led to speculation about the author's convictions and the veracity of the text. Secondly, when in 1966, Aragon decided to rewrite the novel, he removed from it most of the traits pertaining to the socialist realist doctrine and by doing so diluted its socialist realist content. Thus, as far as the ideological content of Le Monde Réel was concerned its didactic merit was relatively insignificant.

It could also be argued that the novels of Le Monde Réel series were not written for the masses. In his choice of themes, as in their treatment, he remained far from his intended reader. Even in Les Communistes, where he seemed to direct his arguments to the workers, he appealed, in reality, to the public at large and to fellow travellers whom he wooed to the communist cause. Thus, when measured by the traditional canons of the doctrine, Aragon failed to create imaginative prose valuable for the party. In contrast to such writers as Sartre or

Malraux, Aragon can hardly be credited with having created novels which had a decisive political influence.

Despite Aragon's assertions to the contrary and the high praise bestowed on the author by the party leadership, he realized that his socialist realist adventure was a move in the wrong direction. Although the principles of socialist realism have never been officially abjured by Aragon, his practice of the doctrine in any strict sense did not continue beyond the limits of the Monde Réel. It is true that La Semaine Sainte may be regarded as an attempt to save the socialist realist doctrine by introducing certain modifications to it, but such later writings as La Mise à mort, Blanche ou l'oubli and Théâtre/Roman cannot be claimed as works of socialist realism. In these novels Aragon abandoned his ideological principles with regard to the problems of literary creation. Highly individualistic, full of subjective statements, of allusions and quotations from foreign languages and permeated by profound pessimism, they do not fit into the schema prescribed by socialist realism; furthermore, their style and vocabulary are of limited appeal to the French proletariat.[2]

On a personal level the adoption of socialist realism was a sacrifice. Aragon admitted in 1963: "Le

[2]Moreover, such luxurious editions as the Oeuvres romanesques croisées . . . or Henri Matisse, roman, are hardly within the means of the average worker.

réalisme est devenu le parti pris de ma pensée, un parti irréversible, en raison de l'expérience de toute ma vie. On comprendra peut-être un jour ce que je lui ai sacrifié."[3] The precise nature of this sacrifice is open to speculation.

We know that Aragon's shift to the communist camp resulted in the loss of many of his surrealist friends, a loss he deeply regretted. "Je n'ai jamais rien fait de ma vie qui m'ait coûté plus cher. Rompre ainsi avec l'ami de toute ma jeunesse [André Breton] ne m'a pas été seulement affreux pour quelques jours. C'est la blessure que je me suis faite, et qui ne s'est jamais cicatrisée."[4] Although until 1956 he avoided mentioning the surrealists, it was to them that he addressed these lines in the dark hours of the Twentieth Congress:

> Malgré tout ce qui vint nous séparer ensemble
> O mes amis d'alors c'est vous que je revois
> Et dans ma mémoire qui tremble
> Vous gardez vos yeux d'autrefois.[5]

Much more important, it would seem, was the damage done to his work as a writer, a severe blow to Aragon, whose ambition was one of the most salient characteristics--"Que toute démarche de mon esprit soit un pas, et non une trace."[6] Yet, it was precisely Aragon's imaginative

[3]Louis Aragon, Preface to Garaudy's D'un réalisme sans rivages, p. 15.

[4]Louis Aragon, L'Oeuvre poétique, V, p. 310.

[5]Louis Aragon, Le Roman inachevé, p. 85.

[6]Louis Aragon, Le Libertinage (Paris: Gallimard, 1924), p. 22.

writing which had suffered as the result of his political commitment. By temperament Aragon was inclined to experimentation, as his latest works so abundantly show. Even his socialist realist novels of Le Monde Réel cycle contain elements which are outside the realistic novel. The opposition to experimentation and the bias in favour of exploiting traditional form and the familiar devices of nineteenth century realism which characterize socialist realism were highly detrimental to Aragon's work. Moreover, between the publication of his first socialist realist novel, Les Cloches de Bâle and the publication of Le Roman inachevé, which inaugurated a new phase in Aragon's literary activity, twenty-two years passed, years in which his talent and imagination were used mainly in party journalism in order to score some propaganda points. Yet, the brilliance of Aragon's post-Stalin writings indicates that he traversed Stalinism without losing his creative power. No doubt then, he must deeply regret the time he wasted on those endless polemical works and journalistic activity which did nothing to bring him glory, and which prevented him from concentrating on his imaginative writings. A tacit admission of regret is found in many of Aragon's works: "Et je n'ai pas ainsi détruit que du papier: j'ai détruit des jours, des années, de grands pans de ma vie. . . ."[7]

[7]Louis Aragon, Henri Matisse, roman, II, p. 271.

Despite the adverse effects of Aragon's political commitment on his imaginative writings, one aspect of socialist realism was of great importance to the author. Work, as one of the principal elements of communist ethics, became for Aragon a way of life. In his attitude to work, he is a true disciple of Gorky, who always considered work to be a basic ethical value of communism. It is Aragon's capacity to work, we believe, which permitted him to mobilize his creative powers in an hour of despair, and to write a number of novels which received enthusiastic acclaim.

Another consequence of Aragon's commitment, besides the tragic waste of his talent, was the disillusionment caused in him by the Stalinist phase of international communism and the moral implicatins of Stalinist practices. We have seen that Aragon's adherence to the communist party had nothing original about it. He trod a well-beaten path taken by many before him. His constant contacts with the Soviet Union and the indoctrination to which he was subjected made him accept communist goals without questioning the vital issue of the relation of means and ends in the realm of social action. Moreover, his unwavering loyalty brought him to a position of power within the F.C.P. to which he was far from being indifferent. For a time Aragon seemed secure in his political commitment.

When Aragon was at the zenith of his political career,

however, he made the painful discovery that the most cherished ends of his party foundered on the choice of means. This was a traumatic experience that left deep scars which continue to this day to remind Aragon of the past,--"on porte en soi le passé comme un enfant mort. Pas que le sien. Le passé du monde."[8] The characteristic trait of Aragon's recent writing is a bitterness which becomes more pronounced with the passage of years:

> Voyez-vous, quand on arrache les ronces, on ne remarque pas que leurs épines vous entrent ici et là sous la peau, et ce n'est que plus tard, quand elles sont bien enfoncées, qu'on les sent toujours là, qui font mal. Alors il faut un canif ou des ciseaux pour aller les chercher dans la profondeur.[9]

Even before the invasion of Czechoslovakia which dealt the final blow to his illusions and made him admit that he was a man "pour qui le drame présent des Tchèques et des Slovaques remet en cause de fond en comble sa propre destinée,"[10] Aragon had spoken of his "blessure toujours approfondie,"[11] of "le tragique de notre destinée,"[12] of "dix ans où pour survivre il a fallu sans cesse oublier ce qui ne se laisse pas oublier."[13] Other communists could

[8]Louis Aragon, Théâtre/Roman, p. 354.

[9]Louis Aragon, Henri Matisse, roman, 1, p. 135. (Note 1967).

[10]Louis Aragon, "Le meilleur livre de ces jours." L.F., 9 Oct. 1968, p. 7.

[11]Louis Aragon, O.C., XXVI, p. 264.

[12]Louis Aragon, Les Collages, p. 23.

[13]Louis Aragon, Blanche, p. 436.

write: "Oublions les déceptions et les tourments, le temps gaché et la vie gaspillée,"[14] but Aragon was not able to follow this advice. He tried to forget his unhappy past, but was seemingly unable to do so and returned obsessively to it in each successive novel.

Confronted with the author's bitterness, with such statements as: "tout ce que j'ai été, tout ce que j'en ai dit, tout ce qui précède, mériterait l'enfer des poubelles. Comme ma vie. Comme ma vie,"[15] with the constantly recurring refrain "Ma pauvre vie à vendre en vain/ Avec ses peurs ses pleurs, ses plaies"[16] some critics have wondered if the complaints were a pose. We do not believe so. Reading and rereading Aragon's work one cannot escape the conviction that what the author finds difficult to live down is the moral implication of his long association with the Soviet brand of socialism. In one of his writings, Maxim Gorky, who himself fell victim to the Stalinist holocaust, pointed out that

> Il faut faire comprendre à l'homme, que c'est lui qui est le créateur et le maître du monde, que c'est sur lui que retombe la responsabilité de tous les malheurs de la terre, que c'est à lui aussi que revient la gloire de tout le bien de la vie.[17]

[14]Henri Lefebvre, La Somme et le reste, I (Paris: La Nef de Paris Editions, 1959), p. 659.

[15]Louis Aragon, Théâtre/Roman, p. 287.

[16]Ibid., p. 61.

[17]Gorky's letter to Romain Rolland, March 18-21, 1917. Romain Rolland, Journal 1914-1919 (Paris: Albin Michel, 1952), p. 1193.

French communists have denied any responsibility for events within the communist orbit--"il n'est pas juste. . . de vouloir nous attribuer des 'erreurs' qui ne sont pas les nôtres."[18] It is, however, clear from many references in Aragon's recent writings that he was fully aware of the responsibility of every communist who accepted injustice and approved of it in the name of "historical necessity." Such events as the Moscow trials and later those of Budapest, Sofia and Prague, or the destruction of entire minority groups, may seemingly have had nothing to do with any particular French communist. Yet, as Pierre Daix has belatedly noted, it was the support of the Soviet regime by communist intellectuals and sympathizers throughout the world which drowned all criticism of the Soviet system, permitted repression on a scale hitherto unknown and caused considerable harm to the world socialist movement. One might in fact argue that the intellectuals, by their refusal to question the practices of the state, by their silence, by their denial and even deliberate falsification of well-known facts,[19] contributed significantly

[18]Waldeck Rochet, "Le projet de thèses pour le XIVe Congrès et quelques problèmes du Parti," C. du C., 32, No. 6 (1956), 674.

[19]The Kravchenko and Rousset libel cases are examples of the many cases of denial. As to falsification, Aragon himself confessed in 1975 that his writings did not always reflect the reality he encountered in the Soviet Union: "le voyageur que j'étais s'était senti, je dois l'avouer, incapable de dire vraiment ce qu'il avait vu, dont il faudra attendre 1956, pour que dans certains poèmes du Roman inachevé en soit donnée une image plus proche de

to injustice, and indeed made possible the liquidation of a generation of revolutionaries, of a cultural elite, and of millions of innocent human beings.

While many French communists contributed to the tragedy by their silence,[20] Aragon was prominent in his vociferous support of Soviet policies and actions. In 1935, instead of questioning Soviet practices, he welcomed

> . . . l'extraordinaire expérience du Canal de la mer Blanche à la Baltique, où des milliers d'hommes et des femmes, les bas-fonds d'une société, ont compris, devant la tâche à accomplir, par l'effet de la persuasion d'un petit nombre de tchékistes qui les dirigeaient, leur parlaient, les convainquaient, que le temps est venu où un voleur, par exemple, doit se requalifier.[21]

Aragon was fully aware of the fact that public opinion is an efficient weapon in the struggle against police states.

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la réalité. . . . Il m'aurait paru indécent, intolérable, d'écrire cela en 1930, et le désir de ne pas ainsi offenser un peuple héroïque et malheureux explique (n'excuse pas) les écarts de langage. L'Oeuvre poétique, V, p. 148. The poem referred to is "J'ai connu les entassements. . ."

[20]It is worth quoting here Pierre Daix's observation: "Le stalinisme a fondé son pouvoir sur l'incompatibilité de la politique et de la morale. Il a affirmé la primauté du politique, laissant à la morale la possibilité de s'exprimer sur les seules questions que la politique choisissait pour elle. Là le dilemme était clair. Se taire revenait à avaliser le mensonge politique." Ce que je sais de Soljénytsine, p. 149.

[21]Louis Aragon, Pour un réalisme socialiste, p. 8. The means of persuasion were revealed by N. Khruchshev at the XXII Congress of the C.P.S.U. (October 1961).

When Jannis Ritsos, a Greek freedom fighter, was a prisoner in a Greek concentration camp, the Lettres Françaises rose to his defence. Aragon observed that: "La campagne faite en France par les Lettres Françaises avait bien abouti à lui rendre la liberté."[22] Despite this knowledge, Aragon refused to reopen the "C.N.E. page" in the Lettres Françaises to those who wished to discuss similar unsavoury events which were taking place in the satellite countries, giving as a pretext the fact that he had depoliticized the review and did not intend to change this policy.[23] During the trials of 1937-1938 Aragon denied that one had the right to doubt or to question Soviet justice, because the trials were regarded by French communists as a safeguard of peace.[24] As late as 1953, remembering Stalin's declaration that the test of a man's

[22]Louis Aragon, Henri Matisse, roman, 11, p. 232.

[23]"Le directeur des Lettres françaises [Aragon] avertit l'assemblée [C.N.E.] que ce serait peine inutile, serait-ce une décision unanime: seul maître de son journal, il n'en rouvrirait pas les pages au C.N.E.: il avait, dit-il, réussi à le 'dépolitiser', ce n'était pas maintenant pour qu'on le 'repolitise'." Vercors, Pour Prendre Congé, p. 47.

[24]Paul Vaillant Couturier wrote in l'Humanité, 25 Jan. 1937: "La paix devra beaucoup pour sa défense à ce procès." See: A. Kriegel, Les grands procès dans les systèmes communistes (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 135. French communists were following the Kremlin line. Litvinov, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, declared that "what they had done was to protect their government from 'menacing treason'. . . they were doing the whole world a service in protecting themselves against the menace of Hitler and Nazi world domination, and thereby preserving the Soviet Union strong as a bulwark against the Nazi threat." Joseph E. Davies, Mission to Moscow (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1941), p. 167.

dedication to socialism and democracy was his defence of the Soviet Union and its leadership, the Communist party, he proclaimed: "Son exemple [C.P.S.U.] est vivant à nos yeux, son expérience plus précieuse pour nous que toute autre, et nous ne serons jamais de ceux qui, comme certains hommes égarés par le nationalisme étroit et l'ambition personnelle, croient pouvoir en faire fi, comme ils font fi de la démocratie véritable."[25] Although Aragon was finally to take a stand against repression, his support came too late for many who were either physically destroyed or whose potential talents were silenced.

What was perhaps, of more significance to Aragon was the fact that political developments in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc had tragic consequences for the world communist movement and the F.C.P. It was Pierre Daix who admitted:

> Quand nous nous étions faits jadis les porteurs de l'iniquité stalinienne, outre que nous étions convaincus qu'il s'agissait pour le moins de légitime défense, sinon toujours de justice, nous avions alors identifié l'Union soviétique avec l'avenir du socialisme. Vingt ans plus tard, nous savons que, ce faisant, nous n'avons pas fait avancer d'un pas la cause du socialisme en France, que nous avons en revanche contribué à détruire l'unité morale de la Résistance et, au surplus, que nous sommes devenus comptables, envers la classe ouvrière de notre pays, des crimes contre le socialisme que nous avons niés et parfois transformés en

[25]Louis Aragon, L'Homme communiste, II, p. 221.

exemples.[26]

During the period 1963-1968 Aragon believed that the F.C.P. would modify its dogmatic positions and would adopt policies independent of those of the Soviet Union. Speaking at the XVIII Congress of the F.C.P. in January 1967, he proposed the definition of a new policy which he called "la politique de l'ouverture." The party, however, was reluctant to adopt it and in any event had little time to implement any new policy even if it wished to do so before another blow was dealt to it in the spring of 1968. This was the "révolution de mai" which shattered any illusion Aragon might have entertained about the position of the party. The F.C.P. found itself on the sidelines. It had not foreseen the eruption--"une convulsion que nous n'avions pas prévue"[27]--nor was it capable of directing it. Aragon's reaction to the events can be surmised from the following passage:

> J'avais mal aux yeux, atrocement, pour tout un jeune peuple égaré, hors de lui, en proie à la fois à l'exaltation et à la stupeur. . . . Je ne savais pas pourquoi cette horreur, et d'où me venait ressentir ici le mal de ces enfants. . . . Je voyais détruit le puzzle patiemment ajusté de ma vie.[28]

The success of the party would have meant the justification of Aragon's commitment; its failure, on the other

[26]Pierre Daix, Ce que je sais de Soljénytsine, pp. 149-150.

[27]Louis Aragon, Théâtre/Roman, p. 301.

[28]Ibid., p. 299.

hand, spelled not only the end of Aragon's active political career but also the loss of his self-esteem,--"D'avoir chanté pour or le cuivre."[29] He resented bitterly the futility of his effort:

> J'aurai traversé les rapides
> Pour rien
> Pour rien brisé
> Mes bras mon âme et
> pour rien
> Pris au mors la mort
> Ne voyez-vous pas que tout fut inutile.[30]

His resentment was particularly vehement because his subservience to the party did not rest on any real authority of the party: he could not be shot or exiled if he chose to disobey. His obedience depended on his attachment to his own personal position within the party, and on his belief in social transformation, both of which in the course of time deepened his loyalty to the Soviet state. Aragon's tragedy may be summed up in the words of another communist, Howard Fast, who wrote:

> Car je n'ai voulu voir qu'un pays qui avait accompli sa révolution socialiste et je n'ai pas su voir qu'établir le socialisme au prix de l'abandon des droits sacrés de conscience, de la dignité, du droit de dire ce qu'il vous plaît de dire, quand il vous plaît de le dire, de parler net et clair pour exposer la vérité telle qu'on la voit--de ne craindre aucun homme, qu'il ait raison ou qu'il ait tort--qu'établir le socialisme à ce prix ne constitue pas une victoire.[31]

[29]Louis Aragon, Elégie à Pablo Neruda (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 26.

[30]Louis Aragon, Théâtre/Roman, p. 316. This observation is echoed by many others among them Dominique Desanti, who wrote: "Les autres continueront jusqu'au choc. . . et s'apercevront un jour qu'ils se sont mutilés en vain." Les Staliniens, p. 123.

[31]Quoted by Pierre Hervé in Dieu et César sont-ils

Another source of bitterness, we believe, was the attitude adopted by the Soviet authorities towards the author. Aragon's immense contribution to the Soviet cause should be mentioned in this context. His participation in many Front organizations, such as the A.E.A.R., Amis de l'U.R.S.S., C.N.E. to mention but a few, helped to retain the allegiance to the communist cause of a multitude of writers and artists who could then be used in the interests of the F.C.P. and the Soviet State.

Aragon's prestige permitted him to suppress effectively all dissent and to channel intellectual thought in the desired direction. He knew how to influence French intellectuals, bullying some,[32] and flattering others by publishing favourable criticism of their works in the party publications, or by publishing their books through the party's printing houses.[33]

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communistes? p. 150.

[32]For instance, at one of the meetings of the General Assembly of the C.N.E. Villefosse remarked: "J'ai le droit de m'exprimer, il me semble. Nous ne sommes pas à Moscou!" to which Aragon replied: "Voilà un mot que je vous ferai rentrer dans la gorge!" Louis de Villefosse, L'Oeuf de Wyasma, p. 214. And Vercors wrote: "L'intervention soviétique en Hongrie souleva au C.N.E. la tempête prévue. Mais dès qu'Aragon a élevé la voix, tout le monde est rentré sous terre," Pour Prendre Congé, p. 56.

[33]Morin observed: "Il suffisait d'un méchant roman à l'eau de Jdanov pour que l'on soit désigné comme l'auteur du meilleur livre de l'année. . . . Les romans de Gamarra, Daix étaient salués comme l'éclosion de chefs-d'oeuvre. La consécration d'Aragon-Casanova faisait fonction de Goncourt." Autocritique, p. 105.

Related to Aragon's work in Front organizations was his participation in the Soviet inspired Peace Movement, where French intellectuals were successfully used as "potiches d'honneur," to use Vercors's expression, to further the aims of the Soviet government.

After the Twentieth Congress, when the prestige of the Soviet Union was threatened, Aragon hastened to defend the Soviet system and wrote his monumental Histoire de l'U.R.S.S. (1962). Its content was determined by the demands of Soviet policy and devoted in large part to the unmasking of Stalin, attributing to him all the incongruity, injustices and crimes perpetrated in the Soviet Union.

Aragon's largest contribution to the Soviet cause was, however, in the realm of letters. To combat negative reactions to Soviet literature and in particular to socialist realism, Aragon tried to introduce Soviet authors to the French public. He could afford to do so, having at his disposal communist publishing houses (Les Editeurs Français Réunis, Les Editions Sociales) and several reviews. He edited, prefaced and even translated countless works of many contemporary and pre-revolutionary writers. When, after the Second All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers (1954), the non-communist press commented unfavourably on developments in Soviet literature, Aragon wrote Littératures soviétiques, in which he defended socialist realism and welcomed "la littérature libre" of the Soviet Union.

All these contributions to the Soviet cause, as well as Aragon's personal friendships, apparently fostered in him the illusion that he could attempt criticism of Soviet policies with immunity and perhaps even influence them. Past history of the U.S.S.R. should have been a warning and should have taught Aragon that in the Soviet system no one is indispensable and all friendships are influenced by the political climate. He failed, however, to foresee his fall from grace in Soviet eyes, and the cold ingratitude of his former Soviet friends undoubtedly struck another bitter blow at his illusions.[34]

We have seen that for nearly two decades Aragon has been trying to bring "le correctif postérieur" to his image. He has wooed his readers in his recent works; in the pages of Les Lettres Françaises and in various declarations he has expressed sympathy for the victims of the Soviet regime. Together with Garaudy, Daix and other former communists, he has taken part in the democratization of the party. Since 1963 he has done much to make good the damage inflicted in the past. Despite his efforts, however, it is doubtful that Aragon will go down in human memory surrounded by the aureole of a genuine

[34]When on January 28, 1973, a well-known Soviet writer, Victor Nekrasov, was expelled from the C.P.S.U. he was accused, among other things, of having close ties with Western "anti-communists." Among the persons mentioned were the German writer and Nobel Prize winner Heinrich Böll, the American writer John Steinbeck and Louis Aragon. Reported in the New Jersey City daily Svoboda of July 19, 1973.

humanitarian. In 1958 when he was writing La Semaine Sainte he believed that "le temps fait la lessive des hommes, l'ordure ne survit pas. . . . "[35] He hoped that many of his enemies would disappear and that those who remained would stop accusing him of opportunism. He hoped too that the young generation would know little about old tales. The contrary has happened. The upheavals of the fifties and the sixties saw many communists leave the party. Many of them have abandoned their conspiracy of silence, with the result that since the Twentieth congress an enormous literature has been published in the West dealing with questions of socialism and the international communist movement. In France, the writings of such former communists as Dominique Desanti, Pierre Hervé, Annie Kriegel, Auguste Lecoeur, Philippe Robrieux, Charles Tillon have revealed the inside workings of the party. Some French communists who did not abandon communism have embarked on complex processes of revision. Fellow travellers have also contributed to the de-mystification of the F.C.P. The condemnation of Aragon personally by many of his former collaborators by whom he is still remembered as "le commissaire politique de la pensée communiste française" is detrimental to his image.[36] There is more. It has been the activities of such Stalinists as Aragon that have prompted some survivors of the Stalin terror to write their

[35]Louis Aragon, La Semaine Sainte, p. 433.

[36]D. Desanti, Les Staliniens, p. 108. See also: Bibliography.

memoirs: "When I see books by the Aragons of this world, who are so keen to induce their fellow countrymen to live as we do, I feel I have a duty to tell about my own experiences,"[37] wrote the widow of the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam, who died in one of Stalin's camps.

Aragon's appeal to the young--"tout ce que je demande, un jour, un jour, une espèce de sympathie--"[38] has remained unheeded. The new generation has accused the F.C.P. of obsequiousness to Moscow and, in its hatred of bureaucratic centralism, which Aragon had represented, has allied itself with the new left. Nothing reveals its condemnation more clearly than the students' behaviour in May, 1968. According to Aragon's own observation, the tendency of the young was "de nous considérer tous comme les complices de l'ancien système, même si nous en avions payé de nos malheurs, nos travaux d'esclaves, le monstrueux fonctionnement! 'Pas de récupération!' Cela s'inscrivait sur les tableaux, les institutions et le visage des hommes."[39] Aragon's bitter experience was to see youth repudiate him personally. It neither forgot the role he had played among the leaders of the F.C.P. nor forgave his conduct during the Stalinist era. When Aragon attempted to

[37] N. Mandelstam, Hope Against Hope, p. 363.

[38] Louis Aragon, Les Collages, p. 23.

[39] Louis Aragon, Théâtre/Roman, p. 300.

address the demonstrators during a manifestation what he heard was: "Vivent le Guépéou et Staline notre père à tous!"[40] Even if we were inclined to regard this outburst against Aragon as an isolated incident, the books of Sophie Bibrovska, born in 1942, and of Cohn-Bendit, born in 1945, demonstrate convincingly the rejection of Aragon by the young. To them he is "Aragon le fidèle, l'exécuteur officiel des surréalistes, le poète du culte de la personnalité,"[41] who neither understands nor cares for the young and who lacks the courage to follow his convictions:

> S'il ne peut se faire entendre, c'est surtout parce que les participants à la discussion savent qu'ils n'ont rien de commun avec lui. La déclaration du maître se déclarant "avec la jeunesse!" tout en étant dans le parti, prouve bien qu'il n'a rien compris . . . au mouvement révolutionnaire qui, dans sa pratique, s'affirme . . . comme opposé au P.C.F. En se refusant à agir honnêtement au moins une fois dans sa vie, Aragon se refuse au mouvement étudiant. Il est indéniable qu'une intervention officielle et publique de ce démagogue politique aurait mis le P.C. dans une position difficile. Être "avec la jeunesse," avec les étudiants, c'était oser ce geste![42]

Whether this judgment is valid or not is beside the point;[43]

[40] Cohn-Bendit, Le Gauchisme (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), p. 64.

[41] Ibid., p. 65. See also: Sophie Bibrowska, Une mise à mort (Paris: Denoël, 1972).

[42] Ibid., loc. cit.

[43] It should be mentioned that Aragon himself has observed: "Pour nous le sphinx moderne, c'est la jeunesse." Cahiers Renaud-Barrault (Paris: Gallimard, December 1968),

it demonstrates Aragon's failure to enhance his image in the eyes of the young generation.

We have seen that Aragon fought to regain his own self-esteem as well as the respect of his countrymen and that he was concerned with the image which posterity was to retain of him. To ensure that analysts of his work would have the necessary information (desirable from the author's point of view), he published several volumes of essays and interviews as well as prefaces and postscripts trying to justify and to explain his writings.[44] In recent years, however, he seems to have come to the conclusion that history cannot be rewritten, that his "aventure spirituelle" was a failure. Aragon's sensitivity to public opinion,--"On voudrait, ah, comme on voudrait être à l'abri du regard, à l'abri du ricanement, des doigts des autres!"[45]--has given place to indifference, because he has apparently realized that it was not the judgment of others, but his own, that he had to contend with:

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p. 65. Aragon tried to keep pace with the young generation, but finally was compelled to admit that "En fait, il n'y a pas, il n'y aura jamais de relations normales entre les générations." Théâtre/Roman, p. 92.

[44]Je n'ai jamais appris à écrire; Aragon parle avec Dominique Arban; See also: Entretiens avec Francis Crémieux (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

[45]Louis Aragon, Blanche, p. 468.

> Peut-être bien qu'il aurait voulu tout effacer de ce qu'il avait été, de ce qu'il avait cru, de ce qu'on ne savait pas qu'il avait été, qu'il avait cru, mais cela ne lui suffisait pas, qu'on ne le savait pas, puisque, lui il le savait.[46]

Anything that can be written about Aragon will seem simplification, because of the complexity both of the man and of the historical period in which he lived. Aragon's political commitment represents only one facet of his colourful and agitated life, but it was this particular phase that brought tragedy and disillusionment into it. In 1947 Aragon wrote: "Je pense très profondément que c'est la quête active du bonheur, qui caractérise l'homme au XXe siècle." He himself did not find this happiness in public life, and instead of bringing it to mankind, he found himself among those about whom a Polish poet has so poignantly written:

> Ils vivaient d'aurore
> et ils ont semé les ténèbres
> Ils vivaient d'idées
> et se sont écartés des hommes
> Ils vivaient de songe
> et le mensonge est devenu leur pain quotidien . . .[47]

[46]Louis Aragon, Théâtre/Roman, p. 306. This can be compared with another statement: "les seules critiques que je craigne, ce sont les miennes, mon jugement. Il m'est arrivé de pardonner à bien d'autres. A moi, jamais." O.P., V, p. 16.

[47]Adam Wazyk, "Critique du 'Poème pour adultes'," L.T.M., Nos. 132-133 (1957), p. 1081.

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Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
October 3, 1897. Louis-Marie-Antoine-Alfred Aragon (illegitimate child) born in Paris.		
		1903. London Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party. Division into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.
1904. Writes "Quelle âme divine," published in 1924.		
		1905. Unsuccessful revolution in Russia.
		1907. Publication of Gorky's novel Mother.
		1912. Formation of the Bolshevik party.
1914-1916. Passes Baccalauréat examinations in Latin and Sciences, then in philosophy.		1914-1918. First World War.
1916. Enrolls in preparatory year for medical studies. Begins to write verses which are published in magazines like Sic and Les Fruits Nouveaux.		

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
1917. Mobilized meets André Breton at Val-de-Grâce.		1917. February Revolution (Old Style) Abdication of Nicholas II. Provisional government headed by Alexander Kerensky proclaimed. November 7, 1917 (New Style) October Revolution.
1918. Leaves for front as "auxiliary doctor" in the infantry. August 1918 awarded Croix de guerre.	November 11, 1918 end of World War I.	March 1918. VIIth Congress of Bolshevik party. Party changes its name to Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik). Russia signs treaty of Brest-Litovsk. July 1918 execution of Nicholas II and his family.
1919. With his regiment takes part in the occupation of Saar and the Rhineland. Demobilized in June. Founds magazine Littérature with André Breton and Philippe Soupault under auspices of Paul Valéry. Tzara in Paris. Aragon, Breton, Eluard and Soupault join Tzara.	1919. Formation of the Communist International.	March 1919. VIIIth Congress of the C.P.S.U. Intervention of foreign powers and Civil War.
1920. First collection of poems Feu de joie published. Breton and Aragon try to join F.C.P. Trips to Germany and Belgium.	November 1920 Socialist Congress in Tours. December. Birth of F.C.P. (Section Française de l'Internationale Communiste).	1920. IXth Congress of the C.P.S.U. End of Civil War. July. 2nd Congress of the Communist International adopts 21 conditions necessary for joining Communist International.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
1921. Publication of *Anicet ou le panorama, roman*. Aragon, Breton, Eluard and Soupault break with Dada. Aragon secretary to M. Hébertot. Editor of weekly *Paris-Journal*.	October 1921. Section française de l'Internationale communiste takes the name Parti communiste français. Introduction of "United front" policy 1921-1922. December 1921. First Congress of F.C.P. in Marseilles.	March 1921. Xth Congress of the C.P.S.U. The New Economic Policy (N.E.P.) inaugurated. "Kronstadt" rebellion savagely suppressed.
1922. Publication of *Les Aventures de Télémaque*.		March-April 1922. XIth Congress of C.P.S.U. Lenin's illness. Stalin becomes general secretary of Central Committee.
1923. Trip to Germany. Publication of *Paris la nuit* and *Les Plaisirs de la capitale*. Aragon in charge of Jacques Doucet's library, begins to write *La Défense de l'infini*.	January 1923. French troops occupy Ruhr. F.C.P. publishes protests. Defeat of communists in Germany.	April 1923. XIIth Congress of C.P.S.U. First without Lenin. Creation of Left Front (LEF) literary movement.
1924. Publication of first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* of *Une Vague de rêves*, which defines surrealism and of *Le Libertinage*. Travels in Belgium, Germany, Spain, Italy and Holland. Liaison with Nancy Cunard. November. *Letter to Bernier* critical of the Russian revolution.	1924. War in Morocco. The F.C.P. agitates against the war. First encounters between Surrealists and communists. Bolshevization of F.C.P. begins. First central school of the party organized.	January 1924. Death of Lenin. May. XIIIth Congress of C.P.S.U. October. U.S.S.R. is recognized by France. Trotsky relieved of his duties.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
1925. Collaboration in Clarté Publishes "Le prolétariat de l'esprit."	July 1925. Thorez is called to Paris. Works in the central apparatus of F.C.P. Organizes campaign against the war in Morocco.	Foundation of Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (R.A.P.P.) Resolution of the C.C. of the C.P. giving equal rights to competing literary groups.
1926. "Le Cahier Noir" fragment of unpublished novel La Défense de l'infini published in Feb. 2 issue of La Revue Européenne. Publication of Le Paysan de Paris and Le Mouvement perpétuel.		July 1926. Zinoviev removed from Politbureau. August-September. Bitter campaign in Soviet and Comintern press against Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev.
1927. January 6, 1927 Aragon joins F.C.P. Trip to Spain. Destruction in Madrid of La Défense de l'infini in November.	F.C.P. "United front" tactics ineffective.	November 1927. Trotsky and Zinoviev are expelled from the party. December 1927. XVth Congress of C.P.S.U. the Congress votes expulsion of other 75 members of the party. Project of First Five-year Plan.
1928. Publication of Le Traité du Style and of Le con d'Irène under pseudonym of Albert de Routisie. In Venice, in Sept. tries to commit suicide. In November meets Mayakovsky and Elsa Triolet. Participates in demonstrations protesting against execution of Sacco and Vanzetti.	The F.C.P. protests the execution in the U.S.A. of Sacco and Vanzetti. Policy 'class against class' directed against socialists is inaugurated.	Sholokhov begins publication of his novel Quiet flows the Don. January 1928. Soviet Press publishes list of thirty members of the opposition deported to Siberia. "Shakhty" trials 1927-1928 of engineers and technicians of Donez Basin accused of sabotage. VIth Congress of the Communist International abandoned "United front" tactics.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
1929. Publication of *La Grande gaîté*. Aragon and Elsa reside in Montparnasse District.	The F.C.P. predicts destruction of capitalism as a result of the financial crisis on Wall Street. Thorez arrested.	1929. Trotsky exiled from U.S.S.R.
1930. Publication of *La Peinture au défi*. First trip to Soviet Union. Attends Second International Conference of Revolutionary Writers in Kharkov. Travels in U.S.S.R. Writes "Front Rouge" for *Littérature de la Révolution Mondiale*, organ of the International Writers' Union.	July 1930. Thorez elected Secretary-General of the Central Committee.	April 1930. Mayakovsky commits suicide. Collectivization started. June-July. XVI Congress of C.P.S.U. Nov.-Dec. "Prompartia" (Industrial party) trials of specialists accused of espionage and sabotage.
1931. Publication of *Persécuté Persécuteur*.		
January 1932. Aragon persecuted by French Government for his poem "Front Rouge." Defense by surrealist group. March. Break with surrealists who publish two brochures directed against Aragon. ("Paillasse" and "Certificat"). Trips to Soviet Union where Aragon edits French edition of *Littérature Internationale*. Publication of "Aux enfants rouges" and other propaganda poems.	May. F.C.P. loses 25% of votes in elections. International Congress against imperialist War held in Amsterdam under auspices of Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse. December 1932. Foundation of A.E.A.R. (Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires).	April 1932. Creation of Union of Soviet Writers. Disbandment of all separate literary groups, including R.A.P.P.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
1933. February. Becomes correspondent of communist newspaper L'Humanité. June. Foundation of review Commune. Directs La Maison de la Culture in Paris.	January 1933. German fascists come to power. September "Congrès Mondial de la Jeunesse contre la guerre et le Fascisme takes place in Paris.	March 1933. The Reichstag Fire, for which communists are blamed. Penal Code of the R.S.F.S.R. adopted.
1934. Publication of Hourra l'Oural and of Les Cloches de Bâle May-December. In August Trip to Soviet Union. Aragon attends First all-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. Collaborates in Muenzenberg's "Institute pour l'étude du Fascisme."	February 1934. Pro-fascist demonstrations in Paris and communist counter demonstrations. March. Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels Antifascistes. (C.V.I.A.) founded in Paris. July 1934. Inauguration of united action with S.F.I.O. (Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière) Abandonment of the policy "class against class" Propaganda for "Front unique."	Jan.-Feb. 1934. XVII Congress of C.P.S.U. August. First Congress of Soviet Writers. December. Assassination of Kirov in Leningrad.
1935 Pour un réalisme socialiste. Foundation of International Association of Writers for the Defense of Culture. Aragon, one of the secretaries of French Section. Trip to U.S.S.R. where Aragon works at scenario of Les Cloches de Bâle in Odessa. Attends Stakhanovites Conference in Moscow.	1935. F.C.P. declares itself partisan of national defense. June. First International Congress of writers for the defense of Culture takes place in Paris. July. Creation of Front Populaire with the S.F.I.O. and the radicals.	May 1935. Franco-Soviet pact signed. Autumn 1935. Stakhanovites Conference takes place in the Great Hall of the Kremlin in Moscow. Stalin proclaims "People must be tended carefully and lovingly, as a gardener tends a favorite fruit-tree."

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
1936. May-June. Aragon and Elsa travel to U.S.S.R. to see Gorky. On board "Felix Dzerzhinsky" Aragon completes Les Beaux Quartiers awarded Prize Renaudot. Attends Gorky's funeral. In Moscow as correspondent for l'Humanité reports on draft of Soviet Constitution. Fall. Trip to Spain to bring to Spanish intellectuals gifts from French Section of the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture.	January. Thorez becomes general secretary F.C.P. VIIIth Congress of F.C.P. Reevaluation of nationalism. "Nous avons repris la Marseillaise et le drapeau de nos aïeux." March. Fusion of Communist Union G.G.T.U. and C.G.T. May. "Front Populaire" wins elections.	June 1936. Gorky's death. At VIIIth All-Union Congress of Soviets, Stalin presents Draft of new Soviet Constitution. August. First Moscow trials of communist leaders.
1937. Aragon and J.-R. Bloch co-editors of Ce Soir. Organizes Second Congress of the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture in Barcelona.	1937 March. Foundation of communist newspaper Ce Soir. June. Popular Front government of Premier Léon Blum resigns. November. Italy joins Germany and Japan in Anti-Comintern Pact.	January 1937. Moscow trial of Karl Radek begins. March. Rykov and Bukharin are expelled from party. June. Marshal Tukhachevsky and several other high ranking officers sentenced to be shot for treason, among them General Primakov, Elsa's brother-in-law. Russia takes part in Paris World exhibition.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
June 1938. Aragon in London delivers a speech "Writers against fascism."	March 1938, Hitler occupies Austria. Sept. Munich agreement. October. Germany occupies Sudetenland. F.C.P. denounces these actions.	Jan. 1938. First session of new parliament opens in Moscow. March. Execution of Bukharin. August. Soviet Union informs German ambassador that Russia will stand by its 1935 promise to support Czechoslovakia in the event of an attack.
Feb. 1939. Aragon's marriage to Elsa. June. Trip to U.S.A. to take part in Congress of American Writers. August. Aragon defends Hitler-Stalin Pact. Takes refuge in Chilean Ambassy where he completes Les Voyageurs de L'Impériale. September. Mobilized in a "Workers Regiment."	March 1939. Defeat of Spanish Republic. Hitler occupies Czechoslovakia. August. Ce Soir is outlawed by French government. Persecution of communists in France. September. Hitler invades Poland. France and Britain declare war on Germany. Nizan leaves the F.C.P. and is declared a traitor to the communist cause. Daladier orders dissolution of F.C.P. October. Communist parliamentarians send letter to Henriot urging him to conclude peace with Hitler. Thorez deserts his unit. Later reaches the U.S.S.R. where he spends the war years.	March 1939. Stalin delivers speech to XVIIIth party Congress criticizing appeasement and warning that Russia will not pull other nation's chestnuts out of the fire. May. Foreign Commissar Maxim Litvinov removed from his post and replaced by V. Molotov. August. Hitler-Stalin non-aggression Pact. September. Red Army enters Poland. November. U.S.S.R. denounces non aggression pact with Finland. Soviet troops invade Finland.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
1940. June. Aragon evacuated at Dunkirk. Returns to France. Receives Croix de Guerre and Médaille Militaire. Demobilized in July. Writes patriotic poetry in *Poésie 40*.	March-April 1940. Trial of Communist Parliamentarians. May. General German offensive. Capitulation of Belgium, Holland and Luxemburg, German troops pass Sedan, thereby sealing doom of France. June. German occupation of Paris. Marshal Pétain sues for peace. F.C.P. seeks permission to publish *L'Humanité*, F.C.P. pursues policy of defeatism.	March 1940. U.S.S.R. and Finland sign armistice which cedes Western Finland to Soviet Union.
January 1941. Aragon and Elsa in Nice. Encounter with Matisse. June. Travels to Paris to organize resistance then in South of France to mobilize writers for the C.N.E. Foundation of the C.N.E. Publication of *Le Crève-coeur Cantique à Elsa*. Articles in *Poésie 41*.	May 1941. Strike in Pas-de-Calais. Intensification of resistance movement. July. First shootings of French communists by Germans.	April 1941. German troops invade Yugoslavia. June. German troops invade Soviet Union. October. Stalin proclaims Moscow in a state of siege. November. The Battle of Moscow.
1942. Publication of *Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale*. *Les Yeux d'Elsa*, and *Brocéliande*. November 11, 1942. Italian troops occupy Nice, Aragon and Elsa leave Nice for Lyons.	Laval takes power in France.	August 1942. Beginning of the battle of Stalingrad.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
1943. Foundation in Lyons of clandestine movement of Intellectuals based on cells of five people "Les Etoiles." July 1943. Aragon and Elsa leave Lyons for Drôme region. Creation of review La Drôme en Armes. Publication of Le Français dans le texte and Le Musée Grévin.	C.F.L.N. (Comité français de libération nationale) declares null and void the 1939 dissolution of F.C.P.	May 1943. Comintern is dissolved. November. Teheran Conference.
1944. Publication of Aurélien.	August 1944. Liberation of Paris. November. Thorez returns to France from U.S.S.R.	June, 1944. Allied landing in Normandy.
1945. Publication of Servitude et grandeur des Français, La Diane Française, Le pays dans mon pays lui-même. Trips to Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and U.S.S.R.	March 1945. Communists enter French government. June. Tenth Congress of F.C.P. plays down revolutionary takeover by the proletariat.	February. Yalta Conference. May 1945. Hitler commits suicide. July-August. Potsdam Conference. August. Atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. September. Japan capitulates.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
February 1946. Aragon elected member of the governing body of L.L.F. and General-Secretary of C.N.E. Publication of l'Homme communiste (V.I), L'Enseigne de Gersaint, L'Apologie du Luxe. Trip to Eastern bloc countries and U.S.S.R.	January 20, 1946. De Gaulle leaves government. March. Churchill's speech of Fulton which inaugurated the "iron curtain" concept provokes reaction of F.C.P. May. France rejects draft of the Constitution proposed by F.C.P. and Socialists. June. Congress of Socialist Party rejects fusion with F.C.P. July 1946. F.C.P. declares itself in favour of internalization of Ruhr (contrary to Soviet wishes). November. Elections make F.C.P. first party in France. December 1946. War in Indochina.	August 1946. Zhdanov's thesis defining role of artists and writers. Persecution of Akhmatova and Zoshchenko. Magazine Leningrad closed.
1947. Publication of Chroniques du bel canto and La Culture et les hommes. After death of J.-R. Bloch Aragon becomes editor of Ce Soir.	March 1947. Beginning of "cold war". May. Communists leave government. Foundation of La Nouvelle Critique. F.C.P. organizes strikes. June. Congrès de Strasbourg. July. Marshall Plan Conference. Under Soviet pressure F.C.P. denounces the Plan.	September 1947. Creation of the Cominform. In conformity with Cominform policy Socialists become traitors again.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
1948. Publication of *Le Nouveau Crève-coeur*. Aragon deprived of civil rights for ten years. Participates in "Battle of the Books" as attempt to disseminate books to workers. Aragon defends Lysenko's theories.	September 1948. Political Bureau of F.C.P. declares: "Le peuple de France ne fera, ne fera jamais la guerre à l'Union Soviétique." September-November 1948. Miners' strikes.	February 1948. *Coup d'état* in Prague. Lysenko denounces Mendel's law of genetics. July. Yugoslavia is thrown out of communist camp. August. Birth of Peace mo ve-ment. First Congress of Intellectuals for Defence of Peace in Wroslaw. Zhdanov's death. Berlin Blockade.
1949. Takes part in organization of First International Peace Congress. On staff of *Les Lettres Françaises*. Publication of *Les Communistes* (V.I,II). Fall 1949. Trip to the U.S.S.R. Delivers speech in the Great Hall of Columns in Moscow. Visits Soviet writers in Peredelkino.	April 1949. F.C.P. denounces foundation of N.A.T.O. First Intern. Congress of the "Mouvement des Partisans de la Paix" in Paris. (Those who did not obtain visas gather in Prague). The congress elects National Committee of the Peace movement consisting of 50 members.	January 1949. Formation of C.O.M.E.C.O.N. (Economic Council which has to play the same role as the Marshall Plan). May. Creation of German Democratic Republic. Arrest of Traïcho Kostov in Bulgaria. June. Arrests of Laszlo Rajk in Hungary. July. Cominform confirms the condemnation of Tito. September. Soviet Union explodes its first atomic bomb. Oct.-Dec. Execution of Rajk and Kostov.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
1950. Elected candidate member of Central Committee of F.C.P. Sets up program for translation into French and publication of collections of Contemporary Russian works. November. Elected member of World Peace Council. Publishes Les Communistes (V.III). To support Fougeron's exhibition entitled "Le Pays des Mines" writes poem Le Pays de Mines.	March 1950. F.C.P. condemns "lois scélérates"-laws against sabotage. April. At XIIIth congress of F.C.P. Marcel Prenaut who refused to accept Lysenko's thesis is eliminated from the Central Committee with 35 other members. F.C.P. supports appeal against atomic weapons issued by World Peace Council in Stockholm. Kravchenko and Rousset trials in Paris. June. War in Korea. F.C.P. condemns "American aggression" in Korea. October. Thorez's illness.	March 1950. Clementis minister of foreign affairs of Czechoslovakia is relieved of his duties. Stalin prize committee set up composed of Aragon, Ehrenburg, Fadeyev, Anderson, Nexö, Neruda, and others with Skobeltsyn as chairman.
1951 Publication of Les Communistes (V.IV, and V in two parts). April. Trip to the U.S.S.R. December 1951-January 1952. Another trip to the Soviet Union. Meeting with Thorez.	F.C.P. campaigns against condemnation (to death) of the Rosenbergs for espionage. André Stil receives Stalin Prize for his novel Le Premier choc. F.C.P. loses 40,000 votes during 1951 elections.	February 1951. Arrest of Clementis in Czechoslovakia. Stalin declares that war with West is not inevitable. October 1951. Gomulka, Secretary General of the Polish C.P. deprived of parliamentary immunity. November. Arrest of Deputy Premier Rudolf Slansky of Czechoslovakia.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
Fall 1952. Participates in World Peace Congress in Vienna, then travels to U.S.S.R. to visit Thorez. Publication of Hugo poète réaliste, Avez-vous lu Victor Hugo, L'Exemple de Courbet.	February 1952. F.C.P. supports North Korea who had accused the forces of the United States of bacteriological warfare. May. Demonstrations against Ridgway's presence in Paris. Arrest of André Stil, chief editor of L'Humanité, for instigating the demonstration. F.C.P. tries to organize general strike of protest. June-Sept. "Marty-Tillon affair." Fall. Georges Guingouin, secretary of F.C.P. in Limoges is expelled from party. Death of Eluard.	April 1952. Stalin declares possibility of peaceful co-existence with West. October. At XIX Congress of the C.P.S.U. Stalin stresses that war is not inevitable, the contradictions between socialist and democratic systems being less acute than contradictions within the socialist camp. Trials of leading communists in Czechoslovakia (London's case). December. Execution of Slansky and Clementis.
1953. Publication of L'Homme communiste (V.II), Le Neveu de M. Duval. Director of Les Lettres Françaises. Writes poem "Il revient" to welcome Thorez from U.S.S.R. January 1953. Aragon in Moscow delivers congratulatory speech to recipients of Lenin Peace Prize. Soviet Sculptor N.	January 1953. Ce Soir publishes articles by Hervé condemning accused doctors. February. Ce Soir stops publication. March. The "Portrait Affair." April. Thorez returns to France.	January 1953. Pravda announces arrest of 13 doctors accused of having killed Zhdanov and of planning other assassinations. March. Stalin's death. Beginning of destalinization. Ilya Ehrenburg publishes his novel The Thaw. April. Accused doctors are rehabilitated.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
1953 (Continued)		
Nikogosian terminates half-figure sculpture of Aragon highly praised by Soviet critics for its expressiveness and elegance.	June. F.C.P. protests against execution of Rosenbergs for atomic espionage. World Peace Council gathered in Budapest begins campaigning for coexistence.	June. Riots in Eastern Germany. July. Beria's arrest is announced. Celebration of 50th anniversary of Bolshevik party. September. N, Khrushchev officially becomes First secretary of C.P.S.U. December. Execution of Beria.
March 1954. Aragon publishes "Sonnet de la fidélité" in L'Humanité. June. Becomes permanent member of Central Committee of F.C.P. In December attends Second All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in Moscow. Publication of La Lumière de Stendhal, Mes Caravanes, Les Yeux et la Mémoire.	March 1954. August Lecoeur relieved of duties as secretary of Secretariat of F.C.P. June. Thorez takes position against destalinization in speech to XIIIth Congress of F.C.P. October. F.C.P. and the Peace Movement protest against rearmament of West Germany. War in Algeria begins.	August 1954. Alexander Tvardovsky replaced as editor of Novy Mir. October. Rehabilitation of some victims of Stalin's trials. Yugoslavia and Soviet Union restore economic relations. December. Normalization of relations with Yugoslavia.
1955. Publication of Littératures Soviétiques. Boris Taslitzky paints Elsa and Aragon.	"L'Affaire Lecoeur."	April 1955. Warsaw Pact signed.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
1956. Publication of *Introduction aux Littératures soviétiques* and *Le Roman inachevé*. Aragon supports his party's approval of Soviet intervention in Hungary.	June 1956. Publication of Khrushchev's secret speech in *Le Monde*. July. XIVth Congress of F.C.P. November. F.C.P. organizes demonstrations against French intervention in Egypt. *L'Humanité* approves Soviet intervention in Hungary. Exclusion of Pierre Hervé from F.C.P. Ten communist intellectuals demand extraordinary congress of F.C.P.	February 1956. Twentieth Congress of C.P.S.U. Khrushchev's secret speech. April. Dissolution of Kominform. June. Insurrection in Poznan (Poland). October-November. Insurrection in Hungary and Soviet intervention.
1957. Aragon awarded Lenin Peace Prize.	F.C.P. condemns creation of Common Market.	First "sputnik" sent into stratosphere. Shepilov's speech at First Congress of Soviet Artists.
1958. Publication of *La Semaine Sainte*. Aragon travels to Soviet Union. Receives Lenin Peace Prize in the Kremlin.	General de Gaulle takes power as result of referendum.	1958. Publication of Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*. Pasternak awarded Nobel Prize for literature. Is forced to renounce it. Reversal of policy of moderation pursued throughout 1956-1957 and part of 1958.
1959. Publication of *Elsa*, *J'abats mon jeu*. Trip to Moscow. April. Delivers a speech in the Kremlin. May. Reading of "Elsa" in Bibliothèque pansoviétique d'Etat de Littérature etrangère in Moscow.	F.C.P. refuses to accept responsibility for failures of "democratic" forces in 1958. XVth Congress of F.C.P. April. Thorez's speech in praise of Aragon at Communist Youths' Conference.	May 1959. Third Congress of Soviet Writers. Khrushchev's meeting with Soviet writers warning them that they should follow the party line.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
1960. Publication of Les Poètes. April. Publishes article in Central Committee's Weekly France-Nouvelle discussing novel L'Ingénieur Bakhirev by J. Nikolayeva depicting bureaucracy and perversion in the C.P.S.U. Aragon condemns methods of personal leadership. Aragon member of Jury distributing Lenin Peace Prize.	Laurent Casanova receives Lenin Peace Prize.	1960. Declaration of 81 parties gathered in Moscow giving equal rights to all communist parties and stating principle of non-interference in internal affairs of other com. parties. Pasternak dies.
1961. Supports Laurent Casanova in article published by Clarté, organ of Communist Students.	Moscow-Peking conflict. F.C.P. sides with Moscow. XVIth Congress of F.C.P. "L'Affaire Servin-Casanova."	1961. XXIInd Congress of C.P.S.U. More revelations about Stalin era. Khrushchev orders building of Berlin Wall. First man sent into space. Exhibition of French art in Moscow.
1962 Publication of Histoire parallèle des Etats-Unis et de l'U.R.S.S. (with André Maurois).		Summer 1962. World Peace Congress takes place in Moscow. November. Publication of Solzhenitsyn's One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich. December. Manège exhibition of modern painting condemned by Khrushchev.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
1963. Publication of le Fou D'Elsa. Preface to Garaudy's D'un réalisme sans rivages. Trip to Eastern Europe. Receives honorary Doctorate from the University of Prague. Ten radio interviews with Francis Crémieux (published in 1964).	Thorez's illness. Waldeck Rochet named Assistant Secretary General.	Offensive against abstract art and the new currents in Soviet literature. Khrushchev's speech of March 1963. Fernand Léger's exhibition which opened in Moscow in January cancelled in April. May 1963. Conference on Kafka opens in Czechoslovakia. August. Meeting of European Community of Writers in Leningrad.
1964. Publication of Il ne m'est Paris que d'Elsa, Le Voyage de Hollande. Begins publication of Oeuvres croisées romanesques d'Elsa Triolet et Aragon.	May. XVIIth Congress of F.C.P. Condemnation of Chinese Communists. May 1964. Thorez and other party leaders condemn Soviet pamphlet "Judaism without Disguise," for its anti-semitic character. Death of Thorez. Waldeck Rochet becomes Secretary-General.	October 1964. Khrushchev's fall.
1965. Trip to U.S.S.R. where Aragon receives honorary degree from University of Moscow. Publication of La Mise à mort and Les Collages.	February 1965. In an open letter a group of party intellectuals demands open debate of problems concerning F.C.P. and intellectuals. Writers' symposium in Vienna. F.C.P. inaugurates policy "l'unité de la Gauche."	1965. Siniavsky and Daniel arrested. Accused of anti-soviet activities.

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
February 1966. Writes article in *L'Humanité* attacking Soviet Union for its sentencing of writers Andrei Siniavsky and Yuri Daniel. Rewrites *Les Communistes*. Publication of *Elégie à Pablo Neruda*.	March 1966. Meeting of C.C. of F.C.P. devoted to "ideological and cultural problems." Aragon presents resolution emphasizing freedom of discussion of theoretical and ideological problems and necessity of allowing debates "between specialists."	1966. Siniavsky and Daniel trials.
1967. Publication of *Blanche ou l'oubli*. Elected to l'Academie Goncourt. Declines participation in the fourth Congress of Soviet Writers.	F.C.P. marks fortieth anniversary of Aragon's presence in the party at the XVIII Congress of the F.C.P.	May 1967. Fourth All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers.
1968. Aragon prevented from speaking during student demonstrations in May 1968. In August joins with F.C.P. in condemning Russian aggression against Czechoslovakia. Publication of *Aragon parle avec Dominique Arban*.	May-June 1968. Student revolts in France. August. Condemnation of Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in party's daily *l'Humanité* Publication of Arthur London's book *l'Aveu: Dans l'engrenage du procès de Prague*. F.C.P. seeks normalization of relations with the Soviet Union.	August 1968. Warsaw Pact troops invade Czechoslovakia. *Literaturnaya Gazeta* attacks Aragon for "political myopia."

Aragon	F.C.P.	Russia and Satellite Countries
Jan. 1969. Aragon publishes article in L.L.F. criticizing confiscation of Solzhenitsyn's archives by secret police. C.N.E. protests against Solzhenitsyn's expulsion from Writers' Union. Aragon signs the protest and publishes it in L.L.F. Publication of Les Chambres and Je n'ai jamais appris à écrire ou Les incipit.	F.C.P. supports "normalization" in Czechoslovakia. Plays down Dubcek's fall.	April 1969. Dubcek relieved of his duties in C.P.C. Husak becomes Secretary-General. November 1969. Solzhenitsyn's expulsion from Writers' Union.
June 1970. Death of Elsa Triolet.	"The Garaudy Affair." F.C.P. supports award of Nobel Prize to Solzhenitsyn. Tillon expelled from F.C.P.	October 1970. Award of Nobel Prize for Literature to Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Soviet Union condemns Nobel Prize Committee.
1971. Publication of Henri Matisse, roman (2 vols.).		June-July 1971. Fifth Congress of Soviet Writers.
1972. Aragon is awarded Order of October Revolution.	October 1972. Les Lettres Françaises stops publication.	
1974, Publication of Théâtre/ Roman.		
1975. Begins publication of L'Oeuvre poétique with important introductions.	April 1975. Death of Jacques Duclos.	