The Theory and Practice of Commitment in the Prose Works of Louis Aragon

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Doctor of Philosophy

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by

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To my parents

and to Nurettin
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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to analyse the prose writings of Louis Aragon in the light of his membership of the Parti Communiste Français (PCF), a commitment which began when he joined the party in 1927 and lasted until his death in 1982. The basis of my approach has been to consider Aragon as a politically committed writer, since his work very clearly bears the imprint of his political commitment to the PCF, in order to identify the ways in which this political allegiance is translated into a form of literary commitment in his fictional and theoretical works. The notion of literary commitment is one which has been defined in quite dissimilar ways by different critics, some seeing commitment in very general terms, as a moral imperative which impels the writer to take a stand upon the issues of the day, whether social or political. Others have interpreted commitment in a much more specific way, defining it as a means of incorporating the expression of a political position into a work of literature. This variance of opinion has necessitated a brief survey of a number of different analyses of the nature of literary commitment, and the elaboration of a working definition of the term, in order to be able to place Aragon in the context of this debate.

Aragon's adoption of the doctrine of socialist realism in 1934 is seen as the central feature in his development as a committed writer. It is also a feature which differentiates him from other committed writers in that it involves him in the incorporation of the ideological perspective of a particular political party in his works, something which a writer such as Sartre resolutely avoided. The emphasis which
Sartre placed upon freedom was not a priority shared by Aragon, who was more concerned with the use of literature as a weapon in the political struggle. Aragon's association with socialist realism and the consequent ideological bias of much of his work has made of him a contentious figure, one difficult to assess with any measure of objectivity, as is evidenced by the regular, often indiscriminately fulsome praises of his work by party comrades, and the often harsh and even virulent criticism which his writing has attracted from the opposite end of the political spectrum. The basic principles of socialist realism are described in Part I, as a prelude to a detailed analysis in Part II of the themes and ideological standpoints of a group of novels, in order to establish the nature and extent of the influence of Aragon's political views upon his literary production, and to evaluate his contribution as a committed writer.

Aragon's prolific literary career as a poet, novelist, literary critic and journalist, together with constraints of space, have necessitated a strict delimitation of the texts to be analysed in this study. The volume of material available and Aragon's continuous development have meant that it has not been possible to establish a precise chronological span which would incorporate work which can be considered as politically committed, whilst excluding that which cannot. Clearly, not all of Aragon's prose works display a politically committed viewpoint. This is particularly the case with much of his Surrealist work. Analysis of works written before 1934 is therefore limited to those works which have expressed views relevant to the subject. The fictional works of the Surrealist period have not been included since, although a work like *Le Paysan de Paris* displays an increased interest in the depiction of the real world, this cannot be said to equate to a
position of political commitment. The study of Aragon's fictional work is therefore limited to the socialist-realist novels, which most clearly express Aragon's commitment to the fictional expression of the ideology of the PCF; beginning with his first acknowledged work of socialist realism, Les Cloches de Bâle, published in 1934, and continuing through the cycle of novels entitled Le Monde réel, which culminates in Les Communistes, written between 1949 and 1951. In order to trace the evolution of Aragon's interpretation and practice of the method of socialist realism, detailed analysis of La Semaine sainte is included, since Aragon always maintained that, despite appearances, this novel was just as much a work of socialist realism as were the preceding five. It was felt that detailed analysis of these six novels would enable a clearer picture to emerge of the nature of Aragon's commitment than would have been possible with a more wide-ranging study of all of his novels, particularly since the novels published after 1958 are concerned more with issues such as the multiplicity of the human character, the activity of novel writing, and indeed reflect some of the political disillusion which characterised Aragon's journalistic writing in the late 1960s and early 1970s, developments which could not be adequately encompassed within the scope of this study. Aragon's own labelling of Le Monde réel and La Semaine sainte as socialist realist novels suggests a coherent grouping as does the following comment:

Il faut aussi considérer Les Communistes à la fois comme l'achèvement des quatre romans qui précèdent celui-ci, et comme la préparation du roman qui suivra, La Semaine sainte.

This neat categorisation perhaps suggests a clearer line of development within the novels than is actually apparent. The picture is rather more complex, for there are differences both within Le Monde réel, and
between Le Monde réel and La Semaine sainte, in their treatment of political themes. Nonetheless, this grouping provides a logical structure within which to work.

In order to provide a framework for the discussion of the novels, I have also undertaken an analysis of the ideas expressed in Aragon's critical writing on the subject of the political role of the writer and socialist realism. In order to encompass the developments seen in the novels, it has been necessary to refer to work dating from before the publication of Les Cloches de Bâle. An analysis is therefore undertaken of two significant articles, 'Le prolétariat de l'esprit' (1925)² and 'Le prix de l'esprit', (1926)³ and of Traité du style (1927), an analysis which I consider to be an essential prelude to the examination of Aragon as a committed writer, since these works constitute important discussions of the political role of the writer and intellectual before Aragon joined the PCF, and before the development of socialist realism. Extensive reference is made to works of literary criticism and to articles which define his theoretical position after his adherence to the party and his espousal of socialist realism. In order to document the important developments represented by La Semaine sainte, there is systematic analysis of articles and critical works published by Aragon up until the mid 1960s.

Aragon has been the object of considerable critical attention. Many of the studies available at the time of completion of this thesis are general surveys of Aragon's entire career or of a large part of it, and therefore do not permit the type of detailed analysis I intend to bring to my discussion. Other publications offer discussion of individual novels in the context of a wider debate. J.E. Flower's Literature and the Left in France⁴ provides a useful discussion of Les Cloches de Bâle.
situating it within a much wider framework of reference, as the title suggests. Les Cloches de Bâle is seen as part of a continuing development of left-wing literature, and more specifically, in relation to the evolution of socialist realism in France, as an example of a socialist realist novel. Susan Suleiman's Authoritarian Fictions. The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre provides an illuminating discussion of Les Beaux Quartiers as an example of the roman à thèse. Her analysis, which I have found useful in my discussion of the ideological elements of Aragon's novels, is primarily a structural one which identifies the formal mechanisms operating within ideological works of fiction whose aim is to convince the reader of the validity of the views proposed in them. Jacqueline Bernard's study Aragon: la Permanence du surréalisme dans le cycle du Monde réel sees a continuity in the work of Aragon which critics have tended to disregard in the past. She maintains that:

Aujourd'hui, on commence peut-être à comprendre que cette oeuvre monumentale, inégale et attrante à la fois est un tout, que nulle partie n'en peut être amputée sans fausser l'ensemble.

She nonetheless concentrates on two specific parts of Aragon's literary production, the Surrealist period and the novels of Le Monde réel in order to analyse:

les liens secrets, les réseaux linguistiques, sémantiques, affectifs qui relient (Le Monde réel) à la période précédente et qui sont porteurs de développements futurs jusqu'à Théâtre/Roman.

Her discussion, whilst focusing on language, imagery and theme, does not, however, take into account the ideological enterprise of Le Monde réel which, I would contend, is central to his purpose. Sophie Bibrowska's perceptive study Une Mise à Mort. L'Itinéraire romanesque
d'Aragon considers Le Monde réel, La Semaine sainte and Blanche ou l'oubli in the light of the fragmentation of the personality portrayed in La Mise à Mort. Taking the Alfred/Anthoine confrontation to be the expression of a division within Aragon himself, between the writer (Alfred) and the Communist (Anthoine), she sees a constant tension within Aragon's novels, a tension embodied in the view that Les Communistes, which is politically the culminating point of the Monde Réel cycle, is an aesthetic failure in that it is geared entirely to the expression of the ideology of the PCF, while La Semaine sainte is seen to succeed, since it is a fruitful combination of 'la présence à la fois d'Alfred et d'Anthoine,'10 (author's emphasis) in which ideology does not dominate. Persuasive though this analysis is, it would seem to be necessary to explain the unevenness of success in these novels not merely as the result of some kind of artistic schizophrenia, but also to take account of the difficulties posed by the artistic enterprise Aragon has committed himself to in his espousal of socialist realism. It would also seem important to view La Semaine sainte not as the result of a compromise between the Communist and creative writer, but in the context of a clearly documented development of the theory of socialist realism.

The approach of other critical works is determined by the political viewpoint of the author. This is particularly the case with Garaudy's sympathetic and wide-ranging study L'Itinéraire d'Aragon. Du surréalisme au Monde Réel.11 It is, however, a rich source of information on Aragon's career up until the publication of Les Communistes. It does not contain any analysis of La Semaine sainte.

Several theses have been written on various aspects of Aragon's novels, all of which examine the novels individually. Soukup's 'The Realism of Louis Aragon: a Study of Four Novels of Le Monde réel',12
as its title suggests, deals only with the first four novels of the cycle, in the light of Aragon's ideas on socialist realism. *Les Communistes* is left out on the grounds that it is an incomplete novel. Although the non-completion of this novel does pose certain problems in the assessment of *Le Monde réel*, it is nonetheless an intrinsic part of the cycle, and one which needs to be analysed in order to put the whole of the sequence into context. Soukup also considers Aragon's treatment of women and of love, but without detailed reference to the texts. Bou Mansour's 'Le Traitement du thème politique dans *Le Monde réel d'Aragon*,' actually ranges more widely than its title would suggest, covering Aragon's work from the Surrealist period up to *Théâtre/Roman*. His approach is to see Aragon's work as a totality and in particular he aims to define the position of the *Monde Réel* cycle in the overall framework of Aragon's novels. In order to achieve this, he too restricts his in-depth analysis to the first four novels of *Le Monde réel*, dealing with *Les Communistes* only to discuss Aragon's re-writing of it, and discussing *La Semaine sainte* only in its relationship to *Le Monde réel*. Molodoshanin's 'Louis Aragon: the Novel and Political Commitment,' focuses particularly on the influence of the historical and political background upon Aragon's novels and upon his development as a political writer, rather than on a detailed analysis of the novels themselves. It seemed therefore, that despite the substantial volume of critical work already in existence, there was still scope for a study which examined the novels from *Les Cloches de Bâle* to *La Semaine sainte* in relation to the doctrine of socialist realism, and which approached them through a thematic analysis, in order to emphasise the elements they have in common, as well as to highlight their disparities, rather than to consider them chronologically and as separate entities as has
been the frequent practice. It was also considered necessary to examine them in the context of Aragon's aims as a socialist realist writer.

This study is divided into two parts, which correspond respectively to the theory and practice of Aragon's commitment. Part I begins with a discussion of commitment in literature and a suggestion of how Aragon fits into the framework of this broadly-based concept. The remainder of this first part of the thesis defines the nature of commitment for Aragon. Chapter two considers his changing attitude to the role of the writer within society prior to his adoption of socialist realism. Chapter three then proceeds to an analysis of the defining features of both the Soviet version of socialist realism and of Aragon's interpretation of it. Chapter four traces the developments within Aragon's interpretation of socialist realism during the late 1950s and early 1960s, seeing this in the context of a changed political and cultural climate within the PCF.

Part II of the thesis attempts an analysis of *Le Monde réel* novels and *La Semaine sainte*, by means of a systematic comparison of the novels with the principal features of socialist realism, as defined by Aragon in his critical writings. This permits a thematic study of the novels, drawing attention to the similarities and disparities within them. It also permits an evaluation of Aragon's fictional practice of the method of socialist realism. It emerged, for example, in my study of the novels that in addition to the areas delineated by the Soviet model of socialist realism, Aragon was considerably interested in the depiction of relationships of love, and that far from being extraneous to the ideological aims of socialist realism, these had an important role to play for Aragon in the ideological framework of his novels. The importance of love has been well documented in Aragon's poetry, but
little critical attention has been paid to the elaboration and significance of this theme in the novels. This has led to an investigation of the links between love and commitment in the Monde réel novels.

Because of its inherent difference and because it does not form part of the cycle of Le Monde réel, La Semaine sainte is treated separately in order to permit an evaluation of the application of the developments which took place in Aragon's interpretation of socialist realism.

The conclusion will assess the novels in terms of the theory of socialist realism, as expounded by Aragon. It will finally evaluate his work in the general framework of committed literature.
NOTES

1. Aragon, Je n'ai jamais appris à écrire ou Les Incipit, p.101
   Full bibliographical notes to all texts referred to in footnotes
   are given in the selected bibliography at the end of the thesis.
2. 'Le Prolétariat de l'esprit', Clarté, novembre 1925, pp.335-37
3. 'Le Prix de l'esprit-I', Clarté, juin 1926, pp.7-9 and 'Le Prix de
   l'esprit (suite et fin)', Clarté, octobre-décembre 1926, pp.122-23
   since the Late Nineteenth Century, 1985
5. Susan Suleiman, Authoritarian Fictions. The Ideological Novel as a
   Literary Genre, 1983.
6. Jacqueline Bernard, Aragon. La Permanence du surréalisme dans le
7. Bernard, p.11
8. Ibid., p.12
9. Sophie Bibrowska, Une Mise à Mort. L'itinéraire romanesque d'Aragon,
   1972
10. Bibrowska, p.120
11. Roger Garaudy, L'Itinéraire d'Aragon. Du surréalisme au Monde Réel,
    1961
12. G.T. Soukup 'The Realism of Louis Aragon: a Study of Four Novels of
    Le Monde réel', 1973
13. Fouad Bou Mansour, 'Le Traitement du thème politique dans Le Monde
    réel d'Aragon', 1978
14. Margarareth Molodoshanin, 'Louis Aragon: the novel and political
    commitment', 1976
15. Charles Haroche, L'Idée de l'amour dans Le Fou d'Elsa et l'oeuvre
    d'Aragon, 1966
PART I
THEORY
CHAPTER ONE

THE COMMITMENT DEBATE

The debate which developed around the notion of commitment in literature during the first half of the twentieth century has in recent years ceased to be of major significance in contemporary France, where the tendency has been, since the experimentation of the *nouveau roman* to concentrate on the potentially revolutionary nature of writing itself. The notion of commitment did however have a profound effect upon many of the writers of Aragon's generation. Before attempting to analyse the theory and practice of commitment in Aragon's works I shall outline a general definition of the term, trace its origins briefly and describe its development in France, in order to place Aragon's work in the general context of this debate. Much valuable work has already been done on the subject, so this chapter will in no way be an exhaustive or innovative discussion of commitment, but merely provide a framework within which to place Aragon and assess his contribution to committed literature.

The involvement of intellectuals, writers and artists in the political and social issues of their time is by no means an exclusively twentieth-century phenomenon. Figures as various as Voltaire, Courbet and Zola became involved in contemporary issues and attempted to bring their influence to bear in the resolution of these issues. If the artist's involvement in politics is nothing new, where then does the originality of commitment lie? Manuèle Wasserman sees Lamartine, Hugo, Daumier, Baudelaire and Courbet as the forerunners of twentieth-century committed writers:
They perceived themselves as spiritual and moral leaders of humanity and felt obligated to awaken their fellow men to the causes of truth and righteousness. This is why their political behaviour was characterized most often by symbolic gestures through which they expressed their positions regarding certain regimes and policies.

The crucial difference between the political involvement of, say, the Romantics and, for example, the commitment of Aragon in the twentieth century is that whereas the former, largely speaking, kept their commitment separate from their art, the committed writer of this century has devoted his art to the examination and discussion of certain political or social issues of his day:

The greatest originality of the modern conception of commitment is that it claims to be inseparable from literature itself.

Not only this but, as David Caute has put it, literature itself has become action, 'a form of secondary action, action by disclosure'.

The erosion of the nineteenth-century separation between art and politics has been variously attributed to the First World War, the 1930s and the need to choose between Socialism and Fascism, and 'the rise of totalitarianism, with its concomitant violence, persecutions, and heightened ideological conflict'. Maxwell Adereth sees the German occupation of France during the Second World War and 'the impact of modern ideologies upon literature' as particularly strong motivating forces. All of these explanations, and in particular the latter one, are persuasive, yet Adereth fails to explain just why modern ideologies, any more than others, should 'compel each one of us to re-examine critically his position in the world and his responsibility to other men'.

It would seem that while the events of the first half of the twentieth century have certainly elicited a significant response from the intellectuals, we need to look at the way in which these crises
affected the intellectuals' conception of their role in society to explain why such a response within the realm of art became imperative to so many.

Committed writers in this century have not only departed from the nineteenth-century position by incorporating their views into their artistic activity, but have also contributed to a progressive change in the type of writing produced. The mirroring of society and social ills, as epitomised by the Realists and Naturalists, is gradually transformed into a more explicit espousal of a specific cause, which often brings literature closer to politics. As I will go on to demonstrate, not every committed writer advocates the policies of a particular political party in his work, though the opponents of commitment in literature are apt to reduce the issue to this; nonetheless the nature of modern society being, as it is, increasingly dominated by politics, the intellectual, as the voice of that society, often finds that the speaking out which he feels impelled to undertake as an intellectual is more and more likely to be political. The objective partisanship which Marxist literary criticism has attributed to Balzac has become a subjective or active partisanship in this century.

I emphasise the political and social aspects of commitment since some critics have tended to interpret it along much broader lines. John Mander in *The Writer and Commitment* sees commitment not as exclusively political but as a moral force, so that for him uncommitted literature is a contradiction in terms. While one might wish to agree that commitment does embrace more than the purely political, for instance when discussing Camus's commitment, as I shall do later, the problem with such a broad definition is that the idea risks becoming virtually meaningless. For example the statement that, 'All art is
committed in the sense that it is a statement of value not always aesthetic',\textsuperscript{11} does not help a great deal in defining the notion with any great precision. Mander does go on to admit that his definition may be too wide. The dangers of both excessively broad and excessively narrow definitions are illustrated in the following comments by Charles I.Glicksberg in \textit{The Literature of Commitment}, when on the one hand he reduces commitment to the extremes of vagueness by saying that

Céline is certainly a committed writer in that he is determined to reveal the inescapable horror of existence.\textsuperscript{12}

while on the other hand equating the appearance of commitment with Communism:

it was not until the Communist critics proclaimed that it was the duty of the writer to join the Party or, in the thirties, to become a fellow traveller in the United Front, that the ethic of commitment was regarded as a categorical imperative.\textsuperscript{13}

David L.Schalk in \textit{The Spectrum of Political Engagement} is aware of the limitations of too broad a definition of commitment. For this reason he rejects the notion of \textit{témoignage}, as discussed by Emmanuel Mounier and the \textit{Esprit} group in the 1930s. \textit{Témoignage} is perceived as being the step before commitment, the action of bearing witness which precedes definitive action,\textsuperscript{14} and in his tentative definition Schalk expressly excludes \textit{témoignage}.\textsuperscript{15} He also excludes from his definition the notion of \textit{embrigadement}, which he associates with 'unquestioning party involvement', though he also acknowledges the ambiguities of this very subjective term, and admits that one person's \textit{embrigadement} may be another's \textit{engagement}.\textsuperscript{16} Another category specifically excluded is that of the man of action or the 'adventurer', (here Schalk includes Malraux) who sees action as a means
of self-definition rather than a manifestation of commitment to an external cause. Schalk's final proposed definition is that commitment (or engagement, which he prefers as a more precise term) is:

the political or social action of an intellectual who has realised that abstention is a ruse, a commitment to the status quo, and who makes a conscious and willful choice to enter the arena, never abandoning his or her critical judgement.

As a definition it seems to perpetuate the separation of political and artistic activity, not seeing commitment as an integral part of the artist's creative work.

I would prefer to define commitment in literature as the writer's dedication through his art to a particular cause, be it political or social, with the result that the finished work serves a dual purpose: functioning on one level as artistic expression and on another as a political or social activity. Within the limits of this definition, two subgroups can be identified: the politically aligned, those promoting a specific ideology, and the non-aligned, those promoting more abstract or non-political values. In this way, embrigadement is not, of itself, excluded. Once, however, embrigadement leads the writer to cross the dividing line between art and propaganda, it could be excluded from the definition since it would no longer allow the writer to fulfill the dual function of committed literature. This, however brings us up against the insoluble problem of objectively deciding just where to place that dividing line. In general terms, one might say that art becomes propaganda when aesthetic values become subordinated to the political ends of the work in question, but this is an abstract evaluation which will constantly need to be measured against individual works.

It will be noticed that, while my definition does not exclude right-
wing commitment, and deliberately so, my discussion will focus on committed intellectuals on the left wing. I adopt this approach since, although right-wing commitment may exist, as Schalk argues, there is nonetheless little or no theoretical discussion on the subject within the context of the right wing. The debate has always centred on the Left.

As with any literary tendency, it is impossible to say with any degree of precision when the debate began. I would certainly agree with Schalk that, contrary to the frequent assumption, Sartre was not the originator of the idea. As I hope to illustrate, not only the term itself but also the concept were in currency well before Qu'est-ce que la littérature?: The Dreyfus Affair is generally considered to be an important juncture in this respect: the moment when a writer stepped into the forefront of a political crisis and took a stand, not as a would-be politician but as a writer and intellectual, as Zola did. Of course this action of itself does not constitute the definitive origin of commitment. Literary trends rarely emerge with such convenient precision. Nonetheless the Dreyfus Affair is of great significance in the intellectual's consciousness of his role in society. Never again would the isolation of the intellectual from society be an unquestioned fact of life.

An early discussion of the issue of commitment took place between Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland during the years 1921-1922. The debate, which took the form of a series of open letters (and which has been analysed in an article by D.J.Fisher19), was not discussed in terms of a definition of commitment, (which had not in any case gained currency as a term). It concentrated instead on the different ways in which the intellectual could show his responsibility towards society.
Despite his continued contact with both the Socialist and Communist groups after the split of the Socialist Party at Tours in 1920, Rolland preferred to remain non-partisan: a result of his desire to retain independence of mind, which was a central factor in his arguments about the role of the intellectual.

Barbusse, on the other hand, who sided with the Communist Party at Tours, was principally interested in winning intellectuals over to Communism. Anyone who resisted, he considered to be socially irresponsible. He persisted over a long period of time in encouraging Rolland to join his Clarté group, but Rolland repeatedly refused to do so.

Controversy was provoked by Barbusse's attack upon what he called 'Rollandisme'. While commending Rolland himself as a writer, Barbusse accused Rolland and his group of having gone only part way along the right road, of having proclaimed revolt instead of revolution:

L'esprit révolutionnaire est le complément nécessaire de l'esprit de révolte. La pensée humaine doit se rendre indépendante pour fructifier en actes, et non pas pour être indépendante. Les 'rollandistes' n'ont accompli que la première moitié de leur devoir d'hommes de pensée.20

In his reply, Rolland maintains that the duty of the artist lies in remaining free and detached from partisan debate:

Croyez-vous que le devoir actuel de l'artiste, du savant, de l'homme de pensée, soit de s'engager(...) ou bien, ne vous semble-t-il pas que la meilleure façon de servir la cause humaine et la Révolution même, c'est de garder l'intégrité de votre pensée libre.21

This insistence upon freedom was condemned in Barbusse's third letter to Rolland. Freedom for Barbusse was neither a necessity nor a right, but a privilege which should come second to the exigencies of the moment.

Thus we can see that as early as 1921-1922 there was debate not only
over the responsibility of the intellectual but also over the nature of this responsibility. The division between politically aligned and independent commitment was already in evidence, as is demonstrated by Barbusse’s commitment to Communism as opposed to that of Rolland to pacifism and freedom. The participation of many other well-known intellectuals in the debate\textsuperscript{22} demonstrates that the nature of the problem was already recognised and discussion widespread.

Some years later in 1927, the question was becoming enough of an issue for Julien Benda to claim in \textit{La Trahison des clercs} that the intellectuals were abandoning their duty as intellectuals and becoming involved in what he called 'les passions politiques'. In his essay, Benda traces the rise of these passions, among which he includes 'les passions de race, les passions de classes, les passions nationales'.\textsuperscript{23} Not only have they permeated society in general, but they have also begun to influence the intellectuals:

\begin{quote}
\textit{les clercs se mettent à faire le jeu des passions politiques; ceux qui formaient un frein au réalisme des peuples s’en font les stimulants.}\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

Benda’s definition of the term 'clercs' indicates that his understanding of it is far removed from that of either Rolland or Barbusse. The intellectuals are

\begin{quote}
tous ceux dont l'activité, par essence, ne poursuit pas de fins pratiques, mais qui, demandant leur joie à l’exercice de l’art ou de la science ou de la spéculation métaphysique, bref à la possession d’un bien non temporel, disent en quelque manière: 'Mon royaume n’est pas de ce monde'.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

According to Benda, not only have these men brought politics into their own work, but in so doing they are encouraging the spread of 'passions politiques' amongst their fellow men.
It would seem easy to dismiss Benda quite simply as an opponent of commitment, yet despite his condemnation of the intellectual's espousal of politics in his work, he does place important limitations upon these statements. In fact, Benda only believes the 'clerc' to be betraying his role when he descends into the political arena to champion the specific passions of race, class and nation. The cause of abstract justice, however, is one which is worthy of the 'clerc', and so in Benda's view, the action of such as Voltaire and Zola was perfectly valid. This stance is reiterated at later stages in Benda's career, as R.Nichols has illustrated; but although Benda comes ever closer to the Left and even to Communism, he maintained that it was 'la mystique de gauche', and not its politics that he approved. Commitment itself he condemned as an abdication of choice and thus of freedom, but he makes it clear that, in 1937, intellectual isolation is no more acceptable an alternative, and urges involvement, even with the Communists:

I say that the 'clerc' must now take sides. He must choose the side which, if it threatens liberty, at least threatens it in order to give bread to all men(...). But he will retain the right to judge them. He will keep his critical spirit.

In the commitment debate Benda is a somewhat equivocal figure, on the one hand condemning commitment and the 'clerc's' espousal of 'les passions politiques', while on the other admitting that the 'clerc' may be obeying his duty by intervening in a case of abstract justice, which may be associated with the Left. This admission coming, as it does, from a man who is associated with opposition to commitment in literature and who reaffirmed this opposition throughout his life, shows how critical the issue is becoming by the late twenties and early thirties.

There is little that is equivocal about the commitment of Paul
Nizan. A member of the French Communist Party until the year before his death in 1940, there was no doubt in his mind over his role as an intellectual. His first major essay Aden-Arabie published in 1932, is a denunciation of modern European society, in particular of the bourgeoisie, its culture and philosophy. The attack on philosophy, as taught at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, where Nizan himself had been a student, also forms the basis for his second essay Les Chiens de garde, which as Schalk has pointed out, forms a rebuttal of Benda's La Trahison des clercs in that while Nizan also accuses the intellectuals or, more particularly, the philosophers, of betraying their role, he makes a crucial distinction by reversing the terms of the argument: the philosophers betray, in Nizan's view, precisely because they do not descend into the political arena:

Nous vivons dans un temps où les philosophes s'abstiennent...Il faudra même parler d'abandon de poste, de trahison.

This démission hides the fact that the philosophers are on the side of the oppressors, and Nizan challenges them to leave their façade of impartiality behind and to openly choose between oppressor and oppressed:

Dans un monde brutalement divisé en maîtres et en serviteurs, il faut enfin avouer publiquement une alliance longtemps cachée avec les maîtres, ou proclamer le ralliement au parti des serviteurs. Aucune place n'est laissée à l'impartialité des clercs. Il ne reste plus rien que des combats de partisans.

Just as Sartre was later to proclaim that silence, just as much as words, has an impact within the world, Nizan maintained that 'Abstention is a choice', accusing the philosophers who remain detached from the world, of having nonetheless made an ideological choice. Not only does
Nizan affirm that commitment is the duty of the philosopher, but he also indicates that the commitment he has in mind is that advocated by Barbusse. It must be a party-based commitment:

Le travail efficace de la philosophie révolutionnaire n'est possible que par une liaison, par une union intimes, par une identification du philosophe et de la classe qui porte la Révolution(...) il faudra aller jusqu'à dire que le technicien de la philosophie révolutionnaire sera l'homme d'un parti.

This party-based commitment is for Nizan not only a central feature of philosophy, but also of literature which he sees as a potential force for revolution. As with philosophy, Nizan attacks bourgeois literature and culture, and proposes a model for committed revolutionary literature. In 'Littérature révolutionnaire en France' he criticises populism and proletarian literature for not being truly revolutionary. He advocates a literature that is revolutionary in the full sense of the word, a literature which will help to bring about revolution:

une littérature révolutionnaire au sens réel et non plus au sens formel comprendra tous les écrits exaltants, préparant la révolution prolétarienne, puisant en elle tous ses thèmes et ses inspirations.

He also advocates that the proletariat should be encouraged to read such literature, to prevent it from becoming just another province of the bourgeoisie.

In 1934 Nizan attended the Soviet Writers' Congress in Moscow, and the following year his literary reviews show that his belief in the necessity of literary commitment has been reinforced. Yet despite his firm espousal of revolutionary ideals, he does not wish to limit literature to the purely political, but allows for the discussion of more abstract values:
La fonction éminente de l'écrivain n'est pas de distraire les hommes d'eux-mêmes, mais de leur proposer les plus hautes valeurs impliquées par leur vie.

His attitude to the issue of propaganda is equally balanced. He is aware of the propagandist nature of all art, whether bourgeois or revolutionary, and does not condemn it, except when the writer tries to hide what he is doing:

Toute littérature est une propagande. La propagande bourgeoise est idéaliste, elle cache son jeu(...). La propagande révolutionnaire sait qu'elle est propagande, elle publie ses fins avec une franchise complète.

Nizan is, however, careful to stress that pure propaganda, writing which merely sets out to prove a thesis, without any artistic content is quite divorced from art, even revolutionary art:

Le romancier révolutionnaire n'est pas un homme qui prouve. La preuve relève de la science et s'administre par des techniques très précises dont les moyens ne sont pas ceux de l'art.

The authentic political novel must avoid such pitfalls while still remaining true to the committed ideal.

Nizan's attitudes to literature can be summed up in the title of his article 'Une littérature responsable'. His responsibility as a writer is seen in the dedication of his literary work to the propounding of revolutionary political ideas, and more specifically the views of the PCF. His novels, however, are not purely and simply fictional accounts of his political beliefs. In his own life, as Simone de Beauvoir has recounted, the fear of death loomed large, and even his political beliefs were not sufficient to allay these fears:

Il nous intéressa surtout quand il aborda un thème qui entre tous
lui tenait au coeur: la mort(...) Il s'était demandé si la foi socialiste aidait à la conjurer. Il l'espérait et il avait longuement interrogé à ce propos les jeunes Soviétiques: tous avaient répondu qu'en face de la mort la camaraderie, la solidarité n'étaient d'aucun secours, et qu'ils en avaient peur.40

This element is reflected in his fiction where death is a recurrent motif, and thus adds another feature to the theoretical nature of his literary criticism, showing that politically committed writing need not limit the writer to a simple expression of political doctrine.

The issue of commitment was being debated concurrently in the pages of the review Esprit. According to Schalk, the Esprit group was responsible for devoting 'the most attention during the 1930s to clarifying engagement.'41 The pages of Esprit (founded by Emmanuel Mounier, a Catholic) contain much discussion of political and social action, but without subscribing to any one party. Without discussing the movement as a whole (which Schalk has already done), it will be useful to refer to a couple of articles written by members of the group to identify the rough outlines of their version of commitment.

In 'Réflexions sur l'engagement personnel', written in 1937, P.-L.Landsberg (also a Catholic) comments that existence can only be meaningful if we accept the fact that we live not in isolation but in a collectivity, and in terms which Sartre is to use himself to discuss commitment, Landsberg sees acceptance of our situation as a key issue. This situation places before us a series of choices and faced with these choices, we have to make a responsible decision, which will have repercussions for the future:

car nous n'avons pas à choisir entre des principes et des idéologies abstraites, mais entre des forces et des mouvements réels qui du passé et du présent conduisent à la région des possibilités de l'avenir.42
The non-partisan nature of this commitment is underlined by stressing that what is being discussed is not embrigadement:

Il importe surtout de défendre l'acte de l'engagement contre le jugement soi-disant neutre qu'affecte une fausse noblesse intellectuelle et de distinguer en même temps cet acte d'un embrigadement sans esprit et sans conscience.

Embrigadement is not defined precisely, but in the context of the position of the review and the article, we can assume with Schalk that it means commitment to the policies of a particular party.

Despite the fact that the individual does not have complete freedom of choice, the act of commitment is nonetheless perceived as a free act:

non pas parce qu'il participe à une liberté formelle de l'arbitre, mais parce qu'il traduit une décision de la personne qui prend conscience de sa responsabilité propre et réalise sa formation positive en tant que personne.

Commitment is neither 'une abdication de la personne' nor can it be viewed as a solution to individual problems. Above all commitment is a duty. The attempt to reconcile freedom and commitment is an unusual one.

Mounier, in a chapter on commitment in Le Personnalisme, emphasises many of the same points: the responsibility of the individual to choose and to act; the place of the individual in the collectivity, not in isolation; the difference between commitment and embrigadement. In addition Mounier introduces another concept elucidated also by Sartre with regard to commitment: embarquement, inescapable involvement in one's own age, remarking as does Landsberg that our decision to become committed is not a free one:
On parle toujours de s'engager comme s'il dépendait de nous: mais nous sommes embarqués, pré-occupés. C'est pourquoi l'abstention est illusoire. 50

The ideas put forward by Landsberg and Mounier in particular illustrate why it is incorrect to see Sartre as the creator of commitment. Not only have we already seen how many were discussing the notion long before Qu'est-ce que la littérature?, but with Landsberg, writing in 1937, we see the issue discussed in the very terms Sartre was to use a decade later.

A somewhat problematical figure in the debate around commitment is André Malraux. Schalk dismisses Malraux and all other 'adventurers' or 'existential gamblers', to use his other term, from his definition of commitment. Yet can one dismiss him as easily as this? His two most well-known novels are, after all, about the problems of revolutionary action, and although they do not contribute to the commitment debate, they provide a translation into fiction of some of some of the problems encountered by the man committed to revolutionary action. La Condition Humaine, although it is a novel about revolutionaries, does not put forward a specific political viewpoint; but then this does not in itself disqualify Malraux from being a committed novelist. It is a novel which examines the role which revolution and action play in the lives of the characters of the book. Malraux's conclusion is that while Katow's commitment is a genuine desire to fight for the oppressed, both Kyo, who sees action as giving a meaning to his life, and Tchen, for whom action becomes an obsession with terrorism and in its turn a meaning for life and an escape from solitude, have ulterior motives in committing themselves to the revolution. In the overall context of the novel, political action becomes one of several solutions to the dilemma posed
by 'la condition humaine'. Malraux then has gone beyond the act of commitment to explore the human motivation behind it. Whereas for Nizan the fear of death was ultimately not mitigated by political commitment, Malraux presents it precisely as a means of overcoming this fear.

L'Espoir also investigates various types of commitment. Once again the act of commitment is taken for granted, since all the major characters are on the side of Republicanism. The interest lies in the motivations of different individuals; in the difference between Communists and Anarchists; between 'être' and 'faire': the Anarchists' concern with being as opposed to the Communists' concern with action.

Malraux gives an indication as to his reasons for emphasising the metaphysical rather than the purely political side of commitment in literature in the preface to Le Temps du mépris, when he comments:

Ce n'est pas la passion qui détruit l'oeuvre d'art, c'est la volonté de prouver.

Despite his own personal commitment to Communism at the time, he seems to be saying that it is not the function of a work of art to put itself at the service of an ideology to prove a political point. He further emphasised the necessary distance between pure politics and art at the Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 when he said:

Le marxisme c'est la conscience du social; la culture c'est la conscience du psychologique.

Despite this refusal to put his work at the service of Communism by directly 'proving' its theses, there would still seem to be grounds for classifying Malraux as a committed writer, in that over a certain span of his life he dedicated his work to indirectly promoting revolutionary
values by exploring the motivation of committed revolutionaries, whilst retaining a certain critical distance.

Sartre's position in the commitment debate is much clearer; indeed his essay *Qu'est-ce que la littérature* has been described as the 'Bible of French commitment'. As I have already pointed out, Sartre is frequently, and erroneously, considered to be the one who introduced commitment into France. As we have seen, key ideas in Sartre's discussion were not entirely new. What he did achieve though, was a full-scale formulation of the notion of commitment at a time when the responsibility and the role of the writer were of paramount concern: in the years following the Second World War and the Occupation. Before the war Sartre had been uninfluenced by political events and felt no need for any kind of political commitment. Simone de Beauvoir has described their lack of interest in political matters during the Front Populaire:

Nous partagions jusqu'à un certain point cet enthousiasme, mais il ne nous vint pas à l'idée de défiler, de chanter, de crier avec les autres. Telle était à l'époque, notre attitude; les événements pouvaient susciter en nous de vifs sentiments de colère, de crainte, de joie: mais nous n'y participions pas; nous restions spectateurs.

The war and the German occupation were to change this attitude radically. For Sartre, the whole experience had a profound effect upon his awareness of his role as a writer. The prospect of devoting his writing to a cause seemed to be the only answer to post-war disillusion. Although Sartre admitted that Resistance writers did not produce much great literature, they certainly provided an indication of the direction which literature could now take. Certainly when the whole of Europe was concerned with rebuilding, writing could no longer be an intellectual pastime, but must be 'Un métier qui exige un apprentissage, un travail
The issue of the responsibility of the writer is for Sartre intimately linked to the growing importance of the philosophy of existentialism. Taking as axiomatic the non-existence of God, existentialism confers upon man complete freedom. Yet paradoxically, this does not grant him complete licence to do as he pleases, but demands in return that man accepts responsibility for all his actions, chosen in complete freedom:

la première démarche de l'existentialisme est de mettre tout homme en possession de ce qu'il est et de faire reposer sur lui la responsabilité totale de son existence.

If a writer accepts this freedom, he must also accept the responsibilities consequent upon it, which means for Sartre the end of artistic irresponsibility.

Having thus arrived at the necessity for commitment, Sartre set out his ideas in the foreword to the first issue of his review Les Temps Modernes and in his essay Qu'est-ce que la littérature? In the essay he traces briefly the evolution of the writer from the twelfth century to the present day and then goes on to discuss the 'Situation de l'écrivain en 1947'. The basic principles of the essay include the assumption that all prose literature (an important distinction, since Sartre contends that poetry by its very essence cannot be committed) must be used to express a prise de position as regards contemporary society. He maintains that neutrality is impossible since even silence is a prise de position, an implicit reinforcement of the status quo. He gives the example of the war in Indochina:
Si vous ne dites rien vous êtes nécessairement pour la continuation de la guerre; on est toujours responsable de ce qu'on n'essaie pas d'empêcher.

For Sartre our involvement in society is axiomatic: 'nous sommes embarqués', and the key moment for the writer, the moment of commitment, lies in the realisation of this fact:

Je dirai qu'un écrivain est engagé lorsqu'il tâche à prendre la conscience la plus lucide et la plus entière d'être embarqué.

Having reached this point, the writer must take stock of his situation and act upon it through his writing, which for Sartre is a form of action:

L'écrivain engagé sait que la parole est action: il sait que dévoiler c'est changer et qu'on ne peut dévoiler qu'en projetant de changer.

The aims of literature are thus, for Sartre, to change society. This goal he saw as being achieved independently of any party. Although Sartre came close to the PCF at various times during his career, he always refused to surrender his freedom to authority, and in Qu'est-ce que la littérature? he states quite categorically that alignment with Communism, at least in its Stalinist form, is not the way for the writer:

Si l'on demande à présent si l'écrivain, pour atteindre les masses, doit offrir ses services au parti communiste, je réponds que non; la politique du communisme staligien est incompatible avec l'exercice honnête du métier littéraire.

In Qu'est-ce que la littérature? Sartre always takes for granted the power of words to have any effect upon the world at large, but his belief in the power of literature was not to last, and by the 1960s Sartre had virtually abandoned fiction for more direct forms of
political action. His disillusion is made plain in this passage from Les Mots:

Longtemps j'ai pris ma plume pour une épée; à présent je connais notre impuissance. N'importe: je fais, je ferais des livres; il en faut; cela sert tout de même. La culture ne sauve rien ni personne, elle ne justifie pas. 

While Sartre in Qu'est-ce que la littérature is dealing with certain ideas which had already been discussed in the 1920s and 1930s, he does contribute to the debate by synthesising some of these ideas into a coherent theory of commitment which forms a natural corollary to his philosophy of existentialism. He also goes beyond other writers I have mentioned, in reaching a stage of disillusion about the practical value of literature.

Just as Sartre refused to surrender his personal and artistic freedom by aligning himself unequivocally with a particular party, Camus was equally wary of putting his writing at the service of an ideology. Although at one time a member of the Communist Party, and always politically involved as an individual, he did not allow politics to impinge directly upon his writing, as Aragon did. Yet one would not wish to categorise Camus as an uncommitted writer. He in fact saw himself as a committed writer. What form then did his commitment take?

In an article on Paul Nizan's La Conspiration, Camus praised Nizan for keeping partisan politics out of the novel. In Camus's view, literary excellence is quite separate from the politics of the writer:

On adhère comme on se marie. Et quand il s'agit d'un écrivain, c'est sur son oeuvre que l'on peut juger les résultats de l'adhésion(...) Malraux qui adhère est un grand écrivain. On aimerait pouvoir en dire autant d'Aragon(...) Montherlant, qui se refuse à tout enrégimentement, demeure un des plus étonnants prosateurs du siècle. Nizan enfin, partisan et partisan provocant, est un écrivain de race et le prouve, des Chiens de garde à La Conspiration.
Camus makes a similar point in an article on Ignazio Silone, when he comments that 'l'art révolutionnaire ne peut se passer de grandeur artistique'. Camus then is not dismissing committed literature itself, but merely one of its symptoms: 'la volonté de prouver', which he quotes from Malraux.

Camus made a full statement about his views on the responsibilities of the writer when he received the Nobel prize for literature in 1957, showing that while he might refuse to serve an ideology with his work, it is nonetheless dedicated to a cause. He stresses the responsibility of the writer not to isolate himself from the rest of mankind, and to be careful in his solidarity to side not with the oppressors but with the oppressed:

\[ \text{il ne peut se mettre aujourd'hui au service de ceux qui font l'histoire: il est au service de ceux qui la subissent.} \]

The artist is being dishonest if he distances himself from the masses. Camus defines the ways in which the artist can put himself at the service of humanity: through 'le refus de mentir sur ce que l'on sait et la résistance à l'oppression'. In his condemnation of society, the writer's revolt must be kept under control in order to remain productive, otherwise the exercise will become self-indulgent:

\[ \text{à force de tout refuser et jusqu'à la tradition de son art, l'artiste contemporain se donne l'illusion de créer sa propre règle et finit par se croire Dieu.} \]

Having defined the position of the artist, Camus goes on to consider what the content of the artist's work might be. In addition to reminding him that, if he does not want to speak in vain, the artist should discuss the suffering of the world, he also stresses the value of joy
and beauty, which belong to no party and have never been guilty of enslaving anyone, 'elle (la beauté) a soulagé au contraire la servitude de millions d'hommes et, parfois, libéré pour toujours quelques-uns'.

The fact of not belonging to a party is an important one for Camus at this stage, for although he does not condemn political activity in itself, he believes that it has no place in literature, which should serve wider and greater causes:

Le seul artiste engagé est celui qui, sans rien refuser du combat, refuse du moins de rejoindre les armées régulières, je veux dire le franc-tireur.

Like Landsberg, Mounier and Sartre before him, Camus does not envisage any choice for the artist in his involvement in the world and consequently he prefers to talk in terms of embarquement, which is inevitable, rather than engagement, which implies a deliberate choice:

Aujourd'hui, tout est changé, le silence même prend un sens redoutable. A partir du moment où l'abstention elle-même est considérée comme un choix, puni ou loué comme tel, l'artiste, qu'il le veuille ou non, est embarqué. Embarqué me paraît ici plus juste qu'engagé. Il ne s'agit pas en effet pour l'artiste d'un engagement volontaire mais plutôt d'un service militaire obligatoire. Tout artiste aujourd'hui est embarqué dans la galère de son temps.

Camus then is a writer very much in the league of the non-aligned committed writer. His freedom is precious to him, but he does not guard it at the expense of ignoring those who suffer in our society. His comment 'Le temps des artistes irresponsables est passé' could serve as the guideline for all committed writers.

How does Aragon fit into this wide-ranging debate on commitment? Rather disconcertingly, he not only rejects the term engagé as
unnecessary and meaningless, but also insists on various occasions that he is not an écrivain engagé. In view of this are we justified in considering Aragon to be a committed writer? Taking into account the definition of commitment which I have established, it is difficult to conceive of Aragon as anything but a committed writer, within the limits of the phase I am dealing with. Adereth sees Aragon's disclaimer as a desire to dissociate himself from 'the view which assimilates commitment to the toeing of a "party line" and a rejection of a "meaningless label"'. Since Aragon himself was a member of the PCF for most of his literary career, and followed the party line very closely throughout most of the period with which I am dealing, and defended the doctrine of socialist realism at the same time, this first explanation would seem to be an unlikely one. Either Aragon is concerned to dissociate himself from the mainstream of committed writing and theory, much of which, as we have seen, is not organised around the doctrines of a political party and thus allows great freedom of personal interpretation, preferring a more rigorous approach to writing, or perhaps the following comment from L'Oeuvre Poétique could explain his attitude just as well:

J'ai passé ma vie à n'être pas celui qu'on cherchait en moi(...). Là-dessus se sont greffées les légendes, qui tendent tous les jours de mon âge à se multiplier. Il faut à chacun que ma vie ait été ce qui me donne l'image dont il a besoin.

Could it simply be a desire to escape from the kind of over-simplification that such neat categorisation brings?

Whatever the explanation, it is clear that Aragon decided to devote his writing to a cause, and that the cause, as with Nizan, is the ideology of Communism, a fact made clear throughout Aragon's critical writings and several of his novels. Unlike Sartre and Camus, Aragon
commits himself and his work to a specific, politically aligned cause, so much so that the two become inseparable in his eyes. One thing he does have in common with Sartre and Camus is his acknowledgement of the notion of embarquement, expressed in terms of the inescapability of politics. This idea is particularly prevalent in Les Communistes, where all the characters, even the apolitical, are caught up in the turmoil of the war. The point is also made in La Lumiére de Stendhal where Aragon says of Le Rouge et le Noir, 'dans ce roman, tout est politique. Comme dans la vie'.

Long before Sartre, Aragon has articulated the view that silence is a form of political statement:

les oeuvres apolitiques sont des oeuvres militantes pour la conservation du régime au pouvoir.

A similar point is made in Traité du style:

ils ont revendiqué le droit de ne rien dire, avec orgueil. Mais cela n'était pas possible, et jusqu'à leur silence qui s'est pris à signifier.

Responsibility, a key theme for all the committed writers discussed here, is mentioned by Aragon as early as 1927 in Traité du style: 'je tiens énormément à ce que je dis, et j'en réclame pleinement la responsabilité'. This is developed later on in his avowed desire to serve the Party as an artist, and in his denunciation of irresponsibility in art:

je m'étais élevé contre ceux qui prêchaient l'irresponsabilité de l'artiste considèrent en fait l'art comme une oasis d'irresponsabilité; comme un lieu de démission de notre dignité d'homme. A cause, entre autres, de la haute idée que je me fais de l'art, des artistes, de l'écrivain, et de leur mission.
While it is evident that Aragon has certain ideas in common with others who have written on commitment, his views on the effectiveness of writing as political action differ from those of Sartre, who in the final analysis remained unconvinced that writing could actually change anything. Aragon, on the other hand, like Nizan, saw writing as a unique weapon in the struggle for revolution, and he never ceased to believe in the efficacy of the written word, not only in prose but also in poetry:

Toute poésie puise sa force dans l'histoire qui se fait, dans la vie des hommes réels, dans la réponse donnée à chaque pas aux questions qui surgissent devant ces hommes; la poésie est une arme de leur combat dans lequel le poète ne se distingue d'eux que par la force et l'efficacité de la parole et du chant.  

Sartre defined his literary method as dévoilement, an unveiling of reality. To a large extent Aragon's novels make use of this same method, particularly in his depiction of the decadence of bourgeois society, where he remains detached from the narrative, letting the events speak for themselves. Aragon, however, identifies himself as a socialist realist novelist, which involves him in depicting events from a precise ideological standpoint: the inevitable decline of capitalist society and the progress towards socialism, with the result that Aragon's novels are not pure exercises in dévoilement, but are coloured by his political perspective. One could in fact say that socialist realism is Aragon's chosen method of commitment in literature, much as dévoilement is Sartre's. Socialist realism is a method which encompasses style, ideas and political orientation. The use of a ready-made method is a major factor which distinguishes Aragon from most of the writers I have already mentioned, who either reject an overtly political viewpoint in their creative work, or, if they claim to be
politically aligned, balance the purely political with a metaphysical concern, as in Nizan's real and fictional preoccupation with death, or Malraux's analyses of revolutionary motivation. This metaphysical element is one which is largely missing in Aragon's work, and, along with his often uncompromising political stance, constitutes one of the major factors separating him from other committed figures. It could be said that his commitment is absolute, allowing for no elements which detract from the purely political. Thus while Aragon has much in common with those who were discussing or practising commitment at roughly the same time, ultimately he stands on his own.
NOTES


2. Maxwell Adereth, Commitment in Modern French Literature. Politics and Society in Péguy, Aragon and Sartre, p.15


5. Charles I. Glicksberg, The Literature of Commitment, p.20


7. Adereth, p.15

8. Ibid.

9. See Terry Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism. Objective partisanship is explained in the following way:

   The author need not foist his own political views on his work because, if he reveals the real and potential forces objectively at work in a situation, he is already in that sense partisan. (p.47)

   In this way, even a reactionary writer such as Balzac is 'forced by the power of his own artistic perception into sympathies at odds with his political views'. (Ibid. p.48) Hence in Illusions Perdues, his perception of society leads him into an unveiling of the mechanisms of emerging capitalist society, despite his own monarchist sympathies.

11. Ibid., p.13
12. Glicksberg, p.77
13. Ibid., pp.199-200
14. Schalk, pp.18-19
15. Ibid., p.24
16. Ibid., p.23
17. Ibid., p.21
18. Ibid., p.25
21. Romain Rolland, 'Deuxième lettre à Henri Barbusse', L'art libre, février 1922, quoted by Brett op. cit., p.298
22. Fisher, pp.138-41
23. Julien Benda, La Trahison des clercs, p.10
24. Ibid., pp.40-41
25. Ibid., pp.39-40. The last sentence of this comment echoes the religious overtones of the word 'clerc', and with it, the idea of distance from worldly passions.
28. Nichols, p.160
Schalk, pp.43-44.

30. Schalk traces the evolution of Benda, and notes that by 1937 Benda was critical of intellectual detachment and was urging writers to take sides. (Schalk, p.43). This development in Benda's thought indicates the pressures brought to bear on the writer during the 1930s.

31. Schalk, p.49

32. Paul Nizan, Les Chiens de garde, p.33

33. Ibid., p.137

34. Quoted by Schalk, p.62

35. Ibid., p.136


40. Simone de Beauvoir, La Force de l'âge, p.237

41. Schalk, p.17. In the following pages he analyses the development of the concept of commitment within this group.


43. Ibid., p.182

44. See p.15 of this chapter

45. Ibid. Author's emphasis
41

46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., p.183
48. Ibid., p.196
49. Emmanuel Mounier, Le Personnalisme, pp.103-4,113
50. Ibid., p.112 (author's emphasis)
51. Schalk, p.24. He defines 'existential gambling' as 'the violent commitment of the adventurer intellectual'.
52. W.D.Redfern, 'Nizan: a matter of life and death', in Stuart Williams, Socialism in France: from Jaurès to Mitterand, p.59
53. André Malraux, Le Temps du mépris, p.9
55. Adereth, p.38
56. Beauvoir, p.249
57. Jean-Paul Sartre, Qu'est-ce que la littérature?, p.281
58. Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, p.24
59. Qu'est-ce que la littérature?, p.347
60. Ibid., p.97
61. Ibid., p.98
62. Ibid., p.30
63. Ibid., pp.307-8
64. Les Mots, p.211
65. Albert Camus, 'La Conspiration de Paul Nizan', Alger Républicain, 11.XI.1938, reprinted in Essais d'Albert Camus, pp.1396-97
66. 'Le Pain et le vin d'Ignazio Silone', Essais, p.1398
67. Ibid.
68. 'Discours de Suède', *Essais*, p.1072
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid., p.1084
71. Ibid., p.1092
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid., p.1079
74. Ibid., p.1095
75. Adereth, pp.45-7
77. *La Lumière de Stendhal*, p.54
78. 'Pour qui écrivez-vous?', *Commune*, décembre 1933,p.343 (author's emphasis)
79. *Traité du style*, p.232, (author's emphasis)
80. Ibid., p.231
81. *Chroniques de la pluie et du beau temps*, p.167
82. 'Intervention au deuxième Congrès des Écrivains Soviétiques', *La Nouvelle Critique*, février 1955, p.45
CHAPTER TWO

FROM DADA TO COMMITMENT

It would be a gross over-simplification to regard Aragon's commitment as a value which remained unchanging throughout the whole of his literary career, or even one which was constantly present. Just as his career itself passed through various phases, from Dadaism to Surrealism, then to socialist realism and beyond, his attitude to writing took various forms, according to his different literary and political allegiances. Three distinct stages can be traced in his evolution as a writer: firstly there is what one might call the pre-socialist realist phase. Here, both before and after Aragon's adherence to the PCF, we can detect the early stages of a socially responsible attitude in his writings, an attitude quite foreign to the Surrealist group as a whole, since their concept of revolution tended to be aesthetic and intellectual rather than purely social. Whilst expressing ideas which indicate the beginning of a committed attitude to writing, Aragon does not indicate at this stage that he has any views about the ways in which this might affect his own writing. Aragon's break with the Surrealists in 1932 provides us with a neat demarcation line between the first and the second phase, which could be termed the orthodox socialist realist phase, in which his literary production coincides with the literary policies of the PCF. Finally Aragon's third phase is one of liberalisation following the more dogmatic nature of the orthodox period. Whilst never renouncing the doctrine of socialist realism, there is nonetheless, in his later work, a distinct turning away from the dogmatic tone and formulae of socialist realist orthodoxy,
which dates approximately from the publication of the novel *La Semaine Sainte* in 1958.

While the main emphasis of this thesis will be upon Aragon's theory and practice of commitment in the period of orthodoxy, this central phase cannot be fully understood in isolation, but needs to be seen in the context of the whole of Aragon's development as a writer.

At the time of his early involvement with the Dadaist group, neither social issues nor commitment had a part to play in Aragon's philosophy as a writer. In the aftermath of the First World War, the Dadaists' reaction to the society which had sent them to war was one of complete rejection and nihilism, as can be seen in the following extract from one of Aragon's Dadaist manifestos in which even art is attacked:

Plus de peintres, plus de littérateurs, plus de musiciens, plus de sculpteurs, plus de religions, plus de républicains, plus de royalistes, plus d'impérialistes, plus d'anarchistes, plus de socialistes, plus de bolchéviques, plus de politiques, plus de prolétaires, plus de démocrates, plus d'armées, plus de police, plus de patries, enfin assez de toutes ces imbécilités, plus rien, plus rien, RIEN, RIEN, RIEN.

The Dadaist revolt, as we can see, encompasses the whole of society, and in retrospect Aragon realised that the Dadaists had not recognised the implications of their revolt or of their role as writers:

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The Dadaist revolt, as we can see, encompasses the whole of society, and in retrospect Aragon realised that the Dadaists had not recognised the implications of their revolt or of their role as writers:

Il fallut 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.

Despite his involvement in Dadaist activities, Aragon tended to remain somewhat detached from the group, as C.G. Geoghegan demonstrates in his study of Aragon's Dadaist and Surrealist periods. This is markedly illustrated by Aragon's publication of a novel, *Anicet ou le panorama*,


At a time when the group was intent upon avoiding such typically bourgeois art forms as the novel. Aragon comments:

je l'ai dit, la volonté de roman allait à contre-pied de cette conspiration au grand jour qui prit forme avec Dada, et se poursuivit avec le surrealisme, contre l'art, le roman, etc. On me passait difficilement cette activité suspecte.

With the demise of the Dadaist movement, Aragon and the rest of the group moved onwards and formed the Surrealist movement, which Aragon defined a few years later as:

une tentative désespérée de dépasser la négation de Dada et de reconstruire, au-delà d'elle, une réalité nouvelle. (PRS p.79)

Whether or not Aragon was fully aware of such a motivation at the time, or whether this explanation was imposed in retrospect is open to question. To decide whether Aragon's move is indicative of a more positive and constructive social attitude we need to look briefly at some key works from the Surrealist period.

Despite Aragon's later denunciation of Surrealism as an 'Attitude idéaliste qui tend vers la réalité, au lieu d'en partir, et qui contient sa propre condamnation', (PRS p.79) suggesting that any work which is not firmly rooted in reality is invalid, there is evidence in certain Surrealist texts and in articles from this period that the spiritual revolt proclaimed by the Surrealists was reinforced in Aragon's case by a growing concern for social and moral issues, issues rooted firmly in the real world.

One main area of concurrence within both Dadaist and Surrealist groups was the disillusionment with socially accepted standards, in particular those promoted by the bourgeoisie. The tone in which these representatives of society were dealt with by the Surrealists was often
one of intense ridicule. Although Aragon often shared this approach, for example in his frequently vituperative comments in *Traité du Style*, there was a different side to his criticism. Earlier works such as *Anicet ou le panorama, roman* may have shown individuals rejecting the values of society, but there is no serious attack on the values themselves. In much of *Traité du Style* however, we can see the intensely critical eye of Aragon lighting upon various social issues.

Although published in 1928, *Traité du Style* was actually written during the years 1926–1927, publication being held up by objections from Valéry and Gide. 1927 was of course a crucial year for Aragon, since it was in this year, on the 6th January, that he joined the PCF. So while still very much a member of the Surrealist group, his adherence to the PCF was beginning to affect his concept of the function of literature, a fact borne out by *Traité du Style*. Contrary to the indications of its title, *Traité du Style* is not a treatise upon style, although it does deal at some length with the literary and intellectual establishments of the day, and includes an attack upon journalism and literary criticism. More importantly for the matter in hand, much of what remains deals with several social issues.

Among these is a major attack upon what Aragon calls 'évasion'. He first raises the subject with reference to literature, in his accusations against Philippe Soupault:

> qui fait depuis un nombre croissant d'années de la littérature avec le verbe partir. Le départ, on ne sait pour où, pourquoi ni comment, mais le départ. (*TS* p.80)

The charge of literary escapism develops into an attack upon the way in which a literary concept has broadened out into a generalised dependence upon escapism and elusive paradises. Aragon summarily crushes this
belief:

Il n'y a de paradis d'aucune espèce! Allons, évadez-vous, pour voir. (p.85)

The logical development of the denial of paradise is to deny the possibility of escape in religion. This subject provokes a long attack from Aragon, in which he not only condemns religion as a form of escapism:

J'envisagerai le sentiment religieux en tant que solution au problème de l'existence, au même titre que l'évasion, etc. (p.96), but also as a form of perversion:

Les diverses images de Jésus, du petit bâton de la croix aux flagellations, jusqu'à l'invraisemblable Sacré-Cœur, tous les martyrs, etc., quelle ample moisson pour les sadiques. Aux masochistes, les peines de l'enfer, la menace, le fouet permis. Aux scapulaires, reliques, les jarretelles de Marie, les chaussures des saintes. (p.99)

Systematically Aragon denounces drugs (pp.111-112) and suicide (p.92) as possible escapes from the realities of life, finally even taking away the simple hope of happiness, 'la recherche imbécile du bonheur.' (p.111)

What all this adds up to is a condemnation of a society whose members do not accept full responsibility for their existence, but constantly seek means of escape.

Having attacked the renunciation of responsibility on the individual level, Aragon moves on to analyse the more generalised lack of social responsibility which generates the kind of reactions which surrounded the Sacco and Vanzetti case. Aragon's own reaction is one of deep-seated shame at the apathy and lack of concern he has witnessed:

'Les Daily News expriment la crainte que les démonstrations qui ont
eu lieu dans le monde entier pour protester contre la sentence de mort n'avaient desservi plutôt que servi la cause des condamnés (Sacco et Vanzetti)', constitue bien une sottise à partir des mots 'que les démonstrations', etc., mais dans la proposition principale 'Les D.N. expriment la crainte' elle constitue une immonde hypocrisie. C'est clair. Clair comme la honte que tout être humain ressent à lire les journaux de ce même jour(...) J'ai dit que ce n'est ni l'humanité ni quelque abstraction qui me donnent cette honte. Mais une honte infinie, pourtant, une honte insurmontable. On m'apprend doucereusement qu'à Biarritz la majorité des manifestants étaient de nationalité étrangère.(TS pp.117-19)

Aragon feels personally involved in the issue, albeit in an intangible way, and cannot understand such detachment in so many of his own countrymen:

Je ne me sens pas, et que celui qui prétend l'être montre son front sans rougeur que je le regarde avec curiosité, absolument étranger à cette horrible aventure. Un lien mystérieux. Mais réel. Un lien.(pp.121-22)

This sensation of being bound up in events despite oneself, of an inevitable involvement in society at large, seems to anticipate the idea, central to Sartrian commitment, of embarquement, though in this case it is much more ambiguously expressed.

Once having launched into his attack upon social and contemporary ills, Aragon becomes quite specific in his criticism, in a way which is uncharacteristic of Surrealism, calling into question the Moroccan war, military service and the army.(pp.234-36) Aragon's anger at what he sees to be the failings of society has been transformed from a destructive outpouring, into a more responsible and responsive awareness which, although as yet lacking in substance, paves the way for a more complete commitment to the unveiling of the mechanisms of capitalist society which will occur in later works.

Aragon's realism in his depiction of the 'monde réel' is one of the outstanding features of his later, more politically committed work. This
interest in the real world can be traced back to the Surrealist work, and his preoccupation with 'le moderne' and 'le merveilleux quotidien'. This awareness of the excitement and the magic of the realities, particularly the visual realities, of everyday life in the Paris of the 1920s is most strongly present in Le Paysan de Paris, where realism and imagination mingle in a detailed evocation of Paris as it was in the mid-twenties. The accumulation of realistic detail, as for example in Aragon's detailed description of the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont or the Passage de l'Opéra, exists side by side with an evocation of their magical qualities:

"c'est l'expérience immédiate du réel urbain qui sert de tremplin à l'imagination(...) Et le quartier banal, la boutique modeste, le parc municipal se chargeront de merveilleux car ce sont des lieux où se célèbre le rite occulte et transfigurateur du Désir."

This is obviously far from the realism of the Monde Réel novels, where the notions of 'le merveilleux' and 'l'imaginaire' will be left behind, but it nonetheless hints at Aragon's preoccupation with the minute details of everyday life, a preoccupation which will later be translated into a detailed representation of French society at different historical moments.

The most overt indications of Aragon's development towards committed writing are to be found in his comments on the role and responsibilities of the writer and the intellectual, some of these dating from before his adherence to the PCF.

Aragon recounts in Pour un réalisme socialiste the way in which the Moroccan war of 1925 provided his conscience with a jolt and created an important turning point in his life:

"La cassure pourtant, le grand choc, ce fut pour moi, et pour
plusieurs, la guerre du Rif(...) ce fut pour nous un coup et pour moi une bifurcation dans la vie. (PRS p.51)

The war, coupled with Aragon's reading of various Marxist texts, made him aware of his responsibilities as a writer and intellectual. The results of his thinking on the subject are expressed in a series of articles published in *Clarté* at the end of 1925 and 1926, in which Aragon analyses the present state of the intellectuals and their role in the contemporary world. In the first of these articles, 'Le Proletariat de l'esprit', we can still see the same rejection of bourgeois values which characterised Aragon as a Surrealist; but in addition, there is a new element: an analysis of the factors determining the role intellectuals play in bourgeois society, and more importantly, suggestions for change.

Aragon levels at the intellectuals the very same criticism that Nizan is later to level at the philosophers in *Les Chiens de garde*: that they have become a part of the bourgeoisie and are sowing the seeds of acceptance of the status quo, the most insidious form of oppression:

Une grande quiétude règne dans le monde sur la situation faite à l'esprit. C'est là ce qu'on nomme civilisation. Il ne vient à l'idée de personne de se croire un sauvage. Et l'oppression intellectuelle est née par la plupart de ceux qui la subissent: il y a dans les régions mentales une armée de métier qui y maintient l'ordre, c'est-à-dire l'inconscience(...) Ainsi personne ne fait entendre la juste plainte de l'esprit. Dans ce silence comment ne pas considérer tout intellectuel comme un bourgeois? Il en est par son acceptation muette.

The idea of 'acceptation muette' brings to mind Sartre's formula: 'chaque parole a des retentissements, chaque silence aussi', and its implications that silence often hides a direct political statement. In this case, an intellectual who does not reject the bourgeoisie is implicitly one of their number. Aragon, rather than directly accusing
the intellectuals, as does Nizan, lays the blame on the leaders of
society who, fully aware of the intellectuals' power, cynically
manipulate them to ensure their silence:

Places, honneurs, tout est bon pour acheter ces consciences. Cela
s'appelle reconnaître le talent.13

Thus economic forces have come to play an increasingly important role in
the control of the intellectuals, and consequently of thought itself.
The intellect has been reduced to the level of a commodity to be bought
and sold, allowing those who have power in the capitalist system to
manipulate the intellectuals.

To this 'capitalisme intellectuel', Aragon opposes his ideal of 'le
prolétariat de l'esprit', which the bourgeoisie is constantly attempting
to stifle. He urges the intellectuals to be aware of their duty to the
proletariat, of which they are often quite ignorant - a result of their
bourgeois education - and to be aware that as intellectuals their
allegiance is, or should be, to the proletariat:

qu'ils ne se leurrèrent plus sur leur situation véritable; et que non
contents de se reconnaître entre eux, ils reconnaissent enfin
l'unité de leur cause et celle du prolétariat; qu'ayant conçu qu'ils
constituent un prolétariat de l'esprit, ils conçoivent que par là
même ils appartiennent au prolétariat.14

In the sequel to this article, 'Le Prix de l'esprit', which appeared in
June 1926, Aragon further develops the notion of the intellect as
subject to the persuasions of profit, so that the 'produit pur de la
pensée',15 is becoming more and more elusive, and is gradually forced
into compromise in order not to be stifled completely by the
bourgeoisie, which controls the access to public expression. In this
way, the revolutionary potential of the intellectual is transformed into
a means of shoring up the establishment:

   Et c'est ainsi qu'on voit les pensées les plus irréductibles au
cours des années tourner comme les girouettes au vent social, et
finalement consolider de toute la force de leur révolte première
l'édifice qu'elles espéraient d'abord ébranler.  

In this process, thought has become so much a part of the capitalist
system that it is devalued to the point where:

   rien ne distingue commercialement un livre dont les effets
innombrables transforment un monde, d'un livre qui distraie quelques
milliers de personnes, si ce n'est parfois que le second fait vivre,
quand le premier fait mourir son auteur.

The ones who consent to this exploitation of their work, those who value
profit above integrity cannot be called true intellectuals, but are 'les
prétendus intellectuels, qui sont les prostitués de l'esprit'.

Aragon exhorts the intellectuals to overcome the temptations of profit,
and show that the true intellect will not bend to the pressures of
capitalism:

   alors la pensée apparaîtra dans son vrai jour, alors brillera le
plein soleil de la Révolution.

In his final summing up of the role of the intellectuals in contemporary
society, we can see just how far Aragon has progressed towards an
acceptance of the intellectual's duty to commit himself and his work to
the attainment of specific political change, from the negativity of Dada
which saw no further than total destruction:

   Que les intellectuels prennent notion de leur rôle, il ne serait
pas trop tôt. Leur rôle n'est pas de peser à l'ouvrier opprimé.
Leur rôle est de préparer la révolution. La révolution mondiale
communiste telle que la définit la IIIème Internationale. Ils ne
doivent être les ouvriers que de cela.
In these articles, Aragon is clearly distancing himself from the Surrealists, by his overtly political interpretation of the role of the intellectual.

Aragon's reflections on the responsibilities of the intellectuals are turned to the more specific case of the writer in Traité du Style. As Geoghegan points out, Aragon had never completely toed the Surrealist line, and by the time he had joined the PCF, the differences between him and Breton in particular were becoming increasingly marked, despite Aragon's continued loyalty to the Surrealists. This growing distance is particularly clear in Traité du Style, where Aragon propounds his views on the writer's responsibility.

I have already mentioned Aragon's feelings of involvement in the Sacco and Venzetti affair, and although it could be argued that Aragon is not speaking explicitly as a writer in this case, it is not an isolated instance of such an attitude. While specifically discussing his writing, he asserts that it cannot be regarded as a disinterested activity. On the contrary, he realises that as a writer he is intéressé, and accepts full responsibility for all that he says:

> je tiens à le dire si j'écris ce n'est pas par pur désintéressement (...). Et puis, si j'étais désintéressé, ce serait probablement au profit de quelqu'un qui ne le serait pas, désintéressé... je tiens énormément à ce que je dis, et j'en réclame pleinement la responsabilité. (TS p.231)

He discredits the idea of 'le néant poétique' or 'parler pour ne rien dire'. Such concepts are illusory since, again anticipating Sartre's idea, even silence can have significance. Aragon criticises those who indulge in 'bavardages':

> ils ont revendiqué le droit de ne rien dire, avec orgueil. Mais cela n'était pas possible, et jusqu'à leur silence qui s'est pris à
In earlier days, Aragon had maintained that silence could be construed as a means of criticism. In *Anicet*, for example, his refusal to comment on the war was a deliberate tactic. He refused to grant it importance by discussing it. The Dadaists as a group looked upon silence as an effective means of showing their hatred of war. In their eyes silence had meaning and effect:

n'églier la guerre était de notre part un système, faux sans doute, mais dirigé contre la guerre. Nous pensions que parler de la guerre, fût-ce pour la maudire, c'était encore lui faire de la réclame. Notre silence nous semblait un moyen de rayer la guerre, de l'enrayer... si taire la guerre nous paraissait efficace contre elle, cela ne faisait que souligner la force de notre croyance en la chose écrite. Pour nous, tout écrit était une réclame, on dirait aujourd'hui propagande.22

However, Aragon now sees that to be fully responsible as a writer, one cannot longer take refuge in silence, which may be misconstrued, but must speak out.

Elsewhere in *Traité du Style* Aragon defends the right of the writer to deal with whatever he feels concerned by, in his work, even if this is a political issue, without his feeling that he is compromising an illusory ideal of literary purity, an ideal which many critics hold on to:

Les pudeurs du jour s'effarouchent, trouvent mauvais ce qu'elles prennent pour une application. Alors quel tintamarre si ce n'est pas, à la rigueur, l'amour, mais suivant leur vocabulaire, la politique, qu'on entend gronder dans cette voix qui s'élève.(p.233)

His tone becomes increasingly biting as he evokes the condemnation awaiting those who dare to defend a cause which has moved them personally:
Oui, mais ta gueule... quand tu as l'extraordinaire culot de te sentir touché si l'on condamne quelque part à des trente, des dix ans de prison, des gens qui ont simplement protesté contre les périodes militaires, ou la guerre du Maroc. (pp. 233-34)

Aragon particularly condemns the silencing of such protest in book form, since this is in his view much more effective and durable than a similar protest in a newspaper article. His belief in and defence of the responsibility of the writer to take a stand on social issues gained added impetus with his adherence to the PCF, where literature was considered above all as a political weapon.

For a time in the late twenties and early thirties, the Surrealists who had aligned themselves with the PCF at the same time as Aragon were also willing to accept its view of the revolutionary function of literature, as is indicated by Aragon's article 'Le Surréalisme et le devenir révolutionnaire', which emphasises the similarities between the aims and methods of the Surrealists and Communists:

La reconnaissance du matérialisme dialectique comme seule philosophie révolutionnaire, la compréhension et l'acceptation sans réserves de ce matérielisme par des intellectuels partis d'une position idéaliste conséquente, et qui ont constaté l'insuffisance de toute position idéaliste, fût-elle conséquente, en face des problèmes de la Révolution, ce sont là les traits essentiels de l'évolution des surréalistes.

This rapprochement, however, was not destined to last very much longer. Inevitable differences were brought to a head at the time of the 1930 Kharkov congress of the RAPP, the Soviet association of proletarian writers, which Aragon attended with Georges Sadoul, another member of the Surrealist group, as French delegates. In his speech, in which he presented himself as a Surrealist rather than a Communist, he was critical of the attitude of the PCF to the committed writer. When the party heard news of this, it rapidly persuaded Aragon and Sadoul to sign
an **autocritique** in which they withdrew their criticisms of the PCF and submitted themselves to party control of their literary activities. In this **autocritique** they stated:

Notre seul désir est de travailler de la façon la plus efficace suivant les directives du Parti à la discipline et au contrôle duquel nous nous engageons à soumettre notre activité littéraire.24

Not only did Aragon thus reaffirm his belief in the principle of devoting his writing to the Communist cause, but in the same document he also criticised Breton, thus creating a rift between the two men which was not entirely healed by Aragon's eventual disavowal of his **autocritique** in the document 'Aux Intellectuels Révolutionnaires'.25 It was a declaration which was not to dispel the underlying tensions, which resurfaced during the **Affaire Aragon**. This latter incident was significant not only in that it finally marked the end of Aragon's association with the Surrealists, and for the most part the association of the Surrealists with the Communists, but also in that it was essentially a dispute over the responsibility of the writer, with Aragon coming down conclusively in favour of this responsibility.

The controversy of the **Affaire Aragon** arose over the publication of Aragon's poem *Front Rouge* in 1931,26 which resulted in his being charged with:

excitation de militaires à la désobéissance et à la provocation au meurtre dans un but de propagande anarchiste.27

Breton and the Surrealists immediately leapt to Aragon's defence in a petition declaring that a writer should not be held responsible in the eyes of the law for the content of his writings:
Breton and the other Surrealists seemed to be unaware of a contradiction in their argument, for while on the one hand they opposed the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*, the notion of art as a self-sufficient creation, on the other hand they denied that the artist should have to accept ultimate responsibility for the consequences of his utterances. In other words, for the Surrealists, an artistic statement does not have the same weight as a purely political one. The declaration was heavy with implications for the whole issue of literary commitment. Breton held to his views in another document, *Misère de la Poésie*, where he also emphasised that despite their current stance, the Surrealists still believed in the social function of the writer but rejected the use of art for propagandist purposes:

Si nous venons de perdre ainsi la chance qu'on eût pu croire qu'Aragon, en écrivant 'Front Rouge', nous avait donné de participer durablement par des poèmes à l'action révolutionnaire, si nous n'avons pas réussi à admettre qu'au but de la poésie et de l'art - qui est depuis le commencement des siècles 'en planant au-dessus du réel de le rendre, même extérieurement, conforme à la vérité intérieur qui en fait le fond' - pouvait être substitué un autre but, qui fût, par exemple, d'enseignement ou de propagande révolutionnaire (l'art n'étant pas alors employé que comme moyen), qu'on n'aillèe pas soutenir que pour cela nous sommes les derniers fervents de 'l'art pour l'art'(...). Nous n'avons jamais cessé de flétrir une telle conception et d'exiger de l'écrivain, de l'artiste leur participation effective aux luttes sociales...

Geoghegan's article has traced Aragon's hesitations over which course of action to take, whether to side with the Surrealists and deny his legal responsibility, or with the PCF and risk prosecution, so evidently Aragon was not fully convinced of the extent to which he was prepared to accept responsibility for his writings. Nonetheless, when the decision
was made, it was unequivocal and highly significant for Aragon's future as a writer in the party. The implications of the reply were underlined by the fact that it took the form of a brief, impersonal statement published by L'Humanité on Aragon's behalf:

Notre camarade Aragon nous fait savoir qu'il est absolument étranger à la parution d'une brochure intitulée 'Misère de la Poésie: L'affaire Aragon devant l'opinion publique' et signée André Breton.

Il tient à signaler clairement qu'il désapprouve dans sa totalité le contenu de cette brochure et le bruit qu'elle peut faire autour de son nom, tout communiste devant condamner comme incompatible avec la lutte des classes, et par conséquent comme objectivement contre-révolutionnaire, les attaques que contient cette brochure.32

The statement distancing Aragon from the Surrealists was swiftly followed by their condemnation of Aragon's position, in the pamphlet 'Paillas!'33

Thus Aragon's links with the Surrealist group were definitively broken and a momentous step in his career as a writer taken. Although, as Geoghegan has shown,34 there were other factors involved in Aragon's break with the Surrealists, the issue of the responsibility of the writer was nonetheless a central one, and upon which Aragon took a decisive stand, taking at the same time a firm step towards commitment. He has recognised that he can serve a cause in his capacity as a writer and has accepted the consequences of this. Sartre's description of the moment of commitment fits Aragon particularly well at this point:

Je dirai qu'un écrivain est engagé lorsqu'il tâche à prendre la conscience la plus lucide(...) d'être embarqué, c'est-à-dire lorsqu'il fait passer pour lui et pour les autres l'engagement de la spontanéité immédiate au réfléchi.35

The way ahead for Aragon, once he had unambiguously placed himself and his writing at the service of the revolution, was not immediately clear
to him. He was faced with the difficulty of finding a suitable vehicle for his commitment. Consequently, there was a considerable period of time between 1931 and 1934 spent in experimentation and transitional work, much of which Aragon readily confessed later that he would rather forget, before finally finding his way with *Les Cloches de Bâle*:

Pendant plusieurs années, le divorce de la pensée et de l'écriture(...) m'avait limité à des expériences dont je cassais à chaque fois la miserable éprouvette(...) C'est l'époque des textes de passage. 36

This period was the one in which he became acquainted with, and adopted as his own, the method of socialist realism which had been recently formulated in the Soviet Union. It seemed to provide for Aragon a framework within which he could fulfil his desire to use his literary abilities in the service of the PCF and of the revolution.
NOTES

1. 'Manifeste Dada', reproduced in M. Nadeau, *Histoire du Surréalisme, suivie de Documents Surréalistes*, p.33

2. *Pour un réalisme socialiste*, p.35. Further references to this work are given in parentheses in the text.

3. C. G. Geoghegan, 'Le Cas Aragon – a case history of the development of a French intellectual through Dada and Surréalisme to Communism'. See for example pp.84–85 where he shows that Aragon played no part in the earliest attempts at automatic writing; p.87 when he points out that Aragon's poetry at this stage was always more lyrical than that of Breton and Soupault.

4. Aragon was being deliberately defiant by emphasising that the work was a novel: 'le mot *roman* intégré au titre par la consonance avec le mot *panorama* constitue un défi aux conceptions mêmes de mes plus proches amis de ce temps'. *Anicet ou le Panorama, roman*, Préface p.14. This preface, written for the *ORC* edition of *Anicet* is reprinted in the Folio edition of the novel. The page reference is to the latter.


6. *Traité du Style*. See for example p.24, where he refers to journalists:

   partout où vous pourrez apercevoir la trace luisante de la méduse, passez la paille de fer, désinfectez l'air en brûlant du soufre...

   Further references to this work are given in parentheses in the text.

7. See Roger Garaudy, *Du Surréalisme au Monde Réel. L'Itinéraire*
d'Aragon, pp.193-94

8. Sacco and Vanzetti were Italian-born radical agitators in the U.S. who were executed for murder in 1927, despite international protest and suspicions that the verdict was influenced by their political opinions.

9. Compare p.44, note 1 of this chapter.

10. Yvette Gindine, Aragon, Prosateur surréaliste, pp.58-59

11. 'Le Prolétariat de l'esprit', p.335


13. 'Le Prolétariat de l'esprit', p.335

14. Ibid., p.336

15. 'Le Prix de l'esprit-(Suite)', p.122

16. Ibid.

17. 'Le Prix de l'esprit - I', p.8

18. Ibid., p.6

19. Ibid., p.9

20. 'Le Prix de l'esprit - (Suite)', p.123


The position of Aragon in the Surrealist group had been uncertain from the very start(...). Aragon's political development as well as his development as a writer had been strikingly independent of the lines laid down in Breton's surrealist manifestos. The famous 'Une Vague de Rêves' now seems to be little more than an act of lipservice to Breton's new movement when one realises that by autumn 1924 Aragon was completing the first main section of Le Paysan de Paris. This book has been hailed as a great 'Surrealist' composition. But in fact it was heavily criticised by Breton not least because it directly flouted a number of important Surrealist principles. Later, in 1928, the publication of Traité du Style registered a number of scarcely veiled criticisms of Breton's ideas.
22. Anicet, Préface, p.20 (author's emphasis).

23. 'Le Surréalisme et le devenir révolutionnaire', Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution, No.3, 1931, p.2


25. See Nadeau, pp.361-62

26. 'Le Front Rouge', Littérature de la Révolution Mondiale, juillet, 1931, pp.39-46

27. See Nadeau, pp.343-44

28. Ibid., p.343

29. Ibid., p.344

30. André Breton, 'Misère de la Poésie', in Nadeau, pp.352-53


32. See Nadeau, p.353

33. Ibid., pp.353-363

34. Geoghegan, pp.26-27

35. Sartre, Qu'est-ce que la littérature?, p.98

36. 'C'est là que tout a commencé...', pp.9-10. This preface written for the ORC edition of Les Cloches de Bâle, is reprinted in the Folio edition. Page references are to the latter.
CHAPTER THREE

SOCIALIST REALISM

The influence of the 1930 Kharkov Congress of the Russian organisation of proletarian writers (RAPP) upon Aragon was, as has already been established in the preceding chapter, an equivocal one. From a position of apparent readiness to align himself with Communist demands of the writers, in the document he signed with Sadoul at the Congress, he hurriedly retreated, on his return to France and under pressure from Breton, to his former stance, independent of Communist control. Even when he had made his choice between Surrealism and Communism, in favour of the latter, Aragon entered a long period during which he seemed to be searching for a mode of expression appropriate to his political allegiance. Consequently, during the years 1932-1934 he produced very little apart from miscellaneous articles for L'Humanité and Commune, and Hourra l'Oural, a collection of poetry inspired by his stay in the USSR from 1932-1933.

Unlike the Kharkov Congress, the Moscow Congress of Soviet Writers held in August 1934 had a profound effect upon Aragon, unveiling as it did the literary doctrine of socialist realism to which he was to devote himself with such alacrity that year. Despite its obvious importance, however, the Congress was not a single phenomenon leading Aragon unprepared to socialist realism. There were various other factors preparing the ground for Aragon's espousal of a literary doctrine specifically Soviet in origin. Most obviously, as a member of a Communist party which was traditionally close to and much influenced by the Soviet party, Aragon was particularly open to developments within
the Soviet literary sphere. This factor, however, is not an adequate explanation of his immediate adoption of the doctrine of socialist realism. As I will illustrate later, Aragon was virtually alone among French Communists in his enthusiastic espousal of socialist realism at this stage, despite the presence of other French Communist writers at the Congress. Why should this be so? It would seem that Elsa Triolet had an important role to play in this respect. Although not a member of the party herself, and no longer even resident in the Soviet Union, it was she who introduced Aragon to figures from Soviet intellectual circles whom he might otherwise not have met. He had already met Mayakovsky (one of the foremost exponents of socialist realism in Soviet poetry) in Paris before meeting Elsa, but it was through Elsa, Mayakovsky's sister-in-law, that Aragon came to know him more intimately. It was with Elsa that he travelled to the Soviet Union for the Kharkov Congress and later spent a year there from 1932-1933, gaining access to circles which, without a Russian companion and interpreter, would have been closed to him, and travelling much more freely within the country than would otherwise have been possible, witnessing at first hand both the intellectual currents, and the social progress being made, particularly in the Urals, which are celebrated in Hourra l'Oural.

The following year, 1934, saw Aragon back in the Soviet Union, together with Elsa and other French writers as representatives of France at the Moscow Congress of Soviet Writers. Before going on to assess the impact of this congress upon Aragon's literary development, I will first outline briefly the development and formulation of socialist realism within the Soviet Union, in order to place Aragon's version of the doctrine within its context, and where applicable, to identify his own personal modifications.
There had been a lack of a comprehensive literary programme in the USSR which continued throughout the 1920s and into the early 1930s and the period of RAPP dominance. Experiments with proletarian and populist literature took place, various resolutions and recommendations were published, sowing the seeds of socialist realism; but with no one central organisation to enforce such decrees, it was not until the formation of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1932, upon the disbanding of RAPP, and the Union's first congress in 1934, that the various notions and tendencies which had been evolving through the 1920s were formulated into a coherent theory of art which could be effectively implemented. The Union of Soviet Writers, proclaimed in its statutes that:

Le réalisme socialiste, méthode fondamentale de la littérature et de la critique littéraire soviétiques, exigent de l'artiste la peinture véridique et historiquement concrète de la réalité dans son développement révolutionnaire. Ce caractère de la description artistique doit s'allier au problème de l'éducation et de la transformation idéologique des masses laborieuses dans l'esprit du socialisme.

Thus it emphasises the importance of the depiction of reality in the context of revolutionary development and with the aim of the ideological education of the people.

The defining features of socialist realism can be isolated by a brief analysis of the main speeches of the Congress. Naturally the concepts of socialism and realism are fundamental. In his speech, Zhdanov, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party and later to become Minister of Culture under Stalin, pointed out the uniqueness of Soviet literature's emphasis upon 'socialist construction', while Radek more specifically mentions the preoccupation with the inevitable progression towards socialism, as
depicted in works of socialist realism:

Socialist realism means not only knowing reality as it is, but knowing whither it is moving. It is moving towards socialism, it is moving towards the victory of the international proletariat. And a work of art created by a socialist realist is one which shows whither that conflict of contradictions is leading which the artist has seen in life and reflected in his work.

Realism is advocated as the method of presenting this subject matter. In addition to the portrayal of Soviet socialist society, the author should present 'concrete images of living typical people', thus opposing realism to excessive individualism by emphasis on the typical. Realism is also seen in opposition to idealism: 'everything supernatural, mystic, all other-worldly idealism', and to naturalism, which is condemned for its lack of selection:

We do not photograph life. In the totality of phenomena we seek out the main phenomena. Giving everything without discrimination is not realism. That would be the most vulgar kind of naturalism(...) Realism means that we make a selection from the point of view of guiding principles. And as for what is essential— the very name of socialist realism tells us this.

Socialist realism is further opposed by Gorky to critical realism, which, although it may have achieved much in the past, has no place in the present, since:

this form of realism did not and cannot serve to educate socialist individuality, for in criticising everything, it asserted nothing, or else, at the worst, reverted to an assertion of what it had itself repudiated.

By virtue of the fact that socialist realism avoids the negative in favour of the positive, it is essentially optimistic and 'impregnated with the spirit of heroic deeds'. This spirit of optimism and enthusiasm is closely linked to the notion of revolutionary
romanticism. This is not to be romanticism in the nineteenth-century sense of the word, quite divorced from everyday reality, but a visionary appreciation of the future, based upon the certainty of knowledge of the progression of humanity towards socialism:

Soviet literature should be able to portray our heroes; it should be able to glimpse our tomorrow. This will be no utopian dream, for our tomorrow is already being prepared for today by dint of conscious planned work.\(^{13}\)

The statutes of the Writers' Union had stressed the importance of national literature within the Soviet republics. Pride in national artistic achievement should go hand in hand with the awareness of the importance of the national cultural heritage left behind by the bourgeoisie, and of the need to use it well:

the proletariat, just as in other provinces of material and spiritual culture, is the heir of all that is best in the treasury of world literature. The bourgeoisie has squandered its literary heritage, it is our duty to gather it up carefully, to study it and, having critically assimilated it, to advance further.\(^{14}\)

Socialist realism, according to Zhdanov, is necessarily tendentious, though unlike Engels,\(^{15}\) he does not mention any need to avoid explicit tendentiousness, or to let the bias emerge naturally; quite the contrary, tendentiousness is seen to be desirable:

Yes, our Soviet literature is tendentious, and we are proud of this fact, because the aim of our tendency is to liberate the toilers, to free all mankind from the yoke of capitalist slavery.\(^{16}\)

If literature is to be tendentious then the role of the writer takes on added implications. He becomes involved in the active construction of socialism,\(^{17}\) which confers added responsibility upon him and raises the demands which the public may legitimately make on him:
We are working before the eyes of the proletariat, which, as it grows more and more literate, is constantly raising its demands on our art. 18

Aragon's presence at the Congress, his rapid assimilation of the ideas being proposed there, and their exposition soon afterwards in the collected speeches published as Pour un réalisme socialiste in September 1935, are a measure of the impact of the new ideas on him, and his awareness that here was the method he had been looking for since the break with the Surrealists. He reported on the Congress in both L'Humanité and Commune, and in the latter called on the Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires (AEAR) to work to take the lead in creating a parallel movement in France which will be based on French culture:

L'AEAR doit montrer aux écrivains et aux artistes la voie par laquelle nous contribuerons à créer la culture de l'avenir, la culture socialiste des Soviets de France et du monde entier, en reprenant l'héritage de la culture française, remise sur ses pieds. 19

Not all of the French participants in the Congress were equally impressed by the proceedings and of those present (Malraux, Jean-Richard Bloch, Rolland, Barbusse, Nizan and Gide) several voiced objections or reservations, as J.-P.A.Bernard has pointed out in his study of the PCF and its literary policies. 20 The non-Communist fellow travellers in particular were very suspicious of such an authoritarian approach to literature:

les nouveaux amis du P.C. assimilaient aussi de façon consciente ou inconsciente le réalisme socialiste et la théorie de la littérature prolétarienne. Ils réunissaient les deux notions en un même concept de littérature dirigée qui n'avaient rien pour les séduire. 21

Paul Nizan, as a loyal party member, was much less sceptical, and
recognised the power of great literature to transform the world in the way envisaged by socialist realism:

Aucune oeuvre de première grandeur qui n'ait été une mise en accusation du monde, un procès de la condition de l'homme dans le monde. Les plus grandes sont celles qui ont uni à ce procès une volonté de transformer le monde qui faisait l'objet du réquisitoire.22

Nizan however did not embrace socialist realism as openly as did Aragon, preferring to talk in terms of 'littérature responsable' and 'littérature révolutionnaire'. His novel Antoine Bloyé was heralded by Aragon as a work of socialist realism,23 but Nizan himself did not become as involved in the debate, although he did contribute to the definition of socialist realism in his review of Aragon's Pour un réalisme socialiste, in which he saw socialist realism as a form which has gone beyond the negativity of bourgeois critical realism by means of its socialist perspective:

Ce qui sépare le réalisme socialiste de ce réalisme-critique de la grande époque bourgeoise, c'est essentiellement sa capacité de perspectives.24

Thus the most systematic commentator on the doctrine of socialist realism in France during the 1930s remained Aragon.

As David Caute has remarked in his study of Communist intellectuals and the party, it is not exactly surprising that French support for socialist realism was so sparse, since there was no way of enforcing it as in the USSR, particularly as at this time the party was interested in retaining the support of as many fellow travellers as possible in the wake of co-operation following the Front Populaire,25 and so would be loath to seem too authoritarian. In the years following the Second World War, however, there was a clampdown on literary policy within the PCF,
characterised by great bitterness at the cultural collaboration which had taken place in France during the war, and at the growing political and cultural influence of the United States in post-war France. Particularly representative of this more hard-line approach is Laurent Casanova's _Le PCF, la Nation et les intellectuels_, published in 1949. Casanova had special responsibility for culture within the party, and this particular publication demonstrates less of an interest in propagating the precepts of socialist realism than with maintaining discipline amongst Communist intellectuals. He reminds intellectuals of their duty to use their special talents for the benefit of the party. He condemns the concern for artistic freedom, decrying it as 'la liberté de trahir son pays'. The issue of artistic freedom is seen in the context of the betrayal of the collaborationist writers during the war — an example of what freedom can lead to — and of the influence of American culture in France with its promotion of despair and pessimism. To counter this influence Casanova exhorts French intellectuals to rebuild French culture.

Maurice Thorez, the leader of the PCF at this time, also played his part in encouraging the intellectuals to ally their work with that of the party and turn their backs on the decadence and confusion of bourgeois literature, promising them certainty in return:

Aux intellectuels désorrientés, égarés dans le dédale des interrogations, nous apportons des certitudes, des possibilités de développement illimité. Nous les appelons à se détourner des faux problèmes de l'individualisme, de l'esthétisme décadent et à donner un sens à leur vie en la liant à la vie des autres. Nous les appelons à puiser dans un contact vivifiant avec les masses populaires, l'élan et la force qui permettent les oeuvres durables.

At the twelfth Party Congress of 1947, he outlined the kind of
literature which was expected from Communist writers:

Nous préconisons une littérature résolument optimiste, tournée vers l'avenir, exaltant l'effort, la solidarité, la marche vers une société meilleure qui est à bâtir de nos mains.28

In 1952 another work appeared, urging Communist writers to apply themselves to the practice of socialist realism, and outlining its basic principles. According to an introductory letter published in it by Jacques Duclos, André Stil's *Vers le réalisme socialiste* appeared at an opportune moment, when the memory of what the Resistance movement had fought for was beginning to fade. Stil stresses the basic issues of socialist realism, such as the aim of the writer to advance the causes of socialism and peace; the equal status of the responsibilities of writer and militant; the importance of realism and of nationalism in literature; and the depiction of the class struggle.

These texts did not appear in isolation. Various other articles appeared in the Communist press, reaffirming the current orthodox position,29 particularly in the wake of Aragon's publication of *Les Communistes* (1949-1951), but the fact remains that it was Aragon who was responsible for the original introduction of socialist realism into France and for the main thrust of critical attention to it in the 1930s, and it is to his elaboration of socialist realism that we must turn in order to define the form socialist realism took for Aragon in the years from the publication of *Pour un réalisme socialiste* to the mid-1950s.

After the dearth of published work between his break with the Surrealists and his presence at the Congress, two major works appeared, both demonstrating the influence of socialist realism: a novel, *Les Cloches de Bâle*, published in 1934, and a collection of speeches, *Pour un réalisme socialiste*, in 1935.
The definition of socialist realism I have already quoted from the statutes of the Soviet Writers' Union (see p.65), was formulated in the context of a society in which socialism was already a reality. Aragon was evidently aware of the difficulties this posed and the objections he might face in transposing a native Soviet theory to France, a non-socialist country, since he laid considerable emphasis on the validity of a French version of the theory. His article 'Réalisme socialiste et réalisme français', published in March 1938, is a key statement in this respect. In it he refutes the arguments which deny the possibility of a native socialist realism in France, by emphasising first of all that it need not be a slavish copy of a Soviet model:

je me fais de l'art du roman une idée qui est peu compatible avec l'imitation des modèles, et de plus je pense que l'imitation des livres soviétiques n'est aucunement la voie du réalisme en France, et qu'elle aurait pour résultat de nous écarter de lui et non pas de nous en rapprocher. Car le réalisme cherche ses modèles dans la vie et non pas dans les livres.

The second objection, that socialist realism cannot exist in a non-socialist country, he reproaches for being based on a misapprehension about the nature of realism itself: that it consists of 'peinture d'après nature'. This is a notion quite alien to Aragon, who considers that realism reflects not only reality but also the views of the writer, stressing the interpretive, as opposed to the purely descriptive element of realism:

Bref, ils ne pensent pas comme moi, que le réalisme est avant tout une attitude d'esprit du romancier, qui est le résultat de sa conception du monde.

The national specificity of socialist realism is a feature which Aragon repeatedly stresses in his writings. In 'Les Écrivains et la paix'
(1946) he expresses his conviction that 'une littérature profondément nationale' is what is needed in the fight against fascism. The notion of the national character of socialist realism is supported by Stalin's characterisation of party art as, 'national par la forme et socialiste par le contenu', a phrase which Aragon recalls at the 1954 PCF Congress. In his speech at the second Congress of Soviet Writers in 1954, Aragon outlined to the assembly the necessary conditions for an authentically French socialist realism; reiterating the necessity of emphasising national characteristics, whilst taking inspiration from the existence of the Soviet Union:

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 le 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. Ne pas penser ainsi, se défendre de le faire pour je ne sais quelle modestie nationale, c'est jouer perdue, c'est en fait entraver le développement de la littérature et de l'esprit humain. (JAMJ p.182)

It is in fact, Aragon goes on to say, only through this emphasis upon specific, national characteristics that socialist realism will have its full transforming effect. In this way, he underlines the socialist realist stress on the value of the national in the context of an international movement, and takes pride in the independence of French socialist realism from the Soviet model. Within the limits of this independence however, Aragon always remained close to the original Soviet version, as we shall see in the following analysis of Aragon's interpretation of socialist realism as elaborated in his literary criticism.
Whilst Marx and Engels formulated no specific literary methodology, the ideological basis of both the Soviet and French versions of socialist realism is clearly indebted to Marxist ideas. Aragon points out in *Hugo, poète réaliste* that, while for Hugo, whom he sees as a precursor of socialist realism, the ideas in his poetry came from the soul, for himself and other Marxists these ideas are very much a class product: 'C'est la classe qui produit les idées, qui inspire les sentiments, l'action, les écrits'. More specifically, socialist realist literature should upset the cultural dominance of the bourgeoisie for the cultural and political benefit of all:

> en reprenant l'héritage de la culture française, remise sur ses pieds, et ne servant plus désormais à la délectation de quelques-uns, et à l'asservissement du grand nombre, mais à la libération et au développement culturel de tous, par la lutte contre les maîtres d'aujourd'hui.

This can be achieved by taking into account the class struggle, depicting the world of work and the cultural development of the masses: all topics which bourgeois culture has in the past refused to deal with, according to Aragon's report from the Moscow Congress in *L'Humanité*. Another valid task for writers and artists in the view of the AEAR is to join the working classes in fighting fascism and war.

The theory is structured not only in terms of class, but also, more specifically, in terms of a scientific, analytical literary theory which views the present in terms of the future and the inevitable progression of man towards socialism:

> si la théorie leniniste du reflet en art est juste, et j'en suis profondément persuadé, nous reflétons nécessairement notre époque, nous reflétons nécessairement dans nos écrits la marche au socialisme de l'humanité. (*JAMJ* p.173)
The notion of future perspective, closely bound up with the idea of progress towards socialism is a key element in distinguishing the critical realism typical of the nineteenth century from socialist realism:

qui tenant compte des choses telles qu'elles sont et telles qu'elles paraissent être, tend aussi à les saisir dans leur mouvement. 39

The demand for scientific realism is an echo of Stalin's invocation to writers to become 'les ingénieurs des âmes'. Aragon takes up this point with great approval, particularly in Pour un réalisme socialiste, since to him it emphasises the true worth of art and the artist:

Les écrivains ont toujours été des ingénieurs des âmes, mais sans le savoir, et à partir du moment où ils ne peuvent plus l'ignorer, ils cesseront d'être les alchimistes d'une science qui va se développer, ils deviendront pleinement ingénieurs des âmes au sens scientifique du mot ingénieur. (PRS p.11)

Given this vocation, the writer must aim for 'le soin scientifique de la réalité', 40 and it is in this scientific approach to the depiction of reality that socialist realism distances itself from less rigorous methods such as naturalism.

If, as I would maintain, socialist realism is the form chosen by Aragon to express his commitment in literature, one characteristic of his commitment has already emerged with considerable force: it falls unequivocally within the category of politically aligned commitment. Another broad statement which could be made is that Aragon's commitment shares one feature which is characteristic of other committed writers, politicised or not: the awareness of a sense of responsibility as a writer. The tentatively expressed social responsibility which Aragon made in Traité du Style is now fully fledged into a complete
acceptance of his responsibility as a writer. Moreover this issue is written into both his and the Soviet versions of socialist realism, and it takes various forms.

In general terms, Aragon presents commitment as the result of a kind of moral imperative, urging him on to action, almost despite himself. This feeling was already present in a less tangible form in his reaction to the Sacco and Vanzetti affair, as described in Traité du Style. In Le Neveu de Monsieur Duval, the awareness has become more explicit and, as a result of it he is unable to remain silent in the face of injustice. Here he refers to the execution of the Rosenbergs:

Car nous étions arrivés aux jours des Rosenberg. Et ce n'était pas oublier mes amis en prison, Stil et tous les autres mais je ne pouvais pas ne pas interrompre le colloque Régence, quand le coeur des hommes battait si fort...

This concept is not a specifically political one, though motivated by political sympathies for the condemned couple, and in Chroniques de la pluie et du beau temps, he characterises the general issue of artistic responsibility as a simple matter of human dignity, recalling a time when he had publicly criticised lack of artistic responsibility:

je m'étais élevé contre ceux qui, prêchant l'irresponsabilité de l'artiste considèrent en fait l'art comme une oasis d'irresponsabilité, comme un lieu de démission de notre dignité d'homme. A cause entre autres de la haute idée que je me fais de l'art, des artistes, de l'écrivain, et de leur mission.

On a rather more practical level, and one which is closer to the specific demands of socialist realism, the writer also has a direct responsibility to his reading public. He is accountable to them and to their expectations of him:

Leur responsabilité sociale posée, la société se trouve fondée à leur demander compte des livres qu'ils écrivent...(PRS p.12)
In Soviet society this has already become a reality, and not only are writers associating themselves with the proletariat in their writing, but they are actually working side by side with them. They play an active role in the running of the country by participating in the Soviets, by taking part in the electoral campaigns, thus helping themselves to escape from the traditional alienation of the writer common to capitalist society. (PRS p.31)

The political situation in France prevents such a politically active role, but Aragon encourages the writer to display his responsibility to the public and to align himself with the working classes in other ways. It is his duty, for example, to promote reading amongst the people, and one way in which he can do this is to provide edifying reading material for his public, stemming the tide of 'l'invasion de la littérature américaine et des romans existentialistes', works which do not advance the working-class cause.

A more far-reaching aspect of responsibility to which Aragon repeatedly returns is that of the writer's responsibility to defend peace. Not only is this presented as a valid cause in itself, and one which the writer is in a position to promote actively, but it is also a means by which the intellectuals may draw closer to working people and overcome the traditional gulf between them by participating in a common concern:

c'est en devenant les meilleurs agitateurs pour la paix qu'ils vaincront leur isolement d'avec les autres hommes, qu'ils feront disparaître ce fossé entre intellectuels et manuels dont ils sont les premiers à souffrir. Parce que la lutte pour la paix est la clef non seulement des questions qu'ils se posent, mais des questions que se posent tous les autres hommes.

Since politics plays such a large part in modern life, the writer has a
duty to introduce it into his work, otherwise the reader will experience no sense of identification with the characters or their ideas, and the work as a whole will have no impact upon him:

Il nous est difficile dans les temps que nous traversons de suivre des personnages, de nous attacher à eux, si ce qui nous presse et nous menace leur est si parfaitement étranger qu'ils nous apparaissent comme des héros d'opéra. La politique qui a envahi notre vie se rouvre alors comme un champ nouveau au roman, non point comme but, mais comme matière.47

In the socialist realist view of art however, the mere introduction of politics into a work is not sufficient. The writer has a further duty: to make a choice, to be partisan; in this case to espouse socialist ideology in his work. Anything less than this is irresponsible. In his set of critical essays *La Lumière de Stendhal*, Aragon commends Maurice Barrès for his acknowledgement of the importance of politics in the modern world, for choosing to take a stand and not remaining on the sidelines; this despite the fact that Aragon's sympathies lie at the opposite end of the political spectrum. For in doing as he did, Barrès has created a more life-like image of his time than many of his populist contemporaries:

Et cela parce qu'il a été(...) un partisan: parce qu'il y a fait à la politique sa place dominante dans le monde moderne, parce qu'il y a pratiquement nié et rejeté le préjugé de la 'distance romanesque', écrit en marge de l'événement.48

The principle of partisanship is applicable for writers not just in their creative writing, but also in the realm of active politics, and it is illustrated by Aragon's condemnation of those writers who made no attempt to intervene in the Rosenberg affair.49

Additionally, Aragon stipulates that such partisanship should go hand in hand with the vocation of writer. There can be no artificial
separation of the two. Despite his repeated condemnation of naturalism, Aragon hails Zola as a writer who has combined successfully the dual vocation of artist and partisan:

pour moi, il n'y a pas l'écrivain, d'une part, et d'autre part, le politique. C'est un seul homme(...) Défendre le Zola de l'Affaire c'est défendre tout le cheminement de son œuvre, tout le développement de sa pensée. (LS p.257)

He criticises those who, while professing to side with the working class politically, try to separate their art from their politics and fail to write for them: 'Il font encore deux parts de leur activité'. 50

While presented by Aragon as elements of the responsibilities of the writer committed to socialist realism, these demands could of course represent the responsibilities of any committed writer. The socialist realist, however, has additional duties, rather more precise in nature, since they relate to membership of the Communist party and the advancement of its aims. Aragon outlined these responsibilities at the 1954 Party Congress at Ivry:

les intellectuels communistes ont l'obligation, comme leurs camarades, d'être présents aussi, et de façon constante, parmi les hommes et les femmes de leur catégorie, pour y déjouer les manœuvres constantes que les forces de classe de la bourgeoisie tentent dans l'espoir d'isoler le Parti, pour faire pénétrer les idées, le programme et l'action du Parti parmi ces hommes et ces femmes, et aider, ainsi dans la mesure de leurs possibilités, le Parti dans son rôle dirigeant, comme le Parti de la classe ouvrière et défenseur le plus avancé, le plus conséquent des intérêts nationaux. (JAMJ p.200)

His speech is a key source for his reiteration of the duties of the Communist writer, among which are the dissemination of Communist ideas, discipline in artistic creation, the awareness of the political implications of art and the need to present a faithful and favourable view of party literature, whilst avoiding any tendency towards 'un art
de pur et simple déclaration, un art d'affiche, un art gesticulatoire, un art diminué', (JAMJ p.207) in other words, avoiding propaganda.

A fundamental notion of socialist realism is that of the artist as an instrument in bringing about social transformation in the direction of socialism, a notion which owes a great deal to the official Soviet definition of socialist realism, though of course the scope of transformation to be undertaken in non-socialist France is quite different from that required in post-revolutionary Russia. In line with what he has seen in the USSR, Aragon views the writer's function as a fully political one in the transformation of society. It is no longer adequate simply to use one's literary talents as political weapons. The transformation of French society into a classless society is to be accomplished actively, as in the USSR, at the sides of the proletariat:

It is not clear to what extent Aragon views this as a viable, practicable prospect in France, though it can be said that he always showed himself favourable to the idea of breaking down the barriers between worker and intellectual, as in his open debates on the publication of *Les Communistes* and his work for the *Batailles du Livre*, the campaign to bring literature to the working class.

The emphasis on the writer's part in the political transformation of society is one which recurs throughout Aragon's elaboration of socialist realism. He makes it clear that the time-honoured practice of the description and interpretation of society through literature is no
longer adequate; the writer must be committed to changing that society:

nous sommes parvenus en un temps où l'explication du monde est devenue insuffisante à l'homme qui a entrepris de le transformer(...) son réalisme a cessé d'être une description pure et simple, pour se faire combat, part active de cette transformation. (JAMJ p.268)

The notion of social transformation through literature takes for granted the power of literature to achieve concrete results in a sphere beyond the purely literary. During a congress of French writers in 1946, Aragon expressed this belief in the power of the written word, maintaining:

que les intellectuels, et particulièrement les écrivains, ont le pouvoir de défendre la paix - que la chose écrite est une arme et peut servir à la paix.52

Aragon frequently stressed the power of the writer, in his privileged position, to move people to action; influenced in his belief by the political effectiveness which literature, and particularly poetry, had demonstrated during the Resistance. Just as during the war the issue of traditional poetic form had proved not to be lacking in political relevance, so today, claimed Aragon, literary discussion is not irrelevant in the face of the struggle to maintain peace:

à cette heure très grave pour la paix du monde, où il est donné à un écrivain français de prendre la parole dans cette Salle des Colonnes à Moscou, ces discussions pourront paraître bien oiseuses en fonction de ce qui est aujourd'hui même en jeu. Sans doute aurait-on pensé de même en 1939, à la veille de l'ouverture de la seconde guerre impérialiste, si on avait alors publiquement débattu du vers français. Pourtant les problèmes du vers français résolus devaient donner aux combattants de notre Résistance contre l'occupant nazi l'aide et le soutien d'une poésie qui persuada par milliers les patriotes de se ranger dans la lutte auprès d'eux. De telles discussions ne sont pas oiseuses aujourd'hui non plus dans la lutte pour la paix. Elles peuvent orienter non seulement les écrivains, mais, par les œuvres de ceux-ci, tous les hommes, dont elles forment l'esprit. (JAMJ pp.181-82)
On the personal level, Aragon later attributed his reception of the Lenin Peace prize in 1959 to the fact that the Soviet Communists acknowledged the active political role he had adopted as a committed writer, and that they wished to combat the notion that the political role of the writer is an ephemeral one:

Je pense que le Comité des Prix Lénine internationaux pour le renforcement de la paix entre les peuples, a voulu en premier lieu, en donnant l'un de ces prix à un écrivain, mettre en échec l'idée assez répandue un peu partout de la futilité de cette profession, de son rôle secondaire dans les affaires des hommes, de son impuissance à combattre les maux majeurs de l'humanité. (JAMJ p.264)

This belief in the value of the writer's political contribution is echoed in Le Neveu de M. Duval, where it is maintained that the writer can do a great deal in the context of the Cold War to dispel the many prejudices about Communists so that, no longer divided by mistrust amongst themselves, the French can present a united opposition to the American presence in their country, a presence which is seen by Aragon as another form of occupation. This point is unusual in that it is so specific. References to the ideological content of socialist realism for Aragon normally take the form of global concepts such as the class struggle, the construction of socialism or the maintenance of peace.

Realism, as a defining feature of socialist realism, receives a considerable amount of attention from Aragon in his theoretical writings. Initially, in Pour un réalisme socialiste, realism is viewed in terms of a stage beyond Surrealism, which although constructed around a certain vision of reality, was guilty of an idealist rather than a materialist attitude to it. In stating that he is calling for 'le retour à la réalité', (PRS p.82) Aragon announces his future intentions. He is to remain with reality, but his depiction of it will be rather
different than in his Surrealist days. Reality will be the starting point, rather than an end in itself, and realism should imply 'la volonté de donner une image vraie du monde réel'.

Seen in terms of the socialist realist code, the suppression of reality is a political act on the part of the bourgeoisie, for while the proletariat has everything to gain by the revelation of reality, the bourgeoisie has a great deal to lose:

elle (la bourgeoisie) ne peut plus supporter l'éclat du réalisme, la considération de la réalité(...) Le prolétariat au pouvoir n'a rien à cacher, il est riche de toute la vérité humaine. Il n'a pas besoin du mensonge, il peut considérer la réalité. (PRS pp.85-86)

Aware of the threat posed by realism, the bourgeoisie has always schemed to discourage the examination of reality in literature. Aragon contends that the topics of the imagination and of psychology are classic substitutes for reality in bourgeois literature. They serve to divert our attention from more serious matters.

In line with the Soviet emphasis upon the desirability of building a socialist realist literature on the more acceptable bases of bourgeois culture, Aragon devotes a great deal of space to the history of realism, its development in the nineteenth century, and to those writers whom he sees as being the precursors of socialist realism, particularly, with special reference to Stendhal and Hugo, in their use of critical realism.

Aragon treats Stendhal as a figure well ahead of his time: '(il) apparaît, en plein romantisme comme un réaliste critique'. (LS p.98) He goes even further than this to say that Stendhal was an activist committed to political change. Realism was not for him a mere 'délectation d'artiste', (p.98) but a political choice:
il explique, il critique la réalité, il contribue à sa transformation (non dans le sens du socialism sans doute, mais dans celui de la démocratie libérale). (p.98)

In Aragon's view, Stendhal is now remembered for some of the attributes which today would characterise a socialist realist writer: his realism, (p.13) the selectivity of his vision, (p.98) his criticism of bourgeois society, (p.98) the importance he gives to politics, (pp.31-32) his perspective on the future, which means that he still has relevance for the reader of today, (p.99) and the desire to transform society with novels which are:

des armes contre un milieu social qu'il s'agit de miner, de changer, de transformer de fond en comble. (p.64)

Hugo too, although treated first and foremost as a realist in his own right, is seen as a precursor of socialist realism. This idea is traced by Aragon particularly in Châtiments, which he holds up as a worthy example to build upon for the socialist realist writer, and which he also uses to demonstrate that realism and poetry are not incompatible:

(Châtiments) n'est pas seulement une oeuvre magistrale contre Napoléon III ou contre Hitler; c'est avant tout une merveilleuse leçon de réalisme dans la poésie. Les Châtiments, c'est le déni opposé une bonne fois pour toutes, aux gens qui croient à l'incompatibilité du réalisme et de la poésie (...). Je dirai plus; je dirai quelque chose qui peut choquer certains: c'est la préfiguration, dans la poésie, de ce que nos amis soviétiques ont appelé le réalisme socialiste.

Important though certain elements of the French cultural heritage may be in the formation of socialist realism, there comes a point where the critical realism of the nineteenth century alone is no longer adequate. As has already been mentioned, Gorky went so far as to reject
critical realism as counter productive:

this form of realism did not and cannot serve to educate socialist individuality, for in criticising everything, it asserted nothing, or else, at the worst, reverted to an assertion of what it had itself repudiated. 39

This comment highlights a significant discrepancy between the French model as developed by Aragon, and the Soviet theory; and it reflects a difference in social reality, for while the Soviet Union, where the writer is working with society, has achieved socialism, France is still in the pre-revolutionary phase. The status of the socialist writer is therefore still an oppositional one within a capitalist society. Thus while in the Soviet Union critical realism is, or should be, defunct, in France it retains its usefulness. This difference in theory is reflected both in Aragon's favourable comments about the critical realists and in his own fictional practice, where he often retains the negative and critical at the expense of the positive and optimistic, since for a socialist realist writer in France there is little opportunity to represent socialist reality, and much to criticise in the status quo. Aragon's positive attitude to critical realism reflects the recommendations he made about building socialist realism on the basis of existing bourgeois culture. It is interesting to note that the main exploration of critical realism takes place in the 1950s, after the publication of Aragon's main socialist realist works, when perhaps he had realised the practical difficulties of applying the directives of socialist realism within the French national context. French socialist realism, as Paul Nizan points out in his review of Pour un réalisme socialiste, nonetheless contains an important advance upon the critical realism, which is seen as a precursor of socialist realism, and this is a
difference of perspective: the perspective of the future and of the inevitable progression towards socialism:

Le réalisme bourgeois a été un réalisme-critique. Il décrivait amèrement la réalité. Mais il ne voyait point d'issue à cette réalité, ou l'issue qu'il voyait était purement imaginaire(...).

Ce qui sépare le 'réalisme socialiste' de ce réalisme critique de la grande époque bourgeoise, c'est essentiellement sa capacité de perspectives. Un pareil réalisme, qui analyse sa réalité dans son mouvement, ne peut pas ne pas s'orienter vers l'avenir de cette réalité. Il comporte une certaine exaltation du futur. Le réalisme-critique était, par essence, pessimiste: il ne dépassait pas une certaine dénonciation du monde(...). Un réalisme socialiste met au premier plan cet avenir qu'il contribue à faire naître, avec une certaine exaltation.

While critical realism is accepted as a basis for socialist realism, naturalism is summarily rejected by Aragon. The reason for this is that socialist realism comprises an analytical, interpretive view of society; while naturalism is of essence indiscriminate, and relieves the author of his responsibility to choose and to be partisan. In a discussion of the role of detail in realism and in naturalism, Aragon concludes that in naturalism no attempt is made to order detail, and so the details themselves assume greater importance than their meaning:

In 'Du réalisme dans le roman', an article which defines the position of realism in the novel, naturalism is condemned for falsifying the delicate balance, necessary in the novel, between reality and fiction. A novel is neither reportage nor a photograph, and so naturalism, defined by Aragon as 'la photographie littéraire', has, or should have,
no place in the novel. It lacks the means to get to the heart of reality: 'cette intervention consciente de l'expérimentateur pour atteindre vraiment à la réalité', and the analytical, interpretive view is crucial if literature is to be a political weapon:

cette valeur de généralisation que l'introduction de la fiction donne au roman, et qui fait du roman non plus le divertissement d'un homme, mais une arme dans la lutte des hommes pour ou contre un monde meilleur.

Socialist realism is not only analytical in its treatment of reality, but has quite a different overall perspective from that of naturalism: it sees beyond the appearances to the inner significance and to the prospect of change:

tenant compte des choses telles qu'elles sont et telles qu'elles paraissent être, (il) tend aussi à les saisir dans leur devenir, dans leur mouvement.

As with traditional realism, one of the key functions of socialist realism is to extract the typical from the individual situation, as André Stil has done in his novel Le Premier Choc: '(il) a démontré(...) sa capacité scientifique à étudier la réalité, et la rendre concrètement, dans une image typique'. This demand is obviously beyond the limits of naturalism and its tranche de vie philosophy.

Another objection to naturalism is voiced by Aragon in his comments on Le Premier Choc:

Stil a donné à son livre la valeur éducative, sans laquelle il peut y avoir bonne photographie, mais non point réalisme...

Here Aragon demonstrates that he follows the Soviet lead in viewing the didactic function as inseparable from socialist realism. Without the particular bias and analytical framework which this function imposes,
all that is left is 'bonne photographie', that is to say: naturalism.

Despite his criticisms of naturalism as being unsuited to the requirements of socialist realism, Aragon does not condemn Zola, as an exponent of naturalism, for developing a genre appropriate at that particular stage of literary history, and believes that out of naturalism something valid may yet be recuperated for the benefit of socialist realism, that is the critical stance implicit in its depiction of bourgeois society:

il nous faut revendiquer ce qu'il y avait de profondément subversif contre la bourgeoisie régante dans le naturalisme d'alors(...) Il s'agit d'y reprendre le réalisme. (PRS pp.73-74)

As Aragon declared, the content of socialist realism can only be satisfactorily conveyed by a stylistic form equal to the task. Questions of style are of great importance to the socialist realist writer:

L'art de parti, exprimant le contenu socialiste qui caractérise la tendance, attache la plus grande importance aux questions de la forme, aux questions nationales de la forme. (JAMJ p.216)

At the second Congress of Soviet Writers in 1954, he again stressed the importance of finding the most effective way of putting the literary weapon to use. (JAMJ pp.189-90) Aragon discusses the issue with reference to some of those writers whom he has seen as precursors of socialist realism. In Pour un réalisme socialiste, he demonstrates how poetic innovation in the use of language register was instrumental in conveying the revolutionary nature of what Hugo had to say:

Réaliste, Hugo qui réclame le droit de cité de l'argot dans la langue, et le droit de vivre en France pour les communards. (PRS p.75)

A style which reinforces the content is vital since, as Aragon points
out in *La Lumière de Stendhal*, it is all too easy for a writer of progressive political views to produce a work of art or literature which is reactionary and regressive, stylistically speaking. His comments on Maurice Barrès are important in this respect. In his view, Barrès is much more of an avant-garde, progressive writer, despite his reactionary political beliefs, than certain left-wing writers who reject socialist realism:

je dirai qu'il y a beaucoup d'écrivains dont l'idéologie est progressiste, mais dont les romans, même écrits aujourd'hui, à les comparer avec *Le Roman de l'énergie nationale* sont régressifs, réactionnaires *en tant que romans(...) j'ai en vue ces romanciers dont le coeur est à gauche(...) et la plume se détourne du réalisme socialiste.* (LS p.267, author's emphasis)

How is Barrès progressive in his use of form? Aragon shows in his championship of Barrès that he had, even before socialist realism came into being, adopted certain features which were later to characterise the theory and practice of this method: he is partisan in his writing; politics form a central element in it; he has rejected the fallacy of 'distance romanesque' which serves to separate fiction and reality; and has avoided naturalism and populism in favour of realism. Aragon concludes that 'ce précédent historique(...) comporte des leçons qui ne peuvent plus être négligées'. (LS p.266) Yet it seems that the points Aragon isolates have more to do with content than with style. He does not define in any precise detail what constitutes Barrès's progressive use of form. As J.E. Flower has commented in his recent discussion of socialist realism in France, there was a lack of 'precise recommendations' about the use of form. 67 Although Aragon opposes the artificial separation of content and style, he has little to say beyond this, using such imprecise terminology as 'la mauvaise forme' and 'la
It would seem that, despite declarations to the contrary, content is of primary importance in discussions of socialist realism, while the question of style remains on the periphery.

There is a similar vagueness in the assumption that socialist realism will have a transforming effect upon the reader, without identifying the potential readership of works of socialist realism, or the ways in which this transformation is expected to operate.

Setting aside these areas of imprecision, the doctrine of socialist realism as elaborated by Aragon is, nonetheless, one which provides him with a clear framework within which to devote his writing to the cause of Communism and the revolution; a framework within which his commitment finds methodological expression. It is not, as Aragon has pointed out, a simple carbon copy of Soviet socialist realism, but a development of the original Soviet doctrine which takes account of the political circumstances of France and of its literary heritage.
NOTES


2. The Kharkov Congress was essentially intended to evaluate the way in which Communist parties in the Third International were carrying out RAPP policies.


4. Ibid., Appendices I, III, IV

5. 'Les Statuts de l'Union des écrivains soviétiques de l'URSS', *Commune*, juin 1934, p.1150

6. *Soviet Writers' Congress*, p.18

7. Ibid., p.157

8. Ibid., p.179

9. Ibid., p.251

10. Ibid., p.181

11. Ibid., p.65

12. Ibid., p.20

13. Ibid., p.22

14. Ibid.

15. In a letter to Minna Kautsky, Engels wrote:

   I am not at all an opponent of tendentious poetry as such(...). But I think that the bias should flow by itself from the situation, without particular indications, and that the writer is not obliged to obtrude on the reader the future historical solutions of the social conflicts pictured.

   Maynard Solomon (ed.), *Marxism and Art. Essays classic and contemporary*, p.67
16. Soviet Writers' Congress, p.21

17. The Statutes of the Soviet Writers' Union said:

   il est nécessaire que les écrivains soient entraînés au travail actif de l'édification socialiste.

   Commune, juin 1934, p.1150

18. Soviet Writers' Congress, p.63

19. 'L'AEAR salue le premier congrès des écrivains soviétiques, Commune, juillet - août 1934, p.1156

20. Bernard, Le PCF et la question littéraire 1921-1939, pp.131-34

21. Ibid., p.144. J.E. Flower has also analysed the hesitations of many on the Left as regards socialist realism in 'The French Experience' in European Socialist Realism, M. Scriven and D. Tate (eds.), pp.104-5

22. 'Dostoievsky' in Suleiman, Pour une nouvelle culture, p.295

23. 'Paul Nizan: Antoine Bloyé', Commune, mars - avril 1934, pp.824-26

24. 'Pour un réalisme socialiste par Aragon', L'Humanité, 12.VIII.1935 in Suleiman, p.177

25. Caute, Communism and the French Intellectuals, p.323

26. Casanova, op. cit., p.25

27. Quoted by Stil in 'A propos des Communistes d'Aragon', Cahiers du Communisme, août 1951, p.987

28. Quoted by Stil in Vers le réalisme socialiste, p.58

29. See J.E. Flower, 'The French Experience', pp.107-8, which gives more details of this reaffirmation of orthodoxy in the 1940s and 1950s.

30. 'Réalisme socialiste et réalisme français', Europe, mars 1938, p.290

31. Ibid., p.291
32. 'Les Ecrivains et la paix', Les Lettres Françaises, 5.VII.1946, p.3
33. J'abats mon jeu, p.210. Further references to this work are given in parentheses in the text.
34. 'Réalisme socialiste et réalisme français', p.303:

Alors seulement, vous toucherez à l'universel. Alors seulement, vos livres deviendront des armes, des instruments pour la transformation du monde, à l'image de la transformation de votre propre pays.

35. Hugo, poète réaliste, p.29
36. 'L'AEAR salue le premier congrès des écrivains soviétiques', p.1156
37. 'Le Premier Congrès des écrivains soviétiques', L'Humanité, 27.VIII.1934, p.6
38. 'L'AEAR salue le premier congrès des écrivains soviétiques', p.1155
39. 'Aragon répond à ses témoins', La Nouvelle Critique, juillet - août 1949, p.78
40. 'Réalisme socialiste et réalisme français', p.302
41. Le Neveu de M.Duval, p.65
42. Chroniques de la pluie et du beau temps, p.167
43. Littératures Soviétiques, pp.123-24
44. La lumière et la paix, pp.40-41
45. 'Le roman et les critiques', La Nouvelle Critique, juin 1950, p.77
46. La lumière et la paix, p.41
47. 'Le roman terrible', Europe, décembre 1938, p.445
48. La Lumière de Stendhal, p.266. (Author's emphasis). Further references to this work are given in parentheses in the text.
49. Le Neveu de M.Duval, p.77
50. 'Pour qui écrivez-vous?', Commune, mars - avril 1934, p.788
51. See p.65 of this chapter.
52. 'Les écrivains et la paix', p.1
53. Le Neveu de M.Duval, p.192
54. PRS, p.79, see chapter 2, p.45
55. 'Le Jeu du Capifol', L'Humanité, 4.I.1947, p.4
56. 'Defence du roman français', Commune, janvier 1936, p.565
57. Alan Swingewood, The Novel and Revolution, p.86
58. Hugo, poète réaliste, p.66 (author's emphasis)
59. Soviet Writers' Congress, p.65
60. 'Pour un réalisme socialiste par Aragon', in Suleiman, p.177 (author's emphasis)
61. 'Du réalisme dans le roman', Vendredi, 3.IV.1936, p.5
62. Ibid.
63. 'Aragon répond à ses témoins', p.78
64. Le Neveu de M.Duval, p.193 (author's emphasis)
65. Ibid.
66. 'Statuts de l'Union des écrivains soviétiq...
CHAPTER FOUR

LIBERALISATION

Just as Aragon was in the forefront of the elaboration of a French version of socialist realism shortly after its formulation in the Soviet Union, he was also among the first in France to begin to reformulate his ideas on socialist realism in the thawing of political and cultural attitudes which followed the political crises of 1956: the revelation at the twentieth Soviet Party congress of Stalinist atrocities, the workers' riots at Poznan in Poland and the Soviet military intervention in Budapest. The process of political and cultural liberalisation which followed was not instantaneous. David Caute has pointed out that the reaction among French Communist intellectuals to the revelations of the CPSU congress was a mixed one:

from the 'liberals', shock, relief, hope, from the true Stalinists, a grudging and barely perceptible realignment.

This meant, therefore, that there was no immediate current of liberalisation, either political or cultural, flowing through the party, but as the gradual process of de-Stalinisation gained momentum, there was also a relaxation as regards the intellectuals and cultural policy. This climate of change paved the way for Aragon's rejection of a dogmatic approach to socialist realism, which manifests itself with the publication of La Semaine sainte in 1958, and in 1959 of J'Abats mon jeu.

It was with the publication of La Semaine sainte that the attention of the reading public and of the critics became alerted to a distinct change in Aragon's writing. Confronted with a novel set in 1815 and
which bore no apparent resemblance to the expected face of socialist realism, opinion differed as to the significance to be attached to this phenomenon: was it merely a change in Aragon's approach to socialist realism, or did it signal a profound change of heart? Many a bourgeois critic seized eagerly upon the latter explanation, seeing in *La Semaine sainte* the renunciation of socialist realism. Those who did so, however, were, Aragon made haste to explain, under a misapprehension. The novel, he claimed, represented not a rejection of socialist realism but a development of it, a development which is traced in detail in *J'Abats mon jeu*. Much of the material in which Aragon elaborates his evolving ideas on socialist realism focuses on the critical reception of *La Semaine sainte*. Evidently irritated by the suggestions from the bourgeois press that *La Semaine sainte* constituted a renunciation of socialist realism, Aragon went to great lengths to insist that this was not at all the case. Several of the articles and speeches in *J'Abats mon jeu* and various interviews of the time reiterate the argument that the novel was not a renunciation but a development of socialist realism, and that as such it illustrated the versatility of the method:

*La Semaine sainte, n'est pas un abandon de la méthode du réalisme socialiste, mais un développement de celle-ci(...)*

*On me dira que, si on compare *La Semaine sainte* à bien des ouvrages catalogués comme relevant du réalisme socialiste, ce sont surtout telles ou telles différences qui frappent d'abord et distinguent mon livre de ceux-ci. Sans doute ces différences existent-elles, sans doute sont-elles d'importance, mais elles soulignent simplement la diversité des résultats auxquels on peut parvenir par la méthode dont je parle.* (*JAMJ* p.80)

Aragon defends his contention that socialist realism permits diversity by maintaining, in a lecture given to the *Jeunesses Communistes de France*, that the theory is not a rigid one, is not 'une conception de
l'art fixée une fois pour toutes, qu'on peut apprendre, qui répond à des recettes'. (JAMJ p.137) All attempts which have been made to restrict it in this way have failed. In order to avert the decline of socialist realism into an inflexible set of conventions, Aragon asserts in this same lecture the need for constant re-examination and redefinition, taking external circumstances into account where necessary:

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, dont c'est, ce doit être sa grandeur qu'il ait la faculté de les interpréter, de les éclairer, de les assimiler, d'en dégager ce qui est conforme au progrès humain. (p.167)

In an implicit condemnation of much that has previously gone under the name of socialist realism, Aragon repeatedly calls for openness, 'une conception ouverte', (p.170) where before there had been a closed, schematic method. Above all he condemns dogmatism, a characteristic which ill-befits literature, in particular socialist realist literature, where dogmatism would detract from its 'valeur de généralité', (p.138) that is to say, the representation of the typical which is all important for realism. Aragon roundly condemns those literary theoreticians who manipulate reality through their preoccupation with dogma. Symptomatic of this is a situation in which theory becomes the predominant element whilst fiction (the practice) is moulded to fit in with the theory. A writer who indulges in such a practice is opposed to realism:

puisqu'il exige des faits conformes à son hypothèse, au lieu de ne retenir celle-ci qu'autant qu'elle peut rendre compte des faits.

Aragon makes it clear that his complaint is not about theory as such but about theory which attains to the status of dogma: 'la prétention dogmatique de certains théoriciens'. This marks a clear change of
emphasis from the works on socialist realism written between the 1930s and the early 1950s, where the tone was prescriptive and dogmatic rather than descriptive or theoretical. The intellectual distance travelled by Aragon in a very short time can be measured by comparing these comments with a statement made as late as 1955 in Littératures Soviétiques, in which he condemned 'cette tendance à considérer les œuvres comme supérieures à la théorie',\(^4\) which implies that he believed at this stage that literary works should be subordinated to theoretical demands.

While Aragon did emphasise what socialist realism should not be, the main thrust of this argument for change is a positive one. Socialist realism should, for example, stress change and movement at the expense of the static, by being:

un art de perpétuel dépassement en renonçant à la formule, à la recette, à la répétition. Et qu'il s'agisse encore de la peinture ou de l'écriture, l'art comme le socialisme, c'est toujours la remise en question de l'acquis, c'est le mouvement, le devenir.\(^5\)

He later goes even further than this to advocate an experimental approach to realism: 'Je demande droit de cité pour un réalisme expérimental',\(^6\) justifying this by taking the analogy of socialist realism and science, referred to in the previous chapter, one step further. If socialist realism is a scientific method, as is claimed, then the artist is a scientist, constantly searching for the new through experimentation, an idea which is obviously indebted to Zola. In keeping with this view, Aragon applauds the nouveau roman for its willingness to experiment.\(^7\) This positive attitude to change is also reflected in Aragon's continued insistence, along with his defence of La Semaine sainte as a socialist realist novel, that his change of stance is not a
renunciation but a renewal:

Ce renouveau n'est nullement un renoncement aux principes fondamentaux qui, depuis longtemps, caractérisent la position de parti en art, mais bien au contraire l'application plus rigoureuse, plus exigeante, donc moins facile parce que moins étroite, de ses principes.

This emphasis upon a rigorous and demanding form seems to square awkwardly with the requirements of change and movement, an awkwardness which Aragon does not resolve.

The independence of French socialist realism vis-à-vis Soviet socialist realism is even more forcefully expressed than in earlier days. During the thirties and forties the emphasis within Aragon's theory of socialist realism was upon French socialist realism as a viable, separate and national entity, although the debt to the Soviet model was clear. By the time J'Abats mon jeu was published in late 1959, however, we can see that this has been replaced by an apparent desire for dissociation from the literary iniquities which had been committed in the name of socialist realism in the Soviet Union. The critical tone is something which has not been heard before:

On me dira que tel ou tel trait, caractère de mon livre, l'oppose à des choses qui ont été écrites en URSS touchant le réalisme socialiste... Qu'est-ce que cela peut 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 énoncée en URSS, 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. (JAMJ p.81)

The criticism is renewed in a speech made in Hungary, on receiving an honorary doctorate from the University of Prague. In this speech, Aragon maintains that it is not only from the right wing that threats to
realism come. They also come from the 'pirate de gauche'. Aragon even goes so far as to say that it is the latter who is the most dangerous to realism, since he discredits it from within the Left, leaving it open to attack from the outside. Naturalism and populism are singled out for particular criticism in this respect, as is, more significantly, the Soviet Union's artistic record in the past:

Si(...) on pouvait chiffrer en kilomètres carrés, la surface des toiles aujourd'hui immontrables qui, sous l'étendard du réalisme, ont été peintes par de telles gens en Union Soviétique pendant des dizaines d'années, on comprendrait très clairement ce que je veux dire en parlant de ce qui risque de discréditer le réalisme de l'intérieur. 9

In Les Collages, Aragon is yet more specific in his accusations against the Soviet Union, when he condemns the way in which lies and criminal acts were justified in the name of realism under the rule of Stalin. 10

According to Claude Roy, another intellectual member of the PCF until the late fifties, Aragon carried his criticisms of the aberrations of Soviet socialist realism into practice by publishing his collection Littératures Soviétiques, which included:

les oeuvres que les 'progressistes' en URSS parvenaient encore à publier là-bas, entre les filets de la censure et les ciseaux de ces 'redaktors', dont Aragon dénonçait violemment l'étouffoir. 11

Roy views the collection as Aragon's autocritique: 'la révision déchirante et tacite du choix ou des silences de l'ancien Aragon'. 12

What then constitutes Aragon's new, 'open' conception of socialist realism? At first sight there would appear to be little change. In 'Paroles à Saint-Denis', a speech delivered in 1959, in which he emphasises once more that, contrary to popular belief, La Semaine sainte is a socialist realist novel, Aragon clarifies this comment by
defining socialist realism as:

ce réalisme de notre temps qui tient compte de la perspective historique de l'avenir ou du présent, suivant les pays, je veux dire du socialisme. (JAMJ p.80)

On the face of it, this would not seem to be significantly different from the original definition which stressed the depiction of reality in its historical context, and with the perspective of the future and of socialism. Yet if we look more closely at the critical works of Aragon from the late 1950s onwards, we can see that while he claims repeatedly that he is still a socialist realist, and while he discusses the issue of realism at great length, the ideological element of socialist realism, socialism itself, is referred to less and less frequently. He still recognises that, speaking for socialist writers, 'nous reflétons nécessairement dans nos écrits la marche au socialisme de l'humanité', (JAMJ p.173) but this seems to be a rather passive formulation. If the reflection of the inexorable progress towards socialism is inevitable, then one need not be a socialist realist writer to achieve it. On the whole, socialist realism is seen markedly less in terms of the active participation in the political struggle which Aragon had frequently claimed it to be, and more as an aesthetic issue.

Whereas in the earlier version of socialist realism, the ultimate aim of literature, that is the transformation of the social order, was always to be kept in sight, Aragon in the late fifties is concerned rather more with the adequacy of realism in portraying the full scope of reality. He consequently condemns naturalism, as he did before, and other simplistic approaches to the depiction of reality, referring specifically to populism:
Souvent on donne pour du réalisme socialiste ce qui n'est qu'un réalisme vulgaire, ou même pas du tout du réalisme, par exemple un arrangement photographique qui relève du naturalisme, un art populiste par exemple, auquel on croit suffisant de juxtaposer une moralité apparemment communiste, ou dans le cadre duquel le bon ouvrier aura sa carte du parti, ou la prendra au dernier chapitre. (JAMJ p.137)

The function of realism is not to reassure the reader in this way, by presenting an ideal world in the guise of the real world. Such reassurance is merely a perversion of reality which deceives the reader, and is as dangerous as utopianism:

Rien n'est dangereux comme les belles images. C'est avec cela qu'on pervertit les esprits(...). La littérature qui règle toutes les difficultés de la vie en quelques centaines de pages relève d'un genre d'activité qu'on appelle habituellement l'utopie. Rien n'est dangereux comme l'utopie, elle endort les gens. (JAMJ pp.136-37)

The kind of realism which Aragon now advocates should not encourage complacency, but should disturb the reader: 'un réalisme non pas pour nous rassurer, mais pour nous éveiller, et qui parfois par cela même nous dérange'. This clearly rejects the resolutely optimistic version of socialist realism promoted in the Soviet Union.

By 1963, when Aragon wrote the preface to Roger Garaudy's essay D'un réalisme sans rivages, which in itself constitutes an important contribution to the definition of socialist realism, the scope of realism has been extended even further, and Aragon encourages the reader to follow Garaudy in taking a broad view of what can legitimately be the object of a realist work of literature. In the preface Aragon himself endorses Garaudy's view that an author such as Kafka, who would once have been criticised for his concentration on the individual, may now be encompassed within the concept of realism; Kafka 'dont le monde, considéré d'abord comme le produit d'une imagination maladive, est
For a work to be considered realist, the author need not necessarily have had realist intentions. What was once the antithesis of realism may become realistic with the passage of time. We are encouraged to look ahead, a notion which is remarkably flexible compared with the prescriptive nature of socialist realism from the 1930s to the early 1950s.

In an important article on the subject of realism, 'Un Réalisme du devenir', written in 1965, Aragon is again concerned with pushing back even further the accepted limits of the concept of realism. The realist, he claims in this article, is not merely concerned with a simple formula of reference to reality, as many readers believe. Aragon takes as an example Claude Mauriac's latest novel La Conversation which, he believes, will disconcert the reader who thinks that realism has its substance in 'la seule référence', since what is missing in the novel are precisely the comforting details which help us to orientate ourselves within a work of fiction. For Aragon, the essential concern of realism in 1965 is to renounce its traditional limits, to push back the boundaries as far as possible. In a comment which echoes the title of Garaudy's book, he claims:

Les réalisistes de 1965 jouent à nier les frontières, les rivages, les chaînes.

Far from being a static form, realism must be dynamic and ever-changing: 'un réalisme non pas de l'être, mais du devenir', 'un art de perpétuel dépassement'. Aragon almost seems to be straining the bounds of credibility in his attempts to break away from the limitations of orthodox socialist realism when he suggests that perhaps the moment has come to take the step beyond what is real today into the realm of
the imaginary, which may one day become real:

Le temps est peut-être venu, où le roman, pour être celui des hommes d'un monde hier inimaginable, ne pourra plus avoir le caractère réaliste qu'autant qu'il osera employer ses nombres imaginaires à lui...Peut-être sommes-nous arrivés à l'heure où le roman doit pénétrer dans le domaine de l'inimaginable, se faire conjecture au progrès de l'esprit humain, hâter la transformation de l'homme et de la nature. 19

While this may seem to be overstepping the bounds of realism, the notions of the imaginary and of conjecture do have two important implications for Aragon's analysis of realism. One is the reintegration of certain elements of Surrealism into the acceptable limits of realism, and the second is the notion of the literary lie: 'le mentir-vrai'. The first of these elements is already apparent, at least on a superficial level, in J'Abats mon jeu, where Aragon acknowledges the existence of his Surrealist works, even encouraging his audience to read them, which would have been unthinkable several years earlier. (JAMJ pp.120-21) On a more serious level, Jean Marabini recounts how Aragon recognises the realist basis of Surrealism:

Je n'ai jamais cessé de penser, dans le style Hugo, que dans surréalisme il y a réalisme et pour moi ce n'est pas une boutade. 20

The point is further emphasised in Aragon's series of interviews with Francis Crémieux, in which Aragon points out with reference to Le Paysan de Paris and its depiction of Paris in the 1920s, the place afforded to reality in Surrealism. For him this awareness of reality is the 'aboutissement logique' of Surrealism. 21 This attitude stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing ethos of, for example, Pour un réalisme socialiste in which Aragon put his Surrealist past and its aberrations, as they were then considered, firmly behind him.
The notion of 'le mentir-vrai' is a commonplace in the realm of fiction, where it is accepted that in order to explore a certain aspect of reality the novelist will have recourse to a certain amount of invention or, as Aragon chooses to call it, lying. This might seem to be a truism unworthy of further comment were it not for the fact that Aragon was so concerned in earlier examinations of socialist realism with establishing the principles of the depiction of reality, that the element of necessary invention was left to one side. In his more liberal treatment of socialist realism, however, Aragon makes frequent reference to the paradox of lying in order to portray reality in all its complexity:

Ce qui est menti dans le roman libère l'écrivain, lui permet de montrer le réel dans sa nudité, ce qui est menti dans le roman sert de substratum à la vérité.  

Indeed surface reality is not in itself considered adequate in achieving the kind of depth Aragon believes is required of the novel:

Si minutieux qu'ait pu être le travail de l'auteur pour, à chaque étape, restituer l'atmosphère historique des lieux, il ne suffisait pas à y créer la vie, c'est-à-dire le roman. L'histoire linéaire, superficielle, ne suffit pas à donner la profondeur, qu'on appelle le roman. Il fallait ici inventer, créer, c'est-à-dire mentir. (JAMJ p.48)

In an interview for Le Monde Aragon seizes upon the phrase 'mentir-vrai' as an encapsulation of the nature of the novel as he sees it: 'une excellente définition du roman réaliste que je défends'.  

Furthermore, in this same interview, Aragon expresses the view that in a world as complex as our own it is not even possible to tell the truth. For the novelist, truth as an absolute does not exist:

Comme si on pouvait écrire la vérité dans un temps où l'histoire est
'Le mentir-vrai' seems to have become the riposte to the slogan of the socialist realist: 'Ecrire la vérité'.

This is not to say that Aragon retains nothing of his earlier conceptions of socialist realism. The importance of detail and exactitude of description remains constant, perhaps even increased, as is illustrated in the interview 'Secrets de Fabrication', in which Aragon discusses the documentary work which was involved in the writing of La Semaine sainte. (JAMJ pp.45-69) As in the earlier version of socialist realism, a mere accumulation of detail is considered inadequate, and as before, naturalism is rejected for this reason, though perhaps not quite as emphatically as before. Naturalism is condemned as the means by which distortions of socialist realism have insinuated themselves into usage, but this is qualified by the acknowledgement that, despite its limitations, Zola's naturalism paved the way for modern realism. By means of his continued rejection of naturalism, Aragon shows that the updated version of socialist realism still retains an interpretive, analytical function which is beyond the scope of naturalism.

It can be deduced from the above analysis that Aragon's perception of reality and of realism undergoes a certain amount of progression within the period of liberalisation. J'Abats mon jeu while laying great emphasis on the need for 'ouverture' within realism, and developing the notion of 'le mentir-vrai', is notable rather for its rejection of rigid formulae than for the markedly different interpretation of realism, something which only becomes apparent in the articles of the 1960s.

There is, however, one area in which J'Abats mon jeu in particular
takes a conspicuous departure from the orthodox position, and this is in
the area of subject matter open to the socialist realist. A constant
leit-motif is that of diversity. The fact that both *Les Communistes* and
*La Semaine sainte* are socialist realist novels is for Aragon a measure
of the scope of socialist realism and of the possible differences of
content it permits. Aragon goes on to claim that socialist realism has
suffered from the limitations imposed on it in the past when the value
of diversity was not recognised. These limitations created certain
preconceptions which he sees as false:

> Quand on parle du réalisme, ces temps-ci, les gens croient tous
> qu'on veut parler de livres édifiants, exemplaires. Qu'est-ce qui
> s'est passé, qui leur a mis ça dans la tête, qu'est-ce que vous me
> racontez, dans quel monde vivons-nous, je n'y comprends plus rien.

He justifies this call for diversity by reminding the reader of a
precedent: the Romantics were by no means a homogeneous group and yet we
readily categorise as Romantics writers as dissimilar as Stendhal and
Chateaubriand. *(JAMJ p.82)* This must equally be the case for socialist
realists since, he claims, 'personne n'a jamais dit que le réalisme
socialiste était une église où les voix vont à l'unisson'. *(JAMJ p.81)*

The first article in the *J'Abats mon jeu* collection, 'Un Perpétuel
printemps' opens with a sentence which makes the reader fully appreciate
the extent of the transformation which Aragon's expectations and demands
of literature have undergone: 'Je n'ai jamais rien demandé à ce que je
lis que le vertige'. *(JAMJ p.13)* Putting aside the question of whether or
not we can reasonably be expected to accept this comment in the light of
Aragon's past career, it effectively produces a certain discordance with
the demands of socialist realism as put forward in the thirties and
forties when the portrayal of man's inevitable progression towards
socialism was the desired focus of attention. The principal implication of this comment seems to be that politics in literature no longer provides adequate scope for the writer. This idea is reiterated elsewhere in J'Abats mon jeu. In his intervention at the Ivry PCF Congress in 1954 Aragon shows, with reference to painting, that the conception of what he calls 'l'art de parti' as practised by many artists is an excessively narrow one and that the accepted trappings of such art may no longer be adequate. He accuses those artists who hang on to outmoded ideas of socialist realism of indulging in 'gesticulation' and of being 'déclamatoire', 'hystérique', faults which detract from the credibility of their work. (JAMJ p.218) He extends his criticism to writers:

dont beaucoup considèrent aussi que le roman ou le poème n'ont de matière que dans les instants de crise, les manifestations de rue ou les charges de police. (JAMJ p.219)

He points out that ordinary life 'dans sa richesse et sa diversité' is also a worthy object of party art. (JAMJ p.220) This point is made again when Aragon criticises the novelist Michel Zéraffa for being too obsessed with the class struggle and with the Communists in his latest novel Les Doublures. (JAMJ p.16) What then is a suitable subject for the writer of socialist realist novels? Aragon answers this question in his address at the opening of the municipal library at Stains. He emphasises that in encouraging his audience to read, he is not exclusively recommending political books:

ne croyez pas que vous le recommandant(le roman), je songe à vous choisir des romans austères, purement politiques. Ce serait mal me connaître. Et si le roman sert à éduquer et à former, c'est souvent parce qu'il contient de belles, de pure histoire d'amour. (JAMJ p.75)
He becomes quite vehement in his defence of the love story, and while at first sight it may seem to have little in common with a theory of socialist realism, albeit a liberal one, its relevance is hinted at in the above quotation. Aragon values it for its educative function. He sees love stories in terms of an attack upon individualism, and thus incorporates it into the framework of socialist realism:

les histoires d'amour sont la forme supérieure de la littérature contre le vieil individualisme, à quoi l'on voudrait nous ramener(...) L'amour, c'est d'abord sortir de soi-même.27

The justification of love stories, however, is not only associated with the redefinition of socialist realism. Aragon sees in them one aspect of his rehabilitation of bourgeois literature. His adoption of a bourgeois art form could be seen as an example of his adaptation of the French cultural heritage to the needs of socialist realism, as he has already advocated in the orthodox version of the theory.28 The issue, however, is rather more complex than this, since Aragon actually professes to a liking for bourgeois literature in its own right ('le crime d'aimer la littérature bourgeoise'). He admits that Aurélien, the fourth novel of his Monde Réel cycle, was a bourgeois novel, and says defensively:

Eh bien, quoi? Mérimée ou Baudelaire, ce n'était pas de la littérature bourgeoise? Et tout le reste de la littérature, de la Complainte de Sainte Eulalie à Paul Eluard, c'était de la littérature prolétarienne?(JAMJ p.38)

It would almost seem that Aragon is admitting the near impossibility of producing anything other than bourgeois literature in a still predominantly bourgeois society. In keeping with the direction his thought seems to be taking, it is literary criteria which are given precedence over the social and political values previously adhered to
with such strictness:

Par-dessus les tiroirs étiquetés réaliste et bourgeois, il y a la littérature.

The same tendency is evident in 'Un Perpétuel printemps' where Aragon defends his right to enjoy a novel 'sans l'ombre de justification "sociale"',(JAMJ p.39) and in the same article even goes so far as to say that readers do not have ideological rights over the writer. He reproaches the readers:

il faut bien une fois s'en expliquer avec vous, chers amis, qui croyez sur moi des droits idéologiques.(JAMJ p.18)

This is in direct opposition to the precepts of socialist realism as articulated in Pour un réalisme socialiste, where the writer was held to be under an obligation to his reading public. This does not necessarily mean, however, that Aragon has completely abandoned his belief in the accountability of the writer, as I shall later demonstrate, but certainly indicates a distancing from the public and its expectations of him, possibly as a result of the public's misinterpretation of La Semaine sainte.

The main thrust of Aragon's reinterpretation of socialist realism lies principally in the areas I have examined above: changed perceptions of realism, the rejection of dogmatism and the encouragement of diversity. His reinterpretation is also evident in other areas. Whereas Aragon's earlier approach to literature was tendentious, in that he openly espoused the portrayal of the progression of mankind towards socialism, in J'Abats mon jeu he emphasises the lengths he went to in order to be objective in the depiction of characters whose ideas were foreign to his own, particularly in Les Communistes and La Semaine


sainte, as though anxious to play down the tendentiousness of his work and appeal to a wider public. The reference to Les Communistes shows that, in Aragon's eyes, the much vaunted objectivity of La Semaine sainte was nothing new.

Instead of the exclusively political, and implicitly socialist, view of society demanded by the orthodox model of socialist realism, Aragon now proposes a more complex outlook. The previously simplistic view of reality should be replaced with one which acknowledges the difficulties and the contradictions inherent in real life:

qui fabriquerait dans son livre un monde communiste ne soulevant point d'objection, qui écrirait pour les convaincus le livre de ma conviction, celui-là, je dois le dire, serait pour moi purement et simplement illisible.

Ce pour quoi je vis, ce qui est mon désir dominant, prend sa réalité dans un monde de contradictions, dans la coexistence d'hommes et de femmes en désaccord, et ne peut se définir que par opposition. Il n'y a pas de lumière sans ombre. (JAMJ p.136)

Socialist realism then is not to be a mere confirmation of the reader's ideas. Preaching to the converted, Aragon seems to imply, achieves nothing, and, as he goes on to say in the following paragraph, such a tendency gives way to utopianism, which serves only to mislead the reader. He proposes instead a literature which disturbs the reader and which makes him question, as a replacement for the old orthodoxy. (JAMJ pp.136-37)

With this turning away from fixed and therefore reassuring attitudes, comes a loss of certainty, a new note of doubt. The dogmatic tone of so many of Aragon's earlier statements has been replaced by an admission that things were really not quite so simple, and that he has had to struggle for the truth:

La vérité ne m'a pas été révélée à mon baptême(...) Ce que j'ai
The suggestion of the difficulties which Aragon had to overcome in his espousal of socialist realism is evident in his preface to Garaudy's D'un réalisme sans rivages, where he writes:

While affirming the constancy of his allegiance to realism, in the same breath he qualifies it by the hints of bitterness in the final sentence.

Whilst there has been evidence of a considerable change in emphasis in Aragon's conception of socialist realism, particularly in its reduced stress upon the ideological content of the doctrine, there are certain features of the original formulation which have been retained. Transformation, for example, is still a key word, though it refers less overtly than before to a Communist transformation of the world. It is nonetheless 'un réalisme qui aide à changer le monde' which is promoted.31 Nor has Aragon wavered in his belief in the responsibility of the writer, of which he talks at length in the 'Discours de Moscou', on his reception of the Lenin Peace prize in 1959. He compares his own convictions with those of 'un autre écrivain français' who has been awarded the Nobel prize for literature (Albert Camus), accusing him of a kind of literary agnosticism, 'qui prétend renvoyer dos à dos l'art pour l'art d'une part, et le réalisme socialiste de l'autre', (JAMJ p.265) and of failing to acknowledge his social responsibility in his refusal to
see men as anything other than solitary beings:

qui n'exalte l'homme que pour autant qu'il est un solitaire, et lui dénie qualité humaine dès qu'il tourne vers le soleil de l'avenir des millions de visages humains.\(^{32}\)

In 'Donner à lire', Aragon acknowledges on a general level the importance of books and the opportunity to read for the working class, thus indirectly emphasising the responsibility of writers like himself to provide books for such an audience, (JAMJ p.71) a point he has often made before.

On a more specific level, the rewriting of *Les Communistes* in 1967 was in the author's eyes partly a manifestation of his 'esprit de responsabilité' as a writer. It is a measure of the evolution he had undergone since the publication of the work in 1949-1951 that he felt the need to alter or eliminate certain incidents or comments which, with hindsight, no longer seemed valid; changes he felt impelled to make as a result of his continued belief in the responsibility of the writer, changes which reflected the different political circumstances under which the novel was rewritten.\(^{33}\)

Not only is it the writer who, according to Aragon, has a responsibility to his public. The critic has a similar obligation. Once again, the responsibility is no longer a specifically political one. For Aragon, the duty of the critic is to teach us to love literature. In the eyes of many people, he contends, the critic's function is a negative, even destructive one. In fact, Aragon maintains, it is much easier to speak of a book's faults than it is to praise its virtues and convey enthusiasm to the reader. The true task of the critic is a more difficult one: 'savoir faire aimer'.\(^{34}\)

Another feature of the original socialist realism which has been
retained is the notion of the scientific basis of the method. In 'Le Discours de Prague' Aragon denounces those literary theoreticians who deform realism by imposing preordained theories upon it. Laws in science, he maintains, do not have an absolute character but can be modified whenever new information becomes available. The same should be true of literary theories:

Pouquoi faudra-t-il que dans l'art, et là seulement, les lois comme des canons théologiques aient caractère absolu, immuable?35

This absolutist approach is opposed to the 'transformation scientifique de la réalité' which he is advocating.36 He urges all realists to abandon dogmatism for just such a flexible scientific approach which he sums up as:

Une théorie scientifique de la littérature étroitement liée à la pratique de l'écriture révisée constamment à la lumière inattendue des faits.37

The national character of socialist realism propounded with such conviction in the 1930s and 1940s remains a constant feature in Aragon's reappraisal of the theory. We have already seen how he used this emphasis in order to distance himself from Soviet socialist realism. He also affirms the importance of the national character of literature above and beyond its class content, since a work may have value outside its class of origin,38 but it cannot be separated from its national context, whether it be bourgeois or working-class:

dans un cas comme dans l'autre le critérium de valeur sera le caractère national de l'oeuvre.(JAMJ p.139)

Thus the national standpoint has overtaken the class standpoint in importance, though Aragon makes it clear that the latter has not been
abandoned. In the same lecture, 'Il faut appeler les choses par leur nom', he warns that socialist realism should not isolate itself from the main body of national literature, for if it does, it will remain a minority activity, powerless to achieve its aims:

il ne saura aucunement faire avancer dans la voie du réalisme scientifique, dans la voie du socialisme, et il demeuraera un art de secte, à l'image des écoles, animé de l'esprit de rivalité, et incapable de s'élever au-dessus de la polémique pour la création d'une littérature, d'un art à l'échelle de l'avenir. (JAMJ p.171)

While the narrow class affinities of socialist realism are to be discouraged, Aragon still recognises, on a less restrictive basis, the role the writer can play in promoting culture among the working class. In his speech 'Donner à lire', he refers indirectly to this function of the writer when he talks of the importance of libraries:

où chacun, même le plus déshérité d'entre les hommes et les femmes, peut rencontrer l'amour, la beauté, la musique et tout ce qui fait la grandeur des rêves et l'humanité des hommes. (JAMJ p.76)

The notion of opening up culture in this way to all men in order to improve their lives in some way, leads on logically to the notion of literature as a didactic force. The principle of educating the reader is one which is common to both the orthodox and the liberalised versions of socialist realism, but once again, although a general principle is retained, its application is much less restrictive. Consequently, as has already been mentioned, Aragon promotes love stories as one particular form which didactic literature may take. The virtue of such a method is explained in the 'Discours de Prague', where Aragon states that the new socialist realism demands a very different type of didacticism from that practised before, and he distinguishes between the old simplistic, dogmatic imposition of a moral lesson, "ce rôle pédagogique
élémentaire', and literature as 'cette grande éducatrice indirecte' which he now promotes.40

What emerges principally from an analysis of J'Abats mon jeu and other theoretical writings from the late 1950s and the first half of the 1960s is a change of tone. The authoritarian statements which characterised earlier works have been replaced by a more conciliatory approach, which freely acknowledges the need for re-evaluation and openness. Whilst the ideological aims of socialist realism are still clearly in evidence,41 they are given less emphasis than before.42 Key notions such as the interpretive function of realism, the responsibility of the writer to educate the reader and the national character of socialist realism are retained, but emphasis is also given to the importance of diversity, of experimentation, of the imaginary, to the avoidance of dogmatism and the primacy of literary values. In this new spirit of openness and flexibility, Aragon does not pretend that socialist realism in the past has been a totally successful experiment:

Je veux dire, pour en revenir au réalisme socialiste, que oui, il a enregistré des échecs, des erreurs, des drames, et même des drames mortels. (JAMJ p.84)

His willingness to admit the failures of socialist realism and to learn from them attests to the desire to prevent the new socialist realism from falling back into the isolation which has plagued it. It would seem that this desire is at the basis of the progression away from a sectarian literary theory:

Il n'y a qu'un fait nouveau: c'est l'échec de cette tentative de cantonnement qu'on a prétendu imposer au réalisme.43

This move away from sectarianism becomes more and more marked as Aragon
moves forward into the 1960s, showing itself in his concentration not so much on socialist realism as on realism itself.

The reformulation of Aragon's theory of socialist realism did not, as I have indicated, take place in isolation, but within the context of a wider movement in the PCF and in Communist intellectual circles. Aragon reminds his audience in 'Il faut appeler les choses par leur nom' that he was not out of step with the party, by quoting a passage from an article by Laurent Casanova which supports his own position, and he remarks:

Ce que je dis ici n'est pas autre chose et s'inscrit dans le combat auquel je n'ai jamais cessé de prendre part. (JAMJ p.172)

Similarly, in an interview in Les Nouvelles Littéraires, Aragon condemns those who are willing to see in the new departure characterised by La Semaine sainte a rejection of Communism, and stresses his allegiance to the party:

Presque chaque fois, il s'agissait d'une phrase paraissant découler d'un point de doctrine. Presque chaque fois aussi c'était parce que mon détracteur la connaissait mal, parce qu'il faisait de la doctrine même, une idée sommaire. Ceux qui la connaissent savent bien que je n'aurais pu écrire La Semaine sainte si je n'avais pas été communiste.  

Despite initial hesitation in the PCF over the implementation of de-Stalinisation, in May 1959 Maurice Thorez is seen echoing Aragon's ideas on the diversity of genre open to the Communist writer and rejecting a dogmatic approach to socialist realism:

Les fondateurs du réalisme scientifique ont combattu l'idée ridicule, l'idée simpliste et dogmatique, d'après laquelle la 'tendance' devait toujours être explicitement formulée.

The enthusiastic reception of La Semaine sainte in the Communist press
also demonstrated the extent to which the reaction against dogmatism was progressing in a changing cultural climate.

A notable event in the relaxation of Communist cultural policy was the publication in 1963 of Roger Garaudy's essay _D'un réalisme sans rivages_, the importance of which Aragon signalled in his preface to the work, remarking: 'Je tiens ce livre pour un événement'. The essay is a dramatic reassessment of the theory of socialist realism, all the more dramatic for being written by a Communist who had formerly been one of the most hard-line exponents of Zhdanovist socialist realism, who had in 1947 written a harsh critique of existentialism, _Une Littérature de fossoyeurs_, and had later been amongst the first in the party to condemn the liberal intellectuals' reaction to the events of Budapest. The essay was notable firstly in its choice of subjects; artists not normally associated with socialist realism: Picasso, Saint-John Perse and Kafka, echoing the way in which Aragon called for diversity in socialist realism.

Like Aragon in his later articles, Garaudy has abandoned the narrower ideological limits of socialist realism and for much of his essay refers quite simply to realism. He also follows Aragon's lead in denouncing simplistic conceptions of socialist realism, which have only served to discredit it as a literary theory:

> Ce serait une conception bien étrange de l'art et bien méprisante du peuple que de prétendre que seul le niveau le plus bas et le réalisme le plus plat sont à la portée du goût populaire.

Nonetheless, he too retains the key notion of the artist's duty to transform the world through his art:

> Pour lui, comme pour tout homme, il ne s'agit pas d'interpréter le monde, mais de participer à sa transformation.
The impetus begun by Aragon and continued in Garaudy's essay did not bear immediate fruit within the PCF, but instigated a slow development which culminated in the PCF's Argenteuil debates of 1966. Entitled 'Débats sur les problèmes idéologiques et culturels' and presided over by the Central Committee of the PCF, the discussions constitute an official recognition of the process of liberalisation. The resolution passed at the end of the debates, while not going as far as Garaudy, emphasises the need to avoid dogmatism, which is considered to be a sterile influence on art, and encourages diversity and experimentation as means to this end. The ideological stance underlying this change should, however, remain true to the traditional ideological position of the party:

Le Parti apprécie et soutient les diverses formes de contribution des créateurs aux progrès humains dans le libre déploiement de leur imagination, leur goût et leur originalité. Il souhaite qu'ils comprennent et appuient les positions idéologiques de la classe ouvrière.

The final resolution also acknowledges the role of the intellectuals in the party and reasserts their right to artistic freedom. According to Daix, the motive force behind the resolution was Aragon, who went much further than some would have wished:

Le printemps 1966 voit ce qui est sans doute le triomphe politique d'Aragon dans le parti. Au comité central d'Argenteuil est en effet adoptée une véritable charte de la liberté de la création artistique, dont l'essentiel a été rédigé par Aragon, très au-delà des propositions initiales de ses camarades.

It is a curious paradox that while Aragon has always been reputed to be a close follower of the party line, he has, at key moments in his career, been ahead of the party: in his espousal and elaboration of socialist realism in 1935, and in his move away from socialist realist
orthodoxy in the late fifties, as he realised the limitations of a codified and simplistic literary doctrine.

Despite the fact that his interpretation of socialist realism has evolved considerably between 1935 and the early 1960s, one can say that, considered as a committed writer, Aragon has remained faithful throughout to the view that literature can and should be used as the expression of a political viewpoint. The belief that literature can function as a means of changing the world is one that remains constant, even if the precise emphases have altered. If Aragon is considered to be a politically aligned committed writer in 1935, then he remains so in the 1960s, although the vehicle of his commitment, socialist realism, has itself undergone a transformation.
NOTES

3. Ibid.
4. *Littératures Soviétiques*, p.125
6. 'Nous n'avons pas, romanciers mes frères...', *L'Humanité*, 17.II.1967, p.8
7. Ibid.
8. 'Le Discours de Prague', quoted by Roland Desné, 'Pour comprendre Aragon', *Cahiers du Communisme*, décembre 1964, p.130
9. 'Le Discours de Prague'
10. *Les Collages*, p.22
12. Ibid.
13. 'Le Discours de Prague'
14. Preface to Roger Garaudy, *D'un réalisme sans rivages*, p.17
16. Ibid., p.7
17. Ibid.
18. Marabini, p.14
19. Ibid., p.16. This suggested technique recalls that used at the end of *La Semaine sainte* where the narrator, from the standpoint of 1815, looks ahead into an as yet distant future. In this case, though, the events foreseen are not imagined. The narrator simply has knowledge available to him but not to his characters in 1815.
20. Marabini, p.17
21. *Entretiens avec Francis Crémieux*, pp.21-22
22. *ORC*, vol.7, p.15
24. Ibid.
25. 'Le Discours de Prague'
26. 'Un Réalisme du devenir', p.7
27. *JAMJ*, p.128. This is, however, by no means a new idea for Aragon since, as I will illustrate in a later chapter, he has made systematic use of love stories in earlier novels. See chapter 8.
28. See chapter 3, p.74, note 36.
30. *D'un réalisme sans rivages*, p.15
31. 'Le Discours de Prague'
32. *JAMJ* p.265. As Flower pointed out in *Literature and the Left in France*, (p.137) Camus had dismissed socialist realism in *L'Homme révolté*.
33. *Les Communistes*, vol.4, pp.409-46. This reference is to the second version of the novel.
34. 'Le Discours de Prague'
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. *JAMJ* p.139:

un point de vue de classe, chez l'auteur, peut donner naissance à des valeurs qui seront reconnues au-delà des limites de la classe; la littérature bourgeoise a engendré, c'est un fait, de nombreuses œuvres qui sont considérées comme valables, comme
objets d'exaltation par des hommes et des femmes qui ne sont pas de la bourgeoisie. Il n'y a pas de raison pour que le fait inverse ne se produise pas.

39. See pp.108-9 of this chapter
40. 'Le Discours de Prague'
41. JAMJ p.268:

Nous sommes parvenus en un temps où l'explication du monde est devenue insuffisante à l'homme qui a entrepris de le transformer(...) et son réalisme a cessé d'être une description pure et simple, pour se faire combat, part active de cette transformation.

42. Those texts in J'Abats mon jeu which still stress the ideological nature of socialist realism were speeches given at party or writers' congresses ('Intervention au IIème congrès' and 'Discours d'Ivry') and date from 1954, before Aragon's reformulation of socialist realism had begun.
43. 'Un Réalisme du devenir', p.7
44. Gabriel d'Aubarède, 'Rencontre avec Aragon 58', Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 15.I.1959, p.4
45. Maurice Thorez, 'L'Oeuvre d'Aragon', Cahiers du Communisme, mai 1959, p.536
46. D'un réalisme sans rivages, p.11
47. Caute, p.228
48. Garaudy, p.89
49. Ibid., pp244-45
51. Pierre Daix, Aragon, une vie à changer, p.414
PART II

PRACTICE
It is in his representation of reality that Aragon effects a significant departure from the original Soviet theory of socialist realism, for as has been explained earlier, in the absence of a socialist state in France to provide the socialist inspiration for his novels, he was obliged to retain the use of the critical realism which he had analysed extensively with reference to Stendhal, Hugo and others. Aragon's choice of this particular form of realism highlights his notion of a specifically French version of socialist realism by drawing on the French realist tradition of the nineteenth century, where the writer played an oppositional role vis-à-vis the régime of the day. This return to critical realism is by no means a regressive step in Aragon's eyes: indeed he views it as a necessary preparation for socialist realism:

ce réalisme démocratique, ou si vous préférez, ce réalisme critique, est une étape nécessaire, et précieuse, sur le chemin du réalisme socialiste, qui n'existerait point sans elle. (LS p.160)

In other words, the socialist writer in a capitalist society has to identify what is wrong with that society before he can begin to propose an alternative and a means of effecting the necessary transformation:

Je réclame le retour à la réalité, mais pour la transformation de cette réalité.

Thus Aragon plays down the difference between critical and socialist realism and presents it as being one of degree rather than one of any real substance.
The principal way in which Aragon draws on the tradition of critical realism is in his extensive critique of bourgeois, capitalist society. In accordance with his rejection of naturalism, his criticism is selective, in that it only attempts to give a partial view of society, seen in the light of his political views; consequently, what we see throughout the Monde Réel cycle is a critical exposé of the decadence of the upper bourgeoisie, and of the corruption of their financial and industrial interests. It is also a partisan criticism in that it presents the bourgeoisie in contradistinction to the socialist, or embryonic socialist, characters. There is a constant shifting between the negative and critical, and the positive and optimistic. This alternation operates both within individual novels and, on a larger scale, within the novel cycle itself, where there is a change of focus between the first four novels, in which the critical elements dominate, and Les Communistes which aims to present a positive response to the criticism. In common with the novels of the nineteenth-century realist tradition, which Aragon admired so much, his depiction of French bourgeois society, from the turn of the century to the German invasion of 1940, comprises a mixture of the fictional and the historical. The fictional element was, for Aragon, a key factor in his attempt to reveal the mechanisms of the capitalist world, as he later acknowledged:

L'extraordinaire du roman, c'est que pour comprendre le réel objectif, il invente d'inventer. Ce qui est menti dans le roman libère l'écrivain, lui permet de montrer le réel dans sa nudité. Ce qui est menti dans le roman est l'ombre sans quoi vous ne verriez pas la lumière.

In other words, historical or political detail by itself is insufficient: the writer puts it into perspective through his powers of invention and generalisation.
Aragon begins his undermining of the values of the bourgeoisie by establishing their moral bankruptcy early on in the cycle, and this remains as a leitmotif which recurs in all the novels. It emerges very clearly in *Diane*, the first section of *Les Cloches de Bâle*, where Aragon depicts an environment of privilege, hypocrisy, self-satisfaction, concern with appearances and outer propriety, snobbery and political frivolity. A similar picture is painted in the four subsequent novels. Alone, these features would characterise the bourgeoisie as unpleasant, even ridiculous, but ultimately ineffectual. Aragon, however, uses these characteristics as a backdrop against which he presents his more serious accusations.

The corrupting power of money is a theme which pervades the whole of the *Monde Réel* cycle. This preoccupation with money has in it echoes of Balzac, but Aragon takes the issue much further than did Balzac, in his indictment of capitalism. On an individual level, money is shown to permeate all levels of existence. In *Les Beaux Quartiers*, the two principal protagonists, Armand and Edmond Barbentane are, at different stages, driven by their need for money, albeit in very different ways. Edmond aspires to the social advancement which only money can obtain for him, whilst his brother Armand is impelled, in the latter part of the novel, simply by the need to survive.

Pierre Mercadier in *Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale*, is portrayed as being typical of his time in his fascination with money. Alienated by his individualism from his family and social peers, money satisfies a fundamental need in him. He demonstrates through his obsession with the inventor of paper money, John Law, through his taste for speculation at the *Bourse*, and through his profound belief in the power of money, that he is, in a very real sense 'de son temps'.(VI p.55) Pierre's
helplessness in his final illness is symbolic of the way in which he has lived off others all his life:

C'était la dernière étape de ce parasitisme vers quoi pas seulement Pierre, mais les Mercadier et tous leurs pareils glissaient de façon insensible le long de leur existence. (VI p. 657)

Parasitism as an image of capitalist society is one which recurs elsewhere in the novel cycle. In Diane, the suicide of Pierre de Sabran and the subsequent attempted cover-up reveals the complicity not only of Brunel, the money lender whose financial demands had provoked the suicide, but also of Diane, his wife, who dupes the victim's brother into believing that the suicide had been provoked by her rejection of Pierre, and Wisner, the industrialist. The Sabran affair highlights bourgeois hypocrisy about money. Brunel himself criticises those who condemn the money lender, yet condone the existence of the banker or the rentier who enjoy the social respectability denied to the money lender, but who are equally implicated in the capitalist system:

Il y a pour vous des façons nobles de gagner de l'argent, et des façons ignobles? (...) Si je prête non plus à Pierre de Sabran mais aux Turcs pour massacrer les Grecs, ou aux Anglais pour mettre de l'Hindou en compote, ou aux Français(...) pour se payer des vestes en peau de Marocain? Alors je ne suis plus un usurier, je suis un rentier, je passe toucher mes coupons, je suis bien vu de mon concierge. (CB pp. 119, 121)

Despite his involvement in the system, Brunel does not attempt to deceive himself about the repercussions of his actions, (though of course he readily deceives others), nor about the links between the world of finance, the military, the government and big business. He accepts, and even glories in the parasitism of capitalist society:

Nous sommes tous des parasites. Pourquoi ne pas l'avouer? (...) En quoi est-il mieux d'être la bête qui a des parasites, que le
parasite sur le dos du bétail? (...) Le parasitisme est une forme supérieure de la sociabilité, et l'avenir est au parasitisme. (CB p.122)

The parasitic nature of capitalism is implicit in the third section of Les Beaux Quartiers, Passage Club, where the gambling club is presented as a microcosm of capitalist society, the acquisition of money without labour being the driving force in both. The owner of Passage Club shows a lucidity equal to Brunel's in his analysis of the workings of the system and the hypocrisy surrounding it:

Les maisons de jeu sont les formes les plus élevées d'un système qui les condamne hypocritement mais qui ne vit que de la Bourse. (BQ p.534)

The desire for profit, however, goes further than this, for it is shown to be a major factor in determining national and international interests. Financiers such as Wisner use their powers to influence national and foreign policy in sensitive areas to ensure their continued prosperity. Wisner, for example, is anxious to preserve peace in the Balkans in order to protect his investments in Serbia. (BQ pp.511-512)

The patriotism of such men is put into question by its association with profit-making in the armaments industry. The build-up to war and the pressure for the passing of the Loi de Trois Ans (which would introduce a compulsory period of three years military service) are seen purely in the context of potential profit, which is dressed up as patriotism:

Faut-il vous rappeler que c'est par eux que j'ai pu vous fournir à l'avance les projets de lois militaires, qui vous ont permis d'éclairer diverses personnes sur les desseins du gouvernement (...) ? Et n'est-ce pas de diriger Wisner vers les fabrications nouvelles, qui, avec les trois ans, les nouveaux armements, lui permettront à la fois d'assurer son industrie et de servir sa patrie... (BQ p.511)
The involvement of financiers in decisions of war and peace, decisions which serve not their country but their own interests, is also highlighted in _Les Cloches de Bâle_:

En attendant, les mêmes financiers à Levallois, comme à Hambourg ou à Casablanca, comme à Bakou, décidaient du pain quotidien de Bachereau ou de Victor, et de la guerre et de la paix, suivant que leurs cartels d'intérêts arrivaient ou n'arrivaient pas à composition. (CB p.334)

Aragon's implication is that far from representing patriotic values, such men actually pose a threat to stability and peace through their vested interests. In _Les Beaux Quartiers_, the socialist Vinet articulates Aragon's view that war is inevitable in capitalist society and that the only hope of ending war lies with the working class:

*qu'est-ce qu'on peut faire en régime capitaliste pour empêcher la guerre? (...) Quand ils vous enverront vous faire tuer, vous verrez bien que votre seul espoir, votre seule planche de salut, c'est la classe ouvrière, et le parti de la classe ouvrière. (BQ p.187)*

This remark is made during a conversation with Armand Barbentane, but it is not until the end of the novel that he assimilates it and realises that the true interests of France do lie with the working class and not with the bourgeoisie: 'cette forteresse vraiment étrangère qui la domine (la France), la forteresse des beaux quartiers'. (BQ p.623)

As Sophie Bibrowska has commented, war is a central theme in Aragon's denunciation of capitalist society:

*pour décrire le monde aliénant de l'impérialisme, l'auteur dénonce ce qui le résume de la manière à la fois la plus dramatique et la plus saisissante: l'extermination de l'homme, la guerre.*

Although only one of the novels of the cycle has war as its central subject, it is nonetheless present in the other novels. In
Les Cloches de Bâle and Les Beaux Quartiers, the reader is made aware of the impending First World War by the military build-up and by the interventions of the author, writing from the vantage point of the thirties. In Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale, the causes of the First World War are analysed by Pascal Mercadier, and are attributed to the blind individualism of his father Pierre's generation. War is even more insistently present in Aurélien, where the eponymous hero, representative of a whole generation, is irreparably marked by his experience of the First World War and destined to be caught up in the Second.

It is of course in Les Communistes that the destructive power of war is most strikingly illustrated through the portrayal of the drôle de guerre and the débâcle of 1940. The treatment of this painful experience was a major motivation in Aragon's writing of Les Communistes, which he described as 'le livre du déchirement français, de cette chose en moi saignante'. (JAMJ p.157) In its presentation of the war, it also constitutes a major part of Aragon's critique of bourgeois society. He shows the readiness of many people in France to accept the war because it provides them with the opportunity to discredit the Communists and the Left in general. Time and again Aragon insists through various characters that the struggle against Hitler was a secondary issue, a mere pretext for the repression of the Communists which took place during the war:

Il leur fallait la guerre pour, à l'abri des lignes de défense modernes, pratiquer le détrousement de nous tous.

He illustrates the way in which the Communists were debased in the public mind when, in the wake of the Soviet-German non-aggression
pact, they were assumed to be on the side of Hitler. This is clearly illustrated through those characters who welcome the pact as a victory in the propaganda war:

Le miracle attendu...Hitler et Staline. On va pouvoir régler son compte à la canaille. (LC I p.114)

The anti-Communist propaganda does, in part, achieve its aims, for news of the pact is received with confusion, embarrassment and even anger by many faithful Communists. It is to combat this confusion and to re-establish the truth of the situation that Aragon, through several of the Communist characters, outlines the party's interpretation of the war. The PCF view that the Communists were ready to defend France against Hitler, but that the government was more interested in suppressing Communism than in fighting the real enemy, is borne out in the course of the novel as Aragon portrays the progress, or rather non-progress of the drôle de guerre: the boredom of the men who are kept in ignorance of military progress, the inadequacy of the military equipment, the incompetence of those in command and the instability of the government. The final confirmation of the Communist interpretation of the war appears to come when Paris is virtually handed over to the Germans without a struggle, despite the fact that the Communists are willing to fight on and resist occupation. Thus it is the Communists who, contrary to received opinion, are the true patriots. They are willing to defend their land from the Germans, even if the government is ready to surrender. We see in the final pages of the novel the spirit which will motivate the Resistance, a spirit seen in opposition to the defeatism of the leaders of the government and of the army, the representatives of capitalist society, 'pour qui la nation n'est pas
une réalité, le peuple n'est qu'un instrument, les hommes que des pions sur un échiquier.' (LC VI p.298)

Aragon also presents those for whom the war means only a threat to their privileged way of life. For Fred Wisner, France is 'le cadet de ses soucis' (LC IV p.257). There are others who dread the outbreak of war because of the risk that it might uncover the various shady deals in which certain characters are involved. Lourmel, a member of the *haute bourgeoisie*, is particularly worried by this possibility, remembering the way in which the Stavisky affair was uncovered in 1934:

*Lourmel n'aimait pas ces plaisanteries(...) s'il y avait la guerre(...) si on mettait le nez dans ses affaires. En 1934 déjà, il avait eu une de ces alertes, au moment des histoires Stavisky.*(LC I p.99)

Another major area of Aragon's criticism of bourgeois society concerns the position of women in this society. Diane de Nettencourt's existence exemplifies exactly what Aragon deplores in the situation of women at this time: their complete dependence upon men, their reliance upon their physical attractions to assure their financial security, a situation summarised as:

*la sordide histoire des robes et des baisers (...) la domination d'argent de l'homme sur la femme.* (CB p.438)

This dependence is also seen to operate in reverse. Sophie Bibrowska draws a parallel between Diane and Edmond Barbentane, commenting that in their search for prosperity, they both resort to selling themselves. She omits to point out, however, that while Edmond could have conceivably reached his goal by other means, Diane, as a woman in the society of that time, had no such choice.

Although Diane is very adept at turning the situation to her
advantage, and so is not presented as a powerless victim, the demeaning nature of her position is made clear in the scene where Brunel reduces her to a mere commodity by offering her to Wisner in payment of his debts:

Sans plaisanterie, reprit Brunel, avec Diane, tu gardes Nettencourt, la rue d'Offémont, les bijoux et quelques broutilles. (CB p.133)

This use of woman as part of a proposed transaction is reproduced in a slightly different form in Les Beaux Quartiers. Paulette Mercadier, in Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale, is in a position analogous to that of Diane, in that her whole existence depends financially on her husband Pierre. Paulette, like Diane, never questions her subordinate and largely decorative role in life, but accepts it as natural and uses it as an excuse for her empty existence:

Trouvant tout travail indigne d'une femme, elle faisait des gorges chaudes de ces personnes qui écrivent ou étudient(...). Le talent c'est l'affaire des hommes, ce n'est pas féminin. (VI p.46).

Pierre gradually comes to despise her and the way in which she clings on to marriage as a guarantee of financial security, particularly when he becomes aware of her fear of losing him and of her scheming to keep him:

Il l'avait vue une bonne fois dans son métier d'épouse, dans son boulot de maîtresse légitime, avec sa peur que les sacrements de l'Eglise et les bonnes paroles du maire fussent insuffisants à lui garantir le couvert, la nourriture, les robes et la respectabilité. (VI p.298)

This distortion of married love, made almost inevitable by the social vulnerability of women, is one of the factors which finally provokes Pierre into leaving home.

Carlotta, in Les Beaux Quartiers, is one more example of woman
dependent upon man for her security. Her position is even more precarious than that of Paulette or Diane, in that she lacks the protection of marriage. Her dependence, even more than that of Diane, is modified by her awareness of her power and her ability to use it to manipulate in her turn. She is also aware of the inherently humiliating nature of her situation and defends herself against it; so when Edmond assumes he has the right to kiss her on the neck, Carlotta reacts violently:

\[\text{tu redeviens alors un homme comme tous les hommes, un ennemi, un de ces types qui nous humilient, un de ces salauds...Tu ne sais pas ce que je peux détester les hommes...}^{10}\]

It is Catherine in *Les Cloches de Bâle* who most clearly articulates Aragon's criticisms of the status of women in bourgeois society. Her rejection of the conventions and morality of this society is absolute and is at its most incisive when it comes to the oppression of women. It is this rejection which determines her whole political orientation. Her involvement with the anarchists in Paris is motivated much less by her desire to overthrow capitalism than by her determination to hasten the end of man's domination over woman:

\[\text{elle était anarchiste, parce que toute autorité, tout gouvernement, tout droit, tout état, c'était toujours le pouvoir de l'homme sur la femme. (CB p.257)}\]

She sees man's power over woman illustrated in the way her mother is cast aside now that she is no longer youthful; in the way in which the possibilities for women beyond marriage and motherhood are severely restricted. Nor is this discrimination the exclusive preserve of the bourgeoisie. She sees the same oppression among women of the working class:
Working men may be low down on the social scale, but they still maintain their superiority over their own women or over prostitutes:

Terrassiers, maçons italiens peut-être, que rien n'accueille au monde que cet estaminet avec des chambres au-dessus(...) mais si dénués qu'il fussent, n'allaient-ils pas s'acheter des femmes?(...) Ils étaient les alliés de Blaise Jonghens, ils n'étaient plus avec elle contre toute cette saleté où la Bourse, le bordel et le tzar n'étaient qu'une seule réalité à détruire. (CB pp.179-80)

Thus, working-class women are doubly oppressed: by capitalism and by the patriarchal system. Consequently, the primary objective of the revolution Catherine is pursuing is 'sa place enfin faite à la femme'. (CB p.179)

Despite Catherine's indignation at sexual injustice, she never fully remedies the irony of her rejection of ties of dependence, whilst remaining financially dependent upon a man, her father, whose monthly cheque from Bakou has long been taken for granted, and which she is unable to renounce.

Injustice, of course, is not restricted to women, and Aragon shows how it pervades bourgeois society at all levels. In Les Beaux Quartiers, it is expressed in the dichotomy, evident in both Paris and Sérianne, between the beaux quartiers, home of the rich and successful, and the bas quartiers where the workers live:

Les beaux quartiers... ils sont comme une échappée au mauvais rêve dans la pince noire de l'industrie. De tous côtés ils confinent à ces régions implacables du travail dont les fumées déshonorent leurs perspectives.(BO p.264)

This disparity underpins the whole novel by means of parallel
descriptions and the diametrically opposed social progression of the two Barbentane brothers: Edmond towards the *beaux quartiers* of the rich, and Armand towards the *bas quartiers* of the workers, the poor and the dispossessed. Against this background, Aragon constructs a network of incidents and characters to further underline these divisions, for example, the despair of Angélique, the maid, when she realises that the man she loves is irrevocably separated from her by the difference in their social class. She sees Pierre, her lover, with another woman, and does not need to be told the reason for her rejection: 'ce n’était pas une servante celle-là; une demoiselle et jeunette...'. (RO p.211)

The same gulf between middle-class lover and working-class mistress is illustrated in the relationship between Armand and Yvonne, who washes the dishes at his school; a relationship in which his ignorance about the reality of working-class life is revealed, and which constitutes part of his political education. Injustice prevails, since, when they are found out, Yvonne's punishment is dismissal, while Armand is let off with a reprimand and a token punishment.

These are not merely isolated examples of social injustice. Aragon shows that the problem is much more deep-seated. As Armand searches for work in Paris, he discovers a world of poverty and degradation which he could never before have imagined. Wandering through Les Halles, he witnesses the gulf between rich and poor, represented by the juxtaposition of the wealth of food in the market and those who are too poor to eat. We see through Armand's eyes the brutality of the police towards those without the resources to defend themselves, the disregard for human dignity: 'ce mépris total qui semblait habituel au pavé de Paris'.

Each of these incidents is characterised by the victims' acceptance
of the status quo. Angélique accepts the social barriers which implicitly prohibit relationships between members of different classes:

Est-ce qu'elle n'avait pas toujours su cela, qu'il n'était pas pour elle? (BQ p.211)

Yvonne equally does not expect any improvement in her lot: 'Elle avait l'air résignée à ce sort'. (BQ.p.384) During the incident in Les Halles, no-one intervenes or seems to find the events unacceptable. Loss of human dignity breeds indifference:

La mort, la douleur, l'indignité, ces idées s'évanouissaient dans la brutalité impudique de l'étal. (BQ p.415)

The seeming inevitability of the division of society into oppressed and oppressor does not, however, remain unchallenged. So far, I have considered the purely critical elements of Aragon's depiction of reality, those implied by his espousal of critical realism. Yet, as I have already shown, Aragon made it quite clear that critical realism was merely a stage in the progression towards socialist realism, and not an end in itself. Paul Nizan summed up the distinction between the two modes of realism in his review of Pour un réalisme socialiste:

Le réalisme bourgeois a été un réalisme-critique. Il décrivait amèrement la réalité. Mais il ne voyait point d'issue à cette réalité(...).Ce qui sépare le 'réalisme socialiste' de ce réalisme critique de la grande époque bourgeoise, c'est essentiellement sa capacité de perspectives.12

Aragon himself saw the distinction in terms of the difference between 'réalisme critique' and 'réalisme scientifique'. He explains his understanding of the latter in La Lumière de Stendhal, where he refers first of all to Zola's attempts to bring the principles of natural science to bear upon the literary process in his naturalist novels.
Aragon believes that the scientific basis of Zola's work is now outdated and proposes a different understanding of the application of the adjective 'scientific' to literature, or more specifically to the realist novel:

Où le roman est basé sur les rapports sociaux, politiques et économiques des personnages, et où le mouvement est celui de l'histoire humaine. (LS p.56)

It is in the description of the social and political relationships between his characters that Aragon displays his debt to the nineteenth-century realists, but when it comes to the analysis of economic relationships and the movement towards socialism, his distance from critical realism is marked by his political standpoint. There is a clear Balzacian echo, as has already been remarked, in Aragon's description of the preoccupation of many characters with money, but in Aragon's case, his observations are based on a Marxist interpretation of capitalist society which was not available to Balzac. Aragon's belief in 'le mouvement (...) de l'histoire humaine' contains the essence of his development of critical realism, in its implication of the inevitability of the progression from capitalism to socialism, even if it has not yet come about. In other words, it is in Aragon's 'capacité de perspectives', his ability to look to the future, that he goes beyond critical realism. This aspect of his representation of reality, what he calls 'le soin scientifique de la réalité', ensures that he avoids the pitfall of critical realism: 'that in criticising everything, it asserted nothing'. Or one might say that it acknowledges the limitations of critical realism and proposes a halfway stage between it and socialist realism according to the Soviet model.

Aragon's conviction of the inevitability of the movement away from
bourgeois, capitalist society is seen tentatively in several incidents in the first two novels of the cycle. The death of the labourer in *Les Beaux Quartiers*, killed in the middle of an electoral campaign by a member of the *Pro Patria* organisation, is hushed up by Dr. Barbentane, who does not wish to see his chances of election spoilt by a left-wing backlash. When the news finally emerges, once Dr. Barbentane is safely elected, a crowd of workers gathers and marches to the 'beaux quartiers' of Sérianne in the midst of election celebrations. Their silent anger, 'une espèce de rumeur, et comme l'haleine d'une foule' forms a stark contrast to the festivities, highlighting other implicit contrasts between poverty and wealth, labour and leisure. The confrontation also reminds the author of the economic dependence of the bourgeoisie on the labour of the workers, thereby hinting at the latent power of the latter group:

Il y avait là tous ceux sans qui les autres, ceux qui les regardaient venir, seraient morts de faim au milieu d'un univers sauvage, nus, et dans leurs excréments. Et ceux qui les regardaient venir n'avaient jamais été plus laids, plus peureux, et plus drôles. Drôles comme des puces savantes qui regarderaient des chiens. (BQ pp.243-44)

The potential strength of the workers is also suggested in their threatening stance: 'ces épaules serrées(...) ces poings de lutteurs'. (BQ p.242) The confrontation, however, comes to nothing, partly because of the ineptitude of the socialist leader, Vinet, who fails to take the initiative, partly because Barbentane is able to dissipate the tension with his easy, conciliatory rhetoric.

The presence of potentially powerful social discontent within society has been hinted at earlier in the novel, during the electoral campaign itself:
Au jour le jour sans doute, il semblait bien que tout fût calme et sûr. Et pourtant. Quand on dressait bien l'oreille dans la paisible nuit sociale, est-ce qu'on n'entendait pas au loin(...) comme des coups sourds, des clameurs, des plaintes. (BG p.154)

The very existence of an organisation such as Pro Patria, created to teach young members of the bourgeoisie certain manual jobs in order to be able to take over in the event of a strike, shows very clearly the recognition by the bourgeoisie of the threat posed to their vested interests by a powerful working class, and their determination to remove that threat.

The conflict brought about by the confrontation of these two groups is seen most dramatically in the strikes which constitute an important part of the narrative in Les Cloches de Bâle and Les Beaux Quartiers, and which go beyond the unfocused anger provoked by the labourer's death. The strikes have a dual narrative role to play: they constitute an extension of Aragon's critique of society. In this context, the division of society into exploiters and exploited is given its most forceful representation. The strikes also form part of Aragon's 'perspective d'avenir' in that they are an indication of potential social transformation.

Each of the strikes ends in failure and yet, as Emilien Carassus has pointed out in his analysis of the strikes in these two novels, this does not mean that they carry a negative message:

raconter une grève qui échoue peut avoir valeur militante. Loin d'y trouver un prétexte à découragement, les travailleurs y peuvent chercher l'occasion de mesurer les obstacles.

Consequently, the depiction of the strikes does not concentrate on their failure, but instead on the potential strength of the workers and in the implicit anticipation that one day they will be the victors.
The strike at Cluses, based on an actual strike, is a condemnation firstly of the factory owner's refusal to respect his workers' democratic right to nominate their own candidate in the local election. He abuses his power to punish those who attempted to oppose his son, who was standing as a candidate. He is also criticised for his determination to defeat the strike by resorting to military force. The incident in which demonstrating workers are shot illustrates the brutality of the soldiers, which shocks even the local police. The violence contrasts sharply with the idyll of Catherine and Jean, which it interrupts.

The taxi drivers' strike, based on an actual strike of 1933-1934, denounces the exploitation of the drivers by the imposition of new working conditions, which remove the limit on the drivers' working day, effectively lengthening it, yet refuse them an increased share of the takings to compensate for a new tax on benzol. The consortium which owns the taxis takes advantage of the drivers' demands in order to reassert its dominance and 'briser la combativité des chauffeurs'.

The exploitation depicted in the treatment of the chocolatiers in Les Beaux Quartiers is of a rather different order. Although the net effect is the same (the workers are being asked to accept reduced wages in order to increase the firm's competitiveness), the owner of the factory, M.Barrel, is not fully conscious of the implications of his reduction in wages. This contrasts with the taxi consortium, which deliberately set about a trial of strength. M.Barrel is merely guilty of benign paternalism in his judgement of the workers and their problems, in his assumption that they will be guided by his decisions and submit to them in their own interests. Of course, this kind of exploitation is
just as dangerous as the other.

The reaction of Wisner in *Les Beaux Quartiers* to the strike at his factory is on a par with that of the Consortium: determination to stamp out the strike, in this case by the use of blackleg workers.

These revelations are balanced by a note of hope, the 'capacité de perspectives' which Nizan saw as the factor distinguishing critical realism from socialist realism. This is seen in various ways. The potential strength of the workers is suggested in their solidarity when all the factories in Cluses support the clockmakers' strike. Their power is also suggested in the fear provoked by the strike in the local inhabitants: 'La terreur des habitants aisés(...) le spectre rouge'. (CB p.218) The full force of the strikers' anger is shown as they move to burn down the owner's house in retaliation for the killing of their fellow workers:

La rage populaire(...)semblait toute tendre vers cet objectif, vers cette justice, vers cette purification. (CB p.195)

The forces of oppression are made to seem vulnerable, no longer invincible, even if they have not been overcome this time.

Even when Fiancette, the strike leader, acknowledges defeat in the taxi-drivers' strike, there is nonetheless the anticipation of further struggles yet to come, which justifies the acceptance of defeat in the short term:

A quoi bon risquer dans une défaite complète et définitive l'avenir d'un syndicat aussi vivace aujourd'hui qu'hier? (CB p.401)

The taxi-drivers' strike is not an isolated incident, but is seen in the context of more widespread strike action in other parts of France and of Europe, emphasising that other workers are beginning to test their
strength:

Le mouvement des mineurs en Angleterre, déclenché au début de mars, avait entraîné une grève en Allemagne vers le 10 mars, qui allait s'étendant. En France dans le bassin d'Anzin, après bien des tergiversations, malgré le freinage du syndicat, les mineurs décidaient la grève le 17(...). Cette espèce de contagion internationale était vraiment menaçante. (CB pp.387-88)

One of the few episodes in Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale which deals with members of the working class describes the appalling living conditions in which a working-class family is obliged to live. The description of the Méré family, however, goes beyond the simple depiction of injustice. When Eugène Méré finally finds a job, he realises that he has been employed solely because he is not a member of a union. This again shows that an organised work force is seen as a threat to the factory owners. Once Méré is officially employed, he joins the union in a spirit of defiance and of pride, convinced that his membership must be worthwhile if the union can instil so much fear into the management:

'Quand j'ai vu que ça les rendait malades, j'ai réfléchi(...) Pour qu'ils les détestent tant, faut bien...' Eugène regardait sa carte de syndiqué avec fierté. (VI p.632)

The 'perspective d'avenir' is equally apparent in the demonstration at the Pré Saint-Gervais, in Les Beaux Quartiers. It is attended by Armand, as yet in complete ignorance about the political forces behind the demonstration. The annual commemoration at the Mur des Fédérés had been officially prevented from taking place in the Père Lachaise cemetery, for fear of its turning into a socialist demonstration against Les Trois Ans. At its new venue, the Pré Saint-Gervais, this is exactly what happens. Aragon depicts a vast, joyful gathering of workers, come
to protest against La Loi de Trois Ans, which is seen by them to be an inevitable harbinger of war:

Cent cinquante mille hommes identifient les Trois Ans et la guerre. Ils savent que ce vote(...) qui va envoyer pour trois ans les jeunes dans les casernes, sera le signal de la course, le signal du massacre prochain. (BO p.441)

The heroic figure of Jaurès embodies the people's rejection of war, and although both he and the people will be betrayed, through his assassination and the declaration of war, he still embodies the prospect of revolutions to come:

le grand Jaurès(...) pressent la grande armée rouge des peuples qui se donneront la main et fusilleront leur maîtres. Il pressent l'Octobre qu'il ne verra point(...) il pressent notre sanglant avenir qui mettra fin aux hémorragies du monde. (BO pp.440-441)

The suggestion of the inevitable progression towards a revolutionary future is given added weight by its association with the revolutionary past of the Commune and with other revolutionary moments familiar to the contemporary reader, but which were still in the future for the workers of the pre-war period.

An alternative type of perspective on the future is offered in the first two novels of the cycle, in the involvement of both Catherine and Armand in strikes. It is significant that each of these characters reaches a turning point in their political education by means of a strike. For Catherine, the strike at Cluses is a watershed in the development of her political awareness. She is forced to reassess her political position, and consequently the incident creates an insurmountable barrier between her and her lover, Jean Thiébault, who remains on the side of the exploiters, and whom she symbolically leaves behind.
Armand's *prise de conscience* is equally dramatic, and is a direct result of the strike at Wisner's factory, where he has just found employment. He works for a few days, but finally realises that if he is to put his bourgeois origins behind him, he must join the strikers, despite the financial hardship he will have to endure. If he does not do this, poor as he is, he will remain on the side of the exploiters. Having reached this awareness, he cuts all ties with his class of origin and joins the strike, thus heralding a new allegiance. The novel ends on a positive note which projects forward into the future. Even though the strike has failed, there is hope while such as Armand join the struggle: 'Vous voyez bien qu'il ne faut jamais désespérer!' (BQ p.625) The characters of both Armand and Catherine look forward to the eventual déclassement of certain members of the bourgeoisie, which Aragon had seen as a theme of *Les Cloches de Bâle.*

The movement from the criticism of bourgeois society, which occupies the first four volumes of *Le Monde réel*, to the articulation of an alternative to this society in *Les Communistes*, represents an attempt to give a more concrete form to the 'perspective d'avenir'. This is successful in certain respects, for example in Aragon's portrayal of the role of Communist women, 'les communistes' of the title, during the war. Here 'la femme des temps modernes' anticipated at the end of *Les Cloches de Bâle* (CB p.438) is given substance. There is a striking contrast between the exemplary commitment of the Communist women left behind during the war, who maintain the spirit of the party in the difficult period of persecution following the Soviet-German pact, and the shallow, thoughtless women of high society, who alternately fear and despise the Communists of whom they know so little.
The crisis created by the war and by the dissolution of the PCF produces a situation which enables women to prove their equality with men. The commitment displayed is on a much more realistic level than the idealised view of woman personified in Clara Zetkin. We see the danger which threatens the women as they carry on their clandestine work of organising meetings, producing and distributing illegal tracts to keep up the flow of information at a time of externally imposed secrecy. Here Aragon successfully combines the demands of realism, by using a historically verifiable set of circumstances, with the notion of a future perspective in his evocation of what society could be like, were women to be permanently set free from the confines of their historical role, as they had been during the war.

The historical circumstances which led to the outlawing of Communists help to create within the novel an almost closed society necessitated by the need for secrecy. This provides a virtual microcosm of Communist society within France, which in its patriotism, integrity, courage and dedication stands in opposition to the bourgeois society surrounding it. Again Aragon uses the historical background to embody a future where the Communists are no longer in the minority, thus overcoming the apparent contradiction between the depiction of the reality of bourgeois society and the conveying of the perspective of an as yet distant Communist future. The difficulties in the creation of a future perspective which remains convincing in fictional terms are reflected in the fact that the critical elements, those observed from real life, predominate. This of course also reflects the political balance of French society of the periods in question. Nonetheless, Aragon has been successful in suggesting the inexorable progression
towards a revolutionary future through collective groups: the strikers, the workers of Paris at the Pré Saint-Gervais, the Communists during the war. He is arguably less successful when he makes individual characters the unquestioning bearers of ideology or authentic values, as he does with Victor Dehaynin and Clara Zetkin amongst others.
NOTES

1. See Chapter 3, pp.84-86

2. Aragon commented in J'Abats mon jeu that socialist realism in France was of necessity 'un art d'opposition' (JAMJ.p.166)

3. 'Du réalisme dans le roman', Vendredi, 3 avril 1936, p.5

4. Les Cloches de Bâle, p.13. Further references to this text and to other novels are given in parentheses in the text. Aragon had also commented on the value of fiction in an early article on realism, where he writes of 'cette valeur de généralisation que l'introduction de la fiction donne au roman, et qui fait du roman(...) une arme dans la lutte des hommes pour ou contre un monde meilleur.' 'Du réalisme dans le roman', see note 3 above.

5. Sophie Bibrowska, Une Mise à mort. L'Itinéraire romanesque d'Aragon, p.73.

6. Les Communistes, VI.p.302. Further references to this work, to page and volume, are given in parentheses in the text. References are to the 6 volume first version, unless otherwise indicated.

7. The PCF interpretation of the war is analysed in chapter 6.

8. Bibrowska, p.77:

   Tous les deux en quête d'un bien être matériel, offrent ce qui leur est le plus facile de vendre, ce qu'ils sont, leur faculté de plaire.

9. See chapter 8, p.235

10. BQ.p.485. See Susan Suleiman, Authoritarian Fictions. The Ideological novel as a literary genre, pp.211-216, on the complexities of the
character of Carlotta.

11. PQ, p.414. This section has been extensively analysed in L.M.Waters, 'The presentation of a political perspective in the early socialist realist works of Paul Nizan and Louis Aragon (1933-1936), pp.30-31

12. 'L'Humanité', 12.VIII.1935, in Suleiman, Pour une Nouvelle Culture, p.177

13. Ibid.

14. 'Réalisme socialiste et réalisme français', p.302

15. M.Gorky, Soviet Writers' Congress 1934, p.65

16. PQ, p.242. See Waters, p.68

17. Emilien Carussus, 'Aragon et les miroirs de la grève dans les romans du Monde Réel', in Les Grèves Imaginaires, p.152 This account analyses the fictional strikes in detail and traces their historical origins.

18. Carussus, p.141

19. Ibid.

20. 'Dans Les Cloches de Bâle, je voulais montrer en premier lieu le passage d'une partie de la bourgeoisie dans le camp des travailleurs', 'Aragon répond à ses témoins', La Nouvelle Critique, 8, 1949, p.81. See also chapter 7 on transformation.
CHAPTER SIX

IDEOLOGY

While Aragon may have tentatively hinted at the inexorable progression of French society towards revolution,\(^1\) the overall depiction of reality in the novels of *Le Monde réel* remains predominantly negative and critical, reflecting the tradition of French critical realism rather than that of Soviet socialist realism with its emphasis upon 'la réalité dans son développement révolutionnaire'.\(^2\)

Whilst constrained by the realities of political life in the France of the 1930s and 1940s, Aragon nonetheless asserts socialist ideology throughout the novels, not simply by pointing out a revolutionary development which is as yet in its infancy, but by presenting ideology more explicitly. In doing so, he responds to the avowedly didactic nature of socialist realism:

> le devoir de transformation idéologique et d'éducation des masses dans l'esprit du socialisme.\(^3\)

I propose to analyse in this chapter the ways in which Aragon conveys ideology\(^4\) and thereby seeks to achieve the ideological transformation of his readers, or, in alternative terms, the means by which Aragon presents his own political commitment in order to achieve a parallel commitment in the reader.

One of the most obvious methods Aragon employs to achieve his aim is his use of positive heroes, individuals who by their actions and words indicate a desirable pattern of behaviour to the reader, an example to follow. The positive hero was a frequently used technique in Soviet socialist realism, a technique which, Mathewson points out, was
the continuation of a characteristic of nineteenth-century Soviet literature:

There is a clear continuity of tradition across the October Revolution. It is manifested particularly in the reappearance in the Soviet era of the nineteenth-century concept of 'positive' literary heroes(...) Beginning in 1932 there prevailed in the USSR a cult of heroism(...) It came to be one of the principal means of indoctrination and exhortation throughout the society. In *Hugo, Poète réaliste*, Aragon identifies a similar tradition, referring to the nineteenth-century realist hero as:

le personnage dont l'existence même a valeur exaltante, éducative(...) qui entraîne(nt) à la transformation de la réalité même.

He continues this tradition in his own novels, where this description can be applied to Aragon's positive heroes, who, as exemplary embodiments of socialist ideology, form an intrinsic part of the 'capacité de perspectives' which is central to French socialist realism. They allow the author to represent an as yet unattainable future. Unlike the youthful Armand Barbentane, who, early in *Les Beaux Quartiers* is unable to comprehend the injustice surrounding him and wonders, 'Quel était le lien, le sens de toutes ces choses épouvantables? Il ne pouvait le dire. Il ne tenait pas le système.' (p.254-55), the hero figure, or positive hero, has grasped not only the injustice, but also the mechanisms within society which cause it.

In her analysis of the hero in the *roman à thèse*, Susan Suleiman defines what she calls the 'antagonistic hero', in opposition to the 'typical hero' of Marxist literary criticism. The antagonistic hero is:

the conscious representative of a group whose values he expresses and with which he identifies himself. It is his identification with the group that allows the hero to be only minimally
individualized. Even if he bears a proper name that sets him apart, the antagonistic hero tends to merge into the anonymity (and unanimity) of the heroic group.

Further on in her analysis, she says of the antagonistic hero that he 'does not become, he is.' These definitions, as I will show, can also be applied, with some modification, to the hero figures of Le Monde réel.

Although Garaudy describes Armand Barbentane as 'le premier héros pleinement positif de l'oeuvre d'Aragon', it would seem that Victor Dehaynin in Les Cloches de Bâle is a more obvious candidate. Yet almost immediately we can see why Garaudy chose Armand, for while Victor may be quite unassailably 'positif', he is not a fully rounded character in fictional terms. This is a problem which recurs again and again with the positive heroes of the Monde Réel cycle.

Victor is established as a solid, reliable figure from the moment of his first appearance as the saviour of the suicidal Catherine. This incident is immediately followed by a long narrative section which elaborates Victor's working-class background and socialist credentials. His political development is presented as a fait accompli. There is no tracing of the complex evolution which characterises Armand and Catherine. Victor has already reached his political destination. His principal functions in the novel are to teach Catherine about socialism by explaining its ideology to her, and thereby correct her romantic admiration of anarchism, and through his certainty to act as a foil to her uncertainties and hesitations.

His first conversation with Catherine centres on a denunciation of the suicide of the daughter and son-in-law of Marx, Laura and Paul Lafargue, who, in Victor's eyes, betrayed the working-class struggle by
abandoning it prematurely. His actions and ideas are so permeated by the class struggle that he seizes on his chance meeting with Catherine not only to prevent her from attempting suicide again, but also to win her over to socialism, by inviting her to a political meeting:

Et puis je me dis que, qui sait? si vous venez avec moi, ça vous donnera honte, et ça vous les changera, les idées. (CB p.301)

In his role as Catherine’s teacher, Victor denounces anarchism. Catherine’s attraction to anarchism, in the wake of her brief association with Libertad and his group, is dismissed by Victor in a criticism of their violent methods:

Victor disait que c’étaient tout simplement des assassins, et que ces histoires-là faisaient le jeu de la police. (CB p.337)

He condemns Vaillant’s attempt to blow up the Chambre des Députés as an action which actually damaged the workers’ cause. His reasoned and careful support for the strike is opposed to the diversionary tactics of the anarchists. Victor is eloquent when defending the dignity of honest labour and its value as a means to equality for women, but when he is not elaborating an ideological point, he has little to say and consequently, he never takes shape as an autonomous character. The only incident where any personal emotion is expressed is at Jeannette’s miscarriage, but even here, there is only the bald statement ‘Il se mit à pleurer.’ (p.395) Victor does not evolve as a character, but remains fixed, the mouthpiece for a set of political viewpoints. In Suleiman’s terms, he ‘does not become, he is.’ He stands in marked contrast to the complexity of Catherine and her political evolution.

The introduction of the German socialist Clara Zetkin at the end of Les Cloches de Bâle is an even more striking example of the use of
a character as an ideological mouthpiece. Indeed, Aragon does not even attempt to make a fully rounded character out of her. He fully admits that she is introduced only for her symbolic value, as an incarnation of the socialist future he envisions: 'Je prends Clara Zetkin comme un exemple.' (p.425) Representative not just of the working class, but more specifically of working-class women, Clara embodies the antithesis of the war-mongering capitalists. At the 1912 Basel peace conference, she enunciates the socialist rejection of war and calls upon women to help eradicate the threat of war. As Aragon states, Clara forms the logical ideological conclusion to the novel in her rejection of war and in the positive role she proposes for women. She is:

Celle vers qui tend tout ce livre, celle en qui le problème social de la femme est résolu et dépasse. (p.437)

Yet she remains no more than a logical conclusion. Seen only through her ideas, described only from the outside, she is aesthetically unsatisfactory and a weak link in the portrayal of the past, the present and the future of women, upon which the novel is hinged.

A rather more minor character in fictional terms, but nonetheless one who is important in terms of conveying ideology and who is presented as a hero figure, is the socialist leader Jaurès, who features briefly in both Les Cloches de Bâle and Les Beaux Quartiers. In the first of these novels, Jaurès's speech at the Basel peace conference is primarily an outcry against war. Like Clara Zetkin, Jaurès embodies working-class opposition to a war engineered by capitalist society. There is, however, an added dimension to his speech and this is described as 'l'espoir de la révolution qui monte à travers le discours qui s'emballe.' (p.434) Revolution is proposed as a logical alternative
Les gouvernements devraient se rappeler, dit Jaurès, quand ils évoquent le danger de guerre, comme il serait facile pour les peuples de faire le simple calcul que leur propre révolution leur coûterait moins de sacrifices que la guerre des autres. (p. 435)

The same concept emerges in Les Beaux Quartiers through the description of the socialist demonstration against La Loi de Trois Ans at the Pré Saint-Gervais, where Jaurès speaks once more against war, embodying the proletarian opposition to it:

comme un drapeau vivant, le drapeau de la vie, contre la guerre. (BQ p. 437)

Once more opposition to war is associated with the revolutionary struggle. The overthrow of the forces which bring about war is the natural corollary to the rejection of war itself. The rhetoric of Jaurès carries along the people with him and awakens them to the reality of what threatens them:

Cent cinquante mille hommes identifient les Trois Ans et la guerre(...) Ils n'ont d'espoir qu'en eux-mêmes, ils se savent trahis de toutes parts. Ils refusent d'être le troupeau expiatoire des jeux incompréhensibles des riches(...) Ils crient À bas les Trois Ans! devant les maquignons du fer, de la dynamite et du pétrole. (p. 441)

As with Clara Zetkin, the character of Jaurès is subordinated to the communication of the political message, but in his depiction of Jaurès, Aragon communicates more convincingly the passion of his oratory and its effect upon his audience, in particular upon the naive Armand. This sense of passionate involvement is lacking from Aragon's depiction of Clara. It can of course be argued that, since she and Jaurès are historical figures, whose only function is to carry a political message,
they form a separate category of their own and ought not to be judged alongside purely fictional characters. In this case the essentially symbolic value of Clara and Jaurès can perhaps be more readily accepted than the one-dimensional Victor, who remains an aesthetic failure.

Neither Armand Barbentane at the end of Les Beaux Quartiers nor Bérénice Morel at the end of Aurélien can be considered as positive heroes, since their respective transformations into politically committed figures have only just been accomplished at the end of each novel, and therefore their exemplary force is somewhat limited. In fact Armand is still almost as naive and ignorant of the mechanisms of capitalist society as he was earlier in the novel, so although he possesses some exemplary value as a character, he conveys no explicit ideological message. Indeed the rapidity of his volte-face in joining the strikers is somewhat unsatisfactory in narrative terms, as I have suggested elsewhere. The transformation of Bérénice into a potential positive heroine is equally unsatisfactory in terms of characterisation, although unlike Armand she is made to convey a brief ideological message, in her criticism of the resignation of French people to the German occupation and its consequences.

There is, therefore, in effect only one major fictional positive hero in the first four novels of Le Monde réel, a fact which underlines their predominantly critical slant, their concentration on the negative facets of bourgeois society and the difficulty which members of this society experience in rejecting it.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that it is in Les Communistes, seen by Aragon as the culminating point of the Monde Réel cycle, where he elaborates his alternative to the capitalist society described in the preceding volumes of Le Monde réel, that we find a greater range of
characters who can be described as positive heroes. Claude Roy has commented:

Il n'y a pas de thèse dans Les Communistes, simplement des exemples, et l'action d'hommes exemplaires.\textsuperscript{14}

While I agree that the novel does explore in great detail the activities of exemplary characters,\textsuperscript{15} I would dispute the complete absence of a thesis in the novel. There are in fact several, mainly concerned with the PCF line on the war, and they are often expounded by the exemplary, positive heroes of the novel. In so far as these characters represent a set of political values which the author is presenting as an authentic model for the reader to follow, almost each one of the gallery of Communists in the novel could be said to be a positive hero. I intend, however, to analyse only those characters who are developed at some length, and who are used fairly consistently for the conveying of ideology. There is no single character who can be considered as the central hero, but rather a range of characters who, taken together, represent the values which Aragon is attempting to propound in the novel. Unlike the earlier novels where the main centre of interest was focused on members of the bourgeoisie, the emphasis in Les Communistes shifts to members of the working class; and where before political commitment was problematic, in Les Communistes it is usually straightforward and unquestioning.

Raoul Blanchard is endowed with just such a commitment to the PCF. Unlike other members of the party, Blanchard had no doubts about the Soviet-German non-aggression pact of 1939, which is discussed at some length in the opening chapters of the novel. He is confidently able to justify it and to refute the notion, proposed by the socialist
Dansette, that his trust in the party is a blind faith:

La foi, c'est quand on avale tout, malgré les faits qui vous crèvent les yeux. Le sens de classe, monsieur Dansette, c'est au contraire qu'on refuse de prendre des vessies pour des lanternes... (LC I p.131)

This confidence reflects the determined support eventually accorded the pact by the party leadership in Maurice Thorez's statement to the press in the wake of the pact. Blanchard's emphatic defence, whilst reflecting the party line, stands in contrast to the bewilderment and confusion felt by other party members, such as Bastien Prache, who, in the initial absence of an official party line, is uncertain what to think. His bewilderment and confusion reflect in their turn the initial reaction of many in the party immediately after the news. 16

Blanchard's presence as a Communist militant remains throughout the novel. He is established as a hero figure from the very beginning, where he is depicted in the Prologue returning from the Spanish Civil War. Despite defeat in the international brigades at the hands of Franco, Blanchard returns to France in the anticipation of a struggle to be carried on:

il faut vivre..., il faut guérir..., on va continuer le combat..., rien n'est perdu. (I p.18)

The struggle continues during the drôle de guerre. When he is on leave, he returns to his factory in order to work. His wife and child are no longer in Paris, and he has no desire to be idle. This gives him the opportunity to re-establish contact with other party members, and exchange information on conditions at the front and in the capital. He discovers that the shock caused by the pact has been dispersed by the more immediate problems raised by the dissolution of the PCF; and he
conveys to other party members valuable news and impressions from his army unit. Keeping open the channels of communication is a vital means of sustaining morale and continuing the struggle:

Parce qu'avec chaque camarade qui arrive de l'armée, c'est une histoire un peu différente, et que de toutes ces histoires réunies, peut-être qu'on peut tirer un enseignement utile pour le Parti, et pour la lutte.(III p.263)

In the army, Blanchard drives an ambulance with Jean de Moncey and serves as an exemplary figure to the younger man, though rarely in an overtly political way. In the prevailing climate of anti-Communism each man is at first wary of the other, but gradually their suspicions are allayed and they confide in each other: Jean about Yvonne, his politically active sister, and his fears for her; Blanchard about his experiences in the Spanish Civil War. When Jean confesses his ignorance about the political maneuverings of the war, Blanchard shows him a history of the Soviet Communist Party and comments, 'Avec un bouquin comme ça...tu comprends toujours ce qui se passe...'(IV p.332), a comment which brings their sympathies out into the open, but which is not a prelude for more specific political discussion. The relationship between Jean's political evolution and Blanchard's influence upon him remains unquantifiable, but nonetheless real, as Jean's description of Blanchard to Cécile later indicates: '"Raoul, c'est un camarade..." Ce mot entre eux, dans ce sens.'(VI p.332) Blanchard's heroic constancy is underlined towards the end of the novel, where he is presented in much the same way as that of his introduction, as the determined militant who sees in defeat not the end but the continuity of the struggle, a struggle which is itself seen as a war:

Par moments, il ne savait plus où il était: en France ou en
Espagne. Même espoir. Même désespoir. Même volonté sauvage de survivre. Le combat ne finit pas ici. La défaite ne signifie rien(...) Un Raoul, toute sa vie, il a été au front. Pas toujours un front militaire. Il n'a jamais attendu de l'aube suivante une fraîcheur, un repos, la mer...mais la continuation de la lutte, mais la poursuite d'un même ennemi.(VI pp.218-9)

Joseph Gigoix's commitment to the PCF is as unwavering as that of Blanchard, and, like Blanchard, he also serves as an example, in this case to Cécile Wisner. Gigoix is a heroic figure of a rather different kind. He is the victim of appalling injuries sustained during the war, but finds in his political commitment a source of comfort, the knowledge that even in his condition he can still be of use to the party:

Vous voyez, Madame Cécile, quand on y réfléchit un peu, un homme même abîmé comme ça, ça peut encore servir... C'est mutilé de guerre tout de même!(IV p.187)

The strength that this gives him enables him to be cheerfully stoical in the face of his injuries. The fact that he is a Communist emerges eventually through his interest in the trial of the Communist deputies. At first the knowledge of his political convictions creates in Cécile a sense of alienation and loneliness:

Est-ce qu'en plus de tout ce qui la séparait de ce malheureux, il y avait encore une autre barrière de pensées?(IV p.133)

Soon, however, it creates between them a 'complicité nouvelle'(IV p.133), and Cécile begins to learn from him, although the ideological content of the knowledge she acquires from him is rather peripheral. She learns, for example, to attribute a new sense to the word 'manifestation'. In her life as a member of the Wisner clan, it had expressed the idea of 'un certain désordre'.(IV p.187) Now in the mouth of Gigoix, it takes on a new dimension:
le mot 'manifestation' prenait un sens d'orgueil, de noblesse. (IV p.187)

When Cécile takes charge of Yvonne Gaillard's children, the children of a 'camarade', another word which takes on a different meaning for her (as it does for Jean), it seems to Gigoix that his example and his words have wrought a change in her:


This reflection is a reaffirmation of his heroic standing in the novel, though at the same time a simplification of events, since Cécile's motivation in taking responsibility for the Gaillard children is not as straightforwardly political as Gigoix's words would have us believe. In fact the extent of his ideological influence on her, and in the novel as a whole, is not immediately obvious since he utters few directly political statements. His exemplary value lies more in his emotive force than in his ideological arguments.

Robert Gaillard can also be considered among the positive heroes of the novel. Despite his resistance to joining the PCF, he remains a loyal sympathiser. Like many sympathisers, he was alienated by the Soviet-German pact, although not taken in by the anti-Communist propaganda which the pact provoked. The fact that he remains on the periphery, unwilling to militate because it encroaches upon his free time, or to join the party because to do so would compromise his freedom to criticise, would seem to make him an unlikely hero figure. Yet he
gradually comes to the realisation that the Communists were right about the pact, that they represent authentic patriotism and did so at the time of the pact:

Maintenant, je me dis que j'ai été un couillon, et que c'est eux qui ont raison, qui ont toujours eu raison, et que le pacte, tant pis pour moi si je n'y comprends goutte, tant pis! Si c'est comme ça que les autres entendent l'honneur, l'armée, la patrie... alors c'est eux qui ont raison, qui savaient, mieux que moi, je n'ai qu'à les croire! Oui, vous ne faites pas la guerre aux Nazis, vous la faites aux Français.(III p.79)

Not only does he reinforce the ideological point already made by Blanchard, but introduces another which will be developed at greater length later in the novel, that is the presentation of the Communists as the true representatives of the interests of the French nation in the war, as opposed to the political establishment which is less than whole-hearted in its opposition to the Nazis.

Gaillard's doubts surface again when Yvonne, his wife, is arrested for involvement in clandestine Communist activity after the dissolution of the party. Her participation in such activities has already been a source of dissent between them, Gaillard believing that her first duty is to her children. He is loath to admit that she chose the right course of action, even while admitting that it was acceptable in theory. Later on in the novel, however, Gaillard is forced into approving her actions when he is questioned as a suspected Communist. Provoked by the interrogation, he finally explodes into a public defence not only of his wife's actions, but also of the Communist view of the war, thus voicing an ideological statement which lies at the heart of the novel:

Il ne faudrait pas, dit le Lieutenant Gaillard, du fait que je ne suis pas communiste et que je le dis...conclure que je désavoue les communistes, et l'aide que, je ne sais comment, vous dites que leur a apporté (...) ma femme. Dès le premier jour, 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. Huit mois de cette farce suffisent pour éclairer un homme comme moi. (V p.180)

Armand Barbentane is the only one of the main hero figures who is not a member of the working class, but one of the few intellectuals. He is a journalist at *L'Humanité*. It is interesting to note that, while one might expect a more educated and, by dint of his profession, articulate character to elaborate the ideology of his party in some depth, in fact more attention is paid to the fact that, as a *déclassé*, he is never completely at ease within his adopted class. Armand's less than perfect integration into the working class is commented on by another soldier, Lombard, who decides to return home without permission during the drôle de guerre. Armand is shocked by the dereliction of duty, but Lombard is more pragmatic:

*Quel imbécile, ce Barbentane! Qui est-ce qui est fidèle à ses idées, lui qui fiche les gens au garde-à-vous... ou moi, qui vais pouvoir sauvegarder mon mandat, revenir parmi mes électeurs, jouer mon rôle à la mairie... C'est un journaliste, ce Barbentane: la classe ouvrière, ce n'est pas du réel pour lui.* (III p.365)

Nonetheless, Armand is presented as an admirable character with a sense of responsibility, aware that the party will be judged according to his own behaviour, and with a concern above all for the men under his command. He gains the respect of his subordinates, to the extent that they gather round to protect him from denunciation as a Communist to the military authorities. Like other positive heroes, Barbentane is used to give direct expression to the Communist interpretation of events. This can be seen most notably at the end of the novel when he explains the ideological standpoint which underpins the whole novel. As the German
army advances inexorably through France, he is asked by a miner in the north:

puisque les soldats ne nous défendent pas, pourquoi ne nous laisse-t-on pas nous défendre?(VI p.301)

Barbentane answers in a lengthy explanation of the PCF line which reiterates several of the points made by Gaillard. 17 He attributes the war to the government's desire not only to involve the Soviet Union in a war, but also to eradicate all traces of the Front Populaire (which the PCF had unsuccessfully tried to revive in the first part of 1939) by any means necessary. He points out that far from being a war for the defence of the French people, it was an attempt to gain revenge for 1936 and to subjugate the people once more. The government is allowing the enemy to invade because it prefers defeat to the prospect of what might happen if the war did 'change character' and become a national war in the hands of the people. Defeat at the hands of the Germans is preferable to the victory of the people:

Il ne manque pas en France de gens qui ont peur de ce que signifierait la guerre nationale, parce que cela suppose le peuple armé, et que le peuple si on l'arme, il faut que ce soit pour défendre ses droits, ses conquêtes!(...) ils préfèrent payer la dîme à Berlin, pour que Trente-six reste sans lendemain... parce qu'ils ont vu que d'une guerre est née chez nous la Commune... et d'une autre la Commune de là-bas, la Commune des peuples soviétiques...(VI pp303-4)

At the end of his speech, he anticipates the new war, the people's war; in other words, the Resistance.

Critics, even politically sympathetic ones such as Roy Pascal, have drawn attention to the unsatisfactory nature of the characters in Les Communistes:
If the characters from the upper classes tend to be two-dimensional(...), those from the working class, particularly the Communists, seem also to be over-simplified in their inner security and moral balance.18

Comments such as these can perhaps be qualified. As I have illustrated earlier, the 'inner security' of certain key figures such as Barbentane and Gaillard is not absolute, particularly when seen in contrast with such characters as Victor Dehaynin. We do see them in situations which reveal doubt and uncertainty. They are differentiated and made more human in the context of their personal relationships, and hence are more convincing than Victor; but in the final analysis, one has to agree with Pascal's criticism of the over-simplification of many of the characters of Les Communistes. This recurrent failure to create politically committed characters who are also fully rounded individuals seems to be a result of the weight of ideology which they are made to bear in the novel. The political message they carry overshadows their individuality and leads to over-simplification. Despite the difficult circumstances in which they find themselves, they do not evolve as a result of experience. As characters they remain static. This is even more obviously the case with the multitude of minor characters, in particular the women militants, who are not sufficiently differentiated to prevent them from remaining exemplary types, whose primary function is an ideological one: to highlight the role which women Communists played in the early months of the war.19

Garaudy had defended this lack of individual development, at least among the positive heroes, in terms of the overall perspective of Les Communistes, which is a national not an individual perspective:

Le héros central, désormais, ce n'est pas un homme, ni un couple, ni une famille, c'est un peuple. Le sujet n'est pas une crise dans la vie d'un homme, mais l'histoire d'une nation.20
Yet the episodic structure of the novel and the fragmented nature of character development prevents this sense of the unity of the people from emerging. In fact, the impression of the people as a dynamic and coherent force is felt much more strongly in the crowd scenes of *Les Cloches de Bâle* and *Les Beaux Quartiers*, scenes in which the workers embody an ideological message, albeit one of a general nature: the inevitability of the victory of the oppressed in the class struggle.21

One of the most unambiguous ways to convey ideology is through the direct intervention of the author into the narrative. This is a technique particularly in evidence at the end of Aragon's novels, where the author is intent on reinforcing his ideological point. It is at such junctures that the self-avowedly didactic nature of socialist realism is at its most pronounced. The use of authorial intervention is most notable at the end of *Les Cloches de Bâle*, where Clara Zetkin's comments interweave with those of the author, anxious to emphasise her political and social importance within the structure of the novel, as though her own words do not suffice:

Elle est la femme de demain, ou mieux, osons le dire: elle est la femme d'aujourd'hui. L'égale. Celle vers qui tend tout ce livre, celle en qui le problème social de la femme est résolu et dépassé. (CB p.437)

On this occasion, the heavy-handed and repetitive nature of the authorial interventions draw attention to the difficulties encountered by Aragon in bringing the novel to a satisfactory positive conclusion, in which the exemplary force of Clara would be self-evident.

The omniscient narrator also intervenes in the final stages of both *Les Beaux Quartiers* and *Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale*, though not in...
quite such a forceful way as in the earlier novel. In *Les Beaux Quartiers*, he interprets the ideological significance of Armand's action in joining the strikers, seeing it in the wider context of the class struggle and the national interests of France. He emphasises a distinction which has been evident throughout the whole of the novel, between the apparent patriotism of the capitalists who lead the nation to the brink of war, and the real patriotism of the working class who have the true interests of the nation at heart:

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...Il commet ce soir un acte vraiment patriotique. (BQ p.624)

At the end of *Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale*, the author's voice becomes indistinguishable from that of Pascal Mercadier when he attributes the First World War to the individualism and political irresponsibility of his father's generation:

Ce sont eux qui nous ont menés là, nos pères avec leur aveuglement, leur superbe dédain de la politique... (VI p.685)

Again Aragon is interpreting the significance of events, but whilst in *Les Beaux Quartiers* the ground had already been prepared for the author's conclusion by Jaurès's speech, in *Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale* the author needs to make a connection which is not immediately evident from the rest of the narrative.

A more frequently used technique than authorial comment is the use of discussion and the political activities of the characters to convey ideology. This is a technique more in evidence in *Les Communistes* than elsewhere, by virtue of the fact that this novel depicts more politically active characters. Frequently it is the positive heroes who
are at the centre of such discussion and activities, but there are also instances of discussions between other characters which have an ideological content. These often take the form of the instruction of a politically naive or uncommitted character by one who is politically committed as, for example, in the discussion between the socialist Vinet and the young Armand Barbentane in *Les Beaux Quartiers*, in which Vinet points out the inevitability of war under a capitalist system, a view central to the novel. In *Les Communistes*, several discussions between militants and sympathisers elaborate the arguments about the pact. Lucien Cesbron, in a conversation with an army officer hostile to the Communists, defends the desertion of Maurice Thorez, the secretary general of the PCF at the time of the war, maintaining that his action was not against the general interest. François Lebecq glosses for his wife a speech by Molotov in which the latter gives his interpretation of the war, an interpretation which Aragon has been at pains to emphasise by various means throughout the novel: that the war is but a pretext for an unavowed aim:

Il a dit que cette guerre était une guerre idéologique, qu'on mène sous le couvert du drapeau de la lutte pour la démocratie, alors qu'on ne saurait qualifier de lutte pour la démocratie des actes comme la dissolution du Parti en France, l'arrestation des élus du peuple à la Chambre, la suppression des journaux ouvriers, la mise en tutelle des syndicats... Il a dit que le but de cette guerre n'est pas celui qu'on avoue: ni la défense de la Pologne, ni la défense de la démocratie, mais bel et bien la défense d'intérêts matériels, colonialistes... (*LC II* p.341)

Such discussions also have implications for characterisation, in that the individuals concerned, particularly in view of their already minor roles within the novel, tend to become reduced to the status of mouthpieces for ideology.

An even more direct method of inserting ideology into the novel,
the incorporation of written documents into the narrative, is used on occasion. In the second volume of *Les Communistes*, Aragon uses the device of reproducing part of a tract from a clandestine issue of *L'Humanité*. It was seized during a search and is displayed derisively at a social gathering where Cécile is present. The device of the tract operates on three different levels: first of all as a straightforward exposition of the Communist party line in the early days of the war, which held that all attempts should be made to gain a rapid peace agreement in the best interests of France.22 On a second level, the Communist statement is given added weight by seeming all the more reasoned and patriotic in contrast with the facile and childish contempt accorded the tract by its bourgeois audience:

*Ils n'en finissaient pas de rire, comme des enfants qui ont trouvé un livre obscene.* (II p.246)

The incident also provides the opportunity for Cécile to see through the superficial veneer of elegance and wit to the rottenness beneath, a key moment in her evolution:

*Elle ne savait pas de quoi il s'agissait. Mais elle les voyait, ces visages, la curiosité, l'espèce de joie cruelle, le mépris aussi, le triomphe. Elle avait vu le visage de Fred, tout d'un coup changé(...) un Fred ignoré, violent, haineux...et les autres(...)Elle s'écarta.* (II p.243)

A similar technique is used to recount the list of the PCF's proposals for the continuation of the war after the fall of Paris. These proposals are also reproduced verbatim within the novel during a conversation between the minister Anatole de Monzie and Philippe Borman.23 Such a list is supposed to have really existed, but the only sources for this information are Communist ones since the proposals
never actually reached the government. By calling for a change in the nature of the war, making it into a national war and arming the people to defend Paris, the proposals echo the points made by Barbentane in his conversation with Boquette the miner.  

An equally unambiguous way of conveying ideology is the use of the political speech. This is a technique which we have already seen in a modified version with reference to Clara Zetkin and Jean Jaurès, both of whom are presented in the act of giving speeches at political rallies. Although in both cases their rejection of war is central to their address, their actual words are not repeated in detail. It is rather the attempt to evoke their charismatic and heroic presence, and the stating of a general principle which are the central elements of the narrative in these cases. The long speech of Etienne Fajon to the Chambre des Députés in Les Communistes (III pp.307-15) is of a rather different nature. Here the political detail of the content of the speech is of more importance than the character of Fajon himself, unlike the two examples above where at least some effort is made to establish the individuality of the speakers. In the speech, Fajon opposes the government attempt (which was ultimately successful) to deprive of their seats those PCF deputies who refused to disavow the party, which was by now illegal. In the course of his address, Fajon deplores the arrest and imprisonment of Communist deputies, and opposes the motion to deprive them of their seats, maintaining that it is an undemocratic move in that it disregards the will of the people who elected them. He then proceeds to accuse the government of using the Soviet-German pact as a pretext for the persecution of the Communists. He highlights the contradiction between the widespread justification of the war as a war for freedom and the way in which political freedom is being attacked in France:
vos persécutions(...) éclairent (les travailleurs) sur le caractère véritable de la guerre actuelle, que vous avez le front de présenter au moment où vous anéantissez toute liberté à l'intérieur du pays(...) comme une guerre de défense de la liberté.(III pp.312-3)

The speech serves as a commentary on the experiences of the Communist militants which have comprised a large part of the narrative up to this point, and undermines the accepted view of the war, proposing, as other characters have done or will do, the Communist interpretation.

The ideology which, to a greater or lesser extent, informs each of the novels, is accentuated more subtly in the oppositions and contrasts which pervade the novels. Suleiman has identified the 'unambiguous, dualistic system of values' as a chief characteristic of the roman à thèse and has analysed it with specific reference to Les Beaux Quartiers where the parallel, but opposed development of Edmond and Armand Barbentane is a key motif. Although this type of ideological opposition is at its most marked in Les Beaux Quartiers, similar oppositions can be detected in the other novels, clearly indicating those values which are considered ideologically authentic. Hence in Les Cloches de Bâle, there is, on the individual level, a series of oppositions which have Catherine as their focal point. Her rejection of the sexual values of the past is embodied in her opposition to Diane, whilst her hesitations and uncertainties, and ultimately her political failings, are to be seen in the contrasts established between her and the politically admirable Victor, and between her and the revolutionary Clara. These oppositions are reinforced by the structural movement of the novel, by the progression from the negativity of Diane to the rebellion and questioning of Catherine and finally to the exemplary force of Clara. On a more general level, the contradictions of class
society are illustrated in the way in which the war-mongering industrial bourgeoisie are ranged against the peacemakers such as Jaurès and Zetkin, and all those who reject a political order which makes war an inevitability. As Bibrowska has commented:

D'une part, il y a donc ceux qui vont faire la guerre, l'impérialisme international; de l'autre, ceux qui luttent pour la paix, le socialisme international.  

This polarisation is repeated in Les Beaux Quartiers, where the forces of war are represented again in the industrialists who support La Loi de Trois Ans and are opposed by the working class demonstrators who rally at the Pré Saint-Gervais to show their opposition to this prelude to war:

'A bas les Trois Ans!' pourtant résume à merveille la grande volonté pacifique du peuple de France, et son désir, fou de vivre, et de vaincre ses maîtres, les faiseurs de tempête.

This division, upon which the novel hinges, and which is reflected in the opposition between Edmond and Armand, is further emphasised by the opposition of the beaux quartiers of the title, to which Edmond aspires, and the bas quartiers, where Armand finds not only suffering, but also solidarity with the working class. In Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale, the dualism of values is less in evidence, though it surfaces at the end of the novel in the opposition between those of Mercadier's generation whose individualism brought about the war and the war generation who suffered its consequences. Another opposition central to the novel, though less obviously ideological, is to be found in Mercadier's own observation about 'les voyageurs de l'impériale', the distinction between those who passively observe life from the upper deck, and those who take an active part in life. Aurélien, like
Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale, is less specifically ideological, but there are two incidents which underline the political polarities of the novel. The first of these is the incident at the swimming baths where Aurélien meets the worker Riquet. Their empathy in the pool is proved to be illusory when they remove their classless swimming wear to put on their socially defining outer clothes. The class barriers, in particular that which separates the labouring class from the leisured class, are raised and inevitably separate them. Riquet's first instinctive vouvoiement and his use of Monsieur when he sees Aurélien's suit indicate the insurmountable nature of these barriers:

Tu ne fais rien du tout toute la journée?(...) A quoi alors tu passes ton temps?(...) Il faut de la santé pour être chômeur toute la vie.(p.186)

There is a further opposition at the end of the novel between the passivity of Aurélien, who accepts the defeat of 1940, and the energy of Bérénice, who is ready to carry on the struggle:

'Mais...Bérénice, bien sûr que c'est fini...Qu'est-ce que vous voudriez que nous disions, que nous fassions?'(...) Elle éclata de rage: 'Ce que j'aurais voulu? Qu'on résiste! Qu'on se batte!' (p.689)

This opposition is politicised in Les Communistes, where it is the government which is ready to accept defeat and the Communists who are determined to fight on in the defence of France.

This constant use of opposition emphasises by juxtaposition rather than by direct statement the contradictions of a society built upon class divisions. The relative worth to be attached to the opposing value systems is made unequivocal by the combination of methods used by the author to convey his ideological views. The indirect method of
opposition is always reinforced by the authority of either the positive heroes or the omniscient narrator.

It has been observed that there would seem to be a contradiction between Aragon's aim, as a socialist realist writer, to analyse the revolutionary development of reality in an attempt to bring about an ideological transformation in society, and his tendency, notably in the first three novels of *Le Monde réel*, to situate novels in the past. Molodoshanin sees *Les Cloches de Bâle* in particular in this light. She accuses Aragon of escaping into the past in this novel, and of avoiding the crucial issues of the 1930s. This situating of novels in the historical past which characterises the first three novels, and the greater part of *Aurélien*, is at first sight a curious feature, given the expectations of socialist realism. However, if we consider the historical framework of *Les Cloches de Bâle* and *Les Beaux Quartiers*, in other words the years preceding the First World War, and compare this with the respective dates of publication, 1934 and 1936, we can see that the ideological centre of interest in the two novels, in other words the build-up to war and the vested interests that the governing bourgeoisie has in the war, are preoccupations bound to be of contemporary concern in the latter half of the 1930s. The analysis of the growing power of the workers through the strikes and mass meetings in *Les Cloches de Bâle* and *Les Beaux Quartiers* takes on added significance when seen in the contemporary context of the *Front Populaire*. The parallels between the novels' historical framework and the contemporary political situation are echoed in Aragon's decision to base the Paris taxi drivers' strike of *Les Cloches de Bâle* upon an actual strike of 1933-1934. It is apparent that whilst the ideological views put forward in the novel all lie within a clear political framework, there
are differences of perspective. One can differentiate between ideological concepts which have a global application, those which are representative of general Marxist or socialist principles, and those which are specific to the historical moment, and are often the expression of a specific PCF line. Within this framework, it becomes obvious that while the denunciation of anarchism in *Les Cloches de Bâle* relates to the position of the socialists in the 1890s and early twentieth century, other points raised in *Les Cloches de Bâle* and *Les Beaux Quartiers* such as the working-class opposition to war and the equation of war with industrial capitalism, are not specific to a particular period in history but are representative of basic socialist principles. Other issues such as the position of women in the socialist struggle, seen through Clara Zetkin, the barriers between the leisured and the working-classes, as seen in *Aurélien*, are instances of much more general ideological principles. At the opposite end of the scale, many of the ideological views expressed in *Les Communistes*, written only shortly after the Second World War, are very specific, and refer to the detail of the PCF's reaction to the Soviet-German pact, its interpretation of the reasons behind the war and its attitude to the surrender of 1940.

Whilst the establishing of an ideological position in order to ensure 'l'éducation des masses dans l'esprit du socialisme', is a central requirement of socialist realism, it is one which evidently caused Aragon some difficulties. In his attempts to use hero figures to convey his ideological message, he has come up against, and frequently failed to resolve, the problem of creating fictionally convincing characters, with the result that both major and minor positive heroes tend to be defined solely in terms of the political ideas they expound.
Convinced of the rightness of their cause, they lack the uncertainty or fallibility which make for more plausible individuals. Often reduced to vehicles for the expression of a set of political ideas, they fail to evolve in personal terms. In the case of historical figures, such as Jaurès, this is perhaps more acceptable, in that they are outside the fictional framework of the novel. It is less easy to make the same excuse for Clara Zetkin since, although she is a historical figure, she is deliberately incorporated into the narrative structure of the novel in order to form a counterpoint to Catherine and Diane. It is interesting to note that it is in the novels where the ideological content is much less in evidence, *Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale* and *Aurélien*, where Aragon concentrates more on the inner life of his characters, that we find the most sustained and sympathetic development of character.

When Aragon uses discussion to elucidate ideological views, the problem is similar. Participants in the discussion are not differentiated as individuals and remain subordinated to the expression of their views, to such an extent that their utterances can be considered more as a type of disguised authorial intervention than the expression of a deeply held personal belief. The use of speeches or the reproduction in the narrative of documents elaborating an ideological standpoint are certainly efficient in terms of conveying a specific idea and are usually presented in suitably authentic contexts. It is, however, when Aragon proceeds indirectly, as in the series of oppositions I have outlined, that the analysis of ideological material is most successful in aesthetic terms.

One issue which is not addressed by Aragon is the effectiveness of these methods in achieving the 'transformation idéologique et
(1)'éducation des masses dans l'esprit du socialisme.' It is perhaps symptomatic of Aragon's lack of comment about stylistic considerations in socialist realism that he seems to assume a direct causal relationship between the reading of the novel and the desired effect. There would seem to be two factors impeding the accomplishment of this goal. Firstly, it is based upon the assumption that the 'masses' will indeed read the novels, in itself a problematic issue. Flower has commented that Les Cloches de Bâle is a work 'which requires a highly developed degree of literary awareness on the part of the reader if Aragon's purpose in it is to be fully detected.' This comment could equally well be applied to each of the first four novels of Le Monde réel, which, being based upon a nineteenth-century tradition of critical realism, are very literary. The links between the transformation of the masses and Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale and Aurélien, where the analysis of bourgeois individualism predominates, are not immediately evident. It is only with Les Communistes that Aragon produces a novel which is more in tune with the recent experiences of the working people, and whose more conversational and immediate tone does not require such a highly developed literary perception. Aragon had Les Communistes published in fascicules at regular intervals to enable readers to be able to afford them more easily, though according to interviews conducted by Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, Aragon's attempts to make Les Communistes more accessible were not universally successful. Leroux believes that Aragon's mistake in this novel was to focus not so much on ordinary people but on party directives:

le réalisme socialiste exigeait de l'œuvre d'art qu'elle soit éducative. Qui Aragon pensait-il éduquer, convaincre, gagner quand il faisait dire à l'un de ses communistes: 'Qu'est-ce que nous serons sans le parti? Des idiots comme les autres...pas plus loin
The problems of the receptiveness of the potential audience are exacerbated by the negative impact of ideology upon characterisation in the novel. The positive heroes and militants are unlikely to have much impact upon the reader if their individuality is subordinated to a political message, since the reader will not be convinced by them, and thus not encouraged to identify with them. Equally, they are unlikely to convince those with sophisticated expectations of the novel. The issue of the ideological transformation of the reader is, therefore, an intensely problematical one, more so than Aragon's confident assertions would lead us to believe.
NOTES

1. See Chapter 5
2. From the statutes of the Union of Soviet Writers, La Littérature Internationale, No.3, 1934
3. Ibid.
4. The word 'ideology' is used here to mean a body of ideas belonging to a particular political system.
5. Rufus W. Mathewson, The Positive Hero in Russian Literature, p.2
6. Hugo, Poète réaliste, p.28
7. See chapter 5, note 12
8. Suleiman, Authoritarian Fictions, p.106 (author's emphasis)
9. Ibid., p.108
10. Garaudy, L'Itinéraire d'Aragon, p.336
11. See chapter 7
12. See note 9 above
13. See chapter 7 on the transformation of Armand.
14. C. Roy, Aragon, pp.100-1. Quoted by Savage, Malraux, Sartre and Aragon as political novelists, p.44
15. It is worth pointing out that these exemplary characters are not exclusively male. Aragon made it clear that he intended to consider above all the work of women in the war, and that he intended the title of the novel to be read in the feminine.
16. The official line on the pact did not emerge until a day or two after the news had broken. See Adereth, The French Communist Party, a critical history 1920-84, p.92
17. See pp.163-64 of this chapter.
18. R. Pascal, 'Aragon - Les Communistes', Modern Quarterly, Summer
1952, p.177

19. See note 15 above

20. Garaudy p.397

21. This point is elaborated more fully in chapter 5.

22. This might seem to contradict what Armand Barbentane has to say at the end of the novel about the continuation of the war, but in fact it reflects distinct policies promoted by the PCF at different points in the war. In the early stages of the war, the PCF first supported and then opposed the war, calling for a peace agreement, while after the fall of Paris it rejected the capitulation and called for a transformation of the war into a national war. See Adereth, *The French Communist Party* pp.95-107, for a fuller treatment of PCF policy during the war.

23. VI pp.325-26. In the second version of the novel, Borman is given his real name: Jacques Solomon, the PCF scientist.


25. See p.165 of this chapter.


27. Ibid., pp.57-59

28. Bibrowska, p.74

29. *Les Beaux Quartiers*, p.442. The pacifist rally at the Pré Saint-Gervais has in turn been seen in opposition to the parade at Longchamp: 'où parade le Paris militariste et chauvin'. Bou Mansour, 'Le traitement du thème politique dans *Le Monde réel* d'Aragon', p.107

30. See Suleiman, pp.58-61 for an examination of the oppositions in the Armand/Edmond story.

31. Margareth Molodoshanin, 'Louis Aragon: the novel and political...
commitment', p.120

32. M.J. Green has analysed the contemporary relevance to readers in the 1930s of the first three novels of Le Monde réel, in Fiction in the Historical Present. French Writers and the Thirties, pp.63-76

33. Molodoshanin also lists issues of contemporary relevance in Les Beaux Quartiers, op.cit., pp.135-36

34. See note 2 above.

35. Ibid.

36. Flower, Literature and the Left, p.116

37. Leroux quotes from interviews describing reactions to Les Communistes:

'J'ai essayé mais ça m'a ennuyé... c'était embêtant, ça me rasait, j'en ai lu un petit peu... j'en ai surtout énormément entendu parler par les Wurms, etc., dans les Batailles du Livre. "As-tu Les Communistes, camarade?" "Pourquoi ne lis-tu pas Les Communistes, camarade?" Les gens les achetaient par devoir, les malheureuses ménagères.'

Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, Au Service du Parti, p.281

38. Ibid., p.280
CHAPTER SEVEN

TRANSFORMATION

Whilst the potential transforming effect of Aragon's fiction may be problematical in practice, the notion of the writer helping to bring about social transformation nonetheless remains a central pillar of his interpretation of socialist realism:

les hommes sont appelés à jouer un rôle historique dans la transformation même de l'homme, dans ce passage de l'homme de la société de classes à l'homme de la société sans classes. (PRS p.13)

The theme of transformation is a prominent one in the cycle of Le Monde réel, though it centres on the transformation of individuals rather than of society as a whole. The depiction of transformation on the radical social scale envisaged by the Soviet proponents of socialist realism in the wake of the 1917 revolution is clearly inappropriate to France in the 1930s and 1940s where, despite the heady days of the Front Populaire and the growing strength of the working class (which Aragon does depict in the strikes and demonstrations described in Les Cloches de Bâle and Les Beaux Quartiers), the capitalist system is well and truly entrenched. Aragon therefore chooses to examine transformation on an individual level through the progression of various characters from states lacking in social awareness to varying degrees and types of commitment, some political, some not. It is this process of the transformation of the individual, through which the novel highlights the way in which society at large should be moving, which seems to be Aragon's personal response to this particular feature of the theory of socialist realism. In fact Aragon felt, during the bleaker
periods of the war, when change seemed remote, that the fictional exploration of change was the only way of clinging on to hope of a more widespread transformation:

en même temps, j'ai commencé (au printemps 42) à écrire Aurélien. Elsa venait de me donner l'assurance, me donnait chaque jour par ce qu'elle me lisait du Cheval Blanc l'assurance de ce que, même dans les conditions du désastre français, le roman, c'est-à-dire l'écriture indirecte, demeurait la seule expression valable de l'espoir, la preuve de la croyance profonde en la possibilité de changer le monde."

Essentially, this transformation is expressed in terms of the traditional pattern of the hero searching for authentic values in an inauthentic world. The pattern, though, is by no means uniform. I would disagree with Bibrowska's rather simplified view of the main characters of Le Monde réel:

Tous les personnages principaux du Monde Réel s'engagent vers l'existence romanesque dans un état de profond nihilisme. Une angoissante prise de conscience que leur vie manque de contenus authentiques les pousse soudain à la recherche de significations pour combler ce néant, pour survivre.

Certainly each of them has in common the search for values, but of all of them, perhaps only Pierre Mercadier in Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale could be accused of nihilism, rejecting as he does all the values of his society, with nothing but his individualistic vision to replace them. The other major characters all begin with a certain set of values which they eventually come to reject or, as in the case of Aurélien, to re-embrace.

The transformation which the characters effect in themselves, their path to commitment, is frequently a social one, presented as a process of déclassement, or as Alain Huraut describes it, 'déracinement'.

This process embodies for Aragon not merely an illustration of growing
political commitment, but more specifically exemplifies the movement of certain elements of the bourgeoisie towards the working class, as envisaged by Marx and Engels, a movement which Aragon wished to explore in fiction:

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(...) 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. Et ce sont les premières formes de ce passage que j'ai voulu décrire.4

As Aragon indicates, the déclassement is sometimes difficult to achieve, and the tracing of the path to commitment has two distinct stages: the rejection of the old value system, that of the bourgeoisie, and the search for a new system to replace it. It is the passage from the first to the second stage which proves to be the problematic area. In fact, in certain cases, the transition proves to be impossible: Mercadier is unable to renounce his pursuit of individual freedom, and Aurélien Leurtillois chooses the opposite of déclassement; reclassement. Whilst the progression towards socialist values is evident in some characters, Armand Barbentane and Catherine Simonidzé most notably, others do not commit themselves to a specific ideology. The final destination is in a sense of lesser importance, in fictional terms at least, than the journey itself, which is what fascinates Aragon, as is perhaps indicated by the greater depth of analysis devoted to those who find commitment problematic as opposed to the briefer and often simplistic treatment awarded those who have already arrived at their destination.

Catherine Simonidzé in Les Cloches de Bâle, a character created at the instigation of Elsa Triolet as a corrective to the negative
figure of Diane de Nettencourt, embodies Aragon's desire to show the movement of a member of the bourgeoisie over to the working class, though Catherine's development is in practice much less simple than this. From the beginning of the second section we see her ill at ease in her social environment, where her mother and her sister cling to bourgeois respectability despite their poverty. Catherine, 'affreusement déplacée et malheureuse', (CB p.166) is a rather solitary figure and increasingly critical of the role that she, as a woman, is expected to play in society, especially in her relationships with men:

Elle ne voulait pas être la femme d'un homme, elle avait peur de se voir définie par l'homme à qui elle se donnerait. Bref, tout ce langage de propriétaire de l'amour, en même temps qu'elle le niait et le trouvait absurde, elle en était assez prisonnière pour craindre le plaisir, comme une hypothèque sur demain. (CB p.175)

Indeed her political development begins from a feminist stand-point. This is not to say that she perceives the oppression of women to be a more important issue than the oppression of the working class, simply that initially her only awareness is of the former:

L'opposition fondamentale dans la société, la contradiction criarde, n'était-ce pas entre l'homme et la femme qu'elle se trouvait?... La Révolution, c'était sa place enfin faite à la femme. (pp.178-79)

It is not until she witnesses the brutal repression of the strike at Cluses that Catherine is brought face to face with the working class, and her sense of injustice widens to encompass political divisions, and crystallises from abstract into concrete rebellion. Her initial response, however, is emotional rather than intellectual, but it has the effect of creating a decisive break between herself and her lover Jean Thiébault. As the striking factory workers advance towards the house of the factory owner to burn it down, Catherine's instinctive reaction is
one of support for the workers, and is radically different from that of Jean:

'Ils veulent brûler la maison! Il faut les arrêter!'
C'était Jean qui avait dit cela en prenant son élan vers la foule. Quelque chose de primitif dans le jeune homme le poussait en avant. La main de Catherine le serra du poignet comme de l'acier. Il voulait se dégager, étonné. Leurs yeux se croisèrent(...) Il pressentit confusément qu'il venait de la perdre. Il répeta: 'Ils veulent brûler la maison! - Ils ont raison', dit-elle, et lâcha son poignet.(pp.195-96)

Her instinctive sympathy for the workers is reinforced when she accompanies a young worker who has been shot to his mother's home. The vulnerability of the dead boy, the poverty of the home and the way in which Catherine is so readily accepted by the mother all add to the emotional impact of the experience, ensuring a complete change of her perspective on life:

Elle va vers la campagne, vers la solitude où retrouver ce calme qui ne sera jamais plus l'insouciance antérieure.(p.212)

Jean's calm acceptance of the situation, representative of their class, angers her, and ensures that their relationship changes irrevocably:

Alors, il acceptait que tout, la grève, la lutte, l'héroïsme et finalement ces morts, tout cela aboutit à centraliser la clientèle, que cela profitât à un patron, à...
Et Jean s'éloignait d'elle par cela même. Il était bien d'un autre monde, un ennemi.(p.219)

From this point onwards, Catherine's rejection of bourgeois values exists on a dual level: sexual and political. She rejects not only oppressive bourgeois attitudes to women and morality, but also the capitalist oppression of the workers, which she has witnessed for the first time at Cluses. Yet her revolt remains directionless, her wandering in the night after the shooting symbolic of this. Her
emotional life too is representative of her lack of direction. She has a series of unsatisfactory affairs with men whom she abandons almost immediately because, despite the physical pleasure she finds, there is never any common intellectual or political ground between herself and her lovers.

Catherine manages to find a focus for her ideas when she becomes involved with a group of anarchists in Paris. She finds with them common ground in her feminist and political discontents. The anarchists' antimilitarism attracts her, for in it she finds expression for her anger at male domination:

L'antimilitarisme chez elle était une révolte contre les hommes, contre tous les hommes, et pas seulement Mercurot ou Jean Thiébault. (p.227)

She goes along with the anarchists' ambition to overthrow society, for in it she sees an opportunity to break man's power over woman:

Oui, elle était anarchiste, parce que toute autorité, tout gouvernement, tout droit, tout état, c'était toujours le pouvoir de l'homme sur la femme. (p.257)

Her political involvement is, however, problematic on two different levels. Firstly, there is the question of the validity of the anarchists' objectives and methods, to which Catherine adheres. At the time of writing Les Cloches de Bâle, it was already some years since Aragon had joined the PCF and moved away from the Surrealists, with their objective of total revolution. It is this same absolutism which he is criticising in Catherine's adherence to the anarchist movement, whose members are more interested in absolutes than in the welfare of the working class. Their simplistic views are not rooted in reality:
Catherine is attracted not to the routine of the political struggle, which she later experiences with the socialists, but to the violence and glamour of the anarchists' methods:

"Tout pâlissait, dans ces combats de l'organisation quotidienne, devant les feux de la Révolution auxquels elle ne manquait jamais de les comparer. Les attentats politiques, l'éclat d'une bombe dans un lieu public, avaient à ses yeux toute la force lyrique, le prestige, qu'elle reprochait avec une moue à tout ce 'socialisme' d'ignorer. (CB pp.303-4)"

Her political footing is thus presented as being very shaky. Secondly, and more importantly, as regards the overall progress of Catherine's political development, she is unable to rid herself of a sense of alienation, which prevents her from committing herself whole-heartedly to the anarchist movement. She leads a double life, maintaining her links with her family and fulfilling their expectations of her, a life which is completely detached from her involvement with the anarchists. While she realises the vacuousness of her life at home, she is unable to break away from it:

"Il est certain que Catherine éprouvait comme une tare, comme une sorte de péché, cette impossibilité à se déclasser véritablement, qui l'attachait à l'univers borné de la rue Blaise-Desgoffe. (p.234)"

She feels guilty at her privileged social background which, she believes, automatically places her among the oppressors of society, despite her rejection of bourgeois values. Libertad, the leader of the anarchist group, reassures her on this point, maintaining that the traditional class divisions are absurd, preferring to divide people into
two different classes: those working to overthrow the system and those determined to support it. Yet this reassurance does not solve her problems in the long run, and Aragon's ironic comment on Libertad's explanation indicates why:

Catherine, du fait qu'elle venait rue de la Barre, se sentait dans le bon panier. Confort intellectuel. (p. 234)

It is not enough merely to want to be on the workers' side. The urge to commitment must be accompanied by a complete rejection of all that binds her to her former life. This is of course precisely what Catherine is incapable of doing. Rejecting bourgeois values comes easily to her, it forms a natural extension of her rejection of patriarchy. Yet she is reluctant to reject with it the comfortable lifestyle which her social status and, more importantly, her father's monthly cheque which spares her any financial worries, make possible; hence her feelings of insuperable alienation from a class to which she is only superficially attached:

Mais elle n'avait pas su prendre son parti de cette rupture, elle ne s'était pas attachée ailleurs. Elle avait eu des curiosités de voyageuse, et rien de plus. Jamais elle n'avait pu se lier avec les autres, avec l'ennemi des siens, de ceux qu'elle avait l'horreur aujourd'hui encore de reconnaître comme les siens. C'est qu'elle avait gardé de sa vie passée les commodités, même dérisoires(...) Sa liberté, le grand mot dans la vie qui l'avait menée à la remorque, cela avait toujours été ce misérable pouvoir de ne pas travailler, de flâner, et c'était cela même, le petit mandat de Bakou, qui l'avait maintenue (qu'elle le voulût ou non) dans les rangs dont elle croyait sortir. (p. 293)

Driven to the point of despair by these realisations, she is about to commit suicide when she is rescued by Victor Dehaynin, who subsequently introduces her to the socialist world of Paris. On the evening of her attempted suicide, he takes her to a union meeting, and in the midst of
a crowd of workers for the first time, she is made even more acutely aware of the distance between her mode of existence and theirs, not only on the political level, but also on a day-to-day level. The pressures of work and the need to earn one's living are completely foreign to her:

Catherine ne se faisait aucune idée de ce que c'est là journée de travail. C'est peut-être ce qui sépare avec la plus grand netteté la bourgeoisie du prolétariat(...) Sa vie, à elle, constituait le plus grave obstacle à la connaissance d'hommes dont la vie était si différente. Il y avait entre elle et eux le petit mandat de Bakou. (pp.302-3)

Through Victor, Catherine finds a practical focus for her desire to commit herself by helping the workers. She offers to help in the organisation of the taxi drivers' strike, but she underestimates the difficulties of the transition from leisure to work and rapidly becomes disillusioned with the daily routine. The problem of work remains an obstacle to her integration into the working class, since for her, work can never be anything other than a necessary evil, while for Victor it is a positive value, a means of gaining self-respect and, he adds, the only authentic way in which women can prove their equality with men. There can be no progress for her as long as she clings to her old attitudes and way of life:

Tant qu'elle n'aurait pas accepté sa part de travail commun, elle ne pouvait qu'être une étrangère dans le monde où chacun gagne sa vie. (p.383)

The fact that she does not have to earn her living gives Catherine a quite different set of priorities and ideals from members of the working class. At the Lafargues' funeral for example, the mere detail of the playing of a 'bourgeois' funeral march is enough to call everything into question for her, when evidently the truly important issues lie
elsewhere. Similarly, she can permit herself the luxury of an emotional reaction which others can ill afford. So, hardly paying any attention to the funeral speeches as a whole, Catherine isolates those words which have significance for her as an individual:

Les femmes socialistes de Russie... Ces mots étaient pour elle un alcool véritable. (p.328)

Catherine returns to Berck to convalesce, feeling that she has made no progress at all since the crucial experience at Cluses, years earlier. She is even distanced from the working class in her illness, since she can afford to pay for her treatment and convalescence. Yet while she is in Berck, the turning point comes unexpectedly. She shelters an anarchist who is on the run from the police. This and other isolated incidents make her aware of her selfish self-containment, cushioned from the harsher realities of the world. She returns to Paris to help the taxi drivers in the final days of the strike. The death of the anarchist Bonnot, whom she had once admired, causes her to reflect on the contrast between the demise of the strike and that of Bonnot, and finally she comes to the realisation of her mistaken allegiance. Now she sees that true heroism belonged to the strikers and that she had been wrong to scorn the routine tasks which had supported the strike:

Tout le romantisme de sa jeunesse était pour qu'elle applaudît encore à la chute des Titans, à l'épopée d'éclair qui avait pendant cinq mois sinistrement illuminé un monde. Mais à ce va-tout, à ce qui perd gagne, à ce pile ou face, s'opposaient les cent quarante-quatre jours de lutte des chauffeurs. Elle ne pouvait plus avoir ce mépris des petites tâches quotidiennes, ce mépris des syndicats, du socialisme, qu'elle avait éprouvé jadis avec toute la supériorité de quelqu'un qui s'en passe, et qui mange après tout chaque jour. (p.406)

She travels to London where she remedies her ignorance of the working-
class struggle by reading, and sees their struggle for herself amongst Welsh miners, though even at this stage she is unable to renounce her comfortable lifestyle and feels guilty. Her contradictions are particularly apparent in London where she meets up with Brunel. Although she despises the man, his company satisfies a need in her for luxury and comfort:

Catherine le méprisait, et ces sorties contrastaient très singulièrement avec ses occupations, ses fréquentations habituelles, mais il y avait en elle une espèce de besoin, une contradiction(...) Elle aimait, à la fois, et haïssait le luxe. Elle voulait certains soirs oublier la misère. Son socialisme n'était pas encore de très bon teint.(p.411)

Thus, despite the affirmation in the final pages of the novel, — 'vacillante Catherine, comme elle s'approche lentement de la lumière'(p.425) — her ambivalent attitude to material comfort seems likely to preclude Catherine from ever undergoing the kind of transformation which would put her on a parallel with Clara Zetkin, the idealised figure Aragon presents us with at the end of the novel.

Catherine's journey towards commitment, whilst inconclusive, has broached some important issues, notably that of alienation, involved in the transformation of the bourgeois character, which will recur in the analysis of Armand Barbentane, the central figure in Les Beaux Quartiers. Armand has certain features in common with Catherine, and although different, his political transformation is equally problematic.

Like Catherine his upbringing has left him in complete ignorance of the conditions of working-class life. He knows that he instinctively dislikes the 'bas quartiers' of his home town Sérianne: 'la ville basse, le faubourg, avec l'usine, le relent de chocolat, les laideurs de la vie
moderne et sordide', (p. 113) though, despite his early attachment to his own comfortable life, he does not undergo Catherine's anguished indecision when he eventually decides to sever his financial connections with his family. Nor does he experience from the beginning her sense of alienation from his own milieu. In fact, he is initially very conformist. He is excessively pious and, far from being aware of social injustice, is shown in the early part of the novel to be actively involved with the right-wing group Pro Patria, whose function was to train young people to take over specialised jobs in the event of strikes, thus reinforcing the power of the ruling class. His membership of the group is, however, less a matter of conviction than of obedience to the instructions of his confessor, and he is completely ignorant of the issues involved. His first contact with the working class in the course of his work for Pro Patria does, however, arouse in him a vague and uneasy sense of injustice, but this is quite unfocused and largely inspired by his religious beliefs:

le jeune homme avait comme une espèce d'idée de l'injustice sociale, à cause du Christ, des vendeurs du Temple, du charpentier Joseph, et il n'était pas très sûr du rôle qu'il jouait. (p. 127)

He soon renounces his faith, however, severs his links with Pro Patria and begins to read socialist newspapers. He rejects his father's political values and espouses antimilitarist views. At first, this is just a means of opposing his father, but he eventually becomes convinced by his own words:

Il avait commencé à jouer le rôle de l'antimilitarisme, et ça y était: il s'était pris au sérieux. (p. 169)

It is made clear, however, that the political significance of these acts
is limited; Armand remains as ignorant of the issues as before. His real motivation is merely the desire to demonstrate his independence and rebellion vis-à-vis his family:

Pour prouver son indépendance et avec ce même goût du schisme qui l'avait jeté dans l'hérésie nestorienne, au débarqué, il se munit des journaux qu'il n'eût point osé lire devant les siens(...) La lecture de ces feuilles faillit avoir sur lui tout juste l'effet inverse de celui que lui-même y cherchait. Ce maudit esprit de contradiction(...) blessé de ce qu'il y avait d'outrancier dans les articles qu'il parcourait, sautant ce qu'il ne comprenait point, à cause du jargon(...) Armand se regimbait devant ce qu'il trouvait sommaire dans tout cela.(p.172)

Socialism is for him merely another role to play. His confusion and ignorance are evident in his interview with the socialist Vinet, and it becomes increasingly clear that for him, socialism is envisaged principally as a means of voicing his rebellion against his father, and is a false start to his political development. The true beginning comes with the double drama of the suicide of Angélique, the servant girl, and the death of a worker during an electoral meeting. Like Catherine, Armand is forced by events into a recognition of injustice; and, like her, his perception is an emotional one:

La ville lui apparaissait comme un monstre qui vient de broyer deux victimes dans sa mâchoire(...) la vie venait de prendre une teinte affreuse et nouvelle, et il ne semblait pas que demain pût recommencer comme hier, après tout cela. Quel était le lien, le sens de toutes ces choses épouvantables? Il ne pouvait le dire. Il ne tenait pas le système. De tout cela seulement se dégageait le sentiment d'une monstrueuse injustice, d'une injustice triomphante et sans corps saisissable, à la merci de laquelle on se trouvait à proportion qu'on était pauvre, ou simplement sensible.(pp.254-55)

He makes no intellectual link between what Vinet tells him and what he sees happening for himself:

Toute une forêt de problèmes surgissait, où ses inquiétudes socialistes ne savaient comment s'inscrire.(pp.317)
He attempts to seek the answer to his questions in philosophy but finds nothing, and even rejects this approach as being on a parallel with religion: 'des systèmes destinés à dorer la pilule'. (p.318) He is unable to find a satisfactory solution to his dilemma because he too, like Catherine, is cut off from the realities of social injustice by virtue of his social status. Whilst he feels shamed by his financial dependence, he also feels an instinctive repugnance towards the idea of working for his living:

"il avait été élevé, comme tous ses pareils, dans l'horreur chrétienne du travail." (p.319)

He has no notion of the reality of poverty and so, when he offers to give up his status to be with Yvonne, later in the novel, she realises, as Armand cannot, that this is a romantic dream for him. In reality, despite his aspirations to something he cannot at this stage define, he is no further advanced than at the time of his work for Pro Patria and the vague sensation of guilt he experienced then. His brief affair at school with Yvonne is significant in that it makes him aware of the reality of working-class life in a more personal and hence more immediate way, and he begins to lose his fear of leaving behind his familiar way of life:

"C'était drôle, mais dans la compagnie d'Yvonne, il perdait cette terreur qu'on lui avait insufflée toute l'enfance, la terreur de se déclasser(...) Il avait appris sans trop savoir comment qu'il avait affaire à un être humain." (p.385)

Despite this important development, Armand still floats in a no-man's-land, eager to reject the values of his family and class, but still lacking the essential motivating force to do so. His reading of L'Humanité remains a gesture of defiance aimed at his father, and the
world of work, which is presented in Les Cloches de Bâle as the way to political salvation, still fills him with apprehension. It is not until Armand finally breaks his ties with his family and goes to Paris, that he experiences at first hand and for the first time, a reality which until then he had only dimly perceived through Angélique and Yvonne. His experiences as he wanders through Les Halles at night are critical in this respect. He witnesses the ruthlessness with which the police turn on first an old woman and then a drunken man. The vivid description of the carcasses of meat hanging in the market is used as an emotive commentary on the treatment accorded the defenceless victims of society:

invinciblement l'homme aux mains des agents s'identifiaient à cette viande décapitée, qui parlait avec une éloquence sanglante de l'anéantissement des cas individuels.(pp.414-15)

Later in the novel, he is caught up in the demonstration against La Loi de Trois Ans, at the Pré Saint-Gervais and is made aware of his ignorance of the working-class struggle and of the fraternity which binds the people together:

il donne attention à des visages dans la foule, marqués par le travail et la faim, à ces jeunes de la section de la Goutte d'Or qui sont non loin de lui(...) à la force et à la jeunesse dont il sent confusément la fraternité. (p.438)

As might be anticipated from his ignorance of the political realities, Armand's response to his experience at the demonstration is once more an emotional one:

Il est emporté par une force qu'il ne juge pas. Il est au sommet de quelque chose, dont il n'a point connu la base.(p.441)

He is moved by the atmosphere and by the words of Jaurès, which carry
him along, although he does not understand them. Yet even here there remains a class barrier, as with Catherine, which cannot be breached by good will alone. The episode with the prostitute Carmen during the police raid, when his watch is stolen, takes on symbolic value for him, signifying the breaking of a sentimental bond between him, his family and his past life:

Ce type qui n'avait rien de rien était encore rattaché à son passé, à la vie de famille par cet objet qui venait de disparaître. Il en eût le cœur gros. Il se sentit en même temps allégé. Ce vol était pourtant comme un symbole. (p. 459)

But it is finally the experience of physical deprivation, to the point of near starvation, an experience which Catherine never underwent, which has the effect of putting into perspective Armand's reservations about severing his social ties and obliging him to take action:

Comment allait-il faire? Travailler? Il y avait deux jours, il se demandait s'il fallait ou non travailler. Maintenant, les données du problème avaient varié. Il aurait bien voulu travailler. Comme les autres. (p. 491)

Without this external impetus it is difficult to imagine Armand, as presented so far, ever being able to make the break, rather like Catherine. However, it cannot yet be said that once Armand begins work his political transformation is in any sense complete, for he is quite blinded by his sense of solidarity with other men to the implications of working through a strike:

Il y a l'étrange couloiment d'hommes pour qui cela est la loi naturelle, et la fierté virile et nouvelle d'Armand, de se sentir plié à la loi des autres hommes. (p. 620)

Given the gradual nature of his development up until this stage, his realisation that what he is doing is in fact a contradiction of
solidarity, comes with perhaps unlikely speed. Nonetheless, his experiences over the past months suddenly fall into place and make sense. The deaths of Angélique and the labourer Justin, his memories of Yvonne and the tram driver he worked with in Sérianne make his position clear: despite having renounced his former life, he is, as long as he breaks the strike, 'du côté des maîtres'(p.620), just as he was in the days of Pro Patria. His actions are contributing to the oppression of the workers with whom he believed he had achieved solidarity. Understanding finally dawns that being a worker is not enough, that the wider issues affecting his fellow men are more important than his own personal security and comfort, and with this realisation comes the final transition from purely individualistic revolt to the collective struggle. At last he is able to transcend his bourgeois origins. His déclassement is complete and is symbolised by his presenting himself at La Maison des Syndicats, despite the sacrifices entailed:

Un enthousiasme qui est l'épanouissement de cette force en lui grandie depuis l'enfance(...) un enthousiasme d'homme enfin l'entraîne au-delà de lui-même et lui fait négliger ce qu'il perd. (p.624)

His decision also underpins the notion of a continued struggle, for despite the fact that the strike has failed, his arrival before the strike committee represents the prospect of hope and the renewal of the workers' fight for justice.

Armand's transformation has already gone decisively beyond that of Catherine. He has accomplished the transition from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat, and his development is pursued further in the fifth novel of Le Monde réel. This development helps to flesh out the character and give him credibility as a committed individual. It also
helps to put into perspective the rather idealised state in which he is left at the end of *Les Beaux Quartiers*. Aragon makes it clear that the process of transformation is more complex than Armand's sudden decision at the end of the novel would suggest. At the beginning of *Les Communistes* he is a fully fledged Communist with an important editorial position on the staff of *L'Humanité*. When war breaks out he is very conscious of his delicate position in the army, at a time when Communists are the targets of so much hatred and suspicion, and so is very much aware of the need to behave in an exemplary fashion and to encourage his men to do the same:

> Chaque communiste peut être le point de départ d'une provocation contre le Parti(...) Chaque communiste est responsable de ce qui arrivera si on le met dans un mauvais cas... 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. (*LC* II p.37)

Despite his concern for his men, and despite the fact that, unlike many intellectuals and workers in the party, his convictions are not shaken by the Soviet-German pact, Armand still does not feel completely at ease within his adopted class. The sense of isolation which he feels is partly accounted for by the burden of responsibility he carries as an officer and as a Communist:

> L'étrange sentiment de se trouver à la fois isolé, et responsable pas seulement pour soi, mais pour tous les autres. Pour tout le Parti. (*II* p.36)

It is also made clear that while he has gone through the process of *déclassement* and is fully committed to the party, his social origins weigh heavily upon him, as Catherine's do upon her. This is exacerbated by the fact that he is an officer, and the physical gulf is illustrated
particularly vividly on the train to Coulommiers at the start of the war when, although he chooses to travel with the men instead of the officers, the acute sense of not belonging reminds him of his early difficulties of integration into the working class:

L'usine à Levallois, l'impossibilité physique de soutenir un travail auquel il était déjà trop tard pour se plier, toutes les étapes de ce voyage qui devait faire de lui l'homme qu'il est devenu(...) Armand se sentait encore en dette envers les autres, pour son enfance, pour les siens, même abandonnés. Il se disait parfois que ces scrupules le rendait moins utile au Parti qu'il aurait pu l'être: un homme sorti du peuple, tout droit, ne pense pas à tout ça.(II pp.23-24)

He is aware that his antecedents have given rise to suspicion on the part of his comrades, and is willing to concede that there is justification for it, given what he sees as the betrayal of an intellectual such as Patrice Orfilat. The sense of alienation persists despite his comrades' faith in him and his absolute political conviction, which finds its expression in his ability to explain convincingly the Communist interpretation of events to others who are less sure. He clashes with another Communist, Lombard, who believes that it is Armand's intellectual purity vis-à-vis the demands of daily life which is the factor hindering his full integration into the working class, where ideas are less important than acts. This intellectual barrier is in evidence in the final volume of the novel when Armand is offered the chance to escape from detention. His pride and idealism cause him to refuse to desert, as he terms it, and suddenly he realises with some considerable pain the extent to which he is still conditioned by his upbringing:

Ne vient-il pas de céder à un préjugé de sa classe, de sa classe d'origine. Jamais un ouvrier n'aurait rejeté ainsi, pour une idée
The same reflex is evident when, attempting to avoid capture by the Germans, Armand is lent some working clothes by a miner, Eugène Decker. At first Armand is reluctant to put them on, until he fights the instinctive reaction:

Ce que c'est que l'éducation! Cela lui semblait impossible de quitter l'uniforme, de se déguiser...(VI p.201)

Aragon has acknowledged certain parallels between himself as a young man and Armand, and it seems likely that the alienation experienced by both Armand and Catherine is indicative of certain difficulties of integration which Aragon himself experienced in his early years as a Communist. He confesses in 1967 that he initially felt isolated as an intellectual in a party which was dominated by people of working-class origin, who felt a certain animosity to the more privileged intellectuals:

Quand j'ai adhéré au parti, ce n'était pas chose très facile que d'y demeurer pour un intellectuel de mon espèce.

This hostility towards intellectuals is documented elsewhere:

Entre 1923 et 1931, les dirigeants du parti se soucient fort peu des intellectuels, quand ils ne manifestent pas à leur égard une défiance ouverte.

Ultimately though, as Catherine and Armand realise, the gap between worker and intellectual, although an endemic problem, is not an adequate reason for the latter to hold itself back from total commitment. On the contrary, it should spur the intellectual on to greater effort, a belief which Aragon states quite categorically:
C'est en devenant les meilleurs agitateurs pour la paix qu'ils vaincroient leur isolement d'avec les autres hommes, qu'ils feront disparaître ce fossé entre intellectuels et manuels dont ils sont les premiers à souffrir.

In this way, through the collective struggle, Armand is able to dominate his feelings of isolation, and become the figure to which others look for reassurance. Catherine, on the other hand, is left struggling with her isolation, though with some hope of success.

Essentially the transformation of Catherine and Armand, their path to commitment, is traced along very similar lines, and although Armand moves closer to commitment than does Catherine, the two characters can be grouped together. Aragon analyses a very different sort of transformation in another pair of individuals in *Les Communistes*: Jean de Moncey and Cécile Wisner.

Unlike the transformation and accompanying déclassement analysed in *Les Cloches de Bâle* and *Les Beaux Quartiers*, the treatment of the path to commitment in *Les Communistes* contains no overtly political outcome for Jean or Cécile as it does for Armand, nor on the other hand, the reluctance to accept the logical consequences of commitment and déclassement displayed by Catherine. The apolitical and rather inconclusive nature of the commitment portrayed in *Les Communistes* through Jean and Cécile seems rather paradoxical in what is otherwise the most strongly politicised novel of the whole cycle. This is not to say that politics have no place in Jean's and Cécile's development - both become more socially and politically aware in the course of the novel - but once more it seems to be the analysis of development rather than the nature of its resolution which is of interest to Aragon.

In the early stages of his development, Jean de Moncey is somewhat reminiscent of the young Armand Barbentane. He displays the same
excessively religious and mystical tendencies, and just as quickly as
Armand, loses his faith, whilst retaining his tendency to excessiveness
in another form:

il n'a pas changé, (...) toujours excessif, buté... seulement Dieu
n'est plus l'objet de ses excès.(I p.195)

His political awareness, like that of Armand, is initially rather vague.
In comparison to his friend Nicolas d'Aigrefeuille, he does, however,
have a certain perception of what is going on in the world around him,
and he takes to reading L'Humanité while he is staying in his sister's
flat. This awakens a variety of emotions in him: he is shocked, his
curiosity is aroused, he is made aware of his ignorance, but remains
sceptical about the extent to which L'Humanité may be believed:

Probable que n'importe quel journal lui aurait fait le même effet,
à lui qui n'en lisait aucun(...) Même si on ne pouvait pas croire
exactement ce journal-là.(I p.67)

Despite a certain amount of flirting with politics, Jean remains
essentially detached from political and social reality, engrossed in his
nascent feelings for Cécile. He is drawn to introspection and what he
calls 'metaphysical anguish' which, he remarks, is granted little
attention in Communist philosophy:

Extraordinaire ce que la mort tient peu de place dans ce qu'ils
écrivent. Ils semblent absolument ignorer l'angoisse métaphysique.
(III p.111)

Such an observation displays the extent of Jean's ignorance of political
reality, as well as the nature of his priorities.

During the first months of the war, his ideas are in a state of
confusion. His emotional life is of paramount importance to him and he
remains detached from external events. He is for instance, ignorant of the function of trade unions, and yet sympathises with the persecuted Communists, to the extent that he impulsively says, when asked by Micheline if he is with the Communists: 'Oui, je suis avec vous...', (III p.109) without really knowing why he says it. At first he is incredulous that he could have said such a thing and so compromise his safety and freedom, and yet he later realises, when confronted by Sylviane's scorn of the people, that he feel quite strongly that 'on ne peut pas être contre le peuple'. (III p.159) His development continues very much in this vein, oscillating between a desire to know more about the Communists, together with a growing respect for them, and his brooding preoccupation with his emotional life. The two strands of his life come together at one stage, when he realises that the barriers keeping him and Cécile apart are social ones, and so not entirely separate from political life:

\[\text{il haïssait tout ce qui le séparait d'elle, il s'imaginait renversant ces barrières irrenversables. Pour que Cécile fût à lui, c'était un monde, une société qu'il fallait abattre. (III p.161)}\]

In its reference to overthrowing society the language here is specifically political. For all its political undertones, however, Jean's early response is an emotional rather than an intellectual one, a response common to both Catherine and Armand. His realisation that the distance between himself and Cécile is a social distance, is an echo of the final section of Les Cloches de Bâle where the idea is elaborated that only in a perfect, socialist society can authentic love be experienced. Jean is somehow aware of this, however dimly. Nonetheless, his political awareness remains very vague.

Despite his growing admiration for the Communists with whom he has
come into contact, his aspirations remain unclear, since his experience has been limited to his class of origin. Like Armand in Sérianne, he has no real conception of the realities of working-class life. His direct experience of the reality of injustice and suffering comes gradually through his friendship for and protection of Sylviane, a prostitute, and through his brief stay in prison following Sylviane's death when he declares:

J'en ai plus appris dans ces quelques jours de prison que dans toute ma vie(...) il faudra que j'aille à l'école(...) Je veux apprendre deux choses: le marxisme et le boxe.(III pp.330-31)

His experience as a medical aide during the war also contributes to his awareness of human suffering, and the influence upon him of his Communist friend Raoul Blanchard also adds to his knowledge. Nonetheless, by the end of the novel, Jean is still at the questioning stage, emphatically denying to his old teacher Cormeilles that he is a Communist, still trying to make sense of all the suffering he has seen and the emotions the war has aroused in him:

Tout ce temps de la guerre, il lui semblait n'avoir été qu'une machine à enregistrer des sensations, des souvenirs, sans les critiquer, sans bien les comprendre.(VI p.308)

We are left with the impression that for Jean, the journey is only just beginning.

Cécile's development from a carefree socialite into a person who faces and accepts her social responsibilities is more clearly documented and rationalised. In the early stages of the novel she is shown to be very naive of the harshness of reality, a result of the social isolation which the 'paradis sans ombre'(I pp.25-26) of her life has guaranteed:
elle aimait que les gens fussent beaux et propres, que la route fût bonne, et rapide la voiture; son livre favori était Le Grand Meaulnes. Elle n'imaginait pas plus le mal que la misère: l'un et l'autre existaient, voilà tout. On n'en voyait rien ni dans ce seizième où elle avait grandi(...) ni dans la propriété de ses parents, à vingt kilomètres de Biarritz. (I p.25)

She understands nothing of politics, and escapes from the practicalities of life into literature and music. Even at this stage, however, we sense in her, and she herself is aware of, a certain alienation from the rich and elegant people who surround her, even from her husband Fred. Her reaction is a purely instinctive one at this stage. She has as yet no independent standard by which to judge them, simply a perception that all she has held to be good is not so:

Fred comme son père, comme presque tous ceux qu'elle connaissait, étaient des gens horribles(...) Donc l'apparence était mensonge. Beaux, bien tenus, nets. Et l'âme sale(...) Sans doute ne faisaient-ils rien de très mal. Elle n'avait rien à leur reprocher, mais elle savait qu'il en était ainsi. (I p.31)

With the approach of war, reality, and more precisely, political reality, begins to impinge upon her consciousness in an unprecedented way, as it does upon the lives of so many others who had hitherto managed to avoid it. As Ambroise Berdoulat points out to her, politics is nowadays inescapable:

L'homme moderne a mis le pied dans l'engrenage infernal, il a beau crier, pleurer, supplier, fuir la politique...tout l'y ramène. (II p.229)

Her ignorance is brought home to her, and her desire for knowledge begins to emerge. Shortly afterwards, her distance from her social circle is intensified when she sees the disfiguring hatred aroused in them by the mere sight of L'Humanité:
This recognition, coupled with her growing love for Jean, creates in her the desire to relinquish her husband, her class and all that they entail. As with Catherine, Armand and, to some extent, Jean, this first movement away from the class of origin, is expressed in emotional terms, quite devoid of any political motivation. The emotions prompted in Cécile by the incident involving the copy of *L'Humanité* are entirely the result of her discovery of the vindictiveness in her husband and friends, not an expression of sympathy for *L'Humanité* and what it represents. Despite her willingness to dissociate herself from her social class, Cécile encounters at first a certain amount of difficulty in crossing the gulf between herself and people of lower social classes. This gulf is illustrated strikingly when Cécile offers to drive her maid, Eugénie, to the front to visit her wounded brother. Cécile finds that the helpful deed is not enough in itself to cross the divide between them, for despite the intimacy of the shared journey, there remains between employer and employee a constraint, born of the immense social gulf between them, which neither is able to overcome. The fact must also be taken into consideration that, at this juncture, Cécile has had no contact with the realities of life for classes other than her own. Her meeting with and care of Eugénie’s wounded brother Joseph are crucial to her education in this respect. A witness to his suffering, but also to his patience, and learning something of the life he used to lead, she begins to question the life she has always taken for granted:

Qu'est-ce donc que Cécile croit avoir à se faire pardonner? Rien. Et tout. D'être ce qu'elle est. D'être la femme de Fred. De mille
choses qu'elle pense et ne pourrait exprimer. (IV p.127)

When she learns that Joseph is a Communist, this creates a barrier between them, at least in Cécile's eyes, and she feels alone. Nonetheless, once this piece of information is out in the open, there is a kind of complicity between Cécile and Joseph to try and hide the knowledge of Cécile's discovery from Eugénie. Listening to Joseph, Cécile begins her second education:

elle écoutait Joseph, et de lui apprenait tant de choses, qu'elle s'y perdait, qu'elle découvrait son ignorance. (IV p.133)

There is a decisive development in Cécile's attitude to Fred when he is attacked at home under suspicious circumstances. She is unable to rationalise her feelings, for she accepts Fred's version of what happened, yet she is aware that there is much in Fred's life of which she is ignorant, and that there is much more involved than mere infidelity:

Pas un fait ne venait soutenir ses répugnances, la violence de ses sentiments. C'était un simple mouvement de dégoût qui s'était emparé d'elle devant cet homme trop beau, trop fort, trop riche et dont rien ne trahissait jamais le coeur. (IV p.254)

This development reinforces her growing alienation from her husband. She begins to see that people like Fred, determined to retain their financial power and fearful of all threats to it, are the ones responsible for the oppression of men such as Joseph, who is representative of thousands of workers who pay with their lives for the privileges of others:

Cette sauvagerie de tous les Fred maintenant régnante, et les Gigoix qui payaient, les uns comme Joseph lui-même, les autres dans les prisons, pour que Fred ait raison, et que rien ne change dans ce
She now realises that she can no longer retreat into her comfortable existence as she did before, when she believed that to turn her back on the ugliness of life was a way of fighting it. A decisive illustration of her new feelings of responsibility comes when Jean's sister, Yvonne, is arrested for clandestine Communist activities. Cécile's instinctive reaction is to help rather than run away from the situation. Her motivation to become involved is, however, shown to be double-edged, for it is Jean's sister she is helping, and her first action in Yvonne's flat is to take a photograph of Jean she finds there; but nonetheless, she readily accepts responsibility for Yvonne's children. Of course this is something quite different from the politicised transformation of Armand and Catherine. Indeed, despite Cécile's rejection of Fred and the class values which he represents, it is by no means clear that she intends to abandon the material advantages of her way of life to ally herself with the less privileged, so to speak of déclassement with reference to Cécile is clearly inappropriate, as it is for Jean. The issue of her motivation is further complicated by the way in which it is intimately bound up with her love for Jean, an issue which will be explored at greater length in a later chapter. Cécile states in her letter to Jean that while she has been impressed by the political convictions of Yvonne and Joseph, she is not fully convinced herself. She says of her conversations with Joseph:

Est-ce qu'il m'a convaincue? Je ne le pense pas tout à fait(...). Sur le fond, ces gens-là ont-ils raison? Comment pourrais-je en être sûre? Il y a dans les choses qu'ils disent (et j'ai ressenti cela vivement à nouveau avec Yvonne, autrement) quelque chose qui sonne d'une façon si émouvante pour moi, si neuve. (V p.292)
Yet there is here, as at the end of the novel, the implicit suggestion that the progress which Cécile has made so far is, like of that of Jean, merely the tentative beginning of a more profound transformation, presumably to have been worked out in the subsequent volumes of *Les Communistes*, which Aragon planned but never wrote. This suggestion would seem to be the sense of the insistence on the significance for them of the word *camarade*: "Raoul, c'est un camarade..." C'est mot entre eux, dans ce sens', (VI p.332) a tentative acknowledgement of a new perspective each has gained independently.

While the types of transformation examined so far are quite different, they do represent a development in a common direction — away from the values of the characters' class of origin, as a result of their realisation of the oppressive nature of that class. The detailed analysis of characters like Pierre Mercadier and Aurélien Leurtillois may seem to be out of step with a literary theory which promotes a view of society inexorably evolving towards socialism, for these two characters represent quite unequivocally values which Aragon rejects: individualism and the acceptance of the capitalist system. How can we then account for their presence in the framework of socialist realism?

Two explanations for this can be advanced: firstly, Aragon's novels are based on a model not of Soviet but of French socialist realism, an important distinction which has already been referred to in Part I, and which means that to attain an authentically French socialist realism, French society as it is in the present has to be fully represented. Such characters are an inevitable part of this society, and link up with Aragon's critical view of capitalist society. Secondly, they form a necessary aesthetic contrast to the positive heroes. Figures such as Aurélien and Mercadier, or problematic individuals such as Catherine,
are ultimately more satisfactory in aesthetic terms, since the complexity of their character development affords more scope for detailed analysis and development than does that of the positive heroes. It is perhaps also reasonable to assume that, paradoxically, negative or at least problematic characters may work as forcefully, if not more so than the positive ones, as examples or rather, counter examples, an idea not explored in Aragon's formulation of socialist realism.

Les Voyageurs de l'Imperiale presents the reverse side of the coin from the two earlier novels in terms of the main characters. It is a critique of bourgeois individualism which refuses responsibility, let alone political commitment. Like other characters examined in this chapter, Pierre too rebels against the values of his class, but his rebellion remains on an individual level since his revolt is against everything in bourgeois life that restricts his freedom to do as he wishes. Pierre's individualism manifests itself in various ways, all of which find their origin in his declaration to his wife: 'je ferais ce qui me fait plaisir!' (VI p.181) We see it in his neglect and eventual abandoning of personal relationships. Embittered firstly by the disappointment of his marriage to Paulette, and secondly by the discovery that his mistress Blanche Pailleron does not love him, Pierre comes to regard all human relationships as prisons, with money as the only key. To attain his desire for freedom at all costs, he throws off his old identity and leaves his family to become an adventurer in the tradition of his ancestors:

He goes first to Venice where he achieves a form of satisfaction in the solitude he finds there: 'Venise lui était une grande aventure négative, comme le non-sentir, le non-voir.' (p.346) He gradually discovers, however, that even he cannot remain completely independent of human contact, as is illustrated by his relationship with Reine Brécy and his eventual return to the Meyer family in Paris.

More importantly, Pierre's individualism is shown in his complete rejection of politics. 'Pas de politique' is a frequent refrain. Pierre is irritated by those who encourage him to take a stand on the issues of the day, especially the Dreyfus affair and the danger of war. He refuses to acknowledge that he could have a role to play in society. It is not that he chooses to set aside his social conscience; he simply does not have one. His attitude to the Dreyfus affair is characteristic of his approach to politics in general:

Ils voulaient tous faire prendre position à Pierre, et Pierre pensait: 'Qu'ils me fichent la paix! Je suis un individu. Tout cela ne me concerne pas.' (p.272)

As the novel progresses, individualism begins to take its toll in a number of ironies in Pierre's life. His avoidance of politics leads to disillusionment in his relationship with Reine, which seemed to have been the first authentic one of his life. His refusal to read the papers prevents him from learning about the scandal in which Reine was involved, until it is too late. When Pierre returns poverty-stricken from his travels to Paris, he is reduced to dependence on the Meyer family. His faith in the absolute value of freedom is obviously shaken, since he is tempted to get in touch with his family, and does, in fact, succumb to going to see his grandson regularly, albeit anonymously. The way in which, when he becomes ill, he is unable to do anything for
himself and is subjected, unprotestingly, to Madame Tavernier's suffocating love and to the rituals of a religion he had always rejected, is a cruel parody of the complete liberty he had craved for in his earlier years. The supremely ironic, and perhaps heavy-handed, touch, in view of his hatred of politics, is that when he becomes paralysed at the end of his life, the only word he is able to articulate is 'Politique'.

Pierre's individualistic search for freedom not only has its repercussions in his own private life, but is also held responsible, as part of a general trend of bourgeois individualism, for the First World War. The condemnation of the social repercussions of Pierre's egotistical search for personal freedom is made by Pierre's son Pascal, who confesses to a certain sympathy for his father, but realises that such individualism cannot be condoned since it causes so much suffering, not only on a personal level, but also on a national and even international scale:

Pendant quatre ans et trois mois, il n'eut plus une pensée à lui, il était un morceau d'un immense corps, d'un immense animal blessé et rugissant. Il faisait la guerre.(VI p.686)

The point Aragon is making is that each individual has a share of responsibility in the fate of mankind. He does this by means of Pascal's condemnation of his father's generation and their blind devotion to the individual:

Ce sont eux qui nous ont menés là, nos pères, avec leur aveuglement, leur superbe dédain de la politique, leurs façons de se tirer des pieds toujours, en laissant les autres dans le pétrin(...) Maintenant, la France est prise à la gorge, et ce n'est pas une façon de parler.(p.685)

The destructive nature of individualism on the personal and collective
level is made absolutely clear.

The image of the 'impérial' of the title is central to the question of individual and collective responsibility. It distinguishes the passive, who are merely carried along on the 'impérial', the upper deck of the bus, that is by life, without taking any responsible part in its running, from those who take the trouble to understand what makes the machine function as it does, and then play an active part in its running, thus assuming their social responsibility. This is the basis of the distinction made between Pierre and his hero figure John Law, whose active role in life Pierre was never able to emulate. The gulf between them prevented Pierre from being able to complete his study of Law, whose essence always escaped him. Talking of the passive passengers of the 'impérial', Pierre identifies himself with them:

je suis inguérissablement l'un d'eux, c'est pourquoi John Law qui inventa une façon d'affoler la machine restera toujours pour moi, malgré cette curiosité que je lui ai portée, un homme que je ne pourrai jamais me représenter dans les simples choses de la vie(...) il a été l'un des rares hommes qui firent dévier le monde. Il n'était pas, lui, un voyageur de l'impérial. (p. 622)

The bleakness of the novel is redeemed only at the end, when we see Pascal, Pierre's son, who represents a symbolic transformation, a change in the tide of individualism, rejecting the egoism of his father on behalf of a new generation. Pascal goes to war so that his son will not have to fight: 'Jeannot, il ne connaîtra pas la guerre! Pascal pendant quatre ans et trois mois a fait pour cela son devoir.' (p. 686) Of course Pascal's sacrifice is an ironic one, since the reader knows that it was in vain.

Despite this, to see the novel as a completely negative work in the context of socialist realism would be a mistake, as is pointed out
eloquently by Garaudy in his discussion of *Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale*:

Ce n'est pas là seulement une grossière erreur de fait sur l'attitude personnelle d'Aragon, mais à notre sens, une incompréhension de principe de la nature du réalisme socialiste. Celui-ci n'est pas lié à la présence d'un héros rayonnant(...) mais à la perspective historique de l'auteur, capable, même lorsqu'il présente l'image d'un être déchu, de se placer du point de vue de ceux qui le condamnent et le dépassent parce qu'ils connaissent les moyens de sortir de l'impasse.13

A glance at the dates between which the novel was written, October 1938 - August 1939, shows that the transformation represented by the rejection of individualism was of present-day importance. The penalty paid for individualism by Pierre's successors was the First World War. In the tension preceding the Second World War, the message retains its urgency and relevance. Aragon reinforces the timeliness of the message of *Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale* in the preface added in 1965:

*Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale(...) était en 1939 une entreprise de liquidation de l'individualisme, ce monstre écœuré 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.*14

In *Aurélien*, as in *Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale*, the central character refuses the possibility of transformation and is reintegrated into his class. As in the earlier novel, it is also a secondary character, Bérénice Morel, (albeit more important than Pascal in *Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale*) who undergoes, at the end of the novel, the transformation which Aurélien fails to seek.

In her study of Aragon's work, Lucille Becker takes the somewhat simplistic view that Aurélien is merely 'another representative of bourgeois individualism'.15 Of course, this is true to a certain
extent: Aurélien is unable to take on any social responsibility but drifts through existence aware only of his own problems, in particular of his love for Bérénice. Yet, while Pierre Mercadier was seen to be fully responsible for his individualistic lifestyle, Aragon makes it clear that his attitude to Aurélien is rather different, since Aurélien is not entirely responsible for the state in which he finds himself. The blame lies elsewhere:

D'aucune façon, il ne s'agissait pas pour moi de condamner, voire de dénoncer Aurélien. Je voulais montrer en Aurélien, par Aurélien comment l'homme d'hier, un soldat de l'autre guerre, arrivé à l'âge de la responsabilité, n'a pas reconnu le destin auquel il était à nouveau entrainé. Et pourquoi il ne pouvait pas le reconnaître, pour quelles raisons anciennes, que cachait la jeunesse, et comment il était à nouveau à la merci des raisons qu'on lui donnerait d'accepter le malheur français ainsi qu'il avait par deux fois accepté la guerre. (A p.12)

The novel is not merely the exploration of one individual case, but, by implication, of a whole generation which suffered a similar fate: 'une situation, un homme dans une certaine situation'. (A p.10)

Consequently, Aurélien's failure in life is seen primarily as the result of the damaging effect of three years' military service, immediately followed by four years of war, which effectively robbed Aurélien and his generation of their youth and of the means to deal with life after the war. Aurélien's difficulty in coping with life outside the army is exacerbated by his leisured, wealthy, bourgeois existence, which deprives him of the need to work (in this respect his problems are similar to those of Catherine) and thus condemns him to an aimless existence:

Le néant de sa vie lui apparut, et il se demandait pourquoi il se levait tous les jours. (p.233)
The recurring image of his room at the point of the Île Saint-Louis, drifting through the waters of the river is symbolic of the way Aurélien lives his life:

Il y avait plus de quatre mois qu'Aurélien filait à la dérive. Le bateau de l'île Saint-Louis semblait emporté dans un courant de la durée, sans but, sans raison apparente, échouant à tous les bancs de sable, pour repartir dans des tourbillons de mémoire.(pp.571-72)

His position is more complex than that of any other character in Le Monde réel, since he is equally distanced from the capitalist world which finances his leisure as he is from the working class:

Il était presque impensable que cet homme (Edmond) jeune, sportif, si bien habillé, eût quoi que ce fût à faire avec les personnages mystérieux et sans figure qui constituaient pour l'imagination d'Aurélien le monde de la haute finance(...) Cela l'effrayait un peu quand il y songeait, et puis ça l'attirait, parce que ça touchait à un monde inconnu.(p.39)

His alienation from the world of the working class is illustrated graphically in his encounter with Riquet at the swimming pool. In the pool, Aurélien is disrobed of all that associates him with his class, endowing him with a social anonymity which reminds him of the war and in which he feels comfortable:

il y retrouvait toujours ce dépaysement secret, cet anonymat social qui lui plaisait, et qui réchauffait en lui certains sentiments endormis, liés à la guerre.(p.181)

The water is a social leveller in the same way as the mud of the battlefields during the war. Once dressed again, he returns to his social niche, with only a sense of regret that he has lost the easy companionship of Riquet, a feeling far from any desire for a more permanent déclassement. Indeed the swimming pool incident represents, like the war days, a social no-man's-land where his social background is
insignificant, rather than an authentic contact with the working class. This is made quite clear when the two men get dressed and reassume the outward signs of their social origins. The effect is immediate and unmistakeable, creating a barrier which Aurélien, for all his good will, is unable to overcome.

The company of his war comrades has an effect similar to the atmosphere of the pool. Aurélien is at ease among these men who are equal by dint of having left their social identities behind to reimmerse themselves in the identities they assumed during the war, and can relive their common experience without reference to the present. When Decoeur comments that Aurélien's war was an officers' war, that only officers are present at the reunion, Aurélien replies:

Vous n'y pigez rien mon vieux. Il y a des associations d'anciens combattants...Ça, c'est une réunion de copains...On était des gradés par hasard, possible: on ne se refait pas...C'est avec nos bouts de galon sur nos manches qu'on a failli se faire trouer, vous comprenez... on se retrouve.(p.437)

Social status or army rank are irrelevant to their camaraderie. The only other experience which succeeds in mitigating his melancholy and giving some kind of sense to his aimless existence is his love for Bérénice. The two experiences of love and war impinge on each other in Aurélien's consciousness for this reason:

Au fond, le siècle d'Aurélien s'écrit en deux mots: il y avait la guerre, et il y avait Bérénice. Qu'importaient ces trois années de transition!(p.220)

When he falls in love with Bérénice, his life acquires focus and meaning:

Aurélien retrouve l'estime de lui-même. Il vient de légitimer, mieux que d'excuser, sa vie. Cette flâne, cette irrésolution
s'expliquent. Il attendait cette minute. Il lui fallait sa raison d'être. (p. 220)

It would be erroneous to believe, as does Aurélien, that Bérénice was his salvation. She becomes for him a refuge from the demands of life, rather than a means of coming to grips with them.¹⁶ She becomes the centre of his existence, but does not succeed in transforming it in any tangible way: his life still lacks purpose or whatever it is that separates him from people like Riquet:

Aurélien ne s'intéressait pas tant à Riquet, qu'à ce qui le séparait de lui (...). Qu'était-ce? Un sentiment du devoir? Un besoin de se justifier? Un désir de dignité? Assurément quelque chose qui faisait à cette minute désagréablement défaut à Aurélien. (p. 385)

When his investments are lost, Aurélien is forced into accepting the need to work. Financial necessity proved to be the turning point for Armand and this could also have been Aurélien's salvation. Instead it marks his integration into the world of capitalism: his life is transformed, but instead of taking the form of déclassement, Aurélien's transformation operates in the opposite direction:

Aurélien accepte de se reclasser dans la société telle qu'elle est, d'être un bourgeois comme les autres. (JAMJ p. 29)

This is not the only evidence of Aurélien's allegiance to the values of the bourgeois class, for in the epilogue, he is resigned to the defeat of 1940, ready to hide behind any excuse, ready to surrender rather than face further sacrifice. This is in stark contrast to Bérénice's determination to continue to resist. As Bibrowska comments, Aurélien's failure lies in the refusal of 'une prise de conscience collective'.¹⁷ He thinks only of himself as Bérénice rightly accuses him.

There is nonetheless a positive counterpart in the novel to
Aurélien's reclassement. The counterpart is Bérénice, as she is depicted in the epilogue. Soukup has commented that the epilogue is extraneous to the novel as a whole. Yet despite its unsatisfactory side, in particular in the lack of continuity of character development, which results from the jump in the time scale, the epilogue rounds off what is otherwise an inconclusive ending. Looking at the novel as a work of socialist realism, the epilogue is necessary to show the final transformation of the central characters: Aurélien into the 'homme de Vichy' as Aragon described him, (A p.11) and Bérénice into a politically committed character.

On the face of it, the transformation of the rather colourless Bérénice into a politically active individual may seem to stretch the limits of credibility. The link between the two apparently irreconcilable sides of her character is, however, present in the shape of Bérénice's 'goût de l'absolu': 'Une passion si dévorante qu'elle ne peut se décrire'. (p.302) This absolutism, if it lacks focus, is seen to be a destructive force, and indeed it brings about the end of the nascent affair between Aurélien and Bérénice, when Aurélien proves himself unable to live up to Bérénice's demands of perfection. Yet it is this potentially destructive power which we see in the epilogue to have been channelled into positive action. Bérénice has sheltered an exiled Spanish republican, she refuses to accept the 1940 defeat and she insists on the necessity for resistance with the same passionate intensity which she demanded, and failed to get, in her relationship with Aurélien. Although relegated to the epilogue, and sprung rather unexpectedly on the reader, this transformation of 'le goût de l'absolu' into a political and moral conscience nonetheless creates an important contrast within the novel, something which Aragon was keen to
emphasise in his defence of Aurélien, in answer to criticisms of his approach:

Je dis ceci pour les critiques de gauche qui m'ont été faites de cette introduction d'un concept aussi peu 'scientifique'(... ) que le goût de l'absolu, dans Aurélien.(p.25)

In Bérénice, finally, Aragon has been able to present the kind of woman he heralded in Les Cloches de Bâle:

le nouveau type de femme qui n'a plus rien à voir avec cette poupée, dont l'asservissement, la prostitution et l'oisiveté ont fait la base des chansons et des poèmes à travers toutes les sociétés humaines, jusqu'aujourd'hui.(CR p.437)

Bérénice has taken the final step to commitment, has undergone the transformation of which Catherine remained incapable. Yet the transformation still remains problematical since, as with Armand, the conversion is not satisfactorily incorporated into the narrative. Equally, the final step, it would seem, is only achieved at a high price: 'cet échec si complet de l'amour'. (A p.624) Nonetheless, Bérénice remains an important figure in Aragon's presentation of the transformation of the individual, a theme which is characterised by the problematic, reflecting the difficulty of commitment and change in bourgeois society, and thus provides a counterbalance to the uncomplicated nature of the positive heroes.
NOTES

1. 'Voici le temps enfin qu'il faut que je m'explique', p.21. This preface written for the ORC edition of Aurélien, is reprinted in the Folio edition. Page references are to the latter.

2. Bibrowska, pp.78-79. Suleiman's description of the exemplary narrative would be more appropriate. She describes a progression from 'ignorance (of self) - knowledge (of self), passivity to action' within the framework of a particular doctrine. Authoritarian Fictions, p.76

3. Alain Huraut, Aragon, Prisonnier politique, p.133

4. 'Aragon répond à ses témoins', p.82 (my emphasis)

5. This double existence anticipates the theme of 'l'homme double' which will be explored in Les Beaux Quartiers, and which draws attention to the disparity between man's private and public life. See chapter 8


7. Orfilat is widely believed to represent Nizan, denounced by Aragon for leaving the PCF after the Soviet-German pact.

8. Les Communistes, IV p.179. This page reference is to the second version of the novel. In the original version, Armand simply refuses to escape because he does not wish to be considered as a deserter. It is only in the second version that attention is drawn to Armand's class prejudices and the reasons why his refusal was ideologically unsound:

   Et ne sait-il pas, lui, Armand, que c'est en échappant à ceux-là qui ont mené la guerre de telle façon que l'ennemi national avance ainsi chez nous, que désormais un ouvrier se fera soldat de la patrie?(IV p.179)
Perhaps an oblique reference to Thorez's experience is intended here: he was accused of deserting when he left France for the Soviet Union during the war.


12. La lumière et la paix, p.41

13. Garaudy, p.350

14. 'Et comme de toute mort renaît la vie', p.25. The ORC preface to Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale is reprinted in the Folio edition of the novel. Page references are to the latter.

15. Lucille F.Becker, Louis Aragon, p.65

16. This idea is developed in the following chapter.

17. Bibrowska, p.81

18. Gerald Soukup, 'The realism of Louis Aragon: a study of four novels of Le Monde réel', p.408
Realism, ideology and transformation, the themes which I have analysed in the preceding chapters, although interpreted by Aragon in his unique fashion according to the national context of France, also form an intrinsic part of the official model of socialist realism as elaborated by the Union of Soviet Writers. Yet no more than a cursory glance at Aragon's socialist realist fiction reveals that the theory in its original form does not adequately encompass the scope of his novels during this period. A vital and perhaps one of the most successful areas of his fiction is not anticipated in the theory: the importance Aragon attaches to love in his novels. By this I do not mean a general or idealised love of man, which might have some direct relevance to Communist ideology. The love, which, in one form or another, is a crucial element of each one of Aragon's novels, and of much of his poetry, is the love between individual men and women. Reaction among certain elements of the cultural sections of the PCF to the publication of Aurélien, where the analysis of a love relationship is particularly detailed, indicates that this insistence on individual love was not entirely welcome in a prominent socialist realist writer. Aragon commented on this reaction in Les Clés d'Elsa:

Dans leur famille, le PCF, se produisaient de bizarres clivages. Les purs-et-durs, les militants tout-crin-tout-fer, ne voyaient pas 'l'intérêt' d'un roman bourgeois comme Aurélien...

The interesting phrase here is 'roman bourgeois'. Evidently, it was felt in certain quarters that Aragon, in writing Aurélien, had reverted to a
discredited art form at the expense, it would seem, of socialist realism.\(^2\) A further inference which can be drawn from this comment is that the love story is seen as being the exclusive preserve of the bourgeois novel. Aragon believed differently, and unrepentantly went on to write *Les Communistes*, which has at its heart a love story, one which, despite the title of the novel, involves two non-Communists. We have already seen how in *J'Abats mon jeu*, Aragon justifies his attachment to the theme of love, not *per se* but as an integral part of the socialist realist novel, in the following terms:

\[
J'aime les histoires d'amour, et je le dis ouvertement: tant pis pour ceux qui les prennent pour je ne sais quelle récréance, quelle lâcheté à l'époque des guerres et des révolutions(...). Si le roman sert à éduquer et à former, c'est souvent parce qu'il contient de belles et pures histoires d'amour.\]

(\*JAMJ\* pp.16,75)

Although these comments were made at a time when Aragon was renewing his ideas on socialist realism, it is clear from his novels that his belief in the didactic value of the love story pre-dates the period of liberalisation and, as I intend to show, has formed an intrinsic part of *Le Monde réel*.

How does the love story help to reinforce the didactic function of the socialist realist novel? It would seem that the function of the love element in the novel is not merely to provide a kind of sentimental parallel to the positive hero, in which exemplary patterns of behaviour go hand in hand with ideologically sound views. There is in fact, as I intend to demonstrate, a complex interaction between the development of certain relationships and the political development, or in some cases political regression, of the individuals involved. Aragon expresses the ideal form of this interaction when discussing poetry in
Chroniques du Bel Canto, in which he sees perfect understanding in a
couple as being based upon the sharing of a similar view of the world:

l'amour de l'homme et de la femme dans le couple trouve son harmonie
précisément lorsque l'homme et la femme s'élèvent simultanément à
une même conception du monde, où leur aventure s'élargit, et
l'amour au devenir humain s'identifie.3

The relationship between love and political commitment has already been
noted by Garaudy, who sees love as 'une voie d'accès au monde réel'4
and by Adereth, who comments that real love is associated with concern
for the welfare of society at large.5 Both of these views highlight
important facets of the treatment of this subject, but this complex
relationship needs to be analysed in more detail.

Aragon's poem 'Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux' provides a helpful
starting point in attempting to analyse the way in which he links love
and political views, for it suggests quite clearly the complexity of the
issue and the reasons why Aragon's ideal is rarely achieved in the
novels. His disconcerting, repeated statement 'Il n'y a pas d'amour
heureux' immediately puts into doubt the possibility of authentic love
in the real world. The poem is an expression of suffering and separation
inextricably linked with love:

Il n'y a pas d'amour qui ne soit à douleur
Il n'y a pas d'amour dont on ne soit meurtri
Il n'y a pas d'amour dont on ne soit flétri
Et pas plus que de toi l'amour de la patrie
Il n'y a pas d'amour qui ne vive de pleurs

The reason for this bleak view is elaborated in a series of interviews
with Francis Crémiex, which Aragon recorded in 1964. In the course of
the discussions, he explains that it is only in the context of the well
being of society at large that individual happiness in love can be
attained. 'Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux', as Aragon points out, was written during the Occupation:

Ce qui est dit ici l'est sur le fond des malheurs de l'occupation. Comment aurait-il pu y avoir un amour heureux dans les conditions dramatiques de la France?

The idea of the impossibility of love in the midst of general unhappiness, however, is not limited to the Resistance poetry, but becomes a recurrent motif throughout his work as Aragon himself has pointed out:

l'impossibilité du bonheur dans le malheur commun(...) qui se trouve d'une façon presque constante tout le long des choses que j'ai écrites.

A love which is attained regardless of the unhappiness of society in general is nothing but a 'petit égoïsme à deux'. Love is not portrayed by Aragon as a reward for the correct political views, but it can only grow in the context of a wider love for one's fellow humans.

It is clear, then, that Aragon sees the existence of a link between public and private happiness as an integral feature of his work, and it is a link which is illustrated in detail in Le Monde réel. Hence, the affirmation that, as far as Aragon's novels are concerned, 'the search for love has nothing to do with socialist realism', is to simplify the issue. It implies either that the love stories in the novel are unimportant in relation to the political content; or that in using them, Aragon has somehow departed from the precepts of socialist realism. It would seem that, since the theme of love is so closely woven into the narrative framework of the novels, and since there is often a clear parallel between the political development of the characters and
the nature of their personal lives, the use of love stories evidently has a place within the didactic structure of the novels, and therefore within Aragon's version of socialist realism.

Another related aspect of this preoccupation of Aragon's is the importance which he gives not to love in the abstract, but to its expression in the unit of the couple, a unit intimately bound up, in Aragon's eyes, with the general progression of humanity. This parallel is clearly outlined in his interviews with Francis Crémieux, during the discussion of 'Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux':

Ici ce qui est posé en réalité n'est pas la question de la possibilité ou de l'impossibilité de l'amour heureux, mais de la possibilité ou de l'impossibilité du couple. J'ai dit que je considérais le couple comme la formation supérieure de l'homme et de la femme. L'avenir sera, du moins je l'espère, le temps où régnera le couple."

Since Aragon's adherence to Communism implies a desire for a future where socialism too will reign, the parallel between love and political values is evidently intended.

The novels of Le Monde réel trace different types of love and of couples, in relation to varying social and political attitudes, and against varying social and political backgrounds. One might expect to see a correlation between authentic love and authentic political values, with a corresponding parallel between inauthentic relationships and a lack of political commitment. This does serve as a rough guideline, but in practice it is far too simplistic to do justice to the complexity of the interaction.

Les Cloches de Bâle presents three radically dissimilar explorations of the associations between love and political views. Diane de Nettencourt constitutes the polar opposite of Aragon's ideal. Her
lack of love is as evident as her lack of any sense of political responsibility. Indeed the term 'responsibility' is somewhat redundant in this context, since Diane is so passive. By virtue of her status in society, married to a man who makes his fortune through sordid financial deals, and through her complicity in these deals, she is ranged with the oppressors of society. To a certain extent Diane is not to blame for this, since historically she belongs to a group of women who depended entirely upon men, fathers, husbands or lovers, for their social and financial status, for whom 'une femme n'a d'existence qu'en fonction de l'argent que lui donnent les hommes'. Consequently, love has no place in her life. Her marriage to Brunel is the antithesis of a loving relationship, and is seen at its most squalid in the bargaining between Brunel and Wisner, where Brunel offers Diane in order to pay off a debt:

Wisner le regarda avec intérêt. 'Ah oui? Tu vas me coûter cher. Et qu'est-ce que tu me donnes en échange? — Ma femme, répondit Brunel. — Tu ne manques pas de culot. D'abord je l'ai déjà ta femme, et puis de toute façon tu ne l'as plus'.(CB p.132)

The lack of love in her life and her manipulation of personal relationships for her own gain are paralleled by her lack of any positive political values.

Catherine Simonidzé, in the second half of the novel, is more interesting since she represents a more complex development of the relationship between love and political values. She rebels against the values of women such as Diane and rejects whole heartedly the conventions which govern women's behaviour. Yet, she is unable to find a satisfactory focus for this rebellion, in either the political or the sexual domain. Her political difficulties have already been analysed at
length. The simultaneous failure of her search for love through various unsatisfactory affairs is due in part to her own self-centredness and reluctance to sacrifice her freedom to another person. This constitutes a parallel with her inability to relinquish her middle-class privileges in order to attain solidarity with the workers. She has a tendency to look upon relationships with men as a means of avenging the humiliations experienced by women at the hands of men, and of affirming her freedom to seek pleasure, a freedom traditionally restricted to men, attitudes which form too negative a basis upon which to form a relationship. Love and sexuality therefore remain emphatically separate for Catherine:

Catherine revoyait le sommeil de Régis, de Paul Jonghens, de Devève, de bien d'autres, dans celui de Ferdinand. Celui-ci, comme tous les autres, avait pu la faire crier, il n'avait pas pu l'attendrir. (p.404)

Her failure to find love is also a result of her inability to find a partner who shares her values. Aragon demonstrates that there is in Catherine's mind the expectancy of an intimate link between political values and her personal relationships. It is because of the discrepancy between their views that Catherine breaks with Thiebault, and this same discrepancy haunts her subsequent relationships:

Liaisons ébauchées, à trois ou quatre reprises, liaisons abandonnées, toujours parce que le plaisir qu'elle avait d'un homme ne pouvait lui en cacher la vie, les idées, l'asservissement social. (p.221)

It is interesting to note that the most politically admirable man in the novel, Victor, who rescues Catherine from suicide, is perhaps the one who could have also rescued her emotionally, as he undertakes her political education, creating a judicious bond between her emotional
and political life. Certainly, there are suggestions towards the end of the novel that Catherine is beginning to love him. This neat ending is, however, denied us, since Victor is to be married to Jeannette; and quite clearly, despite Catherine's political progress, she and Victor could never form a truly equal pair since, in terms of commitment, she lags far behind him, even at the end of the novel. He will always be for her 'l'inaccessible Victor', (p.403) as inaccessible as political commitment. Catherine remains very much a transitional figure between Diane and Clara Zetkin. Catherine's rejection of middle-class values is reaffirmed in her final rejection of Jean Thiébault, now a man of influence, when he frees her from prison at the end of the novel and once more asks her to marry him. Despite this rejection of a man who does not share her outlook, her search for love ultimately ends in failure, embodied in the bleak sentence which closes the third part: 'elle n'avait pas vu Victor'.

Fernande Gontier's description of Catherine's emotional difficulties could serve equally well as a summing up of her difficulties in committing herself to practical politics:

Sa liberté solitaire n'arrive pas à s'enraciner dans le réel, à dépasser une sexualité qui s'éparpille en mille satisfactions passagères et dérisoires.

Nonetheless, there is an optimistic note at the end of the novel which associates her rejection of the sexual morality of bourgeois society with her gradual progression towards an acceptance of her place in the world of work, thus leaving open the prospect of authentic love and the accomplishment of the political commitment which has eluded her:

Elle est sortie du parasitisme et de la prostitution. Le monde du travail s'ouvre à elle. (CB p.425)
Logically the culminating point of *Les Cloches de Bâle*, the epilogue 'Clara' is disappointing in fictional terms. Clara Zetkin does not become a living character, but remains an idealised symbol. We are told that she represents an ideal love, yet we do not see her in the context of a loving relationship. This creates a sharp imbalance with the very detailed and personal portrait of Catherine, and results in a remote character for whom it is difficult to feel any sympathy. It should be pointed out in his defence that Aragon acknowledged these flaws in the epilogue, saying that Clara is merely an exemplary figure,16 who in an ideal world would have been at the centre of his novel:

On dira que l'auteur s'égare, et qu'il est grand temps qu'il achève par un roulement de tambour un livre où c'est à désespérer de voir soudain surgir, si tardivement, cette image de femme qui aurait pu en être le centre, mais qui ne saurait venir y jouer un rôle de comparse(...) 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. (pp.425-26)

This is not, however, a satisfactory excuse. It is almost as though Aragon had grown tired of the novel and decided to bring it rapidly to an appropriate conclusion; or perhaps he was aware that an ideal character such as Clara would be fictionally much less interesting than one such as Catherine whose dilemmas and contradictions remain unresolved.

The epilogue does, however, complete the novel's progression on the thematic level by linking a vision of a socialist society, where women are freed from oppression, with a world where authentic love has a place:

*Ici pour la première fois dans le monde la place est faite au véritable amour.* (p.438)
Such a love is only possible in a society where men and women are equals, and where love is not soiled by money. Clara constitutes not only the culminating point of the novel, but also the standard by which other characters may be judged in the ensuing novels.

The following comment by Aragon about Les Beaux Quartiers summarises one of the main obstacles to love in this novel:

Dans Les Beaux Quartiers, la principale figure de femme, Carlotta, c'est toujours une femme sous le règne de l'argent.

This obstacle is not limited to Carlotta, for much of the novel is built on the opposition between money and love. Money is representative of man's position in the world of capitalism and this position often seems to render him incapable of love or, at the very least, creates serious compromises in his relationships. Hence the relationships in Les Beaux Quartiers vary from the problematic to the entirely cynical and opportunistic.

The opposition between love and money is illustrated early in the novel through one of the minor characters Angélique, a servant girl who falls in love with Pierre Delobelle, a friend of Armand. He returns her feelings for a while, but not long after, Angélique finds him with another woman. Not only is Angélique's love rejected without qualms because of her lowly social status, but this rejection is seen, even by her, as quite normal and acceptable:


Edmond Barbentane, the brother of the main character Armand,
provides two different illustrations of the compromises and indignities inflicted upon love by money. When Edmond first arrives in Paris, he swiftly realises that acceptance within the beaux quartiers to which he aspires requires money. Humiliated by his impoverished state, he resolves to overcome it by using his relationships with rich and influential women. He envisages his affair with Madame Beurdeley not just as a social stepping stone but also as a humiliation of her wealthy status and as revenge for his own lack of status:

Edmond enrageait un peu de tout ce qui liait cette femme à un monde dont il se sentait exclu. Il sentait grandir en lui l'envie de s'en venger sur elle, en l'humiliant de sa jeunesse et de sa force, quelque part dans un vague meuble, d'où les femmes sortent les yeux baissés. (p.291)

This relationship was merely a parody of love, but Edmond's feelings for his mistress Carlotta are more genuine. Indeed she becomes the centre of his life. There is nonetheless a tension between his love for her and the realisation that without money, he will be unable to keep her:

Il était possédé par elle. Rien ne le touchait plus qui n'était pas Carlotta. Et en même temps il se sentait pris d'une fièvre de frayeur. Sans argent, il allait la perdre. (p.523)

This recognition, allied to his ambition for wealth per se, forces him into the demeaning bargain with Quesnel, Carlotta's lover, which enables him to keep Carlotta, but only on Quesnel's terms. Quesnel will continue to give money to Carlotta, and thus, by extension, to Edmond, and will retain the right to see her. The relationship is marred by this double prostitution. The relative ease with which Edmond accepts Quesnel's offer is a measure of the moral degradation which has accompanied his rise up the social ladder. Only a short time before, when Madame
Beurdeley had left her husband for Edmond, bringing with her all her jewellery, he reacted to her gifts with shocked indignation:

Alors, tu veux m'acheter? Ton argent, tes bijoux. Parce que je suis pauvre, qu'entre l'amour et moi, il y a l'argent... L'argent? Tu es venue ici pour m'insulter?(p.447)

There is additionally a tension between Edmond's genuine love for Carlotta and the way in which he is characterised as a gigolo,¹⁹ and is treated by Carlotta herself as a possession:

Elle se sentit injuste envers lui. Elle avait un peu pensé à lui comme à un poisson ces derniers jours. Son petit amant.(p.525)

The message is constantly reinforced that true love cannot flourish between individuals lacking in political commitment, who accept the values of capitalist society; or in a society where the primacy of financial gain is unchallenged. Love is equally impossible in a society where women are not the respected and independent equals of men, but are obliged to sell themselves in order to guarantee their survival, the very society which Aragon denounced at the end of Les Cloches de Bâle. The individual's private life is invariably affected by his public existence.

The question of the interaction between the public and private spheres is elaborated further in two important sections of Les Beaux Quartiers. The corruption of public life is such that a split is created within the individual, who is forced to compromise the ideals of his inner self by his participation in public life. This dilemma is personified in the character of Richard Grésandage who experiences a profound divergence between the professional man in him who must compromise with society, and the inner man who detests such compromise,
but cannot escape it. He is surrounded in his work in finance by men who consider the approach of war as something to be turned to their advantage, whilst he desires above all to avoid it. This image of 'l'homme double' is an important one in Les Beaux Quartiers, showing the difficulty or even impossibility of sincere commitment, even for a man such as Grésandage who is sensitive to these contradictions. Duplicity is the means by which such men can survive:

L'homme social envisage froidement les catastrophes nécessaires. L'homme tout court ne s'y résout pas(...) (p.374)

Duality becomes an image of the times, when public and private selves are diametrically opposed, a reflection, as Adereth has said, of the class contradictions of modern society. There is a clear opposition between Grésandage's work which implicates him with ideas which he rejects, and his love for his wife, which he sees as a refuge from the world outside and its compromises:

Toute ma défense est dans cette duplicité, dans ce maintien pour nous d'un (sic) oasis. (p.374)

Yet the notion of love as a refuge is pursued and seen to be illusory: 'Fuir! Peut-on fuir vraiment?' (p.374) Even in love there is no escape from the outside world. This brings us back to the theme of 'Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux': love gained in the face of general unhappiness is selfish and, according to Grésandage, is a stolen happiness. The fleeting and vulnerable nature of such a love is seen in his near betrayal of his wife Elise with Carlotta, to whom he is strongly attracted.

Grésandage detects the same public/private dichotomy in Joseph Quesnel. There is a profound discord between the outer man, the
successful and wealthy businessman, and the inner man whose life revolves around Carlotta. The tension between these two irreconcilable halves of his life has meant that despite his success in material terms, Quesnel is essentially an unhappy man:

L'amour ne tient pas(...) contre les affaires. Il est devenu le maître d'un monde, mais non pas de son coeur. (p.375)

Quesnel himself is conscious of this disparity in his life, and believes that it is a condition of life in the early part of the twentieth century:

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. J'ai fait toujours deux parts de ma vie... (p.354)

In other words, although he is unable to analyse clearly the reasons why, Quesnel knows that in the capitalist society in which he moves, there is no possibility of the kind of love envisaged at the end of Les Cloches de Bâle, where there is a harmony between man's public and private existence. He is also lucid enough to see that his relationship with Carlotta is doomed to failure because of his way of life: his burden of work which he cannot share with her and his burden of wealth, which distances her from him, because it enables him to buy her love and her happiness.

Essentially, Les Beaux Quartiers is very much a negative examination of the impossibility of love in capitalist society. There is only one, admittedly minor, incident which gives any hint that there is hope of the ideal glimpsed through Clara Zetkin, of a love free from the shackles of money. It is when Armand Barbentane becomes the lover of Yvonne. The situation has all the potential of the stereotype of the
exploitative relationship between a lower-class woman and a wealthier young man. Armand, however, eventually realises that Yvonne is above all another human being, his equal, and that class differences are immaterial:

Sûr que dans les premiers temps il avait eu envers elle tous les abjets sentiments des fils de bourgeois qui prennent une maîtresse dans le peuple(...) Il avait appris sans trop savoir comment qu'il avait affaire à un être humain.(p.385)

Nonetheless Armand and Yvonne have to exist in a society which condemns them, and so their relationship is doomed to failure. It does, however, provide a tentative illustration on a more realistic level than does 'Clara', of the ideal that Aragon envisages.

Les Voyageurs de l'Imperiale also presents a very negative treatment of the theme of love. As Aragon comments:

Avec Les Voyageurs de l'Imperiale, c'est l'impossibilité du couple qui est le sujet même du livre.

The reasons advanced in the novel for the impossibility of achieving love are individualism and, once again, the influence of money. The individualism of the main character, Pierre Mercadier, is evident throughout the novel in his refusal to recognise his private and social responsibilities. He is a solitary and introspective figure, keeping others at bay and concerned only with his personal rebellion against the constraints and hypocrisies of conventional bourgeois society. At first sight, a character who rejects these values might seem a promising hero for a socialist realist novel, but Mercadier's rebellion remains on an individualistic level and does not proceed to a collective, responsible form of revolt. His individualism manifests itself in various ways, all of them involving a rejection of others, be it on the level of personal
relationships, or in his desire for freedom at all costs, expressed through his persistent wandering around the world, or in his complete rejection of politics and lack of social conscience.

Naturally, a character who rejects his private and social responsibilities so completely is an unlikely candidate for Aragon's ideal love; hence Mercadier's loveless marriage, the failure of his fantasy idyll with Blanche, who saw in him only a passing diversion, and the disillusion of his attachment to Reine, brought about by his detachment from the outside world.

The problem of individualism is a barrier to love on another level, since individualism is seen to be a failing not only in Mercadier but in society at large:

Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale(...)

At the end of the novel, Mercadier's son Pascal denounces his father's generation for the 'individualisme forcé' which has caused so much suffering. Even had Mercadier been a different person, love in such a society, Aragon seems to suggest, would be doomed.

As in Les Beaux Quartiers, money plays a significant role in Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale, and once more, symbolising capitalist society as it does, it is presented as a corruptor of love. Pierre seems to believe in love, if one is to judge by the disillusion his experiences bring about. He comes to the conclusion, however, through the behaviour of his wife, that marriage is no more than a financial contract. He believed that he loved Paulette in the beginning, whereas she wanted only security from marriage. Love was just a pretence for her:
On a cru aimer. Seul. La femme pas. Mais elle a appris a en faire
les mines. Elle garde la bonne place. Elle presente ses traites.
D'un sentiment qui n'a jamais existé. D'un abandon qu'elle n'a pas
connu.(p.283)

The lack of love in their marriage finally convinces Pierre that 'Il n'y
a pas de sentiments, il n'y a que l'argent.'(p.282) The way in which
money underpins their marriage is further reflected in the way that
speculation on the stock exchange takes the place of adultery for
Pierre, once he has realised the failure of their relationship:

N'aimant plus Paulette, il la trompait ainsi. Cela valait mieux que
d'avoir des maîtresses, une satisfaction plus subtile, plus
raffinée(...) Il ne croyait plus qu'à l'argent.(p.55)

Pierre sees in Paulette's obvious fear of losing him not a reflection of
her love for him, but proof that she fears only losing her means of
financial support. When he leaves her, money continues to influence his
relationships with others, since he realises that money can also help to
guarantee his freedom by putting a distance between him and those for
whose services he pays. In Pierre's eyes, this is an improvement on
marriage, where the notion of payment for services is not honestly
acknowledged, but remains hidden beneath the burden of sentiment and
duty:

Payer, directement au moins, c'était empêcher de naître un de ces
mensonges qui vous lient progressivement à une femme. Pierre prenait
de mieux en mieux conscience de ce rôle protecteur de l'argent.
Défense de l'individu libre. Rempart de la solitude.(p.300)

Pierre's experience sheds new light on the degradation of love by money
in capitalist society. In Les Beaux Quartiers, love was already a
commodity to be bought and sold; now it is so tainted that, in Pierre's
eyes, money is seen to be preferable, a protection against love. The
novel as a whole is even more negative in its conclusions since there is no positive experience linking love and commitment to add a glimmer of hope. Both public and private morality militate against love.

Aurélien is the novel where the interaction between public and private responsibility, between love and commitment, is stated most overtly, albeit in a negative way. Aurélien himself pinpoints the connection between the two when Bérénice leaves him. The ostensible reason for her rejection of him is that Aurélien spent the night with another woman, Simone; in fact, this is purely incidental. The true reason is more complex than this, and is indicated by Aurélien in a lucid comment:

N'était-ce pas son indignité devant la vie qui l'avait fait indigne de l'amour?(A p.573)

In what way is Aurélien unworthy of life and love? According to Aragon, the First World War plays a predominant role in Aurélien's inability to take an active part in life, and, consequently, his inability to love:

Le sujet du livre est l'impossibilité du couple précisément du fait que, la femme, elle, a eu une certaine continuité de pensée, malgré la guerre, à cause de la continuité de sa vie, sans l'entr'acte des tranchées, et qu'elle est de ce fait même à un autre stade de pensée qu'Aurélien.24

The impact of the war on Aurélien and his generation is a central theme in the novel. The war remains for Aurélien 'une plaie secrète', (p.41) 'cette longue maladie', (p.42) the imagery of disease very apt for the almost pathological effect it produces on Aurélien. Having been so long subject to army discipline, he loses the ability to decide and to act for himself. He drifts through life, unaware that his problems are shared by many others: 'Il ne savait pas qu'il participait d'un mal très répandu.' (p.42) His sense of the futility and absurdity of his existence
is only banished when he meets and eventually falls in love with Bérénice:

Maintenant il était un homme, il avait un but, et le plus haut, l'amour. (p.220)

This in itself, however, is not enough to save Aurélien. Love for one individual, no matter how sincere, does not fulfil man's obligation to play his part in the real world. Authentic love cannot exist in a social vacuum. Aurélien is reminded by both his sister and by Riquet, the worker he meets in the swimming pool, that it is abnormal to remain so detached from the world. Yet he lacks the energy to take up the challenge of finding a role to play in the world, and continues his old way of life. Eventually this leads to the inevitable failure of his relationship with Bérénice, when he is seduced by Simone. His loss can be explained by the fact that his love is only a form of escape from the emptiness of his life, not an aid to confronting and changing it: 'Il retrouvait, Bérénice évanouie, la plaie secrète qu'elle avait masquée.' (p.573) After he has lost Bérénice, the meaning goes out of his life, putting once more into question his tenuous hold on existence:

Il ne croyait pas en Dieu, il était retranché des hommes. Il ne se soutenait que sur ce radeau fragile, un appartement, de petites rentes, l'oisiveté. S'il avait fallu se battre contre la vie, peut-être aurait-il retrouvé le chemin de Bérénice(...) Mais dans cette existence sans obstacle, il demeurait aux prises avec une ombre.(p.573)

It is significant that the end of his relationship with Bérénice coincides with his reintegration into capitalist society, when he accepts a job in his brother-in-law's factory. This is presented not as an entry into the world of work, as it is for Armand, but a means of assuring his standard of living: 'une petite situation(...) qui aurait
compensé le déficit de ses rentes.' (p.640) Both areas of his life, the public and the private are marked by a retrograde step.

It gradually becomes clear in the epilogue that Bérénice is the one who is capable of both passion and commitment. The Bérénice whom Aurélien redisCOVERS in 1940 is not the woman who left him; and when they meet again, he is disconcerted by the change. While Aurélien wants only to discuss the past, she is angered by his implicit acceptance of the Occupation. The idealised image of Bérénice which Aurélien has harboured throughout the years of their separation has changed out of recognition into a politically committed woman. Aurélien still nourishes a nostalgic love for her, but the object of his devotion is a fossilised image, just as the France he has loved and fought for no longer exists:

Ce n'était pas Bérénice. Cette Bérénice vieillie. La sienne, sa Bérénice, c'était ce masque de plâtre, cette jeune morte, belle éternellement. La France aussi qu'il aimait, c'était une morte, pas cette France qu'on pouvait voir. (p.677)

Bérénice can no longer love him because of the immense gulf between their perceptions of political reality. She is disappointed by Aurélien's apathy, and once again he shows himself, this time by his lack of political commitment, to be unworthy of her love:

Il n'y a vraiment plus rien de commun entre vous et moi, mon cher Aurélien. (p.692)

Les Communistes, as has already been pointed out, constitutes a positive response to the preceding novels of Le Monde réel, or at least as positive as is possible within the confines of a historically realistic portrait; and so, to generalise, one can say that whilst in the earlier novels lack of political or social commitment went hand in hand with failure or compromise in love, Les Communistes contains
portraits of Communist militants who are also involved in relationships of genuine love. There is also the central couple, Jean and Cécile, whose discovery of each other coincides with their discovery of social responsibility. Nonetheless, to return to the motif of 'Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux', Aragon reminds us that in the midst of war, the time for ideal love has not yet arrived:

Il faudrait être égoïste pour être heureux dans le malheur des autres.25

This reminds us that there is unlikely to be an example of ideal love in the novel.

Micheline and Guillaume Vallier provide a rather one-dimensional illustration of the Communist couple. Guillaume is a convinced militant, whilst his wife initially knows nothing of politics. When he is mobilised, he entrusts her, in a rather sentimental scene, to the local cell, where she rapidly becomes involved in clandestine activity. A direct parallel is established between her love for Guillaume and her service to the party, which constitutes for her:

un lien profond, imbrisable entre elle et Guillaume absent, entre le monde et eux(...) un secret de l'amour d'eux deux, et l'amour de tous.(LC II p.93)

It could be argued that in this case, it is not that commitment co-exists with love, but that a specious form of commitment is used to fill in an emotional gap. Subsequently, however, Micheline goes on to disprove this by her actions.

Another couple, Annette and Michel Felzer, are used to exemplify the correlation between love and commitment. Previously on the point of separation, they are reconciled when Michel is given a clandestine
mission by the party. Annette, proud of the party's confidence in him, decides to join him. The portrait of the Felzers is brief and rather unsatisfactory from the fictional point of view, since the characters are only superficially developed. The reader's credulity is stretched in being asked to believe that a couple already on the verge of separation for some time can be reunited simply through an order of the PCF. In fact, this chapter, and with it the Felzers, was omitted from the rewritten version of the novel.

The problem with such model couples is that while they exemplify Aragon's ideal, they are fictionally too uncomplicated and too little developed to be of major interest. As in other areas, Aragon makes a more interesting case when the characters are flawed or hesitant. For instance, the case of the Gaillard couple is made more interesting by the tension caused by Robert's refusal to join the party, a refusal which does not trivialise his obvious commitment, and by his disapproval of his wife's involvement in party activity. The relationship between them, however, is not developed in any great detail.

A rather different case is that of Thomas Watrin and Edwige Duplessy. Watrin is a lawyer who is not by nature a political creature. Having left his practice to join up as a volunteer and serving in the same unit as Armand Barbentane, Watrin becomes increasingly drawn to Armand, who is characterised by his 'habitude de considérer politiquement les choses'.(II p.60) His sympathy with Armand's views grows, and his desire to be of use is seen firstly in his decision to defend a Communist youth arrested for carrying illegal newspapers; and later, in his interest in the fate of the arrested Communist deputies. Yet his feelings remain confused, on an emotional rather than an intellectual level. Although on the one hand he maintains that he is
not a supporter of the Communists, he nonetheless feels that he wants to
dissociate himself from the hostile treatment of the Communists. These
feelings are expressed in terms of a sense of responsibility. The method
Watrin chooses to express this echoes in a rather convoluted and
indistinct way the links between love and commitment: he publicly and
spontaneously commits himself to marriage with Edwige, as though by his
private commitment he can make reparation for his lack of tangible
commitment on a public level:

Watrin avait à coeur de ne pas s'engager au-delà de ce qu'il pensait
véritablement. Non, il n'était pas pour les communistes. Seulement
cet inexplicable sentiment de responsabilité qu'il avait(...) Les
deux femmes s'en allèrent(...) sans pouvoir avoir compris, que
pour s'innocenter devant elles, du crime juridique qu'on allait
commettre contre leurs maris, il venait, sans y réfléchir,
d'engager simplement toute sa vie.(IV p.64)

His declaration is described as 'la preuve de son honnêteté'.(IV p.65)
Although there is an unsatisfactory side to this incident, the author
allows the reader to gain more of an insight into the character of
Watrin than of the couples mentioned earlier, and therefore he has more
force and immediacy as an example. It also shows that while there is no
simple correspondence between love and commitment, they are nonetheless
inextricably linked for Aragon.

The most notable example of the interplay between love and
commitment is found in the Jean and Cécile subplot. On the surface, the
developments which these two characters undergo are distinct, since they
take place while the couple are separated. Nonetheless, at various
stages in the novel, each one associates their political development in
some way with their growing love for the other. As Bibrowska has said,
the story of Cécile and Jean is 'une histoire réécrite de Bérénice et
d'Aurélien'. Unlike the latter couple, the development of the political and the sentimental coincide for Jean and Cécile.

In the early part of the novel, Cécile's social awareness is directly influenced by her feelings for Jean: concern for him leads her to become interested in the war. This is not a particularly original notion, but it does serve the function of creating an initial link between her awareness of social reality and her emotional life. It would have been a fairly simple matter for Aragon to have continued to depict a clear-cut link between these two areas, but the development of the theme is much less straightforward than this. For example, in the incident where Cécile takes charge of Yvonne's children, when Yvonne is arrested, the logical conclusion is that Cécile takes on this commitment because of her love for Jean. Yet this easy solution is rejected by Cécile in her letter to Jean:

Elle était étonnée que j'aie pris les petits, et elle pensait que c'était seulement à cause de toi. Oh, je t'assure qu'elle se trompe. (V p.292)

The examples of Yvonne herself and of Joseph Gigoix have been equally, if not more important in bringing Cécile closer to the new sense of responsibility which accompanies her tenuous political awareness.

The association between Jean's growing political consciousness and his feelings for Cécile is more explicit. Early in the novel, Jean seems to echo Aragon's idea that perfect love can only exist in a classless society, when he comments that the barriers separating him from Cécile are social ones, the gulf between his class and hers. Later he sees a parallel between his devotion to Cécile and the Communists' devotion to their cause:
Il voulait comprendre leur mystère, et à quoi l'aurait-il mesuré si ce n'eût été à son mystère à lui, à son amour... leur amour. Comme il a l'amour de Cécile, ils ont, eux, l'amour de quelque chose, de quelque autre but hors de leur portée, qu'on s'imagine. (III p.163)

There is, however, an uncertainty at this stage both as regards the extent of Jean's love ('est-il prêt, pour l'amour de Cécile, à faire ce que les autres font pour cet amour vague, impersonnel' (III p.337)), and his faltering attempts to understand what motivates the Communists by comparing it to an emotion familiar to him.

The most explicit connection made between Jean and Cécile's love and their commitment, although it is still a tenuous one, is made in the final pages of the novel:

Mais quel que soit l'avenir, le malheur ou la délivrance du pays, ce sort qui est le leur(...) cette vie triomphante en eux, ce qui peut en sortir, est lié au bonheur et au malheur des autres, au sort du pays. (VI p.337)

Their own future, and by implication their growing love, is inextricably bound up with the future of their country.

There are, nonetheless, contradictions in this apparent rapprochement between love and commitment. In a much earlier episode, Jean attends the parliamentary session at which the removal from office of the Communist deputies was debated. His presence at this event could have been interpreted as a significant milestone in his political education, yet the mere appearance of Cécile is enough to distract Jean completely from the proceedings and their impact:

d'abord il a mal suivi les débats, à partir d'un certain moment il ne les a plus suivis du tout, Jean a regagné son coin et il regarde fixement la place abandonnée par Cécile. (III p.301)

The final reunion sequence, although in a sense the most emphatic, is
also problematic. The language used is highly vague and emotive. It is full of allusions to the future, and yet when these allusions are analysed, there is often little of substance in them. In fact, the love between Jean and Cécile seems to take them away from their worldly responsibilities (Joseph, the children, the war) and transport them into an idyllic isolation. Has Aragon conveniently forgotten that, in such circumstances, 'Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux'? Not entirely, for he himself acknowledged the inherent contradictions of this apparent happy ending, and attempted a resolution of the problem:

Ils ne savent pas vraiment, Jean et Cécile, quand leur bonheur leur semble n'être peut-être qu'un plaisir volé, furtif, pris à autrui, aux sacrifices et aux douleurs d'autrui(...) ils ne savent pas que c'est pourtant pour cela que l'on vit et l'on meurt, pour que cela soit possible, le bonheur, non pour son bonheur à soi, mais celui des autres, de l'espèce humaine.

Their happiness, although found in the midst of unhappiness, and therefore problematic ('un plaisir volé, furtif, pris à autrui'), is seen as part of the struggle for the happiness of all mankind. Their love cannot, and does not, exist in a vacuum.

Ultimately, the parallel between love and commitment in the case of Jean and Cécile remains on the level of uncertainty, and is on occasions unsatisfactorily explained. Their political development is yet to be tested and to mature. Their love retains an element of precariousness, since there is no guarantee that they will be reunited after the war. The uncertainty and contradictions form a necessary counterpoint to the other more clear-cut illustrations of love and commitment in the novel, and hence create a balanced perspective on the subject.

The wide range of characters and the intricacy of the relationship between love and differing degrees of political commitment are concrete
evidence of the importance of this issue for Aragon and of his conviction that it has an integral role to play within the overall scheme of socialist realism. Aragon said when speaking of poetry during his interviews with Francis Crémieux that in 'la bataille pour le réalisme, il ne faut pas en avoir une idée trop militaire'. His refusal to treat politics and personal relationships as separate and irreconcilable is a key factor in his attempts to forge his own version of socialist realism.
NOTES

1. Les Clés d'Elsa, p.328
2. This criticism disregards the view proposed by Lenin and promoted by Aragon, that it is legitimate for a socialist realist writer to build upon the basis of bourgeois culture.
3. Chroniques du Bel Canto, pp.54-55
4. Garaudy, L'itinéraire d'Aragon, p.380
5. M.Adereth, Commitment in Modern French Literature, pp.180-81. Charles Haroche, who has analysed the importance of love in Aragon's poetry, has also drawn attention to the way in which Aragon shows the most intimate aspects of ourselves to be affected by the class struggle:

   Constamment, lucidement, l'écritain s'attache à nous montrer comment la lutte des classes transforme de l'intérieur les individus, jusque dans les replis les plus secrets de leur conscience et de leur vie privée.

   Les Langages du roman, p.276
6. La Diane Française
7. Entretiens avec Francis Crémiex, p.92
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p.116
10. M.Molodoshanin, p.168. The reasons advanced here for Aragon's inclusion of the theme of love in his novels: the greater chance of literary survival, part of his own current preoccupations etc., all ignore the evidence that, for Aragon, love was an integral part of his overall purpose.
11. Entretiens avec Francis Crémiex, p.92
12. 'Aragon répond à ses témoins', p.82. (quoted by Garaudy, p.295)

13. See chapter 7

14. CB, p.414. The main reason for Catherine's return to Paris had been to see Victor.

15. F.Gontier, La Femme et le couple dans le roman de l'entre-deux-guerres, p.168

16. CB, p.425. 'Je prends Clara Zetkin comme un exemple'.

17. Entretiens avec Francis Crémieux, p.95

18. Armand's relationships with women in this novel are of little significance since the main focus of attention is on his political development alone.

19. M.J.Green discusses the recurring theme of prostitution in Les Cloches de Bâle and Les Beaux Quartiers in Fiction in the Historical Present, pp.66-67, 136

20. See for example p.601, where Quesnel reflects on Carlotta's poor taste in men: 'Il est absolument comme tous les gigolos!

21. Adereth, p.93

22. BQ, p.374. 'Nous avons tous volé notre bonheur'

23. Entretiens avec Francis Crémieux, p.95

24. Ibid., p.96

25. Entretiens avec Francis Crémieux, p.114

26. Bibrowska, p.81

27. See chapter 7, p.205

28. VI p.340. Cécile herself expresses guilt at her happiness in the midst of unhappiness:

   je me sens comme une voleuse. Je vis, au milieu du malheur général, dans un bonheur qui ne m'appartient pas. (V pp.288-89)

29. Entretiens avec Francis Crémieux, p.121
The appearance of La Semaine sainte in October 1958 was marked by enthusiastic approval on the part of the bourgeois critics, an approval which had been singularly lacking upon the publication of Aragon's last novel Les Communistes. This critical volte-face, which ensured the praise of such pillars of the literary establishment as Emile Henriot of the Académie Française, may be explained by the fact that many critics interpreted La Semaine sainte as the expression of a major departure from socialist realism, and consequently a departure from what had often been reduced by hostile critics to nothing more than 'tendentious writing', and the beginning of a new phase of 'objectivity'. While critical opinion in the bourgeois press was favourable, it has been suggested that there were those at the opposite end of the political spectrum who viewed the novel with slight distrust, as if they too suspected a move away from the principles of socialist realism. Jean Marcenac, for example, commented that there were those party members who: 'souhaiteraient que les choses soient plus simples, plus tranchées, plus immédiates.' This would not be entirely surprising since the re-evaluation of socialist realism was as yet in its early stages. This case can, however, be over-stated, since Marcenac made it clear in the same article that he believed such critics to be wrong. He also praised the novel for having brought Communist writers out of a cultural ghetto and into the mainstream of critical opinion. The novel was also publicly praised by, amongst others, Jean Fréville in L'Humanité, and Maurice Thorez in Cahiers du Communisme, who
described Aragon as 'le romancier de France'.

Clearly, as the change in the critics' reception of the novel indicates, *La Semaine sainte* does represent a considerable innovation in Aragon's literary output, especially in comparison with its predecessors of *Le Monde réel*. In the context of the modified conception of socialist realism which Aragon discussed at length following publication of *La Semaine sainte*, this is to be expected. In the preface to the novel, 'L'auteur parle de son livre', Aragon states:

*Cela fait des années que, défendant le point de vue du réalisme socialiste, je combats l'idée schématique et absurde qu'on s'en est fait (c'est une question ouverte où tout n'est pas tranché).*

Yet despite the impact which this notion of openness has undoubtedly produced upon the novel, there is also a certain amount of continuity, a continuity which arises from the fact that the re-evaluation of socialist realism has by no means meant a full-scale abandoning of its principles. Consequently, Aragon examines themes similar to those in earlier novels: his analysis of the development of Géricault is the most striking example of this. Aragon also devotes a considerable part of the novel to the realistic depiction of the events of 1815 and to the examination of certain ideological views. These subjects are necessarily examined in rather different terms than in the novels of *Le Monde réel* because of the demands and restrictions placed upon Aragon by the historical period he chose to use. It will be necessary to determine to what extent this continuity does constitute a development of socialist realism, or whether in fact Aragon has, as the bourgeois critics wished to believe, moved away from socialist realism.

Aragon restated his allegiance to realism in a lecture he delivered
a few months after the publication of *La Semaine sainte*:

Je suis un réaliste, je me réclame du réalisme dans le roman comme dans le poème.  

How is this reflected in the representation of reality in the novel? In the earlier novels, Aragon undertook a detailed examination of bourgeois capitalist society in the first half of the twentieth century, revealing the faults of that society in order to suggest an alternative model. Given the historical framework of *La Semaine sainte*, the oppositional approach of the Communist writer to capitalist society is no longer appropriate. It would seem from a reading of the novel that the 'peinture véridique' of society operates on the level of a realistic historical reconstruction of the flight of Louis XVIII before the return of Napoleon to France in 1815. Indeed the accuracy of Aragon's historical documentation of this episode has been praised. But although the novel abounds in authentic detail about one particular week of the Hundred Days, Aragon himself has stressed that this is not the most important aspect of his novel, even going so far as to say: *'La Semaine sainte n'est pas un roman historique*. (JAMJ p.88) He goes on to qualify this statement by reminding the reader that all of his novels are historical and that, if anything, *La Semaine sainte* is less so than the others:

*La Semaine sainte*, contrairement à l'apparence, est moins un roman historique. La part de l'imagination y est plus grande que dans *Les Communistes*, par exemple, où ma documentation était de première main. (JAMJ p.88)

In an attempt to explain this, Aragon refers to the importance of invention, 'le mentir', in the novel:
Je me suis arrangé pour que le lecteur soit *pris* au livre, pour qu'il croie à mes *mensonges*.(JAMJ p.88)

In the light of these statements, we need to evaluate the role of the representation of reality in the novel, for they imply that the account of the historical development in *La Semaine sainte* is less important than it might appear. This implication is borne out by a careful reading of the text. In previous novels, the representation of historical reality, had a specific function within the novel: the implicit and sometimes explicit criticism of the society depicted. In the case of *La Semaine sainte*, the representation of the historical reality of Holy Week in 1815 is limited primarily to a wealth of detail about the flight of Louis XVIII, the return of Napoléon and the physical conditions which accompanied these developments. These details in themselves are not, as Aragon has suggested, at the heart of the novel. They remain in the background, whereas in other novels such details were essential to his aims. Although historical figures are central to the narrative, their reactions and emotions, which are of considerable importance, are invented. Unlike the earlier novels, there is little in Aragon's evocation of 1815 which could be considered as critical realism, though it is not completely absent. He evokes the harshness of the life that peasants such as Eloy Caron are obliged to endure, the difficulty they have in making a living from the land. He describes 'la rage qu'on avait eue d'abattre les arbres en ces temps de famine, il faudrait cent ans peut-être pour que le paysage l'oubliat.' Through the character of Bernard, one of the group of Republicans who meet secretly at Poix, the author describes the conditions in which rural workers live:

*il faut voir leurs tanières, ces entassements de familles entre des*
murs de paille, de terre et de bois, sous le chaume qui flambe que c'est un plaisir, avec la terre battue pour sol, l'humidité, les eaux inécoulables(...) (I p.356)

The effect of this description is not, however, to undermine the political values of an entire class or to emphasise its moral decay, as has been the case in the novels of Le Monde réel, though it certainly indicates a sense of injustice. This, however, is not an issue which is pursued in the depiction of reality, for little attention is given to the description of either the rural or urban workers. If the depiction and criticism of reality is less central in La Semaine sainte than it was in the other novels, can it be said that Aragon makes any attempt to incorporate the notion of 'développement révolutionnaire' or 'la perspective historique de l'avenir', (JAMJ p.80) seen by him as a necessary complement to critical realism, into his depiction of reality?

Here there is a problem of chronology and of verisimilitude. In Le Monde réel, Aragon was able to suggest revolutionary development in a convincing manner through the growing power of the working class, seen for example, in the strikes of Les Cloches de Bâle and Les Beaux Quartiers, and in so doing, he was reflecting a facet of the social reality of the early decades of the twentieth century. It is a rather more difficult proposition to suggest revolutionary development with any plausibility in 1815. Nonetheless, Aragon does show the beginnings of the working class as an embryonic force in the secret meeting at Poix. The gathering is made up of Republicans from different social strata, amongst them representatives of different trades who are united in their desire to form their own associations: 'ils revendiquaient, et tous, le droit de se coaliser'(II p.48), something which is still illegal. Within
the context of the novel, it is difficult to take this manifestation of the will of the people any further, particularly since the narrative is not constructed around them. To see beyond the temporal restrictions of 1815, when the working class had not yet emerged as a force to be reckoned with, and when it would have been anachronistic to speak of socialism, Aragon found it necessary to go beyond the framework of the novel in an attempt to incorporate the notion of revolutionary development. This helps to account for the way in which the novel is constructed around an alternation between present and future. This movement is particularly striking in the final section of the novel, where the author looks ahead to future political developments through the imagined activities of Degeorge's son Frédéric. To underline the importance which Aragon accords the future in La Semaine sainte, he steps into the narrative at the end of the novel to explain that despite appearances, the future is a central preoccupation:

peut-être que ce livre faussement tourné vers le passé, n'est de ma part qu'une grande quête de l'avenir. (II p.360)

Aragon traces the progress of Frédéric Degeorge and his fidelity to the Republican cause through his opposition to Louis XVIII. He takes part in demonstrations and the 'grandes histoires tragiques de cette génération' (II p.365). He is exiled in London because of his political activities; he returns to France and fights on the barricades during the Trois Glorieuses. He holds firm in his opposition to Louis-Philippe and is rewarded by the sight of the workers' flag raised in Lyon. He becomes a radical socialist deputy and supports Louis-Napoléon, believing, as his father did of Napoléon, that 'il est ce que le peuple en a fait'. (II
p.368) His faith in Louis-Napoléon's word that he will fight for workers' rights is finally betrayed in the coup d'état of 1851:

Le 2 décembre 1851 apprend à Frédéric Degeorge l'abîme qu'il y avait dans cet homme. (II p.369)

Although Aragon recounts a series of failures for the Republican cause, described as 'la tragédie' (II p.367), like the failed strikes in Les Cloches de Bâle and Les Beaux Quartiers, these do not ultimately carry a negative lesson. It is, on the contrary, the positive impression and the sense of hope which predominate, conveyed by the indomitable will of the Republicans to carry on the struggle. Not even the final betrayal of Louis-Napoléon can diminish this. The monument to Frédéric in the cemetery at Arras symbolises this sense of continuity. The final section therefore gives a clear indication of the progression of history and of the continued struggle. The positive note of hope is further emphasised by the religious symbolism which underpins the whole of this final section of the novel: the coming of Easter representing eternal progression and renewal. Aragon gives a new secular interpretation to the Christian feast of Easter:

Ce ne sera pas l'Ange du Seigneur qui est descendu du ciel, avec un grand tremblement de terre, qui a roulé la pierre et s'est assis dessus. Celui qui brille ici comme l'éclair, celui dont le vêtement n'est point blanc comme neige, c'est l'Homme, et que ceux qui portent l'épée le regardent, et en soient bouleversés. (II p.378)

In order to evoke the process of revolutionary development, Aragon has had to go beyond the temporal framework of the novel, and although the treatment is fictionally more complex than that of the 'Clara' episode of Les Cloches de Bâle, we are nonetheless left with the impression that the author is once again stepping in at the end of the novel to
impose an optimistic conclusion which does not emerge altogether naturally from the preceding narrative.

Given that the representation of reality is much less politicised, or politicised in a more general way, than in *Le Monde réel*, what are the implications for the ideological standpoint of the novel? Once again, the historical framework militates, or would seem to militate, against the propounding of Communist ideology. Certainly the overwhelming critical approval of the non-Communist critics would seem to indicate that this is the case. I would contend, however, that there are certain ideological messages which emerge, albeit of a much less specific nature than in the *Monde Réel* novels, and often more problematic. Aragon has drawn attention to the fact that he could not have written *La Semaine sainte* if he had not been a Communist, (JAMJ p.89) and hints that Communist ideology is therefore not entirely absent from the novel, though not in the form that most people assume it will take. Presumably, Aragon is here referring to his attempts at objectivity and lack of dogmatism:

Pour ce qui est du communisme, je suis fort heureux qu'il ne reste pas dans *La Semaine Sainte* la moindre trace du communisme tel que se l'imaginent les gens.(JAMJ p89)

Certainly there is no systematic expression of a PCF line as there was in *Les Communistes*. Yet one critic has maintained that far from being apolitical, *La Semaine sainte* is the most political of Aragon's novels, and that its propaganda is more powerful because of its subtlety. 14 Another has commented that it is not the historical exactitude of the novel which is important, as has already been contended, but 'la signification de cette semaine par sa vérité politique'. 15 What then
is the 'vérité politique' of *La Semaine sainte* and how is it conveyed?

Unlike the earlier novels, where an important part of the ideological message was conveyed by positive heroes, in *La Semaine sainte* this device has been more or less abandoned. There is no one central figure who attains the status of positive hero. Géricault, the main character of the novel, is far too problematic an individual to be considered in this light, and no other character is developed in sufficient detail to fall into this category. The only character who might remotely be considered is François, the lover of Charles-Ferdinand's mistress, not in terms of his position in the novel, which is negligible, but in so far as he expresses a clear ideological view. He is a fervent Republican opposed to both the King and Napoléon. He quotes the views of his friend Augustin:

> Le pouvoir des nobles, des prêtres, des militaires, c'est fini: il est temps que l'Etat passe aux mains de la classe industrielle. (I p.164)

This is the most revolutionary statement of the novel, but it is uttered by a character who appears only once in the narrative, in a minor role, which has the effect of marginalising the comment.

The use of discussion and political activities is one means that Aragon continues to use for the elaboration of ideology. The first main example of this is the prolonged discussion between M. Joubert and Bernard on the way to the secret meeting at Poix. Joubert's political sympathies are made clear from the beginning when he addresses Bernard as 'citoyen'. They discuss the potential reaction of the peasants to the return of Bonaparte, and whether it will be possible to unite town workers and peasants with a deep-seated suspicion of each other. They
also discuss the changing conditions in the towns in the early stages of
the machine age. Joubert maintains that this revolution, which has been
little noticed, will have a direct impact on the political stability of
France and hints that there will be repercussions from groups whose
interests have not before been taken into account:

Ce qu'il y a avec les machines, c'est qu'elles changent ces rapports
entre les hommes, et par là les hommes mêmes... Des hommes dont,
jadis, nous avons peut-être eu le tort de ne pas assez nous
soucier. Pour décider de l'avenir, il ne faut plus simplement savoir
faire manœuvrer les armées. Tous les calculs peuvent s'effondrer en
raison de cette transformation imprévue, qu'apporte une petite
machine sans âme. (I p. 355)

This prospect of chaos is contrasted with the earlier vision of Babeuf,
who had not only the interests of the peasants at heart, but also those
of the nation, recalled in a nostalgic vision of:

cette profonde liaison des choses, et l'industrie du drap, et les
bêtes lainières, et les prairies, et les patriotes qui avaient vu
si loin et si juste où était l'intérêt français. (I p. 360)

The oppression of the peasants, who, driven by need are also undertaking
work such as weaving and spinning in their homes, and by implication
the oppression of the urban workers is given a Marxist interpretation
by the author through Bernard, by drawing attention to the fact that
they do not own the means of production, and that therein lies their
oppression:

Eux à qui ni la machine sans quoi ils ne peuvent travailler, ni la
matière qu'ils élaborent n'appartiennent. (I p. 356)

In addition to this, the peasants do not work under the same conditions
as workers in factories, and do not receive even the derisory protection
given the latter. In the light of this division it is unlikely that a
means of uniting the two groups will be found.

Joubert sees in the return of Napoléon an opportunity for the people to use him for their own ends. In terms which recall the PCF suggestions to arm the people in 1940, he says:

(Bonaparte) à l'armée. Une armée découronnée de ses aristocrates. Il faut en faire l'armée du peuple, unir le peuple et l'armée(...) A nouveau 92, la patrie en danger, les armées étrangères menaçant nos frontières: comme alors la victoire dépend du peuple, ou c'est la trahison.(I p.362)

As in Les Communistes, the defence of national interests is closely identified with the people.

The discussion of the Republicans at their secret meeting at Poix is more wide-ranging, though principally concerned with deciding whether or not to give their support to Napoléon. Some of those present are simply concerned to know which option will ensure that they have enough to eat. In the course of the discussion two principal issues emerge: the need to protect the interests of working people by reinstituting 'les sociétés populaires', and the belief that despite Napoléon's past treachery, the people must take up arms with him in opposition to the King:

Napoléon revient. Il sera ce que le peuple en fera, si seulement le peuple a des armes...(II p.40)

But even when Joubert evokes with 'la voix d'une longue fidélité'(II p.53) the revolutionary tradition which unites them all, he is not able to secure unanimous acceptance of his point of view. The meeting is characterised by dissent. No one view emerges more clearly than the others. They are divided on whether or not to rally round Napoléon, as they are on the issue of the organisation of the workers and the form it should take. Nonetheless, they are ultimately linked by their
patriotism, which is opposed to Géricault's lack of patriotism:

Ceux qui parlaient de la nation, qui faisaient appel au patriotisme, et lui qui n'avait pas voulu se battre (II p. 51)

and by their underlying solidarity:

celui qui ne voulait que manger était prêt à mourir pour ne pas trahir les secrets de ses frères. (II p. 52)

Later on in the narrative, further references to some of these points are made in another discussion between Géricault and Degeorge (one of the 'conjures de Poix'), whom Géricault had approached for an explanation of the political situation. In effect it is Géricault who monopolises the conversation, but Degeorge, confronted with Géricault's pessimism, does affirm his belief in the possibility of changing the world, despite everything that has gone wrong. He also points out that the real choice facing Géricault is not between Napoléon and the King, but between remaining loyal to his country and abandoning it to follow the King into exile:

L'Ane ici n'hésite pas entre le trône classique et le trône impérial, ne le comprenez-vous pas? Mais entre l'émigration et la France. (II p. 279)

This once again underlines the importance attached to the notion of patrie and patriotism, values which are also emphasised in Lamartine's speech, made in the confusion accompanying the flight of Louis into Belgium. He identifies himself as coming from a family of nobles who did not abandon their country for their own protection at the time of the Revolution:

Je m'appelle Lamartine, et je suis né à Macon d'une famille qui ne
The fact that a Royalist is seen expressing the same ideological view as the Republicans, that is the importance of the national interest, 'le sentiment national', illustrates two important points. Firstly, the divisions between opposing sides, in terms of the ideological views assigned them, are not always inflexible, and therefore, secondly, the ideological concepts which are being expressed here are global rather than specific to any political grouping.

These points emerge with particular clarity when we look at the oppositions within the novel. In the novels of _Le Monde réel_, we have seen that a series of oppositions and contrasts reinforce the predominant ideological values of the works, by creating an 'unambiguous, dualistic system of values'. In _La Semaine sainte_, however, the value system which emerges is by no means unambiguous or dualistic. This is particularly so in the presentation of the two leaders who represent the parameters of available political choice. Neither is presented as an acceptable figure: 'Entre les deux,
Louis has done nothing for the people since his accession to power. They had high hopes of him, but they have been disappointed:

A vrai dire, un an de royauté n'avait rien changé au commerce, ni à la misère(...). Du premier jour, les Bourbons de retour avaient, d'un trait de plume, ruiné l'industrie de la laine, rendu dérisoires les longs efforts pour améliorer le cheptel ovin, créer les prairies artificielles.(I, p.235)

Louis is shown to be weak and defeatist in abandoning his army in order to flee into exile. The sense of betrayal and destroyed illusions reinforces this, though the blame is laid as much on the army as on the vacillating King. This betrayal recalls that felt by the French soldiers in 1940:

A cette heure tragique, ces jeunes qui commencent à comprendre qu'on leur ment depuis des jours, qu'on les mène à des fins inconnues, qu'on les abandonne à une destinée dont ils ont horreur, sont naturellement portés à faire le procès de ceux qui les commandent, de s'interroger sur les pensées de leurs chefs, se rappelant leurs origines; et les anciens officiers de Buonaparte à cette heure sont tous pour eux des suspects(...). Ces gens ne vont-ils pas retourner à leur ancien maître, et le mot trahison vole sur toutes les lèvres...

Louis' readiness to compromise members of his own family for his own later advantage is also pointed out:

il avait sournoisement distancé son frère et son beau neveu, laissant la Maison aux mains des ultras, histoire de compromettre la fraction d'Artois dans le désordre de la fuite, et d'apparaître plus tard comme étranger aux incidents possibles. Peut-être même n'eût-il pas été fâché que son frère tombât aux mains de Bonaparte.(II, p.155)

Napoléon is presented in equally negative terms. He is associated with continual warring and is ready to sacrifice everything to military glory:
pour appuyer le nouvel Empire, il faut bien trouver des gens prêts à tout sacrifier. Les gens qui n'ont rien meurent plus facilement. (I p.336)

The people had counted upon him to bring them stability after La Terreur, but their expectations, like their later expectations of the monarchy, were to be disappointed:

On avait compté sans la guerre. Et surtout, plus encore que les prélèvements d'hommes jeunes, la guerre avait amené le marasme des fabrications. L'Empire, pour le peuple ouvrier, c'était la chute des entreprises.(I p.234)

Yet despite this negative presentation of the two leaders, they are not condemned outright. The weakness of Louis is mitigated by his sympathetic presentation through the eyes of Géricault, who sees his vulnerable side: 'comme un homme à chaque pas qui va tomber, vieux et pesant, douloureux dans ses reins et ses bottes de drap', (I p.182) while Napoléon's political and economic successes are acknowledged by Joubert:

c'est lui qui a poursuivi notre vieux songe(...) il a compris, il a protégé l'industrie drapière(...) favorisé les hommes qui transformaient la terre...(I p.361)

Consequently, he is seen as a means by which the Republicans can hope to gain power.

No clear ideological judgement, therefore, emerges in the way that is the case in Le Monde réel. The lack of unambiguous ideological differentiation is analysed by Bibrowska, through the shifting values of betrayal and loyalty: betrayal of whom? loyalty to which side? and the dilemmas which this created. 19 This lack of certainty, of clear direction, is one of the causes of Bernard's suicide. He has worked
faithfully for the **Organisation**, the association of Republicans who meet at Poix, and for him their readiness to rally around the returning Napoléon is a betrayal which puts into doubt everything he has worked for:

>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(...). Voilà des années que je travaille pour 'l'organisation'. Aveuglément. Et si c'était là mon erreur?(II p.109)

The inability of the **Organisation** to provide a clearly defined alternative to Louis and Napoléon heightens the ambiguity of choice and plunges Bernard deeper into despair.

Given the fact that Aragon retains in *La Semaine sainte* the technique of authorial intervention, a technique which has been used in other novels to express a clear ideological position, one might expect that Aragon would use these interventions for a similarly unambiguous overview. The interventions are, however, much more complex in their relation to the text than they were in the other novels, thus reflecting the prevailing climate of ambiguity.

In the first intervention, Aragon draws on an experience of his own from just after the First World War, in order to create a parallel with Géricault's experience at Poix when he overhears the secret meeting. Aragon recounts the feeling of solidarity he felt with striking German miners who were refusing French army orders to go down into the mine. The experience reveals to Aragon not only the reality of 'les ouvriers' for the first time, but also the realisation that despite their identity as the enemy, the German miners were in the right. The condition of worker is shown to transcend national boundaries, an important point,
given Aragon's emphasis on the value of patriotism. The feeling of solidarity which he experienced with the workers parallels the emotions which assail Géricault at Poix. For both Aragon and Géricault, the experience is primarily an emotional one rather than an intellectual or political realisation:

je sentis en moi brusquement que ces inconnus menaçants, ces Boches, c'étaient eux ce soir-là qui avaient raison, dont la résistance exprimait tout ce qu'il y a de grand et de noble dans l'homme...(II p.45)

A second intervention at the end of the Poix episode takes a very different tone from those in earlier novels since, far from expressing ideological certainty, it expresses doubt and disillusion. Aragon talks of:

Ce peuple désuni, divisé, les plus pauvres qui ne savent où donner de la tête, qui vont contre leur intérêt manifeste. Ce manque d'une idéologie.(II p.66)

This sense of disillusion springs not only from Aragon's observations of the Hundred Days, but also from his own experience of life, for 'ce peuple désuni' refers not simply to the men at Poix, but to all the divided and poor people he has ever encountered. He reveals that Théodore's experiences are in fact his own: 'Tout ceci, ce n'est pas la vie de Théodore, c'est la mienne.' (II p.65) The disjointed narrative, moving from 1815 to the First World War and beyond, reflects a state of mind which is far removed from the assurance of tone of the authorial intervention at the end of Les Cloches de Bâle, a state of mind which acknowledges error and uncertainty:

tant de choses évidentes toujours remises en question. On s'est trompé, on se trompera encore. On se déchirera, on frappera les
This serves to intensify the ideological ambiguity which we have already seen in the novel, and also to extend it to the present, for Aragon makes it clear that the disillusion is also part of the present, of his own experience: 'c'est bien moi qui rêve, en plein XXème siècle, dans ce peuple divisé'. (II p.66) This underlying ambiguity is further reinforced by a third intervention in which Aragon highlights the contrast between appearance and reality. He illustrates his point by referring to men such as the Duc de la Rochefoucault-Liancourt, who, despite his aristocratic origins, was active in the development of industry, the training of workers and was the creator of a new kind of workers' association, which was to have important implications for the working class:

\[
\text{c'est ce duc qui fournira aux ouvriers le modèle des organisations qui vont leur permettre en moins de quinze ans de se trouver à Lyon, les premiers dans le monde, à prendre les armes pour leur classe. (II p.165)}
\]

Aragon's conclusion is the one which he reiterates at the end of the novel: that the future, both on the individual and collective level, is of predominant importance. The emphasis on the significance of continued or potential development is central to Aragon's final intervention, where the pessimistic tone of much of the novel is mitigated to a certain extent by a glimpse ahead, which sees not only future failure, but above all an unquenchable hope. Nonetheless the tone of uncertainty and doubt which characterises the second intervention remains, and reflects not only the fact that the political options in 1815 are unsatisfactory but also, one must conclude, since Aragon's
intervention is much more self-conscious and personal than before, some uncertainty on his own part.

It emerges very clearly that the historical context militates against the straightforward expression of Communist ideology within the fictional framework of the novel, and this has obliged Aragon to explore more general ideological points. Whereas in the earlier novels, the emphasis on patriotism and the national interests of France was seen in opposition to industrial capitalism or in the context of the PCF view of the war, these values are seen in a very different temporal context in *La Semaine sainte*, and are often presented in terms of a general revolutionary tradition going back to 1789. How then are the ideological viewpoints expressed in the novel intended to contribute to social transformation? Aragon has stated that although he is opposed to explaining the past in the light of the present, he admits that the past can shed light upon the present:

> si je suis ennemi(...) de l'explication de l'histoire passée à la lumière de celle qui se fait sous nos yeux(...) par contre je trouve normal de se servir du passé(...) pour éclairer le présent. (JAMJ, p.81)

Following Aragon's point, one can say, therefore, that the ideological lessons of the past, of 1815, as elaborated in *La Semaine sainte*: the value of patriotism, the association of the people with the national interest, the importance of the revolutionary tradition, the description of the beginnings of the industrial revolution and of the workers' struggle, all still have relevance as examples for the twentieth-century reader, albeit of a rather general nature. It could be argued however, that they are of such a general nature that they have little value as encouragement to political transformation in the present.
It is perhaps significant that Aragon chose to go back into the past and emphasise the beginning and the continuity of a more distant political struggle, at a traumatic time for the PCF, still recovering from the revelations of the twentieth CPSU congress, rather than set the novel amidst the ideological tensions of the present. In retrospect, the emergence of the working class must have seemed a very reassuring topic. The focus on the future as a source of renewed hope must also have been significant in this respect, yet this does not eliminate the uncertainties which emerge from the novel, not merely historical uncertainties, but those expressed by Aragon himself.

The notion of social transformation is difficult to incorporate into La Semaine sainte as it was in the novels of Le Monde réel. It is, as we have seen, suggested by the importance of the future dimension, and in particular of future political developments, within the narrative, but once again, it is more systematically incorporated into the work on the level of individual transformation; in this case through the evolution of Théodore Géricault, the central figure of the novel. His didactic importance lies in the way in which Aragon attempts to effect a transformation in him, similar to that undergone by characters in Le Monde réel, from a position of non-commitment to one of commitment. It will become clear in the course of my analysis that the process leading to commitment is, as was the case in the earlier novels, a problematic one. Although in Géricault's case the evolution is motivated principally by the necessity for political choice, it lacks the specific political orientation of Catherine Simonidzé in Les Cloches de Bâle or of Armand Barbentane in Les Beaux Quartiers. In this respect, it has more in common with the evolution of Jean de Moncey and Cécile Wisner in
Les Communistes, where there is no overtly political conclusion. It is, however, different from all of these examples in certain important respects. Where the notion of déclassement was central to the evolution of Catherine and Armand, and to a much lesser extent to that of Jean and Cécile, this element is missing in the analysis of Géricault's development. This can be accounted for by the more specific political orientation of the Monde Réel novels, where the discrediting of bourgeois capitalist society was of paramount importance. Rejection of bourgeois origins formed a natural corollary to this. La Semaine sainte, as has already been seen, does not incorporate the denunciation of any particular class and so for Géricault to reject his class would have been a meaningless gesture. In fact Géricault's class is not dwelt on at any length. The only specific mention of it is made when Géricault becomes Mousquetaire du Roi:

qui eût songé à sa roture, du moment qu'il avait les cinq pieds pour être mousquetaire? (I p.38)

A roturier, he is from a fairly well-to-do family, which can afford to pay for another man to take his place in Napoléon's army in 1811. Géricault's development does not take his class origins into account, but involves a more personal dimension, in which the terms of choice are action or stasis:

Arrivé à cette frontière de lui-même où il faut choisir, passer de l'autre côté, étranger désormais à la vie, ou retourner vers elle et s'y plonger, voilà qu'il était pris d'une passion des choses à faire. (II p.376)

Another important and distinctive feature of Géricault's evolution is that it encompasses a dual development: the growth of political and
social awareness in both the man as a social being and as an artist, something which Aragon has not examined before.

In the beginning, Géricault's problem is seen quite simply in terms of political choice. His dilemma is one shared by many others: whether to support Louis XVIII or Napoléon. This is a choice which, as has already been seen, is virtually impossible for some to make, since neither of the options is desirable. Géricault, however, is also quite unequipped to make this choice because of political ignorance. He is additionally a member of a kind of lost generation, comprising all those who grew up in the shadow of the Revolution and the Empire, and who find that in less heroic times they have no way to channel all the energy and enthusiasm of youth:

une jeunesse douée de toutes les qualités humaines - bonté, force, intelligence... - rêvant de grandes choses, une jeunesse incarnée dans un homme d'une société donnée, à qui aucun but répondant à ces qualités n'apparaît.²²

The motif of the lost generation creates a link with a character from an earlier novel; Aurélien Leurtillois, who is also incapable of finding a place for himself in society, but in his case, the war is seen to be responsible for his lack of direction, since he was part of that generation whose entire youth was wasted in war. There is also the obvious distinction that Aurélien has none of Théodore's dynamism.

This dynamism was originally channelled into painting, but by the opening of the novel Théodore has already abandoned painting. His early painting Le Cuirassier Blessé of 1814 seems to embody the contradictions of his political dilemma. He used two different models for the painting: his Republican friend Robert Dieudonné for the head, and for the body, the Royalist Marc-Antoine d'Aubigny:
Ce n'était que deux ans plus tard qu'il avait eu le sentiment d'avoir fait un monstre hybride du Républicain et du grenadier de La Rochejaquelein... comme de ses contradictions propres. (I p.70)

Despite his temporary abandoning of painting, the essentials of his ideas on art are already present: the importance of realism. He rejects the idea of the artist as 'transfigurateur', and admires Caravaggio who dared to show the detailed agony of death, rather than a sanitised, romanticised version of it, in his painting 'La Mort de la Vierge':

Cette morte pour la représenter, on ne lui a jamais pardonné qu'il ait pris non une princesse... mais une femme du peuple portant sur elle toute l'histoire de l'agonie. (I p.137)

Géricault looks forward to the time when the artist will be allowed to seek truth in the depiction of real life, instead of in the limitations of the 'convenances':

Ah, vienne le temps où on nous baisera les mains pour avoir vu dans un marché, une foule, un bouge, une vérité humaine, une vérité de carrefour! Alors on ne chassera plus des églises ou de ce qui en tiendra lieu, la violence des sentiments, la richesse des formes, les passions nues, l'expression qui se moque des convenances pour ne se soucier que de l'humanité! (I pp.137-38)

The abandoning of his painting, after a poor reception by the critics, has left a gap in his life which nothing can fill. He has no real desire to be in the army and he has no interest in the King's cause. In short, he is drifting through his life, seeking oblivion in frivolous distractions, haunted by a sense of waste and futility:

Quelque chose lui pinça le coeur: il venait de repenser à ces années de sa jeunesse, à cet enthousiasme en pure perte, à ses espoirs déçus...ce qu'il avait abandonné, ne croyant plus en lui-même. Voilà peut-être la raison de cette futilité à laquelle il se jetait, le goût qu'il avait de se coiffer, de se parer, sa folie à cheval... (I p.48)
Géricault does realise the inauthenticity of his position. He describes his original decision to follow the King as 'cette folie de se faire mousquetaire du Roi.' (I p.36) He acknowledges to himself his lack of dedication, but is unable to change:

Ce qu'il faisait, c'était sans illusion(...) il se savait par simple hasard enrôlé dans une bande contre une autre bande. Son honneur à lui, ce n'était pas les lys, un chiffon blanc frangé d'or, mais simplement la honte de changer de camp. (I p.372)

Even if he were able to change, he is not in a position to be able to make a choice. His obsession with horses, and with his own appearance, creates a gulf between himself and the harshness of reality, as becomes obvious when he ventures into a poor area of Beauvais and sees at first hand the sordidness of poverty. The comment 'Théodore cherchait à s'orienter' (I p.288) takes on a symbolic value in this context, drawing attention to the lack of direction in his life as a whole. This initial contact with poverty, however, has no positive effect upon him, as in the way that it did for Catherine Simonidzé. Significantly, he allows himself to be led away from the area by a group of fellow soldiers: 'Tous gens jeunes et insouciants.' (I p.288)

It takes three separate incidents to instigate and maintain any kind of social awareness in Géricault. The first of these crucial incidents is his witnessing of the secret Republican meeting at Poix, where he is brought face to face with the real implications of the political choice he has made so carelessly. Far from bringing about a lucid understanding of the falseness of his position, the experience operates almost exclusively on an instinctive, involuntary level:

il se faisait en Théodore une sorte de changement profond, inexplicable, que ne justifiaient pas les propos tenus, la valeur
des arguments, le développement d'une pensée. C'était comme un
glisement d'ombres en lui, une simple orientation inconsciente.(II
p.41)

His tenuous attachment to the King's cause is highlighted by his sudden
desire for the people present to understand the potential role of
Napoléon, as though he were in fact a supporter of the former emperor.
All this gives the impression that it will be a simple matter for
Géricault to change sides and cast aside his attachment to the King:

Napoléon, ce n'était pas forcément la guerre, mais assurément
c'était la dispersion de cet absurde univers auquel le liait
l'uniforme rouge, et seulement cet uniforme qu'il pouvait à chaque
instant arracher de sa peau.(II p.42)

Of course the process will not be as simple as this.

Not only does the experience at Poix alter Théodore's political
perspective, albeit in a confused way, but it also pierces through his
egocentric outlook on life, making him aware of the existence of others.
Confronted for the first time with a world of which he had been socially
and politically ignorant, a world where the price of bread is a cause
for 'une anxiété si nouvelle pour Théodore',(II p.42) he realises that
political choice has far-reaching effects upon people's lives:

le retour de l'Empereur c'était la fatalité bousculée, l'ordre des
puissants, c'était le commencement d'une vie différente, qui
frémissait ici parmi ces hommes misérables, d'une misère qu'il
n'avait jamais vraiment vue ni devinée, ce 'foisonnement de destins
sans espoir.(II p.42)

There is a discrepancy between the powerful emotional impact of the
scene on Géricault and the underlying impressions of alienation and
unreality which characterise the experience and which lead us to look
critically at Géricault's sudden enthusiasm. This is achieved by
Aragon's use of the extended image of the theatre. Géricault is drawn into the scene as though he were watching a play over which he has no control, but in which he is nonetheless involved. As though under a kind of spell, he is caught up in the arguments, and influenced by them. While he realises that his sudden sympathy for the actors in the play is illusory, he wants it to continue:

Soudain il se sentit envahi par cette idée du théâtre(...) et il craignait comme un enfant que l'enchantement ne cessât, que tout à l'heure, le rideau tombé, il allât retrouver ses idées d'avant(...) il craignait que tout cela n'eût été que du théâtre, il souhaitait désesprément continuer à croire.(II pp.42-43)

This sense of unreality is reinforced after the event when Aragon intervenes to suggest that it was all a dream (II p.64) and that he was in fact dreaming about his own experiences. This emphasis upon unreality seems to indicate even more strongly the problematic nature of Géricault's development. Nonetheless, the experience is a crucial one for Géricault since it brings him face to face with something beyond his own experience, a world of others, a world of tragedy and suffering, and the realisation that he belongs to it: 'il est des leurs'.(II p.51) In the same way, Géricault feels a sense of solidarity with men on the opposite side of the political divide, with whom he nonetheless shares a common destiny:

Et pour la première fois dans sa vie, Théodore se trouvait devant cette implacable nudité des hommes, cette nécessité des destins, devant des hommes qui lui donnaient ce sentiment d'être dans un navire qui fait eau, ou rien n'a plus d'importance que l'infatigable fureur à boucher les fissures du navire.(II p.50)

He begins to see that involvement is inescapable, the image of the boat suggesting the inevitability of embarquement.
Yet these realisations do not represent any conclusive commitment to political or social action on the part of Géricault. Despite the profound effect which the meeting has had upon him emotionally, and despite his initial response of solidarity with the Republicans, his reaction, once the spell is broken, remains equivocal. He has a sense of having gone too far to retreat, and yet something holds him back:

Il vient d'y entrer...ou il demeure sur le seuil, déjà trop engagé pour battre en retraite, étranger pourtant à ce monde, dans l'incapacité de faire un pas en avant, qui le jetterait dans la fournaise. Il est là, présent et absent. (II p.51)

There is, as so often with Aragon's potentially committed characters, a sense of alienation, which operates on levels other than that of the sense of unreality already referred to. Théodore is also aware of the enormous gulf between himself and the Republicans. Just as he begins to be aware of the existence and suffering of others and of his desire to help them in some way, he realises his difference from them. This difference is expressed both implicitly and explicitly: implicitly in the image of the theatre used to explore Théodore's reaction to what he sees being played out before him at Poix. There exists between him and the Republicans the distance between actor and audience, fantasy and reality. Explicitly, the alienation is seen in terms of his complete ignorance of the Republican cause, ignorance of its followers' loyalty, accentuated by the insistent repetition of the word 'rien':

Ne sachant rien(...). Théodore ne savait rien(...). Théodore ne sait pas(...). Il ne sait rien, il ne saura rien. (II p.52)

He is also aware that he is compromised by his uniform and that if he came forward, his intentions would be misunderstood.
Alienation exists on a third level: Géricault is aware that he is separated from these political activists not only by his own allegiance to the King, but also by his artistic vocation. He doubts that he would ever be accepted by them, for he himself is not convinced that an artist could have a valid role to play in their Organisation:

L'y accepterait-on? Avait-il même l'ombre d'un titre à s'y proposer? S'il avait eu seulement confiance dans son art, s'il avait pu s'en réclamer... mais les miséreux, que pensent-ils d'un peintre? (II p.93)

This question signals the beginning of Géricault's re-evaluation of art. At the beginning of the novel, we have seen that he has more or less abandoned painting. Now he considers the function of his painting in the light of a possible contribution he might make to society at large. As already mentioned, he has seen that there is a place in art for subjects taken from real life, though he had not yet put his views into practice. In the wake of his experience at Poix, however, comes a renewed interest in art; though at the back of his mind is still the question of how this would relate to his newly acquired political insights:

et même avait-il encore le droit de redevenir ce peintre, que depuis plus de six mois il se refusait d'être? Même cela était en question... Pourrait-on encore vivre chez soi, en dehors de ce qui se passe?(II p.93)

Géricault is concerned at this stage that, even with renewed good will, there will be a divorce between his existence as an artist and as a politically aware being.

Gradually the realisation of how these apparently disparate elements of himself can be united comes to him. He begins to see how his new vision of 'les autres' can be incorporated into his painting, together
with all the ugliness of social injustice. Even as he follows the King on his flight, the revelations of the meeting at Poix impinge upon his perception of the countryside:

Plus rien pour lui n'a le même aspect. Chaque maison misérable, chaque homme dans les champs(...) et c'est comme s'il touchait du doigt une réalité inconnue, découverte.(II pp.213-14)

He realises that the ordinary working people he sees, who in the past were traditionally relegated to the background in painting, are of much more importance than this. He sees that what he had admired in Caravaggio was not simply his technique, but the humanity of his paintings:

C'était la façon de voir du Caravage, qu'il avait lui, considérée jusque-là du seul point de vue de l'esthétique(...). Mais tout d'un coup, il comprenait que, chez le Caravage, c'était là tout autre affaire(...) humaine d'abord, une affirmation des autres, comme il en avait eu la révélation dans la nuit de Poix.(II p.218, author's emphasis)

Yet even having reached all these conclusions, Géricault takes no action to back them up. His resolutions remain on the purely theoretical level. He does not abandon the King and dedicate himself to his work, ironically for the same reason that his support went out instinctively to the Republicans and their cause: that is to say, because of his innate respect for others. He still feels the ties of honour and duty, and is unable to create an order of priorities:

Désertor... 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(...) un sentiment humain qui rendait impossible d'abandonner(...) ces hommes.(II p.220)

He is unable to break these ties alone, and the second of the crucial
incidents I have referred to, his discussion with Commandant Degeorge, is necessary to help him make up his mind as to where his allegiance really lies.

In this conversation, it becomes clear that the inability to choose lies at the root of Géricault's difficulties, as he himself can see. He can perceive little difference between Louis XVIII and Napoléon, but if it were simply a choice between the two, then the fact that Louis is fleeing while Napoléon is commanding more and more the support of the army, would enable him to make a decision. The complication arises with the 'troisième parti' represented by the Republicans at Poix, an option which fails to convince Géricault, particularly if it implies reliance on Napoléon for its success:

vous êtes incapable de me persuader que ceci ou cela peut favoriser ce troisième parti. (II p.275)

He believes that Napoléon has shown his true colours in granting his minister Carnot a title, and that if he returned to power nothing would change:

Houdetot dit que Napoléon a refusé, par là, d'être l'Empereur de la canaille(...) la France ne peut résister aux nobles et aux Alliés, aux conspirateurs et aux armées étrangères, que si l'on donne les armes au peuple. Napoléon le fera-t-il? Ou ne voyez-vous point qu'il va donner à la France à son tour une autre Charte(...) et puis après?(...) Le peuple continuera à crever la faim. (II p.276)

Géricault's scepticism about reliance on Napoléon, doubting that he will represent the interests of the people, impedes his choice and leads him to the conclusion that there is at present no way for him to choose: 'Il n'y a pas de chemin pour moi dans ce siècle'. (II p.279) While Degeorge is convinced that an alliance combining the strength of the people and
the strength of Napoléon could not fail, Géricault believes that it would be doomed to end in brutality and failure, as the Revolution was. Whatever the political colour of the triumphant side, he believes that force would always win:

Voilà tout le choix qui m'est donné, un prétexte ou l'autre de répandre le sang... Le désordre ou la guerre, pas d'autre perspective! (II p.279)

He seems reluctant to get his hands dirty and indicates that he will wait for the political struggle to be settled:

Plus tard, peut-être(...) quand les hommes auront liquidé des querelles pour lesquelles je n'arrive pas à me passionner.(II p.279)

Meanwhile, he will combine his desire to create with his political awareness by taking the people from their traditional position in the background of paintings and placing them at the centre of his work and thus make others aware of them and their suffering:

Je ferai sa place au peuple dans mes tableaux. Il y régnera tel qu'il est, sans espoir, avec sa force perdue, sa beauté gaspillée. (II p.279)

His commitment to others remains, therefore, on an abstract level. He is not willing to enter into any direct political action in order to influence events. He still lacks the emotional impulse to break his ties with the King and to follow his conscience. Duty keeps him loyal, but it has ceased to be an admirable characteristic and has become a form of moral cowardice:

Il a en lui ce sentiment stupide et invétéré du devoir, cette crainte de ne pas faire ce qu'il faut.(II p.299)
It takes a third crucial incident, or rather experience, to force Géricault out of his irresolution. The experience which achieves this is the King's ignominious flight into exile and desertion of his men. Out of this negative experience comes the positive experience of freedom, something which profoundly changes Géricault's outlook and brings with it the responsibility of choice:

La vérité est que tout à l'heure, quand nous nous sommes sentis brusquement seuls(...) 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(...). Peut-être est-ce cela la liberté, et qu'une vie où la liberté règne vaut qu'on la vive.(II p.336)

Finally he is able to abandon his uniform, symbolically casting aside this last tie with the King.

Nonetheless the transformation of Géricault is not complete. His hesitancy and uncertainty remain, and in the final analysis he does not commit himself to any political alternative. One might even say that he is irresponsible in his refusal to take an active part in the political struggles which are anticipated. He contrasts himself with the son of Degeorge, whom he imagines as a much more positive figure than himself:

Il a dix-huit ans, lui, et il s'est déjà battu, et 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...(II p.337)

For the time being, Géricault will concentrate on his art, seeing it both as a means of ordering his experiences: 'Il allait falloir mettre dans tout cela, l'ordre, l'art', (II p.377) and of depicting 'ceux-là qui n'ont rien à perdre, qui ne peuvent pas retourner leur veste, qui seront toujours les victimes'.(II p.377) The combination of these
thoughts with the orientation of the final pages of the novel towards the future and the hope of renewal is as far as the transformation of Géricault into a committed character goes. In fact, the final section of the novel, given over to the future experiences of Frédéric Degeorge, displaces Géricault, whose development is left incomplete. In this, he can be compared to Jean and Cécile in Les Communistes, where the end of the novel sees them only part way along the path to commitment. This seems to emphasise once more Aragon's difficulty in bringing the process of individual transformation to a satisfactory close, or perhaps it merely indicates the complexity of the process, particularly in a historical context where the political options are less clear-cut, and foregoes the temptation of a simplistic conclusion.

One feature of Aragon's other socialist realist novels which does not recur in La Semaine sainte is the relationship between the themes of love and commitment. This is perhaps surprising, in that it was already an important development within Aragon's version of socialist realism, and in view of the fact that it is in 1958 that Aragon comments on the suitability of love stories as a didactic technique in the novel. There are various isolated references to love, but never in a sustained development which links it with the theme of commitment as before. There is a fleeting suggestion at the end of the novel that there was some kind of causal link between the early meeting with Caroline Lallemand and Théodore's subsequent development:

A son retour, il saura peut-être pour quoi il fallait, avant de partir, il fallait qu'il eût rencontré sous le porche de la rue des Martyrs Caroline Lallemand si légère, et femme, dans ses bras. (II p.378)

His original meeting with her would seem to have paved the way for such
a development, but the novel concentrates instead on the parallels between his artistic development and his political awareness.

How do we evaluate Aragon's claim that 'La Semaine sainte, à mon sens en tout cas, relève du réalisme socialiste.' (JAMJ p.91) Do we see in it, as Hubert Juin has done, a continuation of Le Monde réel, or as the departure from socialist realism that others have preferred to see. The answer would seem to lie somewhere between these two extremes. There are elements of continuity in La Semaine sainte: the faithful representation of reality, the existence of ideological interpretation, the sense of revolutionary development and the theme of transformation. There are also important changes, which need to be seen in context of the less dogmatic approach to socialist realism which Aragon was adopting at this time. In practice, these changes mean that the novel is much less politicised. This is particularly notable in the ideological framework of the novel and in the representation of reality, which are no longer geared towards a denunciation of the bourgeoisie and the proposing of the views of the Communist party: clearly there is scope for neither of these in the novel. These developments are of course both a result of the change of historical focus, from the recent past to a period when socialism as a coherent movement had not yet appeared. The choice of subject matter is therefore a significant one and reflects the openness which characterises Aragon's view of socialist realism at this time. It is clear, however, that Aragon has not abandoned the promotion of socialist values in his novel. They are present in the Republicans' analysis of the political and industrial situation, and in the references to the revolutionary tradition which the Republicans are presented as continuing.
It is in this framework of the continuing revolutionary tradition, traced from 1789 through to the Republicans portrayed in the novel and the socialist struggles of the mid-nineteenth century, anticipated at the end of the narrative, that Aragon places the depiction of the progression towards socialism into its historical perspective, thus taking a wider view than before of the transformation of society. He presents not only the victories, but also the failures and the uncertainties of this gradual process. This difference of perspective means that *La Semaine sainte* must be considered separately from the novels of *Le Monde réel*, whilst forming a development of them. Aragon, whilst promoting a flexible version of socialist realism is not abandoning its central precepts, for he adheres to a broadly-based socialist standpoint which permits a sense of revolutionary development to emerge, whilst not tying down the novel to the expression of a narrowly ideological stance.
NOTES

1. In his review of the novel, Henriot described it as 'un vrai chef d'oeuvre, par la force, le jet, la vitalité, la dimension supérieure.' 'La Semaine sainte', Le Monde, 17.XII.1958, p.8

2. Savage, Malraux, Sartre and Aragon as political novelists, p.44

3. Many critics seem to have been sidetracked by the notion of objectivity, making a simplistic division between Aragon's 'subjective' work (Le Monde réel) and his 'objective' novel (La Semaine sainte). As Aragon has pointed out, the fact that he deals sympathetically with characters whose politics he rejects does not make La Semaine sainte any the less a socialist realist novel. He also remarks that he did the same thing in Les Communistes. (JAMJ pp.90-91) The opposition of subjectivity and objectivity is too simplistic a means to distinguish La Semaine sainte from the preceding novels.


5. Marcenac, 'Aragon, témoin du parti', p.209


7. Thorez, 'L'oeuvre d'Aragon', p.536

8. See chapter 4

9. This preface was written for the Oeuvres romanesques croisées and is also reprinted in J'Abats mon jeu. The page references are to the latter. JAMJ p.91

10. JAMJ p.158. Aragon's reference to realism rather than to socialist realism is characteristic of much of his writing at this time, but
does not necessarily imply the abandoning of his ideological standpoint. See chapter 4, pp.101-4

11. For the full definition of socialist realism see chapter 3, p.65, note 5


13. Volume II p.117. Further references will be given, to volume and page number, in parentheses in the text.

14. Rima Drell Reck, Literature and Responsibility, p.228


16. Ibid.

17. Suleiman, Authoritarian Fictions, p.56. See also Chapter 6, pp.172

18. II p.314. This parallel is highlighted by Aragon in his intervention (II pp. 344-47), though he resists drawing any political conclusions:

   Il n'y a nulle comparaison entre ces deux sarabandes, la quête de la mer par les débris de l'année Quarante, la fuite des Princes à la veille de Pâques 1815. C'est un jour où les Dieux sont morts, une fois comme l'autre, voilà tout.(II p.346)

In another part of the novel, Aragon has already warned about the danger of trying to explain the past in terms of the present, thus discouraging attempts to see too many parallels between 1815 and his own experiences in 1940:

   Rien n'est absurde comme de juger, d'expliquer le passé d'après le présent. Rien n'est plus faux ni plus dangereux.(II p.167)
19. See Bibrowska, pp.98-102

20. See pp.259-60 of this chapter.

21. The links between the political climate of 1958 and La Semaine sainte are examined in detail by Molodoshanin, pp.254-76.

22. Aragon claims that his inspiration for Géricault came from James Dean. (JAMJ p.93)

23. See chapter 8

24. See chapter 4, pp.108-9

25. Juin, Aragon, p.135

26. See, for example, Alain Huraut who in his book Aragon, Prisonnier politique, described La Semaine sainte as 'un livre de dégagement', (p.231) in which Aragon left behind the Stalinist period.

27. It could even be argued that in his analysis of the development of the industrial revolution Aragon gives greater emphasis to its impact than is perhaps warranted in order to underline his political analysis. By 1815, industrial development in France was still limited and on a smaller scale than is perhaps implied by Aragon's references to 'fabriques'. Cobban comments in his History of Modern France (Vol.2):

   By 1815 French industry, it is estimated, was at the level of mechanisation reached in Great Britain by 1780. Domestic labour was still the norm. Little workshops, with a master man and a few 'compagnons', working from one to five looms, still overwhelmingly predominated even in the textile industry. (p.49)
While there are those who have charged at least some of Aragon's novels with being propagandist and, for this reason, lacking in artistic merit, there are also those who have commented that Aragon was either unwilling or unable to commit himself fully to socialist realism. The first of these charges is a simplistic one, for although, as I have illustrated, there are certain moments in Aragon's novels where the voicing of ideological statements dominates the narrative and characterisation, particularly in Les Communistes, this is by no means invariably the case, for Aragon frequently attains a narrative and thematic complexity which the accusation of propagandist writing would deny him. The analysis which concludes that Aragon was not fully committed to socialist realism is one which requires more discussion, since there would, in fact, seem to be a disparity between Aragon's theoretical pronouncements, which are characterised by a tone of certainty, often one of dogmatism, and his application of the theory in his novels, which do not always seem to live up to the theoretical rigour of socialist realism in a uniform way.

The tone of the theoretical works can to a certain extent be explained by their structure. Jean-Pierre Bernard has pointed out that the character of Pour un réalisme socialiste is dictated by the fact that it is not a sustained, full-length analysis, but a collection of speeches, characterised by 'le ton forcément un peu outré qui distingue une allocution à une tribune d'un travail théorique mûri'. Bernard goes on to suggest that, given the nature of Pour un réalisme socialiste, it can hardly be considered a definitive statement on
socialist realism. In fact, he argues, Aragon is more intent upon assimilating nineteenth-century writers into a literary tradition which he sees as anticipating socialist realism. Bernard concludes:

Ainsi le réalisme socialiste défini par Aragon n'est pas une doctrine rigide et exclusive. This is a statement which is reminiscent of Aragon's own later comments as he attempted to broaden the scope of socialist realism. If it can be established that Aragon's interpretation of the theory was, from the beginning, not as rigorous as has often been assumed, it may be possible to explain why Aragon's novels have been considered as a departure from socialist realism.

The characteristic features of *Pour un réalisme socialiste* pointed out by Bernard recur in many of Aragon's other works on socialist realism. These tend to be either speeches or lectures, individual or in collection, as is *J'Abats mon jeu*, an important source for Aragon's comments on socialist realism; alternatively, they are essays devoted to assimilating predominantly nineteenth-century writers into a pre-socialist realist tradition. This is the case with both *Hugo, Poète réaliste* and *La Lumière de Stendhal*. The other sources for Aragon's comments on socialist realism are the many journal and newspaper articles he wrote on the subject. Again, given the nature of the medium used, it is not so much a sustained doctrine of socialist realism which appears, as a series of statements from which certain points emerge and recur regularly.

The principal 'mot d'ordre' of all these theoretical works is that of realism. Again it is frequently discussed with reference to nineteenth-century writers, defined in opposition to naturalism and
placed in the context of national culture. Other criteria are invoked with much less insistence. The ideological content of socialist realism tends to be assumed rather than stated in detail, relying on declarations such as:

les écrivains sont appelés à jouer un rôle historique dans la transformation même de l'homme dans ce passage de l'homme de la société de classes à l'homme de la société sans classes. (PRS p.13)

The precise nature of this role for the writer in France is not explicitly elaborated, beyond similar references to the class struggle, the transformation of society and to the writer's duty to participate in the preservation of peace.

The recourse to a past tradition of realism, to broadly based terms such as realism and transformation, although inevitably presupposing a certain interpretation in the light of his political allegiance, nonetheless accords Aragon a certain degree of flexibility in his practice of socialist realism, as does his insistence upon the validity of a French version of socialist realism which will take into account the specific cultural and political context of France, as opposed to that of the Soviet Union.

The association of socialist realism with a long tradition of French critical realism, in works such as Hugo, Poète réaliste and La Lumière de Stendhal, prepares the ground for Aragon's use of a form of realism which is very reminiscent of this tradition in its oppositional, critical stance vis-à-vis bourgeois society, and which is far removed from the determinedly optimistic standpoint promoted by Soviet socialist realism. His denunciation of bourgeois society through a detailed evocation of its corruption and moral bankruptcy, finds its ideological
motivation in Aragon's observation that: 'la bourgeoisie ne peut plus supporter l'éclat du réalisme', (PRS pp.85-86) a statement which underlines the essentially subversive nature of Aragon's realism. Yet even given the necessity of this negative approach in the context of non-socialist France, there is little evidence of a corresponding interest in the depiction of the working class and the realities of the class struggle, features which are implied in the definition of the aims of socialist realism by the Union of Soviet Writers, a definition which Aragon himself quoted as a model in 1953, and which calls for:

une représentation véridique, historiquement concrète de la réalité dans son développement révolutionnaire(...) le devoir de transformation idéologique et d'éducation des masses dans l'esprit du socialisme. 4

I have commented upon the descriptions of the strikes in *Les Cloches de Bâle* and *Les Beaux Quartiers*, which give Aragon scope for a realistic depiction of the growing power of the working class, although bourgeois characters are still the main focus of attention. *Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale* and *Aurélien*, however, are characterised by an almost total concentration on the bourgeoisie through a demonstration of their individualism and lack of social and personal responsibility, though even in this respect Aragon's treatment is largely a sympathetic one. In neither of these novels does the realistic depiction of society extend to the working class except for the inclusion of token scenes, such as the introduction of the Méré family into *Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale*. The superficial and cursory treatment they are given means that, despite the insistence upon the injustice they suffer, they are marginalised within the overall framework of the novel. The brief appearance in *Aurélien* of Riquet, detached from his surroundings, as socially
anonymous as is Aurélien himself, means that he functions on a purely symbolic level, rather than providing a realistic insight into the conditions of the working class. In fact the incident is more significant for what it says about Aurélien than for its comments on Riquet or the working class.

The balance is redressed to a certain extent in Les Communistes, where working-class characters are given much greater prominence and are depicted not as the victims of oppression, or as an anonymous mass, but as militants posing an alternative to capitalist society. Yet any sense of progression which may have been suggested in terms of class depiction in Les Communistes is obfuscated in La Semaine sainte by the return to an era which pre-dates the class struggle. While the roots of the conflict which would lead to the class struggle are shown, the novel's protagonist is an observer rather than a participant in political action, and the evidence of conflict is reported rather than experienced. Once again, the focus of attention is elsewhere.

Aragon's definition of realism emphasised its selectivity and its opposition to naturalism. It would seem, however, that this selectivity has operated on a class basis, with the effect of concentrating to a very large extent on the bourgeoisie, though this is surely not something which is anticipated by the theory of socialist realism. Aragon made clear the importance of the perspective of working-class ideology in French socialist realism:

(...)

le réalisme socialiste était possible en pays capitaliste, si seulement l'artiste, l'écrivain, ayant fait sien 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.(JAMJ p.182)

Yet the working-class characters we do see tend to be depicted either
collectively, and therefore anonymously, as in the strikes and
demonstrations of the earlier novels of Le Monde réel, or to be rather
schematic wooden characters, such as Victor Dehaynin, or scarcely
individualised at all, as in the case of the Méré family. The scope of
Aragon's realism, therefore, is not as wide-ranging as might be
expected. The denunciatory aspect of his novels is a necessary corollary
to the role of the socialist realist writer in capitalist society. Yet
it is surprising that the first four novels do not concentrate more on
the concrete reality of the growing socialist movement at the turn of
the century, or that Aragon did not attempt to take inspiration from
the more contemporary events of the Front Populaire.5

There was criticism of Les Cloches de Bâle shortly after its
publication for what was considered to be its lack of adherence to the
party line,6 whilst others praised Aragon for his reflection of the
true historical perspective.7 As Bernard has indicated, these
differing reactions are symptomatic of differing expectations of
socialist realist works.8 In fact, the ideological line of
Les Cloches de Bâle is relatively clear, though not one which
reflected the detail of PCF policies in the early 1930s, for it draws
attention to the class struggle in the opposition of the working class
to the forces of capitalism, and the suggestion of the 'marche au
socialisme de l'humanité'(JAMJ p.173) by means of the growing strength
of the workers, a theme which is again present in Les Beaux Quartiers.
However, in Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale and Aurélien, there is a
virtual absence of ideology, a lack which Aragon seeks to rectify rather
artificially at the end of each novel by making a political point which
does not in itself emerge naturally from the narrative. The ideology of
Les Communistes, on the other hand, constantly underpins the narrative, and is of a much more specific nature, since in most cases it refers to the reaction of Communist militants to the war. The clarity of the ideological message in Les Communistes is attested to by the wealth of enthusiastic reviews of the novel in the Communist press, and is no doubt a reflection of the hard-line cultural policy of the time. Yet by 1958, La Semaine sainte represents a much more general ideological standpoint, corresponding to Aragon's evolving views on socialist realism.

Aragon's depiction of the social transformation of the individual is one area where ideological and fictional demands seem to merge. His depiction of: 'la rééducation de l'homme par l'homme, pour la transformation du singe social de notre temps en l'homme socialiste de l'avenir' (PRS p.8) is an area where detailed and convincing characterisation combines with the sense of progression towards socialism, personal transformation foreshadowing social transformation. Yet the movement of individuals from the bourgeoisie to the working class was not as straightforward a proposition as might at first have seemed, since the majority of the cases which are described by Aragon are marked either by the hesitations and self-doubt of the bourgeois hero in search of commitment, as is the case with Catherine and Armand; or by the politically tenuous progress of characters such as Jean, Cécile and Géricault. A great deal of attention is also given to characters who completely fail to come to any realisation of even social responsibility, but remain locked within their individual preoccupations (Pierre and Aurélien). Yet it is the problematic characters who attract the author's systematic attention and sympathy, rather than the positive
heroes who have already undergone this evolution. Does this mean that Aragon is turning his back on the demands of socialist realism? There would seem to be a disparity between stated intention: to describe the passage of members of the bourgeoisie to the proletariat, and actual achievement. The reality, however, is not quite as simple as this, for Aragon stressed that he also wished to acknowledge the difficulty of political transformation and not give too optimistic an analysis. He said with reference to Aurélien:

J'y ai voulu montrer encore un exemple de ces possibilités de passage, d'une classe à l'autre, mais cette fois une possibilité rejetée(...) j'ai voulu montrer ce genre de jeunes bourgeois de quoi sont ensuite faits les fascistes et qui, au départ, ne sont pas nécessairement antipathiques.

Rather than a turning away from socialist realism, this would seem to tie up with Aragon's espousal of a specifically French form of socialist realism and to recognise that in the context of French society it would be simplistic and unrealistic to suggest too easy a process of individual, and therefore ultimately of social, transformation. It also recognises that negative examples may have as much force as the positive ones. Certainly, Aragon made it clear that at no stage did he envisage the abandoning of the ideological content of socialist realism, suggesting instead that the prospect of socialism, if not explicitly elaborated in his novels, would at least illuminate them:

Entendre aujourd'hui poursuivre sous le nom de réalisme un art qui serait dépouvu de la lumière du socialisme, revient à nier cette lumière, à nier le socialisme comme étape nouvelle de l'humanité. (JAMJ p.269)

Aragon's flexible interpretation of socialist realism can be seen most clearly in his exploration of the links between political activity
or political development and love, and in the importance accorded to the latter. Love is not mentioned in any definition of socialist realism, and yet the parallels between love and commitment in Le Monde réel are so unmistakeable as to make coincidence an unlikely explanation. Rather than see in this aspect of the novels a departure from the application of socialist realism, the indications would seem to point to its being an expression of Aragon's reluctance to limit socialist realism to a narrowly ideological method.

Taken as a whole, the flexibility of Aragon's approach to socialist realism would seem to indicate not that he failed to submit to the doctrine of socialist realism, but rather that he had developed a version of socialist realism which recognised the different historical and political circumstances of France, as well as his own personal interests, and was therefore less rigorous than the Soviet version. It is this flexibility which anticipates the 'ouverture' that Aragon embraced in the late 1950s, and which ensures a considerable amount of continuity between the Monde Réel novels and La Semaine sainte. Aragon had warned party comrades as early as 1954 of the dangers of reducing socialist realism (which he here identifies with 'l'art de parti') to a schematic and simplistic form:

Beaucoup de camarades(...) se font de l'art de parti une représentation fausse, grossière, schématique, celle d'un art de pure et simple déclaration, un art d'affiche, un art gesticulatoire, un art diminué. (JAMU p.207)

The implicit assumption, which Aragon is contradicting here, that socialist realism is a form of propaganda, seems to be at the root of misinterpretations of socialist realism, which lead to distorted expectations, with the result that when Aragon does not fulfill these
expectations, he is automatically assumed to have distanced himself from socialist realism.

Nonetheless there are tensions between theory and practice, for it is when Aragon comes closest to the original formulation of the theory, in his depiction of working-class positive heroes and in certain incidents where the communication of ideology plays a predominant role, that characterisation in particular is weakened. It is in Les Communistes where the hero figures are most numerous and the voicing of ideology is most insistent and most frequent, that the characters are the weakest. On the other hand, it is when Aragon is most flexible in his interpretation of the theory, as in the extended examinations of the difficulties of commitment and of the parallels between love and commitment, that the characterisation is the most interesting, and that he succeeds in bringing a personal dimension to socialist realism.

The depiction of the working class remains a problem for Aragon, and it is surely anomalous that a writer concerned with bringing about social transformation in the direction of socialism should fail to incorporate the working class convincingly into his novels, not just as a collective force, but as individuals. It is doubtless a result of Aragon's own middle-class, intellectual background that he found it easier to write about the bourgeoisie. The problem of the intended readership of the novels also remains unresolved. Despite his belief that 'la chose écrite est une arme', it is not clear how Aragon intends this to operate: whether he envisages the novels as an encouragement to the proletariat or as a warning to the bourgeoisie of what is to come; and which readership he is aiming at.
Over and above these tensions, there is a unifying factor in Aragon's novels and this is the theme of individual transformation, the necessity for commitment, and it is this which associates him with the broader issue of commitment in literature. Not only does he espouse a specific ideology and devote his writing to it, therefore accepting his responsibility as a writer, but he also analyses the difficulties of the process of political commitment for the individual and, in La Semaine sainte, the importance of commitment for the creative artist. The stage of témoignage which is reached by Géricault is seen merely as a preparation for the process of fully committing oneself to a cause, without which the former is incomplete. Aragon himself has clearly gone well beyond this stage. Some may say that because of his adherence to the PCF and to socialist realism, his work is closer to an expression of embrigadement than of engagement. His reluctance to be constrained by theory is, however, evident in his works, which do not limit themselves to a rigid interpretation of a pre-established doctrine, but which explore its possibilities, even to the point of expressing not simply ideological certainty, but the implied disillusion and uncertainty seen in La Semaine sainte, anticipating the problematic nature of the works yet to come.
NOTES

1. See for example David Caute who has commented:

Aragon, the most outspoken advocate of socialist realism in France, had in essence produced a series of novels in which the negative aspects dominated and in which the 'positive hero' scarcely emerged at all. Far from contributing to what Zhdanov had called the 'ideological remoulding and education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism', *Le Monde réel* merely added to the already formidable pile of novels written by members of the middle class for the middle class against the middle class.

Communism and the French Intellectuals, p.326

Molodoshanin maintained that:

Nizan wrote in accordance with the principles he advocated, whereas Aragon avoided committing himself fully.

'Louis Aragon: the Novel and Political Commitment', p.87


3. Ibid., p.144


5. Michael Kelly suggests reasons why Aragon may have chosen not to deal directly with the *Front Populaire* era in 'Aragon and the Spirit of the Popular Front', Quinquèreme, January 1988, pp.3-13

6. In a review in *L'Humanité*, the critic Garmy commented:

Il n'apparaît pas que notre camarade ait clairement reconstitué la physionomie exacte du mouvement ouvrier d'avant-guerre. Il distingue trop superficiellement entre les divers courants qui le traversent. Il présente un tableau émouvant, pittoresque, mais tout extérieur des grèves, il ne les étudie pas en profondeur, il ne dègage pas leur enseignement.

*L'Humanité*, 31.XII.1934, p.5, quoted by Waters, 'The presentation of
political perspective in the early socialist realist works of Paul Nizan and Louis Aragon', p.9

7. The Soviet critic Mirsky observed:

Aragon est un écrivain communiste chez qui la conception du monde qu'il a comme artiste est toute imprégnée de sa conception politique de l'histoire.

L'Humanité, 22.I 1935, p.4, quoted by Waters, p.10

8. Bernard, pp.140–41

9. 'Aragon répond à ses témoins', p.89

10. 'Les Ecrivains et la paix', p.1
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