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MORAL AND POLITICAL VALUES IN THE  
WRITINGS OF VERCORS

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(i)

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Russell Barnea

Summary

This thesis explores Vercors's writings, with particular reference to his moral and political attitudes, from 1942 to the present. It includes his clandestine wartime publications, the subsequent development of his theory of human 'rebellion', with its strong ethical connotations, and the various polemical and fictional texts in which, in the post-war period, he expresses support for communist aims and for progressive causes such as anticolonialism. Vercors's chairmanship of the CNE in the mid-1950's is examined through his memoirs as well as through his articles and speeches of the time. After the author's overt withdrawal from fellow-travelling in 1957, his more selective political commitment is traced through the remaining years of the Algerian conflict, while the memoirs and other works of reflection that have appeared in the latter part of his career recapitulate the overall development of his political attitudes and reveal certain changes of view. Vercors's more general theory of human value has, on the other hand, remained constant, and he offers it as a starting-point for better understanding between men of all nations and ideologies.

The analysis follows this broad chronological pattern, first in relation to the moral elements, then the political; but there is frequent cross-reference between the two aspects, in keeping with the author's own emphasis on their close interconnection in his outlook. The extent of his combined fictional and non-fictional output is such that three successive chapters are devoted to the exploration of his moral attitudes, then three, similarly, to the political responses. There is also reference, where appropriate, to critical commentary on Vercors's work and to other background sources; and the appendices contain Vercors's direct response to specific questions put to him during the preparation of the present study.

This thesis is intended to contribute to the field of modern French studies through its comprehensive coverage of Vercors's writing in two major areas of commitment.

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Key to abbreviations (in alphabetical order) of works by Vercors, and editions, referred to in the thesis. All texts published in Paris

- AD Les Animaux dénaturés, coll: 'Livre de poche', 1982 edition  
 AN Les Armes de la Nuit, Albin Michel, 1951 (with La Puissance du Jour)  
 BS La Bataille du Silence, Presses de la Cité, 1967  
 CE Les Chemins de l'Etre, Albin Michel, 1965  
 CF Comme un Frère, Plon, 1973  
 CJC Ce que je crois, Grasset, 1975  
 Col Colères, Albin Michel, 1956  
 DFC Les Divagations d'un Français en Chine, Albin Michel, 1956  
 LD La Liberté de Décembre, Albin Michel, 1960  
 MAB Moi, Aristide Briand, Plon, 1981  
 MP Monsieur Prousthe, Albin Michel, 1958  
 NJ Les Nouveaux Jours, Plon, 1984  
 OP Les Occasions perdues, Plon, 1982  
 PA Portrait d'une Amitié, Albin Michel, 1954  
 Per Le Périple, Albin Michel, 1958  
 PJ La Puissance du Jour, Albin Michel, 1951 (with Les Armes de la Nuit)  
 PMH Plus ou moins Homme, Albin Michel, 1950  
 PPC P.P.C. (Pour Prendre Congé), Albin Michel, 1957  
 PS Les Pas dans le Sable, Albin Michel, 1954  
 Q Quota ou les Pléthoriens, Stock, 1966  
 QMB Questions sur la Vie à Messieurs les Biologistes, Stock, 1973  
 RM Le Radeau de la Méduse, Presses de la Cité, 1969  
 SM Le Silence de la Mer, coll: 'Livre de poche', 1983 edition  
 SNS Sens et non-sens de l'Histoire, Galilée, 1978  
 ST Le Sable du Temps, Emile-Paul Frères, 1947  
 Sylva Sylva, Grasset, 1961  
 TA Le Tigre d'Anvers, Plon, 1986  
 YL Les Yeux et la Lumière, Albin Michel, 1955  
 Z Zoo, Galilée, 1978

## INTRODUCTION

Vercors's contribution to French writing over the greater part of the last half-century has been distinctive both in energy of output and in moral seriousness. On the slim foundation-stone of a clandestine 'récit' about the German Occupation, written when he was already approaching middle age, the author has produced some forty fictional or non-fictional works, together with half a dozen theatrical adaptations of his own and others' texts: in the words of one critic, 'la notoriété soudaine de Vercors a fait de lui un écrivain prolifique, sinon prolixe.'<sup>1</sup> In keeping with a well-established intellectual tradition in France he has, moreover, taken a public stance on the major political issues of the day, and in the late 1940's and 1950's he was a notable, if at times uneasy, fellow-traveller. But above all else, as he himself would surely see it, he has tried to shape an enduring moral response to the problem of international tension and conflict. Through his general theory of human identity he has, he hopes, been able to establish a basic premise on which all men everywhere, of whatever national, religious or ideological allegiance, might achieve mutual recognition and a sense of kinship.

If these are the dominant features of Vercors's literary profile, however, they also point to a number of dichotomies or paradoxes which make the analysis of his work both more challenging and intrinsically more rewarding. A key concern of this study will be to examine the interplay between two central elements in his writing, the moral and the political, and it is precisely in this area that some of the more intriguing contrasts become apparent. There is, for example, the dichotomy between the diligent fellow-traveller who voiced strong support for 'l'énorme et courageuse expérience socialiste qui se

poursuit de l'Elbe à la mer de Chine',<sup>2</sup> and the moralist who embraced Kant's principle that human beings should be treated uniquely as ends in themselves, never as means. And as a corollary to this there is the tension, fully recorded in his writing over several years, between the author and his communist friends over the matter of political lies - lies that Vercors consistently condemned as a virtual crime against humanity but which communist spokesmen had often to propagate in adherence to the Moscow line.

But if the importance of truth was a contention that the author maintained in all his writings, while yet supporting the Communists for many years, there are other conflicts in his work which are inherent rather than explicit, consequential rather than intentional. A certain irony can perhaps be seen, for example, in his determination to point out the bond of shared humanity that should override the ideological divisions between men - and the contrasting fact that his vigorously partisan contributions to some of the debates of the 1940's and 1950's (over Pétain, Henri Martin, or the foreign policies of Laniel or Mollet) may, to judge by some contemporary critics' reactions, only have added to the prevailing sectarianism of the times. Vercors has seen it as his duty to speak out firmly and directly in his chosen causes, and through the letter has always aimed to serve generous ideals of fraternity and progress. Arguably, however, his often manichean approach to controversial issues has detracted from the resonance that his concern for mankind's moral inheritance might otherwise have achieved.

Just how far this was the case we may partly discover from the reviews that Vercors's works received at the time of publication; and the potential range of critical response can be gauged, for example, in respect of Plus ou moins Homme (1950), with its juxtaposition within a single volume of philosophical theory and polemical pamphlet.<sup>3</sup> Certainly it will be possible, in looking back at such reviews, to see that Vercors's work has attracted a full measure of antagonism to balance the warm approval which he has also enjoyed, the latter of course particularly in the early years after the War. As for the causes of the hostility, they will emerge mainly from a study of the author's political commitments: political prejudice dies hard in literary as in other circles, and the way in which some of the more conservative critics viewed Vercors's work presumably owed much to his sternly anti-collaborationist stance in the post-Liberation publishing purge and his consistent and robust championing of progressive causes thereafter.

For many right-wing critics, Vercors's sins seem to have been compounded when, following his stated farewell to fellow-travelling in P.P.C. (Pour Prendre Congé, 1957), he had extracts from a subsequent novel, Le Périple (1958), published in Les Lettres françaises. For Vercors this had been a way of fulfilling his promise, in P.P.C., not to turn his back completely on the Communists; and it was also intended as a rebuff to 'la presse bourgeoise' (NJ p 313), which had just acclaimed his apparent conversion. In Les Nouveaux Jours (1984) Vercors recalls his decision over Le Périple, which he sees as having had significant consequences for his career ever since:

De ce jour, pour les revues et journaux je cessais d'exister. Inutile d'ajouter que, à la radio comme à la TV, je serai pratiquement interdit d'antenne. Malgré la vingtaine d'ouvrages publiés depuis lors, et sauf exceptions rarissimes, on ne me verra jamais participer à des émissions littéraires. (N.J. p 314)

But in fact, as the first sentence of this quotation suggests, the negative reactions that Vercors perceived did not emanate only from one political direction. At a time when events in Hungary were still reverberating in the West, various intellectuals of the non-communist Left were also, according to Vercors's own account, offended by his failure to make a complete break with the Communists; and it is thus with a somewhat melodramatic succinctness that the author recalls his sense of having been 'débouté de la gloire, du centre et de la gauche' (N.J. p 314).

This was not, however, his first experience of rejection or hostility to be recorded in the pages of Les Nouveaux Jours. Fred Kupferman in L'Express gave the title 'Les Rancœurs d'Alceste' to his review of the book,<sup>4</sup> and although this is an exaggeration - for there is both serenity and quiet satisfaction in Vercors's recollections of the period in question (1942-1962) - it does highlight one important element in the account. Les Nouveaux Jours includes a catalogue of rejections and disappointments that the author had suffered at various times from those he had regarded - or could have expected to regard - as his allies: Chamson, Pierre de Leasure, Jérôme Lindon, Pascal Pia, Vailland, Marc Beigbeder, Françoise Giroud and Jean-Marie Domenach.<sup>5</sup> Some of these rejections, like Domenach's, could be explained (even if the manner of them could not be excused) by fervent anti-Stalinism; but others left Vercors hurt, perplexed and increasingly uncertain as to his public role. It was this uncertainty which seems to have been reflected in some of the early pages of P.P.C., and in his unsure response

to the events of 1958 and the return of General de Gaulle; and which therefore produced another of those areas of inner tension and conflict in his outlook which it will be a concern of this thesis to explore.

Of course, personal betrayals and the hostility of critics are scarcely unique experiences during a long life and an extensive creative career; but in Vercors's case, when added to the politically-motivated rebuffs that he suffered in 1957-58, they may help to explain the comparative indifference that most of his later publications have encountered. This, in short, is another of the paradoxes of Vercors's career: the fact that for all the well-sustained vigour of his output, the bulk of his work is virtually unknown to the general reading public. Le Silence de la Mer remains a minor landmark in French literary history and a continuing, major, publishing success. But of all the many titles that Vercors has produced since the War, not one - with the possible exception of Les Animaux dénaturés - has achieved a celebrity that is remotely comparable to that of his first clandestine story; while of the substantial production of the last two decades in particular, none seems to have attracted the critical or public attention which its inherent literary interest and continuing testimony to Vercors's moral concern would seem to justify.

Altogether this is a phenomenon to which the author himself has alluded more than once. In a 1977 interview,<sup>6</sup> for example, he evoked Gus Bofa's depiction of Roland Dorgelès 'tout petit ... littéralement écrasé sous une énorme croix de bois', then drew the parallel with his own fate: 'C'est un peu ce qui m'est arrivé';<sup>7</sup> and this view was endorsed by his interviewer, Jean-Louis Ezine, whose comment: 'Étonnant Vercors, décidément condamné au Silence de la Mer' seemed to acknowledge both

the considerable scope of Vercors's interests and ambitions since the War, and the fact that no discussion of his work was ever undertaken without some quasi-ritual, but often prolonged, reference to the first clandestine text. A survey of critical writing on Vercors indicates, indeed, that many discussions do not move far beyond that early phase, and even if they do, it is often to cast doubt on the success of subsequent work. The significance of Le Silence de la Mer and La Marche à l'Etoile, either for the author himself or for the chapter of literary history which they helped to create, cannot of course be minimised; but one of the prime aims of the present study will be to devote a proportionate amount of attention to the many succeeding works of fiction and non-fiction through which Vercors has striven to develop his vision of human responsibility. In particular, it will now be possible to take account of the numerous publications by Vercors that have appeared since the last full-length study devoted to his writing, that of R. D. Konstantinovic in 1969.<sup>8</sup>

Konstantinovic's analysis is particularly interesting for the view that it offers of Vercors's pre-war career as the cartoonist and illustrator Jean Bruller, as well as for the many illuminating comparisons that it draws between the artistic and literary techniques. It also traces the history of the author's clandestine enterprise and offers a broad summary of the humanism expounded in his post-war writings. However, it makes minimal reference to Vercors's fellow-travelling activity and to his positions on the colonial conflicts and other major political issues. And above all, perhaps, as Konstantinovic acknowledges, his conclusions on Vercors's significance as a writer could only be tentative ones given the author's continuing activity and, as indeed transpired, the possibility of many more works from his pen. The

present study has, by comparison, been able to take these later works into consideration and thus aim at a more complete picture of the writer's career and achievement; and this, of course, has been undertaken with the substantial benefit of such texts as Ce que je crois (1975), Les Occasions perdues (1982) and Les Nouveaux Jours, in which Vercors offers his own considered verdict on his literary, philosophical and political activity as a whole.

In the early pages of Les Nouveaux Jours, Vercors refers to himself as 'un optimiste pessimiste' (NJ p 22), and he uses the phrase again at the end of the volume to describe his concern over France's future after de Gaulle. The formula can certainly be applied with some aptness to the broader continuum of the author's moral and political attitudes. The particular balance as between optimism and pessimism will be seen to vary in different periods and within different contexts; although the major shifts - between, for instance, Jean Bruller's pre-war philosophic 'absurdism' and Vercors's later assertion of human value and faith in progress - will readily become apparent. Beside these broad philosophical concepts, furthermore, one must keep in mind the author's own personality and his somewhat contrasting propensities for loyalty and sincerity of commitment on the one hand, caution and scepticism on the other. How far such personal attributes, in combination with his humanist theory, affected the author's response to great political issues should again emerge from our analysis. Certainly there is no lack of attention to political events in either his non-fictional or his fictional writings. From the traumas of post-Liberation France to torture in Algeria, from the Rajk affair to the 'Prague Spring', Vercors has remained a vigilant moral observer and an often impassioned commentator

on the major episodes of recent history.

In the latter respect, of course, he has been only one committed French intellectual among many. His voice was after all only one of many in the progressive chorus that supported Russia against America in the early Cold War years, and similarly it was as part of the broad consensus of left-wing and liberal opinion that he protested against French excesses in Indochina and the Maghreb. In the more speculative, philosophical area, too, his ideas can be viewed against the general pattern of post-war humanism and the search, in the aftermath of the Holocaust and Hiroshima, for new ethical foundations. It will therefore be a further purpose of the present study to relate Vercors's polemical writings to the wider body of Left Bank commitment, and likewise to view his theory of human 'rebellion' as a representative expression (albeit one with its own distinctive features) of modern prometheanism.

Finally, because of the main focus that has been chosen for this study, certain emphases will be observed in the presentation both of Vercors's works and of secondary material. Thus, for example, some of the early short stories, such as those of Les Yeux et la Lumière (1948, 1950), reveal a great deal about the development of Vercors's main philosophical notions and accordingly require as close analysis as some later full-length novels. On the other hand, a major novel like Colères (1956) is so replete with Vercors's key moral and political themes, while also combining fantasy and realism within its dense narrative content, that it can best be viewed in the separate perspectives afforded by two different chapters.<sup>9</sup> And as for the material by reviewers and critics, this will be broadly commensurate with the main areas of enquiry that have been indicated in this Introduction. Such commentary will relate

mainly to Vercors's moral and political attitudes and, since some selection is obviously necessary, is directed particularly at those of the author's works which most prominently and directly expound his views. It has been included in order to provide as broad a view as possible of the way in which Vercors has been judged by contemporaries, as well as to help set his work into the general intellectual and ideological context in which he was writing. Vercors has made a significant contribution both to the literature of commitment and to post-war attempts to restore the humanist faith in Man. Whether in appraising each of these aspects of his work in its own right, or in analysing the dynamic but sometimes problematic interplay between them, or, again, in relating them to the broad background of contemporary opinion, this thesis aims to demonstrate the scope of Vercors's concerns and the overall importance of his writings.

NOTES ON INTRODUCTION

1. Pierre de Boisdeffre, Histoire de la littérature de langue française des années 30 aux années 80, nouvelle édition, 2 vols, Paris, Perrin, 1985, I, 145.
2. Vercors, Les Divagations d'un Français en Chine, Paris, Albin Michel, 1956, p 21.  
In keeping with a tendency to echo himself that will be noted at various points in this thesis, Vercors also uses the phrase 'de l'Ébè à la Mer de Chine' in P.P.C., pp 338-9.
3. Plus ou moins Homme is discussed in Chapters Two and Four of this Thesis, and reference to the reviews that it received when published will duly be made in these chapters.
4. Fred Kupferman 'Les Rancœurs d'Alceste', L'Express, Paris, 24/8/84, pp 50-51.
5. The various slights and rejections that Vercors suffered from the writers and critics listed here are recorded at different points in Les Nouveaux Jours, but are conveniently summed up on p 299 of that text.
6. Jean-Louis Ezine, 'Entretien', Les Nouvelles Littéraires, Paris, 3-10/3/77, p 5.
7. Roland Dorgelès was the author of various works but was principally known for Les Croix de bois, the First World War novel that won the 'Prix Fémina' in 1919.  
Vercors had previously referred to Gus Bofa's drawing of Dorgelès in P.P.C., pp 17-18:  
Je me rappelais ce dessin prophétique de Bofa dans ses Synthèses Littéraires: une croix de bois énorme, que traîne écrasé l'écrivain qu'elle a rendu célèbre. Je voyais d'avance celui qu'on pourrait faire de moi, mon livre comme une pierre au cou, noyé dans le silence de la mer ....  
Vercors had a great admiration for Bofa's art but had incurred his lasting hostility when Bofa suspected him of imitating his style. The episode is referred to in Les Occasions perdues, pp 99-100, and is discussed further in Chapter Two, note 45, in this thesis.
8. Radivoje D. Konstantinovic, Vercors, Ecrivain et Dessinateur, Paris, Klincksieck, 1969.
9. Colères is discussed in terms of its general philosophic content in Chapter Three of this thesis; and in terms of its political content in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER ONE : WAR, OCCUPATION - AND THE EMERGENCE OF 'VERCORS'

Le premier acte public où l'auteur ait engagé sa responsabilité fut ... la publication illégale du Silence de la Mer en 1941. Tous ses autres écrits comme ses autres actes en furent la suite et la conséquence ... Il lui semble ainsi nécessaire de répondre à une question ... "Pourquoi avez-vous commencé d'écrire?", puisque c'est ce "pourquoi" qui détermina un dessinateur solitaire à devenir un écrivain responsable devant les hommes. (PMH p 296) 1

There can be no doubt that the name of Vercors will remain indissolubly linked with the title of his first 'récit'. The dramatic circumstances of secrecy in which the story was written and printed, the defiance of German occupation and censorship which it represented, and the impact which it made on the minds of its early readers - all these elements combined to produce a memorable episode of French intellectual resistance in the Second World War. The legend has perhaps been indirectly enhanced, in retrospect, by the particular resonance of the author's pseudonym. 'Vercors' derives, of course, from the rugged limestone plateau, south-west of Grenoble, which Lieutenant Bruller had seen while posted at Romans-sur-Isère during 'la drôle de guerre'. He had recognised in it 'une forteresse naturelle' (BS p 57), and had briefly considered taking refuge there to fight on after the French surrender of June 1940; yet it was in fact not until some time after his return to civilian life in the Occupied zone, and indeed after his adoption of the pseudonym, that the Vercors massif actually became a maquis stronghold and, eventually, the scene of brutal repression by the SS. Vercors himself has never claimed any part in Resistance fighting or other physically-exposed activity, and in the early pages of La Bataille du Silence (1967) he recalled that even in his own clandestine publishing - where the risks, of course, were real enough - he had had little direct experience of danger: '... la gifle de l'adversité ne m'a jamais atteint, même du bout des doigts'

(BS p 13). Nevertheless, the aura that came to surround the great bastion of active Resistance in south-eastern France does seem coincidentally to have added to the impact of the author's post-war identity<sup>2</sup>, even if these were matters of which he was quite unaware when, in the Autumn of 1941, he first adopted the name of that 'massif altier ... où j'ai failli prendre le maquis pour préserver ma liberté, un nom plein d'Aprè hauteur: le Vercors. Quel pseudonyme, en tête de mon récit, pourrait sonner avec plus de fierté?' (BS p 201)

The title of the story, too, has its own intriguing quality. This may be partly due to the fact that the actual setting, in Occupied France, is geographically remote from the sea (the latter being referred to purely metaphorically in the course of the narrative)<sup>3</sup>; whereas of course 'silence', taken separately, not only plays a literal part in the story but is also charged, in the context of France's subjugation by the Nazis, with an intensity and vibrancy that transcend the common meaning of the word. Then, too, there are the distinctive qualities of the text itself: sober in description, sparse in incident, yet undeniably effective in dramatising the feelings of the three characters - the German officer, his reluctant French host and the latter's sensitive, strong-willed niece. It is these several factors together, surely - historical significance, literary qualities and the resonances of title and of pseudonym - which have helped to make Le Silence de la Mer one of the best-selling works of French fiction of this century<sup>4</sup>, and which, indeed, seem likely to maintain it in relative eminence for many years to come.

The actual circumstances in which the story was written, and the chain of events that led up to it, have been fully and precisely detailed by Vercors in his subsequent accounts of the Occupation. Apart from a considerable number of interviews, prefaces and lectures on the subject, he has produced three main volumes of memoirs covering his wartime experience: La Bataille du Silence, which deals specifically with France's defeat and the emergence of the spirit of resistance to which 'Les Editions de Minuit' gave expression; and more recently the second and third volumes of his Cent Ans d'Histoire de France: Les Occasions perdues, 1932-42, and Les Nouveaux Jours, 1942-62, where, in passages interwoven in a history of France and Europe in the years in question, Vercors relates the conception and growth of his own vocation as 'un écrivain responsable devant les hommes'.

This was, then, a vocation rooted in a historical struggle and infused from the outset with moral commitment; but it would have been hard indeed to predict its development before the War. Through the memoirs we meet the Jean Bruller of the 1930's, a successful illustrator and cartoonist and an idiosyncratic observer of human behaviour. Intro-spective to a degree, he was also ironically aware, according to his subsequent account, of the contradictions in his own outlook:

Incroyant de naissance, je ne peux, d'une part, me résoudre à supposer un sens à l'Univers, encore moins à l'espèce humaine, à son histoire, donc à la mienne. Ainsi le bien, le mal, la paix, la guerre, le socialisme ou le fascisme, agitation insensée d'insectes. Par conséquent se garder de cette agitation et, première règle, éviter de souffrir, la souffrance étant d'évidence, au sein d'une "existence" absurde, la pire des absurdités. L'ennui c'est que, d'autre part, si ces pensées me tiennent entièrement, je ne peux m'empêcher d'agir - et même de penser - comme si je croyais l'inverse. Comme si penser, agir avaient un sens, et impératif. A aucun moment je ne peux mettre en pratique ma règle d'indifférence au monde et de refus de toute souffrance. Tout au contraire, à chaque instant, je choisis entre le bien et le mal, la guerre et la paix, le socialisme et le fascisme ... (OP p 21) 5

Although the 1930's saw Bruller move gradually away from sceptical detachment and become increasingly concerned by the growth of Hitler's power, his moral judgements did not find any outlet in political activity; and to that extent, therefore, 'agir' in the foregoing quotation has a limited meaning.<sup>6</sup> By the mid-1930's, as he became aware of the insidious influence that Nazism was having on some of his French acquaintances, he recalls that his posture was still an uncertain one:

Une vigilance accrue se révélait de rigueur. Mais je n'étais qu'un jeune dessinateur. Et si je désirais de plus en plus me rendre utile, je distinguais mal encore par quel moyen. (OP p 88)

However, it was precisely in his capacity as 'dessinateur' that he was able now to make a small personal contribution. His dawning awareness that pacifism could provide no barrier against fascist aggression was one of the few notions of a general political nature to emerge in his drawings at that time. R. D. Konstantinovic writes of 'l'intention évidente de l'artiste de ne pas s'engager politiquement',<sup>7</sup> but he also shows that while explicit political or social commentary played no part in the great majority of the drawings, Bruller's disappointment over the failures of the League of Nations and alarm at the threat from the dictators did inspire certain illustrations in the series 'La Danse des Vivants'. And Vercoer himself, in Les Occasions perdues, while confirming that in most of his drawings 'ma muse est intemporelle' (OP p 89), recalls that after much hesitation he acceded in 1935 to a request from the editors of the left-wing weekly Vendredi for 'un dessin d'humour toutes les semaines sur le thème de l'antifascisme' (OP p 89), an agreement which he duly fulfilled for the next several months.<sup>8</sup>

Thus Bruller remained a close observer of developments abroad and of their impact on life in France. By 1938, convinced of the Nazi threat to civilised values throughout Europe, he was sure that the French should fight. A new war would not be a clash of imperial rivalries as in 1914: it would be fought against 'des bandits qui sont l'incarnation de la cruauté, du mal.' Pacifism was now definitely renounced: '... ce dont il s'agit, ce n'est plus de haïr et de refuser la guerre, mais de refuser ce mal et l'esclavage' (DP p 166). And it was in this spirit, accordingly, that in August 1939 Lieutenant Bruller rejoined his unit at Embrun, in the Alps - his second, and France's third, mobilization in that year. His experience of 'la drôle de guerre' was to be marked by the transfer of his regiment to Romans-sur-Isère, by training manoeuvres in which he realized his limitations as a leader of men in action<sup>9</sup>, and, still in 1939, by an exercise near Reims in which he slipped on a muddy road and broke his leg. Vercors recalls these episodes in his memoirs with a mixture of modesty and ruefulness; but when the defeat of France came in the following summer, he was both more afflicted and apparently, had the opportunity arisen, more willing to fight on, than were many of the regular officers whom he evokes in La Bataille du Silence and 'Désespoir est mort'.

If Bruller's commitment to the anti-fascist struggle survived the débâcle of 1940, he has subsequently made it clear that lingering 'absurdist' doubts also persisted in his mind throughout the War period. They were, however, firmly subordinated to the need to maintain a clear-sighted moral revolt against the realities of the Occupation. Active collaboration was anathema to him, and he was equally concerned to avoid any kind or degree of moral compromise with the Germans, however well-behaved the latter might at first

appear to be. Evidence that some French people would accept at face value the occupying troops' initially considerate approach was all around him as he rejoined his family in Charente-Maritime and then returned with them to their home village of Villiers-sur-Morin (Seine et Marne).<sup>10</sup> Here he found his house occupied by a German officer who, on meeting him, displayed a determined friendliness: 'Il n'avait pas cessé de sourire, malgré mon visage froid et la sécheresse de mes réponses' (BS p 116); and indeed this German uttered at least one phrase that would be found in the mouth of Werner von Ebrennac: 'La maison est à vous. Je m'y plaisais beaucoup. Cette maison a une âme, je vous félicite'<sup>11</sup> (OP p 206). However, though Bruller remained unsmiling and impassive in the German's presence, this was not achieved without inner struggle. Just as the narrator in Le Silence de la Mer feels guilt at the silence which he and his niece maintain in the face of Von Ebrennac's eloquent goodwill - 'je ne puis sans souffrir offenser un homme, fût-il mon ennemi' (SM p 25), or again, 'c'est peut-être inhumain de lui refuser l'obole d'un seul mot' (SM p 29) - so Bruller in Villiers-sur-Morin experienced qualms, despite his moral resolution:

l'officier ... ne manquera jamais de me saluer, en souriant. Je passerai la nuque roide. La première fois parce que c'est l'ennemi - et je me donnerai tort: pourquoi offenser un homme qui s'est bien conduit avec moi? La deuxième fois parce que, n'étant pas seul, mon geste eût choqué mon voisin.  
(OP p 206)            12

Bruller was meanwhile alert to such indications of the wider public mood as he could obtain through his regular trips to Paris and through contacts with friends like Pierre de Lescure and Jean-Richard Bloch. He learnt with dismay of the writers who were now attuning their political attitudes to those of the Vichy régime - the dramatist Lenormand, for instance, a former supporter of the 'Front Populaire',

or Luc Durtain, one of the French section of the PEN Club, whom Bruller had accompanied on a memorable pre-war visit to Prague and who had celebrated New Year 1939 as Bruller's guest.<sup>13</sup> More generally, too, there were the newspapers and periodicals which opportunistically sided with the Germans against 'la perfide Albion' and joined in the denigration of Jews and of 'les intellectuels pourris' - Grinquoire, Le Piloni, Je Suis Partout and (later) La Gerbe being among the most virulent, but by no means the only examples. At the same time Drieu la Rochelle, albeit under German patronage, was ostensibly offering the columns of the NRF to any French writers who aspired to maintain the review's intellectual traditions.<sup>14</sup> Bruller and his friends, however, perceived the trap:

Il (Drieu) y promet toute liberté mais le danger, je le sais bien, est dans cette fausse promesse; on n'y pourra écrire, au mieux, que des fadaïses; et chaque ralliement profitera à l'occupant. (DP p 211)

And indeed, Bruller and Lescure were to become increasingly dismayed by the defections which each month's publications, in the NRF and elsewhere, brought to light.

From the beginning of the Occupation, every publication had required German authorization and was thus inevitably tainted for Bruller and those who shared his rigorous views. Their attitude was strengthened when, in 1941, the 'liste Otto' was produced by all the major French publishers (with the single exception of Emile-Paul Frères)<sup>15</sup>, black-listing, as 'poisoners of public opinion', a large number of French authors, together with German émigré and English writers. For some time, Bruller himself had felt that drawing no longer offered an adequate means of expression and that he would sooner or later take up writing instead<sup>16</sup>; but circumstances in 1940 and early 1941 seemed to rule out any notion of publication, whether of drawings or of

writing: '... il n'était donc qu'un seul devoir, qu'une seule loi: se taire' (BS p 137).

Naturally, such self-imposed silence did not preclude practical resistance work, and Bruller and Lescurer for a time helped to organize a network for the British Intelligence Service. Of more enduring significance at this time, however, were two quite separate episodes, each of which contributed to the process that would culminate in Bruller's first clandestine publication and the inception of his literary career. The first incident, which clearly made a vivid impression on Bruller, for he has commented on it several times in his writings, was the execution by firing-squad of a young engineer, Jacques Bonsergent, convicted of striking a Wehrmacht officer. The German posters announcing the punishment attracted small silent crowds in the Paris streets - and the following morning were adorned by a variety of small flowers and flags pinned to the paper during the night.<sup>17</sup> This first death of a French martyr was, of course, to be followed by the execution of hundreds of hostages, many of whom Vercors would later commemorate in prefaces and dedications; but the symbolic force of Bonsergent's death in December 1940 was felt, both by Bruller and by the other passers-by, with particular keenness: 'Les larmes aux yeux, je vois naître ce matin-là les premiers frémissements d'un éveil populaire.' (QP p 219). This, then, was a first awakening to reality for some of those French people who had accepted the myth of a 'civilised' German occupation. How could many more, Bruller wondered, be brought to a similar awakening?

The other important episode at this time connects more directly with 'la Résistance intellectuelle'. At a dinner given by the poet René Arcos for a dozen fellow-writers and intellectuals, including Bruller, Bloch, Frédéric Joliot, Jean Cassou and Francis Jourdain, there was anxious discussion of the recent authorized appearance of L'Œuvre and Aujourd'hui, ostensibly left-wing dailies, which had immediately attracted a large readership: '... enfin une presse libre! Enfin une presse républicaine qui ne tombe pas sur les Juifs, qui ne lâche pas les bottes des Allemands!' (OP p 219). But the classic subterfuge was again apparent - would not a corrupting 'pâturage toute contraire' inevitably be fed to the readership once it became firmly established? By contrast, a new clandestine tract, Pantagruel, poorly printed though it was, seemed to offer a more genuine hope; for while it was discerning in its approach: '... il distingue, comme nous le faisons tous, l'Allemagne de Bach, l'Allemagne de Goethe de ses actuels maîtres nazis', it nevertheless called for unremitting struggle against the Germans: 'au-dehors derrière De Gaulle, à l'intérieur chacun selon ses moyens.' (OP p 220)<sup>18</sup>. Here, finally, was a salutary revelation:

Ainsi, avec un peu de courage, ce que nous pensons tous, cela peut donc s'imprimer! Se lire et se répandre en France, à l'étranger! Un coin du bâillon se soulève sur la honte qui nous étouffe. (OP p 220)

Pantagruel, then, had provided a stimulus to Bruller and soon afterwards, early in 1941, Pierre de Lescure offered him a practical opportunity: that of helping to produce a non-communist edition of La Pensée Libre (the exclusively communist nature of the original having deterred the co-operation of writers such as Duhamel). The importance of Pierre de Lescure's contribution to Bruller's development as a writer was such that some mention must be made here of Vercors's subsequent references to his mentor. In La Bataille du

Silence, for example, he describes Lescure's literary gifts and insights, alludes to their shared left-wing sympathies in politics, and above all extols the moral integrity which Lescure had displayed at an earlier time of crisis (over the editorship of the review Paru): 'il m'avait, ce jour-là, donné par son exemple une leçon ineffaçable. Elle a depuis conduit ma vie' (BS p 135). In fact this tribute, echoed fifteen years later in Les Occasions perdues ('sa rigueur morale a servi de modèle à la mienne') (p 209) is more particularly of interest for the light it sheds on Vercors's own considerable loyalty: for, as Les Nouveaux Jours reveals, Lescure had sought even before the War was finally over to rob him of the credit for helping to found 'Les Editions de Minuit'.<sup>19</sup>

In 1941, though, Lescure and Bruller worked purposefully together to produce news items and articles for the new Pensée Libre. Lescure wrote a short story for inclusion, at the same time urging Bruller to undertake one himself. Bruller hesitated - until July 1941, when, like 'un trait de lumière' (BS, p 182), the idea for a story was suddenly conveyed to him through an overheard conversation reported to him by a friend. For a definitive account of the episode, the genesis of Le Silence de la Mer, we can turn once more to Les Occasions perdues. Two Germans, talking in their own language, apart from the quotation from Racine that one of them attempted in French, had been overheard in a Parisian restaurant. One had expressed surprise and even indignation that the Germans were behaving so decently towards the French when there was now an opportunity of 'wringing their necks' so effectively. The other German, however, had merely laughed:

"J'embrasse mon rival", lui dit-il en français avec son lourd accent, "mais z'est pour l'étouffer; tu n'as donc pas compris que nous les bernons? Il faut d'abord limer leurs griffes."  
(DP p 228)

Bruller's ideas were now finally crystallised:

...voilà donc pourquoi je n'ai pas pu rendre mon salut à l'aimable officier si empressé à m'adresser le sien; pourquoi j'éprouvais, dès avant la guerre, une méfiance irraisonnée envers l'aimable Otto Abetz, réputé grand ami de la France, plus tard pour l'aimable auteur de Jardins et Routes, Ernst Jünger,..... Car ou bien ces aimables Allemands nous dupent, ou au mieux ils se dupent eux-mêmes. (DP p 228)

Herein, then, lay the essence of Le Silence de la Mer. Bruller would produce, as a composite of the various congenial Germans<sup>20</sup> he had met before and during the War, a smiling Wehrmacht officer, a sincere friend of France. And against this high-minded but naïve figure, he would set a patriotic young Frenchwoman, aloof and unresponsive at first, then increasingly affected by the German's charm, but unable until the final moment to break the silence of dignity and independence in which she had enclosed herself.

The writing of the story was completed by October 1941, but by then, following a Gestapo raid on the printers, la Pensée Libre no longer existed. Whereupon a further, and as it transpired momentous, idea occurred to Bruller - that of publishing the story as a separate volume, by his own efforts, and with the help of a trusted printer and team of volunteer binders. Nor need his own story be the only one to be published in this way - other short literary works, written in the same spirit of resistance, could follow.

The history of the enterprise which became known as 'Les Editions de Minuit' has been explored in detail in many previous studies and publications.<sup>21</sup> What needs to be highlighted in the present instance, however, is the particular purpose which Bruller had in mind for the project. Greatly though he had been encouraged by clandestine tracts like Pantagruel and its successors, he himself wanted to achieve something different: his efforts would, he hoped, serve some of the

more enduring elements in France's intellectual and spiritual life. Following Pantagruel, clandestine news-sheets were now appearing (and disappearing) with some frequency, but they had a combative purpose and were directly and explicitly committed to the struggle against the Germans. Bruller could of course see, and applaud, the vital function that they were fulfilling; nevertheless his own 'vocation' was of a different order:

Elle est .... de permettre à des esprits exacts de publier sous le manteau des réflexions exactes, méditées dans la rigueur, non moins sévères d'ailleurs pour l'ennemi et même d'autant plus sévères qu'elles sont en marge de la colère, de la passion - en un mot de permettre, à ces esprits fidèles à la longue tradition française, de penser juste. (DP p 231)

The works to be produced by 'Les Editions de Minuit' would not, therefore, be primarily ones of propaganda: rather they would mobilise the powers of intelligence and creativity in the dual service of France's intellectual heritage and of the current resistance effort.<sup>22</sup> According to another of Vercors's accounts, Pierre de Lescure had summed up the essential aim in one particular phrase of his Manifeste des Editions de Minuit: 'Il s'agit de la pureté spirituelle de l'homme'. In other words, it was by opposing the Nazis through freely-chosen forms of expression, rather than simply through the reactive response of counter-propaganda, that the 'Minuit' writers would preserve 'la pureté de l'esprit'. Anything less than this would represent a perverse triumph for the Germans, whereas 'la vraie victoire contre eux, contre tout ce que représentait le nazisme, c'était pour la pensée d'échapper au cycle infernal de l'action et de la réaction'.<sup>23</sup>

Such then, were the principles to which Vercors subscribed as he produced his first clandestine work. In Le Silence de la Mer he had endeavoured to create a work of measure and balance, one which would stimulate reflection and which, while leaving no doubt as to its overall meaning, could not be condemned a few years later as mere

'bourrage de crâne'. Hence his portrayal of Von Ebrennac as a model of courtesy and consideration, a German keenly appreciative of the riches of France's artistic and intellectual life which he aspires to draw upon, by willing consent, as at a mother's breast<sup>24</sup> - the antithesis, in short, of the Teutonic barbarian of popular French mythology. Bruller himself, as a boy, had been quite willing, like all his generation, to hate 'le Boche ... l'incarnation du mal' (BS p 19) until, with wider experience in the 1920's and early 1930's, and through the influence of Romain Rolland, Briand<sup>25</sup> and others, he had begun to hope instead for reconciliation and friendship with Germany. Now, in le Silence de la Mer, these latter aspirations are echoed in the opinions attributed to Von Ebrennac's father, who, we learn, 'aima Briand (et) croyait dans la République de Weimar et dans Briand' (SM p 28), but who also, with the manichean fervour which characterizes so many of Vercors's own later political judgements, had despised and distrusted those who opposed Briand - 'vos Grands Bourgeois cruels - les gens comme vos de Wendel, vos Henry Bordeaux et votre vieux Maréchal'. (SM p 28)<sup>26</sup>; His son, Werner von Ebrennac, is similarly allowed to reflect some of the author's tastes and opinions. Hence the enthusiasm for the roll-call of French writers whose volumes he surveys on the narrator's bookshelves; the admiration for Shakespeare;<sup>27</sup> and the preference for 'une musique à la mesure de l'homme' (offering) 'un chemin pour atteindre la vérité' (SM p 36), which connects so clearly with the fundamental tenets of Vercors's own humanism as he was to expound them later in Plus ou moins Homme, Ce que je crois and other works.

But for all his sensitivity and intellectual discernment, Von Ebrennac is blind to the reality of the Nazis' intentions; indeed, in a passage in which his characteristic romanticism assumes a particular naïveté, he

pictures the Nazi leaders drawing spiritual nourishment from their contact with France: 'La France les guérira. Et je vais vous le dire: ils le savent. Ils savent que la France leur apprendra à être des hommes vraiment grands et purs'. (SM p 41). And if his judgement is thus found wanting, so too, finally, is his character. With his dreams of physical and spiritual union destroyed, remorseful at his unwitting deception of the uncle and niece<sup>28</sup>, he seeks refuge - and probable death - in a posting to the Eastern front. What he fails to do, of course, is to revolt directly against his superiors - and the narrator's reflection underlines the point: 'Ainsi il se soumet. Voilà donc tout ce qu'ils savent faire. Ils se soumettent tous. Même cet homme-là.' (SM p 58)

That Vercors intended his story to highlight this ultimate moral failure and to reprove the over-obedience of the German people towards authority is something which he has frequently stressed in his discussions of the novel. In his 'Discours aux Allemands', for example, reproduced in Plus ou moins Homme, he recalls how few Germans had opposed Hitler and how, once these 'quelques milliers de héros allemands' (PMH p 241) had been disposed of in concentration-camps, there had been no further German voices raised in protest. 'Silence' in this context, 'ce long silence allemand' (PMH p 241) had, of course, been a matter for shame.<sup>29</sup> Later, in a letter reprinted in P.P.C., he succinctly drew together the two key moral implications contained in the story - reproach to the Germans, and warning to the French: '...c'était pour dénoncer une tentation déjà mortelle: celle de se fier aux meilleurs des Allemands, puisqu'ils n'ont jamais su résister aux pires'. (PPC p 315). And similarly, in a lecture to American university students, published in a commemorative edition of Le Silence de la Mer<sup>30</sup>, Vercors reiterates his disappointment

at the insignificant German opposition to Hitler, then points out once more that Von Ebrennac's final departure is intended to symbolise his nation's fundamental proneness to conform.

In this latter text, however, Vercors also dwells on the closing scene in the novel, in which the German officer departs with a smile after hearing the whispered 'Adieu' of the niece. This 'dernière image ... souriante' (SM p 59), Vercors claims, was not only intended to show Von Ebrennac's pleasure at the girl's response. He also wanted to give the German one last benefit of the doubt: the possibility, however slight, that he might in fact revolt one day. Better, therefore, that he should go smiling, perhaps invigorated, into that uncertain future than depart wholly crushed in spirit.

Whether the German would, or could, rebel one day was for Vercors in 1941 a matter of the utmost doubt.<sup>31</sup> However, the quiet expression of mutual sympathy at the end of the story, together with the fact that Von Ebrennac had been allowed to represent humane and civilised values, led to a strong critical reaction by some early readers and even to suggestions that the author favoured collaboration.<sup>32</sup> Although such criticism was greatly outweighed by appreciation of the story, it was a reaction over which Vercors seems subsequently to have felt obliged to justify himself in several discussions. He might perhaps have done no better than refer his critics to Qu'est-ce que la Littérature?, in which Sartre's characteristically firm analysis of the issue fully supports Vercors's position. Sartre writes of the two distinct original readerships of Le Silence de la Mer: the émigrés of New York, London and Algiers (among whom were to be found most of the critics), and the readers in the Occupied zone, among whom 'personne n'a douté des intentions de l'auteur ni de l'efficacité de son texte: il écrivait pour nous'.<sup>33</sup>

However, Sartre's chief interest in the story now was to discuss its topicality. In 1941 the temptation of collaboration, symbolized by the meeting between Hitler and Pétain at Montoire<sup>34</sup>, was strong, and the French in the Occupied zone had discovered, as Bruller had done, that the Germans could be polite and friendly. In showing that fraternisation with these apparently decent conquerors was out of the question, Le Silence de la Mer was, eighteen months after the armistice, 'vivant, virulent, efficace'<sup>35</sup>; even though, according to Sartre, it would a year or so later begin to lose its effectiveness as French resistance and German reprisals progressed to increasingly violent and vengeful stages.<sup>36</sup>

Sartre's analysis of Le Silence de la Mer concludes with a bold prognostication: 'Dans un demi-siècle, il ne passionnera plus personne - un public mal renseigné le lira encore comme un conte agréable et un peu languissant sur la guerre de '39'.<sup>37</sup> We have seen that the book does in fact, continue to reach a wide readership; although how ill-informed that public might be or with what intensity it might react to the story, is impossible to analyse. For many post-war readers, Von Ebrennac's lyrical appreciation of French culture may appear strained in expression, and his credulity psychologically unconvincing. The courtliness of his attitude towards the niece may also now be out of fashion, although readers of Vercors's subsequent fiction will know that the respectful wooing of an apparently inaccessible girl is a recurring romantic theme.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps it is the development of the niece's feelings for the German, and, because of her restraint, the drama of her final 'Adieu', which now emerge most strongly from the text. If this is so, while it may obscure somewhat Vercors's main moral and political intentions, we can conclude that the story does fulfil one of the criteria of a work of art as defined in a discussion of Vercors's writing, by Nelly Corneau: 'Peut-être est-ce

dans la mesure où, conçue dans l'actuel, elle ne traduit que l'inactuel, qu'une oeuvre est assurée de durer'.<sup>39</sup> And if this criterion has indeed been fulfilled, Vercors can feel satisfied that the dual purpose which he and Leasure conceived for 'Les Editions de Minuit' - that of involving themselves in the resistance struggle while at the same time contributing to France's literary patrimony - was, in Le Silence de la Mer, amply achieved.<sup>40</sup>

Although the author's other wartime stories, published nowadays in the 'Livre de Poche' edition of Le Silence de la Mer, may still be widely read only for that circumstantial reason, there is no doubt that some of them have outstanding qualities in their own right, both as literary works and as records of war-time experience. They were inspired by the same general spirit of revolt against the German Occupation and against collaboration as had underlain the writing of Vercors's first clandestine story; but more specifically they can also be seen to have had their individual origin in some particular act of human wickedness or pusillanimity that aroused the author's indignation as the War progressed.

'Désespoir est mort', the first text in the 'Livre de Poche' edition, where it appears 'en guise de préface', is in fact the second piece which Vercors published clandestinely, albeit this time under the pseudonym 'Santerre'. The narrative element is slight, for the author was seeking above all to recapture, some two and a half years after the period in question, a mood and an atmosphere: his own mood after the catastrophe of May-June 1940, a mood of suicidal despair<sup>41</sup> at France's humiliation and of disgust at the abject behaviour of many of her military and political leaders; and the stifling atmosphere of the village of Bésseyes, a few

kilometres west of the Vercors massif, where Bruller's unit had been quartered after the armistice. It is in just such a village, 'brûlé de soleil' (SM p 10) that the narrator, in all respects an echo of Bruller himself, wanders listlessly along the single street or takes refuge in his attic room from the heartiness of the Officers' Mess. Here the majority of his colleagues enjoy extravagant meals, seemingly heedless of any concern beyond their own gratification and self-interest: 'On nous y engraisait comme des oies... La plus franche cordialité régnait entre ces hommes galonnés, qui se déchiraient l'un l'autre sitôt séparés' (SM p 11).

Only two other officers seem exempt from the general venality: Captains Després and Randois. A bond of tacit mutual respect gradually forms between these two and the narrator as each sees in the others a reflection of his own indignation. The narrator's earlier misgivings about Randois - 'Dès avant la défaite, tout en lui m'était ennemi: son caractère hautain, ses convictions monarchiques, son mépris de la foule' (SM p 8) - offer an insight into Bruller's own basic political attitudes<sup>42</sup>; but it is Randois who first bridges the gap between them and, in doing so, teaches the author/narrator a lesson:

Ainsi, il nous rejoignait, il avait su nous rejoindre, nous les solitaires, nous les muets. .... ce mess était à l'image de ce pays, où seuls les lâches, les malins et les méchants allaient continuer de pérorer; où les autres n'auraient, pour protester, que leur silence. (SM p 9)

Thus silence, which can preserve a measure of dignity at a time of natural disaster, is once more an important theme. Here, however, the silence is not directed at an enemy but raised as a protective barrier against 'la funeste insouciance' (SM p 12), the cowardice and self-indulgence of fellow-Frenchmen - those Army officers of whom Bruller writes so scathingly in La Bataille du Silence.

Indeed, the whole text of 'Désespoir est mort' bears the closest possible resemblance to Bruller's immediate post-armistice experiences as described in La Bataille du Silence. Beyond a few changes of name - 'Cabenetos' was the original of 'Despérados', for instance, - there is little fictional invention in the story. Even the line of ducklings, whose comical dignity as they troop along the village street produces a sudden uplifting of the spirits of the narrator and his two companions, had had their real-life counterparts in Bésayes. What Vercors does enlarge upon, in the short-story version, is the possible moral value to himself of this small 'miracle':

Peut-être trouvai-je qu'ils parodiaient assez bien, ces quatre canetons fanfarons et candides, ce qu'il y a de pire dans les sentiments des hommes en groupe, comme aussi ce qu'il y a de meilleur en eux. Et qu'il valait de vivre, puisqu'on pouvait espérer un jour extirper ce pire, faire reflleurir ce meilleur. (SM p 16)

In the few pages of 'Désespoir est mort', therefore, Bruller's earlier general scepticism about human behaviour is seen to have been sharpened to an acute contempt by 'la honteuse et cruelle comédie' (SM p 9) which he has witnessed in the débâcle and its aftermath. But there is in contrast the final positive note, the shaking off of despair spelt out in the title, which epitomizes the moral purposefulness that the new author would continue, despite intermittent moments of pessimism, to bring to all his writing.

'La Marche à l'Etoile', the third and, after Le Silence de la Mer, the best-known of Vercors's clandestine stories, has an emotional power which undoubtedly derives from the author's close personal connection with the main character. The epic walk of Thomas Muritz from his native Czechoslovakia to the France he had learnt to revere through the works of Hugo and Balzac was, in real life,

that of Bruller's own father, who had left Hungary to live in France in response to the same inner compulsion.<sup>43</sup> Bruller père, of Jewish parentage, had died of cancer in 1930; but his son, in the light of the Nazi persecution of the Jews in France and other occupied countries, was able with little difficulty to imagine his probable fate, had he still been alive. Here again, real life supplied the narrative material, for in the Autumn of 1943 Vercors learnt of the shooting, as a hostage, of an old friend of his father's, M. Bernheim. Not only was the latter's age (seventy-two) exactly that which Bruller's father would have reached; but the particularly poignant circumstances of his execution (the shooting of the first fifty hostages of a larger group who emerged from their temporary prison in the belief that they were being freed) had made a deep impression on the author. It is in these same circumstances that Thomas Muritz dies: but with the particular anguish for him that it was a French gendarme who pushed him towards the execution-wall.

Throughout his life, Muritz's total faith in France as the land of Liberty and Justice had been proof against every doubt and contradiction, but in his final moments this faith and devotion were cast back into his face. In a moving passage the narrator dwells on this 'agonie d'un amour assassiné' and on the look of horror and disbelief on the old man's face:

chaque jour la réalité de son existence m'accable, - de son existence en cette mortelle seconde que je n'ai pas su, que nous n'avons pas su, que ceux qui sont restés dignes de son amour n'ont pas su lui épargner. (SM p 190)

But the narrator's compassion is tinged with still more bitter regret - that due to knowledge of French guilt in the tragedy. The selection of naturalized Jews as hostages by French officials, their execution by French gendarmes - these inescapable facts cast a shadow

over the narrator's own patriotic feelings: '... je sens bien qu'il y a quelque chose d'altéré dans cet amour. Que peut-être je ne pourrais plus penser à la France avec la joie pure de jadis...' (SM p 190). France, 'ce pays avare et repu ... qui d'une main tremblante offre son fils adoptif' (SM p 186), had failed to meet the moral challenge that events had dictated; only, of course, it was not France as such which had failed - but those Frenchmen who now held responsibility for her destiny.

Vercors's indignation and regret over the suffering of the many Jews and others who shared Muritz's fate thus emerge unmistakably from this story. As a focus for these feelings, Muritz, with his moral integrity and great simplicity of character, is an appealing protagonist. Indeed, the lyrical account of his pilgrimage to, and joyful discovery of France is a warm celebration by the writer of his father's memory; nor is there anything cloying about Thomas' enthusiasm for the humanitarian ideals enshrined in Republican France, for a relieving note of caution is injected by the innkeeper's wife (on Muritz's first evening in France) and by the narrator's commentary. Vercors's narrative technique, too, is particularly effective in setting the individual drama into its broad historical background. The reiteration of the significant phrase 'Tu es l'un des nôtres' (SM pp 159, 168), the incarnation in the 'petit rouquins' of 'les ambassadeurs de ce qu'il y a de meilleur dans ce peuple' (SM p 174) - with all the tragic irony which this eventually produces - and the symbolic force of the 'Star' of the title, fully revealed when Muritz wears the Jewish emblem in the streets of Paris - all these elements, then, give 'La Marche à l'Etoile' its distinction as a creative work.

Its chief interest for the present study, however, lies in the view that it offers of Vercors's emerging moral and political attitudes. Despite the earlier scepticism of his 'absurdist' phase, the author of 'La Marche à l'Etoile' makes clear that he fully shares the values - the paramountcy of truth and justice, the right to individual liberty - which Muritz cherishes and which, the latter believes, find their true fulfilment in Republican France. That these ideals were jeopardised by France's leaders in 1940 and subsequently betrayed by the Vichy régime is cause for anger, and Vercors does not now hesitate to condemn. Muritz's wholehearted commitment to his dream is contrasted with the cynical self-interest which had manifested itself at such cost to France:

Nous tenons trop à notre chère carcasse. On l'a bien vu, quand ces bourgeois galonnés abandonnaient leurs troupes battues, et sillonnaient la France dans la 15 CV où ils avaient emporté leur famille et leur coffre-fort...  
(SM pp 153-4) 44

In the wartime France of unheroic survivors, in this 'règne des avarés' (SM p 169), the political corollaries of Vercors's moral commitment were beginning to find expression. Once the Germans had been expelled and Frenchmen would again confront each other in the ideological struggles of the new Republic, these two elements in his outlook would be in constant interplay.

It was Philippe Pétain who had presided over the betrayal of Thomas Muritz's vision of France (to Muritz's utter disbelief: 'Mais tout de même ... voyons! un Maréchal de France! Voyons, voyons ... un MARE-CHAL-DE-FRANCE!' SM p 182), and who again figures, in a more prominent way and an equally bad light, in 'L'Imprimerie de Verdun'. A fiercely critical view of Pétain emerges from Vercors's wartime writing, and indeed it is an attitude that the author has sustained in all his subsequent commentaries. In the first two volumes of his

Cent Ans d'Histoire de France, for example, he portrays the Marshal as hardly less disastrous as a military strategist than as a political leader. In Moi, Aristide Briand we see Briand's reservations, in the First World War, about Pétain's excessive caution, his 'interminable stratégie défensive' (p 176) which, he claims, would prove more costly in lives than a bolder approach might have done. That Vercors agrees with this criticism, among many others, is confirmed by the fuller assessment of Pétain he offers in les Occasions perdues. Why had the author, unlike so many Frenchmen in 1940, not placed his faith in 'l'homme providentiel'?

D'abord, parce que, pour me laisser séduire, il eût fallu que j'en susse moins sur la réalité du 'vainqueur de Verdun'. Puis le profond dégoût, l'écoeurement désespéré que je ressens .... s'étend à lui autant qu'aux autres, et plus encore peut-être. Car c'est lui le plus coupable et le voilà le plus aimé! Quoi, l'erreur tragique et persistante qui a revêtu ce défaitiste d'une gloire beaucoup trop grande pour lui; qui en a fait, pour l'infortune de la patrie, le déplorable maître à penser de l'armée après la guerre .... cette erreur persistante, cet entêtement sénile, loin d'être enfin reconnus en font après ce désastre le maître incontesté de la France!  
(OP p 201) 45

Soon, of course, as Vercors relates, Pétain was no longer 'le maître incontesté'. By November 1942, with the Germans occupying the whole country, he was no more than a puppet, 'le paravent ignominieux derrière lequel, par Laval interposé, s'abritent les nazis pour désormais gouverner seuls ....' (OP p 257). But he had had time, through his 'Conseil National', and through a body of legislation which Vercors describes as the most repressive, xenophobic and antisemitic that France had known for centuries, to set at nought some of the most fundamental human rights established since 1789. 'Thomas Muritz' had been one of the victims of this repression; but it was around another, more specific measure sanctioned by Pétain that Vercors constructed the story 'L'Imprimerie de Verdun', the basic plot of

which is virtually encapsulated in a few further lines of Les Occasions perdues:

En France la chasse aux Juifs va bon train. Pour un instant, Pétain a bien songé à épargner les anciens combattants de Verdun, ses 'enfants'. Mais il n'a pas réagi longtemps et a signé leur perte comme celle des autres.  
( 'Eté 1941' - p 229) 46

From this historical fact, Vercors creates the story of Vendresse, owner of a small Parisian printing-works, and Dacosta, his employee and virtual partner. The human relationships in the story are deftly presented, the simple warmth and affection between the two main characters being counterpointed and relieved by their frequent political altercations: 'Dacosta et lui s'enqueulaient ferme trois fois la semaine à cause de Mussolini. Après quoi ils allaient prendre un pot rue Campagne-Première. Ils s'adoraient.' (SM p 113) The irony and amusement in the early part of the story are mostly at Vendresse's expense. His inveterate prejudices against Jews, freemasons and bolsheviks cause him considerable perplexity as he tries to reconcile them with his innate sense of justice and with the reality that Dacosta, 'Juif, franc-maçon et anti-fasciste' is the most honourable and courageous of his acquaintances. Their initial bond, as veterans of Verdun, has been strengthened by time - and by a shared experience in a 'compagnie de travailleurs' in May 1940 when Dacosta had acquitted himself particularly well, after their officers had fled ('elle est belle, ton élite') (SM p 115) from the advancing Germans.

Thereafter, Vendresse's dogged faith in 'le Maréchal' clashes repeatedly with Dacosta's scepticism about 'le tartufe en chef' (SM p 126); but it is the scepticism which proves well-founded, Pétain having signed away the Jews' rights to protection. Dacosta is hounded from Paris and, despite Vendresse's appeals to 'l'Amicale des Vieux de Verdun', his wife

and children are deported. The remainder of the story tells of Vendresse's revolt, his resistance work (printing messages on death-announcement cards) and his arrest, torture and death in Germany. His sterling qualities, Vercors implies, are an enduring reproof to those Frenchmen, like Paars, who promoted their own interests under the Occupation at the expense of the latter's victims. This is only one of many examples in his fictional and non-fictional writings where Vercors indicts the wartime collaborators and turncoats, and deplors that so many of them lived on - and flourished - in post-Liberation France. His irony at the end of the story is aimed equally at these individuals and at a society which too easily forgets the recent past.<sup>47</sup>

Justice, for which Vendresse had died, does not always have the last word in life: hence the need that Vercors felt to pay tribute, through 'L'Imprimerie de Verdun', to the printers who had helped in the resistance struggle. At one point in the text, moreover, he pays a specific, if indirect, compliment to the first clandestine printer of Le Silence de la Mer, Georges Oudeville, who, as we learn in La Bataille du Silence, had shown stoical calm on hearing of the possible tortures he would suffer if arrested by the Gestapo - but then, like Vendresse, was unsure whether he could withstand a blinding spotlight shone straight into his eyes.<sup>48</sup>

Another of Vercors's wartime texts, 'Le Songe', offers a complete contrast in form and style to those previously discussed, just as its theme - the horrors of the Nazi concentration-camps - leads us into a quite different dimension of human suffering and guilt. For Vercors, as for most civilised observers, the camps were the most

odious product of the Nazi régime. In so greatly exceeding his expectation of the human potential for evil, they shocked his conscience and gave a strong impetus to his attempt to elaborate a moral code.

Once again, we find a detailed account of the writing of 'Le Songe' in several subsequent texts, notably La Bataille du Silence, Les Nouveaux Jours and Assez Mentir!, and in various prefaces such as 'Une Coquille vide'<sup>49</sup>. In 1943 Gérard, son of the writer Jacques Chardonne, having been released, quite unusually, from the camp at Oranienbourg after three months' captivity, told Vercors what he had witnessed. Although Oranienbourg was not a camp for systematic extermination, the scenes described were appalling. It is these scenes - of starvation and nakedness, forced labour, beatings and crematorium smoke - which Vercors depicts, in the most graphic manner, in 'Le Songe'. Here, more than in any other text perhaps, his skill with the artist's pencil seems to find comparable sustained expression through the writer's pen.

The whole account takes the form of a lurid nightmare, in which the narrator first observes, then shares, the sufferings of the creatures encountered in 'Cette inépuisable Géhenne' (SM p 85). There is no precise description of a camp, no explicit reference to the SS. The shadowy images are, however, unmistakable, and the vision conveyed - enclosed within the narrator's reproaches to the self-absorbed citizens who will not heed this suffering - is one of peculiar force. A vivid, penetrating quality is sustained throughout, from the description of the sterile landscape:

La terre était noire. Elle était humide et spongieuse. Les pas s'y marquaient, par une légère cuvette d'abord, qui s'emplissait bientôt d'une eau fuligineuse où nageaient des débris de mousse calcinée et de bois pourri. Il flottait une odeur étrange.... (SM p 75)

- to the evocation of the suffering of one broken figure after another:

... un torse à moitié nu, sous des haillons, les côtes se soulevaient et s'abaissaient comme un soufflet.... un homme dont le corps était encore obèse et blanc tandis que les bras et les jambes étaient déjà squelettiques et violacés... bien que le froid me glaçât les os, ses cheveux, sa chemise étaient collés de sueur. Un autre eût semblé presque normal, si le nez, les tempes, les oreilles n'eussent été couvertes de nervures dures comme celles d'une feuille. (SM p 78) 50

The concept of a nightmare as a means of presenting what we know, in retrospect, to have been actual happenings may seem calculated to intensify the vividness and the horror of the picture. This was not, however, Vercors's intention. As he explains in La Bataille du Silence, he was concerned above all to avoid passing on any exaggeration of the reality:

Toutefois je n'osai pas encore reproduire tel quel, comme une certitude établie, ce témoignage épouvantable: un témoin, pour frapper l'auditeur, n'est-il pas bien souvent conduit à grossir inconsciemment les faits? C'est pourquoi je les décrivis sous la forme d'un songe, et sous ce titre.... (BS p 318)

Another, different scruple arose in the author's mind once the text of 'Le Songe' was completed (in November 1943). How many relatives and friends of deportees might be afflicted by these revelations of the letters' probable fate?: 'Epouses, mères, elles étaient une armée déjà, elles seraient chaque jour plus nombreuses à se soutenir pareillement d'espérances... dont, si elles me lisaient, elles ne pourraient presque rien conserver.' (BS p 318) For this reason, then, the manuscript of 'Le Songe' was left lying unused in a drawer, to be published eventually in 1945.

If, meanwhile, the accounts of Oranienbourg were to prove true, surely nothing, thought Vercors, could surpass them in horror or in the degree of human guilt which they revealed?: 'Je crus le sommet de l'horreur atteint'. Only when the end of the war brought the revelations of Bergen-Belsen, Treblinka, Buchenwald and the rest did he realise that what he had heard and sought to convey about Oranienbourg, 'ce camp ordinaire', 'ce n'était encore que de l'eau de rose'.<sup>51</sup>

For the time being, then, 'Le Songe' was left unpublished. Later, in La Bataille du Silence, Vercors recalled the purpose which he had had in mind when writing the text: the wish to 'corner aux oreilles des dormeurs' (BS p 318) news, or warnings, which many preferred to ignore. In itself, this is a clear enough restatement of the didactic intentions that prompted so much of Vercors's writing from the earliest stage: in this instance as wide a public as possible had to be alerted to an appalling evil, so that a moral disaster might be met with at least some positive response. At the same time, however, in the concluding lines of 'Le Songe', there is a paradoxical note of pessimism that recalls Bruller's earlier scepticism. There are in this world 'des hommes comme nous, avec une tête et un coeur', men who, absorbed in 'leur vie à eux, leurs affaires d'argent, d'amour, de table' (SM p 85), can remain indifferent to human suffering of whatever intensity. This observation, indeed, precisely matches one of Bruller's drawings of the 1930's, that of a plump bourgeois reading the newspaper with a bored expression as he breakfasts in bed; the original caption 'Massacres, pestes et famines' being explained, in Les Occasions perdues where the cartoon is reproduced, by the note: 'suggéré par les atrocités de la guerre japonaise' (OP, betw. pp 96-97). It was presumably this kind of reader whom Vercors wished, but somehow

did not expect, to influence through 'Le Songe'; but the last lines of the latter text contain an even more bitter reflection - that there are those who might actually think of the victims of the concentration-camps and who, in so thinking, would smile.

However, if selfish indifference to the fate of others could be deplored by Vercors as a mark of the respectable bourgeois mentality, it was certainly not the failing of Renaud Houlade, the hero of the next clandestine story, 'L'Impuissance'<sup>52</sup>: '... sensible aux malheurs des autres.... Renaud le fut de tout temps à l'extrême' (SM p 89). His whole life, from schooldays onwards, had been a record of quixotic gestures and of repeated self-sacrifice, and the Occupation, when it came, seemed like an unremitting affront to his sense of justice: 'Il voulut arborer l'étoile jaune, se porter otage volontaire.....D'autres ont souffert, ont maigri de faim, lui maigrissait, se consumait de rage rentrée' (SM p 91).

Inevitably, therefore, the massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane came as a stunning blow to Renaud, being intensified, if that were possible, by the news of the concentration-camp death of his friend Bernard Meyer.<sup>53</sup> Renaud's violent reaction, in making a bonfire pile of his cherished books and paintings, was a protest against the great 'mensonge' that he claimed had been exposed - the lie, sustained by the ornaments of culture, that man is a civilised being:

Ce qu'il est, l'homme? La plus salope des créatures! La plus vile et la plus sournoise et la plus cruelle! Le tigre, le crocodile? Mais ce sont des anges à côté de nous! Et ils ne jouent pas de plus au petit saint, au grave penseur, au philosophe, au poète!  
(SM p 97)

Renaud could no longer tolerate the flattering image which works of art (by their collective existence, if not through their individual message) offer of mankind: 'Oseras-tu prétendre que tout ce fatras que voilà est mieux qu'une tartuferie, tant que l'homme est ce qu'il est?' (SM p 98). Despite Renaud's passion, however, the obverse of his 'impuissance', the narrator succeeds in preventing the cultural 'holocauste' (p. 96 - this being, in 1944, an unintentionally ironic use of the word). But while Vercors's reflections at the end restore some of the balance destroyed by Renaud's extreme outburst, his own repugnance for what men had now shown themselves capable of becoming is again clearly evident: 'L'art donne tort à Renaud. Nous le voyons bien que l'homme est décidément une assez sale bête. Heureusement l'art, la pensée désintéressée le rachètent.' (SM p 99)

'L'art, la pensée désintéressée' must therefore be defended: that, after all, was an essential part of the mission of 'Les Editions de Minuit'. But at the same time the solitary enjoyment of art cannot be enough: the narrator, at least, feels that he can no longer insulate himself in that way from the human struggle: 'Devant mes tableaux, devant mes livres, je détourne un peu les yeux. Comme un filou, pas encore endurci, qui ne peut jouir avec un coeur tranquille de ses trésors dérobés.' (SM p 100). And in Les Yeux et la Lumière, Vercors would use the Oradour massacre once again to show, far more explicitly, how unsatisfactory, indeed impossible, any retreat to the Ivory Tower had now become.<sup>54</sup>

This review of the themes of Vercors's wartime fiction is now virtually complete. The 1951 Albin Michel and subsequent 'Livre de Poche' editions in which all the above texts appear, also include a short anecdote on Hitler's visit to Paris, escorted by Brecker, in 1941. This text,

'Le Cheval et la Mort', which is dated August 1944, offers little more than a graphic snapshot: that of an elderly, sleepy Parisian concierge opening her door early one morning to be confronted by Hitler in person, an 'incroyable vision .... aussi horrible que redoutable que si c'eût été la Mort ' (SM p 107), a spectacle on which she instinctively slams the door with a cry of terror.<sup>55</sup>

Apart from this, one further text has sometimes been listed among Vercors's wartime fiction<sup>56</sup> - 'Les Pas exténuants', written in 1944, albeit after the Liberation, and first published in Temps Présent in that Autumn. It subsequently reappeared, among other tributes to friends whom Vercors had lost during and after the War, in Portrait d'une Amitié et d'autres morts mémorables (1954), which is, of course, a non-fictional work. The principal friendship of the title is that with Diego Brosset<sup>57</sup>, while the others commemorated include Jean Prévoost, Paul Eluard and Yves Farge; and it is among these that 'Les Pas exténuants' - 'L'histoire de mon cousin Pierrot' - appears. The stark facts of the story are exactly as related in La Bataille du Silence. Pierrot had been arrested by the Germans for resistance activities just before Christmas 1943. His wife had assiduously sought news of him through a highly-placed official of Darnand's milice, who had appeared obliging and had agreed to pass notes and parcels on to the French prison, and later, when it seemed that Pierrot had been deported, to Germany. But in fact: 'Pierrot était mort, fusillé du premier jour, on devait le découvrir dans un charnier. Le milicien le savait bien qui simplement revendait les colis.' (BS p 318). In 'Les Pas exténuants', Vercors dwells more fully on the relentless irony of the situation:

Ainsi, on l'avait fusillé tout de suite. Arrêté et fusillé. Depuis huit mois nous nous remuions, nous nous débattions, nous faisons démarches sur démarches, pour un mort. Pendant que pour lui sa femme allait supplier son milicien, pendant que pour lui elle courait les routes et les trains, pendant qu'elle lui envoyait colis sur colis, il était mort. (PA pp 124-5)

For Vercors, this had been another of the War's unpleasant lessons, a further indication of man's capacity for callous treachery. But the concluding lines of the 1944 text seem to hint at a much broader underlying disillusionment that their simple, tentative wording represents: 'C'est tout. Je ne sais pas ce que vous penserez de cette histoire. Après tout, peut-être n'en penserez-vous rien' (PA p 125). As we have seen, this tendency of Vercors to regard his fellow-men, as indeed the whole human condition, with irony and a certain distrust was not solely a product of war-time experience. 'Les Psa exténuants' itself, in explicitly contrasting the author's temperament with that of the spontaneous Pierrot, brings out honestly and clearly his native caution:

Il me semblait ... qu'on devait aimer la vie avec circonspection et inquiétude, que la vie était pleine de questions qu'il fallait d'abord résoudre (ou plutôt tenter vainement de résoudre, jusqu'à perdre le goût de vivre). (PA p 120)

These traits of Bruller's character must of course be borne in mind in an analysis of his wartime and subsequent attitudes. As has been shown, the pre-war scepticism had been displaced by revolt against Nazism and the determination that traditional values should survive. And yet a sense of the 'absurd', together with a certain pessimism about human behaviour, seemed still to lurk just below the surface; and for further, perhaps more direct evidence of this we can turn at this point to the main body of his non-fictional writings of the period.

The collected texts of Le Sable du Temps, published in 1945 and again in 1947, include the greater part of Vercors's non-fictional writing during the final stages of the War. The foreword states that 'chacune (de ces pages) peint un moment anxieux de la conscience de l'auteur. Un moment emporté dans le sable du temps....' According to the dates on the various texts, the moments in question ranged from July 1944 to May 1945; but one of the most substantial and significant essays, 'Le Nord', had already been written in 1943 and, like 'Le Songe', had been held in reserve by the author<sup>58</sup>.

'Le Nord' tells of the 'incroyant' narrator's search for a moral touchstone, for some firm and constant guide to action in the context of Nazi occupation. It is intellectual conviction that he seeks; and in doing so, he claims to have weighed up, with equal care, the philosophical bases of Nazism and those of traditional humanism. We know that Vercors had, in fact, rejected the brutal and destructive realities of Nazism from the outset and that in accordance with this attitude he had been drawn into a resistance effort which each new German atrocity, each Vichy betrayal, made him more determined to see through to the end. And yet, at a deeper philosophical level, as he recalled many years later, he was aware of what seemed to be a sharp contradiction in his attitudes:

....c'est qu'effectivement un tel engagement s'accordait encore au plus mal avec ce qui faisait toujours l'essentiel de ma pensée. Ma conviction profonde restait sans changement, elle restait que toute activité humaine, quelle qu'elle soit, est absurde: sur quelles bases justifier alors la décision non seulement de m'y engager moi-même, mais encore d'y engager des amis, d'autres personnes? De leur faire courir et de me faire courir des risques eux aussi absurdes, contraires à toute loi du 'ne pas souffrir'?... Cela n'avait pas le moindre bon sens si toute l'histoire des hommes, comme j'en restais certain, n'était qu'une bouffonnerie tragique. Mais cette bouffonnerie je ne pouvais plus m'en dissocier. Je me sentais lié à elle par toutes mes fibres. Rien à faire. C'était injustifiable mais invincible. (Ce que je crois, p 61) 59

Vercors goes on, in Ce que je crois, to claim that he simply suppressed the philosophical doubt for the pragmatic purpose of the resistance struggle and that he carried out his clandestine writing and publishing with 'l'esprit libre et la conscience en repos'. Even in Le Silence de la Mer, however, it is perhaps possible to point to a fleeting indication of the author's sense of a dilemma. In a rare display of personal feeling, the elderly narrator of the story expresses an exasperation which, while it is primarily occasioned by Von Ebrennac's suspension of his evening visits, seems also like a lingering echo of Bruller's pre-war reluctance to incur any unnecessary additional torment amid the already absurd experience of human life:

Elle (ma nièce) m'embrassa et il me sembla lire dans ses beaux yeux gris un reproche et une assez pesante tristesse. Après son départ je me sentis soulevé par une absurde colère; la colère d'être absurde et d'avoir une nièce absurde. Qu'est-ce que c'était que toute cette idiotie? (SM p 48)

In a story notable for its integrity of form and intention, this may or may not be a passing allusion to Vercors's philosophical doubts. What is certain, on the other hand, is that in 'Le Nord', written a year or so after Le Silence de la Mer, the author was attempting to find at least a provisional answer to his intellectual dilemma. His aim, as he recalls in La Bataille du Silence, was to establish a wholly rational basis for the Resistance: '... fonder en raison nos raisons de résister, en dehors de toute passion, nationale ou politique, de toute impulsion de coeur.' (BS p 315)

In 'Le Nord', the rationalist's search begins, paradoxically enough, with a piece of pure chance - or perhaps with 'quelque chose de plus et, à tout prendre, d'assez mystérieux';<sup>60</sup> for his eyes having roamed over some little-read volumes in his bookshelves, one title had suddenly sent him 'un signe fulgurant, un signe sauveur, comme pourrait

être, aux yeux du voyageur égaré, la Polaire étincelant soudain dans la déchirure d'un nuage. Vous vous rappelez ce titre: FONDEMENTS DE LA METAPHYSIQUE DES MOEURS ' (SI p 58). Kant's treatise does indeed provide the narrator with the basic principle on which to establish his moral code, a principle which emerges all the stronger from the test of time and of human experience:

Les commandements qui découlent de la grande loi de Kant: "Traite toujours l'humanité, dans ta personne comme dans celle d'autrui, comme une fin et jamais comme un moyen", ces commandements se rencontrent sans jamais se démentir avec l'idée instinctive que des milliards d'individus, depuis des milliers d'années, se font du bien et du mal. (SI p 63)

Nor is Vercors deterred by the difficulty of defining the 'end' in question; for his purpose, there is adequate strength and serviceability in the corresponding moral veto: 'Ne traite jamais, en ta personne, ni en celle d'autrui, l'humanité comme un moyen.' (SI p 64)

The clearest demonstration of the validity of this latter imperative is to be found in the history of slavery. According to Vercors, as true civilisation develops, slavery - the very epitome of the use of human beings as mere 'moyens' - withers and disappears. No man worthy of the name is nowadays unaware that slavery degrades the master, not the slave. But this degradation does not stem from the lack of compassion or charity inherent in the master's status: it stems from the fact that the slaveowner automatically transgresses the principle in question. And so Vercors, on the basis of what may seem a somewhat circular argument, sees a strong and enduring truth in Kant's ethic, which, like the magnetic pole of the essay's title, confirms the rightness of the direction he has taken in resisting the Nazis:

Car le nazisme prétend instaurer un ordre où les individus comme les nations seraient traités comme moyens et non comme fins. Et qu'ainsi il se présente comme un de ces vastes mouvements rétrogrades qui ont plus d'une fois, dans l'histoire des hommes, mis en péril la civilisation humaine tout entière. (SI pp 69-70) 61

'Le Nord' ends, in echo of 'le vieux France un jour à la tribune', with a firm, indeed exultant expression of renewed conviction: 'Courage! Et nous aurons raison parce que nous avons raison!' (p 78). But other of the 'moments anxieux de la conscience de l'auteur' at this time are less positively resolved. The three main areas of concern were the guilt of the German people (now, he thought, going well beyond mere acquiescence or conformism); writers' and publishers' accountability as the post-liberation recriminations and reprisals began; and, more generally, the moral responsibility for, and attitudes of many French people to, the great national ordeal.

As evidence of German war-crimes in France and elsewhere accumulated, Vercors felt impelled to give direct expression to his feelings of anger and bitterness. The desire for at least some balance, some 'mesure', that had helped to shape Le Silence de la Mer, could no longer be sustained. The Nazi leaders and their henchmen may have instigated and carried out the worst savageries; but the German people as a whole now seemed to Vercors to be tainted with a penchant for violence and cruelty which quite submerged the smiling face of a Von Ebrennac.<sup>62</sup> Distrust of the Germans would in fact be a recurring preoccupation in the author's post-war writings, and in the 1950's (when as a fellow-traveller he was, moreover, fully in support of the communist position on the issue), it would lend an extra strength and fervour to his opposition to the proposed European Defence Community. But already, in the closing stages of the War, we can observe the transition from his

earlier measured criticism, and his caution on hearing the first accounts of Dranienbourg, to the ringing indictment of, for example, 'Qu'avez-vous fait de moi?' (published clandestinely in July 1944 in l'Eternelle Revue):

Car comment ne l'aurais-je pas en détestation, ce peuple abhorré, moi seul parmi cinq cent millions d'autres hommes? Comment garder un coeur paisible après tout ce qu'on l'a vu faire, après tant de massacres, tant de tortures et de crimes, - après ce stupéfiant retour à des âges oubliés? Par ses actes abominables, il a fait de cette haine-là presque un devoir. (SI p 87)

If he has not suffered physically or materially himself, Vercors can nevertheless reproach the Germans, in his own name, with

... le seul crime qui ne se puisse absoudre; celui qui s'attaque à l'âme ..... je vous abhorre pour ce que vous avez fait de moi. Pour avoir semé, entretenu et cultivé en moi, avec cette constance diabolique qui est la vôtre, des sentiments pour lesquels je n'éprouve que le dégoût et le mépris... (SI p 88)

Bringing him to the verge of hatred, reducing, through sheer habituation, his responsiveness to others' suffering - these, then, are the charges which Vercors lays against the Germans. The pre-war admirer of German culture and supporter of Franco-German reconciliation had by now moved through stages of disappointment and shock to outright condemnation. His first reaction to 'l'univers concentrationnaire' had been to enshroud it in the mists of 'Le Sorce'. But the evidence of such evils - and of German responsibility for them - now lay all around. Should one not, therefore, arraign 'ce peuple abhorré' for a further, albeit intangible crime against humanity - that of poisoning the well of human conscience?<sup>63</sup>

As for the writer's responsibility in the light of all that had occurred, it was in answer to a question from Carrefour that Vercors formulated his views a few months after the Liberation. The somewhat

austere tone of this essay<sup>64</sup> reflects the author's habitual seriousness in such matters, but also, more specifically, his desire to establish at least some firm guidelines at a time of continuing moral and political uncertainty. 'Nous vivons à une époque de l'histoire humaine où rien ne peut être plus funeste que l'équivoque...' (SI p 155). The essence of Vercors's argument lies in the distinction between moral responsibility and social responsibility. As he argues, quite straightforwardly, the writer's personal moral responsibility is never less than total: 'Une société humaine n'est cohérente que si chacun de ses membres est responsable de ses actes.... Publier un écrit est un acte. L'écrivain est responsable des conséquences de cet acte'. (SI pp 158-9). This, however, begs the question as to whether the society in question is 'une société libre' or 'une société policière'. In a free society, the social responsibility is shared between writer and reader, for the latter can refer to any number of other writers' points of view before being influenced. In a police state, however (witness Occupied France), the writer who chooses to publish with official permission will present only approved material - and that with no likelihood of contradiction. His social responsibility is thus very great: 'Ce que l'écrivain a offert à l'ennemi ... c'est sa pensée. Et avec sa pensée celle d'autrui. Celle de tous ceux que cette pensée va convaincre, séduire ou inquiéter'. (SI p 157).

Such a writer must accordingly expect to be held accountable; and Vercors for his part shows no indulgence towards those facing prosecution for their collaborationist writings. For upon such issues depend

la dignité, l'ascendant et la valeur sociale de l'écrivain. Car l'autorité d'un homme est en proportion de la responsabilité qu'il revendique. Et il est bon qu'il soit démontré qu'un écrit...

.. est un acte profondément consenti que l'écrivain, selon l'événement, peut avoir un jour à payer de sa vie. (SI p 162)

That Vercors was able to comment in these rigorous terms (albeit while striking a modest personal note: 'De telles questions, on se sent intimidé pour y répondre' p 156) was of course in keeping with the strong notion of a writer's duty which had never deserted him throughout the Occupation and had guided his own first 'acte d'écrivain'. Later, as Chairman of the CNE, he would represent French progressive opinion in various contacts with the Soviet literary world; and in that context, as reflected in some of the texts of P.P.C., it is interesting to see the efforts that he made to reconcile the diplomatic constraints of his position with the more fundamental conviction (inherited from the tradition of Voltaire, Zola and Rolland and sharpened by experience of the Occupation) that the writer's chief and permanent responsibility, in whatever political circumstances, is to the truth.

In another early post-Liberation essay, 'La Gangrène',<sup>65</sup> meanwhile, Vercors was once more pronouncing firmly on literary responsibility - this time, more specifically, on what he saw as the scandal of the Parisian publishing houses. Having agreed - very reluctantly ('on ne devrait jamais composer' SI p 184) - to serve on the 'Commission d'épuration de l'édition', he now expresses disgust that no effective action is being taken against collaborationist publishers as the months slip by and normal publishing activity seems to be resuming everywhere. First he gives a solemn warning: 'Un pays gangrené d'immoralité est très malade. Quand l'immoralité commence par la tête (domaine de l'expression) il est perdu.' (SI p 185). Then, in successive paragraphs of considerable force and directness, he cites the purveyors of Vichy propaganda, the collaborators, and those who

thought only of their profits, concluding each paragraph with the blunt refrain: 'Je dis que cela est immoral<sup>66</sup>.'

Here again, then, the moralist in Vercors stands forth to proclaim his message in uncompromising terms. This was a posture - and, in practical terms, a situation - towards which his 'résistance intellectuelle' and the purposes which he had aimed to serve through his writings had almost inevitably been leading. As a result of that work, he found himself in post-Liberation Paris pressed from all sides to participate and pronounce in the fierce debates of the day. Whence, to take but two examples, the essays which have just been discussed. Whence the sudden international celebrity, which resulted in his being invited to lecture and broadcast in Britain, America and in other countries of Europe.<sup>67</sup> Whence, in short, a period that he has succinctly recalled as one of 'Luttes. Aménagements. Articles. Réunions' (NJ p 57).

It was a situation which Vercors himself claims to have contemplated with considerable misgiving. As the concluding pages of La Bataille du Silence relate, he had gone somewhat diffidently to Paris to attend 'la première séance en liberté du Comité National des Ecrivains' (BS p 347) in August 1944. There his reluctance to belong formally to the CNE was brushed aside by Claude Morgan: the man who had been writing as 'Vercors' had a virtual duty, it seemed, not only to belong to the Committee, but to participate fully. To which the author unwillingly - and, as revealed in P.P.C. and Les Nouveaux Jours, to his eventual regret - agreed. Any further hope of anonymity was dispelled: Vercors now became a public figure, widely praised (if not universally loved) for his wartime publications<sup>68</sup>, and increasingly immersed in the political controversies with which the Fourth Republic

was soon beset. His early left-wing leanings and particularly, of course, his anti-fascism, had been confirmed by wartime experience and would be reflected in many of the positions that he would now adopt. Above all else, however, and despite the conflicts and tensions that such two-fold commitment involved him in, he would be concerned with defending the fundamental moral values that he saw being jeopardized by political and ideological pressures. As we have already seen, he was not by nature disposed to be over-sanguine about the capacity of some of his fellow-men - including Frenchmen - to live up to those values:

Je suis ... un homme qu'il n'est pas facile de décevoir,  
je n'ai pas sur les hommes en général une opinion si haute  
que leur comportement puisse encore me décevoir... 69

In spite of which, in spite moreover of a sometimes sectarian vehemence in his attitude to ideological opponents, he would seek energetically over the next several years to establish philosophical grounds for an enduring mutual respect between human beings.

NOTES ON CHAPTER ONE

1. The notion of a writer's responsibility to his readers is further considered towards the end of the present chapter in relation to Vercors's early essay 'Responsabilité de l'écrivain' (February 1945). More generally, although Vercors was not an existentialist in the sense in which the term became established in post-war France, the notion of moral responsibility attaching to one's decisions or choices which is reflected in this quotation offers an obvious echo of the attitudes of Sartre or Simone de Beauvoir - as encapsulated, most succinctly, perhaps, in the latter's adoption, for the epigraph to Le Sang des autres, of Dostoevsky's 'Chacun est responsable de tout devant tous'. According to Les Nouveaux Jours (p 36) it had been intended that Le Sang des autres should be published clandestinely by 'les Editions de Minuit' but in the end the manuscript was not received.
2. Vercors acknowledges this fortuitous enhancement of his post-Liberation prestige in Les Nouveaux Jours, where he recalls (p 68) that 'mon nom, ou plus exactement mon pseudonyme, qui vient de se trouver ainsi, le plus fortuitement du monde, être celui d'un maquis héroïque, ce nom ainsi doublement symbolique est devenu une sorte de totem'.
3. The reference to the sea in the text of Le Silence de la Mer is as follows: '... sous les silences d'antan, - comme, sous la calme surface des eaux, la mêlée des bêtes dans la mer, - je sentais bien grouiller la vie sous-marine des sentiments cachés, des désirs et des pensées qui se nient et qui luttent.' (p 55). In Les Occasions perdues, Vercors writes of the special significance that the notion of silence had always had for him: '... le Silence. Mot auquel j'ai toujours trouvé de profondes résonances' (OP p 141); and in La Bataille du Silence (pp 186-7) he specifically recalls his search for, and final choice of, the title of his first 'récit'.
4. At least four million copies of the story have been sold in France, and it has been translated into more than thirty languages. It has also been adapted for the cinema and for television and Vercors wrote his own theatrical version of it in 1949.
5. Further discussion of the comparisons between human beings and insects in Vercors's writing is to be found in the analysis of Les Yeux et la Lumière in Chapter Two of this thesis.
6. A fuller analysis of Bruller's attitude to politics in the 1930s, including internal French politics, will be undertaken in Chapter Four.
7. Konstantinovic, p 44.

8. Bruller's connection with Vendredi is similarly but more briefly recalled in La Bataille du Silence, pp 16-17. It was Louis Martin-Chauffier, apparently, who invited Bruller to contribute his drawings to the journal, although André Chamson, according to Les Occasions perdues (p 90), may have first thought of the idea. Martin-Chauffier is also referred to in this thesis in note 23 on the present chapter, and subsequently in connection with his return from deportation in 1945 (Chapter Two, note 4), and his chairmanship of the CNE prior to that of Vercors (Chapter Four). As is also mentioned in Chapter Four, André Chamson was one of the leading Popular Front writers who formed the editorial team of Vendredi. His brief reference to the journal and its contributors in Devenir ce qu'on est, Namur/Paris, Weismael-Charlier, 1959, pp 60-61, does not mention Bruller or his drawings. This may be due to the brevity of Chamson's account - or possibly to the estrangement between the two men around 1948, after twenty years of friendship. (Vercors discusses this breach in Les Nouveaux Jours, p 133).
  
9. This episode is referred to more fully in connection with the story 'Agir selon sa pensée' in Chapter Two of this thesis.
  
10. Bruller had lived in Villiers-sur-Morin with his first wife and, in due course, children, since the Spring of 1934. He had spent part of the previous year in renovating and decorating his house, which he rented from a local lawyer. The village itself was noted as an artists' colony, and among those who had painted there had been Dunoyer de Segonzac, who in 1943, to Bruller's disgust, was one of several French artists who accepted an invitation from Hitler to visit Germany.  
  
When Bruller arrived back in Villiers after demobilization, he found that his neighbours (the husband being a fellow-artist whose work he respected) had adopted as 'filleul de guerre' a young German officer. Unable to convince these neighbours that the evils of Nazism now rendered Franco-German friendship impossible, Bruller felt obliged to break off normal contact with them. This is related in La Bataille du Silence, pp 116-7.
  
11. In Le Silence de la Mer, Von Ebrencac's actual words are: '... cette pièce a une âme. Toute cette maison a une âme' (SM p 31). There is a certain irony in Von Ebrencac's apparent feeling that the house in question offers a mystic link with the soul of France, since Bruller's rented home, which clearly provided the model, in fact belonged not to a moral 'résistant' but to a 'vichyste'. In Les Nouveaux Jours (pp 178-9) Vercors reveals that his landlord did not dare to give him notice for some time after the War, but finally did so in 1950.

12. Two more examples of Jean Bruller's sensitivity to the feelings of others (for which there seems to be much other evidence in terms of his wider personal contacts) are to be found in his memoirs:

In La Bataille du Silence he tells of his refusal to use the cycle cabs which replaced taxis in Paris during the Occupation: 'Je supportais mal de voir mon prochain traité en bête de somme' (BS p 149) - a very good example, in fact, of the more general refusal (so important in his ethical theory) to treat others as a means rather than an end.

And in Les Nouveaux Jours he relates an occasion when, in the full flush of his post-Liberation prestige, he was approached by the wife of General Paté:

Elle accourait se dédouaner car, fervente de Hitler et de Pétain, elle avait cessé toutes relations avec ma mère, veuve d'un juif. Je n'ai pas trouvé le courage de la mettre à la porte. Cette lâcheté à n'offenser personne, même une vilaine femme, c'est ma faiblesse. (NJ p 77)

13. It was through the encouragement of Jules Romains, a friend of some years' standing, that Bruller joined the P.E.N. Club, even though not yet a poet, essayist or novelist. With Romains, Durtain, Benjamin Crémieux (see note 53 in this chapter) and others, Bruller had visited Prague in June 1938, and there had met some young Czechs whose fervent hopes for their country were now clearly under threat from Hitler. On the journey, Bruller had been disturbed by the manner of the German border officials who seemed to represent the 'New Germany': '... dans les yeux des deux le même regard de glace' (OP p 143) and by the signs of German preparations for war. At the P.E.N. Conference itself he was disappointed by the attitude of H. G. Wells, Romains' predecessor as international Chairman, who had been unwilling, in the name of freedom of expression, to support a motion condemning antisemitism. The whole visit is related in Les Occasions perdues, pp 143-7.
14. This period in the history of the NRF is also recounted by Herbert Lottman in The Left Bank, London, Heinemann, 1982, Chapter 16. In the following chapter of his study Lottman recalls the infamous 'liste Otto', and he discusses other forms and degrees of intellectual collaboration in Chapters 18 and 19.
15. Vercors was to acknowledge the integrity of Emile-Paul Frères in this dedication of his first collected essays, Le Sable du Temps, Paris, Emile-Paul Frères, 1945:

A vous j'offre ces pages, cher Emile-Paul, pour vous remercier d'avoir prouvé qu'avec un peu de courage et d'honnêteté un éditeur pouvait garder sa maison ouverte, malgré la tyrannie et la menace, sans s'humilier et sans trahir.

There is further discussion of Le Sable du Temps, as well as of Vercors's involvement in the post-Liberation 'comité d'épuration de l'édition', later in the present chapter.

16. Bruller had in fact been drafting the story of his first love (for a Jewish girl named Stéphanie) as an evening pastime and form of emotional solace. It was not intended for publication, although it later appeared as Tendre Naufrage (1974). Vercors learned after the War that Stéphanie had died in Auschwitz.
17. Vercors recalls the execution of Jacques Bonsergent in similar terms in La Bataille du Silence (pp 151-2), in Ce que je crois (p 59), and in prefaces such as that to Ralph Feigelson's Le Crime du 15 décembre, Paris, Grassin, 1964, a tribute to the one hundred French hostages, including 53 Jews, shot by the Germans on 15 December 1941. Bonsergent's death also features in other authors' accounts of the Occupation. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, recalls the episode in La Force de l'Age, where she draws the same basic conclusions as Vercors: '... pour la première fois, les corrects occupants nous annonçaient officiellement qu'ils avaient exécuté un Français coupable de n'avoir pas courbé la tête.' La Force de l'Age, Paris, Gallimard, Coll: 'Folio', 1981, 2 vols, II, 542. In H. Noguères, M. Degliame-Fouché and J-L Vigier, Histoire de la Résistance en France, juin 1940-juin 1941, Paris, Laffont, 1967, pp 254-255, there are more details of the case, including the fact that the Paris préfecture at first unsuccessfully prohibited the tearing down or defacing of the German posters. Even after policemen were ordered to guard the latter, according to an eye-witness, Madeleine Gex-Leverrier, Parisians still managed to place flowers beneath the notices. The métro station 'Jacques Bonsergent' was renamed in honour of this early victim of a German reprisal.
18. Looking at the first issue of Pantagruel, dated October 1940, it is easy to see why the tract should have appealed to Bruller. It refers back to an established French tradition of intellectual balance, while at the same time pointing out firmly the grave danger for France that lurked behind the often friendly façade of the Germans. All this is clearly set out in its opening article:

Nous nous efforcerons ... d'éviter toutes critiques haineuses ou acerbes contre les Allemands, par souci de cette objectivité, cette sérénité de jugement que Rabelais recommande ... et aussi, pourquoi ne pas le reconnaître loyalement, parce que l'attitude de nos ennemis est correcte, souvent même courtoise.

Mais Français, comprenez bien ceci:  
L'Allemand qui vous parle si cordialement éprouve  
peut-être une certaine sympathie pour la France ....  
Mais n'oublions pas que la théorie du 'Deutschland  
über alles' veut que tout soit écrasé, s'il le faut,  
pour la grandeur de l'Allemagne....

19. Towards the end of 1944 Lescure had claimed in a Swiss magazine article that he and his young mistress had together founded 'Les Editions de Minuit', and had dismissed Vercors's contribution to the enterprise in half a line. In 'La Vénus de Solare', written when Vercors's disillusionment over the episode was still very intense, he causes his young protagonist to suffer a similar betrayal (see Chapter Two of this thesis); while in a more direct reference to the episode in P.P.C. (p 20), the author still does not refer to Lescure by name. However the issue is fully and explicitly discussed in Les Nouveaux Jours, pp 58-64, where Vercors tries to analyse the reasons for Lescure's sudden reversal of attitude. Further references to the history of 'Les Editions de Minuit' will be found in note 21 below.
20. Details of the Germans of Vercors's acquaintance who would contribute to Van Ebrencac's portrayal are to be found in La Bataille du Silence pp 183-4, and there is a similar reference to one of them in Plus ou moins Homme, pp 236-7.
21. The first and 'official' version of this history was Jacques Debû-Bridel, Les Editions de Minuit: Historique, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1945. Debû-Bridel was in contact with Lescure during the Occupation and learned of the project concerning La Pensée libre and subsequently 'Les Editions de Minuit' from him. For security reasons he did not know until later that Vercors was Jean Bruller or that the latter was also 'Desvignes', the alias under which he operated as clandestine publisher. However, the partnership between Lescure and Bruller is fairly recounted by Debû-Bridel: 'Les Editions de Minuit', he states, was born 'de la rencontre de deux hommes' (p 18). There is an updated version of this account in J. Debû-Bridel (ed) La Résistance intellectuelle (Textes et Témoignages), Paris, Julliard, 1970, which covers the same general ground but inaccurately gives (p 68) February 1941 as the date when Debû-Bridel learned from Lescure of the project for 'Les Editions de Minuit'. (The correct date must have been much later in the year or, more likely, February 1942). In his François Mauriac, (Paris, Seuil, 1980), Jean Lacouture quotes this erroneous date without challenging it - and, interestingly enough, without mentioning Vercors's activity in the publishing part of the enterprise at all. One of the first to reveal the story of 'Les Editions de Minuit' to an English-speaking readership was Justin O'Brien, in 'Writers at Midnight', The New York Times Book Review, March 4, 1945, reproduced in the same author's The French Literary Horizon, New Brunswick, Rutgers UP, 1967, pp 293-298.

And finally another American, H. Lottman in *The Left Bank* (Chapter 21, 'Midnight Presses') presents the more established version of the collaboration between Lescura and Bruller; indeed, since Vercors was one of Lottman's interviewees in the preparation of the chapter, his role in the partnership is fully (and fairly) highlighted.

22. In the collaborative publication *Vie et Mort des Français, 1939-45*, Paris, Hachette, 1971, to which fifteen authors contributed, Vercors discusses the aims he conceived for 'Les Editions de Minuit' in the section 'La Résistance intellectuelle', pp 272-293. In this account he is particularly eloquent in evoking France's long intellectual tradition. In 1941 he was, he says, filled with

l'immuable désir de voir persister, envers et contre tout, la forme la plus haute, irremplaçable de la pensée française, la forme qui de toujours l'a distinguée de toutes les autres pensées, orientale, slave, germanique, latine ou anglo-saxonne; non pas seulement le recours (indispensable) à l'émotion, à la colère; non pas seulement la propagande pour la meilleure des causes; non pas seulement l'appel aux armes; mais cette froide volonté qui, de Montaigne et Descartes à Renan et Valéry en passant par les Encyclopédistes, en a fait un modèle de raison et d'efficacité, celle de penser juste (p 283).

23. From: Vercors, *La Littérature et la Résistance, Conférence prononcée à l'Institut Pédagogique National, 21/2/68*, (Paris, 1968), p 6. The original 'Manifeste des Editions de Minuit' is reproduced in Vercors, *Le Silence de la Mer*, Paris, Albin Michel, Club des Libraires de France, 1964, pp 119-122. Similar aspirations to Vercors's and Lescura's were to be articulated in the War years by other intellectuals in the service of the Resistance. Thus, for example, Martin-Chauffier:

Cette guerre est d'abord la guerre de la libération de l'esprit opprimé par toutes les forces de la matière... c'est pourquoi l'esprit français parlant, non pas au nom de la France seule, mais dans le français qui est la langue universelle, ne montrera pas seulement au monde que la France est ressuscitée, il la ressuscitera lui-même.

From: Delisle (pseudonym of Louis Martin-Chauffier), 'Le Règne de l'Esprit', *Les Cahiers de la Libération*, I, 1, Sept 1943. Reproduced in *Ecrivains en prison*, Paris, Seghers, 1945, pp 75-76.

24. 'Sa richesse, sa haute richesse, on ne peut la conquérir. Il faut la boire à son sein, il faut qu'elle vous offre son sein dans un mouvement et un sentiment maternels....' (SM p 36)
25. Vercors's admiration for Briand, particularly as the statesman who strove for reconciliation with Germany in the 1920's, is reflected many times in his writing; but most notably, of course, in *Moi, Aristide Briand, essai d'autoportrait* (1981), the first volume of the author's

Cent Ans d'Histoire de France. Vercors's view of Briand is referred to in this thesis principally in Chapter Five, and in Appendix II, q.7.

26. François de Wendel and Henri Bordeaux are each referred to, briefly and dismissively, in Les Occasions perdues, p 12 and p 173 respectively. Vercors's implacable hostility towards Pétain is expressed in many places in his writing, and there is further reference to him in the present Chapter.
27. Apart from the several occasions when he introduces a quotation from Shakespeare into his own texts, Vercors has translated Hamlet and Macbeth into French. See also Chapter Two, notes 5 and 22.
28. The words used by Von Ebrennac's friends in Paris, when he learns of the Nazis' real intentions towards France, are very close to some of those quoted by Vercors, in Les Occasions perdues, from the overheard conversation of the two Germans:

Ils ont dit: "Vous n'avez pas compris que nous les bernons?"  
Ils ont dit cela. Exactement... (SM p 53) etc.
29. Perhaps because unaware of the facts at the time, Vercors seems to have been unduly dismissive of those Germans, of different backgrounds and at different levels, who tried to oppose Hitler's tyranny - and often paid heavily for their resistance. The author's references, for example, to 'une douzaine d'écrivains exilés (dont la moitié l'était pour leur race)' (PMH p 240), who, he claimed, were the only ones with enough conscience to revolt against the Nazi excesses, seems to underestimate the efforts (and sacrifice) of some German Christian writers who opposed Hitler from within Germany: Albrecht Goes, Reinhold Schneider, Werner Bergenrön, and Hans and Sophie Scholl, Willi Graf and Christoph Probst of the Munich 'Weisse Rose' student movement.
30. 'Conférence demandée par les universités américaines à l'auteur du Silence de la Mer', published in Vercors, Le Silence de la Mer, Paris, Albin Michel, Club des Libraires de France, 1964, pp 125-195.
31. In fact, in the course of the polemics over the Henri Martin affair in the early 1950's, Vercors resurrected Von Ebrennac in 'Les Marais du Silence' (Les Pas dans le Sable, pp 172-6) and made him express openly to fellow-officers of the Wehrmacht - at the cost of court-martial and execution - his condemnation of Germany's treatment of France. This, by obvious implication, was analogous to France's actions in Indochina, towards which Von Ebrennac unequivocally expresses Vercors's own attitude. 'Les Marais du Silence' is also referred to in Chapter Five of this thesis.

32. Ilya Ehrenburg was one of the first to criticise Le Silence de la Mer on these grounds, and his views were echoed by some of the Free French in London. This is discussed in Lottman, The Left Bank, p 184, and by Vercors himself in Les Nouveaux Jours, pp 41-2.

33. Jean-Paul Sartre, Qu'est-ce que la Littérature? Paris, Gallimard, coll: 'Idées', 1982, p 93.

34. This meeting actually took place in October, 1940.

35. Sartre, p 95.

36. In 1947, when Sartre was writing his essay, Jean-Louis Curtis won the Prix Goncourt with Les Forêts de la Nuit. Set in 'Saint-Clar' in the Basque country, this looks back to the recent Occupation and shows the local people facing some of the same dilemmas as Vercors's story and Sartre's commentary centre upon:

Quent à nos occupants à la 'correction' officielle,  
il n'était que d'ouvrir les yeux et les oreilles pour  
comprendre que cette 'correction' était le voile  
derrière lequel se cachait un despotisme arbitraire et cruel:  
la Gestapo était le revers de la correction germane.

Jean-Louis Curtis, Les Forêts de la Nuit, Paris, coll: 'Livres de poche', 1947, p 69.

37. Sartre, pp 95-6.

38. Some examples of these later heroines are Edwige in La Liberté de Décembre, Bala in Le Radeau de la Méduse and Delphine in Tendre Naufrage. See also Appendix I to this thesis.

39. Nelly Corneau, 'Chronique littéraire', Synthèses, Brussels, August 1951, 419-427 (p 420).

40. The amount of critical comment published on the general qualities of Le Silence de la Mer is such that only a brief selection can be indicated here. One of the earliest commentaries was that, published clandestinely, by Maurice Druon in the Preface to Cahiers du Silence, dated April 1943: 'En écrivant cette nouvelle, l'auteur qui se dissimule sous le pseudonyme de Vercors - peut-être un romancier célèbre, à coup sûr, connu ou inconnu, un très grand écrivain - a mis sa tête à prix...' (p 16). (Whatever the risks entailed, there were apparently several claimants to the authorship of the 'récit' and, as Deb0-Bridel recalls, many guesses made as to Vercors's real identity: Gide, Martin du Gard, Schlumberger and others).

Another early admirer of the story, albeit from a different perspective, was Justin O'Brien, who wrote of 'a subtle masterpiece' (The French Literary Horizon, p 304). Pierre Brodin was still enthusiastic some years after the war: 'Le Silence de la Mer est une des plus parfaites réussites d'un genre difficile où, depuis Mérimée, bien peu d'écrivains se sont illustrés'. (Présences Contemporaines, Paris, Debresse, 1954, p 325); but like some other critics, he used this achievement as a standard by which to measure Vercors's subsequent work: 'Aucun de ses livres parus entre 1944 et 1950 n'est indifférent, mais aucun n'atteint au degré de simplicité et de grandeur qu'on trouve dans Le Silence de la Mer (p. 327). And there is a similar judgement from Pierre-Henri Simon: '... cette courte nouvelle sera toujours lue comme un modèle d'élocution et de sensibilité françaises. Ce qui suivit, La Marche à l'Etoile, Les Armes de la Nuit, ne va pas aussi haut.' Pierre-Henri Simon, Histoire de la littérature française au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, Paris, Armand Colin, Coll: U2, 1967, 2 vols, II, 135.

41. This depth of despair is referred to directly near the beginning of the text: 'Il y a trente mois je désirais la mort' (SM p 7); while a footnote indicates that the author was writing in 1942.
42. Randois's character (and possible parallel with de Gaulle) is referred to again in Chapter Six of this thesis.
43. The first part of 'La Marche à l'Etoile' is dedicated to 'la mémoire de celui dont ces pages racontent la vie'. Bruller recalls the writing of his father's story in La Bataille du Silence, where he evokes 'son odyssee à seize ans depuis sa Hongrie natale, sa marche à l'étoile vers le pays de Victor Hugo et de la révolution française...' (BS p 234). The events which inspired the second part of the story are discussed in Les Nouveaux Jours, pp 30-31.
44. There is a further ironic reference to French Army officers of 1940 showing more discretion than valour in 'L'Imprimerie de Verdun' (SM p 115). Sartre similarly describes a group of officers in Eastern France abandoning their men in June 1940 in La Mort dans l'Âme, and he also indicates the effect that this defection had on the morale of the various men in Mathieu's unit.
45. Vercors would undoubtedly have been influenced in reaching this damning judgement by his close contact before the War with the family of General Mangin, a rival of Pétain's during the First World War and a bitter opponent from then until Mangin's death in 1925. Mangin was the father-in-law of Diego Brosset, Bruller's great friend in the 1930's and a dedicated Army officer himself; and Brosset, according to Portrait d'une Amitié, never concealed his scorn for Pétain. Having thus already acquired an unfavourable view of Pétain in the 1930's, Bruller was of course wholly repelled by what he saw as the Marshal's defection in 1940 and by the reactionary, anti-Republican values that Pétain embodied in the Vichy régime.

However, those who have a more objective standpoint than Vercors's have produced more balanced (if still not flattering) views of Pétain: for example, Herbert Lottman in Pétain, Hero or Traitor, London, Viking, 1985, which brings out the full complexity of its subject's character.

46. According to Lottman's analysis, Pétain's attitude to the Jews, and to the antisemitic legislation that he presided over, was somewhat ambiguous. Lottman quotes René Gillouin, who concluded that 'Pétain was not an anti-Semite... but like most French officers he wasn't an anti-anti-Semite either.' (Pétain, Hero or Traitor, p 218). Lottman also observes that 'the same Pétain who accepted and apparently encouraged anti-Jewish measures was appalled when they got out of hand' (p 218); and that 'Pétain... did not wish to harm French-born Jews, especially those with distinguished war records.' (p 249)
47. There is another reference to the dénouement of this story in Chapter Six of this thesis, where there is also further analysis of Vercors's disillusionment over many of the post-Liberation developments in France. See also the references to 'Meurtre sans importance' in Chapters Two and Six.
48. This reaction of Dudevillie's is recalled in La Bataille du Silence, pp 202-3. Georges Dudevillie and Ernest Aulard were the two main printers who assisted Vercors with 'Les Editions de Minuit', and apart from the tribute paid to them through 'L'Imprimerie de Verdun' their work is fully acknowledged in the author's memoirs.
49. Assez Mentir!, by Vercors and Olga Wormser-Miqot, Paris, Ramsay, 1979, warns that the Holocaust should not be forgotten or allowed to be glossed over by historians 'revising' the record of Hitler's years. The reference to 'Le Songe' is in Vercors's (shorter) section of the publication, pp 16-17. 'Une Coquille vide' is reproduced in Plus ou moins Homme, pp 345-8. The reference to 'Le Songe' in La Bataille du Silence is to be found on pp 315-8, and in Les Nouveaux Jours on pp 36-7. The subject of the German concentration-camps is further discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, with particular reference to the novel Les Armes de la Nuit.
50. Towards the end of 'Le Songe', Vercors refers to the animal-like instinct that makes a man struggle to survive even amid the most appalling suffering:

Car l'homme n'est pas seul dans sa peau, il y  
logé une bête qui veut vivre ... la bête, elle,  
se relèverait sous les coups... (SM p 84)

This in itself indicates that the text is one of Vercors's earliest, because the idea expressed here is quite contrary to

the theory he was to develop after the War. In this theory it is the human spirit alone, quite distinct from any animal quality, which induces a man to rebel against his situation - or against his human condition in general - thereby ensuring the growth and progress of the human species. Animals are, by contrast, totally devoid of that spark of rebellion against the natural order, or even against their particular sufferings. The development of these ideas in Vercors's work will be discussed in Chapter Two.

51. Assez Mentir!, p 16.
52. 'L'Impuissance' was first published clandestinely in Eluard's L'Eternelle Revue, Paris, 1944.
53. The massacre at Gradour-sur-Glane took place on 10 June 1944. It is further discussed in connection with the story 'Les Mots' in Chapter Two of this thesis. 'Bernard Meyer' in 'L'Impuissance' represents Benjamin Crémieux, to whose memory the story is dedicated. Crémieux had been one of the P.E.N. members who had visited Prague with Vercors in June 1938 and had celebrated New Year 1939 at Bruller's home. In Les Nouveaux Jours (p 45) Vercors writes that, following on the news from Gradour, 'apprenant la mort à Buchenwald, "d'extrême faiblesse", de notre bon, de notre cher Benjamin Crémieux, j'écrirai la nouvelle pleine de rage que je nommerai 'L'Impuissance'.'
54. In Le Tigre d'Anvers (1986), there is an echo of Renaud's intended gesture when the narrator, having learned of the 'épreuves horribles' suffered by Pierre Cange, feels less appetite for his lobster. His host, Hector Lebraz, counsels a balanced view: 'C'est un bon sentiment. Mais élargissez-le aux malheurs du monde et vous n'écoutez plus Mozart, fuirez Renoir et brûlerez votre bibliothèque' (TA p 102).
55. The basic Albin Michel/Livre de Poche collection also includes 'Ce Jour-là', a child's view, sensitively portrayed, of the arrest of his parents during the Occupation. As this was not published until 1947, however, in a collection 'Pour les enfants de fusillés', it is not appropriate to discuss it with the strictly wartime writings.
56. As, for example, in R. D. Konstantinovic's useful bibliography, where it features as a 'récit' among the 'Oeuvres romanesques' (Konstantinovic p 195).
57. The tribute to Brossat was first published separately in 1945, soon after its subject's death. There will be further reference to his influence on Bruller in Chapters Two, Four and Five.

58. According to La Bataille du Silence (p 315) this was because Vercors was uncertain whether his arguments in the essay would be convincing, and he was therefore unwilling to publish it and create any doubts about the ethical case for Resistance that he was trying to propound. In Debû-Bridel's 1945 History of 'Les Editions de Minuit', 'Le Nord' is listed among the clandestine texts as 'reçu en décembre 1943, retiré par l'auteur.'
59. Ce que je crois, published in 1975, presents, as the title suggests, a recapitulation of the more enduring opinions and judgements that Vercors has formed in the course of a long lifetime. It also offers a synthesis of his ideas on human progress.
60. A similar 'chance' occurrence contributed to the development of Vercors's theory after the War, when he happened to see some insects dying of cold on a mountain path. As for the note of 'mystery' which is also hinted at here, a similar notion, relating to instinct or intuition rather than purely rational processes, will be seen to emerge in parts of Les Yeux et la Lumière (subtitle: 'Mystère à Six Voix'), which offers a tentative fictional representation of Vercors's philosophy. These points will be further discussed in Chapter Two.
61. Vercors's initial stance in 'Le Nord' (his willingness at least to consider the philosophical origins of Nazism), as well as the broad conclusions he reaches, bear some resemblance to Camus's approach in 'Lettres à un ami allemand'. In the fourth and final letter, however, Camus stopped short of hatred for the Germans, whereas Vercors by 1944 claimed that such feelings were justifiable. Further comparisons between the two authors will be made in the next chapter.
62. In Le Silence de la Mer, the recollection by Von Ebrennac of his German fiancée's tearing off the legs of a mosquito might seem to indicate that the author already harboured suspicions about some underlying traits of the German character. Les Occasions perdues (p 83) confirms that Vercors had witnessed such an incident, and it was therefore he who may have felt what Von Ebrennac actually says: '... j'étais effrayée pour toujours à l'égard des jeunes filles allemandes'. (SM p 40).
63. After the War Vercors would continue to condemn the Germans in both his fictional and non-fictional writings. To the established catalogue of their crimes against humanity he would add the insidious damage the Nazis had done to traditional notions of morality, including respect for the Truth. In Assez Mentir! he succinctly recapitulates the progression of his attitude towards the Germans under Hitler, from Le Silence de la Mer to the end of the War:

Ce Mal ... en 1941 n'avait pas atteint encore, et de loin, son horreur absolue; mais déjà (il) la contenait comme l'oeuf contient l'oiseau et, si le germe est celui d'un vautour, il ne peut en sortir qu'un vautour.... Homme de bonne volonté, j'avais jusqu'à la dernière minute voulu espérer dans ce Mal une ultime lueur d'humanité... Si, à la Libération, j'avais dû, le coeur déchiré, renoncer avec toute tolérance à ma propre nature, c'était parce qu'on ne pouvait plus, honnêtement, se montrer tolérant le moins du monde sans trahir l'essentiel... (Assez Mentir! p 22)

64. 'Responsabilité de l'écrivain', first published in Carrefour, 10/2/45, reproduced in Le Sable du Temps pp 155 ff.
65. 'La Gangrène', first published in Les Lettres françaises, 20/1/45, reproduced in Le Sable du Temps pp 183 ff.
66. Annie Cohen-Solal: Sartre 1905-1980, Paris, Gallimard, 1985, aptly refers to Vercors in the controversies over the writing and publishing purges as being among the 'durs des durs' (p 291). Vercors's attitude proved to be at variance with that of General de Gaulle, even though the latter, according to Les Nouveaux Jours (pp 67-8), counted Le Sable du Temps among his preferred books at that time. According to Vercors, again in Les Nouveaux Jours (p 54), de Gaulle wanted to safeguard some of the collaborationist publications, and the publishers, because of their international standing. De Gaulle's own account of these matters, in his Mémoires de Guerre: Le Salut, does not specifically bear this out, but it does reflect his distrust of the Communists' strength in the post-Liberation press and his readiness to commute the death-sentences passed on many collaborationist writers. There is further analysis of Vercors's rather mixed attitude towards de Gaulle in Chapter Five of this thesis.
67. Vercors's visit to Britain is recalled in Les Nouveaux Jours (pp 78-80) and to the USA in the same text (pp 91-98). Among details not included in this retrospective account is the fact that he broadcast a tribute to Britain's war-effort on the BBC on May 9th 1945 (reproduced as 'Branle-Bas' in Le Sable du Temps), and that when at Columbia University, New York, in March 1946 he addressed an audience, together with Camus and Léon Motchane, under the chairmanship of Justin O'Brien. His journey to America by 'Liberty Ship' is fully described, however, and it is quite clear that this experience inspired his later novel Sillages (1972).

68. A review of 'Le Songe' by René Lalou, 'Le Livre de la Semaine', in Les Nouvelles Littéraires, Paris, 1/11/45, p 3, typifies the enthusiastic reception that Vercors and his publications received in most quarters immediately after the War:

Comment ne pas accueillir, dans la publication du 'Songe', une occasion de dire à Vercors quelle gratitude lui ont vouée des milliers de Français? ..... Le Silence de la Mer ... nous fut un tel réconfort ... la conscience d'un peuple avait trouvé son interprète et ... une voix s'élevait pour justifier, sans grandiloquence mais avec une inflexible dignité, le 'non' que nous opposions à l'envahissement...

And Lalou concludes, with some prescience, by considering Vercors's likely role in future: '...avoir témoigné pour la France en une heure décisive lui impose à présent la charge de témoigner pour l'humanité'. However, another review in Les Nouvelles Littéraires, written by 'G.C.' and devoted to Le Sable du Temps and to Koestler's Le Zéro et L'Infini (21/2/46), having referred to the profound impression made by Le Silence de la Mer and spoken of 'la conscience probe' of the author as revealed in Le Sable du Temps, also accurately concluded that 'Vercors pense visiblement que la situation était moins complexe quand il s'agissait de lutter contre un ennemi extérieur, et il n'est pas seul à apercevoir aujourd'hui qu'il est infiniment plus facile de s'unir contre que pour ...'

69. Le Sable du Temps, p 123; a comment provoked by what Vercors saw as selfish, unpatriotic behaviour by a French concert audience in December, 1944.

CHAPTER TWO : REASON, REBELLION AND THE MORAL CODE

... devenu Vercors (et célèbre), l'on voulait m'envoyer à travers le monde représenter la résistance intellectuelle, et par fidélité je ne voulais pas me récuser .... Il me fallait par conséquent, pour le repos de mon esprit, découvrir enfin les raisons pour lesquelles j'avais agi comme j'avais fait, et de plus, ressenti, au cours de cette action, une sorte de plénitude et de bonheur. Il me fallait déceler, d'un pareil démenti à mes propres pensées, le moteur et la source - la source ne pouvant être qu'une erreur de ma logique, le moteur que le redressement intuitif de cette erreur. (Ce que je crois, p 62)

It was in such terms that Vercors in 1975 recalled the inner debate which began to occupy his mind even as he embarked on the tide of activity and public commitments that followed the Liberation. His Resistance work had been his first sustained involvement in a context wider than those of family life, private friendships and artistic career, and he needed now to take account of the philosophical implications of his new position. Wartime events had clearly overtaken his earlier conviction, rationally deduced, that 'les actes humains - passions ou vertus - sont absurdes, indifférents ou équivalents' (YL pref. p 18). As we have seen, his opposition to the Nazis and subsequent condemnation of the German people had stemmed from instinctive feelings of moral repugnance; but in order to articulate that revolt and at the same time structure the intellectual resistance whereby he felt his most effective contribution could be made, he had brought to the fore traditional, humanist values, values that apparently owed just as much to 'les enseignements de notre raison' (YL pref. p 18) as had his previous absurdist conclusions. He was sure now that the positive choice of action had been the right one, but more than ever, it seems, he felt the need for a fully-developed version of the rationale he had begun to define in 'Le Nord'. Accordingly, much of his writing from the end of the War until approximately 1950 reflects

his pursuit of a comprehensive theory through which his experience could be more coherently aligned with Kant's ethical principle. And this is as true of the fiction of this period - Les Armes de la Nuit, Les Yeux et la Lumière and La Puissance du Jour - as it is of 'La Sédition humaine' and some of the other essays published in Plus ou moins Homme.

Among the earliest post-war works was the short novel Les Armes de la Nuit, begun in August 1945 and completed in the following Spring. Like many of the war-time stories, it offers a lightly fictionalized version of actual occurrences which the author had learnt of at second hand and reacted to with particular intensity. For Vercors, the ethical issues raised by the treatment of deportees in German concentration-camps had to be confronted head-on. As he proclaims in the 1951 introduction to the text: 'quand, pendant l'été 1945, il (l'auteur) assista au retour des déportés, ce n'est pas l'envie d'écrire, c'est l'envie de hurler qui lui fit composer Les Armes de la Nuit' (AN p 7); and his comment underlines once more the primacy of the moral element in his early fiction, while also providing an appropriate keynote for the story itself, 'le récit du crime le plus noir qui se puisse concevoir : l'assassinat d'une âme'. (AN p 86)

The novel opens with the return to Paris of Pierre Cange, a Resistance leader deported to Buchenwald and thence to Hochawörth concentration camp<sup>1</sup>. A rendezvous between Cange and the narrator in the Rue de Sèvres offers us a glimpse of Paris at the end of the War - the names of newspapers shouted by a vendor: 'Libération! Ce Soir! Le Monde! Libre! ... cette agitation pacifique, sans Allemands, sans menace' (AN, p 21) - this being juxtaposed with a recollection of Pierre's arrest at the same spot two years before. On that earlier occasion, we learn, 'l'objet rituel manquait dans la vitrine de Kodak, au coin

du boulevard' (AN p 20) - a typical example of Vercors's direct implantation of personal experience into his fiction, for, as he recalls in La Bataille du Silence, he had been told by an indiscreet Resistance agent in 1942 of the use that this particular window was being put to. What most strikes the narrator of Les Armes de la Nuit now, however, is the repatriated Cange's withdrawn and evasive behaviour; and this becomes more evident still as they return home to Brittany and to the presence of Pierre's fiancée, Nicole. Eventually, in a scene dramatically counterpointed by 'l'inépuisable clameur au dehors' of storm and sea (AN p 68), Cange reluctantly tells the narrator of his experiences at Hochswörth.<sup>2</sup>

Ostensibly it is Cange's own conscience which is laid bare in this account; but of course the guilty men, those responsible for the action with which he reproaches himself, are the SS camp-guards and officers, specialists in 'la science abominable qui a le mépris pour fin et l'homme pour moyen' (AN p 74)<sup>3</sup>. Cange's memories of Hochswörth cling to him like the nightmare vision of 'Le Songe': 'Que trouva Pierre tout au fond de ce puits de muettes ténèbres? Quel noir limon, quelle eau polluée? ... C'était comme s'il se fût lentement enfoncé devant moi dans un étang, lugubre et mortel.' (AN p 55). Starved, beaten, sent repeatedly to queue at the doors of the gas-chamber, he had for a considerable time resisted all attempts to crush and debase him. He had sustained his inner resources by reciting a private litany of historical figures whom he admired: 'Brutus, Louis Blanc, Robespierre ... le noble Bonchamp, Lénine l'opiniâtre, Pascal, Socrate, Copernic ...' (AN p 71)<sup>4</sup>; but in the end his resistance had collapsed in the face of a wholly exceptional ordeal. Ordered to dispose of a heap of corpses, he had been forced, under threat of

suffering the same fate, to push a still conscious comrade into the camp furnace. As Vercors comments in Les Nouveaux Jours on his own reaction to the 'révélation abominable' that such incidents had actually occurred:

J'imagine ce que, après cela, devaient maintenant penser d'eux-mêmes les malheureux qui avaient payé ce prix pour survivre. Ce qu'en tout cas je penserais de moi si j'avais, par déchéance, obéi. Tandis que j'écrivais, mon coeur se levait encore de pitié et d'horreur. (NJ pp 101-2)

His fictional protagonist is accordingly left crippled by shame, the victim of a Nazi offence against humanity that the narrator is unable to forgive, or even clearly to define:

"Murder most foul, as in the best it is,  
But this most foul, strange and unnatural". 5

Tout peut se pardonner - peut-être même le meurtre.  
Mais une âme! ..... (AN p 86)

Cange's listless behaviour after his return to France is shown to be the more disconcerting to his friends because of the outstanding vitality and determination that had previously characterized him. Before the War, then as a Resistance leader and even when a prisoner in Buchenwald, he had always been to those around him an exemplary figure. There are repeated references to the inspiration and enrichment that the narrator and others had derived from his company: 'cette spontanéité, cette noble énergie, cet esprit de décision qui nous émerveillaient' (AN p 14); or again: 'sa présence autrefois si nourrissante, parfois si exaltante...' (AN p 42). Even now, there are occasional flashes of Cange's former pride: 'Je parle des hommes comme moi!' (AN p 25), and glimpses of his old verve, as when he drives a horse and carriage at full speed through the Breton mist: 'il n'avait rien perdu de son coup d'oeil, de ses réflexes ... (AN p 33). In short, Cange had before Hochawörth been a gifted and charismatic figure; and in these respects, Vercors's portrayal

of him strikingly recalls the presentation of Diego Brosset in Portrait d'une Amitié, also written in 1945. The latter text is a sustained panegyric on the young military officer with whom Jean Bruller had formed a close and invigorating friendship before the War - 'De quelle amitié ai-je tiré plus de richesses?' (PA p 16) - and who had died in an accident while leading a Free French division in the Liberation of France. Brosset, 'viril et rayonnant' (PA p 58) had been a demigod in his swimming and sailing prowess, and a dashing, albeit in the end fatally reckless driver. Vercors is unreserved, sometimes lyrical, in evoking his friend's moral and physical ascendancy, and these same qualities undoubtedly helped to inspire his portrayal of Pierre Cange.

There are moreover a number of affinities between Pierre Cange and Vercors himself which clearly stem from the latter's own 'univers moral'. Thus, for example, Cange's admiration for Brutus, the incarnation of Roman virtue, recalls Vercors's respect for the moral courage of his particular fictional idols, Gauvain and Cimourdain, 'qui payent de leur vie leur propre vertu';<sup>6</sup> while Cimourdain, 'l'incorruptible, l'inflexible', in turn shares important attributes with another of Cange's models, Robespierre. Most significant of all, perhaps, is Cange's reference to a more recent heroic figure - the pioneering aviator Henri Guillaumet, stranded in 'le désert glacé des Andes, gelé, brisé, aveugle, mais, pour obéir à son devoir familial, marchant, marchant dans la tempête et la neige pour qu'on retrouve son corps...' (AN pp 71-72). Guillaumet's words after his rescue: 'Ce que j'ai fait, je le jure, jamais aucune bête ne l'aurait fait', words celebrated by Saint-Exupéry in Terre des Hommes,<sup>7</sup> are not specifically cited in Les Armes de la Nuit; but there is no doubt that they

perfectly express the notion of human value that was from now on to be elaborated in Vercors's own writings and that already underlay this first of his stories about Pierre Cange.

In Cange's case, as we have seen, Vercors went to some lengths to present an innately exceptional character, accentuating thereby his sense of degradation and loss of motivation after the incident at Hochswörth. Cange's perception of the moral situation in which he now finds himself is expressed in a few stark words: 'J'y ai perdu ma qualité d'homme' (AN p 69); and the philosophical and dramatic significance of this declaration, left suspended at the end of a chapter to be picked up at the beginning of the next, is duly underlined by the narrator's further reference to the natural elements outside:

Je ne souhaite à personne d'entendre jamais de telles paroles.  
Je ne sais si le ciel au dehors s'assombrit tout à coup, ou  
si ce fut une illusion: les ténèbres dans l'instant me parurent  
envahir les derniers recoins de la sombre chambre....' (AN p 70)

As to how his friend could be helped to recover any feeling of self-respect, the narrator's twice-repeated 'Je ne sais pas' at the very end of the book (p 87) is intended to convey his impotence to point the way out of the dilemma; but it can equally be taken, in the perspective that is now possible, to indicate the author's own uncertainty as to just how 'la qualité d'homme' should be defined. Literary critics at the time seemed to share this uncertainty. Thus, for example, having praised the 'force impérative' with which Vercors presents the central moral crisis in this and previous stories (and having balanced this by pointing to the somewhat contrived treatment that reduces the characters' 'vérité vivante'), André Rousseaux drew from Cange's plight a more sweeping conclusion than Vercors had really intended: 'telle est bien la vérité qui se dégage des camps...

c'est que l'honneur de l'homme est perdu dans le monde'.<sup>8</sup> And although Vercors himself would have accepted Rousseaux's further reflection that 'la Résistance est liée invinciblement à l'idée de combat pour l'homme', such notions had been shown in the story itself to be of no consolation to Pierre Cange. Meanwhile, Florence Lambert was as respectful as Rousseaux about Vercors's moral authority, while being less reserved about the technical quality of the story, to which, she claimed, 'l'art de Vercors donne ... une rare puissance.' But she too seemed unable to go any further than the author in responding to 'ce désespoir qui réclame la solitude et auquel nous ne voyons pas d'issue...'.<sup>9</sup>

Since Cange's predicament was bound up inextricably with the War, the tendency of reviewers was, not unnaturally, to focus on the recent past. Vercors, however, was beginning to consider more enduring implications. The concept of 'la qualité d'homme' was from now on to be at the centre of his attention, although a good deal more observation and reflection were required before he would be able to establish it firmly and distinctly as the foundation of his moral theory.

Vercors's quest for the philosopher's stone, which he was in fact to pursue over some four years following the publication of Les Armes de la Nuit, is succinctly recapitulated in Ce que je crois:

... la qualité d'homme commençait de m'apparaître comme pierre de touche fondamentale. Très bien. Mais demeurait alors le plus important: qu'était-ce, exactement, que cette qualité? En quoi consistait-elle? Puisque si c'était en vertu de celle-ci qu'une action devait être approuvée ou condamnée, encore fallait-il que je m'en fisse une idée juste. Or, j'en avais bien un sentiment aussi, mais brumeux, incertain ... (CJC pp 67-8)

According to the next few pages of the same text, Vercors went on to develop and crystallize his thoughts on this basic question partly through isolated insights, partly through an effort of systematic rationalisation. As he admits, he lacked the philosophical training to carry through his reflections 'avec une rectitude, une rigueur spinoziennes' (CJC p 62), and he required, at least in partial compensation, 'beaucoup de temps, de pages noiciées, et le secours fortuit de mainte circonstance' (CJC pp 62-3). One such circumstance, for example, was his chance observation, during a stay in the Alps, of some crickets that were paralysed and dying in the cold evening air. Just as Pascal in the Pensées recognized the uniqueness of man's awareness of his own mortality, so the sight of the crickets brought home to Vercors another essential and exclusively human attribute - the capacity to rebel against metaphysical injustice:

.... j'entrevis que l'homme, à l'inverse du grillon (du fait même de cette réflexion, de ce sentiment qui m'avaient envahi), n'accepte pas sans réagir ce sort impitoyable et que tout ce qu'il fait et qu'il invente pour y porter remède est le fruit de ce refus. Que même ce qui le différencie de toutes les autres créatures, lesquelles endurent sans exception l'ordre des choses et les injures qu'elles en subissent, c'est cette volonté rebelle d'y résister et de les vaincre. (CJC p 69)

Shortly after this, in the Summer of 1948, Vercors was in Germany, lecturing to audiences of young people. 'Le problème allemand' still seemed to him to be closely connected with the moral search to which he was committed, and the behaviour of the German people under Hitler to represent both a historic catastrophe and a warning for the future. In his main 'Discours aux Allemands' Vercors was as severe as ever in his analysis of the past<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, in the anxiety to establish his bona fides that characterizes so many of his polemical speeches and writings - 'Je ne veux pas vous tromper ... je ne veux pas qu'il y ait la moindre tromperie ... j'ai décidé de ne rien cacher'<sup>11</sup> - he

quoted extensively to his German audience from a newspaper article that he had written on 'le problème allemand' in 1945<sup>12</sup>. That article contained a clear-cut condemnation of the moral failure he had already stigmatised in his clandestine writings: 'Quelle voix a protesté pour l'honneur du peuple allemand? Hélas: rien qu'un lamentable silence' (PMH p 243), and, concluding in terms of 'une immense déception ... un grand désespoir' (PMH p 244), seemed to preclude any expectation of better things to come.

Now however, in 1948, Vercors was able to speak of some modification of his attitude, justified in part by reference to attenuating historical factors<sup>13</sup>. Full confidence in the Germans was still impossible; nevertheless, 'mon esprit se refuse désormais à condamner l'Allemagne tout entière avec cette sévérité sans espoir. Je me refuse désormais au désespoir.' (PMH p 246). On the basis of this cautious hope, the hope that 'l'Allemagne humaniste' had not quite disappeared, Vercors now urged his young audience to look inwards for moral guidance rather than outwards for strong leadership; above all, they should 'cesser de penser à eux-mêmes d'abord en tant qu'Allemands, mais ... penser enfin qu'ils sont d'abord des hommes ... et d'abord savoir ce que c'est qu'un homme' (PMH p 249).

As a contribution to their search for 'la rédemption possible' (NJ p 144) Vercors offered his listeners his own definition of 'l'homme': the notion, prompted by his observation of the dying insects, that man is quintessentially a rebel against the natural order of things. Our very humanity, indeed, depends upon that rebellion, which reaches its most intense expression in the work of art:

Nous sommes des hommes dans la mesure même où nous parvenons à surmonter cette nature indifférente qui nous ignore et nous tue, que ce soit le froid, la nuit, les distances, la pesanteur, le temps, le feu, la mer, ou notre propre corps indocile. La suprême victoire s'appelle l'art, quand nous nous arrachons à notre esclavage, quand nous proclamons notre indépendance par le poème, par la musique ... L'homme n'existe que par cette lutte. (PMH pp 250-51)

But at the opposite end of the scale to the artist can be found human beings who turn against their fellows and act as accomplices of oppressive Nature. Invoking the struggle in the Roman arena between 'les Bestiaires' and 'les fauves', Vercors conjured up an image of some of the former turning against their fellows, joining the beasts in their onslaught on human flesh. In so doing, the 'Bestiaire felon' becomes 'un valet' and forfeits his right to the name of 'Bestiaire'. So it is with human life in general:

... nous ne sommes des hommes qu'autant que nous luttons contre la nature pour la vaincre, au coude à coude avec nos frères de misère. Quiconque cesse cette lutte pour la retourner contre les siens perd du même coup le nom d'homme et devient le complice de son bourreau, complice de la nature comme le Bestiaire felon l'est des fauves.... (PMH p 252)

An example from recent history was readily available, and Vercors equally ready to offer it to his German audience:

Voilà quelle fut l'ignominie de Hitler et de ses pareils. Ils se sont fait une loi, ils se sont fait gloire d'aider la nature à éliminer les plus faibles, à assurer leur domination éphémère avec l'aide des lions du cirque ... (PMH p 252);

while the corollary was what had happened in France:

La France de Pétain avait pris le parti des fauves contre les hommes, la France résistante a pris celui des martyrs contre les fauves... (PMH p 253)

After which, the moral choice for all men could be clearly and concisely stated: 'Etre des hommes ou des valets'. (PMH p 254).

The central elements of Vercors's philosophy were thus, in 1948, emerging quite distinctly. The notion of 'la qualité d'homme', together with its negative pole, already adumbrated in Les Armes de la Nuit, was now to have specific representation in the various fictional and non-fictional works that the author would produce over the next few years; although in Les Yeux et la Lumière, a collection of six 'récits' with an epilogue published in 1948, the developing philosophical concepts still lay just below the surface, emerging with some explicitness only in the epilogue. The stories of Les Yeux et la Lumière had, in fact, been written in 1946-47 (during which period three of them had already been published separately) and looking back in a 1950 preface to the collection, Vercors admits that they represent something of a transitional stage in his thinking:

... La vérité est que tandis que j'écrivais ces nouvelles, en 1946-47, je ne suis pas sûr que cette notion-là [de l'homme-rebelle] fût aussi claire dans mon esprit qu'elle l'est désormais ... Peut-être même le mot rebelle m'eût-il alors ... inquiété, sinon effrayé. Et quoique dans ces six récits mes héros ne se sentent des hommes que s'ils subordonnent la défense de leur peau à un refus qui la dépasse, peut-être m'aurait-on surpris en les qualifiant de rebelles. (YL pref. p 20)

Even the words of Gracch, Vercors's acknowledged spokesman in the epilogue - which it is reasonable to assume was the last text of the 1948 edition to have been written - would, according to the author of 1950, need some revision if they were to represent fully and fairly 'mes conceptions d'aujourd'hui' (YL pref. p 21)<sup>14</sup>. However, Vercors chose to leave all the texts unaltered in the cause of intellectual objectivity, and we can thus see in them an interesting reflection, in fictional form, of his experiences and moral concerns at the time. Above all, perhaps, they collectively symbolise - in the words of the quotation at the beginning of this chapter - his search for 'les raisons pour lesquelles j'avais agi comme j'avais fait'.

Circumstances and setting vary considerably from story to story, as does the identity of each main character; yet according to the 1950 preface 'un seul et unique personnage reparaît à chaque "chapitre" ... ce héros, c'est l'homme pur, l'homme en soi, l'abstraction-homme', (YL pref. pp 7-8). It is the actual moment when the protagonists take on this common representative role that provides the key and focus of each story:

... au point critique de leur vie, ils agissent tous 'comme un seul homme' parce qu'ils sont en fait, à ce moment-là, un seul homme — pas même un seul: l'homme tout court, qui n'a qu'une seule façon d'agir 'en homme'. (YL pref. p 8)

Now this attaching by Vercors of an exemplary significance to his characters' choices of action is of course wholly in keeping with the philosophically ambitious aims that he was seeking to fulfil. At the same time it recalls very strongly some of Sartre's observations, in Qu'est-ce que la Littérature? on 'the writer's situation in 1947'. According to Sartre, the struggle by captured Resistance agents to preserve the idea of man against the absolute evil represented by their Nazi torturers continued to exercise a strong influence on contemporary writers: '... cette fascination se reflète encore dans nos écrits: nous avons entrepris de faire une littérature des situations extrêmes'<sup>15</sup>. And by the same token Sartre was willing, on behalf of himself and others, to accept the label of 'metaphysical' writer in so far as this implied 'un effort vivant pour embrasser du dedans la condition humaine dans sa totalité'<sup>16</sup>. In our analysis of Les Yeux et la Lumière, it will be reasonable to assume that the 'point critique' reached by the protagonists can be equated with Sartre's 'situations extrêmes' — or, for that matter, with the 'situations-limites' that he proposed for the theatre; and it will also be apparent that the stories were intended to have just the

kind of universal dimension that is indicated in his broad reference to 'metaphysical' writers.

In Vercors's first story, 'La Vénus de Solare', set in Renaissance Florence, the moral crisis is experienced by a young sculptor, Salvator, as he loses faith in the notion of the artist's responsibility towards posterity. According to Salvator, there can be no guarantee that the best creations will survive or that succeeding generations will be worthy heirs. Indeed, after viewing the ruins of Carthage and its scanty vestiges of past glory, he had come to see any commitment to the future as being but '(une) duperie sinistre' (YL p 33). In this particular connection, R. D. Konstantinovic points out that Bruller had visited the site of Carthage at the same age as the young Florentine (twenty-two), and suggests that he had experienced the same disillusionment there; but Vercors, in a footnote to Konstantinovic's analysis, claims to have realised only some time later 'ce que cette vision avait de déprimant pour un architecte, un sculpteur, un peintre...'<sup>17</sup>. A more striking autobiographical link is perhaps to be found in a different aspect of Salvator's disillusionment - his sense of betrayal at the hands of the friend who had first given him a belief in the artist's mission, but who now treacherously claimed all the credit for some work they had done together. There can be little doubt that the intensity of Salvator's reaction - 'les voilà donc les fruits de la gloire! Fruits empoisonnés qui mènent un tel homme à une telle bassesse! (YL p 38) - owes a good deal to Vercors's own chagrin at the very similar treatment from Pierre de Lescure that he had suffered at the end of the War.

In keeping with his general disillusionment, Salvator willingly agrees, when his adored wife Tullia falls ill, to destroy his statue of her in order to propitiate the Fates. Though he has no faith in such superstitions, the destruction will at least serve to express his scorn for life's absurdity:

Comme un refus, comme une révolte, comme une négation désespérée, farouche, hautainement dressée contre la cruauté aveugle d'une nature atrocement stupide. Insolemment dressée aussi contre la déraison des hommes et leur dérisoire agitation, leur incroyable vanité. (YL p 49)

Yet - and herein lies the seed of a true humanist rebellion - he hesitates before carrying out his intention. As his sculpting-master points out to him, an indestructible truth has intervened - that of the artist's essential bond with humanity at large: '... c'est la vérité. Elle s'est montrée plus forte que tes raisons' (YL p 57). And even though, in order to discharge honourably his promise to Tullia, Salvator must finally destroy the statue, he carefully perfects, before doing so, one small part of its form.

At a purely narrative level, Salvator's behaviour thus appears by the end of the story to have been doubly inconsistent; but he is in fact the first of the successive protagonists in this 'Mystère à Six Voix' to demonstrate 'le refus' - the sudden reaction by an individual against the course or code of conduct that sceptical, self-protective reasoning seems to mark out. His particular importance lies in the value that he has learned to attach to his art; a value which Vercors was from now on to stress consistently in the terms that he had first used in his 'Discours aux Allemands'. Thus, for example, in the section 'Problèmes esthétiques' in Plus ou moins Homme, he writes that 'l'art est la forme suprême de notre indépendance proclamée à la face de la nature' (PMH p 283); while the artist, 'un combattant

comme un autre' in the ranks of mankind, is charged with 'une mission spéciale que (ses) dons facilitent: celle jour après jour de proclamer l'indépendance' (PMH p 292). Clearly, there are parallels between Vercore's views on Art and those of André Malraux; and even though the latter was drawing on a more formidable range of aesthetic expertise, it is perhaps not inapposite at this point to recall his striking formulation in Les Voix du Silence:

Chacun des chefs-d'oeuvre est une purification du monde,  
mais leur leçon commune est celle de leur existence,  
et la victoire de chaque artiste sur sa servitude rejoint,  
dans un immense déploiement, celle de l'art sur le destin  
de l'humanité. L'art est un anti-destin. 19

The other stories of Les Yeux et la Lumière all illustrate a moment of truth analogous to that experienced by Sôlvator. In 'Un Mensonge politique', a young member of the clandestine 'Sainte-Ligue' in eighteenth-century Portugal is caught up in the machinations of a leadership struggle. Gaspar, initially prepared to go to any lengths in the best interests of the 'Ligue', finally refuses to lie in his evidence before the 'Grão Conselho'. His conscience is stirred by the sight of the honest rank-and-file 'frères', drawn by lots to judge one of the rivals: 'Il sentit qu'il aimait profondément ces hommes, tout ce gentil peuple, qu'il était lié à eux par chacune de ses fibres, et que chacun de ses actes, toute sa lutte pour la gloire de Dieu n'avait de signification que par cet amour...' (YL p 90). At the same time, Gaspar realizes that Spanza, the leader of the conspiracy, for whom he had agreed to lie, is an unscrupulous manipulator of his followers' goodwill: '... il ne les aime pas, il se sert d'eux, pas plus ...' (YL p 91), and he begins to see the moral abdication that had underlain his own earlier readiness to obey: 'obéir aveuglément, c'est obéir peut-être à l'ange, mais peut-être à la bête ... J'ai

voulu démissionner de moi-même ... faire fi de mon jugement, de ma conscience ... ' (YL p 101).

A quotation such as this, of course, seems to echo Vercors's criticism of, and admonitions to, the Germans; but in fact, in writing 'Un Mensonge politique', the author was concerned with a quite different set of political references. His loyalty as 'compagnon de route' to the French Communists was to be severely tested on more than one occasion by conflict over the truthfulness or otherwise of the Party's official statements. For Vercors, truth was the indispensable currency of all human relationships, from the personal to the highest public level; and lies, by the same token, represent a deadly threat to human solidarity, intensifying as they do 'la première des conditions humaines.. la solitude'. (PMH p 88). At the political level, indeed, lying is little less than 'un crime contre l'humanité', a crime for which international stability would ultimately pay the price. Thus, despite his general sympathy in this early post-war period with the revolutionary governments of Eastern Europe, and his understanding of what he saw as harsh but necessary measures taken by them to protect their regimes, Vercors was not prepared to condone cynical disregard of the truth (and concomitantly of justice) whether in the West or in the East. And hence, as he explains in Les Nouveaux Jours, the reason for his writing 'Un Mensonge politique':

Cynisme et mensonge des Yougoslaves ... quand, voulant éliminer des ennemis de classe, mais anciens résistants comme Mihailovic, ils les chargent, pour les condamner, de crimes imaginaires (et ce sera le thème de mon récit, adapté ensuite à la scène: Le Fer et le Velours). (NJ p 101)

The theatrical version of 'Un Mensonge politique' which is referred to here was first played, under the title indicated, in 1970. Despite the long interval of time between the appearance of the story and that of the play, there is little difference in substance between the two

texts.<sup>20</sup> Gaspar in the play is still the character who, after his 'examen de conscience', represents the author's own scrupulous ethical position, although this position is now lent reinforcement by the praise of one of the old 'liqueurs' whom Gaspar has refused to deceive: 'Merci, mon frère, de n'avoir pas voulu être de ceux qui nous traitent en objet, dont les mensonges nous humilient. De tout cœur je vous bénis' (Z p 149). In whatever genre, therefore, Vercors has been consistent throughout in stressing the importance of truthfulness. It was a position which, as critics have pointed out, was bound to be hard to reconcile with political realities on either side of the Iron Curtain; and perhaps as a rueful reflection on his own experience over many years, the author of Le Fer et le Velours added the first phrase of the following quotation to one of Spanza's original retorts to Gaspar: 'Comme tant d'impuissants, tu barbotas bêtement dans les contes de bonnes femmes!' (Z p 160). Of course, the dismissiveness of such a formula may also seem reminiscent of Hoederer's admonitions to Hugo in Les Mains sales; but, as Sartre's play demonstrates, Hugo's indignation over the tactical lies that Hoederer is prepared to tell in furtherance of the proletarian cause blinds him to the larger falsehoods, including the rewriting of history, that the party's leadership is ready to adopt. The Sartre of 'Qu'est-ce que la Littérature? condemned systematic lying by the Communists, but he showed in that essay, as well as in his sympathetic portrayal of Hoederer, that a strictly limited use of lies might be justifiable as a necessary means to the revolutionary end. To this extent, then, Sartre's attitude differed from that of Vercors, who remained convinced that any resort to deceit immediately corrupted the cause that it was meant to serve. But in both his play and the original short story, Vercors was able to make out the case in favour of principle over pragmatism rather too easily, perhaps, by incarnating the latter approach not in a character

of Hoederer's warm humanitarianism but in a ruthlessly self-serving politician.<sup>21</sup>

With 'Agir selon sa Pensée', which follows 'Un Mensonge politique' in the collection, the reader is reminded by the context (the Franco-Prussian War), by the use of a brief 'cadre', and by the confessional nature of the subject-matter, of some of the stories of Guy de Maupassant. But despite such historical and literary associations, the main interest of the story could again be seen to lie in its strongly autobiographical character. 'Capitaine Grant', the leader of a unit of 'franc-tireurs' deployed against the Prussians in the Ardennes, readily likens himself to Hamlet, 'ce coupeur de cheveux en quatre' (YL p 115), whose indecisiveness eventually costs so many lives<sup>22</sup>; and he admits that he has learnt from experience the limitations of the leadership that any 'raisonneur' like himself (or Hamlet) can offer; 'Nous sommes, lui et moi, des hommes dangereux à qui l'on ne peut pas tout confier'. (YL p 115). Such remarks exactly match Vercors's own heart-searching after his mobilization, as Lieutenant Bruller, in 1939. In La Bataille du Silence, duly applying the comparison with Hamlet to himself, he records how he had learnt in training manoeuvres that 'dans l'action je n'étais pas un chef mais un intellectuel radoteur' (BS p 62); while in Les Occasions perdues he gives details of his responsibilities in the exercise (covering the retreat of the regiment) which closely resemble those of Grant in actual combat in the Ardennes. Here, then, is another example of Vercors's direct presentation, in his fiction, of episodes of personal experience; and the conclusion which he draws as to his leadership capacities likewise bears a marked resemblance to those of his fictional hero: 'Moi, pauvre intellectuel, je n'avais su que peser le pour et le contre, couper les cheveux en quatre et ne

me décider que sous la pression du massacre (heureusement virtuel) de la section sous mes ordres. Et je pris peur pour mes hommes...' (OP p 172).

What Grant most reproaches himself with, in fact, is that his hesitations have caused the death of a possibly innocent civilian. Reluctant in the absence of incontrovertible proof to condemn the man, a suspected spy, to summary execution, Grant had allowed him to run a Prussian gauntlet (or to refuse to do so, and thus reveal his knowledge of the military situation). The man had gone blindly into the ambush, and Grant's decision now lies heavily on his conscience: 'J'ai voulu, gémit-il, j'ai voulu d'abord ne pas me soucier de justice; je n'ai pas pu; alors, j'ai voulu éviter de perpétrer une injustice: et tout ce que j'ai eu faire, ce fut une lâcheté.' (YL p 128)

The ending of the story is broadened to include the unsympathetic reaction of Grant's comrade, Frank, to these avowals; a reaction which the narrator deplors in terms highly reminiscent of the essay 'Qu'avez-vous fait de moi?'<sup>23</sup>: 'Il [Frank] nous observait tous les deux avec un regard si dur que je frissonnai. Et je me mis à haïr la guerre et les Prussiens plus violemment que jamais, à les haïr avec rage et désespoir pour être parvenus à faire de Frank l'homme de ces mots-là et de ce regard-là' (YL p 128). The narrator's sympathy and understanding (like those of the author) are clearly reserved for Grant himself; for the latter's unwillingness to perpetrate a possible injustice, and his mental anguish over the consequences, are clear evidence of that capacity for transcendent moral concern which Vercors now saw as being one of the hallmarks of Man.

In 1946 and 1947, Hitler's war and the Occupation were, inevitably, still very close to the author's consciousness, as indeed 'Agir selon sa Pensée', despite the historical transposition, clearly demonstrates; and the remaining stories of Les Yeux et la Lumière all deal directly with incidents occurring in the War or in its immediate aftermath. 'Le Démenti' tells of another unexpected conversion: that of the sceptical Arnaud, who, despite being convinced of the absurdity of life and of all human endeavour, is persuaded to help the Resistance on a single occasion and finally gives his life to the cause. There are clear parallels between Arnaud's philosophy and that of Bruller before the War<sup>24</sup>; although the metaphysical pessimism and the accompanying comparisons between human beings and insects are so strongly concentrated in Arnaud's reflections that the character is virtually submerged beneath their weight<sup>25</sup>. Indeed the suddenness of his conversion appears the more implausible in view of the apparent depth of these convictions.

Various references to the night sky in this 'récit' presumably serve a literary rather than a philosophical purpose. In the fully developed version of his humanism that is presented in Plus ou moins Homme and Ce que je crois, Vercors goes to some lengths to emphasize the disproportion and discontinuity between human life and the rest of the Universe, and to stress that human actions can be judged only on a human scale. In 'La Sédition humaine', for example, he dismisses any notion of a moral interrelationship between Man and Universe: '... ce qui est vain et absurde c'est de rapporter nos actes à la mesure de l'univers, d'exiger d'eux qu'ils changent quoi que ce soit au déroulement de l'éternelle cosmogonie ... Entre les actions humaines et l'existence du Cosmos il n'est aucune commune mesure.' (PMH p 51); and in Ce que je crois, published twenty-five years later, he is still firmly expressing

the same idea: 'Ils sont, ces deux mondes (le monde illimité des galaxies - et le monde sublunaire avec les hommes et leur destin terrestre) sans commune mesure. Non seulement aussi étrangers l'un à l'autre que le serait, pour un staphylocoque, une tragédie de Shakespeare, mais également sans rien entre eux de concomitant.' (CJC p 65).<sup>26</sup>

Arnaud, even in his absurdist frame of mind, seems to recognise the distinction, as he thinks of the maquisards he has reluctantly agreed to help: 'Qu'ils meurent ou non, cela ne changera rien à l'Univers, rien à mon univers.' (YL p 137); and yet, after opening fire on the pursuing Germans and thus committing himself irrevocably to the Resistance,<sup>27</sup> his perception changes: '... c'était comme si ce n'était pas tout à fait la même lune, ni les mêmes étoiles, ni le même ciel ... pour la première fois depuis tant d'années, il regarda le ciel, la lune, les étoiles, il regarda cette vertigineuse éternité d'indifférence, non avec désespoir, mais avec amitié.' (YL pp 142-3). And as his resolve to defy the Germans strengthens, the moon itself seems to respond: '... il eut l'impression que la lune, là-haut, lui souriait et il acheva presque à haute voix: "C'est donc ... qu'il y a ... AUTRE CHOSE!" et il eut envie de crier de joie ...' (YL p 144). Such complicity between man and cosmos, undoubtedly introduced here in order to underline the exemplary character of Arnaud's decision, does not appear in any of Vercors's subsequent works; and it is presumably just such a passage as this that the author, by 1950, felt tempted to revise.

'Le Démenti' ends with a striking image of Arnaud's martyrdom: '... ils virent le corps crucifié. Il était nu et on l'avait cloué sur la porte de la grange avec quatre gros clous de charpentier ... Les hommes restèrent longtemps à regarder. Ils étaient silencieux, comme

on l'est toujours en présence du mystère.' (YL p 144). It is quite possible to see how, on reading passages such as this, the communist critic André Wormser could suggest that the author of Les Yeux et la Lumière might one day be converted to Christianity and, tongue in cheek, could assure his readers: 'Je ne désespérerais pas du salut de Vercors.'<sup>28</sup> In fact, of course, there was no question of religious conversion for Vercors, nor has there ever been. In 'Le Démenti' his thoughts were firmly with his fellow-men and with the notion of solidarity to which Arnaud finally awakens. That was the 'autre chose' which the latter discovered in the face of death; and underlying the solidarity, typically so in Vercors's work, is the network of mutual trust to which each man worthy of the name commits his personal honour: 'Bien sûr, je ne dirai rien. Ils se sont fiés à moi...' (YL p 143). As for the final crucifixion scene, which may seem to have been calculated to underline the rather too obviously edifying intention of the story as a whole, the idea for it apparently had a factual basis; for in Les Nouveaux Jours Vercors reports Pierre de Lescurie's claim, towards the end of the War, to have witnessed in the Jura 'des horreurs sans nom, (des) fermes incendiées, (des) paysans cloués en croix sur les portes et mangés des corbeaux...' (NJ p 59).

Luc, the protagonist of 'Les Mots', is akin to Arnaud in his sceptical detachment from politics. In fact, the only sincere commitment which he feels as a poet is to the resonances and associations of words and, through 'le jeu authentique de la pensée pure' (YL p 149), to the cultivation of 'un langage neuf où les idées enfin puissent être parcourues par un sang riche et jeune qui les renouvelle.' (YL p 152). It is not difficult to surmise, therefore, that he is a fervent disciple of the automatic writing school, and although they are not named in the text, it is equally clear that Aragon and Eluard are the

fellow-surrealists whose change of orientation has disappointed him: 'c'est avec surprise et peine qu'il avait vu ses aînés, ses maîtres, sombrer à l'appel des événements dans le poème de circonstance...' (YL p 152). As for the Occupation, Luc simply aspires to preserve his 'pureté intérieure' (YL p 149) by excluding the Germans from his consciousness; and to try to ensure this, he moves to an isolated cottage on a Limousin hillside. By an irony of fate, however, it is from this vantage point that he is to witness the massacre by German troops of the villagers living in the valley below.

The account of this massacre is clearly modelled on the one which took place at Oradour-sur-Glane in June 1944<sup>29</sup>; but Vercors chooses to add a further element, that of the German commanding officer calmly painting a landscape (and producing a canvas of considerable artistic merit) as the destruction proceeds below. The author's judgement - that art detached from moral concern is an inadequate and ultimately sterile pursuit - thus emerges with redoubled emphasis from the story. On the one hand, words of protest and compassion press into Luc's mind as eventually he picks his way among the mutilated bodies of his neighbours, and it is clear that simple human solidarity, any expression of which his poetic credo had eachewed, can now no longer be denied. On the other hand, the German officer's every word and gesture evince the triumph of self-contained aestheticism over moral concern. He has all the cultural refinement of Von Ebrennac - but is devoid of any sense of ethical responsibility. His reaction to the massacre - 'la sale besogne' - is primarily an aesthetic one: '... j'ai horreur de ces choses ... Tout cela est sordide.' (YL p 162); and it is with enormous unconscious irony that he claims, in referring to his painting: '... j'ai bien mérité des hommes aujourd'hui. J'ai enrichi l'humanité d'une

beauté nouvelle.' (YL p 162).

That Vercors's portrayal of the officer verges on caricature (although the critic Konrad Bieber claims to see no lack of realism in the depiction)<sup>30</sup> is perhaps another indication of the degree of moral indignation that Vercors felt over German war-crimes; but does it not thereby come close to the realm of propaganda that the author had initially forsworn, in his desire to write dispassionately in the service of 'la pensée juste'? The question is in fact highly germane to Vercors's whole purpose in writing the story in the first place. As he explains in La Bataille du Silence (pp 273-5), he had agreed unreservedly with Eluard in 1943 when, through the clandestine anthology 'L'Honneur des Poètes', he proclaimed the need for poets to leave the Ivory Tower of surrealism and to protest at the evils present in the real world. Vercors quotes approvingly the last two lines of Jean Tardieu's 'Vacances', from the opening pages of the anthology:

'Puisque les morts ne peuvent plus se taire  
Est-ce aux vivants à garder leur silence?'

- and writes critically of the attitude of Benjamin Péret who, from his distant retreat in Panama, had sought to defend the integrity of the surrealist doctrine by branding as 'deshonneur' any involvement in politics.<sup>31</sup>

In its narrative content, therefore, 'Les Mots' was intended to challenge the purists' view; but at the same time, as Vercors admits in La Bataille du Silence, it also deliberately rebuts some of the literary principles to which he himself had subscribed, together with Lesclure, in the 'Manifeste des Editions de Minuit'. The poet Luc, before the massacre, would never, of course, have joined in their defiance of the German censors; but he would hardly have demurred at

that part of the manifesto which proclaimed: 'Nous entendons préserver notre vie intérieure et servir librement notre art' or which invoked 'la pureté spirituelle de l'homme'. As for Vercors's treatment of the story, we have already seen that he was unable to sustain a dispassionate and balanced approach for very long after the publication of Le Silence de la Mer. As the War with its trail of iniquities and sufferings proceeded, indignation towards the oppressor and sympathy with the victim rose forcefully to the surface of his writing. It is in terms of this progression, therefore, that the presentation of the German, if it appears too satirically contrived, should perhaps be seen.

Although the War again, and its aftermath, provide the background to the final 'récit', 'Meurtre sans importance', the moral issues no longer appear so clearcut. Bruno, like Pierre Cange a survivor of Hochswörth concentration-camp, now in a cholera-stricken and riot-torn area of India, has had ample opportunity to measure the insignificance of individual human lives:

Il enjamba un mort- une fourmi. Ces millions de fourmis. Depuis un an, depuis Hochswörth, on pouvait dire qu'on l'en avait repu! Charognes, charognes, charognes, un monde peuplé de charognes. Et qui se valent toutes. Charognes nazies d'Hochswörth ou d'Auschwitz, charognes démocratiques d'Hiroshima, à quand celles de Moscou, de New York? (YL, p 173).

With Isabelle, also a victim of the Nazis, Bruno has left France in a mood of disgust at what the Liberation seems to have ushered in: '... cette indifférence générale, cet égoïsme, cette pourriture; la Résistance noyée de tard-venus ou de faussaires se disputant places et prébendes; les Kollabos relevant déjà la tête, ménagés par un pouvoir complice.' (YL p 16) - an uncompromising but by no means unique expression of Vercors's own reaction to the abuses he perceived in post-Liberation France.

Later, the young couple have the chance to escape their dangerous situation in India if they can dispose of an unscrupulous Dutchman, Van Houtt, who has managed by dubious means to acquire a number of valuable diamonds. Yet, despite all the circumstances facilitating the murder and the certainty of avoiding detection, Bruno finds himself unable to carry out the crime. A feeling of human solidarity is at the last minute awakened in him by the beating pulse of his intended victim's helpless body: '... il sembla que toute la vie du monde fût concentrée sur ce morceau de peau rose et blonde sous laquelle le sang pourrissait sa course incessante.' (YL p 218). Here again, it seems, is a passage that is not entirely consistent with the fully developed version of Vercors's philosophy. An essential part of his concept of the human rebellion against Nature was to be that the consciousness alone rebels - that the body, radically alien from the mind, belongs totally to the realm of Nature. This notion, which later provides a fundamental theme in the novels La Puissance du Jour and Colères, is succinctly expressed in 'La Sédition humaine': 'Le monde de nos consciences de soi est un monde fermé, isolé du reste des choses, par sa dissidence (et d'abord de la vie du corps)...' (PMH p 51)<sup>32</sup>. It also appears in the Epilogue which follows 'Meurtre sans importance'; yet it seems to be contradicted in the latter story in the way in which, as we have seen, Van Houtt's life as a conscious individual - to say nothing of the humanity which he represents and to which Bruno is drawn in a spirit of solidarity - is symbolised by the beating of his pulse.

In attempting to sum up the meaning of the stories of Les Yeux et la Lumière, one might do no better than to take as a guide the epigraph which Vercors himself provides:

- Je n'ai pas pu, dit Salvator.  
- Ni moi, dit Gaspar.  
- Ni moi, dit Grant, ni moi,  
dit Arnaud, dit Luc, dit Bruno.

-Pourquoi? dit Gracch. 33

Each protagonist's 'refus', then, is expressed as an inability - the inability to follow the dictates of self-preservation, mental habit or obedience; and it is just this spark of defiance, seen in their tentative response to a mysterious inner prompting, which marks them out as early exemplars, in Vercors's work, of 'la rébellion humaine' acting in the service of solidarity. Certainly 'le refus' in each instance seems to owe more to instinct than to reason; Arnaud's rationalisations, for example, having served only to confirm him in his philosophical pessimism: 'Pourquoi restait-il là comme un idiot - au lieu de s'en aller? Sa raison ne pouvait lui dicter rien de plus raisonnable: rester n'était que non-sens.' (YL p 135). And similarly, in the Epilogue, it is 'la raison' which Gracch accuses of having blinded those who, like the tyrant Othon, in arriving at their judgement of the world, had overlooked the vital element of proportion:

... que l'humaine conscience, notre univers, soit ans connexté avec celui des mondes astronomiques ou atomiques, que notre esprit et le cosmos soient discontinus, notre raison orgueilleuse refuse de le concevoir, et la trompeuse imagination vient à son secours. Notre raison ... non pas notre intuition; pour qui la proportion, par bonheur, est du domaine du fait, autant que la vie et la mort; pour qui il n'est qu'un monde que l'homme sait avec soi en commune mesure, et c'est l'humanité. (YL p 245) 34

Sceptical reasoning, without the saving notion of proportion, has misled the tyrant into counting life as of little worth when measured against the vastness of the universe: but Gracch, the would-be tyrannicide, defends the fundamental dignity of the human spirit: 'Je dis l'homme, petite flamme fragile qui s'appelle conscience de soi; non ce mystérieux sac de chair qu'elle habite en esclave,

qui la crée mais aussitôt la dégrade, qui la torture, qui l'emprisonne, qui la tuera ...' (YL p 243); and he again defines the moral choice, that between 'l'homme' and 'le valet', which all must face: 'Il faut être avec cette petite flamme, ou contre elle; et qui est contre elle se fait complice de la nature, complice de la douleur, de la faim, de la nuit sans fond ... de la mort.' (YL p 243). This was the choice which, whether consciously or not, all the protagonists of Les Yeux et la Lumière had faced; and from which, as we have seen, they had all emerged, with varying degrees of decisiveness, on the side of 'l'homme'.

In thus bringing the all-important notion of proportion to bear on his earlier scepticism, in refuting Othon's pretension to measure human life on the scale of 'les fourmis', Vercors felt that he had gone a long way towards remedying the 'erreur de (sa) logique' referred to in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter. Meanwhile, of course, despite Gracch's cautionary remarks on 'la raison orgueilleuse', the author's philosophy, including its strong moral connotations, still depended essentially on human reason. It was through rational demonstration that he would continue to shape and expound his views, not only on the fundamental questions of human existence but also on the ethical values entailed in all personal and political relationships. In so doing, needless to say, he would not find it easy to convince all readers or critics. Aragon, reviewing the 1948 edition of Les Yeux et la Lumière, had already sounded a warning from the marxist point of view. The answer to the questions that Vercors's text seemed to raise, Aragon asserted, the true guide to action in this world, was to be found not in any individualistic theory but in an established ideology: '... l'idéologie des hommes, et non pas d'un homme ... une idéologie que le romancier accepte, qu'il n'invente pas.'<sup>35</sup> Whilst warm in praise

of Vercors's moral presence, analogous to that of Romain Rolland, Aragon discerned a lack of cohesion between the stories that betrayed, he felt, the want of a system which was 'général, impersonnel, valable pour ses lecteurs et lui ...' For Aragon, therefore, the conclusion was clear enough: the time would come for Vercors to make a choice '.... un choix qu'il ne m'appartient pas de lui dicter. Mais que lui dictera sans doute l'histoire...'<sup>36</sup>

Reviewing Vercors's work in more general and objective terms a little later, however, Nelly Cormeau saw it as exemplifying a notable trend in the fiction of the time. Various contemporary writers and critics, from among whose number Gide had so recently passed away, were dismissive of those who used art as a means of direct moral instruction; but according to Madame Cormeau such fiction, even if it did not always transmute the particular attitudes or concerns of the author into great literature, could still have an important value for readers seeking to find meaning and purpose in the modern world:

Il reste que si seules sont assurées d'aborder aux époques lointaines les oeuvres du génie transcendant le temporel, celles, plus modestes, qui conservent la palpitation de l'heure présente, offrent un intérêt puissant aux contemporains auscultant avec passion leur époque avec l'espoir d'en dégager le sens. Alors naissent ... ces romans qui ne sont pas tout à fait des romans. Nous voulons dire que la fiction n'y est pas première, jaillie d'un élan romanesque irrésistible qui s'impose à l'artiste comme un mouvement nécessaire. La nécessité, c'est dans l'idée qu'elle réside ici, dans le problème dont la solution est souvent cherchée avec angoisse et que l'auteur habille d'une anecdote afin de le rendre plus concret, plus accessible au lecteur. 37

In Les Yeux et la Lumière, according to the same critic, it is duly the 'spiritual' subject - 'le problème, le cas de conscience ou le conflit intérieur' - which stays in the reader's mind; while in a broader perspective, embracing the story of Pierre Cange in both

Les Armes de la Nuit and La Puissance du Jour, she saw a conjunction in Vercors's work between contemporary 'angoisse' and more traditional moralism:

... Vercors peut être considéré comme un moraliste au sens classique, au sens où - mutatis mutandis - l'était La Fontaine, et on le classerait plus exactement encore en le nommant un "anecdotier de la morale." Il excelle, en effet, à proposer des "cas" particuliers. 38

If Vercors was thus seen to be predominantly a moralist in his fictional work, it was a role to which he seemed even more clearly designated with the appearance of the non-fictional volume Plus ou moins Homme (1950). Of the diverse essays and articles that make up this volume, the author accords much the greatest prominence to 'La Sédition humaine', both in placing it first (although it was the last of the texts in the volume to have been written, having been published separately in Les Cahiers du Sud in 1949), and in his comments on it in the 'Avant-Propos'. Here he claims that, as a synthesis of his thoughts over the previous few years, the essay offers his definitive analysis of the concept towards which he had been working: that of the basic, irreducible 'qualité d'homme' which is present in all human beings - of whatever race, creed or intelligence - and which can produce an absolute value in ethical terms. For such had been his ambition:

... fonder en raison une éthique impérative, non plus relative aux états transitoires et changeants des sociétés et des mœurs, mais bien quasi-absolue puisque relative à la qualité d'homme en soi. En bref, une éthique qui, observée, rend les hommes plus hommes - moins hommes dans le cas contraire. (PMH p 9)

For the author, this ethic is none other than 'celle qu'il défend obstinément, après Kant, depuis qu'il a commencé d'écrire. Celle qui interdit de jamais traiter aucun homme comme un moyen.' (PMH p 9). And

that this imperative 'se confond avec la qualité d'homme en tant que telle' (PMH p 10) is what he now sets out to demonstrate.

'La Sédition humaine' is a fluent, confident account of that secession from Nature which Vercors had already sketched in his Discours aux Allemands and in the Epilogue of Les Yeux et la Lumière. He traces the origins of that secession back to the earliest glimmerings of intellectual curiosity in our anthropoid ancestors. Until then, and over millions of years, these slowly evolving creatures had, like all other animal species, experienced life in a brutish and essentially passive way, ignorant of their own identity and uncomprehending in their relationship with the world around them:

Et pourtant, un beau jour, la conscience de soi de l'anthropoïde s'est éveillée à sa condition. Un beau jour, une furtive interrogation a traversé sa sombre cervelle. Premier et jusqu'ici unique de toutes les espèces vivant à la surface de la terre, il s'est arraché à soi-même, il a regardé en lui, autour de lui, et s'est aperçu qu'il était seul. Premier et unique de toutes les espèces vivantes, d'abord à tâtons et plus qu'à moitié inconsciemment, il a commencé, si peu que ce fût, de "chercher à comprendre". Il a découvert son ignorance et s'est rebellé; il a refusé son exil; le banni est entré en rupture de ban. L'homme était né. (PMH pp 29-30)

Vercors's whole depiction of Man's astonishing development thereafter is infused, appropriately enough, with the notion of resistance: human resistance against the tyranny of Nature (or, in terms of the Christian interpretation of life, against the will of God). Vercors does not accept the existence of a Deity, but he does see, in some Old Testament myths, metaphors for Man's ceaseless struggle with Nature. For example. Adam's banishment from the Garden of Eden after eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge illustrates, according to Vercors, the exile of 'homo sapiens' from the indivisible unity of Nature; while the Tower of Babel story can be interpreted as a deliberate attempt by God (or, again

according to Vercors, by Nature) to limit rebel Man's ability to communicate with, and understand, his fellows:

... le mythe de Babel, ce n'est pas tant le mythe du langage que celui de la solitude. Celui des consciences humaines inexorablement enfermées dans leurs sacs de peau, incapables de se communiquer l'une l'autre leurs idées ou leurs sentiments, leurs vérités ou leurs peines, autrement que par l'intermédiaire grossier et conventionnel, vague et insuffisant, infidèle et trompeur des mots et des signes. (PMH p 35)

This latter reflection leads in due course to a brief characterization of politics, which Vercors sees as being men's perpetual effort to face together the unremitting challenges and difficulties of life; their failures, and the resulting wars and persecutions of all kinds, thus offering the clearest possible demonstration of human beings' essential isolation and inability to communicate with each other:

'... leur tragique isolement en ces fragiles enveloppes que l'égoïsme, la méfiance et la peur opposent les uns aux autres, alors même qu'ils se recherchent à tâtons dans la nuit.' (PMH p 46) And because men are

divided among themselves - as one of Nature's means of sustaining its domination - they can yield to the temptation to turn against their fellows. Vercors reproduces the image of the Roman arena and of 'bestiaires' encouraged by sensation-hungry spectators to fight their fellows instead of the lions and other animals; and in the same vein, he re-emphasizes the historical parallels still so close to hand: the 'kapos subjects' in the concentration-camps joining with the 'bourreaux nazis' in the execution and torture of other prisoners, the 'ministres subjects' of Vichy and elsewhere in occupied Europe handing over to the Nazis the Jews and refugees within their jurisdiction; and by the same token, racists and nationalist extremists everywhere; indeed, all those 'qui prétendent s'arroger, par droit de naissance, une supériorité sur d'autres hommes...' (PMH p 48)

Now Nature has not created all men equal, nor, of course, given the discordant and aggressive appetites which they inherit, can they be consistently fraternal towards each other. But, as we have seen, rebellion against Nature has alone enabled Man to distinguish himself from the animals; and Vercors maintains that only an ethic founded on that rebellion can bring about an increase in Man's humanity. Man must not accept Nature's dispensation, must not, above all, allow himself to be used as a pawn in the natural order of things: 'La nature utilise les consciences de soi comme simples moyens et non comme fins: la première revendication des rebelles et leur première loi sera donc d'être traités en fins et jamais en moyens.' (PMH p 48)

In keeping with this ethic of rebellion, men worthy of the name must control the obscure, aggressive impulses with which Nature has endowed them: to do otherwise is simply to serve the natural order by sharpening the divisions between individuals. And so Vercors firmly sets forth, once more, the ethical positions which he had come to adopt and which, as we have seen, had already found expression in his fictional work. In the relentless struggle in which Man is pitted against Nature and sometimes against his fellows, the brotherhood of men and the establishment of Justice must be taken 'pour maxime et pour commandement'. They alone can hold in check the threat of moral and social disintegration:

La nature divise les hommes par la solitude, l'incompréhension, la haine.

Qui aide à cette division; qui dupe les hommes ou leur ment; qui se résigne à ce que l'homme soit un loup pour l'homme et soit en conséquence, est un traître passé à l'ennemi ....

Qui aide (la nature) à faire souffrir et à tuer, qui approuve ou accepte la guerre, la persécution ou le génocide, est complice et valet abject de son propre bourreau. (PMH p 49)

From these general principles Vercors draws, albeit briefly, more specific conclusions on the value-systems of different societies; the relative humanity of such values depending, once again, on the balance (or imbalance) between 'la révolte' and 'les impulsions de la nature' inherent in a society's moral outlook. If 'la nature' is dominant, then, says Vercors, the results are racism, ultra-nationalism, colonialism - as seen variously in the Transvaal or Madagascar, at Oradour or Auschwitz - or indeed, in more primitive societies, in cannibalism. There are further nuances, of course, and among them Vercors evokes the many persecutions that have ensued from too dogmatic a moral code, such as those associated with religious fanaticism. He also refers to 'l'aberration simpliste de la "légitimité" en matière de gouvernement' which puts 'le citoyen' before 'l'homme' and 'son devoir civique' before 'son devoir humain' (PMH p 53) (the reverse of his own attitude, he could well claim later, in his numerous challenges to French governments of the 1950's over colonial and other issues).<sup>39</sup> But despite all the complexities which he thus cursorily acknowledges, Vercors concludes with a dogged restatement of his basic tenet: 'Le seul fil d'Ariane en ces labyrinthes, c'est de ne jamais perdre de vue la révolte, ni la solidarité des révoltés.' (PMH p 53)

Vercors had thus provided, in graphic and concrete language, an account of what he saw as the most fundamental human drive and the ethical lessons that he had drawn from it. Given the succinctness of the essay (some sixty pages) he could not of course claim to have offered a comprehensive explanation of mankind's moral development, nor did he make such a claim. Indeed, the essay is followed in Plus ou moins Homme by an appendix which reproduces correspondence between the author and a

Mr. Francis Bédit, who had taken issue with many of Vercors's arguments.<sup>40</sup> Vercors admits the enormous difficulty involved in trying to decide 'si telle ou telle pensée, telle ou telle volonté agit en faveur de la rébellion ou la contrecarre ... Si elle participe à notre lente émancipation victorieuse ou tend au contraire à nous maintenir sinon nous ramener dans notre condition primitive' (PMH p 69). However, he goes on to point once more to the 'fil d'Ariane' which can act as a basic guide amid '(ce) grand brouillamini'; and in conclusion, he states quite plainly the moral intention which he feels justifies his efforts in writing the essay:

Pascal écrivait: "Il faut se connaître soi-même; quand cela ne servirait pas à trouver le vrai, cela au moins sert à régler sa vie, et il n'y a rien de plus juste." Aider, si je peux, les hommes à régler leur vie: je n'ai pas eu d'autre dessein. (PMH p 69)

There can be little doubt about the seriousness of purpose with which Vercors had undertaken his treatise, and given its inclusion in a volume of some 375 pages whose title, Plus ou moins Homme, was a fair indicator of its main philosophical direction, it is not surprising that the publication was widely and prominently reviewed. Not that in the terms of its title or of its philosophical ambition the work was by any means unique at the time. Professor Michael Kelly has, for example, listed the 'plethora of books published ... with some variant of l'homme or l'humanisme in their title' in 1946 alone<sup>41</sup>; but while he identifies that year as the high point of the post-war humanist boom, there was surely no immediate slackening of interest thereafter in efforts to redefine the fundamentals of Man's moral and social being: in 1950, after all, the year of Vercors's publication, L'Homme Révolté had yet to appear. At this stage, in any case, Vercors's post-Resistance prestige still ensured that a major statement of his views would be closely attended to, and such accordingly

proved to be the case with Plus ou moins Homme.

Neither the author's earlier reputation nor the apparent earnestness of his endeavour were enough, however, to disarm some of the critics. Robert Amadou, for instance, claimed that 'M. Vercors se donne - et nous donne - beaucoup de peine pour essayer de prouver ce qu'on a fort bien démontré avant lui'.<sup>42</sup> Certainly, many elements of Vercors's theory were already to be found woven into the long tradition of humanist thought;<sup>43</sup> but it should be remembered that, like Camus preeminently, he was approaching these age-old speculations with an entirely new sense of urgency in the light of war-time atrocities and the threat of greater evils to come. Not that Amadou was indifferent to political considerations: indeed, he seemed particularly incensed by the various articles and essays which follow 'La Sédition humaine' and which, while relating Vercors's intermittent disagreements with the Communist Party, reveal his basic sympathy with their cause. It is presumably because of this allegiance that the critic concludes his review by wholly dismissing 'cet ouvrage inutile', having initially at least shown a modicum of generosity: 'Le dernier livre de M. Vercors n'est pas tout à fait dépourvu d'intérêt. Quelques pages en sont fort belles et on les relit avec plaisir....'<sup>44</sup>

Like Amadou, most reviewers of Plus ou moins Homme in 1950 responded to the political as well as to the philosophical content of the volume, and inevitably Vercors's general support for the Communists alienated some from the book as a whole while strengthening its appeal for others. In this respect, two of the reviews that deal quite fully both with 'La Sédition humaine' and with the polemical texts offer a clear and instructive contrast. Michel Vivier, in Aspects de la France, shows hostility to Vercors from the outset by casting doubt on the inherent

interest of La Silence de la Mer and by recalling the accusation of plagiarism made some two years previously in connection with that story: 'Vercors avait-il plagié Binding comme naguère Jean Bruller imitait Gus Bofa? Aucune réponse rassurante ne fut faite à cette troublante question ...'<sup>45</sup> He then goes on to schematize 'La Sédition humaine' in political terms: since, according to Vercors, one is 'plus ou moins homme' in proportion to the degree to which one's ethical values reflect the basic human revolt, one can make an ironic deduction:

.... c'est dire, en somme, que le degré d'humanité s'accroît au fur et à mesure que l'on avance de l'extrême droite vers l'extrême gauche: quasi-nulle chez le conservateur qui a pris bestialement le parti de l'inégalité naturelle et de l'ordre social, la dignité humaine culmine chez le rebelle qui, contre la nature et la société, a élu le parti de la révolution permanente. On le voit, cette philosophie, fondée sur un jeu de mots, a pour but de justifier a posteriori le comportement révolutionnaire ... "Dissidents" et "rebelles" sont la fleur de l'humanité. Nul n'est vraiment homme s'il n'est F.T.P. 46

Writing in Les Lettres françaises, on the other hand, the Communist Claude Morgan did not attempt to conceal his 'fraternité de combat' with Vercors, despite occasional 'divergences de pensée';<sup>47</sup> and he finds much to approve of in 'La Sédition humaine' and the accompanying essays. For example: 'La comparaison, que Vercors reprend à plusieurs reprises, de l'homme au bestiaire est excellente ...' But this approval, like Vivier's criticism, has an unmistakable political basis; and it is in terms of the most stereotyped political polarization that the 'bestiaires' who turn on their fellows, and all those who glory in the oppression of the weak, are stigmatized by the reviewer: 'Voilà la condamnation de tous les hitlérismes.' As for political lies, the very subject of the contention between Vercors and the Communists that is dealt with in Plus ou moins Homme, Morgan makes a confident assump-

tion as to what unites, rather than divides, the author and himself:

Car chaque fois que nous retrouvons, autour de nous ou en nous, ces traces du poison maurrassien ou hitlérien "le mensonge, le parjure, la mauvaise foi", tout cela vient de bien plus loin que Hitler et Maurras... Les mensonges, les parjures et la mauvaise foi étaient déjà l'instrument de l'exploitation de l'homme par une classe privilégiée, et je crois que Vercors l'admet volontiers. 48

Although he found Vercors's explanation of Man's transformation from anthropoid 'un peu abstraite', Morgan was prepared to set aside his admitted preference for Engel's account in order the more warmly to welcome Vercors's moral deductions: 'Ce qui importe, c'est d'en être arrivé là et d'avoir fondé sur ce concept une morale ... morale pleine à la fois de rigueur et de générosité ...' However, another marxist critic, Georges Mounin, was less ready than Morgan to allow the mutual goodwill between Vercors and the Communists to soften his judgement of the author's ideas. In the course of a substantial review in La Pensée, he expressed the same respect as Morgan had done for Vercors's moral integrity, but his criticism of the treatise was all the more pointed: 'Il est émouvant de voir qu'au rebours de tant de philosophes professionnels qui laissent leurs cours de philosophie au vestiaire en sortant de leur classe, Vercors vit sa philosophie beaucoup mieux qu'il ne la formule....'<sup>49</sup>

Mounin's verdict was that 'La Sédition humaine' was 'un échec'; and notwithstanding his ideological standpoint, some of his criticisms of Vercors's basic theory seem both fair and cogently applied. Instead of explaining the earliest stages of human rebellion, the author of 'La Sédition humaine' had simply projected his own idealism on to the past:

... tout se passe comme si, aux origines de l'homme, le problème s'était posé de la sorte; ainsi supposé, le problème est résolu. Cette attitude consiste ... à projeter dans le passé, sous forme mythique ou philosophique, une situation qui, en fait, est souhaité comme un avenir. 50

Nor was it satisfactory for Vercors to plead, as he had done, that mere 'commodités de langage' had led him to the oversimplification by which it appeared that 'l'auteur suppose à la nature des desseins et une volonté de même essence que la volonté et les desseins des hommes' (PMH p 23, footnote). Mounin, determined to reassert the marxist view of history, was again rigorous in his reproof:

... la commodité de langage ici recouvre une absence d'explication, une absence de description juste des faits: pour bien comprendre l'homme, le problème est non pas de reconstituer son hypothétique histoire idéale, mais de décrire et d'expliquer son histoire vraie; 51

whence Mounin's overall judgement on Vercors's theory: 'une espèce d'utopie abstraite de l'homme'.

Similar strictures to Mounin's would soon, of course, be directed towards the author of L'Homme Révolté, and this is just one of the associations between Camus and Vercors that an analysis of the latter's humanism inevitably brings to mind. Both writers, for example, sided with the world's 'victims' rather than with their 'executioners'; but while the latter for Camus were primarily the Stalinists for whom human victims were an incidental price to pay for the sake of the Revolution, for Vercors 'le bourreau' was Nature, against which human beings, the predestined victims, had rebelled and must continue to rebel. Since some men, Nature's abject accomplices, were forever ready to assist in life's normal onslaughts on humanity, the equivalent on the purely human plane of the Camusian formula 'ni victimes ni bourreaux' would in Vercors's terms be 'ni victimes ni valets'. Camus, again, was concerned to challenge the marxist faith

in Reason and to deplore the revolutionary excesses to which a total adherence to Reason could give rise. Vercors kept alive his own faith in the principles of 1789 and, as a fellow-traveller, endorsed the Soviet Revolution; while his own moral prescriptions were, as he would claim, elaborated from a reasoned interpretation of the past and a rational analysis of the present. It was in this respect, indeed, that he took quiet satisfaction in the theories that he had been able to develop through Les Yeux et la Lumière and 'La Sédition humaine': his diagnosis had, he felt, the strength of an inherent logic which neither Sartre's postulation of 'liberté' nor Camus's of 'justice' could similarly claim.<sup>52</sup>

Above all, perhaps, Vercors's notion of 'la rébellion humaine' invites comparison with Camus's 'révolte'. In its metaphysical connotation - 'la révolte métaphysique est le mouvement par lequel un homme se dresse contre sa condition et la création tout entière',<sup>53</sup> - the latter seems to hold many of the implications of Vercors's version; but it was the instinctive starting-point of Camus's ethic of solidarity - 'Je me révolte, donc nous sommes'<sup>54</sup> - that Vercors, despite apparently having come very close to this position in parts of Les Yeux et la Lumière, seems in the end to have found most unsatisfactory. For Vercors, 'la rébellion' corresponds to the ceaseless, determined drive whereby all men (except the 'valets') serve the vital purposes of human survival, enlightenment and progress; and it is interesting to note that he has not in any way, in retrospect, modified his preference for his own concept over Camus's. Thus in 1984, in Les Nouveaux Jours, he is still ready to assert that 'la "révolte" de Camus n'est qu'un défi sentimental, qui ne peut pas déterminer une éthique impérative; ma notion de "rébellion" est au contraire la condition même du fait

"humain" et peut en constituer le fondement imprescriptible. C'est une distinction notable ... '(N.) pp 246-7)<sup>55</sup>

Despite the critics, therefore, Vercors's confidence in what he considers to be a coherent and self-contained theory seems to have remained unshaken; and this same confidence was reflected in 1950 when he started to transpose his now fully-developed concept of 'la qualité d'homme' into fictional form. The result, completed in December of that year and published in the following August, was the novel La Puissance du Jour, a continuation of the story of Pierre Cange, but an altogether longer and more complex work than Les Armes de la Nuit.

In brief, the novel tells of Cange's eventual recovery from the state of physical inertia and moral despair seen at the end of the earlier story. The means by which he is restored to his former confidence and vigour are contrived by a group of erstwhile Resistance colleagues, inspired by his fiancée, Nicole; and they involve the kidnapping, sequestration and 'trial' of an ex-Préfet, Broussard, who had actively encouraged the Nazis in their pursuit of Resistance agents. Broussard is for a time kept caged like a captive tiger (being thereby, and to an obvious degree, 'moins homme') in a secluded mental asylum run by one of the conspirators, Dr. Mouthiers.<sup>56</sup> Apart from the latter, we meet various members of the group, most notably the scholarly poet Saturnin, whose earlier ideal of purity had been mocked and frustrated by ironic twists of fate; while others too have a certain interest and significance as representatives of some of the political and social attitudes in post-Liberation France.<sup>57</sup>

The main focus though is on Cange and on the slow, uneven progress of his recovery. His involvement in the act of reprisal against Broussard contributes to this process, but it would not by itself have achieved the full effect. The real turning-point for Cange, in fact, is when he witnesses an operation on an eminent medical practitioner, Professor Varèse, the victim of a brain tumour. What he sees in the operating theatre brings home to Pierre, as he reflects upon it, an understanding of the fundamental human predicament, the concept, outlined in 'La Sédition humaine', of Man as prey to, but in rebellion against, the relentless force of Nature.

Specifically, it was the sight of Varèse's brain-tissue, exposed by the surgeon's scalpel, which had shocked and fascinated Pierre:

Et moi, je me disais: "Voilà donc le professeur Varèse..."  
Je regardais cette gelée palpitante et je pensais: "Le  
professeur Varèse..." Mais je ne me disais pas: C'est lui".  
Ah! non! mon vieux ... Rien à voir, même. Pas plus  
que le soleil ou la lune. Mon cher, je vous assure, c'est  
éclatant. Ce truc-là vit tout seul, ça vit pour soi tout seul,  
ça ne nous connaît pas ... et ça ne nous aime pas... (PJ p 273)

The physical substance of each of us, then, is alien and impenetrable to the mind which inhabits it. After this revelation of Nature's relentless, often cruel, pressure on the human spirit, Pierre perceives the rebellion through which Man attains his full dignity. His own lapse at Hochaworth had been a brief, temporary triumph of Nature and of Nature's accomplices, the SS; but from now on he would gather his strength and determination to fight in the camp of his fellow-men: '... mais qu'est-ce que c'est, le camp des hommes? ... c'est le camp du chirurgien.' (PJ p 335). It is for the latter profession, a somewhat predictable choice in humanist terms, perhaps, that Cange now intends to train.

There is growing exultation in Pierre's conversation, and in his diary entries, as he records his strengthening conviction and restored belief in the mission of humanity. His attitude is most coherently, if not succinctly, expressed in the final extracts from his diary presented in the Epilogue. Here he is anxious to refine and clarify the 'tiger' metaphor which he had applied freely to Broussard, and, in the phrase 'le Grand Tigre' (PJ p 339), to the force of Nature in general. Cange realises that the use of the label in this fashion is an injustice to the animal in question; and as for the human 'tigres' - 'tous ceux qui n'ont pas intégralement rallié le camp des hommes' (PJ p 354), - further discrimination is called for. Among human beings, Cange claims, 'les vrais tigres ce sont les respectueux, ceux à qui l'aisance économique permet la méditation et qui n'ont jamais su pourtant distinguer le vrai visage des hommes, et qui restent attachés à leur état de nature....' (PJ p 354). After which anti-bourgeois generalisation,<sup>58</sup> one that surely overstretches and weakens the original metaphor, Vercors allows Cange to turn to more exceptional embodiments of human perversity, then once again to the metaphysical plane: 'Et puis il y ceux que j'appelle superbes, qui savent très bien qu'ils sont des tigres et qui s'en vantent, exécuteurs sadiques et fanatiques des hautes oeuvres de ce Grand Tigre qui les ignore d'un mépris cosmique....' (PJ p 355).

Finally, Cange feels able to define confidently that 'qualité d'homme' whose loss he had deplored. His definition emerges from a nightmarish vision of life on Earth:

... toute cette viande planétaire, cet immense potage organique, ou nous barbotons en aveugles et qui ne se divise pas - mon poumon, la cervelle de Varèse, la côtelette que je mangerai ce soir, le grouillement de la jungle, la mêlée des bêtes dans la mer, toute cette gelée vivante qui se perpétue sans cesse aveuglément, qui se dévore, se digère, se recrache, se refait et se reproduit pour se

dévoré encore depuis des millions de siècles, ce perpétuel carnage, cette boucherie, cette bouillie fourmillante farcie pourtant de griffes et de crocs sous lesquels elle tient pour la servir, dans la nuit de leur ignorance, les malheureux individus, ses esclaves dociles.... Tous très dociles sauf nous. Sauf nous, les hommes. Sauf ceux d'entre nous du moins qui n'acceptons pas cet esclavage, cette ignoble docilité. Je sais maintenant que la qualité d'homme réside dans ce refus. Qu'elle y réside tout entière. (PJ pp 356-7)

La Puissance du Jour thus finally asserts the moral and philosophical views which, as we have seen, Vercors had been developing and refining in the years since the War. Cange's reactions and ruminations form a very substantial part of the book, but the conclusions which he reaches in the end come as no surprise in the light of 'La Sédition humaine' and other texts discussed in the present chapter. For this reason, then, R. D. Konstantinovic is fully justified in referring to the novel, as he does, as 'un roman à thèse'.<sup>59</sup>

Konstantinovic is in fact generally critical of La Puissance du Jour, attributing its failings variously to speed of execution - "265 pages écrites en trois mois seulement" - to the author's preoccupation with public and political activity, much of it involving him in sharp controversy, and to a number of setbacks in his private life.<sup>60</sup>

Vercors himself denied having experienced the sense of crisis which Konstantinovic had suggested: his private misfortunes, for example, had mostly occurred well before the writing of La Puissance du Jour; and he went on:

Je ne crois donc pas qu'il faille en chercher les faiblesses ni dans ces revers intimes, ni dans l'inexpérience, ... ni dans mes difficultés avec mes amis communistes ou les dénigrements des anticommunistes; mais simplement dans l'absence d'une certaine adéquation entre le sujet traité et mon tempérament .... 61

In that 1969 footnote, Vercors went on to admit that the defects that Konstantinovic and others had found in his first long novel could still recur: '... rien ne prouve que cela ne se puisse reproduire dans quelque ouvrage futur, malgré l'expérience technique accumulée'. However, when he eventually chose to resurrect Pierre Cange and to make him the protagonist of Le Tigre d'Anvers (1986), it seemed to be primarily for the sake of the moral message that the story still had to offer rather than in order to undertake a complete literary reworking. In the 1986 novel all the main elements of setting, characterization and plot are, barring certain compressions and changes of emphasis or detail, just as they were in Les Armes de la Nuit and La Puissance du Jour; and the techniques of diary extracts and reported conversations are again extensively used (with the latter being perhaps particularly favoured, in keeping with a trend in Vercors's more recent fiction). Above all, however, it is the moral thesis that emerges quite unaltered from the new text: the eponymous 'tigre' clearly announces that the central metaphor for man's metaphysical adversary is just as before, even if new forms of political excess and repression can now be added to the catalogue of mistreatment inflicted by 'les valets' on their fellow human-beings.<sup>62</sup>

To revert now once more to the early 1950's, however, we find Vercors preparing to produce a quite different kind of novel from Les Armes de la Nuit or La Puissance du Jour, indeed one that is set in a wholly different context from that met so far in any of the author's fiction. It is this new subject-matter and change of tone and atmosphere that will be discussed in the next chapter.

NOTES ON CHAPTER TWO

1. 'Hochwörth': Vercors used this fictitious name for the camp where not only Pierre Cenge suffered (in the 1986 version of the story, Le Tigre d'Anvers, (p 34) it is 'Hochworth' - 'un des camps les plus durs de Saxe orientale') but likewise Bruno in 'Meurtre sans importance' and Le Prêtre in Le Périple.

Together with a number of other writers (Sartre, Aragon, Eluard, etc) Vercors contributed some lines for an inscription which is carved in the walls of the 'Mémorial de la déportation' at the eastern extremity of the Ile de la Cité in Paris. Vercors's inscription reads:

'Mais le jour où les peuples  
Auront compris qui vous étiez  
Ils mordront la terre de chagrin  
Et de remords, ils l'arroseront  
De leurs larmes et ils vous  
Èlèveront des Temples.'

The monument offers a stark reminder of the fate that awaited the deportees, with bare concrete cells, iron grills and the names of various concentration-camps, interspersed with the words of the French writers, carved into the walls. The girl of Vercors's first youthful love-affair (Stéphanie, who became Delphine in Iendre Naufrage) was one of the 200,000 French deportees who did not return from the Nazi camps.

A preface relating to the deportation of French Resistance agents that Vercors wrote soon after the War is to be found in Simone et ses Compagnons, compiled by the deportees' companions, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1947. Another preface, written at approximately the same time as Les Armes de la Nuit, was to Camps de Mort, by Irène Gaucher, Paris, Wolff, 1946.

2. The actual Breton setting - the Ile de Bréhat area - of both Les Armes de la Nuit and Le Tigre d'Anvers also has an auto-biographical connection. Vercors had spent a holiday at Loguivy in 1936 (DP pp 111-2), and his last holiday before the War, in August 1939, had again been spent sailing in Brittany, albeit this time in the Baie de Douarnenez (DP pp 164-5).
3. The determination by the Nazis to destroy every shred of human dignity in their victims is of course highlighted in other accounts of concentration-camp experiences. Thus, for example, David Rousset in L'Univers concentrationnaire, written in August 1945:

Ceux qui doivent mourir vont à la mort avec une lenteur calculée pour que leur déchéance physique et morale, réalisée par degrés, les rende enfin conscients qu'ils sont des maudits, des expressions du Mal et non des hommes.

D. Rousset, L'Univers concentrationnaire, Paris, Christian Bourgois, coll. '10:18', 1971, p 72.

Another author who wrote from personal experience was Primo Levi. At the beginning of The Truce, the sequel to If This is a Man, he recorded his reflections, in similar terms to those of Pierre Cange, after Auschwitz had been liberated by the Russians:

.... we should have liked to wash our consciences and our memories clean from the foulness that lay upon them ... (but) ... we felt that now nothing could ever happen good and pure enough to rub out our past, and that the scars of the outrage would remain within us for ever .... It is foolish to think that human justice can eradicate it.

Primo Levi, If This is a Man/The Truce, London, Sphere 'Abacus', 1987, p 188.

And finally André Malraux, discussing his reading of a range of similar accounts:

L'enfer n'est pas l'horreur; l'enfer, c'est d'être avili jusqu'à la mort, soit que la mort vienne ou qu'elle passe ....

André Malraux, Antimémoires, Paris, Gallimard, 1967, p 584.

4. An account of concentration-camp life that may have directly influenced Vercors was that provided by Louis Martin-Chauffier in Les Lettres françaises of 9 June 1945. In a front-page interview entitled 'Au sortir de l'Enfer', Martin-Chauffier talked of his determination, during his year in Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen, to withstand 'l'univers du camp'. In keeping with his vow that 'le seul univers était mon univers intérieur', he had been able to endure a beating from a kapo by adopting a tactic similar to Pierre Cange's: '... je me récitais du Virgile, puisqu'il voulait m'humilier et que je ne l'étais pas ....' In Le Tigre d'Anvers, Vercors specifically echoes this in Cange's account: '... tel professeur se récitait du Virgile' (IA p 88).
5. The echo of Hamlet recalls Vercors's wartime work on a set of 'eaux-fortes' to illustrate the play, and his later translation of the text (1970). See note 22 in the present chapter.
6. From the essay 'Oedipe et Cimourdin' (sic), first published in the special edition of Europe (February-March 1952) devoted to Victor Hugo. This quotation and the one following are from the text of the essay as republished in Les Psa dans le Sable (1954), page references 191 and 190. The essay reveals Vercors's early and constant admiration for the heroes of Hugo's Quatre-vingt-treize; it is further referred to in Chapter Six of this thesis.

7. 'Cette phrase, la plus noble que je connaisse, cette phrase qui situe l'homme, qui l'honore, qui rétablit les hiérarchies vraies...' Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. Oeuvres, Paris, Gallimard, coll: 'Editions de la Pléiade', 1949, p 165.

We learn in Les Occasions perdues that Vercors had read Terre des Hommes while mobilized in the Spring of 1939. A further indication of the significance of this text to him can be seen in his adaptation, in Colères, of Saint-Exupéry's reference to 'Mozart assassiné' to represent the waste of human talent: this is discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis. A more biographical link between the two writers can be found in an anecdote in Les Nouveaux Jours: after making a speech in New York in 1946, Vercors was told by Saint-Exupéry's widow, 'bouleversée', that '...elle avait cru entendre son mari...' (NJ p 95). See also note 32 in the present chapter.

8. André Rousseaux, Le Figaro Littéraire, Paris, 8/2/47, p 2.

9. Florence Lambert, Les Nouvelles Littéraires, Paris, 2/1/47, p 3.

10. Vercors's speech is reproduced in Plus ou moins Homme, pp 227-254.

Details of his itinerary and of the audiences he addressed in various German towns and cities are to be found in 'La Jeunesse allemande' (op.cit. pp 255-262). The main arguments he put forward in Germany are also summarized in Ce que je crois, pp 69-74, and in Les Nouveaux Jours, pp 143-5.

Les Lettres françaises of 27/5/48 gave great prominence to Vercors's forthcoming visit to Germany with a front-page article headed: 'Ce que Vercors va dire aux Allemands'. Vercors here quotes extracts from his proposed speech, including the whole of the peroration as discussed in the present chapter of this thesis.

Les Lettres françaises of 8/7/48 followed this up with a report of Vercors's visit, together with that made at the same time by Jules Romains. The article by F-A Viallet, 'Jules Romains et Vercors à Munich' (p 1) was critical of the former's more conciliatory attitude to the Germans and reported that Vercors's address 'a été beaucoup moins goûté que celui de Jules Romains, lequel faisait boire du petit lait à ses auditeurs, en passant un coup d'éponge... sur le passé.' Relations between Romains and Vercors had been very close in the 1930's: see also Chapter 1, note 13. Although the friendship between the two writers was strained by their divergent political allegiances after the War, their reconciliation is recorded in Les Nouveaux Jours p 297.

11. Plus ou moins Homme, pp 227, 231, 247.

12. The article in question had been published in Les Lettres françaises, 2/6/45, p 1. As mentioned in Chapter 1 (note 29) of this thesis, there had of course been some German resistance to Hitler, and Vercors tends to leave out of account the Nazi régime's rapid preemptive measures to stifle opposition from political adversaries like the Social Democrats and Communists.
13. For example, the inactivity of France, Britain, the USSR and the USA between 1933 and 1939 had encouraged Hitler and discouraged resistance to him within Germany.
14. Vercors expresses similar retrospective reservations about Les Yeux et la Lumière in a letter to André Wurmser reproduced in P.P.C.: 'Je l'écrivais alors que j'étais à cheval sur une demi-vérité que je n'avais encore pas éclaircie tout à fait à mes propres yeux.' (PPC p 243). However, later in the same letter he makes what seems a more positive reference to the book when he evokes 'le grand poème qu'Aragon (par une rencontre bien émuante pour moi) intitule Les Yeux et la Mémoire.' (PPC p 249).
15. Jean-Paul Sartre, Qu'est-ce que la Littérature? Paris, Gallimard, coll: 'Idées', 1982, p 268.
16. Sartre, p 268.
17. R. D. Konstantinovic, Vercors, Ecrivain et Dessinateur, Paris, Klincksieck, 1969, p 33.
18. There is a full presentation of Vercors's views on art in Goetz, Paris, Musée de Poche, 1958, a monograph on the artist Henri Goetz; and a similar discussion in Ce que je crois, pp 121 ff.
19. André Malraux, Les Voix du Silence, Paris, Gallimard, coll: Galerie de la Pléiade', 1951, p 637.
20. The text of the play is published in Zoo, Paris, Editions Galilée, 1978, pp 104-171. The title play in the volume is Vercors's adaptation of Les Animaux dénaturés and a third play included is the stage version of Le Silence de la Mer. Vercors may have been prompted to write a theatrical version of 'Un Mensonge politique' after learning that the story had been adapted for the stage by students in Cracow following Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 (see Les Nouveaux Jours, p 289).

21. Despite the implicit reproach to the Communists over political lies in 'Un Mensonge politique', Vercors was treated more gently by the Communist reviewers of his book than was Sartre when Les Mains sales appeared. In his review of Les Yeux et la Lumière, referred to in note 28 in the present chapter, André Wurmser compared Vercors's approach favourably with that of Sartre (still at that time, of course, a notable 'bête noire' of the Communists); and Pol Gaillard was similarly scathing in his review of Sartre's play ('Quand le mensonge ridiculise', Les Lettres françaises, Paris, 8/4/48, p 7) in which, he affirmed, 'c'est Sartre qui a les mains sales...'
22. In his introduction to his own translation of Hamlet, published in Dedipe et Hamlet, Paris, Perrin, 1970, Vercors emphasises the more universal aspects of Hamlet's role and character: 'De même que tout homme, soumis à la fatalité, ressemble à Dedipe, tout homme aussi, devant chaque décision qui engage sa vie, ressemble à Hamlet.' (p 123)
23. This 1944 essay is discussed in Chapter 1 of the present thesis.
24. 'Le démenti' is of course the term used by Vercors in the quotation at the beginning of the present chapter to denote his decision to resist the Nazis despite his earlier absurdist philosophy. Arnaud's 'conversion' in the story encapsulates this progression in a much briefer, more violent form.
25. Vercors's allusions to insects to demonstrate the vanity of human aspirations are analogous to the strain of imagery in modern literature (embracing for example Sartre and Malraux) in which insects have represented the antithesis of human dignity.
26. The echoes of Pascal are unmistakable here. Pascal's view of man: 'Un néant à l'égard de l'infini, un tout à l'égard du néant, un milieu entre rien et tout' (Pensées, Paris, Garnier, 1958, p 88) involves a similar comparison with the vastness of the cosmos and the minuteness of 'un ciron'; but his main intention, that of challenging the complacency of 'les libertins', was of course quite different from Vercors's. To refer to a quite different point of comparison, it could be argued that in Camus's play Caligula the emperor's attempt to possess the moon demonstrates that he has not learned Pascal's (or Vercors's) lesson about 'la disproportion de l'homme'. Only at the end, facing death, does he realise that he has taken the wrong path in seeking 'l'impossible'.
27. A comparison could be made here between Arnaud's action and that of Mathieu in firing on the Germans from the belfry in La Mort dans l'Âme. Both experience a new exultation in the violent action, but it has a different meaning for each of them: Arnaud feels an unexpected solidarity with the maquisards, Mathieu mainly senses release from past frustrations.

28. André Wurmser, 'Vercors ou c'est plus fort que moi', Les Lettres françaises, Paris, 16/12/48, p 3.
29. The most recent study of this episode: Dradour, Massacre and Aftermath, by Robin Mackness, London, Bloomsbury, 1988, suggests that the killing was carried out on the orders of Nazi officers intent on retrieving a large consignment of gold bullion which they wrongly believed to be hidden in the village following the ambush of a German convoy.
30. See Konrad Bieber, L'Allemagne vue par les Ecrivains de la Résistance française, Geneva, Droz, 1954, p 136: 'cela cadre fort bien avec le type de l'artiste allemand, ou de l'Allemand capable de finesse artistique tel qu'on l'a vu partout en Europe. Qu'en de tels hommes voisinent les dons artistiques les plus rares et une bestialité complète, voilà qui correspond aux faits..' A biographical detail that can be noted here, perhaps, is that Konrad Bieber, as Professor of Romance Languages at Connecticut College, was later on to be Vercors's host during the visit he and his wife made to the United States in the winter of 1961-62. (An earlier invitation, in 1960, had come to nothing because of the difficulties that Vercors, as a recent fellow-traveller, had had in obtaining the necessary visa from the American authorities).
31. The wartime poetry of Tardieu, Eluard, Cassou and others is also discussed in :  
Vercors, La Littérature et la Résistance, Conférence prononcée à l'Institut Pédagogique National, 21/2/1968, (Paris, 1968), (referred to also in Chapter 1, note 23 in this thesis).  
Tardieu's short poem 'Vacances' showed, according to Vercors, the poet preparing to 'prendre ses vacances de poète solitaire un peu hermétique, et de rejoindre l'océan des hommes, celui de leurs souffrances et de leurs espoirs, comme on va l'été se replonger dans la mer dont nous sommes tous nés.'  
As for Eluard, Vercors notes in his 'Critique de la Poésie' the three dread lines 'qui viennent interrompre le chant pur de sa voix ancienne.' Those lines are, of course, successively  
'Garcia Lorca a été mis à mort,'  
'Saint-Pol-Roux a été mis à mort,'  
and  
'Decour a été mis à mort.'  
(The above quotations are from the published text of the lecture, pp 8-9). Tardieu's poem 'Dradour' was published anonymously in the last clandestine issue of Les Lettres françaises (no. 19, August 1944); and this and other writers' reactions are duly referred to in Pierre Seghers, La Résistance et ses Poètes, Paris, Seghers, 1974, pp 352-355.  
Finally, it should be recalled that Vercors himself published two clandestine poems under the pseudonym 'Roland Dolée'. These were entitled 'La Patience' and 'Les Morts' (both dated 1943) and are reprinted in Seghers, *op.cit.*, pp 634-7.

32. Descartes was one of the first French writers to analyse the distinction between mind and body, but while he pointed to the normal co-operation between the two in human beings and to the control exercised over bodily reactions by 'l'Âme', Vercors has tended instead to stress the fundamental alienation between human mind and body which is particularly evident when the individual is ill. In this latter respect a further reference to Saint-Exupéry is apposite. In the course of his reconnaissance flight to Arras, related in *Pilote de Guerre*, Saint-Exupéry reflects on the increasing unimportance of the body as one faces death. In this connection he ponders the words of his dying younger brother: "... je ne souffre pas. Je n'ai pas mal. Je ne peux pas m'en empêcher. C'est mon corps." Son corps, territoire étranger, déjà autre.' A. de Saint-Exupéry, *Oeuvres*, Paris, Gallimard, coll: 'Editions de la Pléiade', 1959, p 347. More generally, and possibly in a lighter vein, one could reflect on the conflict between mind and body which seems particularly apparent at times of insomnia; although this is a phenomenon to which Vercors himself has not referred in his writings.
33. Gracch's 'pourquoi?' presumably conveys the philosopher's challenge to the protagonists of the other stories to evaluate the respective parts played by reason and instinct in their decisive action or reaction. In narrative terms within the 'Epilogue', Gracch is a widely-respected philosopher who has attempted and failed to assassinate the tyrant Othon. His name may possibly have some connection with the brothers Gracchus of Ancient Rome, who tried to enact laws to control the tyrannical greed of the Roman aristocracy.
34. In other words, and in terms of the book's overall title, Othon's 'eyes' have not seen the 'light' - he has not responded to the reality, often initially conveyed to us by instinct or intuition, of humanity's common destiny and interdependence. The first part of the quotation again recalls Pascal's warning about the limits of human understanding, but for Gracch (and for the Vercors of 1948 at least) intuition could provide invaluable insights into the essential community between men; and on this basis reason could then construct a positive and practical ethical theory. There are obvious parallels here with Camus's notion of 'revolt', as will be discussed later in this chapter.
35. Louis Aragon, 'Vercors: Les Yeux et la Lumière', *Europe*, Paris, December 1948, 120-123 (p 122).
36. *Ibid.*, pp 122-123.
27. Nelly Corneau, *Chronique Littéraire*, *Synthèses*, Brussels, August 1951, 419-427, (p 420).

38. Ibid., p 421. Among the 'cas particuliers' presented in Les Yeux et la Lumière, this reviewer preferred 'La Vénus de Solare'; whereas Aragon's approval had been reserved for 'Le Démenti' and the other stories dealing with recent wartime events.
39. For further details, see Chapters 4 and 5 of the present thesis. Of course, critics of Vercors's political attitudes - and by 1950 they were already numerous and sharp in their judgements, as the reviews of Plus ou moins Homme indicate - would claim that his prescriptions ultimately pointed towards an all-powerful State to which the individual would be subordinated, and in which 'les devoirs civiques' could well take on a sinister, all-pervasive connotation. For all his fellow-travelling commitment, Vercors, too, has expressed strong reservations about a dominant State or Party: see, for example, the relevant discussions in Chapters 4 and 5 and in Appendix II of this thesis. The problem surely betrays one of the conflicts, or at least tensions, inherent in his political outlook.
40. This correspondence followed the publication of 'La Sédition humaine' in Les Cahiers du Sud in 1949. The arguments of Mr. Bendit, 'un correspondant britannique' (PMH p 55) also helped prompt the writing of Les Animaux dénaturés, as is discussed at the beginning of Chapter 3 of this thesis.
41. Michael Kelly, 'Humanism and National Unity: the Ideological Reconstruction of France', in Nicholas Hewitt, ed., The Culture of Reconstruction. European Literature, Thought and Film in the Years 1945-1950, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1988, p 113.
42. Robert Amadou, 'Notes critiques', La Gazette des Lettres, Paris, 15/11/50, p 123.
43. This can most succinctly be demonstrated by a brief quotation from Micheline Tison-Braun, La Crise de l'Humanisme, Paris, Nizet, 2 vols, 1967, II,7: 'L'homme, dit l'humaniste, est la mesure de toutes choses. L'homme, et non la nature. L'homme de l'humaniste apparaît d'abord comme une volonté en lutte contre la nature extérieure. Là où la brute s'adapte passivement ou succombe, l'homme adapte les choses à ses desseins.'
44. Amadou - details of article as above.
45. Michel Vivier, 'Vercors ou la philosophie du maquis', Aspects de la France, Paris, 17/11/50, p 3. Vercors's views were unlikely to receive a favourable hearing in this particular journal with its 'Action Française' connections and stridently anti-communist, monarchist outlook (witness its front-page headline 'La Monarchie nécessaire!' of 18/8/50). It was also, of course, campaigning on

Pétain's behalf, as in the front-page article 'Libérez le Maréchal!' of 18/5/50).

As for the insinuations about plagiarism made by Vivier (echoing others), Vercors deals with both of them in his recent memoirs: over Gus Bofa in Les Occasions perdues, pp 99-100, (see also note 7 in the Introduction to this thesis); and over Binding in Les Nouveaux Jours, pp 133, 148.

46. Ibid.

47. Claude Morgan, 'La Morale de Vercors', Les Lettres françaises, Paris, 9/11/50, p 3.

Vercors's relatively close relationship with Morgan among the leading Communist intellectuals was demonstrated over the Kravchenko affair, as discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

48. Ibid.

49. Georges Mounin, 'Chroniques Philosophiques: Un récent livre de Vercors', La Pensée, Paris, May 1951, 91-96 (p 91).

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid., p 92. There is a clear echo here of Aragon's concluding comment on Les Yeux et la Lumière (see note 36).

52. In his 1950 Preface to Les Yeux et la Lumière, for instance, Vercors writes of the 'démonstration assez rigoureuse' by which he had sought to 'fonder en raison' his definition of Man and thereby resolve the contradiction of his Resistance activism arising from pre-war absurdism; whereas,

Cette contradiction, s'ils s'ingénient de façon poignante à en trouver la clé, je ne crois pas que jusqu'à ce jour Camus ou Sartre l'aient résolue pour eux-mêmes. La "justice" de l'un, la "liberté" de l'autre, continuent me semble-t-il (en tant que sources d'une éthique) de s'inscrire dans ces démarches du sentiment que l'on peut contester sans qu'aucun argument logique (rigoureusement déduisible d'un critère échappant à toute controverse), puisse réfuter la contestation. (YL, préf. p 18).

Vercors similarly compares his experience and ideas with those of Sartre and Camus in Ce que je crois (1975), pp 76-82.

53. Albert Camus, Essais, Paris, Gallimard, coll: 'Editions de la Pléiade', 1965, p 435.

54. Ibid. p 432. See also Vercors's comments on this formula in Appendix I of this thesis.
55. One reviewer who explicitly compared Camus and Vercors in 1950 was G-N Rousseau in 'Camus et Vercors, deux hommes aux prises avec notre désordre', Réforme, Paris, 23/12/50, p 7. Rousseau's comparison between Plus ou moins Homme and Camus's Actuelles: Chroniques 1944-48 (Gallimard, 1950) in the end revealed a decisive preference for Camus's work. He paid some tribute to 'l'habile et courageuse auteur du Silence de la Mer' but was critical of the way in which political commitment seemed to distort some of Vercors's ideas. If he failed to convince, 'c'est parce qu'il élève trop souvent la voix ... c'est enfin parce que sa pensée ne se dégage qu'à demi des conjonctures suspectes de la politique ... Aux piétinements convulsifs de sa pensée, nous préférons toujours les calmes et ferventes démarches de celles d'Albert Camus.'
56. Paul Eluard had had to take refuge from the Nazis for a time in 1944 by hiding in Lozère 'parmi les aliénés du docteur Bonnafé.' See Les Nouveaux Jours, p 39.
57. Some of these characters and their political allegiances will be discussed in Chapter Six of this thesis.
58. Further reference to the specifically political content of Cange's attitude will again be found in Chapter Six.
59. Konstantinovic, p 178.
60. These personal setbacks are recounted in Les Nouveaux Jours, in various passages relating to the post-war years 1946-48. The author's misfortunes included the breakdown of his marriage, his mother's illness and death, rejection or betrayal by various friends and colleagues (Pierre de Lescuré, Chamson and Pascal Pia, for example) and his losing control of 'Les Editions de Minuit' to Jérôme Lindon.
61. Konstantinovic, p 179 (quotation from a lengthy 'corrective' footnote by Vercors).
62. Le Tigre d'Anvers will be further analysed in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER THREE : OF ANIMALS AND MEN

The three novels with which this chapter is mainly concerned - Les Animaux dénatureés (1952), Colères (1956), and Sylva (1961) - together occupy a distinct area of their own in Vercors's post-1940 fiction. In them, Vercors explores further the theories about the nature of humankind that he had presented in 'La Sédition humaine'; but if they thus pursue a thread of enquiry that had been present in the author's mind since the War, the three novels are different in several ways from fictional works like Les Yeux et la Lumière and La Puissance du Jour which precede them, just as they are, in other ways, from those that follow. Man's relationship with animals lies at the heart of two of them; the plots of all three are pervaded by elements of fantasy or near-fantasy; and the themes of war, occupation and resistance have almost, if not entirely, receded into the background. Certainly, the change of tone and content in Les Animaux dénatureés provided such a contrast with Vercors's war-time and immediate post-war writing that René Fallet for one, writing in Le Canard Enchaîné, greeted it with ironic relief:

... surprise: Les Animaux dénatureés n'ont rien de commun avec la résistance, le maquis, la gestapo, le Vercors, la Kommandatur et tout l'arsenal littéraire - 'années sombres' que s'était quasiment annexé l'auteur du Silence de la Mer ... Interruption (sans doute momentanée) de l'exploitation de la toujours fertile mine des grands sentiments.... 1

We have, too, Vercors's own account, in Les Nouveaux Jours, of his feeling of having reached a new threshold in his writing career, and the sense of fresh possibilities lying ahead:

Maussade et incertaine, l'année qui vient de s'achever (1951) ne l'a pas été pour moi personnellement. Et ce passage de l'une à l'autre, je l'ai au contraire franchi avec un sentiment confiant: ma vocation comme écrivain vient en effet de s'éclaircir, de découvrir les larges, passionnantes perspectives qui s'ouvrent devant elle .... (NJ p 201).

As he goes on to explain, the writing of Les Animaux déaturés stemmed from the essay 'La Sédition humaine' and from the ensuing debate with Francis Bedit.<sup>2</sup> That debate had centred on the dividing-line between Man and the primates closest to him, the anthropoid apes. Bedit had argued that once that dividing-line is drawn across Man's evolutionary line of descent, then all behaviour, good or bad, for which human creatures are responsible must perforce qualify as human behaviour - and the 'rebellion against Nature' to which Vercors had attached such decisive importance is only one manifestation of human quality in creatures to whom the status of human being has been attributed on the basis of other criteria.

As an outcome of this debate, Vercors found his attention focussed more and more on the question of the 'dividing-line'. At what precise point in the evolutionary chain can Man, in the proper sense of the term, be said to have evolved from Ape? And if ever the 'missing link' were found, on which side of the line would he, or it, fall? To try to answer these questions would surely shed some light on the broader enquiry which Vercors now considered so vital for his contemporaries - the search for a basic definition of Man that could subsume all racial, ideological and religious differences within an incontrovertible and universal measure of human value.<sup>3</sup>

As speculation about the 'missing link' assumed more concrete form in his mind, Vercors saw its potential for a work of fiction. What if a race of creatures physically akin to apes but with rudimentary tools,

language and simple rituals, were discovered in a remote part of the world?

Qu'en ferez-vous? Du gabier ou des électeurs? Qui décidera? Et je me dis ... que ce dilemme ferait un roman bien amusant qui obligerait le lecteur à réfléchir; au moins sur la nécessité de définir ce qui fait, au plus bas de l'échelle, que l'homme est 'homme', peut-être sur cette définition elle-même. Je le sens si bien, ce roman, je sens si bien son importance que, presque aussitôt, je me suis mis à l'ouvrage.... (NJ p 202).

Vercors thus seems to have approached his story in a spirit of mingled seriousness and amusement; and it is a corresponding combination of qualities in the novel that has led many reviewers and critics to liken it to the philosophical fiction of Voltaire or the satirical fantasies of Swift or Aldous Huxley.<sup>4</sup> Certainly the work blends within a harmonious and entertaining whole (far more successfully so, by general agreement, than the similarly ambitious Colères) a relatively complex plot, a varied cast of characters and a substantial portion of the author's reflections and researches. One measure of its enduring success, perhaps, is that it is Vercors's only text, apart from Le Silence de la Mer, to appear in the 'Livre de Poche' series; while at the same time the theatrical version, Zoo, has proved to be a highly successful and critically-acclaimed play.<sup>5</sup>

At the heart of the novel is the discovery of a colony of half-human, half-animal creatures by a party of anthropologists exploring the innermost recesses of New Guinea.<sup>6</sup> The young English hero of the story, Douglas Templemore, sends full and regular reports of the expedition's work to his fiancée, Frances, in London<sup>7</sup>; and, conveniently enough for the purposes of the narrative, Frances is both unversed in anthropology and as eager to learn as Douglas is to impart. Thus she, and we, read that the physical appearance of the 'tropolis' ('une contraction d'anthrope et de pithèque', AD p 82) combines predominantly

ape-like features with elements of grace and delicacy:

Leur corps est couvert de poils, mais je dois dire que l'aspect en est troublant, surtout celui des femelles. Elles sont plus fines que les mâles, ont les bras moins longs, de vraies hanches et une poitrine très féminine. (AD p 80) 8

And certain other human characteristics are evident: '... la tentation est grande de parler d'eux en êtres humains - puisqu'ils taillent la pierre, font du feu, enterrent leurs morts, et même communiquent entre eux par une espèce de langage...' (AD p 81).

The 'tropolis' thus constitute a delicately-poised balance between ape and man, and this balance is carefully maintained by the author as the scientists pursue their observations of the creatures. Then growing feelings of respect and liking for the 'tropolis' as individuals lead to the first moral dilemma. The Irish priest Dillighan, a believer in orthogenesis and one of the highly diversified group of eccentrics who make up the expedition, agonizes over whether or not the 'tropolis' have a soul and whether, unbaptised, they face eternal damnation or, at best, limbo.<sup>9</sup> If Vercors sees any irony in this theological problem, it is only gently hinted at in the text, perhaps as a tribute to the priest's benevolence; and in any case the moral complexity of the situation is soon intensified when the Papuan bearers, despite recent conversion by Dillighan, begin to indulge in 'tropophageie'.

Even this misfortune for the 'tropolis', however, seems a minor one compared with the threat from an unscrupulous Australian tycoon bent on exploiting this ready supply of slave labour in his textile mills. As the scientists, with Templemore taking the moral lead, rally to the creatures' defence, the capitalist conspiracy takes shape: even if there is an outcry over the proposed breeding and exploitation of the 'tropolis', no arguments on their behalf are likely to prevail

once sufficient financial investments, particularly from major banks, have been committed to the business venture. The self-seeking motives of capitalist enterprise are here allowed to speak for themselves, and there is little of the obvious political axe-grinding by the author that intrudes into parts of Colères. Similarly unobtrusive, but no less effective, is the reference to the likely 'moral' outrage of British textile industrialists who will be faced with this formidable Antipodean competition. It is the tycoon, Vancruyzen himself, who is the first to anticipate such protests, and he does so with appropriate Australian scepticism:

...vous croyez que les Anglais resteront tranquilles?  
- Vous pensez que ...  
- Bien sûr. Ils nous mettront des bâtons dans les roues;  
ils soulèveront le droit moral d'exploiter ces animaux  
ambigus, et toute le bataclan. (AD p 120) 10

The artificial insemination of some female 'tropis', with Templemore as donor, represents a pragmatic attempt to ascertain whether the 'tropis' belong to the human species, and the result, with the birth of several 'tropiots', seems positive. But the success of this experiment leads only to another, more momentous, ethical controversy: for the anthropologist Julius Drexler (the historical associations of whose name can hardly have been accidental)<sup>11</sup> now throws open the whole question of human status. Should all those groups normally considered to belong to the human family in fact enjoy the same status as the most fully evolved? In other words:

L'apparition des tropis ... prouve l' inanité de la notion simpliste de l'unicité de l'espèce humaine. Il n'y a pas d'espèce humaine, il n'y a qu'une vaste famille d'hominidés, qui descend l'échelle des couleurs, au sommet de laquelle est le Blanc - l'homme véritable - pour aboutir, à l'autre bout, au tropi et au chimpanzé. (AD p 149)

The racial and social implications of Drexler's argument are therefore plain, as Templemore urgently reports:

Voici donc tout prêts à renaître, Frances, le fantôme grimaçant du racisme et ses infernales séquelles ... Un racisme au nom duquel des populations entières pourront demain être privées de leur appartenance à l'humanité et des droits qui s'y attachent, être vendues à leur tour comme cheptel ... Le Durban Express pose déjà la question: 'Les nègres sont-ils des hommes?' (AD pp 149-150) 12

There is thus much more at stake than the fate of the 'tropis', and the only recourse, according to Templemore, is to establish a basic, clear and irrefutable definition of Man:

Il s'agit de faire en sorte que toute l'humanité soit enfin obligée de se définir une bonne fois elle-même ... De telle manière que ses droits et devoirs envers ses membres cessent d'être fondés confusément sur quelques traditions discutables, des sentiments transitoires, des commandements religieux ou des obligations sectaires, qu'on peut à chaque instant attaquer ou contredire; mais qu'ils le soient solidement sur la claire notion de ce qui, en vérité, distingue spécifiquement les hommes du reste de la création. (AD p 150)

Here, then, is Vercors's essential thesis, presented with due seriousness and indeed dramatic urgency by the committed Templemore. Despite this, however, and despite the echoes of Nazism that briefly haunt the text<sup>13</sup>, the remainder of the narrative preserves the lightness of touch which has characterized it hitherto. Templemore's action, after returning to England, of deliberately killing a newborn 'tropical' registered as his son, leads to a murder-trial in which the issue is not the identity of the killer but the status - human or otherwise - of the victim. The sensational nature of the trial, and the failure of the jury to reach a verdict through lack of any clear definition of human status, lead, as Templemore had hoped, to widespread public discussion and to a parliamentary Committee of Enquiry on the subject.

It is not altogether surprising that the most persuasive arguments presented to the Committee are those of the civilised and open-minded trial judge, who has reached conclusions very close to those of Vercors in 'La Sédition humaine'. The whole distinction between men and animals centres on the secession from Nature: 'L'animal fait un avec la nature. L'homme fait deux ... Des animaux dénaturés, voilà ce que nous sommes' (AD p 322) There remains, of course, the question of how 'cette dénaturation' can be recognised. After a full measure of the hesitations and compromises inherent in committees (and particularly so, Vercors seems to imply, in a British one), an answer is eventually agreed upon: the awareness of being separate from Nature is indicated by any manifestation of religious attitudes or behaviour. As a Minister of the Crown, anxious to resolve the legal tangle (and to reach a conclusion helpful to British commercial interests) explains:

Esprit religieux égale esprit métaphysique égale esprit de recherche, d'inquiétude, etc. Tout y rentre: non seulement la foi, mais la science, l'art, l'histoire et aussi la sorcellerie, la magie, tout ce que vous voudrez ... (AD p 327)

It is, in short, a serviceable working proposition, and a sufficient modicum of religious awe is finally seen to reside in the 'tropolis' ritual smoking of meat,<sup>14</sup> '... une très primitive adoration du feu, un hommage rendu à son pouvoir magique de purification et d'exorcisme' (AD p 339), on which basis they are admitted to full membership of the human community. In a second trial, Templemore is acquitted of murder, since the human status of the victim was not established at the time of his death; and the Defence Counsel points, somewhat optimistically, to the value of the principle that has been established as a result of his client's altruism:

Ils (les tropis) participent aux droits de l'homme. Rien ne les menace plus. Rien non plus ne menace d'autres peuples arriérés ou sauvages, que l'absence de toute définition légale était seule à mettre en danger. (AD p 344)

While there is certainly more than a little wishful thinking in such a pronouncement, it does represent one of Vercors's aspirations in his efforts to achieve a definition of Man. After the euphoria of the trial, however, a more realistic analysis is made by the judge, and it is this more measured hope that Vercors seems to have invested in the novel as a whole:

Vous avez inquiété les gens. Vous leur avez mis le nez dans une inconcevable lacune, qui durait depuis des millénaires... on est allé au plus pressé, on a comblé cette lacune comme on a pu. Il faudra le faire mieux, et tout à fait. (AD p 355)

However, while the author's pursuit of a definition of Man was now becoming recognized as a key and recurring theme of his writing, it was the frank discussion of racial differences that seems to have disconcerted some readers of the novel. Such reactions did not appear very markedly in the generally favourable reviews of French and other critics in the West; but Vercors himself was to record in P.P.C. the criticisms of some Soviet readers. Several statements and comments in the novel, exemplified by the following remarks to a lawyer by the expedition's leader, Cuthbert Greame, seem to have attracted this unfavourable attention:

... entre le chimpanzé et le Plésianthrope, entre celui-ci et le Sinanthrope, entre le Sinanthrope et le tropi, entre le tropi et l'homme de Néanderthal, entre l'homme de Néanderthal et le négrito, enfin entre le négrito et vous, mon cher Maître ... la distance chaque fois est à peu près la même. Alors si vous pouvez nous dire où finit le singe, où commence l'homme, vous nous rendrez un fier service! (AD p 127)

Other remarks in the novel which might also have left some readers uneasy are made, paradoxically enough, by two notably liberal-minded and well-intentioned ladies. There is, firstly, Frances's reference to

'une négresse à plateaux ... cent fois plus près, par son intelligence, d'un chimpanzé que d'Einstein' (AD p 196) (although her main point will be that Einstein and the negress share something, provisionally defined as 'une âme', which the chimpanzee lacks); and similarly there is the recollection by Lady Draper, as she points out the importance of a 'gri-gri' or sacred object to every human community, of 'ces pauvres nègres tellement sauvages, que nous avons vus à Ceylan, tellement arriérés, qui ne savent rien faire, même pas compter jusqu'à cinq, à peine parler...' (AD pp 235-6).

Now the 'négrito' in Greame's observation refers to a diminutive negroid race of people living in the Malayo-Polynesian islands, and it was to be to the question of skeletal size that Vercors mainly referred in discussing the criticisms he had received. In P.P.C., where he reproduces a preface written in 1955 for the Hungarian and Polish editions of Les Animaux déformés, he first recalls the terms in which certain Soviet critics and readers of the original edition had reproached him:

Vous montrez que du singe à l'anthropopithèque, de celui-ci au Nègre et du Nègre au Blanc il n'y pas de limite zoologique précise. Et c'est pourquoi il (le lecteur soviétique) pourrait être offusqué de vous voir effacer ici ou là cette limite entre le singe et le Nègre.... (PPC p 214)

Vercors's answer to these reproaches turns on the distinction between 'une graduation (quantitative)' and 'une hiérarchie (qualitative)' (PPC p 220). To make comparisons based on physical or biological factors is by no means to proffer a value judgement. The latter would depend on quite different criteria, as the novel seeks to demonstrate:

... si l'on est tout à fait antiraciste, si l'on a extirpé de soi le moindre relent de racisme, alors on peut comparer le squelette d'un Négrito à celui d'un Singe sans craindre de lui porter tort, au contraire, puisque si le Noir veut le Blanc ce n'est pas à cause de son squelette c'est parce que son comportement est humain comme celui du Blanc ... Mais bien sûr, pour en arriver là il faut savoir exactement où il se trouve, le fait humain. Et pour le savoir, il faut d'abord se le demander ... (PPC pp 221-2)

In fact, leaving aside the vexed question of intelligence, just as Vercors himself does in this discussion, it seems that he may have been wrong in placing so much emphasis even on physical differences. There is, for example, the recent theory put forward by Drs. C. Stringer and P. Andrews of the Natural History Museum in London, which states unequivocally that all humans have a common African ancestor and that the genetic component mitochondrial DNA varies between humans anywhere in the world by no more than half of one per cent - in other words, 'the differences between races are clearly not profound and are indeed only skin deep.'<sup>15</sup> But of course Vercors was less concerned with the exact degree of difference between races than with what, in the face of Drexler's theories, unites them; and the same unifying 'fait humain' was just as important in the face of looming ideological tensions. Accordingly he goes on, in the 1955 preface, to underline the wider intention of the work and the particular resonance that he hopes it will have in Eastern Europe:

Le motif profond de mes efforts dans la recherche d'une notion fondamentale de l'homme n'est pas seulement l'anti-racisme. S'il doit s'établir une coexistence pacifique entre l'Est et l'Ouest, il faudra que ce soit une vraie coexistence avec tous les enrichissements qu'apportent les échanges de tous ordres et d'abord les échanges d'idées. (PPC p 223)

For only such exchanges can enable people on both sides of the ideological divide to see that they share, with all men, 'ce "quelque chose" de commun ... ce que de livre en livre je m'efforce de dégager.' (PPC p 223)

This recurrent theme apart, what are the features that distinguish Les Animaux dénaturés from the works by Vercors before it and from those that follow? Most obviously there is the close attention paid to animal, or quasi-animal life, a feature that otherwise will recur only in the novel Sylva (where of course the borderline between animal and human identity is the central focus) and in the short story 'Les Castors de l'Amadeus'.<sup>16</sup> A second notable element, albeit one again that will be repeated in Sylva, is the presentation of an English setting (apart from the trip to New Guinea) and of a mainly English cast of characters, ranging from the agreeably eccentric Greame to the magnanimous Templemore. It is this setting, apparently far removed in the author's mind from the political tensions and recriminations of post-war France, which, together with the often bumbling but inoffensive characters, helps to give the novel its essentially good-humoured tone. English life, in fact, provides a picturesque background to various scenes - the incipient murder mystery in a country cottage, spring-time in Regent's Park and on Hampstead Heath, the crowded, colourful 'Prospect of Whitby' public house. Vercors has provided ample evidence in his writing career of his respect for Britain's historical institutions and traditions<sup>17</sup> (although this did not prevent his denunciation of what he saw as the colonialist policies of post-war Labour and Conservative governments); and it is probable that his interest in English life generally was intensified through his relationship with Miss Rita Barisse from London, whom he met at an international P.E.N. Congress in Copenhagen in 1948 at a time when his first marriage was breaking down. This new acquaintance must have helped Vercors to strengthen his knowledge and understanding of the various facets of English life that are affectionately, if sometimes ironically, evoked in Les Animaux dénaturés.

And while Templemore is akin to Vercors himself in his idealism and readiness to sacrifice himself for his principles in a court of law, he also seems to reflect at least one aspect of the author's private experience: for the picture that we are given of Douglas's emotional state when he first meets Frances Doran - 'Il était encore meurtri d'une trahison abominable qui l'avait abreuvé de dégoût plus encore que de désespoir' (AD p 34) - is surely very close to that given in Les Nouveaux Jours of Vercors's own bitterness over the estrangement from his first wife just before he met Miss Barisse.<sup>18</sup> Another, quite different, connection between Les Animaux dénaturés and Rita Barisse is that it was the latter who translated the novel into English. Under the title You Shall Know Them (Boston, 1953) it was chosen as 'Book of the Month' in July 1953 by the American Book of the Month Club - the first work by a French author since the War to have been so dignified. A comment by the New York Times critic neatly sums up the novelty for American readers of Vercors's story, which, he wrote, 'supplies with great verve the missing link between science fiction and the roman à thèse.'<sup>19</sup>

In linking Les Animaux dénaturés with Vercors's next major novel, Colères, Claude Roy produced a pun that has something in common with the American critic's formula:

S'il me fallait expliquer brièvement ce que sont les deux derniers ouvrages d'imagination de Vercors, Les Animaux dénaturés et Colères, j'aurais recours à un mauvais calembour qui est une bonne définition: ce sont des conscience-fictions. L'un et l'autre récit utilisent les ressources conjuguées de l'essai, du conte philosophique, du dialogue platonicien, du récit d'anticipation, pour tenter de poser les grands problèmes moraux qui occupent Vercors depuis des années. 20

And Vercors himself points, in P.P.C., to one of the essential connections between the two novels, when he recalls a meeting of writers from East and West that he had attended in Venice in April 1956, under the auspices of 'La Société Européenne de Culture'. At the meeting, which included Silone, Spender, Ehrenburg, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, Vercors had found himself in a minority of one at the outset when he had argued that before any other discussion those present should agree on a basic, generally acceptable definition of human culture - in other words, of what is meant by 'human'. He had been overruled by the others, who wanted to confine themselves to more tangible matters. In P.P.C., Vercors is ironic about the other luminaries' decision and its outcome; and he goes on to underline the philosophical relationship between Les Animaux dénatureés and Colères:

'Tenons-nous-en aux problèmes concrets' disaient-ils sagement. Ils s'y tinrent en effet sagement de sorte qu'en une semaine ils ne s'accordèrent plus sur rien. Cet avertissement sans audience, c'est en somme celui que n'a cessé de prodiguer l'auteur des Animaux dénatureés et de Colères. C'est la même permanente question qui traverse les deux ouvrages: 'qui sommes-nous?' Dans le premier, l'auteur montrait qu'il est vain d'essayer de répondre par la zoologie. Dans le second, il tente de montrer qu'il serait vain de se connaître par l'introspection, même totale, de notre univers charnel, à supposer qu'une telle exploration soit possible: nous ne pourrions que nous y dissoudre. La raison reste, en définitive, notre unique recours. (PPC pp 109-210)

In Colères, the exploration of his own 'univers charnel' is carried out by the middle-aged poet Egmont,<sup>21</sup> who chooses this means of transcending the limitations of human understanding and the distressing, ultimately tragic, reality of existence. As the 'prière d'insérer' reproduced in P.P.C. indicates, the attempt finally proves abortive; but it is only one thread in a complex novel which, after weaving together most of the author's philosophical and social preoccupations, manages in the end to present some reasonably positive conclusions

about human progress. Egmont is only one of several notable characters over whom the spotlight plays in the long narrative; the others include Mirambeau, a distinguished scientist of progressive political views who joins the workers' struggle for social justice; Closter Cloots,<sup>22</sup> a schoolteacher raging against 'the dying of the light' as seen in the death of a professor and foreshadowed in his own terminal illness; Robert Péliou,<sup>23</sup> an ardent young party militant; and a brace of rationalist intellectuals, Dutouvet and Burgeaud.

Vercors's sympathy seems fairly evenly shared between these different characters, most of whom reflect one aspect or another of his outlook or experience. The complexity (overburdening, even) of the novel results partly from its juxtaposing of metaphysical speculation and revolt with an account of political struggle in a precise socio-economic context. Vercors's philosophical attitudes, as they had evolved from pre-war absurdism to the recognition of human rebellion and human progress, are explicitly presented in lengthy discussions between the characters; while at the same time there is a clear demonstration, through narrative incident and characters' reactions, of the author's post-war political orientation. One of the underlying themes of the novel, in fact, is the tension between the demands of philosophical (or scientific) investigation and the pressures of political involvement; and, the novel seems to suggest, it is only through striking a balance between these demands (a balance of the sort accomplished by Mirambeau) that human progress can be fostered and energy not dissipated through anger or despair.<sup>24</sup>

All the main threads of the story converge in the experience of Egmont, who also serves as a common point of contact for the other characters. Under his real identity of Daniel Roux, Egmont has practised as a

doctor<sup>25</sup>, thereby following in the established humanist-professional lineage of Laurent Pasquier, Antoine Thibault, Bernard Rieux and, of course, Vercors's own Pierre Cange. However, by the age of fifty he has retired from medical work, just as he has withdrawn from the activities of the Communist Party, and he now appears increasingly absorbed in meditation, poetry and a private collection of stuffed zoological specimens.

Egmont's decision to leave 'le parti', scathingly denounced by Péliou - 'ce poète à la manque ... un solitaire ... il s'enferme dans ses nobles larmes comme le rat dans son fromage' (pp 53-5) - has been prompted partly by distaste at communist tactics: '... leurs vérités changeantes, contradictoires ... qu'ils aient repris à leur compte le conseil de Maurras: ne discutez pas avec un adversaire, déshonorez-le. Comme ils ont fait avec Ito....' (Col pp 63-64) - a clear echo of Vercors's own reproaches towards his communist friends. At another level, however, Egmont's retreat from life has spiritual causes, not far removed from the world-weariness of archetypal Romantic heroes: 'Un seul mot conviendrait: l'ennui. Je vis dans un ennui sans borne, qui ne souhaite plus rien. Ni vivre, ni mourir.' (Col p 65)

At an early stage in the novel, he is called on to witness the defiance of death enacted by a mathematics professor stricken by cancer, who refuses, literally, to lie down: 'c'est mon tour de crever mais je n'accepte pas .... Faut pas se faire complice!... Moi, je ne meurs pas, on me tue....' (Col pp 23-24). He also listens to Cloots's ideas for an allegorical 'récit' which might stir people out of their resigned acceptance of the human condition (the dying professor is an exemplary exception to the rule), and challenge their readiness to live in ignorance:

On sait qu'on ne sait rien, mais on s'accommode.... Je veux dire que le peu que l'on sait, ça nous suffit .... notre pensée devrait se rapporter à ce fondement-là, à ce fait humiliant qu'on ne sait rien, que personne ne sait rien, qu'on ne peut rien savoir, que les bribes infimes de nos connaissances sont arrachées de force après des milliers d'années d'efforts .... On devrait vivre dans une colère constante.... (Col p 33)

Cloots's pessimistic assessment of human knowledge and its slow rate of growth is, of course, a one-sided version of the theory that Vercors had advanced in 'La Sédition humaine' in 1949. Then, too, he had described the painful progress of Man's knowledge, which, he claimed, Nature has at every stage sought to limit:

Elle ne permet jamais une victoire permanente ... lui arrachons - nous une loi physique, elle dévoile bientôt une autre face d'elle-même qui contredit la première. Plus nous avançons dans une explication du monde, plus ces mystères se multiplient, plus ils apparaissent insondables ... (PMH p 33)

But 'La Sédition humaine' had been concerned to present man as quint-essentially a rebel, whose very humanity derived from his struggle for knowledge and understanding; and in keeping with this, Colères in due course offers a counter-balance to Cloots's lament - implicitly in Mirambeau's scientific work and achievement, explicitly in Dutouvet's declaration of faith in reason and the liberating power of education.

The narrative details of Cloots's projected allegory can be quickly summarized. Humanity is represented exclusively in the guise of concentration-camp internees, herded on to a crowded island and facing eventual extermination at the hands of beautiful 'Jungfrau' (sic). The latter act as 'Kapos', provide all the necessities of life, yet show intermittent cruelty and are permanently indifferent to suffering. The fact that some of the 'Jungfrau' are from time to time killed and eaten as meat by the internees confirms, if confirmation were needed, that their collective role in the allegory is to personify Nature<sup>26</sup>; but it is on the inevitable death which Nature

decrees for each internee that Cloots wishes mainly to focus attention.

Egmont is not enthusiastic about the symbolism of Cloots's story, which, it must be said, draws together into an uneasy amalgam some of Vercors's most familiar themes and images. The impression of 'déjà vu' is further reinforced, for any reader aware of Jean Bruller's pre-war illustrations, by the precise verbal reconstruction of the drawing 'Projets d'avenir'<sup>27</sup> which the author of Colères provides as a backdrop to Cloots's conversation with Egmont. It is doubtful, though, whether Vercors intended any of this episode as self-parody; for in Colères Cloots combines a serious representative role as philosophical rebel with a tragic personal destiny in narrative terms. Furthermore, a central idea in his thesis - that death is Nature's way of making room for those who succeed us, that human beings die because they procreate rather than procreate because they will die - does in fact make a deep impression on Egmont and helps to determine his subsequent actions<sup>28</sup>. To this extent, Cloots succeeds in his purpose (which was of course Vercors's own): that of disturbing settled ways of thinking by presenting reality 'sous un angle imprévu'. (Col p 42)

The biologist Mirambeau claims that his experiments bear out Cloots's theory. He has found that the cells of living tissue seem at a given point to obey chemical commands to stop proliferating, thus producing in due course the death, through ageing, of the animal or human organism to which they belong. Therefore human beings, genetically programmed to reproduce in order to replenish the species as it becomes depleted through disease or accident, seem similarly programmed to die in order to leave room for the newcomers. For Mirambeau, these life and death messages or commands, and the reasons for them, are understandable enough, and he duly evokes 'La Palice,' one of Vercors's

own favourite references<sup>29</sup>; but they strike Egmont with the force of a revelation, one which he formulates in the starkest terms: '....

l'espèce est (donc) contre l'individu .... la nature et elle sont pour la vieillesse et la mort....' (Col p 92)

Now whereas the account of some of Mirambeau's work was based on actual scientific investigations that Vercors had read of, the crucial discovery of a chemical agent issuing instructions to living cells was apparently the result of an intuition on the author's part. As he explained later in Questions sur la Vie à Messieurs les Biologistes (1973), this intuition was to be confirmed by discoveries made in the real world of science:

Il m'est ainsi arrivé pour ma part (et c'est une étrange sensation) de voir de miennes intuitions, émergées de la conscience en dehors - ou presque - de toute réflexion suivie, des intuitions somme toute quasiment poétiques, de les voir un beau jour ... bel et bien confirmées par la science expérimentale. L'A.R.N. messenger, par exemple! dont la récente découverte a été galuée en 1965 par le prix Nobel ... Or, c'est en 1953,<sup>30</sup> donc douze ans plus tôt ... qu'écrivant mon roman Colères et sans rien savoir, et pour cause, de ces recherches, j'imaginai un biologiste qui ... décèle puis établit au cours de ses expériences que cette répllication (de la cellule vivante), sa croissance, sa décroissance ou son arrêt ne peuvent avoir pour cause et pour régulation que certaines 'consignes' reçues par le truchement de quelque agent chimique, consignes déterminées et formées elles-mêmes en quelque profondeur mystérieuse de la vie. (QMB pp 19-20)

Vercors goes on to acknowledge that messenger R.N.A. is not in fact considered by scientists to transmit 'le message de vieillissement', but he maintains that further research might well in due course reveal the element responsible:

Or, si les moyens d'investigation dont disposent les chercheurs ont été assez fins pour déceler, identifier et décrire une structure aussi microscopique que l'A.R.N. messenger, pourquoi ne permettraient-ils pas de déceler et d'identifier (si bien sûr il existe) l'agent régulateur du vieillissement? (QMB p 27)

Certainly, it was on this hypothesis that Vercors established Mirambeau's striking 'discovery', which is of particular significance in narrative terms in the effect that it has upon Egmont. The latter now has a preoccupation, beyond generalized 'ennui', that he will pursue throughout the novel. The greatest area of ignorance for any human being would seem to be his own body, whose mysteries lie far beyond the scope of the individual consciousness that inhabits it. Vercors had already, in texts such as 'La Sédition humaine' and Les Yeux et la Lumière, intensified the traditional Cartesian dualism of mind and body into what he saw as a desperate struggle between consciousness and 'ce mystérieux sac de chair' (YL p 243); and now, as Egmont embarks on a sustained process of self-exploration, training his consciousness through a kind of self-induced trance to penetrate into the alien, or at worst, hostile, regions of his 'république cellulaire', he reports back to Olga, his mistress, in the language of a fascinated but wary traveller, alert to the threat of ambush and capture.

A particular impetus at the outset of his exploration had come to Egmont from a gangrenous foot-injury sustained in a fire at his woodland retreat. The vivid description of the fire itself (Col pp 110-14) owes much to the destruction of Vercors's own home, 'Le Moulin des Iles', near Coulommiers, in May 1953<sup>31</sup>; but one of the most significant details borrowed by the author from his real-life experience was the severe blistering of his feet sustained while treading bare-foot on smouldering timbers. For Vercors, as for Egmont, this had been due to a feverish attempt at rescuing prized possessions, which had, for a time, blotted out any awareness of pain. In the aftermath of the accident, Egmont discusses with Olga the questions of reflex response as opposed to full consciousness of stimuli, and of the relative roles of thalamus and

cortex in the perception of pain by animals and humans. He recalls Descartes's theory of 'les animaux-machines', which he had hitherto rejected out of hand; and although still uncertain as to how well-founded this or similar theories might be, he is now scandalized by some possible implications for human beings:

la douleur, nous la supposons universelle, nous la partageons avec tout ce qui vit. C'était le sort commun, il était supportable. Mais si rien ne souffrait dans l'univers, personne — sauf nous? (Col p 130)

Whence the possible deduction: 'douleur et conscience humaine, c'est tout un! La conscience, c'est la souffrance!' (Col p 131); and from this, recalling Cloots's (and the pre-war Bruller's) reflection that in an absurd creation one's main aspiration might be simply to 'souffrir le moins possible' (Col p 43), the further thought that a heavy ransom is demanded in return for the human capacity for knowledge and understanding:

Et donc il reste cette sauterelle que la connaissance... il faut la payer le prix de la souffrance physique. De la douleur consciente et ressentie ... si réellement c'est ça le tarif, eh bien, j'ai le droit de demander: est-ce que, la connaissance, elle vaut vraiment ce prix-là? (Col p 133)

What follows is Egmont's personal revolt against an unjust order of things - 'je ne me laisserai plus faire comme ça' (Col p 133) - and, in defiance of his own equation of suffering and awareness, his quest to gain new insights into, perhaps more control over, his own physical substance. His earlier melancholy is fully dispelled by 'l'avidité scientifique ... la passion de connaître', now sustained by 'la colère' (pp 166-7); while Olga's reiterated warnings: 'Défense de descendre ... si tu passes outre c'est de l'espionnage', (p 166) and their shared fears over the consequences of his transgression: 'une peur prométhéenne, au moment de dérober le feu défendu' (p 289), lend the venture a sustained

note of suspense.

Egmont reports his impressions to Olga in a series of dream images and metaphors:

un pays de collines inondé ... une eau tranquille, étalée sur les champs .... la troupe campée sur les collines .... énormément de barques ... les canots pleins d'une sorte de géomon .... une sorte de fourmillement (pp 198-9) ... les palétuviers ... des cavernes creusées dans la montagne... (p 228)

- which culminate in his observation that living cells resemble a continuous, complex ballet or pavane. But although he achieves a remarkable control over some physical processes, overcoming the gangrene in his foot and becoming physically rejuvenated, Egmont eventually incurs the anticipated penalty for his attempt to merge mind and matter: he lapses into a form of catatonic trance, from which he is only released, months later, by electro-convulsive therapy.

Through the different ways in which other characters respond to Egmont's enterprise, Vercors is able to explore a range of moral and philosophical attitudes. Olga, a doctor herself, asserts the claims of her profession in what at first seem the unmistakable terms of twentieth-century prometheanism:

Je crois que le simple fait d'être médecin, c'est déjà une révolte. Au fond, chaque geste d'un médecin est un blasphème ... quelle action pourrait mettre plus clairement en accusation l'ordre de l'univers que mes efforts pour le corriger? (Col p 208)

In fact, however, she differs from Egmont, and from all the other characters in the novel, in having a belief in God. It is God, she believes, who encourages Man to revolt, for this is the surest means of stimulating human progress; and her attitude to her lover's experiment accordingly combines concern for his personal welfare with understanding of his aspiration. The neurologist Burgeaud, on the

other hand, called in to administer the ECI treatment to Egmont, registers unequivocal disapproval of the latter's individualism. Earlier in the novel he has expressed, quite objectively, the view that purely individual intelligence is a myth, humanity's entire intellectual development over the centuries having been due to the interaction of individuals within society from one generation to another. Descartes and Einstein are thus merely the names of intellectual crossroads: 'l'homo sapiens est un produit social ... toute découverte individuelle reste un produit de l'espèce humaine tout entière' (Co) pp 177-8)<sup>32</sup> - a concept that would continue to be an essential element in Vercors's own theory of human development, as Ce que je crois, written some twenty years later, showed:

Je crois que la rébellion humaine n'est pas, n'a pas pu être un fait individuel: qu'elle fut et reste un fait collectif, autrement dit un fait social. Animal solitaire (comme le lion ou le tigre) je crois qu'aucun 'homo' jamais ne serait devenu 'sapiens' .... Il serait demeuré un primate quère plus évolué que le chimpanzé. Une intelligence ne peut se développer que par réverbération avec un grand nombre d'autres intelligences (et l'on sait ce que devient un enfant isolé: un enfant-loup) (CJC pp 85-6)

Neither this argument nor Burgeaud's exposition in Colères seems disposed to balance the many possible variants of heredity and environment; for the example of the feral child, which Burgeaud also discusses in some detail and which will be further evoked in connection with Sylva, might after all be countered by the example of a child prodigy emerging from an unpromising social background<sup>33</sup>. However, what is wholly firm and clear, on the part of Vercors and of Burgeaud, is the linking of man's intellectual progress with the notion of collective rebellion; and it is on these grounds that the neurologist, with the (intermittently) slurred manner of speech with

which the author invests him, attacks Egmont's exploit:

Toute science, même de la chasse, est répétition, vérification, et surtout communication au reste de la tribu. Egmont ne fait rien progresser, ce n'est encore qu'une illusion, puisqu'elle est incommunicable. (Col p 305)

In pointing to the danger inherent in Egmont's chosen course, indeed, Burgeaud employs one of the most familiar metaphors in Vercors's demonology:

... les fauves, c'est la cohésion des chasseurs qui les tient en respect, c'est parce que l'humanité avance derrière une ligne blindée sur laquelle ils se brisent les griffes: la raison humaine. Chasser seul à poitrine découverte n'est pas de l'héroïsme, pas même de l'audace, c'est de l'extravagance... (Col pp 305-6)

Nor does the view from 'la Tour de Babel, que la raison humaine construit obstinément à travers les orages, les tremblements de terre' (p 306) reveal Egmont's action as being other than selfish and insignificant: 'Tous ces petits ... qui par orgueil abandonnent le chantier, pour aller conclure dans leur coin leur petite tour individuelle, ce ne sont pas seulement des traîtres, ce sont des idiots.' (p 306)

Now while there is clearly an underlying identity of attitude between Burgeaud and the author<sup>34</sup>, Vercors does not allow this harshly dismissive verdict on Egmont to go unchallenged. The latter had after all been trying, by his own singular methods, to answer the question to which Vercors attached such fundamental importance; a question which for Egmont had assumed priority over any new involvement in politics:

Vous savez ce que c'est qu'un homme? Pas moi. Vous savez ce qui se passe dans l'homme? Pas moi. Seulement je le saurai. Quand je saurai ce qui s'y passe, je ne serai pas loin de savoir ce qu'il est. Quand je saurai ce qu'il est, vous me reparlerez de votre comité.... (Col p 245)

It is perhaps in recognition of this endeavour, however fruitless, that Olga is allowed to redress the balance on her lover's behalf,

and in doing so, to invoke a wholly Romantic image of revolt:

Ne faut-il pas de temps en temps ... qu'un de ces hommes lance contre ce ciel muet le cri de sa révolte, pour rappeler à tous ce qu'ils font là? Même si ce cri ne sert à rien d'autre? Même s'il s'en rompt les veines, comme Roland à Roncevaux? (Col p 307)

Dutouvet the archaeologist takes a more open-minded view than Burgeaud of Egmont's experiment; but like Burgeaud and Vercors, he unhesitatingly places the highest value in human reason, for which he offers a stirring advocacy in the face of his own daughter's incipient despair:

...L'honneur de l'homme, c'est ce courage sans récompense, c'est de vivre sans connaître encore sa raison de vivre.  
- Mais s'il n'y en avait pas, au bout du compte? s'écria la jeune fille. Pas de raison?  
- Il y a notre raison, qui raisonne justement pour la découvrir.  
(Col p 323)

If this is a formulation that strongly recalls Camus's memorable lines in Lettres à un ami allemand - 'Je continue à croire que ce monde n'a pas de sens supérieur. Mais je sais que quelque chose en lui a du sens et c'est l'homme, parce qu'il est le seul être à exiger d'en avoir...' <sup>35</sup> - there is, in addition, a firmly positivist element in Dutouvet's thinking. For him, human intellectual progress, albeit now only in its infancy, is firmly set on a curve of exponential growth:

Voilà, depuis cent cinquante ans, que le nombre des cervelles actives, que celui des échanges, se mettent à croître en progression géométrique, et avec eux, la connaissance. Qu'elle se met, la connaissance, à grimper presque à la verticale. A tendre vers l'infini ... (Col p 327)

In his analysis of Colères, R. D. Konstantinovic <sup>36</sup> refers to Dutouvet's trust in the enlightening power of human reason and his confidence that, once adequate education is available to all, the rapid parallel growth of 'la connaissance' and 'la sagesse' will usher in a new age of material satisfaction and leisure for all the world's inhabitants.

In so affirming, Konstantinovic suggests, Dutouvet is speaking on behalf of the author himself; but Vercors, in one of his footnotes to Konstantinovic's commentary, rejected this identification, although he did agree that Dutouvet was expressing ideas 'que l'auteur ne trouve pas chimériques'<sup>37</sup>. However, he himself discerned the possibility of an intensifying struggle for resources 'entre les nations nanties, généralement blanches, et les masses affamées, généralement de couleur', a struggle which threatened to disrupt 'les promesses du développement humain', and his caution was, of course, to prove well founded, as any present-day reader of Colères, measuring Dutouvet's optimism against such late twentieth-century realities as starvation in Africa and the Third World debt crisis, will be fully aware. At the same time, however, and despite such problems and impending crises, Vercors's faith in reason, and in its ability to assist human progress, has remained central to his philosophy, as Ce que je crois, written some years after the discussion in Konstantinovic's text, amply and explicitly demonstrates<sup>38</sup>.

As for his relationship with the characters of Colères, the fact is that Vercors seems, with certain obvious exceptions, to have distributed his ideas and values fairly widely among them. Thus the biologist Mirambeau is just as much a spokesman for the author as either Dutouvet or Burgeaud; and indeed, given his important role in the narrative and the positive manner in which he is presented, it can be argued that here is a character for whom the author felt a particular affinity. More than once in his writings, Vercors has referred to himself as 'un scientifique manqué'<sup>39</sup>, and his detailed account of Mirambeau's theories and experiments in Colères seems to represent a fictional fulfilment of that aspiration. Then, too,

there are more personal links, expressed in particular through the character's choice of language. Burgeaud had spoken of 'les Fauves' and 'la Tour de Babel', but even more of the author's favourite images and phrases seem to have found their way into Mirambeau's utterances. The reference to 'La Palice' has already been mentioned; and in the same discussion Mirambeau uses the phrase 'tout de suite les grossièretés' (Col p 89) as a jocular riposte to the charge of dabbling in metaphysics, exactly as Vercors was to use it himself in his debate with Professor Kahane<sup>40</sup>. Most telling of all, perhaps, is Mirambeau's reflection on, and later reference to, 'Charlot horloger' (Col pp 146, 336), a short silent-film characterization by Chaplin that has remained firmly in Vercors's mind as a warning against placing unquestioning faith in so-called 'experts' in any field<sup>41</sup>.

By the end of the novel, Mirambeau has drawn satisfaction both from his direct involvement in political struggle and from his intellectual researches; and this 'bilan' of his activities is one which Vercors, given his own interest in both fields, can only have found admirable. The industrial and class conflict into which Mirambeau is drawn is the only significant account in Vercors's work of a political struggle in the French socio-economic context, and indeed there is no evidence that the author has ever been personally involved in this particular kind of issue. But Mirambeau's venture, inspired by anger over immediate injustice, is also sustained by a rationalist's belief that human intelligence is a precious resource that must be developed at every level of society for the advancement of the species as a whole. As can be seen in the discussion of Dutouvet's ideas, Vercors was not afraid to embrace such nineteenth-century notions of progress, but, as Ce que je crois makes clear, he combined them with wholly twentieth-

century theories on the relationship between energy and matter in order to redefine what he saw as the intellectual's sacred duty: that of fostering and safeguarding 'les valeurs de néguentropie essentielles à l'avancement des connaissances' (CJC p 120)<sup>42</sup>. For Mirambeau, this mission amounts to an effort to free the industrial workers - 'ces hommes réduits à l'état de machines' (Col p 191) - from some of the burden of daily toil and economic pressure, so that they can more fully develop their brains and imagination. Failure to achieve this will be to perpetuate humanity's loss, a loss which Mirambeau deplores in apparent echo of another humanist whom Vercors held in particular esteem - Saint-Exupéry: 'Quelle perte, nom de Dieu'. Combien de petites Mozart...' (Col p 190)<sup>43</sup>.

Having duly fought the good fight on the workers' behalf, Mirambeau is rewarded at the end of the novel by a general sense of well-being and fulfilment:

Il se sentait profondément heureux. Il lui semblait que l'herbe ensoleillée, la fraîcheur de l'étang, le chant alterné des fleurs, que l'haleine grisante et poivrée de la brise à travers les aiguilles du pin ... que cette fête sereine autour de lui commençait à gagner de proche en proche vers l'horizon morose, où dormait dans une chaleur lourde le quartier populaire. Il respirait, mêlé à cette senteur lentement enivrante, un parfum grandissant de victoire. (Col pp 350-1 [end])

The last word of the novel thus sums up the positive conclusions to which most of the strands - narrative, political and philosophical - have ultimately been leading. Egmont, to be sure, cannot claim victory in his personal quest of discovery, for, as Burgeaud had warned, he draws no lasting knowledge from his experience. He too, however, strikes a positive note at the end. He has left behind a kind of paradise, receding though still dimly perceptible to him on his ECT-induced return to consciousness; but there has been

a consolation - reconciliation with life in real terms and a renewal of contact with humanity. Just as another doctor, Rieux, emerges at the end of La Peste from a very different form of confinement to witness, and draw comfort from, the renewed happiness of 'ceux qui se suffisent de l'homme et de son pauvre et terrible amour'<sup>44</sup>, so Egmont's spirits had been raised by his first, simple contact with a human being - the plain but smiling face of an old nurse:

... Et elle m'a souri. Et nous nous regardions. Et Dieu sait que la pauvre femme n'est pas belle; mais elle souriait, et elle voyait que je la voyais. Tu comprends? Je sortais du tunnel et un être humain m'attendait, et voyait que je le voyais. Ah, c'était magnifique! (Col p 349).

Although in strictly chronological terms Sylva (1961) was not Vercors's next novel after Colères, the philosophical strands that connect the two works, and which also link them with Les Animaux dénaturés, suggest that they can most appropriately be discussed in unbroken sequence. Among the first critics to comment on the relationship was Pierre Daix, in a long interview with Vercors published in Les Lettres françaises, soon after the appearance of Sylva<sup>45</sup>. Vercors readily agreed that his latest novel was 'un prolongement' of Colères and of Les Animaux dénaturés: '...c'est un roman de la même famille'. Indeed, he himself was prepared to go further and claim that it was connected at a fundamental level with all his other works of fiction: 'Le problème est toujours le même: la nature de l'homme. Et à mes yeux ... Sylva reste dans la ligne du Silence de la Mer, de la Marche à l'Etoile et du reste'; although this claim, however valid in the broadest terms, seems to neglect the fact that the author's conscious and deliberate attempt to define 'la nature de l'homme' had informed his writing only from the late 1940's onwards.

As for the element of fantasy which plays so prominent a part in Sylva (the sudden metamorphosis of a fox into a young woman within the first few pages of the novel), this too had a serious philosophical purpose as far as the author was concerned:

..... par le réel ou par le fantastique, je cherche pareillement à créer une rupture: une rupture dans des structures mentales qui sont... solidement implantées chez le lecteur et à tenter d'obtenir de sa part une nouvelle vue des choses...

The aim was, as always, to stir his readers to think afresh about the human condition and about the essence of humanity; hence the recourse to 'ces méthodes de "choc" un peu brutales si l'on veut, et même "fantastiques" quand il le faut'. After the initial surprise, however, the novel is wholly devoted to exploring in rational and realistic terms the implications of the situation thus conjured up. Just as Templemore had had to grapple with the ethical problems surrounding the 'tropolis' and Egmont had become increasingly absorbed in his unique challenge to Nature, so Richwick, the narrator in Sylva, confronts the practical and moral complications of his unlooked-for guardianship of a beautiful girl with vulpine habits and mentality.

The basic idea for Sylva was not Vercors's own, as he himself acknowledged both in the interview with Daix and, indirectly, in the opening pages of the novel itself, where Richwick reads David Garnett's 1922 story Lady into Fox. Vercors of course reverses the transformation, but he names his heroine in honour of the unfortunate Sylvia Tebrick of the original story. Garnett's whimsical and relatively brief novel seems to have little of Vercors's seriousness of intention or intricacy of development, but it did suggest an appropriate setting - England in the early 1920's - which Vercors was glad to adopt, not only for the reasons referred to previously, but also because, as he told Daix, the English countryside 'riche en fantômes, en événements irréels,'

(and, of course, with its strong hunting associations), lent itself particularly well to the story's subject-matter. Vercors goes to some lengths to present the Someraet background realistically, and although the view we have of the small cast of supporting characters is coloured by Richwick's strongly subjective attitudes, there is also basic realism in the characterization<sup>46</sup>. Such factors counterbalance the initial fantasy and help to ensure that the peculiar philosophical and moral issues of the story are firmly linked to recognizable human experience.

The basic care for, and training of, Sylva are described in detail, with every subtle nuance of the relationship between Richwick and his protégée being explored. Sylva's slow early development and her progression from purely animal reactions and conditioned responses to the dawning of intellectual enquiry are carefully plotted. The attraction for Vercors of Garnett's formula in reverse can be readily understood: once again he could focus on the demarcation-line between human beings and animals, and could provide a fictional representation, through the lives of engaging individual characters, of the theory of human development and rebellion that he had expounded in non-fictional terms in 'La Sédition humaine'. Indeed, Sylva's story is that of thousands of years of human experience encapsulated within a period of months. First, the slow evolution towards an individual consciousness of existence and of separateness from the rest of the living world. Then the terror flowing from the realization of human vulnerability, mortality and ignorance. And finally the human estate, which Sylva duly inherits upon her full accession to the 'schismatic' species:

Or ma petite renarde n'avait-elle pas franchi le pas après lequel il n'est pas de retour, n'était-elle pas tout entière passée aux schismatiques? ... Elle était désormais humaine jusqu'au fond de l'âme. (*Sylva* p 270)

One of the original reviewers of the novel, Robert André, duly likened Sylva's story to 'l'odyssée humaine'; but at the same time, as he also pointed out, her experience could be compared with every individual's progress through infancy:

Avec lenteur, des rechutes dont Vercors suit les vicissitudes avec beaucoup d'art, Sylva opère une métamorphose seconde, et avec elle nous revivons les expériences oubliées de notre première enfance. 47

The first view in a mirror, for example, is a crucial, if baffling experience, which Vercors has rightly highlighted: 'Ni l'animal ni le nourrisson ne assisissent le sens du reflet...'<sup>48</sup>, although once this discovery of a separate personal identity is assimilated (for Sylva a deeply disturbing process, as Chapter 20 of the novel relates), the growth to full self-awareness can begin.

Beyond this threshold, too, the exercise of human reason brings more and more areas of experience within the scope of understanding and control - even though the great ontological mysteries remain intact. Sylva's new intellectual curiosity impels her on a quest for knowledge which the books and accumulated wisdom of Richwick and her nurse can only minimally supply; and her impatience at the limitations of human understanding, echoing that of Cloots and Egmont, enables the narrator to draw one of the key philosophical lessons from the whole experience:

...cette surprise de Sylva, cette colère, n'était-ce pas le fondement de tout - de tout ce qui fait la noblesse de l'esprit humain? Mais l'homme s'est égaré parmi les arbres des questions innombrables, il a perdu de vue la forêt de l'interrogation qui les englobe toutes: pourquoi, à quelles fins, notre cerveau a-t-il été créé si achevé qu'il est capable de tout comprendre, mais si infirme qu'il ne sait rien - ni ce qu'il est lui-même, ni le corps qu'il dirige, ni cet univers dont ils sortent? Et parce que ma renarde avait, elle, une cervelle toute neuve, qui n'avait pas eu depuis l'enfance le temps de s'encombrer d'arbres, voici qu'elle s'était d'emblée heurtée à la forêt de ce "pourquoi"...

(Sylva p 273)

While Sylva is thus set on an ascending curve towards human awareness and dignity, Dorothy, her rival for Richwick's love, follows a precisely opposite trajectory. A certain symmetry in the plot gradually emerges as evidence of Dorothy's decline into drug-addiction and debauchery counterpoints Sylva's progress. Richwick's moral dilemma is succinctly expressed when he takes stock after a particularly dramatic confrontation with Dorothy: 'Je me vis enfin comme j'étais: pris en fourchette, comme on dit, entre Sylva et Dorothy, entre une bête dont je voulais faire une femme, et une femme qui voulait redevenir une bête'. (*Sylva* p 207). The antithesis here of 'bête' and 'femme' (rather than 'homme') is in fact peculiarly apposite in the light of the confrontation just referred to. While Vercois undoubtedly intended Dorothy's falling-off to represent mankind's ever-possible 'bestialization' in any of its diverse potential forms, she herself initially expresses a narrower (and wholly non-feminist) view of the pressures that have defeated her:

Est-ce que nous demandions quelque chose? Nous étions des femmes hereuses. Qu'avions-nous à faire d'une cervelle? L'esprit ne sert à rien. Sinon à pourrir le plaisir ... De quoi avions-nous besoin? D'être protégées, réchauffées, de jouir et d'enfanter. Mais non! Il fallait aussi, n'est-ce pas, que nous pensions! ... On ne me fera plus agenouiller pour me frapper le front contre la dalle devant l'absurdité du monde. C'est votre affaire à vous, votre crâne est épais, il est solide - et vous aviez la violence de vous révolter, mais nous, pauvres femmes au crâne mince? .... (*Sylva* p 203)

Unable, therefore, to overcome her despair at the absurdity of the human situation, deeply distrustful of all human attachments, Dorothy surrenders her remaining freedom of choice to sink into total depravity. The contrast with Sylva is again unambiguously stated in Richwick's record:

Sylva s'extrait douloureusement de l'inconscience bestiale tandis que Dorothy retourne lâchement s'y enfouir, s'y dissoudre, s'y oublier ... la qualité d'une âme ne se mesure pas à ce qu'elle est mais à ce qu'elle devient. (*Sylva* p 245)

Richwick's loyalty towards and struggle to help Dorothy, his involvement in her orgiastic indulgences, and his eventual breaking free from an association that threatens his own destruction, all lend further life to the central male character and increased fictional interest to the allegorical core of the novel. His relationship with Sylva has already been characterized by sexual desire and jealousy, and the parallels with Shaw's Professor Higgins or with Cide's Pastor in La Symphonie Pastorale can be extended to include his scornful but determined attempts to repulse a younger rival. In fact, Richwick's whole experience in the course of the novel becomes, like Sylva's, a learning process. Shaken out of his phlegmatic and conservative attitudes, he gains new insights into himself and into some of the fundamental laws of human development. It is through Richwick's experience, indeed, that we are able to assess what D.B.D. Asker, in an interesting discussion of the novel, refers to as 'the moral implications of the metamorphosis, whereby the latent tendencies and weaknesses of human characters are exposed and in part remedied'<sup>49</sup>. However, in attributing Richwick's moral development solely to the understanding he gains through Sylva, and in claiming that 'this humanizing keeps exact pace with Sylva's progress in leaving behind her former animal nature'<sup>50</sup>, Asker leaves out of account Dorothy's contribution to the narrator's evolution. Indeed, his essay does not mention Dorothy at all, and although one could argue that the seeds of this character's degeneration are already sown before Sylva's advent, or that her downfall is pathologically self-contained, there can be no doubt that her exemplary decline does help Richwick to crystallise his understanding of the moral challenges facing humanity.

The publication of Sylva, like that of Les Animaux dénaturés and perhaps to a lesser degree Colères, did not pass without creating some of the intellectual echoes that the author had been hoping for. Two notable products of the discussion that the novel helped to provoke were a debate by correspondence, Les Chemins de l'Être by Vercors and Paul Miraki<sup>51</sup>, published in 1965, and Vercors's Questions sur la Vie à Messieurs les Biologistes, published in 1973. In the first volume, Vercors's correspondent argued from the viewpoint of a Christian believer, while in the second debate the author's main adversary was the eminent biologist and president of the 'Union Rationaliste', Ernest Kahane<sup>52</sup>. Although these books include areas of philosophical debate that go beyond the scope of the present chapter, some discussion of Sylva lies at or near the beginning of each of them.

One issue raised by Miraki, for example, is that of the feral child. Experience had proved that after a certain number of years spent wholly with wild animals such a child could never properly learn human language, skills or knowledge. Vercors replies that he himself had made this point in Colères; and that it was for this very reason that he had chosen the 'fox-into-lady' formula:

...à une entorse scientifique (qu'aurait été mon histoire s'il se fût agi d'un enfant-loup) j'ai préféré franchement un .... prodige-miracle. Sylva naît avec un cerveau d'adulte, mais aussi neuf que celui d'un nouveau-né. Tout peut donc s'y inscrire... (CE p 18)

Above all, however, it was Sylva's expression of revolt at humanity's ignorance of the fundamental why's and wherefore's of existence that drew both the believer Miraki's and the rationalist Kahane's fire. Vercors himself, in Questions sur la Vie à Messieurs les Biologistes, describes their reaction to Sylva's naive questioning of Richwick: 'Pourquoi qu'on sait pas? C'est exprès? On nous empêche?' (Sylva p 272)

It was this latter use of the pronoun 'on' which had attracted such critical attention:

Ce 'on', en l'écrivant, je ne me doutais pas des effets ni des rebondissements qu'un mot si bref allait entraîner pour moi. D'abord une polémique avec un des mes amis catholique et croyant, Paul Misraki, qui m'attaquait ironiquement, moi le farouche incroyant, sur ce 'On' qui, disait-il, 'fleurerait drôlement la métaphysique' ... (QMB pp 63-64)

In Les Chemins de l'Etre, Vercors had defended his use of the pronoun by pointing to his heroine's relative lack of sophistication:

'On' est la manière de s'exprimer de Sylva (au stade où elle en est), non de l'auteur. Mon 'leitmotiv' à moi n'est pas de me plaindre d'une Volonté anthropomorphe, hostile ou brimatoire: c'est d'attirer l'attention sur le fait que l'ignorance est le fondement du comportement humain, en tant que l'homme ne l'accepte pas, se rebelle et poursuit la connaissance ... (CE pp 16-17)

But Kahane had not, it seems, been satisfied by this justification, and it is in answer to his critique that Vercors offers a fuller analysis of Sylva's mentality. The use of 'on' by her could indeed be deemed metaphysical, considering the stage of civilisation that she had attained at the moment of uttering the phrase. Her attitude could be assimilated to that of Cro-Magnon man: 'Or, à ce stade - et pour encore quelque vingt mille ans - qu'est-ce qui règne sur toute chose, ou plutôt est encore la réponse à toute chose inexplicable et effrayante, sinon ce 'On' métaphysique?' (QMB p 66). It is at an equivalent stage in Sylva's development, some time after she had become aware of her own individual existence, that the anxious 'on' had been uttered. And thus, Vercors claims, while he had used a due measure of poetic licence, 'mes raccourcis ont bien respecté les étapes successives ... la longue maturation de l'animal-homme'. (QMB p 68)

In Sylva's outlook, therefore, as consequence and sequel to the first bewildered questioning of experience, there had developed 'l'esprit religieux' (a stage reached by our ancestors long before the development of fully elaborate and established religions); and it is in these terms that we can establish the final link between this novel and Les Animaux dénaturés, where the primitive religious sense of the 'tropis' had been attested, albeit minimally, by their rudimentary smoking of meat. The words of Judge Draper in the earlier novel offer us as effective a summing-up as any of the distinction between animals and men that the author was so concerned to define:

.... l'esprit de l'homme, arraché, isolé de la Nature, comment ne serait-il pas .... plongé dans la nuit et dans l'épouvante?  
.... Comment n'inventerait-il pas aussitôt des mythes: des dieux ou des esprits en réponse à cette ignorance, des fétiches et des gris-gris en réponse à cette impuissance? N'est-ce pas l'absence même, chez l'animal, de ces inventions aberrantes qui nous prouve l'absence aussi de ces interrogations terrifiées? ...  
(AD p 323).

NOTES ON CHAPTER THREE

1. René Fallet, 'Les Animaux malades de la peste', Le Canard Enchaîné, Paris, 30/4/52, p 4.

It is interesting to note, and consistent with the attitude taken here by René Fallet, that Vercors was subsequently attacked by Le Canard Enchaîné when in 1957 he made a public protest over the issue of torture in Algeria. This episode is referred to at the end of Chapter Four and in Chapter Five of this thesis. Les Lettres françaises also commented on the change of tone apparent in Les Animaux dénaturés compared with Vercors's previous writings. In the issue of 2-8/5/52 it printed an extract from the novel with the following introductory comment (p 1):

Les 'bonnes feuilles' que nous avons le plaisir de publier sont extraites du nouveau roman de Vercors....Ce sont celles qu'il a lues lors de sa causerie à l'U.F.U. au milieu des rires de l'assistance. Elles sont, en effet, d'un ton sans doute imprévu pour les lecteurs de Vercors ...

2. The debate with Francis Benoit was published as 'Dialogue sur l'Idée de Rébellion' in Plus ou moins Homme, pp 55-69. The same format - that of a philosophical debate conducted by correspondence, then published by mutual agreement - will be seen again in Les Chemins de l'Être and Questions sur la Vie à Messieurs les Biologistes, both referred to later in the present Chapter.
3. Or, as Vercors told his audience, as reported in the article in Les Lettres françaises referred to above:

... ce roman est une tentative pour faire admettre, à travers une trame amusante, une nécessité ... impérieuse et grave, mais que personne ne semble pressé de reconnaître malgré l'urgence ; celle de s'entendre enfin sur une définition universelle de la personne humaine, sans laquelle il n'est pas de 'dialogue' possible. (Les Lettres françaises, 2 - 8/5/52, p 1)

4. See, for example, Pierre Brodin, Présences Contemporaines, Paris, Debresse, 1954, p 330: 'On a prononcé, à propos des Animaux dénaturés, le nom de Huxley et, remontant plus loin, celui de Voltaire. L'ouvrage, en effet, nous rappelle un peu Brave New World et Candide.' However, Brodin goes on to assert that Vercors's 'aimable satire' owes nothing to such illustrious predecessors - it is a success in its own right. Vercors himself, in an interview with Pierre Daix published in Les Lettres françaises of 6 - 12/4/61, in which both Les Animaux dénaturés and Sylvia were discussed, disagreed that these stories were either fantasies or 'contes philosophiques': he preferred to stress their underlying psychological realism. The interview will be further discussed later in the present Chapter.

5. Zoo was first performed at the 'Théâtre de l'Été' at Carcassone in July 1963. It has also been produced in Geneva (1963), at the T.N.P., Paris (1964), Brussels (1964-5) and was revived in Paris by Jean Mercure in 1975. It was favourably reviewed each time - by, for example, René Lacôte in Les Lettres françaises of 18/7/63, Jacques Lenormand in Le Figaro Littéraire of 27/2/64 and Robert Kaners in L'Express of 1 - 7/12/74. The comparable critical approval that was generally accorded to Les Animaux dénaturés in 1952 must have been particularly gratifying to Vercors himself, since he has indicated his own satisfaction with the work: '... parmi mes romans je préférerais que me survive Les Animaux dénaturés.' (Interview with Jean-Louis Ezine, Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 3 - 10/3/77, p 5) He also recalls Paul Eluard's praise for the novel, in his own tribute to Eluard in Portrait d'une Amitié pp 163-4.
6. The remoteness of the region and primitive nature of some of its inhabitants have recently been highlighted again in the account given by the German explorer Ernst Witte of his encounter with the Dani tribe in the highlands of New Guinea. This, one of the most inaccessible areas of the world, not fully plotted on maps, is the habitat of tribes like the Dani whose isolation from the modern world has remained complete until the present. Witte witnessed male and female initiation rites, a funeral at which a widow used a stone axe to cut off her fingers, and women suckling orphan pigs alongside their own babies. [Witte's account of the tribe was given in a talk on BBC Radio 4 on 24/8/85: 'An Encounter with the Stone Age'. Unfortunately the broadcast was not reproduced in The Listener at that time and no other textual version appears to be available.]
7. The reasons for Vercors's choice of English characters and background for the novel are discussed later in this Chapter, as well as in connection with Sylva (see note 45). As far as the expedition to New Guinea is concerned, Vercors may have been influenced by various literary and cinematic associations between pith-helmeted Englishmen and distant parts of the world: the stories of John Buchan, Rudyard Kipling, H. G. Wells and Rider Haggard, for example, and the films that derive from these and similar works.
8. Vercors himself provided a sketch for the first edition that quite faithfully reflects the description of the female 'tropolis' given in this quotation by Douglas Templemore.
9. Vercors's presentation of Dillighan was one of the criticisms made by Paul Misraki, a practising Catholic, as recorded in Les Chemins de l'Être (Vercors and Paul Misraki, Paris, Albin Michel, 1965: see also the discussion on Sylva later in this chapter). Against Misraki's charge that Dillighan's pronouncements were absurd, Vercors admitted that the priest was 'comme tous les autres personnages de roman ... quelque

peu caricatural.' But he also claimed that some of Dillighan's statements were not all that absurd, 'tant que le "véritable esprit de l'Eglise" ne serait point partagé par tous ses membres.' The author always tried, he claimed, to treat equally 'catholiques, bouddhistes, marxistes, etc... Je m'élève seulement.. contre la prétention de chacune de ces vérités fragmentaires de s'ériger comme unique et totale, et de s'imposer à toute l'espèce humaine.' (All of these quotations are from Les Chemins de l'Être, p. 8).

10. Such scepticism later seems confirmed when a British Cabinet Minister points out to the trial judge, in private, that the views of the British textile industry and His Majesty's government are very close on the matter:

C'est une heureuse coïncidence que ... que l'intérêt de notre grande industrie s'identifie avec ... avec la thèse du Ministère public. Thèse tout à fait humanitaire, n'est-ce pas? Tout à fait. (AD p 285)

But Vercors's irony towards Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy is only gently applied in this novel: he seems to see it as an inevitable part of a traditional way of life which has much to offer in other respects.

11. 'Julius Drexler' was presumably borrowed from the combined names of Julius Streicher and Anton Drexler, two of Hitler's earliest associates in the National Socialist movement.
12. It will be recalled that Vercors had briefly alluded in 'La Sédition humaine' to racial discrimination in South Africa. He saw it as one of the historical excesses - like those '...à Madagascar, à Oradour et à Auschwitz' (PMH p 53) - which concession to, rather than secession from, the power of Nature in Man can produce.
13. The few such echoes, apart from Drexler's name, are as follows: 'je me ferai l'effet d'un nazi qui fête Noël en famille et se réjouit des camps de concentration...' (AD p 87 - Dillighan expressing scruples over the tropic's possible damnation); and '.. ne voyons-nous pas souvent que ce qui est un crime pour les uns ne l'est pas pour leurs voisins ou leurs adversaires. Auxquels parfois il apparaît au contraire, ainsi qu'on l'a pu voir pour les Nazis, comme le devoir, sinon l'honneur?' (AD p 293) (the argument used by a government spokesman in the British House of Commons to urge the importance of finding a single definition of Man to which a common morality can apply).
14. Vercors's notion here recalls the observations of Claude Lévi-Strauss in Le Cru et le Cuit, (Mythologiques vol 1, 1964).

15. Robin McKie, 'Out of Africa - Men's route to rule the world', The Observer, London, 20/3/88, p 4. The words quoted are in fact those of Dr. C. Stringer, as reported in the article.
16. 'Les Castors de l'Amadeus' was first published in Les Lettres françaises, Paris 17/3/60, reproduced in Sept Sentiers du désert (1972), pp 225-237. Vercors had already referred to 'l'adresse ingénieuse of the 'castor-architecte' in Plus ou moins Homme, p 282, and he makes a similar brief reference in Les Animaux déaturés, p 90. In the short story, as in Plus ou moins Homme, his point is that despite beavers' remarkable efficiency as survivors and adapters, they lack the spark of rebellion which can lead men out of ignorance and resignation. Beavers accept and adapt, men refuse and make progress.
17. As evinced, indeed, in one of his most recent publications, Anne Boleyn, Paris, Perrin, 1985, in which he refers to 'la vigueur avec laquelle ce peuple s'identifiait à son île-forteresse' and to 'son sentiment de constituer ainsi une nation à part...' (AB p 12).
18. See Les Nouveaux Jours, pp 139-140, for an account of Vercors's distress over the failure of his first marriage and of his meeting with Rita Barisse.
19. You Shall Know Them was published by Little, Brown and Co., Boston. André Malraux, La Condition humaine, and Jules Romains, Verdun, had been pre-war winners of the 'Book of the Month Club' accolade. The New York Times critic's comment is quoted in the Club's publicity material for July 1953 announcing the award to Vercors's novel.
20. Claude Roy, 'Le Devoir et l'inquiétude', Libération, Paris, 4/7/56, p 2.
21. Vercors's choice of names for the characters in Colères is significant in several instances (see also notes 22, 23, 25). As far as 'Egmont' is concerned, he was presumably thinking of the soldier-statesman of that name executed in 1568 for leading a revolt in the Netherlands against Philip II of Spain. This was the hero of Goethe's tragedy Egmont, for which Beethoven's suite was composed in 1810. The name had, however, been given a more modern resonance by Aragon, who wrote a long article of protest against the imprisonment of André Stil entitled 'Les Egmont d'aujourd'hui s'appellent André Stil', published in Les Lettres françaises, 30/5 - 6/6/52, pp 1, 4.

Since the fictional character in Colères is something of a Romantic hero and has rebelled against the Communist Party, it may be the more traditional association of the name that the author had in mind. He was clearly familiar with Goethe's drama, since he quotes from it briefly in Plus ou moins Homme (p 170).

22. Closter Cloots is another rebel, and although more in revolt against the natural order than against any political one, he presumably owes his name to Anacharsis Cloota (1755-1794), a 'conventionnel' and one of the founders of 'le culte de la Raison'. This Prussian-born revolutionary receives honourable mention in Hugo's Les Misérables (Part V, Book 1, Chapter 5) for which Vercors, ever an admirer of Hugo, wrote a Preface in 1985 (For further details of this preface, see Chapter Six of this thesis).

Cloots is also mentioned in Camus's L'Homme révolté as the man who dreamed of revolution bringing about 'l'unité du genre humain' (Albert Camus, Essais, Paris, Gallimard, coll: 'Editions de la Pléiade', 1965, p 517), and it may have been this idealism that induced Vercors to borrow his name for the fictional character in Colères.

23. This choice of name may again be due to Vercors's familiarity with Les Misérables. Just as Anacharsis Cloots is evoked in connection with the 1832 Paris riot, so too are various of the great street-barricades that have always characterized revolution in the French capital. In describing in particular the St. Antoine barricade of 1848 (Les Misérables, Part V, Book 1, Chapter 1), Hugo likens it to an Ossa on the Pelion of all revolutions; and this reference in itself, perhaps, given the revolutionary ardour of the young militant in Vercors's novel, may indicate the origin of his name.
24. A full exploration of the purely political aspects of this novel, and of the political involvement of Mirabeau in particular, will be found in Chapter Six.
25. The surname 'Roux' may have been deliberately chosen by Vercors for its distinguished medical associations: it belonged to the third director of the Institut Pasteur in Paris and the discoverer of an anti-diphtheria serum.
26. Vercors is clearly trying here, through Cloots's allegory, to take account of the fact that Nature can be beautiful (like the 'Jungfrau'), and can provide Man with food. It is these beneficial aspects of Nature, as opposed to the destructive ones, which receive little attention in 'La Sédition humaine' whereas Les Animaux dénaturés contains a discussion between Judge Draper and the Lord Privy Seal in which the latter explicitly voices the unwillingness of many to accept the notion of a hostile Nature.
27. This drawing, one of the 160 published by Bruller in the series La Danse des Vivants between 1932 and 1938, is reproduced and commented on in R. D. Konstantinovic's study, pp 39 and 182. The drawing shows two bright-eyed, confident students talking animatedly in a café crowded with tired, disillusioned older faces. The actual phrase 'projets d'avenir' is used in the scene between Cloots and Egmont in Colères (also p 39).

28. This notion was earlier expressed in a formulation that has often been erroneously attributed to Goethe: 'Death is Nature's masterly way of having lots of life'. The author in fact was Georg Tobler (1757-1812), an acquaintance of Goethe, and the quotation in its full German form is:

"Ihr Schauspiel ist immer neu, weil sie immer neue  
Zuschauer schafft. Leben ist ihre schönste Erfindung,  
und der Tod ist ihr Kunstgriff, viel Leben zu haben."  
J. W. von Goethe, Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften I vol. 16,  
(Artemis-Gedenkausgabe) second ed., 1961-66, p 923.

29. Some of Vercors's other references to 'La Palice' (or 'La Palisse') are to be found in the following texts:-

La Puissance du Jour, p 357  
Ce que je crois, p 74  
Les Chemins de l'Être, p 23

30. There is a slight discrepancy in this date: according to a note at the end of Colères, the period of writing was from January 1954 to February 1956.

31. The fire at 'Le Moulin des Iles' is fully described in Les Nouveaux Jours, pp 220-4. It is also more briefly recounted in the Introduction to Les Divagations d'un Français en Chine (1956), pp 16-17.

32. Kenneth Clark held a rather more balanced view than this as far as the great figures of civilisation are concerned; but he, too, saw the influence of a whole society or cultural tradition in works of genius:

However irrational it may seem, I believe in genius. I believe that almost everything of value which has happened in the world has been due to individuals. Nevertheless, one can't help feeling that the supremely great figures in history - Dante, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Newton, Goethe - must be to some extent a kind of summation of their times. They are too large, too all-embracing, to have developed in isolation.  
Kenneth Clark, Civilisation, London, John Murray, 1969, pp 201-3

33. Vercors may not in fact entirely exclude the possibility of a poor environment producing unexpected talents, but he is quite clear about the stifling effect of such environment - see, for example, Mirabeau's or DuRoiwet's views on education, and the reference to 'Mozart assassiné.....' (note 43).

34. Burgeaud's views here, with Vercors's endorsement, clearly reflect the importance attached to unity of action in left-wing and communist orthodoxy, a theme that will be further explored in relation to the industrial situation in Colères in Chapter Six of this thesis. Among Vercors's contemporaries Roger Vailland was also putting this point of view forward in novels like Beau Masque and 325000 France.

35. Albert Camus, Lettres à un ami allemand, in Essais, Paris, Gallimard, coll: 'Editions de la Pléiade', 1965, p. 241.

36. Konstantinovic, pp 94-5.

37. Konstantinovic, p 94.

38. In addition to the central importance of such ideas in Ce que je crois, views akin to those of Dutouvet and Mirambeau are also reflected in Sens et non-sens de l'Histoire (1978):

Il n'est de progrès spécifiquement 'humain', d'autre façon possible de progresser dans l'humanisation, que là où il y a progrès de connaissance (de quoi d'ailleurs dépendent tous les succès techniques) que là aussi, nécessairement, où les formes sociales et les formes de vie rendent étudées, recherche et connaissance accessibles au plus grand nombre et en favorisent ainsi l'épanouissement. (p 160)

39. As, for example, in Ce que je crois, p 53. He similarly referred to himself as 'un scientifique raté' in the interview with Jean-Louis Ezine, Les Nouvelles Littéraires, Paris, 3 - 10/3/77, p 5. In Questions sur la vie à Messieurs les Biologistes, Vercors naturally presented himself as a lay interlocutor of the scientists, but his interest in the matters discussed, and the knowledge that enabled him to sustain a searching debate with Professor Kahane, are indicative in themselves. As will be seen in Chapter Six of this thesis, it is as a scientist that the hero of Le Périple goes during the late 1950's to Algeria, where he is tortured by a French officer.

40. In Questions sur la Vie à Messieurs les Biologistes.

41. Other texts in which Vercors refers to 'Charlot horloger' are as follows:-

Ce que je crois, p 118

" " " " " " p 204

P.P.C., p 263

Les Nouveaux Jours, p 258

Vercors's admiration for Chaplin as an actor as well as a man of principle made him accept with alacrity an invitation from 'Le Mouvement de la paix' to present their peace prize to Chaplin in 1954. The presentation is described in Les Nouveaux Jours pp 256-7. Sympathy with Chaplin's political difficulties in the United States undoubtedly played a part in Vercors's attitude. Chaplin is also mentioned briefly, as an 'acquaintance' of Hector Lebraz, in Le Tigre d'Anvers, p 134.

42. A related passage in Ce que je crois explains 'néguentropie' as follows:

.... si cette rébellion enfin est donc bien .... ce qui constitue spécifiquement la qualité d'homme, cette conviction doit, d'évidence, s'étendre de l'individu au groupe et à la vie sociale, celle-ci se présentant d'ailleurs d'emblée, dans ses efforts pour s'organiser, comme un élément majeur d'anti-entropie (d'entropie négative - de néguentropie). (p 85)

43. The similar reflection in Saint-Exupéry's work comes at the end of Terre des Hommes: 'C'est un peu, dans chacun de ces hommes, Mozart assassiné' (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Oeuvres, Paris, Gallimard, 'Editions de la Pléiade', 1959, p 261).

44. Albert Camus, La Peste, in Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles, Paris, Gallimard, coll: 'Editions de la Pléiade', 1962, p 1467.

45. Pierre Daix, 'Vercors et le Fantastique', Les Lettres françaises, Paris, 6 - 12/4/61, pp 1, 5. This interview refers to a number of Vercors's publications, including Les Animaux dénutrés and Sylva. All the quotations used are from page 5.

In the same issue of Les Lettres françaises (p 2) there is a favourable review of Sylva by André Wurmser which contains the following interesting personal assessment of the author:

Albert Richwick, un gentleman-farmer, gentiment anglais et foncièrement pareil à Vercors: il en a la chaleur humaine, la noblesse naturelle et le talent ... comme son suteur, il peut bien éprouver colère, rancune, jalousie, désir, il ne désobéit jamais aux impératifs de la raison.

46. However, Sylva's nurse, Mrs. Bumley, presumably owes her rather unusual name to Vercors's sense of humour. In Les Animaux dénutrés he had already inflicted the name 'Miss Merrybotham' on the nurse/attendant given charge of the female 'tropsi', Derry, when the latter is brought to England - and for his French readers' sake had suggested the following translation for this name: 'Mlle Guédairière' (AD p 163).

47. Robert André, 'Sylva, de Vercors', La Nouvelle Revue française, Paris, May 1961, p 929.
48. Ibid. p 930.
49. D. B. D. Asker, 'Vixens and Values: The Modern Metamorphosis of Garnett and Vercors', Canadian Review of Comparative Literature, June 1983, 182-191 (p 191).
50. Ibid. p 187.
51. Paul Misraki has composed the musical score for over a hundred films, and apart from two novels, has published:  
Pleidoyer pour l'extraordinaire (1970)  
L'Expérience de l'après-vie, (1974), and  
Les Plaisirs de l'irrationnel (1976)
52. Professor Ernest Kahane was Professor of Biochemistry at the University of Montpellier, Secretary-General, then Hon. president of the 'Union Rationaliste'. He contributed to the 'Dictionnaire rationaliste' and wrote on Pasteur, Claude Bernard and Teilhard de Chardin.

CHAPTER FOUR: IDEALIST AND FELLOW-TRAVELLER

Thus the Vercors who emerged as a literary celebrity at the end of the Second World War was to be much concerned over the following years with his attempt to define in fictional and non-fictional terms the moral parameters of human identity. At the same time, however, and like so many contemporary figures in French intellectual life, he was to become increasingly involved in the political and ideological debates of the post-war period, pronouncing from a markedly left-wing standpoint on a whole range of dominant issues: France's relationship with the resurgent Germany, Cold War allegiances, the role of the Communist Party in domestic politics, and colonialism in Indochina and North Africa. A close connection between political and moral aspirations was a common enough premise in post-Liberation France, and indeed was characteristic, as Jean Touchard observes<sup>1</sup>, of the ideological legacy of the Resistance. In Vercors's case, though, we find the relationship between the two areas of commitment continuing to be asserted with perhaps more than usual emphasis and frequency: as he never hesitated to affirm, his political judgements were strongly influenced by the moral convictions he had acquired through War and Occupation, and which subsequent experience and reflection were helping him to refine. This is not, of course, to say that moral and political judgements could always easily be reconciled - or that the conclusions he drew were always to prove well-founded.

The very content and composition of some of the author's key non-fictional publications suffice to indicate how closely, and how overtly, his moral and political preoccupations were linked. In Plus ou moins Homme (1950), for example, the opening essay, 'La Sédition humaine', on Man's intellectual and moral evolution, is followed by

two essays whose titles, under the general heading of 'Problèmes éthiques', speak for themselves: 'La Fin et les moyens' (first published in 1946) and 'La Morale et l'action' (1947). Another essay in the volume, 'Politique borgne et politique morale' (1945), first evokes 'la passion de la vérité et de la justice' that has lived in men's hearts for almost the past two hundred years, then argues that the only valid political attitude will be one that embraces this idealism together with a realistic appraisal of worldly interests - in other words, 'la seule politique réaliste, c'est la politique morale' (PMH p 340). And the same themes are pursued in the 'polémique' of 1947 with various communist luminaries, where Vercors, while expressing sympathy for the Communists' aims and aspirations, was as concerned as ever to define 'les critères moraux valables dans toutes les sociétés et toutes les circonstances' (PMH p 140), as opposed to the political realism and concomitant moral relativism propounded, for example, by Victor Leduc:

... les grandes valeurs morales qu'il plaît à Vercors de tenir pour absolues, immuables et éternelles --- notre analyse de l'histoire nous conduit à les penser relatives à l'évolution des sociétés ... (PMH p 148)

Vercors was not, of course, the only 'progressive' left-wing writer to express concern in the early post-war years over communist pragmatism and readiness to adapt truth to political necessity, and for succinct recapitulation of a debate to which several thousand words were originally devoted we can turn once more to Les Nouveaux Jours:

Le numéro spécial des Chroniques de Minuit, où Jean Cassou, Louis Martin-Chauffier, Georges Friedmann, Claude Aveline, André Chamson et moi-même mettons en garde nos amis communistes contre un usage trop jésuitique 'de la fin et des moyens', fera grand bruit et provoquera, dans la presse du parti, de violentes polémiques de Pierre Hervé, Victor Leduc, Essanova et Roger Garaudy (tous défrôqués depuis). (NJ p 100)

His position on the mandarins' platform can be further defined by

reference once again to the two most eminent contemporaries, Sartre and Camus. Sartre's unsuccessful attempts to define an existentialist morality of action led in the end to as decisive a rejection by him of the sort of Kantian criteria<sup>2</sup> that Vercors was anxious to propound as of the ethical values which Camus derived from his notion of 'revolt'. Vercors's own 1946 formulation on 'ends and means' in the following quotation seems initially to offer a hint of the political realism to which Sartre's Hoederer or the eventually 'converted' Goetz found it necessary to subscribe; yet it ends with a reference to 'limits' which suggests that the writer's ethical position is really much closer to that of Camus:

La fin et les moyens: la carte et la terre. Demander que les moyens politiques soient purs comme la fin, c'est demander au terrassier de se garder des mains d'aristocrate. Prétention absurde, et, de plus, illusion dangereuse. Cela donc, nous le savons. La question qui demeure est celle-ci: où se trouve la limite que nous pouvons tolérer? (PMH p 85)

The fact is that in general terms, and whatever the theoretical differences he chose to highlight between 'la rébellion' and 'la révolte', Vercors's moral outlook had more in common with Camus's than with that of Sartre; yet his political sympathy, if not active participation, was offered over many years to the communist cause, and here it is the analogy with Sartre that is stronger<sup>3</sup>. And if these comparisons in themselves imply a certain tension between moral conviction and political commitment, that is precisely the way in which Vercors's relationship with the Communists and his general political evolution through the 1940s and 1950s can best be characterised. The parenthesis in the quotation from Les Nouveaux Jours above may indicate some scepticism in his later attitude towards the Communist Party; but this only represents the latter stage of a

long and intricate relationship with is documented in successive phases of the author's work.

The body of non-fictional material on which an analysis of Vercors's political commitment can be based is a very substantial one. The most direct evidence comes from the volumes of collected essays, articles and correspondence in which his immediate response to particular issues is juxtaposed with discussion of moral and philosophical premises: Plus ou moins Homme, Les Pas dans le Sable (1954) and P.P.C. (Pour Prendre Congé) (1957). A rather more distanced view of his involvement, setting it in the wider context of contemporary events, can be obtained from the volumes of history/autobiography, Les Occasions perdues and Les Nouveaux Jours; while a historical perspective, albeit on a different scale, is also offered in Sens et non-sens de l'Histoire (1978), a broad survey of human progress which concludes with the author's personal observations on present and future political developments. (These in turn summarize some of Vercors's comments in Ce que je crois (1975).) In addition to these full-length texts, reference can be made to a number of articles, prefaces and introductions by Vercors which have all, in one respect or another, reflected his main political orientations; and finally the appendices at the end of this study include his response to certain specific questions which were submitted to him during the preparation of the present thesis.

The author's own account needs, however, to be balanced by that of others, and for this purpose we can refer to contemporary newspaper articles and reviews, as well as to various published studies of the period. Vercors's political positions are briefly discussed in two works by David Caute: Communism and the French Intellectuals 1914-1960

(1964) and The Fellow-Travelers (1973), and are also traced in M. Lottman's The Left Bank (1982); although it must be said that the latter study, while interesting in the way it situates Vercors in the Parisian intellectual gallery of the post-war years, seems in the relevant chapters to have drawn mainly on interviews with Vercors himself and thus adopts a less critical stance than, for example, Caute's second book. Post-war commitment in general is analysed in M.-A. Burnier's Les Existentialistes et la politique (1966) as well as in Lottman's and Caute's studies; and finally some short references to Vercors's positions are to be found in general historical studies such as J-P Rioux's La France de la Quatrième République (1980, 1983) or, on a more specific issue, in L'Affaire Kravchenko by Guillaume Malaurie (1982).

Like Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, but unlike Camus or Malraux, Vercors did not give any active demonstration of left-wing sympathies before the War. A sense of life's absurdity, as recorded in Portrait d'une Amitié, La Bataille du Silence and Les Occasions perdues, seems to have persuaded him that any personal participation in politics was at worst futile, at best inappropriate; and by his own account, it was these negative criteria that largely determined his pre-war political stance. Admittedly the dynamic example of Diego Brosset had led the young artist to question 'la valeur morale et philosophique de cette délectation morose où je me complaisais' (PA p 57), and had helped him to take a more positive view of life's offerings: '... à me permettre enfin de m'abandonner sans mauvaise conscience à l'amour des choses - du ciel, de la mer, des arbres, des hommes, de leur oeuvres ....' (PA p 57). Yet his consciousness of ultimate futility

would persist throughout the 1930s, despite an apparently busy and fulfilling life and despite further inspiring friendships, such as those, for example, with Jules Romains and Jean-Richard Bloch, whose willingness to intervene in the public arena he respected but felt unable to emulate. He was aware of basic contradictions in his attitude at this time with regard to the dominant issue of war or peace<sup>4</sup>; and the more general political connotations of his attitude are similarly discussed, in a reference to the year 1932, near the beginning of Les Occasions perdues:

... Si malgré moi je m'intéresse quand même à la politique - parfois même me passionne pour elle, comme du temps de Briand - mon scepticisme m'a toujours retenu d'aller aux urnes. Il y aura en mai des élections législatives. Elles se feront donc sans moi ... (OP pp 21-22).

That Bruller's interest in politics overrode his reluctance to vote as the decade went on is duly revealed in the remainder of Les Occasions perdues, thus confirming the version of the earlier text, La Bataille du Silence, which depicts him as

un dessinateur campagnard ... craignant le monde et son théâtre, et qui, s'il remplissait son devoir d'électeur dans une perspective de progrès social, et même assistait aux meetings, aux manifestations, n'eût jamais cru possible ni souhaitable d'y intervenir de façon active... (BS p 15)

And so an interest in politics, albeit restricted for many years by various degrees of scepticism, caution and mere passivity, clearly formed part of the author's outlook in the pre-war period. As for his political leanings, these too emerge quite explicitly from his account of the 1930s. The outcome of the 1932 election, for instance, prompts the following reflections:

Les Socialistes gagnent aussi des sièges, toutefois beaucoup moins que les Radicaux et, quant aux Communistes, il n'en reste pratiquement rien: une dizaine de sièges. Cette faiblesse m'attire. Pour deux raisons. D'abord parce que ma sympathie, comme celle des Anglais, va volontiers aux 'underdogs', aux chiens battus; puis parce que les Socialistes, qui devraient être ma vraie famille, sont trop souvent opportunistes ... D'autres que moi ont dû penser de même: Aragon, Nizan, Sadoul, mais, tandis que ceux-là vont jusqu'au bout de leur pensée et prennent au parti leur carte de militant, il n'en est pas question pour moi. Par scepticisme, bien entendu, mais aussi - mais surtout? - parce que, connaissant les méthodes du parti, je sais que, si j'y entre, un jour j'en sortirai. (QP p 22)

Since the author admits that he did not keep a diary at this time, it is reasonable to wonder whether the latter part of this rationalisation, published fifty years after the events in question, does not owe something to hindsight. The quotation is also of interest, however, in the attitude it reveals toward the Socialists in the 'Assemblée Nationale'. With certain honoured exceptions - Léon Blum, Pierre Mendès France<sup>5</sup> and above all Daniel Mayer - Vercors has often been highly critical in commenting on the politicians of the non-Communist Left, and seems to have held them at least partly responsible, through default, for his own political evolution<sup>6</sup>.

An even stronger thread that runs through Les Occasions perdues is, however, the author's distrust of right-wing politicians and of all those whom he saw as the forces of reaction. Thus Pierre de Leasure's difficulties over the periodical Paru are offered as an example of the covert manoeuvrings of 'maurassian' elements (QP pp 47-48); while more open manifestations of incipient fascism are shown to be emerging in the Paris street fighting of February 1934. Indeed, it seems to have been as much a concern for the survival of the Republic as his still somewhat vague left-wing opinions that now drew Bruller's interest towards the embryonic 'Front Commun' of Socialists and

Communists; although again he felt unable to join other recruits to the Communist Party, such as Jean-Richard Bloch, because of the party's 'revirements tactiques qui ne cessent de m'effaroucher' (OP p 64).

These two main strands in Bruller's political outlook - sympathy with progressive elements at home, hostility towards fascism at home and abroad - from then on re-emerge regularly in the account given in Les Occasions perdues of the remaining inter-war years. The consistency of his reaction to events is such, indeed, that a sample can adequately demonstrate the whole pattern of his attitudes at the time. Thus, for example, his rejoicing at the electoral victory of the 'Front Populaire' in May 1936:

...On s'arrache les feuilles. Victoire du Front Populaire!  
Joie, joie, jour de joie, on se congratule sans se connaître,  
les gens s'embrassent dans les rues, mon beau-frère jubile  
autant que moi. Sur le bord du trottoir, je lis tout excité  
le détail des résultats ... (OP p 106) 7

The author's enthusiasm was tempered, however, by apprehension over the many difficulties that lay in the path of Léon Blum. Such challenges in France itself would come, predictably enough, from capitalist magnates and right-wing anti-semitic politicians - but also, and less predictably, from the workers' continuing strikes. Abroad, Blum would have to confront the dangers posed by Hitler and Mussolini; and in that context, 'comment concilier l'anti-militarisme inhérent à l'idéal socialiste avec la défense nationale et la nécessité de protéger la République?' (OP p 107). In the event it was the Spanish Civil War that provided Blum with his most serious dilemma in foreign affairs: 's'il abhorre le fascisme, il hait plus encore la guerre' (OP p 115); but although Bruller respected this pacifist idealism and was, indeed, apparently still clinging to it himself, albeit with less and less conviction, the author claims they could both perceive the flaw in the policy of non-intervention:

Car il (Blum) sait bien qu'en mettant sur le même plan la victime et l'agresseur il commet un acte immoral; et il sait bien que cette guerre civile n'est pas seulement celle de l'Espagne, qu'elle est aussi bel et bien la nôtre. Que ce qui se joue là-bas c'est notre destin à tous. (DP p 116)

Through a weekly drawing in the periodical Vendredi, Bruller had meanwhile given some expression to his anti-fascist attitude. In his memoirs, however, he seems less interested to detail his actual contributions, which admittedly continued for only a short period, than to recall the absorbing discussions which - 'témoin le plus souvent muet' (QP p 90) - he had heard taking place among the directors and leading contributors to the periodical. The various political standpoints of these personalities - André Chamson, Louis Martin-Chauffier, Jean Guéhenno and Andrée Viollis<sup>8</sup> among others - ranging as they did from radical and socialist to communist, represented a cross-section of the strands contained within the Popular Front movement.

Another, quite different, discussion in which the author was involved in those pre-war years arose through his contacts with Diego Brosset and the latter's in-laws, the family of the late General Mangin. Not for the first time, Bruller found himself spending an evening in the company of senior Army officers, whose conservative views were diametrically opposed to his own. On this occasion, since his interlocutors were, 'bien que de droite, des hommes de bonne volonté' (QP p 132), and as an apparently rare degree of open-mindedness prevailed, he undertook to explain to them his political outlook - only to realize that he was failing to convince:

Malgré la qualité de leur écoute. Ce n'est pas moins ma faute, du reste, que la leur. Mon analyse, à cette époque, tient moins de la réflexion que du sentiment: je n'ai pas encore médité sur les rapports de l'éthique et de la société, sur les bases de la spécificité qui distingue l'homme de l'animal. Faute d'un fondement irréductible, mes propres arguments ne sont guère en mesure de balancer des préjugés qu'ils traînent depuis l'enfance. Et qui les ont faits ce qu'ils sont. (OP p 132)

The basis for ethical and political judgement which Bruller lacked at this time was, as he came to see it, an irrefutable definition of human quality, and, as we have seen, the latter would not become firmly established in his outlook until the early post-war years. Before then he was to live through the manifold experiences of defeat, occupation and liberation and to emerge, reluctantly by his own account, as one of the spokesmen of 'la Résistance intellectuelle'. His wartime writings were, of course, mainly concerned to project the key humanist values enshrined in French culture and rationalism, in opposition to the brutalities of Nazi ideology, but they also reflected his long-standing distrust of the right-wing elements who, he claims, were unwilling to go to war in September 1939 - and then were largely responsible for the disaster of 1940 and the subsequent collaboration.

As for the Communists, they were to become engaged, alongside other Frenchmen, in the practical Resistance struggle with which Vercors himself, as he readily acknowledges, had little to do. Like many other middle-class intellectuals of his generation, though, he was impressed by the efforts and sacrifices of the Party's militants and rank-and-file members in the common fight; and this respect, indeed gratitude, were to be constant factors in his post-war support for the Communists, whatever other differences might arise: ...'Comment oublierais-je jamais le rôle prédominant qu'ils ont tenu dans la

Résistance?' (NJ p 188). Their merits stood out all the more clearly when, as in another of his accounts of the War, their record was set against that of others:

Les Communistes ... seront pourtant les tout premiers à réagir. Dès juillet (1940), un manifeste signé Thorez circule qui sans aller jusqu'à préconiser de prendre les armes contre l'occupant, appelle la classe ouvrière à la résistance. De cette classe, Mauriac dira plus tard que seule, dans sa masse, elle a été fidèle à la France. En effet, dans sa masse la bourgeoisie est pétainiste, c'est-à-dire "collaborationniste", surtout dans la zone dite libre où les Allemands ne se font pas voir ... (Sens et non-sens de l'Histoire, (p 170) 9

In short, Bruller's wartime experiences seem broadly to have confirmed the general orientation of his pre-war political outlook. His personal appearance at the first meeting in liberated Paris of the 'Comité National des Ecrivains', whose gatherings he had never previously attended, offered him his first encounter with some of the writers who had contributed clandestinely to the 'Editions de Minuit', as well as to Les Lettres françaises, Combat or other Resistance publications. Their reactions to the newcomer were, it seems, by no means uniformly flattering to his ego; and Vercors indicates in La Bataille du Silence that he could already discern the political motivations underlying the more enthusiastic of the welcomes he received - such as that, for example, from the Communist Secretary of the CNE, Claude Morgan:

Je voudrais lui expliquer mes réticences à faire partie du CNE ... ma double personnalité Deavignes-Vercors me retient d'y adhérer, si je veux rester fidèle à une indépendance d'esprit que, comme membre d'un collège moins littéraire que politique, je perdrais nécessairement.

Mais il pousse des hauts cris. Vercors se doit absolument, tout au contraire, d'y entrer, d'y agir. Son absence intriguait les gens, les pousserait à des interprétations pénibles. Bon, bon, bon, je cède ... (BS p 327)

This account continues with the author's admission that he lived to regret his acquiescence; and indeed it was a decision on which he had

ruefully expatiated in his political 'testament', P.P.C. (1957). The description of the CNE meeting in Les Nouveaux Jours, written much longer again after P.P.C. or La Bataille du Silence, still strikes the same note of disillusionment and anti-climax, while seeming to give an even more sceptical glance forward to the new chapter that was opening in August 1944 in Vercors's career:

Les seuls qui m'attendaient 'comme le messie',<sup>10</sup> c'étaient Morgan et Bellanger: pour s'assurer de ma collaboration, le premier aux Lettres françaises, le second au Parisien libéré, qu'ils dirigent. Les autres ne voient en moi qu'un écrivain d'occasion, et me le laissent clairement entendre.

Je me le tiens pour dit. Ce que je suis et vais être pour un temps, en vérité, c'est un certificat de résistance. Tous les journaux, les magazines, les revues solliciteront ma signature ... Que ne m'a-t-on permis de conserver mon cher 'incognito'! (N.) pp 53-54).

But of course this version of events, like those in the other volumes of memoirs, was written with the benefit of hindsight. While we can readily accept Vercors's claim that he was embarking on the new phase of activity with misgivings (and some of his writings at the time certainly show scepticism about the general moral reliability of his fellow-men), his considerable output of articles, prefaces, correspondence and speeches over the next few years does at least bear witness to the energy and assiduity that he brought to his role as a celebrated Resistance writer in the post-war public eye. Likewise, the vigour and increasing firmness of his pronouncements on wider political subjects - including but also going beyond the issues of German guilt, France's sufferings and the treatment of collaborators - contrast strongly with the caution and reticence he had displayed before the War. Now a recognised author, apparently not indisposed to accept the Communists' hand of friendship, he seemed fully

accredited to have his say in the contentious political and ideological exchanges that were to dominate intellectual life in France over the next few years.

Anne Whitmarsh, in her study of Simone de Beauvoir<sup>11</sup>, has succinctly analysed the attitude prevailing among many intellectuals in the aftermath of the Liberation. There was a widespread feeling that the detachment or isolation to which many had clung in the past should be relinquished in favour of a collective effort to renew France morally, politically and socially. Those who now felt bound to make a public declaration of their commitment came from a broad political spectrum, ranging from the extreme Left to the moderate Right (for whom François Mauriac was one of the most prominent spokesmen); but since a dominant aspiration was to change the existing system in order to escape from the failures and corruption of the past, there were naturally far more of left-wing persuasion among them, even if it is not easy to ascertain what or how much significance they each attached to the concept of revolution:

... although the call to revolution is admittedly the most extreme form that commitment can take, and although commitment is perfectly possible at the other extreme for those on the right, in practice it (commitment) tends to be limited to moderate or left-wing intellectuals. 12

Where Vercors stood on the ideological spectrum, as between the 'call to revolution' and a more moderate left-wing approach, will be one of the questions to which we shall seek an answer in his texts. What we have already established is that he was one of the intellectuals who were emerging from a background of pre-war detachment, although unlike some of those to whom Whitmarsh refers, and most notably Simone de Beauvoir herself, he seems never to have felt any particular sense of guilt over his earlier reserve. In his wartime

writing, both fiction and non-fiction, he seems quite certain at whose doors the blame for France's (and Europe's) disaster was to be laid, and neither then nor in his later memoirs does self-reproach feature noticeably in his appraisal of the pre-war years<sup>13</sup>.

As for his post-war commitment, it was soon to become closely bound up in his relationship with the 'Comité National des Ecrivains', that 'collège moins littéraire que politique', as it is denoted in La Bataille du Silence. Herbert Lottman traces the history of the CNE in The Left Bank, highlighting the role played in its formation by the communist poets Aragon and Eluard, and the work of Claude Morgan in editing Les Lettres françaises. The committee and its newspaper, conceived by the Communists as a means of bringing non-communist writers and critics to work alongside them in the anti-fascist struggle, had at an early stage secured the contributions of such figures as Paulhan, Debû-Bridel, Guéhenno and Mauriac. Other non-Party members whom Vercors met on his first attendance at the CNE in August 1944 were Duhamel, Queneau, Camus and Sartre; while the first post-Liberation issue of Les Lettres françaises on September 9th, as Lottman records,

reproduced a Manifesto of French Writers signed by three members of the Académie Française - Georges Duhamel, François Mauriac and Paul Valéry - along with fifty others, including Camus, Eluard, Guéhenno, Michel Leiris, Jean Lescure, Paulhan, Queneau and Sartre and a dozen more from the South, such as Aragon, Benda, Cassou, Melreux and Roger Martin du Gard. 14

A shared sense of purpose, stemming from the Resistance effort, had thus brought together writers of widely differing political opinions. But their unity, always precarious, did not long survive the pressures of post-war politics, and as the communist activists in the CNE asserted their domination over the organization and its journals, the latter were invariably and predictably aligned with the Communist Party's

positions on domestic and international issues.

However, even before the politics of the Cold War began to work their divisive effects - indeed, before the War in Europe was actually over - Vercors himself was drawn into bitter controversy over the treatment of collaborationist writers and publishers. His two essays in Carrefour, 'la Gangrène' and 'Responsabilité de l'écrivain' (written in January and February 1945 respectively, and reproduced in Le Sable du Temps) conveyed very clearly the moral intransigence of his attitude. His disgust, as a member of the CNE's 'Commission de l'épuration de l'édition', that collaborating publishers had not been driven out of business was unequivocally expressed in 'la Gangrène', while the second essay lent implicit support to the principle of the CNE's 'liste noire' of banned writers<sup>15</sup>. Lottman shows how divided the Resistance intellectuals soon became on this issue, with Jean Paulhan leading the moves towards reconciliation and amnesty. However, it was not until 1947 that Paulhan, Duhamel, Schlumberger and Gabriel Marcel resigned from the CNE over the matter; whereas Vercors's continued intransigence, together with an outspokenness of tone that he was by now adopting in many of his contributions to public debate, can be seen in the open letter he addressed to them:

... voici le premier démenti, infligé du coeur même de la Résistance spirituelle française, aux hommes qui continuent de penser que le génocide est un crime sans nom, à jamais impardonnable même à ceux qui l'ont approuvé par leurs écrits sans y participer par leurs actes...  
(PMH p 357)

In Les Nouveaux Jours, Vercors recalls the whole episode, including the charges of censorship that had been levelled at him as a result of his letter (charges to which he had riposted at the time in his Petit pamphlet des diners chez Gazette, 1947). In retrospect, he somewhat tempers the sharp, implacable impression given by his letter

and earlier essays by revealing that he had exercised a natural tendency to indulgence in signing the appeal for Brasillach's life<sup>16</sup>. But at the same time, he stands firmly by his refusal to work with collaborators, and by the CNE's vow of fidelity 'aux victimes du plus grand, du plus horrible crime de l'Histoire humaine'. (NJ p 113)

The reality of German war-guilt and of French complicity thus remained for Vercors a touchstone at the intersection of political and ethical judgement. It prompted him to elaborate the concept of 'la qualité d'homme', which runs like a thread through his fictional and non-fictional works; and in the post-war polemics in which he was becoming involved, he would make frequent reference to the legacy of Nazi cynicism and brutality, not hesitating to suggest, in certain contexts, that some of the governments of the Fourth Republic had become tainted with the same infection. This was first and most notably to be the case in his attacks on French policy in Indochina, although here perhaps he was partly inspired by the editorials in the same vein that appeared in Lea Temps Modernes from December 1946 onwards<sup>17</sup>.

Because of their dissensions over the purged writers and other matters, harmony among the erstwhile Resistance intellectuals did not survive even as long as the political co-operation between the PCF and other parties at the level of national government. This phase had begun with de Gaulle's appointment of Communist Ministers in his first administration and, after his resignation in January 1946, continued through the period of 'tripartisme' until Ramadier expelled the Communists from his Cabinet in May 1947. Thereafter, and for several years, there was to be no co-operation between the French Communists and other parties, as mutual distrust duplicated the Cold War tensions

prevailing on the international scene. Vercors himself played no direct political role at this or any subsequent time; but, no longer the 'témoin muet' he bore witness - through his writings, through speeches and through membership of the CNE and associated bodies - to the values and political ideas to which in varying degrees he now felt attached.

Where, then, did he stand in relation to the Communists in those early post-war years? There are of course two dimensions to be considered with regard to this question - the national and the international. The close relationship between the French Communist Party and the Kremlin, with Maurice Thorez as the charismatic human link, meant that all discussion of the Party, whether favourable or otherwise, had to take into account the international connotations of the PCF's every action and reaction. Vercors was as aware as anyone of this connection and of the 'revirements tactiques' which the French Party had to execute in obedience to Moscow's strategic directives. Nevertheless he sometimes sought to dichotomize: thus, for example, the Party could represent the best hope of social progress in France itself - while there might conceivably be question-marks over Stalin's policy in the Eastern bloc. The reproach made against Vercors by contemporary commentators on the Right, and by David Cauter in The Fellow-Travellers, was that the questions he felt obliged to ask about communist methods never led, however unsatisfactory the answers he received, to any realignment of his attitude<sup>18</sup>.

As ever for Vercors, no discussion of political issues was possible without the closest reference to moral criteria. Thus, in the essay 'La Fin et les moyens' (1946) he is concerned to assert the cardinal

importance of truthfulness in human relationships, seeing it as the fundamental value on which every society - and of course the international community - must ultimately depend. Truth had suffered grievously at the hands of the Nazis, and through men like Maurras and the Vichyite leaders 'cette mortelle désagrégation' (PMH p 91) had spread to France. Not only to France, however; and in an ostensibly balanced section of the essay, the author attacks the lies told by the major powers of both East and West as they tightened their spheres of influence at the expense of smaller nations. Hence, for example, in the dispute over Trieste it was understandable that the Western Powers and the Soviet Union should each have supported their own 'satellite' (Italy and Yugoslavia respectively), since neither side wanted the port to fall into the other's hands ....

Mais .... nous ne pouvions (et ne pouvons) tolérer qu'on prétendit ce faisant, dans un camp comme dans l'autre, penser seulement aux droits des peuples à disposer d'eux-mêmes. Car c'était un mensonge, qui aidait le monde à pourrir. (PMH p 99)

But if he is prepared to enumerate instances where Communist regimes seemed to be lying to the world, while citing similar deceptions by the West and reiterating after each example that 'ces mensonges aident le monde à pourrir', Vercors cannot bring himself to credit the central indictment against the Soviet system made in Koestler's then recently published novel Darkness at Noon<sup>19</sup>. As was noted by Simone de Beauvoir among others, this story of the Moscow show trials of the 1930s created a major stir in French intellectual opinion in 1946, for it exposed tyranny at the heart of the Revolution, with individual life and honour being relentlessly sacrificed to the long-term collective 'good'. Ivanov's flat assertion in the novel that the only rule of revolutionary

ethics is that the end justifies the means is elaborated on by Gletkin, the deadly Stalinist heir to Rubashov and Ivanov, when he claims that,

truth is (only) what is useful for humanity, falsehood what is harmful .... We have the same right (as Christianity) to invent useful symbols which the peasants take literally. 20

This of course was a direct denial of the morality that Vercors's essay was now asserting; and what made the novel intolerable to him was not, as Merleau-Ponty subsequently argued, that

il y a bien peu de marxisme dans *Le Zéro et l'Infini*, qu'il s'agisse des formules de Roubachov, de celles de Gletkin ou des jugements de Koestler quand ils transparaissent. 21

- but rather his own inability to believe Koestler's thesis that the leadership had willingly embraced lying as a means of defending the Revolution. Certainly the Russians had had to resort to diplomatic duplicities in their struggle with the West; but systematic lying to their own people and to the world, as in the show-trials, was a wholly different matter. If Koestler's charge were accepted (even if untrue), or if communist actions in the future lent it credence by showing contempt for the truth, all the hopes that humanity invested in the Soviet experiment would be destroyed. Hence Vercors's condemnation of the novel as pernicious, and his plea that Communist regimes should do nothing that, like Koestler's book, struck at the hope which sustained men everywhere,

au sein de ce monde misérable où les intérêts du Grand Capital ne cachent même plus combien ils sont à la fois démesurés et sordides, combien ils se moquent à la fois de l'avenir des peuples et de la vie humaine .... (PMH p 100)

The essay thus concludes with a sweeping rejection of capitalist interests and, despite the author's anxiety over the matter of lies, with his tribute to 'une terre (qui) déjà témoigne que ces intérêts peuvent disparaître' (PMH p 100). However, Vercors does not dwell

on the means by which this disappearance occurred (or was effected) and how it might be achieved elsewhere; and this, together with his somewhat yearning references to men's 'hope' and, on the same page, to 'leurs rêves', are a suggestive reminder of the 'idealist' label attached to Vercors and others of progressive outlook by David Cauter in Communism and the French Intellectuals:

The 'idealist' intellectuals ... have, on the whole, willed the end of Communism but not the means employed in practice by Bolshevika and Communists. They have accepted a number of Marxist premises, the general critique of capitalist society as exploitative and warlike, as well as the belief that in liberating itself the proletariat will liberate mankind, but they have shrunk from the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as it manifested itself in the Soviet Union ... For these idealists ends and means have proved an obsessive problem. 22

Vercors himself had in fact been concerned, earlier in his essay, not to appear unrealistic:

Je n'élève pas le débat, on le voit. Je n'en appelle pas à la vertu pour elle-même, à la morsure pour elle-même (religieuse ou autre). Je reste terre à terre et 'réaliste', comme on dit ... (PMH p 89);

and his primary intention had been to urge honesty on ideological friend and foe alike (albeit mainly the former, at whom the essays by various contributors in L'Heure du Choix were directed). But it also appears that he was at this juncture prepared to believe that his own basic ethical principle, derived from Kant, whereby human beings were not to be exploited as means but to be treated as ends in themselves, could conceivably be well served under Communism - and presumably more so than in an unregenerate capitalist society. Admittedly, in his next major essay 'La Morale et l'action' (April, 1947), Vercors's appraisal of Soviet Communism is once more tinged with unease:

il s'est vu obligé, pour sauver sa vie, de remettre à die le déclenchement de la révolution prolétarienne sur la surface du monde, de restreindre la liberté sur celle de son territoire, d'y laisser provisoirement reparaitre la hiérarchie sociale, donc une certaine forme d'injustice.... (PMH p 112)

But these reservations seem relatively mild when compared with his references to 'liberal America' which, with its racial persecutions of blacks and Jews, 'semble prendre en partie la suite du racisme nazi' (PMH p 111) and which sustained fascism wherever it survived, as in Spain, Greece, or Turkey; or to British 'Socialism' which continued to depend on the exploitation of parts of the world still under Colonial rule from London (PMH p 111). Against all of this, the key value: 'n'être jamais, ou cesser d'être, dans la condition dégradante d'un moyen pour les appétits d'autrui' (PMH p 130) stood as firm as a rock. Here was an absolutely fundamental motivation, reflected

dans la parole du Bouddha, dans le Coran, dans la Bible, dans l'affranchissement des esclaves, dans la prise de conscience du prolétariat, dans toutes les révolutions .... (PMH p 130)

Revolutionary ideals are thus associated with the most profound and enduring of human aspirations. Although in this essay the moralist in Vercors is most obviously to the fore, his left-wing sympathies can again be discerned in a formulation such as this, as well as in the measured but perceptible variation of tone by which he refers alternately to the Capitalist world and to the Soviet Union.

As for the practicalities of domestic politics at the time, it is interesting to see how Les Nouveaux Jours, written with some thirty-five years' hindsight, evaluates the transitional period corresponding to 'le tripartisme'. Vercors's verdict on de Gaulle's failure to work with the Communists, for example, suggests that in respect of some political alliances he is (and was, to judge by the text) prepared to

be quite pragmatic:

C'est, à mes yeux, un début décevant. A la tête d'un 'Front National', majoritaire de gauche, de Gaulle y aurait, certes, causé orages et tempêtes. Mais ensemble ils eussent pu faire du socialisme un exemple pour le monde. Je ne me consolerais pas de cette chance perdue. (NJ p 87) 23

Moving on to the Communists' eventual dismissal by Ramadier, the author still sees the main cause to have been American pressure on the French government, as tension with the Soviet Union increased:

Dès lors, la participation de ministres communistes au gouvernement de la France rend malaisé ce renversement des alliances. Pour plaire à l'Amérique, il faut donc se débarrasser d'eux. On profitera d'une grève qu'ils soutiennent, en mai, aux usines Renault, pour les exclure du gouvernement. Curieux hasard: le Pentagone vient justement d'édicter qu'une aide financière ne sera accordée qu'à des gouvernements absolument sûrs. (NJ p 110)

Two similar 'curious coincidences', involving the Belgian and Italian governments, are then recalled in support of this theory; but where Vercors seems to attach only minor importance to the industrial unrest which the Communists were supporting, a more objective account, such as that by the historian Jean-Pierre Rioux, underlines its serious impact on the government's efforts to restore the economy<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, Vercors himself seems still to be echoing the orthodox Communist version of events, as laid down by Zhdanov in August 1947 and propagated in France by Duclos and Thorez thereafter; and a more balanced verdict has in fact been provided by one of the Communist ministers involved, Charles Tillon:

Je crois que, à l'époque, les torts étaient largement partagés, car les Communistes étaient redevenus absolument dépendants, non plus d'une Internationale qui avait été dissoute en 1943, mais d'une nouvelle organisation qui germait déjà dans l'esprit de Staline. A cet égard, je vous rappelle que le Kominform fut créé très peu de temps après notre exclusion du gouvernement ..... 25

But whatever the actual distribution of responsibility in the events

of May 1947, it was from this time onwards, 'pour des raisons de constance et d'équité' (NJ p 109), that Vercors seems to have felt less and less able to maintain the independent political position which, he claims, had allowed him to act as an 'honest broker' between various factions in the CNE (sharing in this with Louis Martin-Chauffier, who became Chairman of the Comité at this time in succession to Jean Cassou). Although, as 'La Fin et les moyens' shows, his 'independence' had not amounted to strict impartiality over the major ideological choice between East and West, he had been prepared to set the faults of one side against those of the other; and a similar approach had been maintained in 'La Morale et l'action', where he had sought to defend the vital mission of certain thinkers and writers (in the tradition of Voltaire, Zola and Romain Rolland) who, while fulfilling their right and duty to make political choices, nevertheless stayed sufficiently removed from day-to-day action to be able to warn of abuses and safeguard civilisation's fundamental ideals -

ces valeurs constantes et universelles sans lesquelles  
il n'est plus de société ni d'homme social ... (PMH p 135)

Now, as the Cold War polarization intensified throughout Europe, Vercors was drawn more definitely towards the communist side and to the role he would fulfil over the next several years, that of a prominent and relatively active fellow-traveller. He consistently denied that he was himself a Communist and continued to argue with his communist friends on moral premises; nevertheless, he was usually ready to champion their cause in the political and social conflicts of the Fourth Republic, and to fight against what he saw as the repressive forces leagued against them. As for the Soviet Union, the heroic wartime ally (NJ p 164), his attitude would remain basically positive

throughout this period, even if varying from firm to more cautious endorsement and occasionally admitting doubts, as over the Rajk trial and the campaign against Tito. At the same time, there would be no doubt about the corollary to that approach - a readiness to challenge the United States very sharply indeed whenever, as in the Rosenberg case, the occasion arose.

Vercors's move towards firmer support for the Communists in 1947-48 is seen in Les Nouveaux Jours as having been induced by a number of inter-related factors: the anti-communism being increasingly displayed by RPF, for example, and the attempt by some former CNE members and by a prominent Resistance leader to persuade him to renounce his relationship with the Communists. All of this seems to have confirmed him in his partisanship; for, whatever the faults in the Party's methods,

il ne représente, en France, encore aucun danger et je ne peux oublier les combats qui nous ont unis, le prix, plus élevé que tout autre, qu'il a payé dans la lutte clandestine. Dans la mesure même où tant d'efforts conjugués tentent de m'en écarter, je me sens lié à eux par toutes ces fidélités.  
(NJ p 139)

Meanwhile, an opportunity to display solidarity in a wider context occurred when he went as a French delegate to the Peace Congress attended by intellectuals from both sides of the Iron Curtain at Wrocław in August 1948. The ostensible purpose of the Congress was to seek a basis for peaceful coexistence between East and West; and one sentence in Les Nouveaux Jours points to the danger in the international situation then as viewed by Vercors (and presumably by the Communists), while perhaps also explaining the efforts that the Eastern bloc invested in the meeting: 'l'Amérique étant seule à posséder "la Bombe", la tentation sera grande pour elle de s'en servir'. (NJ p 150)

The lively proceedings at the Congress, which was to lead in due course to the formation of the communist-sponsored 'Mouvement de la Paix', have been described by various commentators on the period. From the vantage point of 1986, Neal Ascherson of The Observer claimed that Wrocław 1948 was a watershed for many Western intellectuals.

It was there that the true nature of Stalinist power, the bullying, menacing and cheating, was revealed in a way that no open-minded 'progressive' could ignore. 26

The bullying came at the outset, when Alexander Fadeyev, 'Stalin's head writer' unleashed an assault on Western culture (embracing both T. S. Eliot and J-P. Sartre), denounced America and claimed that 'the Soviet Union had won the War unaided'. The interest of all this for the present study lies in the reactions to Fadeyev by the other delegates. According to Ascherson, the general enthusiasm of most of the 500 delegates contrasted with the shocked reaction of the British: a sharp riposte by A. J. P. Taylor, the early departure of Julian Huxley, and the drafting by Edward Crankshaw of a protest resolution which the French delegation 'crumpled up and flung in Crankshaw's face'.<sup>27</sup>

Some corroboration as to the attitude of the French in this account is to be found in J-P. Rioux's brief reference:

La délégation française, où voisinent Communistes (Picasso, Eluard, Joliot-Curie, Léger ... etc.) et compagnons de route (Vercors, Autant-Lara, J-L. Barrault, Martin-Chauffier) y subit sans broncher le jdanovien assaut du romancier soviétique Fadeyev contre Sartre, "cette hyène dactylographe". 28

But Vercors himself, in Les Nouveaux Jours, presents an altogether more modulated version:

Le discours qu'il (Fadiev) prononce est d'une telle violence... qui la suite est prévisible: ce début belliqueux, alors qu'il s'agit de paix, va faire rater la tentative ... Seuls peuvent l'approuver les Communistes, s'y résigner les 'compagnons de route'. J'ai beau en être, je songe à m'en aller; comme le font dès le lendemain Huxley, la plupart des Anglais et bien d'autres. Mais Eluard, Joliot, Farge ... me retiennent: il ne faut pas jeter le manche après la cognée. N'empêche, je n'y crois plus. Ce ne sera jamais ce que c'aurait dû être. Le mouvement qui se crée a choisi son camp ... (NJ pp 150-1)

It is interesting to compare this version with the 1948 account Vercors published in Plus ou moins Homme. There he claims to have had no unrealistic hopes before the Congress began - but that in outcome it had yielded far more than he had expected. In presenting this balance-sheet, he feels the need to restate his credentials:

On sait assez que je ne suis pas communiste. Il m'est arrivé souvent de m'opposer à certaines vues de mes amis dans ce parti, et ceux-ci, quand je leur parlais dans l'erreur, ne se gênent pas non plus pour le dire. Nous n'en restons pas moins amis .... (PMH p 374)

As long as these arguments take place at home, the friendship can remain secure. But to have to disagree at an international assembly would (significantly enough) be 'une épreuve plus pénible'. Hence the anxiety he had felt about the first speech, 'celui du grand écrivain soviétique Fadiev', whose excessive frankness and violence of tone had seemed to him likely to be counterproductive. But now he has an admission to make: 'J'avais tort. La franchise en appelle une autre, et bientôt chacun discutait en pleine clarté' (PMH p 374). And the fundamental truth that such frankness helped to uncover? It was that if war could previously have been justified as the ultimate means of defending freedom, in 1948 it would be an unforgivable crime. The author's moral seriousness was not deserting him, and indeed, in evaluating the strategic confrontation at this stage in the Cold War, it readily merged with his political partisanship. The West, after

all, was telling the biggest lie:

.... prétendre défendre la liberté (telle que la conçoivent par exemple les régimes de la libre entreprise) par la guerre atomique, n'est qu'un mensonge absurde .... (PMH p 375) 29

On this last point, not unexpectedly, Vercors claims that there was general and heartfelt agreement at Wroclaw; and on such a basis his friendship with the Communists could, and largely did, remain harmonious. However, it was to be tested repeatedly over the next few years as a series of dramas at home and abroad made many fellow-travellers face the implications of their commitment. First, in May 1949, there was the good news - the final victory of the Chinese Communists over Chiang Kai-Shek and the latter's eviction, with his American supporters, from the Chinese mainland. This military triumph was greeted with a storm of applause at the inaugural meeting in Paris of 'Le Mouvement de la Paix', an irony not lost on Vercors, at least according to Les Nouveaux Jours<sup>30</sup>. Here he admits to his satisfaction at the time that Mao's victory would, in the accepted left-wing version, free China from imperialism, protect the U.S.S.R. in Siberia and reduce the risk of American aggression. At the same time, he was beginning to count the cost of his relationship with the Communists, finding his political posture by no means a comfortable one:

Tirailé de toutes parts, je veux rester obstinément fidèle aux Communistes mais objectant à leurs expédients, à leurs mensonges, à leurs escamotages, je ne m'en tiens pas moins à l'écart tant que je peux. (NJ p 163)

It was not easy to stand aside, however. A succession of events now obliged him to bear witness; and in the first case literally so, as he was called upon to testify for the defence in the libel proceedings brought against Les Lettres françaises by Victor Kravchenko, whose

book J'ai choisi la liberté was a best-selling indictment of the Soviet tyranny from which he had fled<sup>31</sup>. An article in Les Lettres françaises had accused Kravchenko of being an American stooge and claimed his book had been written for him by agents of the United States. Vercors, asked by Claude Morgan to be his 'témoin de moralité' had hesitated - what if Kravchenko were telling the truth? - but then gratitude for the journal's wartime record and respect for 'l'homme de bonne foi' that Morgan represented in his eyes overcame his reluctance, and he joined the chorus of fellow-travelling intellectuals arrayed against the plaintiff. Seeing the latter in court - '...ce regard noir fuyant, tout ce faciès blafard qui respire l'intrigue' (NJ p 164) - Vercors felt with relief that he could testify unreservedly for Morgan; and Les Nouveaux Jours adds, as a parenthesis:

Je ne regretterai pas ce témoignage: lorsque plus tard Khrouchtchev donnera hélas raison à Kravchenko, Morgan désespéré prouvera son honnêteté en brisant avec son parti. (NJ p 164) 32

Now Vercors seems here to be claiming credit for his good judgement over Morgan, while passing rather lightly over his misjudgement of Kravchenko. The account of his evidence at the trial given in L'Affaire Kravchenko suggests he should perhaps have felt rather more remorse than his own memoir reveals; for Malaurie recalls Vercors's 'brutale déclaration: Kravchenko devrait connaître le même sort que les criminels de guerre', which was interpreted by the defence lawyer, M<sup>e</sup> Nordmann, as follows: 'Vercors est venu dire que Kravchenko eût été fusillé s'il avait publié son livre en 1944<sup>33</sup>'. Malaurie's account thus shows that Vercors went to considerable lengths in his support for Les Lettres françaises; although it also confirms that the CIA had indeed played a part behind the scenes in encouraging the Ukrainian dissident to sue Les Lettres françaises (rather than other hostile commentators on his book) for the sake of the

publicity value of such an exercise in Paris at that particular stage (early 1949) in the Cold War<sup>34</sup>. In the end, Kravchenko was vindicated in respect of his authorship and his personal integrity, whereas the court declared itself unable to pronounce on his critique of the Soviet government. Even before the verdict, however, Les Lettres françaises had held a celebratory dinner at 'La Coupole', with Vercors, Eluard, Elsa Triolet and Aragon at 'la table d'honneur', and where 'chaque invité signe avec application la lettre adressée à Truman, assurant que 'le peuple de France ne fera jamais la guerre à la Russie Soviétique'<sup>35</sup>.

The following year, 1950, must have suggested itself to many journalists and commentators as a suitable time for taking stock and for reviewing the state of the world after half a century of change and crisis. We can find something similar in Vercors's writings in that year, albeit in the context of yet another reappraisal of his position as a fellow-traveller. The particular case at issue was the Rajk trial in Hungary; but in the introduction to his dossier on the affair in Plus ou moins Homme, the author first surveyed the great ideological challenge facing his contemporaries, and it is here that we find his mid-century 'bilan'.

On the one side, Vercors claimed, lay the real threat to world peace and to freedom in France. Churchill and Eisenhower, 'deux grandes gloires passées', (PMH p 164)<sup>36</sup> were seeking to rearm West Germany for the great anti-Soviet crusade, and there were hints about the first American H-bomb test; while Western governments as a whole seemed activated by one dominant purpose, that of controlling the working class throughout the world. Meanwhile, those comrades in France who opposed NATO's 'enslaving' deployment would feel the full weight of repression, as would

those who claimed that 'la guerre d'Indochine est une guerre accélérée' (PMH p 165) in which the French were justly incurring the same odium as the Germans in France in 1940-44. Given all of this,

en ce temps de mépris de fer envers toute justice et toute liberté, comment oserait-on s'éloigner d'un parti qui se trouve seul en France à défendre réellement et efficacement les populations ouvrières et coloniales? (PMH p 165)

But on the other side, in Eastern Europe, there had been some deeply disturbing developments - the Rajk trial and Soviet attacks on Tito - disturbing less in their own right than as a result of the 'brouillard mensonger' (PMH p 165) which had surrounded them. Whence the dilemma for Vercors: should he, or should he not, speak out against these apparent abuses perpetrated in the good cause? His moral convictions, as formulated in the question, seemed to provide their own answer: 'Quel est alors le devoir d'un esprit droit, épris de justice et de liberté, mais aussi de vérité?' (PMH p 165) And accordingly, like the equally troubled Jean Cassou, he had had an article published in Esprit in December 1949, in which once more he had urged on the Communists the vital importance of telling the truth.

In his article 'Réponses' (published with Cassou's 'La Révolution et la Vérité' under the general heading Il ne faut pas tromper le peuple)<sup>37</sup> Vercors had thus characteristically taken his stand on a fundamental moral principle. He was not greatly concerned about the guilty verdict in the Rajk trial, which he felt must have been justified on some grounds or other, even if these had not emerged in court (hence his refusal to send a protest telegram to the Budapest judges)<sup>38</sup>. Furthermore, Rajk must have lied - either throughout the career of treachery for which he had been hanged, or in his lengthy confession. But - and here was the key point for Vercors - the confession itself revealed an enormous

inconsistency: the fact that throughout it and throughout his trial, Rajk had proclaimed his loyalty to Communism as the hope for mankind, while simultaneously admitting that through espionage, treason and collusion with the renegade Tito, he had been working actively for the restoration of capitalism in Hungary (as had Tito in Yugoslavia).

So the truth had not emerged from the trial, either from the accused or from the judges, who had accepted this blatantly inconsistent story. Possibly the authorities thought that they had acted for the best - 'mais agir ainsi, même pour notre bien, c'est nous mépriser' (PMH p 170). All lying by governments implied contempt for the people, and such duplicity and contempt were anathema to Vercors. His protest was, he admitted, 'une rengaine'<sup>38</sup>, but it was for him the most important issue at stake. 'Je ne puis pas admettre ce mépris du peuple. A cela commence et s'arrête ce que je pense du procès Rajk' (PMH p 170). As for the Tito affair, his position was exactly the same, for the inconsistencies of the official version were just as gross. If, as the Cominform claimed, Tito's intrigues were known of from 1937 onwards, how had he become the idol of the Communist world from 1943 to 1947?

The choice of the Catholic monthly review Esprit for the publication of Vercors's article and that of Cassou is straightforwardly explained in the 'dossier' in Plus ou moins Homme and is elaborated on in Les Nouveaux Jours<sup>40</sup>. Quite simply, neither writer felt that Les Lettres françaises, or even Europe (on whose editorial board they were serving), would agree, because of communist control, to publish their articles. And yet Vercors's text contained a comprehensive and somewhat grandiloquent credo, in which the communist cause was duly honoured:

J'aime l'humanité par-dessus tout, la France parce qu'elle en incarne la destinée depuis cent cinquante ans, le parti communiste parce qu'il est le seul, à mes yeux, à vouloir et pouvoir, dans les présentes conjonctures du monde, réaliser cette destinée - à promettre à l'homme sa libération (PMH p 171),

and in which he went on to pledge to the Party, provided it did not sully its 'admirable' aims, a support that would go well beyond lip-service: '.... Si un jour il est attaqué, c'est dans ses rangs que je me battraï ....' (PMH p 171).

There is here perhaps more than a trace of the self-dramatization which characterized several of the author's 'prises de position' on political matters (and on which he himself commented in retrospect, in relation to one particular episode, in Les Nouveaux Jours<sup>41</sup>); but however fervent his vow of support, his article, like Casanova's, was bitterly criticized by Laurent Casanova in L'Humanité. Casanova accused Vercors of giving aid and comfort to the enemies of Communism and of indulging a personal crisis of conscience at the expense of the collective cause. The first of these charges seems to have been justified since, as Vercors admitted at the time, the anti-communist press exulted over the public airing of doubts by two notable fellow-travellers<sup>42</sup>. But in answer to a further reproach, from Aragon, that Vercors had virtually called all Communists liars, including Thorez, Mao-Tse-Tung and Aragon himself, Vercors explained that on the contrary he saw all honourable Communists as being victims of the intriguing few (such as Rajk). The ensuing exchanges, with Vercors writing for Les Lettres françaises a defence of his position which, despite a preliminary discussion with Pierre Daix, was never published, are fully recorded in the 'dossier' in Plus ou moins Homme and have been briefly summarized by Lottman in The Left Bank.

In the conclusion to his 1950 'dossier' on the Rajk case, Vercors responded

to the censorship to which Les Lettres françaises seemed to have subjected him by announcing that his collaboration 'par la plume' with his communist friends would now be suspended. At the same time, his pledge of general support for them was renewed: '.... ma fidélité à leur action, je déclare ici, une fois encore, qu'elle continue de leur être assurée.' (PMH p 196) The Communists, for their part, seemed prepared to let matters rest as far as Vercors was concerned: as Les Nouveaux Jours records, he was not, unlike Cassou, to be 'excommunié'. The reason for this discrimination was apparent enough: 'C'est que je ne suis pas sorti du domaine de la moralité pour déborder sur celui de la politique' (NJ p 177); whereas Cassou, having overstepped this crucial demarcation line by openly siding with Tito against Stalin, had made himself a candidate for character-assassination. Deploring with retrospective bluntness the 'pratiques détestables, maurrassiennes'<sup>43</sup> (NJ p 178) that the Communists used to discredit Cassou, Vercors recalls himself once more reflecting on the contradictions which continued support of the Party imposed on him.

At this point, it is interesting to turn briefly from Vercors's own account in order to consider the view of his stance in the aftermath of the Rajk affair that emerges from David Cauté's two studies of the period. The reference in Communism and the French Intellectuals is short and, perhaps for that reason, rather inaccurate, since the last sentence is not supported by the text of 'Points de Suspension' which Cauté refers to as his source:

Vercors, who had accepted the Party line on the Moscow trials, could take no more. In his view, Courtade (who had reported back from the Rajk trial) was lying. The Party would have no more to do with him. 44

In The Fellow-Travellers, on the other hand, (where Vercors, along with many others, is no longer referred to as an 'idealist'), Caute's comment is more critical:

Vercors, who had swallowed the Moscow trials, could take no more (something which happened to him time and again; but, like Donald Duck, he invariably emerged from the pond bone-dry). 45

The objective record of Vercors's further political involvement does in fact confirm the point that Caute is making here, whether or not he is justified in treating Vercors quite so ironically. It is certainly a less misleading comment that Lottman's 'he ceased to write for Les Lettres françaises'<sup>46</sup>, or even J-P. Rioux's 'Vercors, Cassou et Martin-Chauffier s'éloignent en silence'<sup>47</sup> (referring to the general crisis of conscience affecting the fellow-travellers around 1950). For Vercors, at least, did not keep his distance for very long. The imprisonment in October 1950 of the young communist sailor Henri Martin, who had agitated against the atrocities allegedly committed by the French in Indochina, produced a loud, sustained outcry from French left-wing and liberal opinion, with Vercors being prompt to join in.

What particularly incensed Vercors was that Martin was condemned after honourably protesting at criminal orders (as the Germans had failed to do during the War), while at exactly the same time an alleged Nazi war criminal named Ottenbacher was acquitted. The violence of Vercors's indignation at this 'double injustice' is undisguised in the article which he sent to Claude Morgan for publication in Les Lettres françaises, and which is reproduced in the dossier 'Pour Henri Martin' in Les Pas dans le Sable. A few lines from the article will suffice to convey its tone:

Rage et douleur, voilà ce qui m'anime .... Un Français a été condamné pour avoir refusé d'être complice de pratiques sauvages, un Allemand acquitté pour les sauvageries qu'il a fait ou laissé commettre! O victimes de l'avenir, victimes des futurs carnages, des futurs génocides, ce double jugement-là aura scellé votre destin! (PS pp 165-166)

At a time when the CED plan was beginning to be debated, Vercors's distrust of the Germans was once more very evidently on display, with wartime attitudes being duly evoked in succeeding passages of intense and dramatic protest. The French government, and the courts, had blood on their hands:

Je les accuse de forfaiture devant l'honneur de la Nation.  
Si j'ai tort, il faut m'emprisonner aussi; et faire brûler  
Le Silence de la Mer et la Marche à l'Etoile qui sont des  
livres subversifs.... (PS p 167)

Even more striking, perhaps, is the defiant peroration to the article, in which Vercors associates the French courts with the 'vomissements des temps honteux de Vichy' (PS p 167) and states his own willingness to act with others in the spirit of the Resistance to exercise justice. In such a cause, he claims, 'la mort ne nous fait pas peur, messieurs, ni la prison ....' (PS p 168).

The Henri Martin affair thus provided an issue on which Vercors could once more mount the intellectual barricades alongside the Communists. In the same Autumn as had seen the publication of Plus ou moins Homme, including 'Points de Suspension', (and indeed before the appearance of La Voie Libre, containing 'Points de Suspension' together with similar contributions from Aveline, Cassou and Martin-Chauffier), Vercors had turned back towards Claude Morgan and Les Lettres françaises. It was not possible, and there was no attempt, to disguise the recent difficulties, which Vercors referred to at the outset of his article. The same 'moral reasons' that had separated them remained. However...

... il faut bien que je crie quelque part mon indignation,  
et devant la nécrose croissante de la presse actuelle, je ne  
vois pas qui d'autre que les Lettres publierais encore, sans  
hésiter, ce que j'ai à dire. (PS p 165)

Morgan not only published the article in Les Lettres françaises<sup>48</sup> but

in the same issue produced his own enthusiastic review of Plus ou moins Homme. Brushing aside the misunderstanding or 'faux problème' that had come between them, he praised Vercors's criticism of the 'politically-motivated' bombing of Hiroshima and his condemnation of Pétainist France (both recorded in Plus ou moins Homme). The consistency of Vercors's stance, in short, is clear for all to see:

....c'est le même grand principe moral qui l'oblige aujourd'hui à exprimer son indignation devant ce double crime contre l'homme: la condamnation de Henri Martin, et l'acquiescement d'un assassin hitlérien .... 49

But a rapprochement such as this did not, of course, escape attention, and one of the first reactions appeared in another, far less favourable, review of Plus ou moins Homme:

.... Tout est bien qui finit bien: Vercors vient d'adresser aux Lettres françaises un 'admirable article' en faveur d'Henri Martin. Claude Morgan, sans plus attendre, lui rend la politesse et consacre trois colonnes élogieuses à la 'morale de Vercors' telle qu'elle s'exprime dans Plus ou moins Homme....50

Michel Vivier thus ironised long before David Caute over Vercors's readiness to bury the hatchet with Les lettres françaises and, more generally, to pursue, 'en marge de la (cinquième) colonne, le rôle difficile de "flanc-garde"<sup>21</sup>.

Vercors himself, as if in answer to this kind of criticism, has produced in Les Nouveaux Jours a rationalisation of his attitude at each successive crisis in which his relationship with the Communists was strained but - until much later - never quite broken off. 1950 marked the beginning of the long, acrimonious debate in Europe over the question of German rearmament. Vercors was as vehemently opposed as the Communist Party to proposals to integrate the Federal Republic into the Western defence structure, and this was one consideration that enabled him, 'sans arrière-pensée' (NJ p 186), to work within the 'Mouvement de la Paix'. On the other hand, he claims he could not accept the virulent communist

attacks on Robert Schuman and Jules Moch, the French negotiators in New York. Once again, as had happened in the case of Jean Cassou, simple fairness of judgement was being flung out of the window for the sake of the Party line; and once again, according to Les Nouveaux Jours, the author pondered the peculiar difficulty of his fellow-travelling role. The question, then, is how and why he maintained this dogged attachment to the Party, despite the continued pressures and persuasions being exercised on him to sunder the relationship. In attempting to explain this from his more recent viewpoint, Vercors has recourse to a domestic image, albeit one which soon broadens into another sweeping survey of the national and international scene. His relationship with the Communists was like a bad marriage, full of tension and mutual recrimination. But let an outsider make even a mild criticism of one of the partners in front of the other and he will be put sharply in his place:

Alors on dit des époux qu'ils s'aiment comme des tourtereaux. Ainsi de moi avec les communistes. Ils m'indignent, me révoltent et je passe mon temps à leur dire leurs quatre vérités. Mais je supporte mal les attaques de tous bords dont ils sont accablés. Et qu'on m'excuse de le répéter: mais comment cesser d'être 'compagnon de route' tant que dure la 'sale guerre' d'Indochine, tant que persiste l'énorme supériorité militaire américaine, aggravée par la menace d'une Allemagne réarmée, tant qu'en France les Communistes sont la cible quasi unique de la répression policière? (NJ p 188)

Moreover, if we ourselves may extend the author's metaphor, it seems that unlike conjugal relationships, where, as in his own case, a first unhappy marriage could be succeeded by one of more genuine harmony, politics offered him no congenial partners other than the Communists. When, for example, the Socialists under Guy Mollet supported the expulsion of foreign (including Spanish) Communists, Vercors says he saw them acting as the 'flunkies' of fascism: 'Comment

ne resterais-je pas "compagnon de route" des communistes quand je vois un Guy Mollet, et tout son parti derrière lui, devenir en France le second de Franco?' (NJ p 184)

And so another important theme in the record of Vercors's political reactions re-emerges: his disappointment with the SFIO, which had never ceased to betray its own principles - 'depuis du moins qu'il a limogé Daniel Mayer' (NJ p 184)<sup>52</sup>. We find far fewer references in Plus ou moins Homme to the French socialist party and its leaders than to the Communists - an indication in itself, perhaps, that while the author may have felt more affinity with some aspects of the farmers' political philosophy, they had failed to measure up in his eyes as a true force for progress. In his memoirs and historical surveys, on the other hand, Vercors explicitly traces his disillusion with them; and this disillusionment is also most strongly stated in parts of Les Pas dans le Sable, a collection of the author's articles, speeches and letters, mainly from the period 1950-54, and hence a vivid contemporary record of his political attitudes in those years.

One particular article in Les Pas dans le Sable, entitled 'Une Farce déshonorante', was inspired by the authorities' decision to ban two communist paintings from the 1951 'Salon d'Automne'. Vercors used the episode to attack the record of the Socialists on a broad front and over a very long period of time:

... pourquoi ne suis-je pas socialiste? Eh bien, c'est parce que, depuis trente-cinq ans, je vois comme aujourd'hui les socialistes trahir sans cesse le socialisme. Cela a commencé en 1914, en Allemagne et en France. Cela n'a pas cessé. Et ce qui est merveilleux, c'est de voir que les socialistes, dans tous les pays, acceptent toutes les compromissions pour obtenir ou conserver le pouvoir, et que, dans tous les pays, ils perdent le pouvoir ainsi obtenu parce que ces compromissions leur lient les mains.... (PS p 252)

As stated by Vercors, the indictment to which the Socialists at home and abroad should answer was heavy indeed:

Je pense en effet profondément que les malheurs des temps passés, présents et futurs, sont ou seront causés par cette trahison des socialistes .... (PS p 252)

If the Socialists had kept faith, as allies of the Communists, with the proletariat and the revolution, and had supported the masses 'qui ne se décident pas à rallier le communisme, mais qui ne veulent plus de la tyrannie capitaliste' (PS p 253) - then the world would have been a different and a better place. There would be no threat of a Third World War, a disarmed Europe would be at peace, there would be no war in Indochina or Korea; and factories and homes would have been built on the savings from armaments.

The author's onslaught on the Socialists was clearly not to be restrained by the consideration that much of his indictment was founded on hypothesis. Certainly there is nothing very new in the charge that socialist politicians are too often prepared to compromise their principles for the sake of office; and in any case, according to Philip Williams, the failures of the SFIO were as much due to the so-called 'militants' as to parliamentary leaders such as Léon Blum:

.... They resented Blum's interest in new men, often from the middle class, who had not worked their passage with the party. They resented any open tampering with the hallowed class-war creed, though they hardly ever pretended to take it seriously - for notoriously the Socialists were 'herbivorous Marxists', quite unlike the Communist carnivores .... 58

But Vercors's approach in 'Une Farce déshonorante' is typical of much of Les Pas dans le Sable in its polemical vigour and intensity of tone; and indeed, these qualities are so much to the fore in some sections (including, as we have seen, the dossier 'Pour Henri Martin') that it is easy to see why, in a generally favourable

review of Les Pas dans le Sable in Combat, Hubert Juin should write of 'cette candeur qui est une passion de l'homme (dans son excès même), ces erreurs qui sont un appétit de générosité.....'<sup>54</sup>.

As indicated by 'Une Farce déshonorante', one of the many highly-charged issues dealt with in Les Pas dans le Sable was French government pressure on various communist personalities and publications in the early 1950's. The concern that Vercors expressed so forcefully for the Communists' civil liberties was, of course, very much in keeping with his role then as a fellow-traveller; but that he also genuinely felt that France was passing through its own McCarthyite phase at that time seems to be borne out by the much more recent recapitulation of events that appears in Les Nouveaux Jours. Here he recalls the government's prosecution, on various grounds, of Fernand Vigne, André Stal, Jacques Duclos and Alain Le Léap among others, together with his own vigorous challenge to the responsible minister in 'Lettre Ouverte à M. le Garde des Sceaux'<sup>55</sup>. Les Nouveaux Jours evokes the 'ambiance d'embastillements, de chasse aux sorcières, de violation des lois....' (NJ pp 218-219) created by the authorities' anticommunism; and although 'cette période affreuse' and its abuses had now passed into history -

D'avoir rappelé ces faits, à l'heure où j'écris ces lignes, je demeure stupéfait de ce que la France (comparée à celle d'aujourd'hui) a pu être un moment .... C'est loin et oublié... (NJ p 219)

- Vercors can still not excuse the Fourth Republic for having engendered such paranoia and repression. Nor are his judgements, whether contemporary with events or retrospective, unsupported by historians with no axe to grind. J.-P. Rioux, for instance, recalls the buffetings undergone by the PCF in 1952 and 1953, including 'la chasse aux sorcières dans

l'administration<sup>56</sup>, and the Stalinist rigidity that the Party adopted partly in self-defence:

Jamais les communistes n'ont été aussi isolés dans l'opinion et aussi paralysés par la glaciation stalinienne: l'anticommunisme a une proie facile. La droite l'érige en méthode de gouvernement. 57

Through loyalty to the embattled Communists, therefore, and out of a vehemently-expressed distaste for the centre-right and right-wing governments of Pinay, René Mayer and Laniel, Vercors remained throughout the early 1950s an apologist for the communist cause. It is Rioux, once more, who cautions against attaching too much historical significance to the efforts of any intellectuals on the Party's behalf, whether in the CNE, 'Le Mouvement de la Paix' or in any other front organisation:

... la masse des Français s'intéresse peu alors aux tourments des écrivains, des artistes ou des philosophes, et les organisations de masse qui brandissent la 'colombe de la paix' dessinée par Picasso rassemblent peu d'ouvriers, de paysans et d'employés.... 58

However, within the fellow-travelling camp itself, Vercors's prominence at this time actually increased when, in January 1953, he succeeded Martin-Chauffier as Chairman of the CNE. According to Les Nouveaux Jours his election, which went ahead despite considerable resistance on his part, was due to the trust which he inspired on both sides of the Committee: that is, on the Right (represented by Maurice Druon) and on the Left (led by Elsa Triolet). This trust can in itself, perhaps, be taken as evidence of the sincerity with which Vercors argued, in however partisan a fashion, on the issues of the day. But, as he himself anticipated, the chairmanship of the CNE was to be no sinecure - and it would in due course impose further severe strain on his ability to remain loyal to the Communists and at the same time true to his own principles.

Yet in the furore over the Slansky trials, which erupted immediately after his assumption of office, the clash of principles was initially between himself and his non-communist colleagues. Those condemned to death or life imprisonment in Prague at the end of 1952 had been leading members of the Czech government or Communist Party, now accused, at Stalin's instigation, of complicity with the enemy state of Israel. The complex strategy that Stalin was pursuing behind the scenes possibly demonstrated as much about his skill in undermining Kremlin rivals like Beria and revisionist leaders in the satellite countries as about the intensifying paranoia that is said to have characterized the final stages of his life. But the indictments of pro-Sionism against the Czech defendants led, since most of them were Jewish, to the counter-accusation of antisemitism against the Soviet regime - especially since, at about the same time, a number of Soviet doctors, again mostly Jewish, were being arrested in Moscow. In France, L'Humanité applauded the Prague trial verdicts, while the liberal and anti-Communist press (in Vercors's phrase: 'la presse atlantique'<sup>59</sup>) was eloquent in denunciation. Then it was the turn of the CNE, under its new Chairman, to react on the issue.

In a 'dossier' of almost forty pages in Les Pas dans le Sable, Vercors reproduces his first 'Discours présidentiel' (April 1953), largely devoted to the repercussions of the trials, an 'abrégé des faits essentiels' together with several relevant letters, and finally his Chairman's address of May 1954. The overall title of the dossier is 'Un dilemme', although the author seems to have been exercised by several different dilemmas in the course of the affair. The principal one was whether to allow a censure motion submitted by

Serge Groussard<sup>60</sup> against the Czech authorities to be debated and voted on by the CNE.

According to Les Nouveaux Jours, which reiterates more succinctly a passage from the first 'discours présidentiel', a political motion of this kind had never been submitted before, despite the many highly contentious issues - Indochina, Rajk, Korea, the Rosenbergs - of the post-war years. In pointing to the divisiveness of these issues as the reason why they had never been debated, Vercors seems involuntarily to be admitting the basic invalidity of the CNE as a representative forum of intellectual opinion:

Toute motion pour ou contre, selon les cas, aurait effectivement provoqué soit le départ des membres pro-soviétiques du CNE, soit celui des pro-américains. Et c'est ce que personne, alors, ne désirait ... (NJ pp 209-210)

Certainly he himself, as Chairman in January 1953, was anxious to protect the unity of the organisation against splits of this sort. However, the challenge had been concerted, he believed, by an anti-communist cabal; and when the executive committee under his chairmanship rejected the motion and refused the plenary debate, a score of members, including Martin-Chauffier, resigned from the CNE.

The steps by which this stage was reached are set out in detail in 'Un dilemme'. Vercors, strongly opposed to antisemitism as he naturally was, claims he was not convinced that it was being practised as state policy in the Eastern bloc. On the contrary, some familiar suspicions were stirring in his mind, and a familiar historical parallel was available to express them:

.... il me paraissait très probable que s'il y avait une affaire Dreyfus, elle n'avait pas eu lieu à Prague contre les Juifs, mais qu'elle se montait bel et bien à Paris contre les communistes, parallèlement aux persécutions policières dont ils étaient l'objet ... (PS pp 214-215)

And by the time of his first Chairman's address a few months later, he felt able to claim that his provisional judgement, and that of the executive committee, had been fully vindicated; for Pravda had published in March an article condemning antisemitism, based on an earlier text by the Czech president, Gottwald. This, in the Chairman's view, seems to have been conclusive evidence:

....ces inquiétudes, l'article de la Pravda les a maintenant dissipées ... cela n'est ni possible ni concevable pour un Etat vraiment communiste; ceux qui l'ont toujours su et toujours dit ont reçu la plus éclatante des confirmations.  
(PS p 200) 61

Nor, apparently, had his opinion altered (except perhaps to become more confident) by the time of his second Chairman's message in the following year, 1954, and its reference to those who had resigned:

.... je me demande ce qu'ils pensent aujourd'hui, un an après, de cet antisémitisme soviétique qui les avait tant horrifiés. S'ils parviennent à y croire encore, malgré l'évidence.... (PS p 231).

In view of all this, Vercors was perhaps fortunate to escape further ironies from the pen of David Caute. The Fellow-Travelers in fact deals caustically with those progressive intellectuals elsewhere in Europe who once more allowed the Soviet government the benefit of the doubt; while at the same time Caute gives credit for the 'sensitivity to the facts' shown by those like Aveline, Martin-Chauffier, Vildrac, Laporte and Bost, 'all friendly towards communism in their time'<sup>62</sup>, who resigned from the CNE over the affair. Vercors is not mentioned in this context, despite his prominent role; but Caute himself is in no doubt about the realities of the situation behind the Iron Curtain:

That Moscow had launched a concerted anti-semitic campaign was obvious. In 1949 nearly all Yiddish publications as well as the Yiddish theatre in Moscow had been closed down, and three years later the majority of Yiddish cultural leaders were shot after a wave of mass arrests .... 63

For Vercors, it was the United States, and the aggressive anticommunism fostered there during the Cold War years, which posed a greater threat to human rights - so much at least was implied in his protest at the Rosenberg executions in June 1953. In 'Une Constance sinistre', written immediately after the event and reproduced in Les Pas dans le Sable, there is a passing acknowledgement of Europe's debt to America for the recent past; but the author is more concerned with the urgent questions that now needed to be asked. Even if the Rosenbergs were not innocent, their guilt was not clear beyond reasonable doubt, yet the American authorities had pressed their condemnation remorselessly, rejecting appeals from every part of the world:

...d'où vient cette constance, d'où vient cet entêtement  
à ne pas revenir sur l'erreur judiciaire? ... nous hurlons  
de comprendre qu'on s'est hâté de les mettre à mort,  
justement pour n'avoir pas à ouvrir ces dossiers. (PS pp 50-51)

If the predominant note in this essay is meant to be more one of sorrow than of anger - 'je ne veux pas polémiser en ce jour de deuil abominable' (PS p 50), there is no doubt about the polemical vigour with which Vercors rattles other skeletons in the American cupboard (Sacco and Vanzetti, or Willy MacGee); nor, in a brief, rather lurid postscript to the affair, 'Les Enfants d'Edouard' (PS pp 55-57), did he find it inconceivable that the American authorities might try to suppress the truth by disposing of inconvenient witnesses. The Defence lawyer, Emmanuel Bloch, had already died, ostensibly of natural causes - what similar fate might not befall the Rosenbergs'

two sons, those latter-day Princes in the Tower? They might one day rise to accuse the American administration<sup>64</sup>; they too, therefore, might need to be disposed of:

On sait comment ces choses-là se font. Un avocat meurt opportunément de crise cardiaque dans sa baignoire. Deux enfants meurent opportunément d'épidémie dans une institution. (PS p 57)

Vercors did not seek to exculpate the Rosenbergs completely, but like most liberal and left-wing observers he did see them as the scapegoats of America's Cold War phobias. Other commentators have suggested that the widespread sympathy felt for the Rosenbergs was in fact exploited by the Communists in Europe and elsewhere as a means of distracting attention from the Prague trials<sup>65</sup>. Vercors himself did not want to be accused of sweeping the alleged Soviet oppression under the carpet, and indeed he anticipated that the enemies of Communism would not let that happen: '...ils vont m'opposer Rajk, Kostov, Clementis, Slansky.' (PS p 49). To counter which, the author claimed he had not yet said his last word on Rajk and the other cases; but the spotlight now must rest on America. For the conspiracy by an all-powerful faction there to subvert justice for political ends - a conspiracy of which the great American public 'mystifié et confiant' (PS p 51) seemed unaware - could in due course endanger the world:

Puisque désormais nous savons, nous savons sans recours que rien n'arrêterait la main qui déciderait, demain, d'écrabouiller Pékin, ou Moscou, ou même toute l'Europe, pas même l'horreur et la réprobation universelles. (PS p 49)

It is instructive to dwell, at least to this extent, on the author's passion over the Rosenberg affair because of the contrast it makes with his more cautious approach to the contemporary Slansky case. In respect of the latter, admittedly, Vercors had been asked to take

an official standpoint in his capacity as Chairman of the CNE, and this may help to explain the deliberate, almost bureaucratic, presentation of his 'dossier' on the affair. There can nevertheless be no doubt that his basic sympathies in the mid-1950s inclined him as a matter of course towards the Communist bloc and away from the policies of most Western governments. He would not close his mind to oppression or injustice behind the Iron Curtain, but until firm proof was available, he was normally prepared to give the Communists the benefit of the doubt, as well as the time to set right any abuses that might develop in their system<sup>66</sup>.

A quite new dimension was added to Vercora's relationship with Communism when he was invited to visit China as the French representative of 'Le Mouvement de la Paix' in September 1953. The section of Les Pas dans le Sable inspired by this two-month visit includes an address to his Chinese hosts on Rebeais, an enthusiastic appraisal of young people in China, whom he apparently found more spontaneous and optimistic than their Western counterparts, and, in the candidly-entitled 'Essai de témoignage partiel', an attempt to evaluate the impact of Communism on the Chinese people as a whole. Vercora apparently saw much to approve of in all the main areas of economic and social activity; and even where progress was gradual, as for example in the nationalisation of light industry, he could conclude that plans were proceeding 'avec une sage lenteur' (PS p 82). Nor did he see any element of coercion in the huge agrarian reforms: 'Avant tout: pas de contrainte'. (PS p 87). Propaganda undoubtedly existed, but for wholly constructive purposes - public services,

education and health, for example - and the whole tenor of the authorities' message could be summed up in the exhortation 'Elevéz-vous' (PS p 93).

Given the entirely positive way in which he felt able to interpret all such evidence, it is small wonder that Vercors was soon calling on French governments to recognise the Communist regime in China. The justification for such a step could, in Vercors's eyes, hardly be overstated:

Or, la clé du monde, nous savons où elle est aujourd'hui: elle est en Chine. Le réveil de la Chine est l'événement autour duquel tout l'avenir s'organise .... La pierre de touche est là: la France va-t-elle enfin admettre la réalité chinoise? (PS p 120)

In fact, of course, despite the 'good sense' and 'realism' of Pierre Mendes France, at whom the foregoing appeal was directed, France would not recognise Communist China until de Gaulle's decision to do so in 1964. Vercors welcomed this later policy<sup>67</sup>, although Chairman Mao's 'cultural revolution' thereafter threatened to undo much that the original revolution had achieved. But in any case, Vercors's first visit had filled him with a warmth and enthusiasm for the Chinese people that transcended purely ideological considerations. Thus Les Divagations d'un Français en Chine, the detailed account of his journey that he wrote (and illustrated) after his return, was as much concerned with his and his wife's experiences and impressions as tourists as it was with political developments. At this level, certainly, his interest in the folk-customs, culture and daily lives of the Chinese, 'ce merveilleux peuple' (DFC p 289), seems to have been livelier and more immediate than that of Simone de Beauvoir when she made the same journey not long afterwards<sup>68</sup>; though both

of course, were impressed by, and keen to extol, this vast new construction of Socialism with its distinctive Chinese variations.

Vercors's journey to Peking started, in fact, with a brief stay - his first - in Russia, and he embarked on this stage in the spirit of a loyal but vigilant fellow-traveller:

Je n'ai jamais caché mes sympathies à l'égard de l'énorme et courageuse expérience socialiste qui se poursuit de l'Elbe à la mer de Chine, à cause de l'espoir qu'elle représente seule en ce siècle pour tant de masses humaines. Mais je suis aussi un homme de peu de foi .... (DFC p 21)

Although he would lend credence 'ni à Koestler ni à Kravchenko' (p 21), there was still the uneasy possibility that the smoke of those many accusations might conceal some fire. In the event, while Moscow did not produce the 'coup de foudre' (NJ p 232) experienced in Peking, the general impression recorded in the early pages of Les Divagations was, with due allowance made for the shortness of the visit, a favourable one. There seemed far less surveillance of visitors to the Soviet capital than he had been warned of, and he discerned a tranquil solidity in its people and buildings. In this account, however, there is little specific reference to the matter of intellectual freedom in the Soviet bloc; whereas from a visit to Leningrad made on the return journey from China, Vercors recalls, thirty years later in Les Nouveaux Jours: 'une apparence de liberté de parole, mais jamais au-delà d'une certaine limite. Le tout sous une carapace impossible à percer...' (NJ p 237); or even more discouragingly, a conversation limited to generalities when he shortly afterwards met some writers and intellectuals in Prague where, it seemed, 'un couvercle pèse sur tout'. (NJ p 239).

It seems, then, that if Vercors felt doubts about the extent of intellectual and artistic freedom at the time of this first personal

contact with Soviet society, he preferred to keep them in reserve. Years before, he had expressed anxiety about the Communists' willingness to subordinate truth to political necessity and had called attention to fundamental illogicalities in the Rajk trial. But on becoming Chairman of the CNE he seemed primarily concerned, as 'arbitre entre deux tendances opposées' (PPC p 68), to preserve the cohesion of what he still claimed to be a valuable meeting-ground for communist and non-communist opinion; and it was apparently the desire to safeguard the organisation against the destructive tactics of anticommunist elements within and without that motivated the course of action he pursued over the Slansky affair. At the time, and in his subsequent accounts, Vercors drew what moral comfort he could from his part in the decision to withdraw the CNE page ('Le CNE vous parle') from Les Lettres françaises. Although this in fact stemmed from a unilateral act of censorship by Aragon (through the agency of Daix and Morgan), the withdrawal of the page could at least be presented, in Vercors's 'Discours présidentiel' of April 1953, as an indication of the Committee's independence; or even, with the greater incisiveness of hindsight, as a rejection of the 'relation de suzeraine à vassale' (NJ p 216). More generally, the decision can also be viewed to some extent as a complement to Vercors's stance in the aftermath of the Rajk affair. As an individual author then he had announced his intention of no longer writing in Les Lettres françaises (although having broken that particular 'silence' over the Henri Martin affair, his signature was to appear several more times in the journal in the 1950's). Now, by mutual agreement, the CNE page was closed, and with it one further channel of communication between Communists, fellow-travellers and the wider body of intellectual left-wing opinion. Vercors regretted this, and especially so since

attempts to publish the CNE page in Libération also came to nothing; but as there was no question of gratifying the adversaries of Communism by writing for 'la presse bourgeoise' (PPC p 32), he had to accept that any further differences that might arise between himself and his communist friends would not be aired through the medium of the press. However, his acceptance of 'un boeuf sur la langue' (PPC p 31), the self-denying ordinance of dutiful discretion, could not be sustained indefinitely, whatever his continuing support for communist aims in general. Moral and political anxieties, reaction to events in 1956 in particular and the accumulating frustrations of the chairmanship of the CNE - all were finally released in his remarkable farewell to systematic fellow-travelling, P.P.C.

Although ostensibly a testament and a lament, as the wryly-humorous pastiches of Villon are intended to emphasize, this unusual text, or collection of texts, cannot be characterized quite so simply. In the broadest terms, it is the 'dossier en vrac' (p 11) of Vercors's experience as a 'potiche d'honneur' (PPC passim). In this 'rôle ingrat' (p 9) he had loyally served the communist cause for more than a dozen years. Now, cracked and chipped from rough handling, he was voluntarily leaving the display-shelf, in order to remain for a while, in somewhat different phraseology, 'à l'écart de la cité et de ses luttes' (p 12). This, then, was to be a temporary absence: although no longer Chairman of the CNE, he would not give up membership of that or other bodies such as 'Le Mouvement de la Paix'; nor would he seek (beyond, presumably, the present exposé of his position) to embarrass his erstwhile companions. But, most essentially, he was withdrawing from all the parades and public platforms of commitment, becoming an observer in the background rather than a leading voice of progressive opinion.

The events which most contributed (albeit indirectly) to Vercors's decision were those that took place in the Soviet Union and Hungary in 1956. That period was, of course, a watershed for many fellow-travellers, with Khrushchev's comprehensive denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress and the rehabilitation of Rajk and others being followed by the crushing of the Hungarian uprising in November<sup>69</sup>. According to his account in P.P.C., recapitulated in Les Nouveaux Jours, Vercors was less surprised than many by 'le coup de tonnerre du XX<sup>e</sup> Congrès, qui donnait si terriblement raison à nos craintes' (PPC p 31); yet something positive could emerge from the revelations about the Stalin era if they led to a strengthening of the fellow-travellers' critical role. He applied the lesson, with creditable directness, in his Chairman's address to the CNE at the beginning of May. Although his own past efforts to warn the Communists of moral pitfalls had been disregarded, he did not now want to claim vindication for its own sake; but just as he and others had kept faith with the Party, so the Communists could now return that confidence by restoring the CNE page, or something comparable:

Du moins, je souhaite que l'esprit de cette page hypothétique devienne celui de notre association: je souhaite que les membres du CNE fassent désormais pleinement leur métier d'éclaircisseurs attentifs. (PPC p 45)

In fact, not only did Aragon abruptly reject the suggestion at the meeting, but Vercors's speech, contrary to tradition, was not reprinted in Les Lettres françaises<sup>70</sup>. His resignation from the chairmanship occurred shortly afterwards, following a separate dispute within the 'comité directeur'. Vercors briefly considered forming 'une minorité agissante' to act as gadfly to the main CNE

body, but when Aragon's election to the chairmanship at a time of great political sensitivity in 1957 confirmed unequivocally the communist control of the organization, he decided that the time had come to withdraw from the scene.

Meanwhile, of course, the drama of Hungary had provoked the worst rift between Communists and fellow-travellers since the War. While Vercors writes more succinctly and directly of his anger at the second Soviet intervention in Les Nouveaux Jours than he does in P.P.C., both texts adduce two particular considerations with which he qualified his condemnation: the recent aggressions (Guatemala and Suez) by Western powers, and the influence of endemic fascist elements within Hungary in exploiting the upsurge of anti-communist feeling there<sup>71</sup>. P.P.C. reproduces the text of the protest drafted by Vercors and published in the press over the signature of Sartre, Claude Roy, Vailland, Simone de Beauvoir and other prominent communist and progressive intellectuals. In Vercors's own attitude, as Les Nouveaux Jours makes clear, the element of protest at the Russian action was genuine enough, but its expression in the published declaration was balanced and possibly diluted by the diversity of aims that he was seeking simultaneously to fulfil:

.... réunir les consciences révoltées, sans venir  
apporter à l'impérialisme occidental et à ses condamnations  
hypocrites le secours de notre dépit (PPC p 119). 72

When Sartre decided to be quite unequivocal a few days later by announcing his complete break with the Communists, Vercors felt obliged to justify his own continued support for those who in his view still bore 'le seul espoir de l'avenir' (PPC p 126). In an article published in L'Observateur, he affirmed the need to weigh

up carefully the good with the bad in all that had recently occurred in the Soviet bloc. Above all, he and other communist sympathisers should not

laisser accabler sous nos yeux, sans distinction, toute la Russie soviétique, noyer dans le même sac les "libéraux" avec les "durs", les jeunes bolcheviks avec les bureaucrates, les courageux rénovateurs avec les opportunistes butés ... (PPC p 129)

L'Express, which had omitted Vercors's signature from the original published protest of which he had been the author, now added insult to injury by referring to him as 'un "conformiste" indécorable' (PPC p 137): an attack from an unexpected quarter which combined with a number of other inexplicable slights (fully detailed in Les Nouveaux Jours)<sup>73</sup> to make him feel increasingly isolated among the various factions in the ideological arena. But he was not yet ready to throw in his hand. In answer to further criticism of his position, he restated the rules he had always tried to follow - to avoid sweeping judgements and oppose any indulgence in violent prejudice: 'Depuis quinze ans, depuis Le Silence de la Mer, je ne fais rien d'autre que d'essayer de lutter contre les sentiments violents, d'où qu'ils viennent.' (PPC p 132)

It is, of course, easy enough to set this claim against the author's vehement denunciation of, say, the Laniel government in the summer of 1954, or his wholehearted condemnation of Guy Mollet<sup>74</sup>, in order to suggest that Vercors was not always consistent in the observance of his own precepts. His polemical verve was undoubtedly unleashed on many occasions against targets which he made to appear devoid of any redeeming element. But Vercors himself would presumably draw a distinction between the rhetorical force that he exerted in the progressive cause and the violence which lurked just below the

surface of reactionary and fascist attitudes. For the present, in any case, his concern was to try to salvage something important from the Hungarian crisis: the dialogue in which he was engaged with Soviet writers, both by correspondence and through direct contacts on visits to Moscow<sup>75</sup>. Vercors saw this dialogue as a major contribution that he and others could make to understanding between East and West; and there is a strong note of regret, in the section of P.P.C. subtitled 'Un dialogue interrompu', that at the critical juncture it bore so little fruit, whether in helping to restore solidarity between Soviet and Hungarian writers or in saving some of the latter from persecution.

The various texts reproduced in this section of P.P.C. confirm that amid all the political controversies of the mid-1950s, Vercors did not lose sight of his philosophical objective: a universal definition of 'la qualité d'homme' through which all men, whatever the historical and ideological divisions between them, could acknowledge their shared humanity. This central focus of his writing was duly reflected in 'Profession de Foi', published in a Moscow literary review in July 1955. Vercors first evokes the sturdy tradition of French writers of conscience and protest - Voltaire, Hugo, Zola and so on - a tradition to which he had dedicated his own efforts, both in his clandestine publishing and in his post-war commitment. But his other main aim, from Plus ou moins Homme to Colères, was his attempt to define the enduring human quality that preceded and subsumed both the Western, Christian conception of Man and the materialist, Marxist conception. Nazism had denied this fundamental bond of humanity, which was basically why the Allies of East and West had come together to defeat Hitler. Now that tension and suspicion had replaced that

common purpose, Vercors was convinced that shared intellectual recognition of a conception such as his could be the starting-point for a new exchange of ideas; if indeed it was not 'indispensable à l'ouverture d'un dialogue fructueux' (PPC p 85).

However, following Soviet censorship of certain references in other articles that Vercors had hoped to have published in Russia in 1955, then the apparent unresponsiveness of Soviet writers to the appeals sent by Sartre, Montand, Picasso, Vercors and others in May 1957 on behalf of the Hungarian novelist Gali and the journalist Obersovsky, Vercors was forced to admit that the conditions for genuine dialogue did not yet obtain. But if he himself could do little more to help at present, he could urge others to wait and watch for better opportunities in the future. And there was a particular, characteristic exhortation, albeit expressed this time in Villonesque stanzas, to be offered to the younger generation:

Item, aux jeunes que je dis  
(soviétiques, autres aussi)  
Je veux léguer cette exigence:  
Gardez bien ce qu'avez compris  
.....  
N'oubliez pas: la vérité  
Rien qu'elle et toute. (PPC pp 200-201)

It was likewise in terms of regret, but with no undue despair about the future, that Vercors concludes another section of P.P.C. by announcing he can go no further as a representative of 'Le Mouvement de la Paix', however close to their aims he remained at heart. Not only had communist control of the movement, as with the CNE, become too rigid, but his own name no longer carried its former authority:

Simplement, je pense que mon nom, pour l'heure, a perdu toute valeur pour leur cause: ce n'est pas lui qui retient les fidèles, et pour ceux qui hésitent ou se sont éloignés, il est démonétisé et repousse plus qu'il n'attire. (PPC p 290)

In this sense of a declining moral prestige, indeed, lies one of the keys to Vercors's decision in 1957 to withdraw from all public commitments. At the beginning of P.P.C., he invites the reader to judge him on that decision, admitting that an average human share of 'amour-propre' and other innate defence-mechanisms prevent him from clearly doing so himself. Taking into account the treatment he received from L'Express and from Marc Beigbeder and Françoise Giroud in particular, there is no doubt that injury to his 'amour-propre' had already contributed a good deal to the decision to withdraw. In Les Nouveaux Jours, Vercors claims to have been helped through various moments of disillusionment by his sense of humour; and both there and in P.P.C. he maintains that he was not personally offended when Le Canard Enchaîné published a stinging attack on his public postures. Vercors has the candour to reproduce this article in both P.P.C. and Les Nouveaux Jours<sup>76</sup>; and in both texts, too, he spells out, in identical terms, the conclusion he drew from this and from the other signs of his depreciation:

La femme de César ne doit pas être soupçonnée, ni la sincérité des hommes qui luttent pour la justice (PPC pp 356-7, NJ p 312).

The particular cause of Le Canard Enchaîné's irony had been Vercors's decision to return his cross of the 'Légion d'Honneur' to the President of the Republic in protest against the French Army's use of torture in Algeria. This issue, and the Algerian War in general, were matters over which the author would be greatly concerned during the next few

years. Not, however, that he would seek to publicize his views in any of the established media - or through those fellow-travelling organizations to which in P.P.C. he was effectively bidding farewell.<sup>77</sup>

NOTES ON CHAPTER FOUR

1. In Jean Touchard, La Gauche en France depuis 1900, Paris, Seuil, coll: 'Points', 1977, pp 264-7.

Among the positive attitudes that developed through the Resistance Touchard identifies, for example, 'un constant souci de la morale, une morale exigeante et un peu vague qui se présente comme une morale de l'homme .... il est surabondamment question de l'homme, de l'esprit .... de la pureté - une République pure et dure.... (p 264).

2. To see the evolution of Sartre's attitude to Kant's principle that we should treat others as ends and not means, one can compare l'Existentialisme est un humanisme and Qu'est-ce que la littérature? (both positive) with Critique de la Raison dialectique (negative).
3. Although Sartre, of course, was only close to the Party, as 'un compagnon de route critique', from approximately 1950 to 1956. Vercors comments briefly on Sartre's general political orientation compared with his own in Appendix 1 of this thesis.
4. That is to say the contradiction between philosophic 'abstention' and a concern for international peace during most of the 1930's, followed by the contradiction between the same 'abstention' and the conviction that Nazism had to be fought.
5. Pierre Mendès France was of course a member of the 'Parti Radical' (albeit having strongly independent attitudes and policies) until he joined the PSA, soon to be the PSU, in 1959. After maintaining his opposition to de Gaulle from 1958 to 1969, he supported the Socialist candidate Gaston Defferre in 1969. The spelling of his surname without a hyphen throughout this thesis accords with the correct French form.
6. Vercors's attitude to the SFIO is more fully analysed later in the present Chapter, and there is further discussion of its parliamentary leaders in Chapter Five. The author's rather sweeping remark about the Socialists' 'opportunism' in the extract referring to the 1932 election probably does less than justice to the complexities of their attitude towards the exercise of power: these are succinctly brought out in Albert S. Lindemann, A History of European Socialism, Yale U.P., New Haven and London, 1983, pp 239-245.

7. The phrase 'Joie, joie, jour de joie' may or may not be in echo of Pascal's 'Joie, joie, joie, pleurs de joie'; there would certainly be no irony intended, for Vercors has always admired Pascal, as testified by some of his observations in 'La Séditation humaine' and the fact that Pascal is one of Pierre Cange's litany of heroes (AN p 71). Vercors's own phrase recurs in Le Tigre d'Anvers, p 169, in a different context from the 'front Populaire' victory.
8. Reference to Vercors's pre-war contact with Chamson and Martin-Chauffier was made in Chapter One of this thesis. Guéhenno both surprised and impressed Vercors by his oratory at a public celebration of Romain Rolland's seventieth birthday at the 'Salle de la Mutualité' in 1936; and his Dans la Prison was published clandestinely by 'Les Editions de Minuit' in 1944. Andrée Viollis seems to have influenced Vercors mainly through her early protests over French colonial abuses, as referred to in Chapter Five.
9. The exact stage in the War when the Communists became actively involved in the Resistance has been much debated. What is significant for the present study is that it was a subject of contention in correspondence exchanged by Vercors and General de Gaulle in 1955-6. Vercors wrote to de Gaulle in February 1955 to express his disappointment that in L'Appel, the first volume of Mémoires de Guerre, the General maintained that the Communists had not entered the Resistance until the Soviet Union was at war with Hitler. This letter from Vercors is reprinted in P.P.C., pp 326-9. De Gaulle's reply, which rather surprisingly came a year later, in February 1956, is not included in P.P.C. but is reproduced in H. Noguères, M. Degliame-Fouché and J.-L. Vigier, Histoire de la Résistance en France, juin 1940-juin 1941, Paris, Laffont, 1967, pp 490-1. De Gaulle's letter is warm in tone: 'Votre lettre, au sujet de L'Appel, m'a touché. Elle vient de vous, c'est-à-dire de quelqu'un qu'on ne peut oublier jamais. Et puis, elle a le son de la sincérité....' He then fully acknowledges the courage of individual Communists but reasserts that the Party did not commit itself to the struggle until the Summer of 1941. He also points out the differences between the Communists' purposes and his own: 'J'ai tâché de servir seulement la France. Eux l'ont servie aussi, mais ils n'ont pas servi qu'elle et, même, ils n'ont pas servi elle, d'abord.'

This exchange of letters is also discussed in Paul-Marie de la Gorce, L'Après-Guerre: Naissance de la France moderne, Paris, Grasset, 1978, pp 120-3.

Vercors's reply to de Gaulle's letter is referred to in Chapter Five, note 22 of this thesis, and the author's overall attitude to the General is further discussed in the same Chapter.

10. Vercors had been informed by a friend on the telephone from Paris three days after the Liberation that he was awaited there 'comme le messie' (NJ p 53, BS p 347). The same message is passed to Pierre Cange in Le Tigre d'Anvers, p 153.
11. Anne Whitmarsh, Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits of Commitment, Cambridge, C.U.P., 1981.
12. Whitmarsh, p 80.
13. Except in one isolated instance, on the subject of his pre-war pacifism: see 'Une maxime pour les hommes de bonne volonté' (1948), republished in Plus ou moins Homme, pp 327-331.
14. Lottman, p 221.
15. These two essays are more fully analysed in Chapter One of this thesis. Vercors's intransigence, while undoubtedly stemming from his own moral indignation over the collaborationist writers and publishers, was fully in tune with the attitude of Les Lettres françaises at the same period. That journal's views on the 'Épuration' are discussed in Nicholas Hewitt, 'Les Lettres françaises and the Failure of the French Post-War 'Renaissance'', in N. Hewitt, ed., The Culture of Reconstruction. European Literature, Thought and Film in the Years 1945-1950, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1988.
16. In this connection he acted like Camus, unlike Simone de Beauvoir. The latter's recollection of Brasillach's trial relates how Camus's attitude changed from initial intransigence to a readiness to sign the appeal for clemency, whereas de Beauvoir herself, like the Vercors of 'Responsabilité de l'écrivain', continued to attach the highest importance to words and to the moral responsibility of those who write and publish them. See La Force des Choses, Paris, Gallimard, coll: 'Folio', 2 vols. 1981, I, 36-9.
17. The editorial in Les Temps Modernes of December 1946, 'Et Bourreaux, et Victimes' contains one sentence in particular that has become well known: 'Il est inimaginable qu'après quatre années d'occupation, les français ne reconnaissent pas le visage qui est aujourd'hui le leur en Indochine, ne voient pas que c'est le visage des Allemands en France.' Les Temps Modernes, Paris, December 1946, (unnumbered page, preceding p 385). Vercors's attitude to Indochina and to other colonial issues will be examined in Chapter Five.

18. His farewell to fellow-travelling in P.P.C. did not mark a complete break with the Communists, and it was not until the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 that his remaining trust in the Soviet system seems to have been finally extinguished.
19. Koestler's novel, originally written in German, was published in France as Le Zéro et l'Infini in December 1945. The French title derives from a passage in the text which says that the individual's value in the social equation is both nought and infinite. Koestler himself discusses its publishing success in France - and the opposition it provoked among the Communists and their supporters - in The Invisible Writing, the second volume of his autobiography.
20. Arthur Koestler, Darkness at Noon, London, Hutchinson, 'Danube' edn, 1973, p 217. The words in parentheses have been inserted for the sake of clarity. In a postscript to this edition, Koestler writes: 'Darkness at Noon... revolves around the central theme of revolutionary ethics, and of political ethics in general; the problem of whether, or to what extent, a noble end justifies ignoble means, and the related conflict between morality and expediency...' (p 257)
21. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Humanisme et Terreur, Paris, Gallimard, coll: 'Idées', 1980, p 97.
22. David Caute, Communism and the French Intellectuals 1914-1960, London, André Deutsch, 1964, p 18.
23. Vercors's support for a political alliance with de Gaulle at this juncture, which was also one of Léon Blum's hopes, contrasts rather strikingly, perhaps, with his rejection of the Socialists' 'compromises' at various other times. But it is consistent with his continuing respect for de Gaulle, which was demonstrated in the correspondence referred to in Note 9 of this chapter and will be further discussed in Chapter Five. Other commentators have been highly sceptical as to whether de Gaulle would ever have been prepared to further the aspirations of the Left in the way that Vercors seems to be suggesting here. See, for example, the reference to Jacques Ozouf's assessment in Chapter Five, note 65.
24. Jean-Pierre Rioux, La France de la Quatrième République, Paris, Seuil, coll: 'Points', 1980, 1983, 2 vols. I, 172-8, analyses some of the main domestic pressures on the Ramadier government.

Vercors makes a brief fictional allusion to American influence on French industry in Colères, and it is also a significant theme in Vailland's Beau Masque.

25. Charles Tillon, interviewed in Le Nouvel Observateur, Paris, 10-16/10/77, p 107. Tillon's moral credentials as stated in the interview would presumably be thoroughly acceptable to Vercors: 'J'ai toujours agi selon ma conscience. C'était ma façon à moi d'être communiste. D'ailleurs, c'est peut-être pour cela que je ne le suis plus.' (p 107).
26. Neal Ascherson, 'Waltzing to the music of Stalin', The Observer, London, 12/1/86, p 7.
27. Ibid.
28. Rioux I, p 216, footnote.  
The 1948 report on the Congress by Pierre Daix also revealed a French delegation in complete harmony over Fedayev's final resolution:  
'... la délégation française est unanime à l'approuver, la délégation italienne aussi; seules les délégations anglaise et américaine comptent de faibles minorités d'opposants et d'abstentionnistes.' Pierre Daix, 'Le Congrès de la Lucidité', Les Lettres françaises, Paris, 2/9/48, pp 1-2.
29. In Appendix I to this thesis, Vercors still emphasises that in those early Cold War years his concern was to 'défendre le camp à cette époque le moins armé (l'URSS et satellites) contre le plus armé (USA), l'expérience socialiste en cours contre l'offensive impérial-capitaliste.' On the other hand, he depicts himself, in a fictional scene in Le Tigre d'Anvers, taking a stance, with others, against those like Aragon who were denouncing in too partisan a fashion the Pentagon's monopoly of the bomb. (This scene, set in 'La Coupole', will be referred to in the analysis of Le Tigre d'Anvers in Chapter Six).

Whatever his present view, we can briefly compare his earlier evaluation of the strategic posture between the two sides with that offered by Roy Jenkins in his Truman (London, Collins, 1986) p 147:

(The ending of the Berlin blockade in May 1949) was the first turning of a tide which, in spite of the presumed power of nuclear supremacy, had flowed relentlessly in favour of the Soviet Union throughout 1947 and 1948 .... It also presaged a new, unacknowledged but real stability in East-West relations on the central front which was to persist until the renewal of Soviet probes ..... in the early 1960's.

30. Vercors's wry comment in Les Nouveaux Jours - '...à un congrès de la paix, applaudir bruyamment cette victoire guerrière' (NJ p 163) - is as nothing compared with the irony heaped on the Peace Congresses by David Caute. The Soviet Union after August 1949 had its own atomic bomb, as Caute's comment reflects:

'Peace' was the word. But 'peace' had a specific thrust, as every congress made clear: it meant 'à bas' the Marshall Plan, the Atlantic Alliance, Western rearmament and the new West German State. It meant 'à bas' the American bomb - but not the Soviet bomb ....  
David Caute, The Fellow-Travellers, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973, p 291.

31. In Guillaume Malaurie, L'Affaire Kravchenko, Paris, Laffont, 1982, the commercial success of J'ai choisi la liberté in France is compared with that of other best-sellers, two of which share with it a highly ironic juxtaposition in the light of the present chapter:

Fort de ses 503000 lecteurs, J'ai choisi la liberté rivalise donc avec Le Petit Monde de Don Camillo, Le Silence de la Mer, Le Zéro et L'Infini et Le Petit Prince (p 17).

In an article in Les Lettres françaises during the libel hearing, Claude Morgan urged support for the journal in terms which characteristically harked back to the Resistance and championed French independence (by implication from the United States);

En avant pour sauver le seul journal où se poursuit le dialogue engagé pendant la Résistance par des hommes qui, s'ils ne pensent pas sur toutes choses de la même façon, sont étroitement associés pour défendre l'indépendance et la grandeur de la France, d'Aragon à Vercors, d'Eluard à Martin-Chauffier, de Cassou à Benda. Claude Morgan, 'Kravchenko se dérobe', Les Lettres françaises, Paris, 1/4/48, p 2.

32. Vercors in fact uses the spelling 'Kravtchenko' throughout his account. For the sake of standardisation it has been changed to the normally-accepted form in this quotation.
33. Malaurie, p 64. The significance of Vercors's apparently harsh comment from the witness-box is that Kravchenko had defected to the USA in April 1944 and in an interview in the New York Times had denounced the duplicity of the Kremlin's foreign policy - i.e. at a time when the Russians were fighting as allies of the Americans, British and Free French against Hitler. As Malaurie records (pp 33-4) this denunciation of the Kremlin was exploited by the collaboratorist and Nazi press in Paris (La France socialiste, Die Pariser Zeitung). Thus, Vercors implies, had Kravchenko published his book in the pre-liberation France of 1944, with presumably even greater impact than his American newspaper interview, he would have deserved the fate meted out to the worst collaborators.

Malaurie's account of Vercors's evidence at the trial also relates how Kravchenko's lawyer, M<sup>r</sup> Izard, quoted ironically from Ilya Ehrenburg's original assessment of Le Silence de la Mer: 'Littérature médiocre. L'auteur: un séide de Rudolf Hess'. (Malaurie, p 64). Vercors himself refers to this exchange in Plus ou moins Homme, p 181.

34. Assessments of the success of this CIA ploy and more generally of the effects on public opinion of the whole affair vary considerably - e.g. in Cauté, Communism and the French Intellectuals, p 168, compared with Rioux, I p 216, or Malaurie, pp 192-212. Malaurie on the whole supports Rioux rather than Cauté in concluding that the anticommunist cause benefited more than the Communists. Malaurie's text is also of interest in the comparisons it makes between Kravchenko's experience and that of Solzhenitsyn at a later stage.
35. Malaurie, p 166.
36. Churchill, at the time leader of the Opposition, and Eisenhower, then NATO Supreme Commander, were not mentioned by name in this text. However, Les Nouveaux Jours (p 178) makes clear that these were the two leaders to whom Vercors was referring.
37. These articles appeared in Esprit, Paris, December 1949, pp 943-8 ('La Révolution et la Vérité') and pp 949-953 ('Réponses'). Vercors's article is reproduced in Plus ou moins Homme, pp 166-172.
38. Vercors's desire to demonstrate his continuing support for the communist cause at this time led him to express what now seems like an uncharacteristically offhand attitude towards Rajk's fate:
- ... je ne m'intéresse ni à la personnalité de Rajk ni au verdict lui-même ... J'aurais plutôt le sentiment ... que Rajk et ses coaccusés sont coupables, coupables de quelque tentative dont l'objet toutefois se dissimule derrière des aveux déguisés. (PMH pp 167-8)
39. In the text of his article, Vercors himself reminds readers of other instances where he has protested at the Communists' abuse of the truth:
- C'est une rengaine: je l'ai dit dans Action, je l'ai dit dans Les Lettres françaises, je l'ai dit dans le recueil appelé L'Heure du Choix, je l'ai dit dans un récit de mon dernier livre, Les Yeux et la Lumière (PMH p 168).

40. See Les Nouveaux Jours, pp 165-166.
41. In Les Nouveaux Jours, p 137, Vercors admits to some retrospective embarrassment over his highly melodramatic vow, read out in his absence to a meeting in 1948 and reproduced in Plus ou moins Homme, pp 353-4, that he was prepared to assassinate Pétain if 'Le maréchal' was released from prison. In Les Nouveaux Jours he does not, however, wholly repudiate his original intention.

According to Herbert Lottman (Pétain, Hero or Traitor, p 377), books defending Pétain were beginning to be published in 1948, and in that year opinion polls showed that 37 per cent of Frenchmen were prepared to accept the release of the Marshal, compared with 13 per cent in 1947.

42. See Plus ou moins Homme, pp 174-5: 'Le fait est que mon article, comme celui de Cassou, fut en effet repris par la presse anticommuniste, largement déformé comme il se doit; nous fûmes félicités par ceux-là même que nous considérons toujours comme nos adversaires'. Vercors was to have a rather similar reception when he published P.P.C. in 1957, and was again to take steps to show that he had not basically changed sides.
43. Vercors had discussed Maurras's tactic of character-assassination in Plus ou moins Homme, p 92. The subject is again referred to in Chapter Six (note 16). Sartre, in Qu'est-ce que la Littérature? claimed to see it being explicitly repeated in Communist Party tactics. See Qu'est-ce que la Littérature, Paris, Gallimard, coll: 'Idées', 1982, pp 308-9.
44. Caute, Communism and the French Intellectuals, p 182. (The short section in parenthesis in this quotation has been inserted for clarification).
45. Caute, The Fellow-Travelers, p 186.
46. Lottman, The Left Bank p 255.
47. Rioux, I, p 217.
48. Vercors's text was published in Les Lettres françaises of 9th November 1950, on the front page. The journal gave it the prominence it had customarily accorded to Vercors's contributions, with the banner headline: 'Une lettre de Vercors sur une affaire d'honneur' and the following introductory note:  
'... Le journal de Jacques Decour, quels que soient les désaccords auxquels l'auteur du Silence de la Mer fait allusion, se doit d'ouvrir ses colonnes à un texte qui prend appui sur les principes mêmes de la Résistance.'

49. Claude Morgan, 'La Morale de Vercors', Les Lettres françaises, Paris, 9/11/50, p 3. This review is analysed with particular reference to 'La Sédition humaine' in Chapter Two of this thesis.
50. Michel Vivier, 'Vercors ou la philosophie du maquis', Aspects de la France, Paris, 17/11/50, p 3. This review is also referred to in Chapter Two.
51. Ibid.
52. This reference to Daniel Mayer is a highly significant qualification, as is shown in Chapter Five.
53. Philip M. Williams, French Politicians and Elections 1951-1969, Cambridge, CUP, 1970, p 150.  
This analysis can be complemented by that of F. G. Dreyfus in Histoire des Gauches en France 1940-1974, Paris, Grasset, 1975. Dreyfus notes that on emerging from the War 'La SFIO ... se complait dans un vague humanisme pseudo-marxiste qui détourne d'elle intellectuels, étudiants, jeunes responsables économiques et sociaux....' (p 53). Analysing Marx's errors, Léon Blum sought a new, clear identity and direction for the party:  

Léon Blum veut orienter le parti dans un sens humaniste et libéral: il se heurte à l'opposition des marxistes du parti, personnifiés alors par Guy Mollet. (p 53)

It was Mollet's subsequent 'opportunism', despite this apparent intransigence in his post-Liberation commitment to the class struggle, that Vercors was to find so unacceptable.
54. Hubert Juin, 'Le Temps efface-t-il toutes les traces sur le sable?', Combat, Paris, 21/9/54, p 3.
55. 'Lettre Ouverte à M. le Garde des Sceaux' was originally circulated as a supplement to the March 1953 issue of Europe, and is reproduced in Les Pas dans le Sable, pp 256-270. Apart from this and 'Une Farce déshonorante', Les Pas dans le Sable contains a number of shorter articles expressing Vercors's indignation over the government's proceedings against the Communists. One of these texts, 'Quand s'ouvrent les prisons' (PS pp 246-7), was first published in Les Lettres françaises, 6-13/6/52, p 1. It refers to Vercors's previous conflict with the journal, but only to provide the main rhetorical springboard of the author's article:

Ce n'est pas ma faute si la persécution des oeuvres et des hommes communistes oblige les honnêtes gens à montrer leur émitié sans insister davantage sur les reproches qu'ils peuvent nourrir ...(etc)

Vercors's voice of protest was of course only one of many among the Communists' supporters, and petitions, letters and articles on behalf of Stii, Duclos and others became a prominent feature of publications like Les Lettres françaises in 1952-3.

56. Rioux, II, p 16.
57. Rioux, II, p 17.
58. Rioux, I, p 214.
59. Les Pas dans le Sable, passim.
60. Serge Groussard had been in the Resistance, had been deported and had taken up a literary and journalistic career after the War. His publications include La Femme sans passé (prix Fémina, 1950) and he worked as a journalist on Le Figaro and L'Aurore. Another of the serious dilemmas for Vercors was posed by the refusal of Les Lettres françaises to publish a short joint statement by himself and Groussard. Aragon's intransigence over this led to the decision to withdraw 'la page du CNE' from Les Lettres françaises.
61. In answer to a reproachful letter from Jean Cassou, Vercors also explicitly denies that Stalin's death (in March of that year, 1953) had altered the course of events, since Gottwald's article preceded it. Vercors's reply to Cassou is reproduced in Les Pas dans le Sable pp 225-7. See also note 66.
62. Cauté, The Fellow-Travellers, p 287.
63. Cauté, The Fellow-Travellers, p 286.  
By 1957, as is shown by a speech prepared for, but not delivered to, a meeting of Soviet writers and intellectuals in Moscow in February of that year, Vercors himself held a quite different view from his earlier one as far as antisemitism in the Soviet bloc was concerned:

Aujourd'hui, vous savez que la vérité n'était pas aussi simple, que l'antisémitisme existait, que l'on décimait les écrivains yiddishs, et que d'affreuses déportations de Juifs ont eu lieu sur le sol soviétique. (PFC p 155)

The reason that he did not deliver the speech, which also referred to Rajk and the Hungarian repression, is that he sensed on arriving in Moscow that it would create more barriers than it would remove; although he does claim to have spoken in similar terms to small groups and individuals. It is perhaps typical of his honesty, however, to have included the original text in P.P.C.

64. Vercors was right in this respect: the Rosenbergs' two sons, Michael and Robert, did eventually campaign for a review of their parents' trial. But they had duly grown to manhood before doing so, despite Vercors's somewhat sinister implications.

Sidney Lumet's feature film Daniel (1983) also depicted the Rosenberg case from the children's point of view, although with considerable changes of detail.

Finally, there is another, quite separate reference to 'les enfants d'Edouard' in Moi, Aristide Briand, p 320, when Laval, according to Vercors's account, crassly assumed this to be a reference to Edouard Herriot.

65. Bernard Levin, in a review in The Observer of The Rosenberg File by R. Radosh and J. Milton (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), writes that the authors had concluded, after the most painstaking research, that the Rosenbergs were guilty of spying but had been punished excessively. Levin writes that the book also shows

how the Communist Party first abandoned the Rosenbergs to their fate and then realised that the case could be used to distract attention from the real frame-up of the Slansky show-trials in Prague, whereupon they made it the 'cause célèbre' that it has remained ever since for some. Bernard Levin, 'Nothing extenuate', The Observer, London, 2/10/83, p 31.

Another account of left-wing reaction to the Rosenberg case can be found in Ronald Hayman, Writing Against: a Biography of Sartre, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986. Hayman writes of the way in which news of the Rosenberg executions was received by Sartre:

who shut himself up in his hotel room and gave vent to his anger by writing as if innocent people had never been executed in the Soviet Union .... In Stalin's persecution of the Jews hundreds of innocent people were vanishing, and Sartre's silence on the subject was so audible that François Mauriac took him publicly to task for it, but the killing of the Rosenbergs made him angry enough to work all day on his article (p 285).

The strength of Sartre's reaction is clearly evinced in the extract of his letter quoted by Hayman, and the tone of his rebuke to the Americans is indeed harsher than that of Vercors.

66. See, for example, Vercors's reply to Jean Cassou in the wake of the Slansky affair, (Les Pas dans le Sable, pp 225-7). Cassou having been strongly critical of the remaining fellow-travellers, Vercors adumbrates the possibility that he too might break with Communism one day; but he vows never to round on his former friends as Cassou and others were now doing. At present the Communist bloc must be allowed to put its house in order and, above all, must not now be condemned out of hand: 'Faut-il être si totalement pour ou contre...?' (PS p 226).

67. In Appendix I to this thesis, Vercors confirms his approval of de Gaulle's decision.

68. See, in particular, her comments in La Force de Choses:

D'autre part, la culture chinoise ... me touche peu ...  
j'étais là, avec en face de moi un monde que je  
m'efforçais de comprendre, et où je n'entraais pas.  
Simone de Beauvoir, La Force des Choses, Paris, Gallimard, coll:  
Folio, 1981, 2 vols, II, 78-9.

In writing La Longue Marche subsequently, de Beauvoir consulted documentation and specialists on China in France.

69. In La Force des Choses, however, Simone de Beauvoir's linking of Vercors's decision with the Hungarian crisis is very much an over-simplification:

La gauche française se relevait mal de Budapest ...  
Vercors, qui avait été un ami zélé du parti, explique  
dans un petit livre assez drôle, P.P.C., qu'il en avait  
assez de jouer le rôle de potiche d'honneur et qu'il  
quittait la scène.  
S. de Beauvoir, La Force des Choses, coll: 'Folio', II, p. 138.

In fact, in his 'petit livre' of 365 pages, Vercors's withdrawal is shown to result from a lengthy chain-reaction of which the Budapest events happened to be the trigger.

The reaction to Khrushchev's speech of Edith Thomas, a veteran of the CNE, offers both parallels and contrasts with Vercors's own case. She had left the Communist Party in 1949 after the Rajk affair, but like Vercors she remained attached to it 'comme étant l'incarnation, même mensongère, de l'espoir de la classe ouvrière'. By 1956, her hopes had ebbed even more '... la sclérose sénile n'a-t-elle pas entièrement envahi ce grand corps malade qu'est le parti communiste français?' As for the Twentieth Party

Congress revelations, she wonders, only to doubt, whether they at last herald 'le temps de l'honnêteté intellectuelle...'  
'Une lettre d'Edith Thomas', L'Express, Paris, 13/7/56, p 2.

70. Although the regular page 'Le CNE vous parle' had not been published in Les Lettres françaises since 1953, the Chairman's annual address to the Committee was reproduced in prominent position in the journal each year - as, for example, the speeches by Vercors in 1953 and 1954, previously referred to in connection with the Slansky affair. His address for 1955 was presented in Les Lettres françaises of 26/5 - 2/6/55, pp 1, 5. In keeping with the chosen title 'Une Année sans histoire', there is little of substance in the speech except the Chairman's somewhat fulsome tribute to Elsa Triolet, who was then resigning from the 'Comité directeur'; and Vercors concludes with a peroration which in view of the underlying tensions in the CNE seems to have been a masterpiece of wishful thinking - and now appears even more ironic in the light of the turmoil that would descend on the organization and its Chairman in the ensuing year:

Il me reste à nous souhaiter autant de prospérité pour l'année qui vient que pour l'année passée, autant de paix dans le monde, de solidarité et de compréhension, qu'il en règne parmi les membres du Comité National des Ecrivains, et dont celui-ci donne l'exemple. (p 5).

71. These were, of course, fairly standard arguments put forward in the West by apologists for the Russian invasion. Simone de Beauvoir refers to 'les mensonges de L'Humanité qui représentaient les A.V.O. lynchés comme des ouvriers victimes des fascistes...' (La Force des Choses, coll: 'Folio', II, 115); and she also recalls, at the same stage, the endlessly repetitious dialogue 'Et Suez? - Et Budapest?' (Ibid)
72. Maurice Chavardès, reviewing P.P.C. in Le Monde, sums up Vercors's reaction over Hungary rather more critically than he does any other part of the author's record of activity: 'Son attitude à l'égard du soulèvement hongrois parut aux uns trop faible, aux autres contradictoire ...' Maurice Chavardès, 'La Ballade d'Adieu de Vercors', Le Monde, Paris, 7/1/58, p 7.
73. See Les Nouveaux Jours, pp 298-300. It was the attack on him in L'Express by Marc Beigbeder that seems particularly to have rankled with Vercors. Beigbeder had been the Secretary of the CNE during Vercors's chairmanship, and Vercors had tried hard to oppose his dismissal by Aragon earlier in 1956. (See Les Nouveaux Jours, p 292 - an account which, incidentally, contains at least one inaccurate date).

74. Vercors's criticism of Laniel and Mollet will be discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis.
75. Vercors's visit to Moscow in February 1957 (see also note 63) is recounted in Les Nouveaux Jours, pp 305-310, and various letters and other texts relating to it, including a long article by him published in Le Monde on his return, are reproduced in P.P.C., pp 137-196. Simone de Beauvoir views this visit in a positive light in her memoirs:

Fidèles à l'esprit du 20<sup>e</sup> Congrès et adroits, les Russes avaient décidé de ne pas s'aliéner les sympathisants qui avaient refusé d'encaisser Budapest: Vercors, un des protestataires, fut reçu par eux en 57. C'était une importante nouveauté, qu'on pût sur un point attaquer l'URSS sans être considéré comme un traître.

(La Force des Choses, coll: 'Folio', II, 119)

76. See P.P.C., p 356; Les Nouveaux Jours, p 311. The cutting reference in Le Canard's article to Vercors's 'discretion' and self-control over Hungary seems to suggest, when taken together with Chavardès's comment and the reaction of L'Express, that it was his response to this event above all that damaged his reputation among non-communist left-wing intellectuals in France.
77. He would, however, express his views on Algeria through the clandestine Vérités pour, as will be discussed in Chapter Five; and by publishing extracts from his forthcoming novel Le Périple in Les Lettres françaises in 1957, he not only protested about torture in Algeria but showed that he was not completely deserting his communist friends. This, in turn, probably cost him more support among those of the non-communist Left, although Maurice Chavardès, in the review referred to in note 72, showed that Vercors's message in P.P.C. was plain enough:

Le dernier (des compagnons de route) se retire, plus déçu peut-être que tous, plus fermement résolu cependant qu'éloignement ne signifie pas trahison.  
(M. Chavardès, Le Monde, 7/1/58, p 7)

A review of P.P.C. by a less well-disposed critic was that by Thierry Maulnier in Le Figaro Littéraire. The tone of this long review is triumphant at the great number of defections from the Communists' ranks, and ironic at the expense of Vercors himself:

Les potiches d'honneur du parti communiste ont cette particularité qu'on peut y verser des années durant un flot continu de sang, d'horreur et de mensonge avant la goutte qui les fait déborder ....

Les voilà soudain, ces écrivains, qui cessent d'accepter, qui cessent de croire, qui cessent d'estimer tolérable ce qu'ils ont interminablement toléré. Les voilà, comme M. Vercors, aux prises avec un conflit insurmontable et, comme ils sont désormais incapables d'approuver ce qu'ils restent résolus à ne pas combattre, ils se réfugient dans l'abstention ....

(Thierry Maulnier, 'M. Vercors prend congé',  
Le Figaro Littéraire, Paris, 28/12/57, pp 1, 5)

CHAPTER FIVE : DECOLONISATION, DEMOCRACY AND A DEFINITION OF SOCIALISM

Indochina and Algeria provided major tests of France's democratic fabric in the post-war era. The successive strains which they imposed damaged the unity and confidence of the nation, provoked varying degrees of extremism, repression and moral outrage, and, in the case of Algeria, brought about the replacement of the Fourth Republic by a regime whose democratic credentials were seriously questioned by many of the Left and liberal Centre. Yet once the Algerian conflict was settled, France was to enjoy a new stability and growth that for most French people would rapidly dispel the worst traumas of the recent past. Vercors himself played a full part in the 'intellectuals' protests over Indochina in the 1950s, and later, despite the farewell signalled in P.P.C., remained involved in the even more intense and protracted debate over Algeria. But thereafter, while he still made occasional interventions on specific issues, any sustained activism on his part was effectively at an end. He has however reviewed the whole period of his commitment through his memoirs, and in Les Nouveaux Jours, for instance, colonial problems are accorded due importance among the major issues of those years. At the same time, as the second part of this chapter aims to demonstrate, he has also reflected on more recent developments and on some of the French political figures who have most interested him, while in Ce que je crois he has put forward his views on socialism as part of a general synthesis of experience and ideas. As for the period of decolonisation, the initial focus of the present chapter, it is as clear from his memoirs as from his contemporary reactions that he found it hard to assess the pace and nature of the changes under way - and equally hard, indeed, to

judge exactly what the impact of this process on France's own democratic evolution would be.

In analysing the relative slowness of the French Left to face up to the issue of colonialism, Claude Bourdet in 1978 laid some of the blame on a 'myth' that had pervaded left-wing thinking since the French Revolution:

Les hommes de gauche de ma génération ne percevaient pas le problème colonial. J'ai passé toutes les années de la Résistance sans songer une seconde à l'émancipation des peuples colonisés. L'idée qu'ils puissent aspirer à autre chose qu'à être français me paraissait incongrue ... Pendant cent cinquante ans, les petits Français ont continué à apprendre quel rôle généreux et civilisateur jouait la France .... 1

Certainly this observation is applicable to Vercors's own pre-war and wartime attitude. When the French Empire is referred to in Les Occasions perdues, for example, it is as one of the potential assets available to the Free French after 1940, a resource that de Gaulle himself had evoked in his 'Appel du 18 Juin'. But if in those years the practical exigencies of France's survival had necessarily to take priority, this did not mean that Vercors had no intrinsic concern for the colonies themselves. As the author makes clear in Les Nouveaux Jours, he had shared the exalted view of France's imperial role which Bourdet alludes to, and which indeed most conscientious French republicans, when they thought of their overseas heritage, tended to accept as axiomatic. Though he had learned early in 1944 of the reforms adumbrated by de Gaulle at Brazzaville, Vercors does not try to disguise his relative unreadiness at that time for any fundamental changes in the colonial situation. He had been duly indignant over the abuses denounced in the past by Gide and by Andrée Viollis and had wanted them to be brought to an end: 'Mais pas encore - trop fier depuis l'enfance de l'étendue de notre empire - qu'on mit fin à l'empire lui-même.' (NJ p 41)<sup>2</sup>

By October 1945, the author's uncertainty about the proper approach in the colonies in general began inevitably to centre upon Indochina in particular. He was still anxious not to see too rapid a disintegration of what French civilisation still had to offer elsewhere in the world:

De Gaulle envoie Leclerc à Saigon avec un corps expéditionnaire. Je n'en suis pas encore à souhaiter une défaite mais, dans l'état de faiblesse auquel la France est réduite, je redoute un échec qui aura, sur tous les peuples subissant sa loi, et jusqu'en Algérie, en Tunisie, un effet dévastateur ... (NJ p 85)

But anticolonialism was soon, of course, to become an important cause for fellow-travellers in the Cold War years, as well as one in which various moderate left-wing and right-wing intellectuals and Catholic progressives felt themselves concerned. The different strands within this complex of attitudes are analysed by Paul Clay Sorum in his Intellectuals and Decolonization in France<sup>3</sup>. Sorum points out that many French intellectuals, even of the Left, remained reluctant in the post-war period to urge complete independence for France's colonies (i.e. to adopt what is strictly speaking an anti-imperialist position)<sup>4</sup> and that they were anticolonialist only in as much as, according to his definition of the term, they wanted to reform the administration and economy of the colonies for the benefit of their indigenous populations. Hence, he asserts,

The various leftist anticolonialists took largely 'moralist' positions. They judged overseas policies according to their compatibility with basic moral values, in particular with the amorphous and sometimes contradictory set of values that, under the label of 'humanism', stood for the interests of every individual (human rights, the integrity of the person, social justice).....5

Vercors's responses to the colonial question need to be viewed not only in terms of Sorum's analysis (with which, it must be said, they correlate fairly accurately) but also in the light of his fellow-travelling orientations, his distrust of many of the governments of the Fourth

Republic and his unremitting condemnation of the Nazis. As we have seen, he was at first hesitant in judging the efforts by the authorities to quell the communist-led insurgency to Indochina<sup>6</sup>; but when they eventually came, his moral protests over the methods used would be as vehement as anyone's. As on most other political issues, his commentaries on colonialism in the 1950's were rarely a product of purely dispassionate analysis. It is true, for example, that his was only one of many voices of progressive opinion to draw comparisons between French actions in Indochina or North Africa and the oppression visited on Europe by the Nazis<sup>7</sup>. However, as a writer who arguably remained conscious of the Resistance heritage and apprehensive about 'L'Allemagne revancharde' (PS p 180) for longer than most of his peers, he was to make exceptionally frequent polemical use - nowhere more so, indeed, than in the colonial context - of the moral and emotional vibrations associated with Nazism.

These various aspects of the author's outlook are combined most clearly in the texts of Les Pas dans le Sable. Here, for instance, he proclaims Henri Martin to have been condemned for denouncing '...ce qu'il a vu en Indochine: des Rotterdam et des Oradour que couvre cette fois, hélas! un gouvernement français.' (PS p 166), while in another passage Martin is presented as 'celui que révolte (sic) les Oradours d'Indochine.' (PS p 170) In the same 'dossier' a letter to François Mauriac similarly refers to 'des Oradour au napalm' (PS p 177); while the short story 'Les Mareis du Silence' offers an implicit but obvious analogy between Martin and a resurrected Werner von Ebrennac, now condemned by his superior officers for protesting openly, in the name of 'la paix et la justice' (PS pp 174, 176), against German policies in occupied France.

Elsewhere in Les Pas dans le Sable, a text on the Moroccan crisis of 1953-4 under the title 'Le plus grand sentiment de honte' offers further denunciation of the insidious nazification of French colonial methods. In deploring the harsh measures taken by Bidault and Lacoste<sup>B</sup> to suppress the uprisings, this text develops more fully than ever the analogies with the German Occupation; the irony of the situation of course being heightened by the fact that Bidault had headed the 'Comité National de la Résistance' and Lacoste had been a leading member of the 'Parti Socialiste Clandestin'. The German reprisals in Tulle in 1944 offered one specific parallel, while another was provided by Philippe Henriot, the arch-collaborator who had denounced the maquisards just as French commentators were now condemning the Moroccan nationalists. The Moroccans whom Vercors despised were not those who had risen against 'l'oppression étrangère' (PS p 278) but those who had sided with the French authorities. And since the 'greatest shame' is when one's country betrays its basic values, Vercors's shame was over those of his compatriots

qui hurlèrent jadis au crime d'Oradour et qui  
aujourd'hui trépigment parce qu'on ne fait pas assez  
vite un Oradour marocain. (PS p 278)

However, although they appear in the overall context of Les Pas dans le Sable, with its dark presentiments about German rearmament, wishful thinking over the Slansky affair and denunciations of the Rosenberg executions, Vercors's reactions to France's war in Indochina or to the beginning of her North African misadventures should not be too promptly categorized as standard fellow-travelling protestations - or, for that matter, too easily discounted as familiar expressions of outrage from an established moral censor of Nazism. The retrospective accounts of the colonial episodes that we find in Les Nouveaux Jours are still as bitterly critical of French actions as were the texts of Les Pas dans

le Sable, and indeed they reproduce parts of the latter almost verbatim. Thus, for example, the reference in the 1984 text to the 'répression à outrance' (NJ p 255) in Morocco, where the rhetorical question: 'A quel sens pervers, nazifié, du patriotisme ces gens obéissent-ils?' (NJ p 255) is followed by virtually the same formulation of the author's sense of shame as that quoted earlier. And similarly - although this represents what Sorum calls 'realist' rather than 'moralist' criticism - the waste in Indochina of French manpower and resources was decried in 'Paix au Vietnam!'<sup>9</sup>

.... depuis sept ans nous perdons dans une hémorragie  
sans fin nos ressources et nos vies humaines (PS p 179)

and this material damage to France is equally regretted in Les Nouveaux Jours, albeit with the balance of the author's sympathies (humanist as much as ideological in inspiration) still on the side of the Indochinese:

...Mes sentiments sont partagés. Je ne peux pas me féliciter de voir la France en Indochine ... se faire ainsi étriller; mais bien moins encore m'affliger de cette résurrection des peuples colonisés. De coeur, je suis avec eux. (NJ p 190)

On these specific colonial issues, therefore, there has been no attempt at a retrospective moderation of the author's position of the kind we saw over some aspects of his association with the Communists. For all his earlier pride in the Empire, Vercors came to feel a strong moral aversion towards the excesses of the French authorities in reacting to the nationalist uprisings, and he clearly sees no reason now to soften the critical judgements he made in the 1950's. Those judgements were shared, of course, by the majority of left-wing intellectuals; but Mauriac, too, in Le Figaro and L'Express voiced anxieties and criticisms about aspects of colonial policy<sup>10</sup>, while

Raymond Aron, the most notable 'realist' critic of those policies, recalls in his Mémoires how he himself condemned French strategy in Indochina on the classic grounds of national self-interest:

La France, sans moyens de défendre son propre territoire, gaspille ses ressources en une aventure que justifie à la rigueur la diplomatie mondiale de l'anticommunisme mais non l'intérêt propre du pays. 11

Or again, David Schoenbrun, an American observer in the 1950's with considerable sympathy for France but little for left-wing ideologies, confirms the loss of moral prestige (as lamented by Vercors) that the French were suffering at that time through blunders and abuses in their colonial affairs. Tracing some of the problems to the constitutional clauses concerning 'L'Union Française', he relates the 'seven and a half years of senseless war' in Indochina, then analyses in detail 'the record of violence, treachery and governmental irresponsibility' in North Africa<sup>12</sup>. And for a professional historian's typical view, we can turn briefly once more to Jean-Pierre Rioux, whose analysis of events in 1953 juxtaposes the Moroccan situation with that of Indochina:

.... en piétinant le traité de Fez de 1912, la France a donné au nationalisme marocain un martyr et un espoir, le sultan déposé. Dès septembre, les attentats ont repris.

En Indochine le pire est accompli: la France ne sait plus pourquoi elle poursuit une guerre ruineuse et dont l'opinion se détourne .... 13

This small sample of independent judgements, then, using both moral and practical criteria, offers further evidence that Vercors's strictures on colonial issues were not necessarily a mere echo of received progressive wisdom. The general consensus of historians today on the events in Indochina, the Maghreb protectorates and, finally, Algeria, confirms the view of the more lucid contemporary observers: that French decolonisation was an ineluctable and, for France itself, ultimately a positive

process. In Les Nouveaux Jours, Vercors does not always claim to have shared such lucidity or political realism, and he is mainly content to reiterate his earlier moral positions: arguments which, until the mid-1950's at least, represented less a sustained critique of colonialism per se than a reaction against specific policies and methods of the French authorities<sup>14</sup>.

A particular target for Vercors in 1954, for example, was the Laniel government, which had fumbled and failed the colonial test and much else besides. Here again, we find scarcely any difference between the scathing summary of that government's record at the end of Les Pas dans le Sable and the corresponding passage in Les Nouveaux Jours:

L'exécrable gouvernement de l'injustice, de la persécution policière, de la soumission à l'étranger, de l'Europe-croupion sous la botte allemande, du colonialisme infâme teinté de racisme sournois, de la guerre déshonorante et, par-dessus le marché, de la défaite ... (PS p 283) 15

Colonialism as practised by this government, therefore, was vile and racist; but by implication, possibly, it need not have been so malign. Similarly the war in Indochina was, as the author saw it, a dishonourable campaign; but his final comment does at least beg the question as to whether he would have preferred to see the French victorious. In any case, Vercors clearly had other axes to grind, and his outspoken attack also served as preamble to the warm welcome that he wished to extend to Laniel's successor, Pierre Mendès France. For at the time when Les Pas dans le Sable was about to be sent to the publisher, Mendès was bringing to an end the Indochina war; and already his leadership was offering other major benefits:

Il a restauré la confiance des Français dans leur propre pays et leur propre destin, et celle de l'étranger dans les promesses de la France. (PS p 283)

It should of course be observed that this dichotomizing of the two

'présidents du Conseil' was notable only for the forthrightness of its expression - Mauriac too, after all, had made Laniel a whipping-boy and Mendès France a hero in his 'Bloc-Notes' of the period<sup>16</sup>. But for all Mendès's prestige among the intellectuals, he was unable, at least in the early stages, to see the necessity for a really radical solution of the Algerian crisis, which began during his premiership and was to develop into the most costly and divisive episode in the whole experience of French decolonisation.

Whatever their private reservations about some aspects of the status quo, the initial response of Mendès France and his Interior Minister François Mitterrand to the Toussaint insurrection was unequivocally summed up in the formula 'l'Algérie, c'est la France'<sup>17</sup>: and France as thus designated was to be defended by all means available. This notion of the unity and integrity of a French Republic embracing the Algerian departments was by no means alien to Vercors himself, as he acknowledges in Les Nouveaux Jours. He felt little personal sympathy towards the 'pieds noirs' whom he had met on a visit to Algeria a few months before, but the Arab population had appeared incapable of doing anything radically to change their condition, and even Ferhat Abbas, whom Vercors had also met, had surprised him by his seemingly moderate and conciliatory approach<sup>18</sup>. Transcending all these impressions, however, was the author's almost conservative attitude to the link between the two countries:

... l'Algérie est un département français depuis plus longtemps que Nice ou la Savoie. Aussi ne puis-je en prévoir la sécession probable sans que l'idée m'en fasse deuil. (NJ p 260)

It is interesting to set this reflection against one by Catherine Nay in her first study of François Mitterrand. Here it is recalled that the

latter's pronouncements on Algeria until 1958 attuned fully with the prevailing sentiment in France; and that:

A la seule exception des communistes et d'une poignée d'hommes de gauche ou de libéraux, hommes politiques, intellectuels ou journalistes, peu suivis par l'opinion dominante, l'idée que l'Algérie c'est la France est reçue partout comme une sorte de dogme. Le Parti Communiste lui-même .... n'ose pas déclarer clairement le contraire dans les premiers temps. 19

Vercors thus found himself sharing the majority opinion on this issue - and not just because the Communist Party at first hesitated to take a contrary view. He did have a progressive concern over the way in which Algeria was being governed in the interests of a selfish European minority. But had social and economic reforms been enacted in time, the author declares, he could have continued - however paradoxical it appears in retrospect and in the context of his overall political commitment - to support the concept of a French Algeria:

Une Algérie française? Je ne demanderais pas mieux.  
A condition qu'y soit effectuée une réforme agraire radicale,  
ce que personne n'osera faire. Surtout pas Guy Mollet.  
Tout 'socialiste' qu'il soit - ou plutôt qu'il n'est pas.  
(NJ pp 285-286)

By 1956, as this quotation suggests, it was becoming too late to avert the worst consequences of the crisis; and it is not simply because he can look back over some thirty years at the failure of Mollet's Algerian policy that Vercors in Les Nouveaux Jours makes this critical reference, among others, to the Socialist leader's administration. Already at that time, as a text in P.P.C. dated October 1956 reveals, he was prepared to reproach the Communists for their parliamentary support of the Mollet-Lacoste programme:

Vous avez cru qu'il suffisait de voter les pleins pouvoirs ...?  
Ce faisant, vous abandonniez tous ceux - radicaux, socialistes,  
communistes - qui tentaient de s'opposer à une folle politique.  
(PPC pp 342-3)

At parliamentary level, a few Socialists like Daniel Mayer or André Philip, and, even more exceptionally among the Radicals, Pierre Mendès France (who resigned from the Cabinet in May of that year), represented the unavailing opposition to Mollet to which Vercors here alludes<sup>20</sup>; while, as the authors of Les Porteurs de Valises point out, several Communist militants were to be led by what they perceived as the 'erreur historique' of the Party's vote on March 12th into active support for the FLN - 'dans la conviction qu'il faut faire plus et mieux pour les Algériens'<sup>21</sup>.

In 1956, however, Vercors himself, still greatly preoccupied with his chairmanship of the CNE, his relationship with the Communists in general and with the aftermath of the Hungarian uprising - to say nothing, of course, of his continuing literary activity - could not, even had he so wished, concentrate his thoughts on Algeria as did, say, Francis Jeanson and those who joined him in his clandestine action. Compared with the latter, Vercors was in the more commonly shared position of sensing the gravity of the Algerian situation without knowing what measures to recommend to secure a just and enduring settlement. In a letter to Charles de Gaulle in March 1956<sup>22</sup> he expressed the hope that the General would go to Algeria (having renewed some form of working agreement with the Communists) and there, as the only living Frenchman with sufficient authority to be listened to by all sides in the conflict, would achieve a solution to the crisis. This appeal by Vercors gave no hint of the policy that might ensue, although it seems clear from the general development of the author's thinking, as recollected in Les Nouveaux Jours, that he was hoping de Gaulle could do in Algeria as Mendès France had done after arriving in Tunis in July 1954: wear the mantle of 'conciliateur' (NJ p 263) while at the same time announcing the stages

that would lead to autonomy and possibly full independence for the territory. A pious aspiration on Vercors's part, perhaps, particularly since he was aware, from recent direct contact, of the strength of the 'colons' attachment to their dominant and privileged position<sup>23</sup>.

With increasing realism about the struggle actually taking place, Vercors's thoughts on Algeria were from now on divided, like those of many other observers, precisely because of the grimness of the alternative solutions. Having apparently discarded any lingering attachment to the Algerian 'départements' as integral components of the French Republic, he outlined in another text in P.P.C. the dilemma facing

... les hommes de bonne volonté qui ne peuvent se couper le coeur en deux, qui ne peuvent se résigner ni à une féroce victoire contre un peuple qui retrouve ses raisons de vivre, mais pas plus à une humiliante défaite de la France, compromise et déshonorée par ses éléments les plus impurs ... (PPC p 354) 24

An increasingly dire tone can be noted in the author's language here, as in the accompanying allusions to 'la tragédie algérienne' and the 'interminable tragédie' which could befall France. In the same text, too, Vercors refers to what he sees as a fundamental flaw in colonialism - something which he had not hitherto formulated and which had presumably crystallised in the light of all that was now being enacted in Algeria:

Le colonialisme fut un crime ambigu: une grande part de noblesse, et même de fraternité humaine, se mêlaient à son iniquité, à sa perversité fondamentales ... (PPC p 354)

Of more immediate significance, though, is a comment in the same text on the resort to clandestinity by those Europeans in Algeria who were opposed to the French military effort: '... la clandestinité est maintenant là-bas le pain quotidien pour les hommes libres....' (PPC p 354) - the direction of the author's thoughts being clearly indicated by his

next premonitory words:

... comme elle le fut en France sous la résistance, même pour ceux qui n'y participaient pas les armes à la main, comme elle l'y sera de nouveau sans tarder si les événements suivent leur cours fatal. (PPC p 354)

The fact is that by the Spring of 1957, Vercors was convinced that the most alarming of various predicted outcomes of the conflict could soon become a reality. Two main elements - the mass arrests and use of torture by Masau's paratroops and the official censorship imposed on liberal and progressive journalists seeking to challenge these excesses - confirmed the author in his pessimistic belief that the scourge of fascism, dormant but not extinguished since 1945, was about to spread from Algeria to France itself.

Vercors's own protest against the use of torture, intended particularly as a token of solidarity with René Capitant<sup>25</sup> following the death in custody of Ali Boumendjel, was to return to President Coty on March 26 1957 the insignia of the 'Légion d'Honneur' that he had held since the Liberation. Although this action was derided by Le Canard Enchaîné, which thereby produced the proverbial 'last straw', the final blow to his credibility, that persuaded the author to give up his role as a spokesman for the progressives' cause, other commentators have not, in retrospect, underestimated the significance of the gesture. Thus Hamon and Rotman, for example, in Les Porteurs de Valises, record the episode as a sign of the growing seriousness with which 'l'opinion de gauche, encore marquée par la résistance à l'hitlérisme'<sup>26</sup> was reacting to the successive revelations from Algeria; while in A Savage War of Peace Alistair Horne writes of '... the further publicity when the writer and Resistance hero, Vercors, posted his Legion of Honour back....<sup>27</sup> As for the threat to the freedom of expression, the author

was again only one among a large number of left-wing intellectuals who were growing alarmed by the government's censorship of the Press. The various instances of such control in the course of the Algerian conflict are fully documented in Les Porteurs de Valises, and indeed in most other accounts of the period; but they are as graphically summed up as anywhere in the account by Paul Clay Sorum, where he records that

.... twenty-one issues of L'Express were seized in France from the beginning of the war to 1961, sixteen of France-Observateur and four of Témoignage Chrétien. 28

The fear of a fascist takeover in France arising from the Algerian situation was likewise shared by many left-wing intellectuals as the remaining governments of the Fourth Republic continued to wrestle with the crisis. Apart from the matter of press censorship, one root cause of the progressives' fear, as Sorum indicates, was their long-held suspicion of France's professional Army 'because, in part, of the Vichy past of many of its officers' and because North Africa could be used 'as a base to impose army rule on France in the manner of Franco in Spain'<sup>29</sup>. One could match such fears with the analysis of Francis Jeanson, who had researched Algerian realities more thoroughly than most of his peers and according to whom many of the 'pieds noirs' still had Vichyite or collaborationist tendencies a year after the American landings in Algeria in 1942. Such attitudes would presumably have persisted thereafter, given their particular rationale as noted by Jeanson:

.... la Résistance les inquiétait .... dans la mesure où ils y pressentaient une tendance révolutionnaire susceptible de s'opposer à l'exploitation colonialiste. 30

Certainly it was reasonable to assume, in the light of these two sets of observations, that Army officers and 'colons' were natural allies in the struggle both against Algerian nationalism and against those

politicians in Paris prepared to seek an accommodation with it.

Such uneasy reflections as these thus occupied one part of Vercors's attention in July and August 1957 as he composed the lengthy 'bilan' of his fellow-travelling career. The author's main purpose in P.P.C. was, of course, to relinquish his problematic public ties with the Communists and the progressive organisations under their control; but the specific and growing danger facing France from the 'Algérie française' axis needed also to be signalled in this ostensibly final moral and political testimony. Hence it was that, mindful no doubt of recent discussion of France's new-found 'nazi' propensities,<sup>31</sup> the author of Le Silence de la Mer felt impelled in the concluding pages of P.P.C. to modify his oft-reiterated condemnation of the German people for allowing Hitler's crimes to go unchallenged. The exclusiveness of this moral failure to the Germans was something he could no longer justly assert:

... puisque des hommes de mon propre peuple se montrent inclinés à une égale cruauté; et que devant celle-ci le peuple français se montre, en ce moment, incliné à une égale indifférence. 32 (PPC p 357)

There could be no differentiating between the torture chambers of the Gestapo and those of Algiers; nor, despite the author's show of circumspection, is there any mistaking the allusion in the following:

Je ne dirai point à qui ressemblent ces 'hérétiques' qu'on tremble d'entendre à l'aube, puisque déjà toute plume non clandestine est condamnée à la prudence - ou aux poursuites. (PPC p 358)

However lurid and, with hindsight, unduly pessimistic it may be, this vision of men of conscience and the Republican values they defended being threatened by resurgent fascism<sup>33</sup> does at least have its own internal coherence. What is harder to assess, from the complete text

of P.P.C., is Vercors's own practical posture in relation to the impending catastrophe. For his warnings on the latter are not confined to the final section of the book; nor does he wholly exclude the Algerian situation from the complex of motives impelling him to distance himself from the Communists. Thus, near the beginning of his text he casts responsibility for what may transpire over a wide cross-section of his natural political allies:

Si le fascisme en France n'attend pas; si le peuple français, si la classe ouvrière sous la conduite de son propre parti continuent de jouer les Belles au bois dormant; les gauches de se combattre et de s'exclure .... si les républicains de l'Assemblée, par un incroyable aveuglement, ou une incroyable veulerie, continuent de voter pour les forgerons des chaînes qu'on prépare pour la république .... (PPC p 14)

And the result which these various conditions may combine to bring about? Surprisingly perhaps, in view of the premium that Vercors had always attached to the intellectual's responsibility for his society, it would be a state of affairs so deplorable that 'il aura mieux valu ne point y participer' (PPC p 14).

This rather curious formulation is explained by a preceding reference to the author's friend, the late General Diego Brosset. The latter had written to Vercors on May 10th 1940 from Panama, unaware that the German invasion was beginning but expressing forebodings as well as frustration that his repeated warnings to his military superiors had been ignored<sup>34</sup>. His concluding words, in the extract quoted in P.P.C., were those echoed by Vercors: if France does not awake in time and the enemy does not wait, then '.... les choses qui se passeront alors, il aura mieux valu ne point y participer.' (PPC p 14) Now in so far as Brosset is here declining responsibility for a potential military catastrophe, his words might appear an understandable enough display of offended 'orgueil'. But the further implication that it is better to keep one's hands clean

than become involved in the national disaster, however much the latter be of others' making, might well (and particularly in France in May 1940) have struck a reader less indulgent to Brosset than Vercors as morally dubious and even reprehensible in a professional soldier. Brosset was, of course, to distinguish himself as a commander of the Free French Forces, as Vercors has faithfully recorded elsewhere<sup>35</sup>; but it perhaps denotes a slight attack of moral myopia on the author's part to have chosen to justify his own retreat from the public platform at least partly in terms of this rather unedifying borrowed formula.

However, this single passage does not indicate the alternative courses of action that Vercors also seemed prepared to contemplate. A few pages later, while announcing his intention of withdrawing from 'les rangs des confréries organisées' (PPC p 22), he maintains his readiness to fight alone when the time comes. The mischief being wrought by the Republic's enemies amid the heedless disunity of its supporters will demand all his vigilance; nor will he be found missing from the anti-fascist barricades:

Je ne me 'dégage' pas. Les prochaines barricades contre un fascisme qui marque chaque jour de nouveaux points, il est très improbable que l'on m'y trouve absent. (PPC p 22)

Apart from the obvious inconsistency between this attitude and the one inspired by Diego Brosset, there is of course an internal contradiction in the proposed scenario of 'ce combat solitaire' (p 22) which will somehow yet be fought on the barricades. Much depends, presumably, on how literally we are to take the references to 'barricades' and to 'coups' ('je crains qu'il n'y en ait bientôt, hélas, beaucoup à recevoir' (PPC p 22)). Quite literally, it seems, according to the 'Foreword' to the English edition of P.P.C., published under the title

For the Time Being in 1960<sup>36</sup>. This mentions the events that have occurred since the original French publication, including those of '13 May, which the author forecast, and General de Gaulle's accession to power'. Notwithstanding which, the text is deemed to be as topical as when it first appeared and, the author claims, he still

stands by his decision and is keeping apart from all public activity, his view being that for him this could only end on the barricades or in prison. 37

The average British observer of the French scene in 1960 might well, despite the continuing Algerian crisis, have been puzzled by the portentousness of this message, as well as uncertain about the exact intentions of its author. Our own retrospective vantage-point, on the other hand, offers the further testimony of the 1984 memoir Les Nouveaux Jours; and we are also able to study some 'clandestine' comments, made by the author in 1959, that provide direct evidence as to his troubled and uncertain reactions at the time<sup>38</sup>.

If the insurrection in Algiers on 13 May 1958 represented the triumph there of the fascist elements which Vercors had denounced in P.P.C., we know that the consequent return to power of General de Gaulle was not to prove the same triumph writ large in France<sup>39</sup>. Vercors's own attitude to de Gaulle, however, had from the Liberation onwards combined admiration for France's champion with suspicion towards the opponent of Communism<sup>40</sup>; and as his retrospective account records, he duly maintained this caution at the time of the General's return. Thus, when he joined the left-wing protest march 'pour la République'<sup>41</sup> in Paris on 28th May, it was with somewhat mixed feelings. Having announced his retirement from all such public shows of commitment, he initially felt loath to participate. On the other hand, a poorly-attended demonstration could

conceivably encourage de Gaulle to replace the Republic with his own authoritarian regime - even though Vercors hesitated to attribute to the General himself 'l'âme d'un dictateur' (NJ p 327). In the event, the large turnout, with Mendès France, André Philip, Mitterrand and Duclos prominent among its leaders, gave an effective signal, in Vercors's view, as to the strength of Republican feeling:

    Pour rassembler les Français, pour éviter un affrontement, de Gaulle devra donc tenir compte des convictions qui nous animent. (NJ p 327)

Vercors's was a positive assessment of the great day of action, therefore, even if rather more sober than that of Claire Etcherelli's ingenuous heroine, Elise: 'Nous sauvons la République, nous étions le nombre, invincible et uni ....'<sup>42</sup> But another participant, Simone de Beauvoir, found the thronging demonstrators to be '.... de trop bonne humeur, contents de crier et de chanter, mais pas du tout décidés à agir'<sup>43</sup>; while a more general difference between her memoir and that of Vercors lies in her unremitting scepticism towards de Gaulle. As the Algerian crisis wore on, her diary recordings continued to reflect the sometimes feverish apprehension of left-wing intellectuals about the threat from fascism, which many saw persisting even after the Fourth Republic had given way to the Fifth. A lingering apprehension which, however successfully his later account puts it into perspective, and whatever his regard for de Gaulle's achievements, was undoubtedly shared for a time by Vercors himself. It was this apprehension that propelled him, almost predictably, into the next significant phase of his career.

According to Les Nouveaux Jours, Vercors had begun to contemplate a return to clandestine publication towards the end of 1957, well before

de Gaulle's accession to power. The idea apparently occurred to him just before he received a first copy of Vérités pour, although this connection suggests, unfortunately, that there is confusion in his record over the year in question<sup>44</sup>. Basically, however, the notion of resuming the very activity on which his literary and public career had been founded seems to have been prompted by government clampdowns on reporting of the 'pacification' process in Algeria:

... une recrudescence des violences, des tortures.  
De quoi ne peut parler en France aucun journal,  
aucune revue, sous peine de poursuites judiciaires.  
(NJ p 317)

Even so, the author's involvement in the production of Vérités pour, following his first meeting with Francis Jeanson early in 1958 (or more probably 1959 - the date is again problematic)<sup>45</sup>, cannot be wholly explained by the need to evade official censorship. There was, of course, his decision, recently proclaimed, to refrain from any further direct comment on the issues of the day. And there seems, too, to have been the reawakening of an old conspiratorial excitement, as evidenced in this account in Les Nouveaux Jours of his meeting with the contact who would soon introduce him to Francis Jeanson:

Sur le moment, je n'ai pas eu de réponse. Mais le sourire s'est accentué. Autrement dit le courant a passé et je devine que mon souhait n'est pas tombé dans une oreille distraite. Vais-je trouver, avec l'année nouvelle, une façon de me réinsérer dans l'action clandestine? (NJ p 317)

Likewise, there is surely a relevant autobiographical echo to be found in Vercors's latest fictional work, Le Tigre d'Anvers, published in 1986. The old mathematician Hector Lebraz, representative in several ways of the author himself, recalls the moment in 1946 when he was tempted to join Pierre Cange in a resistance venture against the Franco régime in Spain:

...ça me démangeait les doigts .... l'action clandestine,  
pour qui une fois y a goûté, est un alcool très fort ...  
(IA p 243)

The actual contribution that Vercors made to Vérités pour is outlined in Les Nouveaux Jours. He was able to offer the editorial team the use of his flat near the Parc Montsouris and there, feeling like 'un père protecteur ... un vieux contestataire à la retraite' (NJ p 323) in relation to the young men and women involved, he watched over the work of assembling and packaging successive issues of the clandestine newsheet. He was not, however, only an onlooker, as a further reference in Les Nouveaux Jours indicates:

.... si je déserte les tribunes comme je me le suis promis,  
je n'en collabore pas moins, pratiquement et intellectuellement,  
au clandestin Vérité pour .... (NJ p 330)

His most substantial intellectual input appears, in fact, to have been the interview he gave to Francis Jeanson for issue number 8 of Vérités pour, dated 2nd May, 1959. The discussion covers various implications of the situation both in Algeria and in France, and what is now chiefly striking in it is Vercors's pessimism about the threat to freedom in France. The disunity of the Left had set the stage for 'le drame lamentable où il était trop visible que la liberté allait trouver son tombeau,<sup>46</sup> leading to a dénouement as desperate as it was predictable:

Elle l'a en effet trouvé, même si certaines apparences  
peuvent encore faire illusion: sur les cadavres, les poils  
continuent à pousser ....

In another graphic phrase, Vercors evoked 'la grue au long bec' (de Gaulle, possibly, or the Gaullist State) which threatened to gobble up the frogs around its feet, while his diagnosis of the immediate future posed the following stark alternative: 'la tyrannie ouverte, c'est-à-dire policière, ou bien, dès aujourd'hui, l'action clandestine....' The latter, he urged, should underlie a rallying of

forces on the Left, with, as priority, 'la lutte au côté du PC.' Grassroots support was indispensable: '... la gauche sans la classe ouvrière est impuissante ...', for only by concerted tactics could 'la tyrannie en marche' effectively be checked.

As an essential part of their own study, the authors of Les Porteurs de Valises document and analyse the many abuses of human rights and curtailments of freedom that occurred throughout the Algerian conflict. They cite cases where the Gaullist régime took 'plus que des libertés avec les libertés'<sup>47</sup>; and they also quote Edmond Michelet, the Justice Minister of the time, as having reflected, in apparent echo of the intellectuals, that the French use of torture was a legacy of 'la vérole nazie'<sup>48</sup>. Yet despite this context, and making all due allowance for hindsight, Hamon and Rotman still seem surprised at the alarmist terms which Vercors used in the interview in question and at his call for a broad clandestine coordination 'comme au temps où s'organisait la résistance':

Avec le recul de vingt années, il paraît à peine croyable que le noir pessimisme de Vercors, lors de son entretien avec Jeanson, s'applique à la France gaulliste de 1959. Le Général n'est pas Franco et le parallèle avec l'occupation nazie est singulièrement excessif. 49

But if analogies with the Occupation and references to fascism did, all too easily for Vercors perhaps, entail making moral judgements in black or white terms, one area of moral greyness which he seemed to acknowledge was that of the young French conscripts sent to carry out their military service in Algeria, thereby becoming, as the author and others saw them, victims of a situation largely beyond their control. It was Vercors's awareness of this, heightened no doubt by his own sons' involvement<sup>50</sup>, that prompted him, in the

Vérités pour interview, to delimit the support that he himself was prepared to offer the FLN. In particular, he stated, he would not help to arm the latter against 'toute la jeunesse française, qu'une politique abominable envoie se battre contre les partisans algériens qui luttent pour leur liberté....' Others, however, should following the bidding of their own conscience: 'Chaque français est ici responsable de son choix....'; and it was in clear acceptance of the various kinds of aid which Jeanson and his associates were prepared to give the nationalist cause, as well as in support of the conscripts' right of conscientious objection, that in September 1960 Vercors signed, with others, the famous 'Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie', the so-called 'manifeste des 121'<sup>51</sup>.

In their discussion of this manifesto, Hamon and Rotman classify Vercors, alongside other signatories such as Robert Barrat, Jérôme Lindon<sup>52</sup>, André Mandouze and François Maspero, as one of the 'anticolonialistes de choc' - a tribute, perhaps, to the persistence of his progressive aura, despite his semi-withdrawal since P.P.C. In his study, too, Alistair Horne attaches a particular, if slightly different significance to Vercors's signature, stating as he does that most of the '121'

were of the Left and many identified as committed 'fellow-travellers' .... nevertheless, the presence among them of such heroes of the Resistance as Vercors ensured that the document was taken seriously in wider circles. 53

Similarly, most studies of these events recall Vercors's appearance in that same September as a defence witness at the trial of members of the 'Réseau Jeanson'. The defence lawyers were keen to exploit his record as a Resistance writer, and they can hardly have been disappointed by the firmness of his statements on behalf of the accused. In Vercors's view, the latter had helped to preserve France's honour; but if they were

to be deemed traitors, then he, too, having collaborated in Vérités pour, must be counted among them. As for the Algerian nationalists, fighting 'comme nous nous sommes battus' (in 1940-44) for the independence of their country, they deserved every respect: '... et non seulement tout le respect, mais toute l'aide qu'on peut leur apporter'.<sup>54</sup>

Though unpecific in its terms and, we must assume, still excluding any help in arming the FLN, this last answer by Vercors (to Maître Jacques Vergès)<sup>55</sup> went further than many anticolonialist intellectuals would have been prepared to commit themselves. As the authors of Les Porteurs de Valises recall, not all progressive writers and journalists were willing to endorse Jeanson's direct assistance to the nationalists, notwithstanding their own criticism of government policy and actions in Algeria<sup>56</sup>. But as it transpired, even this bold contribution by Vercors to the debate was soon overshadowed on the scale of controversy by the letter sent to the court by Jean-Paul Sartre<sup>57</sup>. The directness of the latter's challenge both to the government and to the Army was of course to bring down upon Sartre's head the wrath of the right-wing and military establishments; and, as compounded by writings such as his preface to Les Damnés de la Terre, was to make him the prime Left Bank target of the OAS.

Yet neither Vercors nor Sartre was officially prosecuted for avowed collaboration with Vérités pour or for signing the 'Manifeste des 121'.<sup>58</sup> and in any case it seems that Vercors himself thereafter began to see de Gaulle's Algerian policy as the best hope for bringing the tragedy to an end. He welcomed the slowly-emerging prospect of negotiations and was not anxious, unlike some other left-wingers, deliberately to encourage the intransigence of the FLN. For fundamentally, and even when calling for a militant solidarity on the Left, he had acted in

the cause of resistance rather than of revolution. His overriding concern throughout had been to defend France's republican and humanist traditions - and to protect those whom he saw as victims of right-wing or colonialist extremism - rather than to promote the kind of 'détournement idéologique' being practised by 'la fraction la plus radicale, la plus internationaliste'<sup>59</sup> of the French Left. Vercors was not, in short, to be counted among those of the '121' for whom, according to Pierre Vidal-Naquet,

l'insoumission n'a de sens ... que si elle s'accompagne  
d'une aide effective à la révolution algérienne conçue comme  
le chemin le plus court qui mène à la révolution française. 60

But if Vercors in the Algerian context was politically less radical than some, the moralist in him remained fully alert and concerned to preserve France's heritage of social ideals from the destructive pressures of the crisis. In his evidence at the 'Réseau Jeanson' trial, for example, he expressed the fear that 'le rayonnement' of France's reputation was being jeopardised by the armed repression in Algeria<sup>61</sup>; and it was largely in the name of that reputation that his gestures of commitment during the remaining years of the conflict were made. One such, for example, was the short preface that he wrote for Barberousse<sup>62</sup>, when, in the context of a young Arab's account of his interrogation and torture in Algeria, Vercors evoked the resurrected France of the Liberation - 'Qu'elle était belle et émouvante, qu'elle était noble, cette France sortie du tombeau'<sup>63</sup> - only to point to the dark stains of 'les tortures, la nuit des cachots' now spreading from Algeria to sully the nation's image. In the same spirit, the author was among the twenty-one signatories of an appeal launched in April 1961 by the 'Comité de Solidarité pour les victimes de la répression due à la guerre d'Algérie' in protest against the detention in French gaols of more than 20,000 Algerians and of a

number of French prisoners of conscience. And finally, some months after the end of the war, Vercors kept faith, by contributing to a pamphlet written on their behalf, with the young militants imprisoned after the 'Réseau Jeanson' trial. These young frenchmen and women, 'Les Oubliés' of the pamphlet's title, had, he maintained, been among the first to realise that

la tâche de la France était une oeuvre d'émancipation,  
qu'elle n'était pas .... une oeuvre d'asservissement.  
Que la France .... ne pouvait pas avoir combattu naguère  
pour recouvrer sa propre indépendance à la seule fin  
ensuite de la dénier à d'autres peuples .... 64

But if in Vercors's view the 'Réseau Jeanson' had, whatever the ideological motivations of some of its members, defended the true honour and traditions of France, the rescue of the French Republic and its democratic structures from the traumas of the Algerian War could be ascribed in large measure to the efforts of Charles de Gaulle. Certainly Vercors is willing to give de Gaulle credit for this service to his country; and a cautious but steadily-increasing appreciation of the General's role can duly be traced through the account in Les Nouveaux Jours (written with 'le recul de vingt années', to borrow Hamon and Rotman's phrase) of de Gaulle's exercise of power. In appraising the administration in the closing stages of the Fourth Republic as well as in the early part of the Fifth, Vercors takes a carefully balanced, indeed in some areas distinctly positive, view. Furthermore, the 'bilan' that he presents in respect of the General's first initiatives fairly acknowledges his own misapprehensions:

Qu'il ait gardé Maastricht est mauvais signe - je m'étais naïvement dit qu'un de Gaulle ne pourrait pas permettre qu'on déshonore la France. Mais en craignant qu'il ne s'attaque à la liberté de la presse, qu'il n'asservisse les mass media, je ne me suis pas moins trompé. Ceux

qui dénoncent les tortures, ou qui (comme Vérité pour...) prennent le parti de l'indépendance, sont certes poursuivis en justice - mais c'était déjà le cas avant lui. Puis l'équipe d'Europe No. 1 ... analyse avec courage l'événement et la politique et n'en subit aucun ennui. Les élections sénatoriales se déroulent librement .... (NJ pp 328-9)

A later passage highlights the success in budgetary policy that was apparent by the end of 1960:

A l'intérieur, du reste, son administration se révèle un succès. La France se trouve, financièrement, dans la meilleure situation. Elle a, patiemment, remboursé la plus grande partie de ses dettes; ses réserves en devises atteignent deux milliards de dollars .... (NJ p 356);

while that 'aine que non' of further progress in the 1960's, the solution of the Algerian problem, at last appeared in sight following the massive vote of assent won by the General in the January 1961 referendum. This, like the gradual moves towards peace thereafter, was a vindication of that Gaullian pragmatism which Vercors now seemed ready to endorse:

Charles de Gaulle a vu juste. ... Dans cette consultation il jouait son autorité .... Ce succès est le sien et je n'ai pas été d'accord, pour une fois, avec la gauche qui, redoutant cet aspect plébiscitaire, avait préconisé le non. Pour préserver la République, pensai-je, et pour constituer l'Europe, il faut régler d'abord la question algérienne; et seul actuellement le Général peut le faire ... (NJ p 359) 65

It is not too difficult to perceive the discrepancy between this favourable judgement and the apocalyptic language of P.P.C., the interview of Vérités pour, or even the author's candid recollection, earlier in Les Nouveaux Jours, of his fear that the de Gaulle of May 1958 could 'assassiner la République' (NJ p 327). By early 1961, de Gaulle had of course distanced himself from the 'Algérie française' camp which had brought him to power: and for Vercors at least, a conclusive proof that the General had little in common with, indeed was the main bastion against, the 'fascist' elements in France and

and Algeria came with the failed Algiers putsch of April 1961. According to Vercors's account in Les Nouveaux Jours, it was de Gaulle's broadcast appeal to the nation and the Army to rally to the Republic that foiled the 'quarteron de généraux en retraite'; a message which, however, might never have reached the troops but for their transistor radios. It was this vital technical factor which, in the author's view, helped to save the Republic<sup>66</sup>; a thesis similarly advanced by Michel Winock in a recent article in Le Monde:

... depuis le début de la guerre d'Algérie, une nouveauté s'était produite dans la sphère des communications: l'invention des transistors et la commercialisation des postes de radio portatifs. Tous les bidasses avaient entendu le discours si bien trempé ... la voix de la France s'était fait entendre. Presque partout, les soldats et officiers du contingent refusent d'obtempérer aux ordres des insurgés. 67

Vercors claims, in Les Nouveaux Jours, that before de Gaulle's decisive broadcast he himself had been ready to rally to Debré's call to the populace to confront the paratroops if they landed in Paris - even though, presumably, not all the allies he might have found in the streets or on Malraux's barricades would have been those he had had in mind when he wrote P.P.C. But at least this whole episode, as recounted retrospectively, indicates the author's growing willingness to respond pragmatically to de Gaulle's leadership; while at a more personal level the author admits to having been flattered, albeit briefly, by the General's claim in a letter to him that he had spent the night of the crisis reading Sylva<sup>68</sup>.

The record of events in Les Nouveaux Jours ends in 1962 - the centenary year of Briand's birth, which Vercors had chosen as the starting-point for his three-volume cycle of history. March 1962, of course, also brought the end of the Algerian War, and it is with this dénouement

that Vercors's sequential account concludes. He does, however, in the remaining three pages of his text, glance briefly through the major developments that would mark the passage from 1962 to the early 1980's. France, freed at last from 'ce boulet .... cette guerre injuste et atroce' (NJ p 432) and with a new governmental stability 'telle que de Gaulle la veut depuis toujours' (NJ p 432), was about to experience an unprecedented growth and prosperity before entering the prolonged economic crisis of the 1970's. All of which has tended to confirm the author, as far as his country's prospects are concerned, in the attitude of 'un optimiste pessimiste':

Optimiste, je me dis qu'elle saura rester au rang où de Gaulle (et les Français) ont su la rétablir après qu'elle a failli mourir. Pessimiste, je me demande si ce succès gaullien n'aura pas été seulement un arrêt dans la glissade.  
(NJ p 433)

Significantly, though, Vercors finds no room in this admittedly rapid survey for 'les événements de mai' of 1968. As he has made clear elsewhere, the students' challenge to the government was to leave him basically unimpressed, even if he acknowledges that de Gaulle's own reign was then effectively finished<sup>69</sup>. Certainly he was not tempted by these events to share in what John Cruickshank has called 'the Maoist enthusiasms of Sartre's anarchist old age'<sup>70</sup>, enthusiasms which contact with the young revolutionaries did so much to stimulate.

For Vercors, in fact, by far the most momentous developments in 1968 were to be Dubcek's 'Prague Spring' and the Warsaw Pact invasion which cut it short<sup>71</sup>. This latter process, and the dashing of liberal hopes abroad, helped also to extinguish the author's remaining indulgence towards the Soviet Union, with its satellites firmly tethered behind 'l'enceinte barbelée du dogme' (NJ p 434). And accordingly, when

Vercors goes on to evoke his abstention from public platforms in the 1960's and 1970's - 'sauf pour des cas précis, urgents' (NJ p 434) - it is not surprising, on turning elsewhere for the record of these rare appearances, that we should find one of them to have been on behalf of the 'Appel de la gauche pour les Juifs d'URSS', launched in Paris in January 1971.<sup>72</sup>

As is appropriate, given the quite different character of the two books, no single political figure dominates the historical section of Les Nouveaux Jours as fully as Briand inevitably does in the first volume, the 'Essai d'autoportrait'. But two major politicians do assume in approximately proportionate terms in Vercors's account the importance to which their actual influence and achievements in the post-war history of France entitle them. The author's treatment of one of them, Charles de Gaulle, has already been examined; and it is relevant now briefly to recall Pierre Mendès France, who opposed the General in 1958 (and in 1968) but who shared with him, for a time at least, the ability to appeal directly to the French people in a way which transcended normal party allegiances. Vercors's own response to Mendès France in the 1950's exemplifies the latter point, while also clearly indicating that the author, notwithstanding his sympathy with the Communists, could rally to inspired reforming leadership on the non-Communist Left (or, in this instance, Centre-Left). Mendès, of course, with his personal idealism and strong faith in parliamentary democracy, was no friend of the Communists; nor, after supporting him initially, were the latter above joining in a disreputable display of triumph when he was finally defeated in the National Assembly<sup>73</sup>. But Vercors's respect for a parliamentarian of his calibre lends some

weight to the author's claim that his own natural political 'home' was never really with the Communists but with democratic socialism (if only it had been better led):

par tempérament, les idées que je partage sont celles du parti socialiste. Mais celui-ci ne cesse, en toute occasion, de se trahir lui-même! (NJ p 184)

At the same time, however, it would be inaccurate to suggest that there have been no Socialist leaders at all to whose qualities Vercors has felt able to respond. In earlier years, for example, Léon Blum was respected for his humanist idealism, which, like Vercors's own, had its origins in Kant's theory of moral imperatives<sup>74</sup>. Again, Vercors would undoubtedly have approved of Blum's call in 1945 for the moral renewal of France: '... Jamais nous n'attacherons trop d'importance à l'assainissement moral de ce pays...'<sup>75</sup> But in 1946 Blum's disciple, Daniel Mayer, had been ousted as Secretary-General of the SFIO by Guy Mollet; and although at the time this change reflected the militants' wish to cleave to the fundamental socialist doctrines of the class struggle, the realities of national and international life soon dictated a more pragmatic cause for the party's development. Mollet proved to be pre-eminently a party manager, whose priority was the stability of the SFIO as a parliamentary force and who consequently suppressed all internal ideological debate. It was his political opportunism, as, for example, we find it encapsulated in a sentence from Jean Touchard's analysis - 'Le gauchisme de 1946 n'a pas empêché Guy Mollet de faire la guerre d'Algérie, et de se rallier en 1958 au régime né du 13 mai.'<sup>76</sup> - that partly explains Vercors's aversion to Mollet; while further and conclusive grounds for condemnation lay in the Secretary-General's anti-communism, consistently maintained until its abrupt abandonment, for electoral considerations, in 1962.

However, Vercors's judgement of the Socialist leadership was characteristically manichean. The antithesis to Mollet was Daniel Mayer, the author's enthusiasm for whom as a man and a politician is unequivocally expressed in his preface to Le Combat de Daniel Mayer (1982)<sup>77</sup>. Here Vercors briefly traces Mayer's career, highlighting the moral firmness and passion for social justice that had always guided him. He reveals his own relatively recent friendship with Mayer, which had blossomed despite the divergence in their attitude to the Communists: Mayer, 'plus sensible à leurs vices qu'à leurs vertus', had been their implacable opponent, whereas Vercors, 'plus sensible ... à leur vertus qu'à leur méfaits' (CDM p xi) had forgiven them many things, (perhaps too many, he now agrees), in order to remain their ally. Having paid tribute to Mayer's antifascism in the 1930's and his work in the clandestine SFIO during the war, the preface then recalls Mayer's replacement by Mollet in 1946: 'un désastre pour la France - et pour le socialisme!' (xvi). For Mollet was a master of deceit:

.... élu pour entraîner vers une gauche pure et dure un parti socialiste jugé trop modéré, il ne fera, pendant douze ans, que s'aligner sur la politique de la droite (CDM p xvi);

the influence of all this on Vercors himself being recalled in equally forthright terms:

Pendant toutes ces années, si malgré mille réserves je suis demeuré proche du parti communiste, c'est bien à cause de Guy Mollet: puisque, hors le PCF, il n'y avait pratiquement plus de socialisme en France. (CDM p xvi)

Compared with Mollet's compromises and opportunism, Mayer's conduct in seven successive cabinets (1946 to 1949) had been inspired by a single principle: 'faire triompher l'idéal socialiste'. This he had sought to fulfil through his fight to safeguard the Social Security system, his and Blum's two 5% reductions in the cost of living, and his

arbitration in the 1947-48 strikes<sup>78</sup>. And even after his ministerial career had ended, he had rendered one last signal service: as Chairman of the parliamentary Foreign Affairs committee he had played a part in scuttling 'la fameuse Communauté Européenne de Défense chère aux Américains - et à Guy Mollet' (CDM p xvii).

Now given the strongly subjective tone of this preface, it would be reasonable to conclude that it is as instructive about Vercors himself as about Mayer and Mollet; and any serious historian would undoubtedly wish - and be able - to add various nuances to Vercors's starkly contrasting portrayals, the one all black, the other white, of the two Socialist leaders<sup>79</sup>. Much of what it tells us about Vercors's own attitudes had of course already been set out by him before in different contexts: the references to the Communists for example, or to German rearmament. However, for all the confidence and forthrightness of its moral and political judgements, the text does also beg some crucial questions, which any comprehensive exploration of Vercors's political outlook must spell out and attempt to answer.

These questions centre upon the dichotomy, inherent in the history and ideology of socialism, between revolutionary class-warfare promising mankind's eventual 'liberation' on the one hand, and reformism guaranteeing present democratic freedom on the other. When Mollet took over the leadership of the SFIO, it was as a (relatively) 'young Turk' ostensibly upholding the principles of the class struggle as against the moderate, reformist tendency headed by Mayer. Vercors's criticism of Mollet is that he then abandoned the pure doctrine of the movement and cooperated with bourgeois parties and institutions in order to share in the government of the Republic. But according to the sweeping

attack on the SFIO in 'Une farce déshonorante', as discussed in the previous chapter, the French Socialists, like their counterparts abroad, had been betraying their commitment 'au prolétariat et à la révolution' (PS p 253) consistently since 1914: including therefore the period of the 1930's under Léon Blum, whose leadership and moral stance Daniel Mayer fully supported. The reference to the 1932 election in Les Occasions perdues is duly critical of the Socialists' readiness to align themselves with 'la mollesse des radicaux' (OP p 22); and since Blum's concept of the SFIO as 'un parti d'action de classe' rather than as 'un parti de lutte de classe'<sup>80</sup> implied, as did his 1936 programme, a social revolution achieved initially through democratic reforms, one might expect Vercors to be as critical of such 'revisionism' as Mollet was in 1946. In fact, however, the author's comments on Blum's exercise of power with the Radicals in the Popular Front are mainly sympathetic in tone; and while this attitude may be largely explained by his sharing the aversion to fascism that inspired the Popular Front, there is no doubt either that Blum's character and moral values were congenial to Vercors and benefited enormously in his view from comparison with Mollet. Because of this, because of Vercors's warm friendship with Daniel Mayer after 1957, and because of the author's final disillusionment with Communist Party tactics, it seemed that Vercors was prepared in his later writings to discriminate in his judgements on the Socialist revisionists - something which in 1951 ('Une Farce déshonorante') he seemed wholly unprepared to do. Hence, his readiness in Les Nouveaux Jours to date the Socialists' falling-off only from the time when they had replaced Mayer with Mollet (NJ p 184).

Mayer had never had the opportunity of leading the Socialists in government, and in the preface already referred to Vercors admits the

impossibility of knowing exactly how he would have tackled the issues with which Mollet dealt so lamentably. The author is certain, though, that in view of Mayer's record as 'Ministre du Travail', social justice would have been his priority. But this would not have been at the expense of democratic freedoms: witness at a later stage, and in a different context, Mayer's opposition to de Gaulle's 'Coup d'Etat' (Vercors's phrase) in May 1958. More generally, as Claude Juin's biography shows, Mayer shared Blum's ideal of government for liberation rather than for domination; and because of the importance that each of them attached to freedom as a fundamental requisite for human dignity, neither could accept the bureaucratic control by the Party (or rather by its central committee) which the Communist system entailed. Furthermore, as Vercors's preface noted, Mayer had proved his non-partisan commitment to human freedom and to justice through his work as President of the 'Ligue des Droits de l'Homme' and of the 'Fédération internationale des Droits de l'Homme'.

It was clearly the threat to individual freedom inherent in Marxist revolutionary theory, and particularly in the envisaged dictatorship of the proletariat, that repelled many humanist socialists from orthodox Communism. Vercors too, even while polemically engaged on behalf of the Communists in the 1940's and 1950's, was capable of expressing doubts about this basic implication of their ideology:

Je ne parviens pas à accepter sans réserve que l'individu puisse se trouver sans secours contre l'arbitraire du pouvoir - même si ce pouvoir est l'émanation du peuple et même s'il a cent fois raison. (PS p 252)

Although this is followed by the swingeing attack on socialist betrayals previously referred to<sup>81</sup>, we can see the author revealing here the kind of anti-totalitarian attitude that had been shared

over the years by Socialists like Jean Jaurès and Léon Blum, Daniel Meyer and André Philip. In which respect, as well as in his support for Mendès France, his essentially defensive and non-revolutionary stance in the Algerian crisis, even his acknowledgement of the institutional stability achieved by de Gaulle, Vercors is seen to correspond all the more faithfully to David Caute's characterization of the fellow-traveller as one who

retains a partial faith in the possibilities of progress under the parliamentary system: he appreciates that the prevailing liberties, however imperfect and however distorted, are nevertheless valuable.... 82

But of course Vercors's activity as a fellow-traveller, in any established sense of the term, was confined to a period of roughly ten years, ending ostensibly with the publication of P.P.C. in 1957 (even if he continued to espouse anti-fascist and anti-colonialist positions thereafter). In his more recent writings, on the other hand, he has tended to measure his political attitudes against a much longer timescale, as, for example, in looking back to Aristide Briand or forward to long-term changes in the future. Each of these perspectives can now contribute significantly to an overall picture of the author's commitment.

Briand was the French statesman whom Vercors admired above all others. Not only are his aims and achievements the subject-matter of Moi, Aristide Briand, they are also frequently evoked in the other two volumes of Vercors's historical series - as well, of course, as having been warmly mentioned in Le Silence de la Mer<sup>83</sup>. Many of Briand's essential values became Vercors's own - and, he believes, helped to shape his own political outlook on both social and international questions:

.... Il haïssait l'intolérance, et je la déteste autant que lui. Il haïssait le mensonge et je le déteste autant que lui. Il rêvait d'une révolution sans violence ni sang versé et je rêve d'elle autant que lui. Il a vomì la guerre et je la haïs autant que lui. (MAB Introd. p 12)

Leaving aside for the time being the applicability or otherwise of this assessment to Briand<sup>84</sup>, we have here a bold restatement, published in 1981, of the author's fundamental political orientations. And for further elucidation, in particular of his views on revolution in the context of human progress, we can turn now to two other works of mature reflection, also written long after the period of overt commitment: Ce que je crois and Sens et non-sens de l'Histoire.

Ce que je crois is no mere catalogue of the author's views on politics, ethics, art and literature. Rather it offers a persuasive synthesis of ideas on the meaning of human life, as pondered by 'un scientifique manqué' with a strong sense of moral responsibility. The theoretical underpinning of Vercors's notion of progress - based on 'le principe auto-organisateur' governing all matter and energy (CJC p 33), and pointing towards the eventual attainment of complete knowledge - falls mainly into the category of scientific speculation; but its political connotations are fully expounded in terms of the ideological debate in which he had formerly participated and which inevitably remained close to the centre of his thinking. If, as Vercors postulates, social cohesion is to be maximised for the sake of mankind's intellectual and scientific development, then not only must the immutable moral laws: 'l'obligation de vérité, l'interdit de mentir' (CJC p 114), be respected, but there is an imperative duty, shared by individuals and states alike, to exchange information and ideas fully and accurately, both within and beyond national frontiers. Chauvinism, imperialism and

colonialism are among the negative forces which threaten cohesion, as indeed does any form of society based on the exploitation of human beings:

Une telle société devra donc se transformer pour faire cesser cette exploitation, et ceci pas tellement (pas seulement) parce qu'elle fait obstacle à la lutte commune qui seule peut donner un sens et un avenir à l'espèce humaine (CJC p 116)

And how to achieve this desirable transformation? Revolution offers the obvious short-cut: but would not the disintegration and violent upheaval hinder rather than assist humanity's ascension? The dream of a revolution 'sans violence ni sang versé' is adumbrated, even if violence can sometimes be justified:

je donne ma préférence aux moyens non violents. Mais la plus grande violence, c'est quand même l'injustice sociale avec ses conséquences de plus en plus nuisibles, à mesure qu'elle se prolonge, pour la cohésion sociale et l'avenir de l'espèce, qui en dépend. Violence pour violence, celle qui aide au changement pourra se trouver moins nocive, plus créatrice que celle qui s'y oppose. (CJC p 117)

Logically, therefore, if mankind is to progress from a society founded on exploitation (and such a progression would be in keeping with the universal law of ever-increasing structural organization), then capitalism with its wasteful competition, domination of the weak by the strong and inequitable distribution of freedoms, must give way, like feudalism before it, to 'une étape supérieure' (CJC p 193). Nor does Vercors have any doubts as to the kind of society towards which this progress should in theory be heading: '... c'est vers le communisme, et c'est pourquoi je souhaite sa réussite.' (CJC p 193)

But experience has shown that there are many huge obstacles still to be overcome before true Communism is achieved anywhere in the world. The primitive urge to domination in human nature can still assert itself, to the detriment of any really positive use of human resources:

.... appropriation de privilèges, luttes intestines, relents ou resurgences d'antisémitisme, police toute-puissante et véritable Etat dans l'Etat, persécutions, déportations ... (CJC p 194)

Vercors had earlier written of the 'hôpitaux psychiatriques' (CJC p 119) to which writers and journalists seeking to safeguard essentially progressive values against abuses by governments risked being assigned; and even Communist China, in which he had once voiced such confidence, was a prey to some of the defects cited above. Would these be purged by the Cultural Revolution through which the country was now passing? 'On le voudrait' (CJC p 193) was his footnote comment in 1975; although now he would undoubtedly accept that the 'Red Guards', according to all the evidence and by the Chinese leadership's own admission, did far more harm than good to the cause they were supposed to be serving.

In short, even though its starting point seemed to be a blueprint of the rationally-ordered society which mankind should eventually attain, true Communism is at present a very long way from realisation. Indeed, it is the faults in today's Communist regimes, most grievously their suppression of the voice of reason and of any challenge to party dogma, that help to explain why Vercors can now claim: 'Je suis socialiste, je ne suis pas du tout communiste'.<sup>85</sup> He has, of course, never been a Communist; but what he is particularly rejecting in the second part of this statement are the contingent aberrations and abuses to which Communism has given rise, both beyond the Iron Curtain and in western parties like the PCF. Similarly, his claim to be a socialist has still got nothing to do with the French party political form of socialism. Even though the 'Parti Socialiste' has replaced the SFIO and governed France following its electoral victory in 1981, Vercors sees nothing in their policies that has gone beyond 'une amélioration du capitalisme'.<sup>86</sup>

The paradox remains, however, that Vercors still hopes, according to Ce que je crois, for the eventual success of authentic Communism as the social organisation of the future. The formula to which he now subscribes is that which saw a brief realization in 'Le Printemps de Prague' in 1968, and which he describes as a fully achieved socialist society that could still allow its individual members to challenge and debate the policies and methods of government<sup>87</sup>. This short-lived Czechoslovakian experiment, which Dubcek called 'Communism with a human face', seems to have corresponded closely to the ideal form of government that the author outlines at the end of Sens et non-sens de l'Histoire:

L'auteur ne cache pas qu'il souhaite l'avènement d'un socialisme 'ouvert', quéri de toute rigidité, de tout abus de pouvoir, de tout 'centralisme' autoritaire et borné, hanté par la commodité de citoyens-robots; souhaite qui, dans sa pensée, n'est nullement celui d'un socialisme faible ni indulgent: mais au contraire puissant et organisé, coordonné en vue de développer dans le corps social (dès l'enfance et à tous les âges) ce qui est, par essence, la marque même de l'homme et son épanouissement: cette tendance d'ange rebelle à soumettre son animale nature, à transcender son agressivité en solidarité, à refuser l'ignorance passive de l'hominiion pour la plus noble activité mentale: l'interrogation. (SNS p 188)

Thus, even if Vercors is cautious on the question of means, he is quite positive about the desired political end to be achieved. He has reconciled, apparently to his own satisfaction, the socialist dream of universal solidarity with the individual's prerogative of intellectual reflection and challenge; and by accommodating this cardinal freedom within a comprehensive structure of social interdependence fully coordinated with 'le sens de l'Histoire', his formula appears to respond to the reservations of critics such as Nelly Corneau, who at a much earlier stage had questioned the author's assumption that 'rebel' humanity was progressing inevitably towards

an all-embracing, collectivist society:

... l'assurance confiante de l'auteur ... nous paraît ... naïve et inconséquente dans une certaine mesure. D'abord parce que, malgré tous les espoirs que Vercors peut nourrir, le règne du collectif c'est la dépersonnalisation, l'asservissement de l'individu à la petite ou la grande termitière: classe, parti, Etat. Ensuite parce que si l'homme est fondamentalement un rebelle, il n'y a pas - si vaste que soit l'emprise économique - d'évolution inévitable. L'économique, le social, le politique sont, après tout, de création humaine .... 88

Time will tell whether Vercors's hopes concerning the future pattern of society are fulfilled, or whether it is the critic's scepticism about 'le règne du collectif' that will be justified. The notion of 'socialisme ouvert' seems akin, in certain respects, to the ultimate communist society that Marx and Engels envisaged, somewhat obscurely, emerging from the dictatorship of the proletariat:

... his (Marx's) ideal was not the repressive - authoritarian Sparta, so revered by Rousseau and the communist philosophers, but Periclean Athens with its democratic and libertarian participation. 89

So it is in terms of a broadly-defined liberation - intellectual and spiritual as well as economic - that Vercors's idea of socialism can best be understood. The paradoxical but visible interplay between human freedom and the apparently deterministic 'auto-organisation' within his theory<sup>90</sup> supersedes the traditional tension between 'bourgeois' democratic freedoms and revolutionary coercion. Justice and freedom will progress, he believes, despite the destructive and wasteful conflicts 'des violents ... des durs ... des méchants' (CJC p 214); and the new society, 'une société où l'homme puisse s'accomplir, sans cesse devenir plus homme' (CJC p 214), will be built by the accumulated, painstaking efforts of those who strive, 'au coeur de la jungle', in the cause of peaceful progress and growing enlightenment:

... ceux-là remettent incessamment leurs pas dans les mêmes pas, leur charrue dans le même sillon, et ainsi tracent et approfondissent et ouvrent dans ces ténèbres la route d'un avenir où telle qu'en soi-même enfin se change l'espèce humaine. (CJC p 214)

And finally, to confront this conclusion with that of Raymond Aron in Plaidoyer pour l'Europe décadente (as recapitulated in his Mémoires) is to enable us to see a little more of the relationship between Vercors's outlook and the Marxist view of the future. Aron states that he accepted neither Marx's 'optimisme rationaliste'<sup>91</sup>, whereby science would eventually create a wholly non-exploitative society in a post-capitalist world, nor 'le pessimisme stoïque'<sup>92</sup> of Spengler, with its anticipation of urban proliferation and cultural disintegration. Aron's own philosophy emerges between these two poles:

... une philosophie ouverte qui avoue humblement les limites de notre savoir, échappe à l'orgueil prométhéen et au fatalisme biologique, ne s'achève ni sur une certitude de victoire ni sur un cri de désespoir. 93

Vercors's vision, by contrast, recognizes the limits of our present knowledge while adhering firmly to a promethean ambition for Man's intellectual and social progress. Given the three levels represented by Marxian optimism, Aron's realism and Spenglerian pessimism, his position would seem to lie somewhere between the first two.

NOTES ON CHAPTER FIVE

1. Comments made by Claude Bourdet to Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman in October 1978 and quoted by them in Les Porteurs de Valises, Paris, coll: 'Points', 1981, p 28.
2. For a further indication that Vercors's early outlook on the French Empire was typical of those of his generation and upbringing, whatever their later political orientation, see Catherine Nay, Le Noir de le Rouge, Paris, Grasset, 1984. François Mitterrand is here referred to (p 224) as having been 'élevé dans le culte de l'Empire, comme tous les enfants de la bourgeoisie' and having conceived thereby, as a would-be leader of his country, 'une ambition pour la France plus digne de ses espoirs que le pré carré hexagonal.'
3. Paul Clay Sorum, Intellectuals and Decolonization in France, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1977. (Apart from reference to this title, the more normal English spelling of 'decolonisation' is used in the present chapter).
4. Jean Daniel, writing in Esprit (May 1960), was one of the first to diagnose this element in French left-wing thinking:

.... la gauche française n'est pas anticolonialiste par essence. Elle est sans doute égalitariste, c'est-à-dire opposée à l'exploitation économique: mais elle est, idéologiquement, impérialiste, ce qui l'a conduite en Algérie à être pour l'intégration.

Quoted by Hamon and Rotman in Les Porteurs de Valises, p 239.
5. Sorum, p 20.
6. Indeed, one of Vercors's earliest comments on colonialism in the post-war period was directed not at the French government but at the British. See the discussion of the 1947 essay 'La Morale et l'action' (reproduced in Plus ou moins Homme) in Chapter Four of this thesis. As for Indochina, a complex of factors contributed to the post-liberation crisis, including the spearheading of the independence movement by the Communists under Ho Chi Minh, the reluctance of the left-wing parties in France to respond to the Nationalists' overtures in Paris in the Summer of 1946, and the initiatives of the High Commissioner, Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu. As far as Vercors is concerned, it was the latter who bore the heaviest responsibility:

Afin de saboter les accords de Fontainebleau, le père Thierry d'Argenlieu a pris, cette fois, prétexte d'une question de douanes pour faire bombarder le port d'Haiphong et ses faubourgs. Il y a des milliers de morts ... La France va payer de la perte de son empire la violence butée d'un moine vindicatif. (N) p 106)

7. To take account of all the attempts by writers and journalists to arouse French opinion on colonial problems by making comparisons with Nazi methods would require a separate study in its own right. A few key examples are, however, relevant here. Les Temps Modernes led the way in commenting on Indochina in its editorial 'Et Bourreaux, et Victimes' of December 1946 (previously referred to in Chapter Four, note 17). In the Algerian context, Claude Bourdet produced an early article, entitled 'Votre gestapo d'Algérie', in France-Observateur, 13/1/55, pp 6-7; while among 'non-intellectual' witnesses who were moved to refer to Nazi-style atrocities was a French soldier whose 1956 letter is quoted in Les Porteurs de Valises, p 70: '... des Oradour, nous en faisons tous les jours'.
8. In fact, neither Bidault nor Lacoste are mentioned by name in the text in Les Pas dans le Sable, but they are so specified in the account in Les Nouveaux Jours (p 255). They were both, of course, later to become the 'bâtes noires' of progressives for their respective roles in the Algerian drama.
9. As an example of 'realist' criticism, Sorum (op.cit. p 179) refers to the manifesto signed by Vercors and others and published in Les Temps Modernes (December 1948/January 1949) and Esprit (December 1948): 'this condemned the ineffectiveness of French methods in failing to restore peace and keep Indochina in the French Union. Vercors's brief 1953 text 'Paix au Vietnam', reproduced in Les Pas dans le Sable (pp 179-180), does in fact denounce 'une guerre absurde et criminelle' (p 179), i.e. raise both moral and realist objections. However, in order to illustrate a particular parallel with Les Nouveaux Jours, a 'realist' criticism only has been quoted from the 1953 text.
10. Mauriac was, for example, among the first of the French intellectuals to expose the use of torture in Algeria with his article 'La Question', L'Express, Paris, 15/1/55, p 16. Subsequently, in the same journal, he discussed the execution of nationalists in Algeria; for example, in 'Bloc-Notes', 29/6/56, p 24:

Ces exécutions étaient légales? Je l'accorde. Étaient-elles moralement justifiées? Je ferai à ceux qui les ont décidées l'honneur de le croire. N'empêche que politiquement elles sont sans excuse ....

11. Raymond Aron, Mémoires, Paris, Julliard, 1983, p 247.
12. David Schoenbrun, As France Goes, London, Gollancz, 1957, p 247 (Indochina), p 258 (North Africa).
13. Jean-Pierre Rioux, La France de la Quatrième République, Paris, Seuil, 1980, 1983, coll: 'Points', 2 vols, II, 35.
14. Theoretical arguments for rejecting colonialism altogether are only to be found in a later text such as Ce que je crois (see, for example, pp 113-116). There will be an analysis of Vercors's main political views in Ce que je crois later in the present chapter.
15. The similar passage in Les Nouveaux Jours is to be found on p 256.
16. In his consistent support for Mendès France in L'Express, Mauriac was giving voice to a personal enthusiasm which also, of course, happened to be that of the newspaper's founders, J-J Servan-Schreiber and Françoise Giroud.
17. 'L'Algérie, c'est la France' was the formula used by Mendès France in addressing the National Assembly on 12 November 1954. Mitterrand used the same words in the same debate and also repeated them in Parliament on 4 February 1955.
18. Vercors's visit to Algeria in the Spring of 1954 is related in Les Nouveaux Jours, pp 251-3. In his novel Le Périple (1958), which is analysed in Chapter Six of this thesis, the author relates a similar visit to Algeria, where his narrator, a well-known scientist of progressive views, falls eventually into the hands of the paratroops while trying to investigate the disappearance of a young Jewish colleague.
19. Nay, op.cit., p 218. This author has now produced a second study of François Mitterrand: Les Sept Mitterrand, Paris, Grasset, 1988.
20. These parliamentary figures were not in fact named by Vercors in his text, which was perhaps more particularly referring to the rank-and-file supporters who would have been discouraged by the policy of the PCF. But Mendès France's resignation from the Cabinet on 23 May 1956, though it may have had little impact on his immediate colleagues (see Rioux, II, 103), did help observers like Vercors to clarify their own positions (see Les Nouveaux Jours, p 286). The Communists in fact withdrew their support from Mollet in the Summer of 1956.

21. Hamon and Rotman, p 47.
22. This letter, dated 10 March 1956 and reproduced in P.P.C., pp 329-332, was in reply to the one sent to Vercors by de Gaulle in February 1956 (see Chapter Four, note 9). The author's reference to his second letter in Les Nouveaux Jours (p 364), however, puts it firmly in the context of early 1955, and a comment by the author in Appendix I of this thesis likewise refers to his writing to the General in 1955 to urge him to make a visit to Algeria, backed by the Communists, to try to resolve the continuing crisis there.

There is a similar discrepancy over dates in Vercors's references to Vérités pour (see note 44 on this chapter).

23. See, for example, the author's reference in Les Nouveaux Jours (p 260) to 'l'égoïsme forcé' of the 'pieds-noirs'.
24. In the immediately preceding text in P.P.C., 'Le sudiste et les noirs', (PPC pp 350-2, dated March 1956), Vercors refers to the attitude of William Faulkner, who had just stated that as a Southerner he would fight for the South in any conflict against the blacks - even though he knew justice to be on the side of the latter. At a time when Lacoste's 'pouvoirs spéciaux' and an increased military effort were being applied in Algeria, Vercors gives the American writer credit for his honesty here: 'Du moins ne prétend-il pas que, ce faisant, il défendrait la justice et la civilisation' (PPC p 352).

On the other hand Vercors was, like most progressives, somewhat censorious over Albert Camus's candour, in his famous Stockholm reply, over the choice he would make as between his mother and justice. (See Les Nouveaux Jours, p 347, the reference in Appendix I, and the discussion of Le Périple in Chapter Six).

25. René Capitant resigned his Law professorship over the issue in March 1957.
26. Hamon and Rotman, p 74.
27. Alistair Horne, A Savage War of Peace, London, Macmillan, 1977, p 233.
28. Scrum, p 147.

Scrum's list is not of course exhaustive. L'Humanité too, for example, was seized on February 26 1957 for having reported the evidence given by Jean Muller to Témoignage Chrétien in that same month. Apart from this and sundry other examples, there is also the whole category of liberal publications censored in Algeria itself during this period. (See the article by Jean Lacouture 'Le Combat des Européens libéraux', Le Monde, 9/6/72, p 11)

29. Sorum, pp 148-9.
30. Francis Jeanson, quoted in Hamon and Rotman, *op.cit.*, pp 31-2.
31. Some of this discussion was stimulated by the publication of Pierre-Henri Simon's Contre la torture, Paris, Seuil, 1957 (March). In a reply to Simon in Le Monde, Hubert Beuve-Méry denied that the contagion from Nazi evil was by now incurable. But it was time to sound the alarm: 'Dès maintenant, les français doivent savoir qu'ils n'ont plus tout à fait le droit de condamner dans les mêmes termes qu'il y a dix ans les destructeurs d'Oradour et les tortionnaires de la Ceatapo'. 'Sirius', 'Sommes-nous les vaincus de Hitler?', Le Monde, 13/3/57, p 1.
32. Indeed, Vercors at this point was almost prepared to compare the French unfavourably with the Germans (of pre-1933 days, that is):  
Le pire est ceci: le peuple se tait. Même l'Allemagne, avant la chute de la République, n'a pas connu un tel silence. Des bagarres ont eu lieu, souvent sanglantes, jusqu'au dernier jour. Il est permis de se demander si la classe ouvrière française ne va pas se soumettre sans combat. (PPC p 358).
33. Sorum, *op.cit.* pp 148-9, analyses the warnings by journalists such as Claude Bourdet about the fascist threat - but also points out that 'the general public did not share this view; few people (in January 1958) expected a coup d'état' (p 149).  
Rioux, *op.cit.* II, 148, also refers to 'l'indifférence inquiétante des Français, qui s'accrochent à leur radio mais préparent sans désemparer leur long weekend de Pentecôte (1958).'
34. There is a clear analogy here between Brosset and de Gaulle, at least as far as their unheeded warnings before the War are concerned. Some links between the two of them and the fictional Pierre Cange can also be discerned in La Puissance du Jour and in the more recent version of Cange's story, Le Tigre d'Anvers. In the latter account we learn that Cange, at 'l'Ecole de guerre' in the 1930's, was scornful of the defensive doctrine prescribed by Pétain, '.... alors que chacun savait que Hitler préparait une armée blindée, une armée offensive de rupture et de mouvement.' (IA p 26).  
Brosset's letter to Vercors from Panama is also referred to in La Bataille du Silence, pp 98-9.
35. Especially in Portrait d'une Amitié and in Les Nouveaux Jours.

36. Vercors, For the Time Being, translated by Jonathan Griffin, London, Hutchinson, 1960. The title is a phrase quoted in English by Vercors in the original version of P.P.C., p 20.
37. As has been seen in relation to other episodes (the question of an amnesty for Pétain in 1948, the protest over Henri Martin's imprisonment), Vercors had previously aired the possibility that he could become involved in direct action, risking arrest and imprisonment in pursuit of his cause. However, as far as the events of May 1958 in particular are concerned (i.e. those anticipated in P.P.C. and commented on in retrospect in the 'Foreword' to For the Time Being), he was by no means alone among French intellectuals in conceiving dramatic impacts on their own lives. Françoise Giroud, for example, in Si je mens, Paris, Stock, 1972, recalls that she feared imminent arrest on one of the nights of the crisis - and that she was almost prepared for a return to the clandestinity of the Occupation years:

.... Cette marche solitaire et silencieuse vers la clandestinité, en somme, arme en poche, ça ressemblait tout à coup à l'Occupation. Incroyable! C'était incroyable de recommencer cette comédie! (p 214)

The next day, with no paratroops in sight after all in Paris, a sense of proportion returned. She had, however, shared the more general apprehension about an impending putsch felt by those in her circle of acquaintances: 'j'ai cru, comme tout le monde, à la possibilité d'un putsch...' (p 213); and she had also been concerned to help protect Mendès France, whose life had several times been threatened.

Vercors's dramatic words in the 'Foreword' to For the Time Being owe something to the memory of May 1958 - but, as the present analysis will indicate, also express his (probably exaggerated) fears about the threat to civil liberties in 1959-60. The cryptic wording of the 'Foreword' would have left the English reader wondering just where the threat to those liberties lay.

38. See also Appendix I (p 2). Vercors's reference here in the second paragraph to the possibility of a fascist putsch in France was made in response to the question as to whether the author still feared a fascist takeover in France in 1960, at the time of publication of For the Time Being. It will be seen that Vercors's reply also embraces the abortive Generals' coup in Algiers in April 1961.
39. De Gaulle's strategy in May 1958, the subject of exhaustive studies, is perhaps most aptly summed up in the following reference to the respective roles of François Mitterrand and the General himself:

Mitterrand s'était placé à la tête de ceux qui refusaient, au nom de la défense républicaine, le diktat des militaires d'Alger. De Gaulle, lui, confisqua cette insurrection militaire

pour s'en faire un tremplin propre à lui permettre de construire "sa" république. Or, Mitterrand se trompait parce que de Gaulle trompait. Jean-François Kahn, 'Deux Siècles de guerres franco-françaises', L'Événement du jeudi, Paris, 14-20/4/88, p 50.

40. Vercors's admiration for de Gaulle at the time of the Liberation was indicated in 'L'Enthousiasme', which is included in Le Sable du temps pp 171-9, and is reproduced in Les Pas dans le Sable pp 146-151. The author's reservations about de Gaulle's anti-communism were expressed directly to the General in the correspondence already referred to in Chapter Four, note 9, and in note 22 in the present Chapter. These letters are reproduced in P.P.C. pp 326-332.

Paul-Marie de la Gorce in L'Après-Guerre: Naissance de la France moderne, Paris, Grasset, 1978, gives his own view of the relationship between Vercors and de Gaulle at the time of the correspondence:

.... deux hommes, dont la rencontre, ici, symbolise, à sa façon, les malentendus, les nostalgies, les déchirements, les illusions ou les erreurs d'une époque .... Beaucoup de choses rapprochaient ces deux hommes: le souvenir du combat commun, un certain sens de la grandeur et de la Liberté, mais également leur méfiance vigilante envers les hégémonies qui s'appesantissaient sur la France. Sans doute aussi, le sentiment que c'était l'heure de l'émancipation outre-mer.... (pp 120-1)

Vercors's view of de Gaulle is, of course, a significant political strand running throughout Les Nouveaux Jours and will be further referred to in the present Chapter.

41. 'Manifestation pour la République' is the caption that Vercors uses under a photograph in Les Nouveaux Jours showing some of the major political figures marching to the 'Place de la République' on 28 May 1958. Those shown include André Philip, Pierre Mendès France and Edouard Daladier.
42. Claire Etcherelli, Elise ou la vraie vie, Paris, Denoël, coll. 'folio', 1972, p 267. This novel tells of Elise's political and emotional education among the car-factory workers and North African immigrants of the 1950's. It ends after the disappearance of Elise's Algerian lover, Arezki, and the death in an 'absurd' road-accident of her brother Lucien - who had been on his way to join the great Republican demonstration of May 27. The novel is also referred to in Chapter Six.

43. Simone de Beauvoir, La Force des Choses, Paris, Gallimard, coll. 'Folio', 2 vols, II, 159.

Another participant in the demonstration of May 28 was Françoise Giroud. She seems to have been the least impressed of the three female commentators:

... ce triste défilé, de la Bastille (sic) à la République, où nous marchons consciencieusement, mais pour défendre quoi qui n'ait déjà sur soi renversé ses murailles et de ses propres mains déchiré ses entrailles? (Si je mens p 213)

Rioux, (II, 158), describes the procession as 'dramatique, lugubre même'.

44. The year in question must have been 1958, as all the established information about Vérités pour (including a reference in Vercors's own interview with Jeanson) confirms that it began publication in September of that year. In his interview with Jeanson (Vérités pour, no. 8, May 2 1959), Vercors refers to '(les) six mois que je reçois votre publication (tous les numéros)' (p 8), and it therefore seems clear that his recollection in Les Nouveaux Jours (p 317) of receiving the first copy towards the end of 1957 is simply an error of memory.

It should be noted that Vercors refers throughout the relevant sections of Les Nouveaux Jours, and in Appendix I of this thesis, to Vérité pour. The singular form of the noun is again erroneous and may perhaps be due to Vercors's association with the non-clandestine Verité-Liberté ('cahiers d'information sur la guerre d'Algérie', published by the 'Centre d'Information Verité et Liberté' Rue de Renne, Paris). This started publication in May 1960, with Vercors among the 20 members of its 'comité de direction'; the others included Robert Barrat, Claude Bourdet, Jean-Marie Domenach, André Philip, Claude Roy, Jean-Paul Sartre and Edith Thomas. As an important source of information on the subject-matter of this chapter, Verité-Liberté will be referred to in notes 51, 54, 57, 60 and 61.

45. By extension from the previous note, the year in question here must have been 1959. Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, Vercors states in Les Nouveaux Jours that he did not know, when he first met the editor of Vérités pour in early 1958 and started to collaborate with him, that this was indeed Francis Jeanson (of whom Vercors had of course heard in connection with Sartre and Les Temps Modernes, but had not previously met). It was not until the trial of Jeanson's associates in September 1960 that, according to Vercors, he realised that it was Jeanson who had been directing the journal. See Les Nouveaux Jours, p 321.
46. All the quotations from this interview are in Vérités pour, no 8, 2/5/59, p 8.

47. Hamon and Rotman, p 159.

48. Hamon and Rotman, p 160.

According to Simone de Beauvoir, who went to see Michelet together with Gisèle Halimi and others to protest over the case of Djamilia Boupacha in June 1960, the Justice Minister had regretted the use of torture ('une ligne à ne pas franchir') and had spoken of 'cette gangrène qui nous vient du nazisme'. Simone de Beauvoir, however, records her disdain for his shrug of the shoulders signifying 'son impuissance', and she concludes: 'je ne fus pas fière d'avoir à lui serrer la main.' La Force des Choses, coll: 'Folio', II, 301-2.

Vercors, like some other progressives, takes an altogether more approving view of Michelet, whom he refers to as a 'grand honnête homme' for his resignation in 1961 over the issue of torture (Les Nouveaux Jours, p 364)

49. Hamon and Rotman, p 159.

50. See Les Nouveaux Jours, p 283.

51. As established newspapers and periodicals could not print the manifesto for fear of seizure, it was distributed by post and also appeared in Vérité-Liberté, no 4, Sept/Oct 1960, p 12. Full details of the text and signatories are to be found in Les Porteurs de Valises, pp 393-6. A total of 172 names were in fact listed, this 'excess' being explained in Chapter 19 of Hamon and Rotman's study.

52. Although a cosignatory with Jérôme Lindon in the 'manifeste des 121', Vercors had not earlier rallied, it seems, to support 'Les Editions de Minuit' over the publication, and subsequent seizure, of Henri Alleg's La Question in 1958. It may just possibly have been that his resentment towards Lindon for his takeover of 'Les Editions de Minuit' in 1948 was still too strong at that time to let him show such solidarity with the publisher. This is purely speculative, however, for Vercors's sense of duty normally overcame personal considerations. Also, as he points out in Les Nouveaux Jours (p 147), he approved Lindon's choice of titles for publication during the Indochina and Algerian wars and (by 1984 at least) no longer felt any personal animosity.

53. Horne, p 416.

54. Quoted in Hamon and Rotman, p 300. The whole text of Vercors's main 'déposition' at the trial is to be found in Vérité-Liberté, no 5, Nov. 1960, p 6, under the heading 'Je n'excuse pas, j'approuve.'
55. Jacques Vergès's conduct as one of the defence lawyers is recalled in Annie Cohen-Solal, Sartre 1905-1980, Paris, Gallimard, 1985, pp 540-1: '... M<sup>r</sup> Vergès, très en forme, ne cesse les provocations, parlant un jour du Ministre de la Culture du gouvernement comme de l' "ancien terroriste Malraux"'
- Vergès remains a controversial advocate in France to this day, as his role in the 1987 trial of Klaus Barbie in Lyon demonstrated. For Vercors's view of Vergès's allusions in the Barbie trial to the French use of torture in Algeria, and the treatment that the author felt Barbie deserved, see Appendix III. (Vercors also refers specifically to Barbie in Assez Mentir! p 28).
56. See Hamon and Rotman, pp 203-4, 233-9.
57. Sartre wrote to the court from Brazil, where he was travelling with Simone de Beauvoir after visiting Cuba. His letter to Roland Dumas, the leading Defence lawyer, is reproduced in Vérité-Liberté, no 5, Nov 1960, pp 5-6; and its dramatic impact on the court and on French opinion, especially right-wing opinion, is discussed by Annie Cohen-Solal, pp 542-4.
58. Annie Cohen-Solal, pp 546-7, recalls de Gaulle's attitude to the position taken by Sartre and the other intellectuals - the latter, he felt, should always exercise a certain privilege of informed protest. However, in Les Nouveaux Jours Vercors, while duly recording de Gaulle's reaction in similar terms (NJ p 352), claims that certain sanctions were imposed on the dissident intellectuals through their professional activity (NJ p 353).
59. Hamon and Rotman, p 239.
60. Quoted in Hamon and Rotman, p 314. Vérité-Liberté, no 5, reproduces the declarations made from the dock by some of the 'Réseau Jeanson' defendants. One of them, Micheline Pouteau (who received a sentence of ten years' imprisonment, like the other main defendants) revealed in her statement that she had had a clear revolutionary purpose in working within the 'Réseau':

... mon geste ... n'est pas le geste d'une individualiste bourgeoise, c'est-à-dire dicté par de seuls impératifs moraux, c'est le geste d'une avant-garde révolutionnaire qui, dores et déjà, est repris et amplifié par les syndicats ouvriers, les syndicats d'étudiants ... le geste d'une révolutionnaire française. Vérité-Liberté, Nov 1960, p 8.

Vercors gave his support to all the accused members of the 'Réseau Jeanson', but the complexity of ideological and moral strands that formed the opposition to French policy in Algeria is well illustrated by the contrast between Micheline Pouteau's statement and the author's own more traditional, almost 'bourgeois', references to national power and moral influence (see note 61).

61. Vercors's testimony at the trial, as reported in Vérité-Liberté, no 5, Nov 1960, p 6, contained the following peroration:

L'Algérie algérienne se fera-t-elle avec la France ou se fera-t-elle contre la France?... Si la France devait perdre cette influence dans toute l'Afrique comme elle l'a déjà perdue en Asie, ce serait la fin du rayonnement, de l'expansion et de la puissance française dans le monde. J'estime que ce serait là la vraie trahison.

He had, he said, given help over Vérités pour from a mixture of moral and patriotic motives.

62. Mustapha G...., Barberousse, Paris, P-J Oswald, 1960; with Introduction by R. Barrat, Preface by Vercors.
63. Barberousse, Preface, p 9. This image of liberated France was one that Vercors had seen on posters in Paris following the Liberation in 1944. He refers to the poster in Le Sable du Temps, p 15, and in Les Pas dans le Sable, p 125.
64. Les Oubliés, Paris, December 1962, Preface by Vercors. (No publisher's details: a simple folder of separate sheets, with no pagination. Vercors's preface is printed inside the cover).
65. See also Appendix II, where Vercors endorses de Gaulle in these terms:

... pendant toute la guerre d'Algérie, j'ai pensé qu'il n'y avait que lui qui pouvait faire quelque chose .... il a évité la guerre civile, comme il avait déjà évité que la France disparaisse après la débâcle ... il l'a sauvée une second fois.

Needless to say, not all left-wing commentators have been so positive in their assessment of de Gaulle's achievement. See, for example, the more sceptical verdict of Jacques Ozouf, 'Elle et lui', Le Nouvel Observateur, Paris, 16/11/70, p 25:

de Gaulle va sortir la France du bourbier colonial, réussir une paix qu'a rêvé la gauche anticolonialiste, mais qu'elle vient justement, dans la faillite du Front républicain, de manquer. Bref, quand de Gaulle atteint un objectif qui est aussi celui de la gauche, ce n'est jamais dans une coopération avec elle, mais dans le vide laissé par elle; et souvent même contre elle.

Mais qu'importe, après tout? On pourrait soutenir que l'essentiel tient dans le legs véritable - les communistes diraient 'objectif' - de la politique gaullienne: la paix, la décolonisation .... Ce serait pourtant vite oublier les motifs pour lesquels ces buts ont été poursuivis: bien moins pour eux-mêmes que pour écarter un obstacle sur la voie d'une grandeur nationale désuète. Et oublier aussi les méthodes qu'ils ont justifiées.

66. See Les Nouveaux Jours, p 363, and the reference to the troops' transistors in Appendix I.
67. Michel Winock, 'Le Quarteron et les transistors', Le Monde, 18/7/86, p 4.
68. In Les Nouveaux Jours, Vercors recalls being impressed by de Gaulle's apparent 'sang-froid' on the night of the crisis:

De Gaulle, que faisait-il la nuit du 21 avril?  
Eh bien, il l'a passée, cette nuit, à lire tranquillement Syva! C'est de quoi m'informe une lettre de sa main datée de la nuit même .... (NJ p 363)

This flattering letter was, however, not the only one that de Gaulle had sent out on that occasion, as Vercors was soon afterwards to learn - several other writers produced a similar message from the General. As Vercors comments:

Cette détermination, au moment que sa vie peut-être était en jeu, de faire preuve à nos yeux de ce flegme admirable, voilà qui était bien dans sa manière. Le diable d'homme!  
(ibid)

Regrettably, perhaps, we do not know what the General's opinion of Syva was. The same anecdote, omitting the specific mention of Syva, is told about de Gaulle in Le figre d'Anvers, pp 160-1, where Vercors again seeks to establish a parallel between the General and Pierre Cange.

69. See Appendix II. Vercors's comments on the student leaders of 1968 in this interview reveal his scepticism about their sense of purpose or coherence, while also demonstrating his generally sympathetic attitude to their political activism. The same attitude on the author's part is displayed in the novel Comme un frère, which will be further discussed in Chapter Six.

70. John Cruickshank, 'Limitations of the Intellectual' The Times Higher Education Supplement, London, 26/2/82, p 14.

It is interesting to note that Vercors, despite his detachment from the 'événements de mai', nevertheless lent his name in 1970, along with various other left-wing and Resistance figures such as Charles Tillon and Sartre himself, to the new 'Comité d'initiative nationale' of 'Le Secours rouge'. This movement emerged from the activities of various Maoists and other 'soixante-huitards' and was particularly formed to protest against 'repressive' measures by the French government such as the arrest of Alain Geismar and the seizure of La Cause du Peuple. Vercors's involvement seems to have been neither active nor long-lived. The episode is related in Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, Génération, Paris, Seuil, 2 vols, 1987, 1988, vol II, Les Années de poudre, pp 192-3.

71. 1968 was a year of momentous events across the world, as the many publications and broadcasts in 1988 that have commemorated its twentieth anniversary testify. Most commentators seem to concur with Vercors's view as to the much greater significance of the Prague Spring and repression compared with the student upheavals in the West; and it is perhaps worth recalling here the resignation from the PCF, after the Warsaw Pact invasion, of Pierre Daix, for so long one of Vercors's main Communist interlocutors.
72. The 'Appel de la Gauche pour les Juifs d'URSS' was launched at the 'Salle de la Mutualité' and the text of the speeches was published (1971) by Cité-Impression. (Simone de Beauvoir incorrectly records the date as 14 January 1971 in La Cérémonie des Adieux, Paris, Gallimard, 1981, p 26, where she omits to mention Vercors's participation but states that 'tous dénonçaient l'antisémitisme de l'URSS'). In fact other speakers from the platform, apart from Vercors and Sartre, included Ely Ben-Gal, Jacques Madaule and Daniel Mayer.

The appeal was being made specifically on behalf of a group of Jewish dissidents who had received heavy sentences in the Leningrad courts for plotting to flee the country in a commandeered aircraft. Vercors in his speech was mainly concerned to reproach the Soviet authorities for their coercive measures against those seeking to preserve a fundamental human right - that of their own cultural identity. But in rhetorical terms, too, his address contained phrases that were highly indicative of the author's change of attitude towards the Soviet Union: in his opening paragraph, he remarked that the Soviet 'solution' to the Jewish question, as referred to approvingly by an acquaintance of his, needed only the adjective 'final' to give it a quite different resonance. This, of course, contrasts markedly with his attempts to give the Soviet Union every benefit of the doubt over the Slansky affair.

73. Vercors records his own distaste at the Communists' participation in the abuse of Mendès France on this occasion. See Les Nouveaux Jours, p 268.
74. See Jean Touchard, La Gauche en France depuis 1900, Paris, coll: 'Points', 1977, p 160.
75. Quoted in Touchard, p 294.
76. Touchard, pp 299-300.
77. Claude Juin, Le Combat de Daniel Meyer, Paris, Edns Anthropos, 1982. See Appendix II for further comments by Vercors on Daniel Meyer.
78. Mayer's tactful and reasonable handling of the strikers, as Vercors saw it, suggests parallels with Briand's treatment of the railwaymen after the strikes of 1910. See Moi, Aristide Briand, p 131.
79. Jean-Pierre Rioux provides a more balanced summary of Mollet's administration in a section entitled 'grandeur et décadence du "molletisme"' (op.cit. II, 117-127). As the sub-title indicates, however, the record ends on a negative note; and there is little doubt that this negative impression predominates in the minds of other observers, less objective than Rioux, of the events in question: see, for example, Simone de Beauvoir, La Force des Choses, (coll: 'Folio', II, 405). There is also this general comment by Catherine Nay, op.cit. p 225:

Le paradoxe veut qu'aujourd'hui aucun socialiste digne de ce nom n'ose glorifier le temps du gouvernement Mollet, qui établit au moins un record sous la IV<sup>e</sup> République, celui de la longévité: dix-sept mois.
- As for Daniel Mayer, one amiable weakness at least is indicated by Jean Touchard's reference to his defeat over the secretary-generalship in 1946: 'Il était ... assez facile de trouver des armes contre Daniel Mayer qui est assurément un esprit généreux mais dont les qualités d'organisateur prétaient à la critique'. (Touchard, op.cit. p 295). Mayer has, however, had a distinguished career as an 'elder statesman' in recent years. Apart from his long connection with the Human rights organizations, he served as 'Président du Conseil Constitutionnel' during Mitterrand's first presidency.
80. This aspect of Blum's theory is discussed in Touchard, op.cit. pp 164, 195.
81. See the discussion of 'Une Farce déshonorante' in Chapter Four.

82. David Cauter, The Fellow-Travellers, p 5.
83. There is also a reference to the writing of Moi, Aristide Briand in Appendix II (q 7).
84. Girardoux's portrayal of Briand in Combat avec l'Ange (1934) fully brings out the statesman's loathing of war, whereas Alfred Cobban, in A History of Modern France Vol III, 1871-1962, London, Penguin, 1965, also points to the high degree of flexibility and pragmatism that characterized the politician, especially in the early stages of his career:
- ..... Aristide Briand ... had begun his political career as a socialist but was too little a doctrinaire and too much a politician to stay in any of the Socialist groups. Supple, conciliating and infinitely persuasive, Briand was to move in and out of the highest posts of government ... with equal nonchalance. (p 63).
- It is somewhat paradoxical, perhaps, that Vercors, with his strong resentment of Mollet's opportunism, should have approved so thoroughly of Briand. However, Cobban does subsequently pay due tribute to the sincerity and distinction that Briand brought to his attempts to build peace and reconciliation with Germany in the 1920's.
85. See Appendix II, q 4, 'Sur le Socialisme'.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid.
88. Nelly Corneau, 'Chronique littéraire', Synthèses, Brussels, August 1951, 419-427 (p 423)
- The critic is here referring specifically to Vercors's assertion concerning 'le passage d'une civilisation d'essence individuelle à une civilisation d'essence collective', which he felt that all of human society was inevitably undergoing. (PMH p 117).
- See also Vercors's comment on 'le libre arbitre' in Appendix II, q 4, 'sur le Socialisme...'
89. Albert S. Lindeman, A History of European Socialism, New Haven/London, Yale U.P., 1983, p 120.
90. See Appendix II, q 4, 'sur le Socialisme'.

91. Raymond Aron, Mémoires, Paris, Julliard, 1983, p 297.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid.

CHAPTER SIX : POLITICAL VALUES IN VERCORS'S FICTION

Of Vercors's substantial fictional output - some sixteen novels or 'récits' and a score of short stories - a large proportion naturally reflects the political attitudes that determined his wartime and post-war commitments. The texts in question range chronologically from Le Silence de la Mer to Le Tigre d'Anvers (1986), and between these two titles our exploration must take account of a considerable number and variety of works. After the early clandestine stories, for example, a significant focus is provided by the experience of Pierre Cange, with political overtones emerging more distinctly in the second of the two original volumes devoted to him, La Puissance du Jour (1951). However, the most substantive text of all for the present analysis is represented by Colères (1956), the broader philosophical and moral content of which was discussed earlier. Colères highlights several facets of Vercors's approach to commitment in literature and offers a particularly interesting view of his political attitudes in the domestic French context. Having embraced the class struggle with some gusto throughout much of the novel, he seems in the end to conclude that social justice can still be achieved within existing democratic structures; but this, of course, is subject to vigilance being maintained, and pressure exerted, by a due combination of progressive forces. Thereafter it is to the colonial context, and specifically the threat to human rights in Algeria, that the author turns in Le Périple (1958), his first fictional text following the publication of P.P.C.; and if the latter logically enough heralds a new phase, in which political concerns in his creative writing become increasingly diffused amid a greater diversity of subject-matter, there are several subsequent novels - Monsieur Prouathe (1958), La Liberté de Décembre

(1960) and Le Radeau de la Méduse (1969) - in which his enduring political attitudes are implicitly, but still unmistakably, conveyed. Quota ou les Pléthoriens (1966), in contrast, offers a satirical transatlantic excursion, while the novel Comme un frère (1973) presents a more recent France as the setting within which the author, with the accumulated wisdom of long experience, can observe the political activism of his younger counterparts.

In Le Silence de la Mer, the Nazis' perverted intentions towards French civilisation, the 'fiat nox' that appalled Von Ebrennac, represented both a moral and an ideological threat to be resisted by every means - even if, within the story itself, none of the three protagonists went beyond one form or other of passive protest. In the next two clandestine stories, 'Désespoir est mort' and 'La Marche à l'Etoile' (both 1943), one of the most damaging consequences of the German Occupation was seen to have been the release or intensification of negative forces within French society itself, forces which, directly or indirectly, the author was setting out to combat. Already there had been passing reference, in Le Silence de la Mer, to France's 'Grand Bourgeois cruels', who had exploited national sentiment against the Germans following the 1914-18 War and helped to undermine Briand's policy of reconciliation. An analogous spirit of selfish opportunism (albeit now acquiescing in France's military humiliation) seemed to dominate many of the French Army officers among whom the narrator of 'Désespoir est mort' found himself in May and June 1940; just as, Vercors implies, it came to vitiate all too easily the moral sensitivity of the nation to which Thomas Muritz had devoted unstinting loyalty in 'La Marche à l'Etoile'. But more explicit indications of the author's basic socio-political stance at this time are also to be found: in 'Désespoir est mort', for example, we have the narrator's

strong initial reserve (tantamount to Bruller's own) towards Captain Randois with his ultra-conservative background and anti-Republican leanings; while in the final paragraph of 'La Marche à l'Etoile', the narrator reflects on the pragmatism of those men of worldly ambition to whom the breaking of Thomas Muritz's spirit would be of little import: '... cela ne troublera guère nos importants - tous ces habiles qui ont les deux pieds sur la terre et toisent la grandeur d'une nation à la mesure de ses profits.' (SM p 190)

This early attitude is broad in its sympathies (for Republican ideals, for France's humanist tradition and for the victims of oppression) as it is in its antipathies (to fascism, to Pétainism and to the more ruthless drives associated with capitalism); and while the degree of moral sensitivity or responsibility shown by characters is largely determined by their particular orientation within this general scheme of values, there can also be revealing exceptions and paradoxes. Thus Captain Randois, for example, has a profound sense of his country's honour that offsets unfavourable attributes such as 'son caractère hautain, ses convictions monarchiques, son mépris de la foule' (SM p 8)<sup>1</sup>; and already it seems possible to see here, in embryonic form, the mixture of respect and distrust that characterized the author's attitude towards General de Gaulle. Vendresse in 'L'Imprimerie de Verdun' (1945) shares the small businessman's typical paranoia over taxes - 'lesquels sont trop lourds parce que les Juifs s'engraissent, que les francs-maçons volent, que les "bolcheviks" sabotent' (SM p 113). But he also has an unshakeable notion of justice, and proves in the Occupation that he is prepared to defend it to the death.

Together with this willingness to counterpoise some aspects of characters' moral and political outlook (thereby adding substantially, of course, to

the credibility of the portrayals), the early stories show traces of scepticism towards the practice of politics in general while clearly condemning the self-serving machinations of certain practitioners in particular. Such individuals may reach the highest political positions, like, for example, Paul Doumer, to whom the narrator of 'La Marche à l'Etoile' makes scathing reference:

Je n'éprouve que répulsion pour ces pères qui se font gloire 'd'avoir donné leur fils à la France.' Peu d'hommes plus que le vieux Doumer, s'aidant de ses quatre fils tués pour se hisser aux honneurs, ont mérité mon aversion. (SM p 172) 2

Or again, like Paars in 'L'Imprimerie de Verdun', they may operate on the fringes of political power. This story is first and foremost a testimonial to the integrity and self-sacrifice of those printers like Vendresse who served the Resistance cause; but it ends with a collaborator's successful readaptation to post-Liberation circumstances, and here the author's laconic, matter-of-fact recounting is amply expressive of his disdain:

Paars, après la libération, a été arrêté trois jours. Mais des gens très bien se sont portés garants de ses sentiments. Depuis fin '43, il versait des sommes importantes à certaines organisations. De plus, il est au courant de toutes les questions concernant le cuivre électrolytique. Il serait, dit-on, difficile de se passer de lui. C'est un gros bonnet dans l'Office de Répartition. Il y fait la pluie et le beau temps. (SM pp 138-9)

Vercors's doubts about the political and moral reliability of many of his compatriots seem indeed to have been considerably reinforced by what he witnessed following the Liberation. His main concern was that French collaborators, including those bystanders whom he had once seen laughing at some Jewish victims of German brutality<sup>3</sup>, were already beginning to feel secure about their own prospects for reintegration:

... ces rieurs cruels, eux (me disais-je) ... les voici déjà fort rassurés, puisqu'on leur serre la main, qu'on les salue. Ils se sentent le poumon plus libre. Sans doute déjà rient-ils de nouveau, quand ils sont entre eux. (PS p 157)

In fictional terms, Paars might be taken as broadly representative of such elements, particularly when his effortless rehabilitation is recalled. As for the author's desire to avoid witnessing any of the collaborators' self-congratulation - 'Ah! qu'il me soit épargné d'assister un jour à leur triomphe ...' (PS p 157) - a fictional parallel may perhaps be seen in the decision made by Bruno, the central character of 'Meurtre sans importance' to escape from the corrupted atmosphere of post-Liberation France<sup>4</sup>. Bruno, like Pierre Cange, regains his equanimity and sense of purpose through coming face to face with a new moral challenge; but significantly, neither character is shown having to get to grips with the complications and relative values of post-war politics in France, where, following the manichean clarities of the Occupation years, many who hoped for radical political solutions as a corollary to their Resistance experience were left thwarted and confused. It was these post-war realities which, even though they did not inhibit the confident assertiveness of his pronouncements at the time, Sartre later referred to as 'les véritables problèmes politiques, qui vous conduisent à être "pour, mais..." ou "contre, mais ...".'<sup>5</sup> In this period of readjustment, Vercors too was searching for new political and ethical certainties, and his increasing and perhaps partly symptomatic readiness from that time onwards to adopt left-wing, usually pro-communist positions on major international issues has already been observed. As far as domestic French politics were concerned, his move from post-Liberation wariness to overt fellow-travelling partisanship can perhaps most clearly be illustrated now by returning to two of the major novels, La Puissance du Jour and Colères.

La Puissance du Jour is dominated of course by Pierre Cange's struggle to recover from his intense spiritual ordeal at Hochawörth concentration camp and by his eventual diagnosis of the destructive forces, from Nazi savagery to Nature's 'mépris cosmique' (PJ p 355) (the former acting in the service of the latter), that run directly and deliberately counter to human progress. But while the evil perpetrated by the Nazis and by key collaborators like Broussard is of such intensity that Cange feels capable of evaluating it only in quasi-metaphysical terms, the political aftermath of the War in France and the gathering momentum of ideological conflict, recrimination and factionalism are subjected to more conventional discussion and judgement. Partly at least, this is because the various characters surrounding Cange and the narrator are allowed to speak for themselves, with their words being recorded directly by the narrator or in Cange's notes; and in this respect two of the former Resistance figures involved in the kidnapping of Broussard emerge as particularly noteworthy.

Saturnin (the Resistance name by which he is still known to his comrades) is a poet and scholar whose private life has become a torment since the wartime infidelity of his mistress, Thérèse. The latter now has a daughter by Broussard's son - but, 'absurde coup du sort' (PJ p 200), the child bears a marked resemblance to the loathed older Broussard, the notorious 'chacal de Vendée' (PJ p 112) who had helped the Gestapo hunt down the members of the Resistance in his area. Saturnin's firmly-held 'morale de pureté' had impelled him to renounce his teaching-post in the Autumn of 1940 - 'Raison: continuer sous la tyrannie serait la reconnaître légale' (PJ p 194) - and thereafter to live in poverty with Thérèse (the direct cause of her lapse) while working for the Resistance and continuing to write poetry which he

subsequently burnt in a fit of self-reproach over Thérèse's suffering. The Liberation has brought a dramatic but short-lived improvement in his fortunes, when, with his literary prestige reinforced by his Resistance record, he is appointed to a Poetry professorship at Poitiers. But even now the same 'fatum' or force of hostile circumstances<sup>6</sup> as hitherto continues to dog him: right-wing law students persistently interrupt his lectures (on Desnos and other literary victims of the Nazis) with shouts of 'Et Maurras!' or 'Brasillach!', and this provokes scuffles with other students which eventually lead to the withdrawal of Saturnin's professorship when he declines to change his syllabus for the sake of order.

When Saturnin is summoned to Paris to discuss the situation, the confrontation there between himself and a government official, a lawyer by training, leads him to assert his strong preference (clearly the author's own) for the scientific attitude, with its 'revolutionary' desire to question every assumption, over the legal mentality with its inherent conservatism,

... dont l'essence est de codifier les mœurs, donc de les fixer, de les figer, ... de les empêcher de changer, puisque des mœurs changeantes seraient la négation du Droit. (PJ p 349)

Further to this already sweeping observation, it will be recalled that Vercors subsequently allows Pierre Cange, in one of the more extravagant arguments of his moral theory, to identify a 'tiger' (i.e. essentially anti-human) mentality in those respectable, secure and conformist members of society who look to the established social order to preserve their material advantages: 'Ce sont les plus aveugles, puisqu'ils croient que toute sagesse humaine git dans ces protocoles de notaires et de gendarmes' (PJ p 355). And later, of course, in Colères, a struggle to obtain social justice from the vested interests

defended by 'notaires', 'gendarmes' and, in the last resort, the CRS, will duly unite the striking factory-workers and their intellectual supporters, with the scientist Mirambeau, in keeping with Saturnin's observation (and perhaps with Vercors's own view of himself as 'un scientifique manqué') coming to lend the most telling intellectual weight to their cause.

However, if Mirambeau in the later novel offers a successful model of the progressive intellectual, Saturnin in La Puissance du Jour represents the failure of the species. His experience explicitly demonstrates the difficulty of pursuing an ideal of ethical purity amid the challenges and pitfalls of political action: a course similarly pursued, with varying but limited success, by some of the fictional and dramatic protagonists of Camus, Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir<sup>7</sup>. Just as their relationship with Communism lay at or near the heart of these characters' dilemmas, so Saturnin is shown trying to come to terms with the Party in the midst of his personal post-Liberation debacle. And if the comparison with Sartre can be extended to his characteristic juxtaposing of an intellectual individualist and a party militant who eschews all personal doubts or moral absolutes, then the Brunet to Saturnin's Mathieu, the Nasty to his Goetz, can be said to be provided in La Puissance du Jour by the confident young militant, Manéon. In the latter's eyes, appreciative though he is of Saturnin's human qualities, the poet's decision to join the Party is a matter for the sharpest criticism, indeed one which, had Manéon himself been in a position to do so, he would have rejected out of hand. The young militant's opinions (which he is wont in any case to deliver with notable directness) are succinctly recorded in Pierre Cange's diary; and according to one such passage, Saturnin's move

towards the PCF has been prompted by 'confusion mentale':

.... dégoûté comme nous tous par tout ce qui se passe et voyant le Parti seul fidèle à ce qui pendant quatre ans fut défendu en commun, il y est entré croit-il par souci de fidélité à lui-même. En réalité, c'est une fuite: un refuge, une solution facile aux incertitudes causées par des contradictions insolubles. Il s'est fait communiste comme d'autres se sont faits moines. (PJ p 214) B

Even while reacting so strongly, however, Manéon is able to explain the Party's decision to accept the new recruit: 'Le Parti ... est actuellement en pleine politique d'expansion. Cherche avant tout à recruter. L'entrée de Sat peut de ce point de vue avoir une influence énorme sur la jeunesse du sud-ouest - même peut-être à Paris.' (PJ p 216). Manéon has already declared his certainty that Saturnin will one day leave the Party amid recriminations which will hurt the poet and possibly drive him into the arms of 'la réaction' (PJ p 216): whereas the Party had calculated that it would gain more by Saturnin's present membership than it would lose by his eventual resignation (as indeed, Manéon concedes, may have been the net result of Gide's enrolment and defection before the war). Beyond this, however, and the fact that the Party cannot allow itself to be seen to be directly involved in the kidnapping and possible execution of Broussard, we learn little more of Communist policies during the period covered by the novel. Vercors claims no omniscient insights into the Party's organization or thinking, and simply allows Manéon, with his 'bouche forte, ferme et franche' (PJ p 212) and his 'pragmatisme foncier' (PJ p 214), to act as the sturdy and relatively engaging representative of its militants. Through the narrator and Pierre Cange, certainly, the author treats Manéon with a respect not so readily accorded to his fellow-conspirator Altman ('courage moral plus douteux .... un tantinet antisémite?' (PJ p 192)<sup>9</sup>; but as between Manéon and Saturnin, the balance of sympathy is maintained

until the end. For the purposes of this novel, Vercors was clearly as interested in presenting Saturnin as a victim of 'Le Grand Tigre' as in detailing his relationship with the Communists; and furthermore Vercors himself, like Saturnin, subscribed to certain of the 'vertus abstraites' (PJ p 215) which Manéon as an orthodox militant was rejecting<sup>10</sup>. In the event, Manéon's prediction proves correct and Saturnin leaves the PCF; but in keeping with the neutrality tinged with benevolence with which the Party's role in the novel is presented, the narrator carefully records that no ill-will attended this parting of the ways:

Manéon s'est trompé sur l'éclat de cette démission: Saturnin l'a donnée discrètement, sans rendre ses raisons publiques. Au contraire, lors d'une causerie à Bordeaux, un auditeur, après que Sat eut parlé d'Aragon, s'étant levé en criant: "Où est la pureté, Saint-Sernin?", il avait répondu calmement: "Certainement pas dans l'infidélité."

De son côté, le Parti l'a laissé tranquille. (PJ p 350) 11

Broussard's eventual escape from France, meanwhile, enables Vercors to point once more to the tenacious freemasonry that persisted among Pétainist and fascist elements in the post-war period, for the collaborator's departure via Bordeaux is facilitated by 'les Massy-Verquoux, grands négociants en vins' and by 'les grands éléments pétainistes du Ministère de la Marine.' (PJ p 351). His destination finally proves to be Indochina and not, as first suspected, Spain, but Vercors is of course able, in respect of both countries, to focus on acts of political repression, whether by the Franco regime in Spain or by the French authorities fighting the Viet-Minh. Cange goes to Spain, in order to set up, abortively as it transpires, a clandestine network - 'parce qu'il s'y trouve des hommes à sauver' (PJ p 317); while Broussard turns up in Saigon, where he is put in charge of a commando group, 'formés en majorité d'anciens volontaires dans les Waffen-SS', who soon achieve notoriety for the brutality of their methods. Completing the novel as

he was towards the end of 1950, amid the early controversy created by the Henri Martin affair, Vercors did not need to be particularly inventive in rounding off Broussard's story: a revolt against the latter's inhumanity by a crew of French sailors duly leads to the court-martial and sentencing of the leading protesters. In the fictional world, however, justice or at least retribution is allowed to prevail, for shortly after the court-martial Broussard finally disappears and is presumed killed. In thus transferring his war-criminal to a theatre of action where political evil was in his view still rampant - but where a clearcut moral response could still be made to count - Vercors was able briefly to reach beyond the social and ideological confusions prevailing in France, where not only Saturnin but Resistance comrades like Potrel and the narrator himself, as they severally attest, were experiencing various degrees of difficulty and disillusionment in adapting to post-war realities.<sup>12</sup>

However, in the novel Colères, published a few years later, Vercors remained resolutely within the French social context, and by now he also clearly felt able to offer a fuller fictional representation of his commitment. The theme that he chose to illuminate was the need for working-class solidarity in the face of capitalist machinations, and thus one of the main strands of the novel concerns a bitterly contested strike taking place in the mid-1950's in a provincial manufacturing company. Certainly this was the first time (as it was also to be the last) that the author had devoted so much attention to the basic social issues of industrial relations or the condition of the working class. There are, admittedly, still some echoes in the novel of the major international controversies with which the author

continued to be polemically involved: thus we find early on a discussion between Mirambeau and Robert Pélion about a protest manifesto over repression in Spain and against atom-bomb tests, while even Egmont, whose political commitment had so notably waned, is reported to have shown genuine anger on a public platform 'contre les tortionnaires du Maroc' (Col p 65). Then, too, the sinister influence of American financial interests is briefly glimpsed in the background of the industrial dispute, just as it is alleged by Pélion (and promptly denied by Mirambeau) that Egmont has left the PCF in order to have a play produced in the United States<sup>13</sup>. But apart from these brief references, and a similarly fleeting evocation of German revanchism, the entire political content of the novel and the author's social concern are focussed firmly on one small section of the French industrial landscape of the 1950's - one in which, moreover, the arrival of Arab immigrant workers or 'Norafa' has a small but significant part to play.

The setting for the social conflict, as for all the major episodes in the novel, is the town of 'Chaulieu', whose whereabouts in the French provinces is left indeterminate but whose population offers an appropriate cross-section of bourgeois, intellectuals and proletarians - even if, according to the young militant Pélion, the prevailing conservatism of outlook 'dans cette vallée de calotins' (Col p 51) initially favours the employers against those who, like himself, seek to arouse the social conscience of the community and the class-consciousness of its workers. Pélion, in fact, considerably extends the role taken in La Puissance du Jour by Manéon. He has the same directness of approach and the same militant's faith in the Party; but his personality is much more fully developed by the author, whether in terms of a vitality which tends to impetuosity or in respect of his love for and eventual

engagement to Pascale, the daughter of Dutouvet. Although he does not work in the factory himself, it is Pélion's energy and conviction that help to spearhead the strike there and that draw Mirambeau into the conflict on the workers' side; just as it is his brutal victimisation by the police that stiffens the scientist's resolve to carry the fight to the local Préfet and, if necessary, beyond<sup>14</sup>.

The basic cause of the industrial conflict, as expounded by Pélion to Mirambeau near the beginning of the novel, is a thinly-veiled attempt by the employer, Coubez, to discriminate against the CGI members among his workforce. A monthly wage supplement is being offered to all the workers in principle - since the law forbids overt discrimination - but is only being paid on the basis of an individual evaluation of each worker's case, in which the decisive criterion, according to Pélion, is membership of one union rather than another:

... c'est comme par hasard quatre-vingt-dix pour cent des 'libres' qui l'obtiennent, et quatre-vingt-dix pour cent des cégétistes qui se la bombent. C'est transparent ... (Col p 50)

This attempt to undermine the CGI has not yet secured the support of the 'free' unions, who have discerned the divide-and-rule strategy underlying the employers' initiative; but the temptation for 'les pauvres bougres' (Col p 52) on the shop floor to abandon the Communist union in order to ensure their own share of the bonus threatens to be too strong for the majority of them, whose political awareness, as Pélion stresses, is far less developed than any self-respecting Party militant would wish to see. The very fact that the bonus-scheme has been launched in a centre of such ideological backwardness might seem to cast doubt on Pélion's judgement that it marks the beginning of a carefully-coordinated capitalist campaign - 'Coubez n'est pas seul dans le coup, vous pensez bien. On l'a chargé de l'expérience, parce

que le coin retarde de cent ans' (Col p 51) -for surely success for the employers in such a place would be unlikely seriously to jeopardise the CGT's position in more important industrial concentrations. Nevertheless, it appears that the conspiracy-theory soon convinces Pélion's listener: '.... c'est fortiche, murmura Mirambeau accablé' (Col p 52); even though immediately thereafter in their conversation the scientist shows a more characteristic independence of mind in defending Egmont's, and his own, right to take a personal stand on social or political issues.

In this exchange, indeed, as in several others in the novel, Vercors is clearly concerned, on the basis of his own substantial experience, to mark out the possibilities for a constructive relationship between intellectuals like Mirambeau or himself and the Communist Party. Pélion, although by his own definition only 'un militant de base' (Col p 53) and quite ready to refer his listeners to Party intellectuals like Garaudy on weightier philosophical questions, nevertheless serves in the novel as the main spokesman for the PCF; and his combination of forthrightness and lack of guile is obviously intended to make him an attractive interlocutor for Mirambeau, despite the latter's intermittent chafing at Communist inflexibility<sup>15</sup>. While firmly rejecting the romanticism of Egmont's withdrawal<sup>16</sup>, Pélion acknowledges that some 'solitaires', like Mirambeau, can play a positive role in the progressive cause:

Des solitaires de votre genre. Vous, vous aimez les hommes..  
Aimer les hommes, .... ce n'est pas seulement pleurer sur  
leurs souffrances. C'est se battre aussi pour qu'elles  
cessent. (Col p 54)

And even if the Party's demands are sometimes exasperating, Mirambeau (like Vercors, as we have seen) is usually ready to show solidarity in the face of the ideological enemy and to give the practical support

that counts:

Péliion éclate de rire.

- Vous criez des "non!" gros comme vous et puis vous faites tout ce qu'on vous demande - et même ce qu'on ne vous demande pas. (Col p 55)

However, Mirambeau's indulgent and fatherly view of Péliion is not the only one that the novel offers. Cloots, pursuing his mission to disturb his contemporaries' intellectual apathy in the face of his own anticipated death from kidney failure, is reluctant to support Mirambeau's efforts on behalf of Péliion, now accused by the police of setting fire to his own workshop for the sake of the insurance money. While not averse to the young militant on personal grounds, Cloot is impatient over Péliion's 'sectarisme':

Je ne supporte pas ses palinodies. L'année dernière encore, si vous osiez douter du génie de Staline il vous eût arraché les yeux. Maintenant il va répétant que le père des peuples n'était qu'un fils de pute, il couvre d'injures les incroyables. Ce n'est pas tolérable. (Col p 236)

Mirambeau for his part, initially disappointed though he is by Cloot's abstention from political involvement, in due course draws a lesson from it as he does from all his varied experiences throughout the novel. Like Egmont, Cloots has chosen to confront the metaphysical rather than the political challenges of life; and later, as the police harassment of Péliion continues amid the seeming indifference of many others whom Mirambeau had hoped to arouse to protest, the old scientist is prompted to reflect on the importance of each of the different endeavours of his friends and himself; Cloots's crusade for intellectual and spiritual vigilance, his own scientific research, and his and Péliion's fight for social justice. Ideally these separate quests should somehow be coordinated for the better service of mankind; and it is as though Vercors himself is here devising, against the background of his

own political and philosophical strivings, a synthesis or balance of activities that any intellectual of conscience might be satisfied to attain:

Il ressentit une bouffée agréable de naïve fierté, d'être là, lui, l'oeil au microscope fouillant le mystère de la vie, et la pensée auprès de Pélion et de toutes les victimes sociales ...  
(Col p 263)

The effective committed intellectual in this novel, then, the one who burns with indignation at a cynical abuse of power and also devotes the necessary time and energy to combatting it, is Mirambeau. But whatever satisfaction Vercors derived from thus allotting this key role (and the reward of seeing the fight to a successful conclusion) to a man of science, it was as a writer - and in Colères, self-evidently, as a novelist - that he himself was still exercising his commitment in the public arena. It is perhaps appropriate at this point, therefore, to consider some of the author's views on the function of the novelist and on the novel as genre as he perceived it at the time that Colères was being written, and for this purpose a highly pertinent text is provided by the essay 'Les Problèmes des écrivains français', written for, but never published by, a Soviet literary review in September 1955 and subsequently reproduced in PPC.<sup>17</sup>

In this text, Vercors first addressed the proposition from a Soviet writer that contemporary French literature was a literature of ideas, with characters serving primarily as their author's mouthpiece. For Vercors, the basic explanation for this situation, in so far as it actually obtained, had to do with the bourgeois domination of the writer's world. Just as Sartre had proclaimed that 'nous sommes les écrivains les plus bourgeois du monde'<sup>18</sup>, so Vercors now stressed the inescapable links binding French writers to the bourgeois education,

culture and milieu that they shared with the overwhelming majority of their readers. And while it is not particularly useful to summarize the author's avowedly general observations on conservative or 'reactionary' writers in this context - apart from noting his unquestioning acceptance of the notion of bourgeois decadence and his praise for Mauriac's 'rare courage' in depicting the tarnished reality of his own class -, what is of real interest and relevance to the present study is his analysis, in the major portion of the essay, of the situation of France's progressive writers.

The latter, according to Vercors, were regretfully aware that virtually their only readership was provided by the bourgeoisie. They certainly had no wish to flatter or entertain those whom they regarded as ideological adversaries, while on the other hand a direct depiction of 'les vices de cette société'(PPC p 90) could too easily become predictable or didactic in approach. A more effective method, albeit one still pertaining to 'la littérature d'idées', was for the writer of revolutionary aims to penetrate beneath the bourgeois skin so as to reach the human being beneath:

A montrer au lecteur en quoi le bourgeois en lui aujourd'hui trahit l'homme. A lui donner ainsi mauvaise conscience.  
A l'affaiblir dans sa foi, déjà bien chancelante, de suprématie de classe. (PPC p 91)

Now, one could hardly find a more straightforward statement than this of those subversive intentions of progressive or communist intellectuals that Camus, according to Philip Thody<sup>19</sup>, had sought to satirize through the character of Clémence in La Chute. However, while any direct or indirect attack on the bourgeoisie from his ideological allies was presumably acceptable enough to Vercors the fellow-traveller, for the novelist in him the pursuit of class-warfare was never, even in Colères where it is given great play, a dominant or central preoccupation. As

he pointed out in his essay, Marxism could not supply answers to every question, nor respond to the more personal challenges that human beings encounter: 'la mort des êtres chers, la douleur d'un enfant ...' (PPC p 94). And therefore far more fundamental to his own approach, as to that of many other progressive writers, was what he now defined under the general heading of 'inquiétude':

L'inquiétude, c'est une disposition de l'esprit à n'être jamais assouvi. Chez le savant, c'est l'impulsion tyrannique de chercher toujours plus avant, c'est de trouver, s'il le faut, le courage de tout remettre en question, même quand il croit détenir une vérité. Chez l'artiste, chez l'écrivain, c'est de ne jamais se contenter d'une image figée de ce que l'homme est ou devrait être, et de ce qu'il fait sur cette planète. (PPC p 95)

Such 'inquiétude' or 'non-quiétude' (PPC p 96) was precisely what he had found lacking among Soviet intellectuals<sup>20</sup>; whereas for a French progressive writer of his kind it was the dominant compulsion:

C'est cela qui l'oblige à chercher, comme je fais, toujours et sans cesse, par-dessus même ce qu'il croit actuellement vrai, quelque chose de plus vrai encore, d'immuablement vrai, et qui est cette essence de l'humain que l'on ne peut trahir sans tout trahir. (PPC pp 96-97)

These brief extracts from a contemporaneous text should serve to confirm, if confirmation were needed, that the author of Colères had a variety of different aims in writing this most complex and ambitious of his novels. It is Mirabeau and Cloots, as we have seen, who embody the intellectual 'inquiétude' of the scientist and writer respectively; but Egmont too, in trying to penetrate the inmost secrets of his own organism, is searching for the basic truth about human identity, just as he is endeavouring through his own form of promethean rebellion to advance human knowledge beyond 'l'obstacle insurmontable qu'oppose la nature à toute connaissance vraie' (PPC p 94) - which again, in the terms of the essay just referred to, represents one of the fundamental human dilemmas to which Marxism offers no solution.

However, despite all of this, there is no doubt either that Vercors was determined in Colères to strike some firm blows on behalf of the proletarian underdog and against what he chose to present as capitalist exploitation backed by the coercive apparatus of the State. Not that in doing so he simply aligned himself with Communist dogma on every issue: Mirabeau's and Egmont's complaints about the Party's cavalier treatment of intellectuals speak for themselves, while even the militant Pélion emerges from various vicissitudes of fortune able to view the successful outcome of his strike in a broader, more balanced perspective. The police proceedings against him having been suspended, 'tout, convenait-il, n'était pas pourri encore dans la république ...' (Col p 349)<sup>21</sup>. And in beginning to show a serious interest in the implications of Mirabeau's research, he also seems set fair to escape the closed-mind syndrome that Vercors had regretfully noted in some of his own contacts in Moscow:

Mirabeau avait trouvé Pélion un peu changé - à son avantage, pensait-il .... Quelques questions pertinentes sur les travaux du vieux savant et sur des problèmes - horreur! ayant quelque parfum métaphysique<sup>22</sup>, montraient l'ouverture d'une lucarne, sinon d'une fenêtre, sur des paysages plus larges. C'était bon signe. (Col p 350)

From such indications, then, it is apparent that Vercors is determined in this novel to maintain his preferred position as a constructive, but when necessary critical, ally of the Communists. Similarly, in his treatment of the strike, in particular through his account of the united action taken by all the trade unions at the Coubez factories, he seems anxious to transcend the tensions of inter-union relationships, including the sectarianism emanating from the Communist CGT. Pélion and his CGT comrades are at the heart of the struggle from the outset, but, as the novel seeks to demonstrate, success is only made possible through the unity of purpose that is achieved between themselves and the local

branches of Force Ouvrière and the CFTC. Vercors repeatedly highlights the importance of this solidarity and, as the following two vignettes somewhat optimistically illustrate, he depicts the ideological divisions between the three unions crumbling and giving way beneath a tide of comradely feeling.

The first episode occurs during an annual workers' parade in Chaulieu, an event which in previous years has been marred by bitter rivalry between the unions, the exchange of rather predictable insults - 'social-traître!' or 'Laquais-de-Moscou!' (Col p 75) - and, in the ensuing scuffles, the prompt interventions of the waiting CRS. All of this has regularly amused 'les bourgeois de Chaulieu, à l'abri derrière leurs hautes fenêtres' (Col p 75) and, just as regularly, has left the Préfet and his associates exulting in the wake of the workers' rout. On the present occasion, however, Mirambeau steps into the threatened mêlée, the workers rallying around him outnumber the police, and the whole crowd moves forward in a new unity and mood of elation. Vercors's description of the scene here takes on an almost epic quality, briefly reminiscent perhaps of the Hugo of Les Misérables or the Zola of Germinal:

Les cris se fondirent bientôt dans un chant triomphal, tandis que les bannières, un instant dispersées, venaient se réunir en tête ... fraternellement mêlées.

Et le cortège se mit en marche vers la ville - sans cordon sanitaire. Il y pénétra en chantant avec une telle ardeur, en martelant le sol avec une telle force, que les vitres en tremblaient au passage .... (Col pp 78-79)

The second scene, from one of the several committee and mass-meetings that are recounted in the novel, shows Pélion and Mirambeau taking their places on the improvised platform in front of the assembled workers:

Il y eut une ovation; Pélion serrait en s'essayant la main de son second voisin, délégué des syndicats chrétiens, et l'on saluait cette poignée de main comme un symbole . . .  
(Col p 146)

However, although the spirit of comradeship is similarly strong among the workers at the meeting, it is observed from various signs of hesitation that Coubez's bribe to the non-CGT members is having its insidious effect; and it is only later, through Pélion's and Mirambeau's patient door-to-door canvassing of the workers' homes, then through the authorities' miscalculation in attacking Pélion directly, that the whole workforce is finally convinced of the need to resist Coubez's tactics by an all-out strike. The mass meeting and canvassing episodes have a further significance, however, and one which is of particular relevance to the present analysis: for they represent Vercors's only sustained attempt, in all his published writing, to produce a realistic portrayal of urban working-class life. Just how far he succeeds in that portrayal is the next important question that needs to be considered.

In the 1955 essay referred to previously, Vercors had briefly alluded to the very few French writers of working-class birth and upbringing and to the even smaller number - Stil and Laffite, for example - who had remained 'fidèles à leur origine jusque dans leur écriture' (PPC p 91). As for the majority of French writers, he acknowledged, it was regrettable but understandable that they should have difficulty in writing for and - here Vercors slips too easily, surely, from one sim to another - about working-class people:

... si ces écrivains nés dans le peuple ont perdu le pouvoir de lui parler, comment l'auraient gagné ceux qui n'y sont pas nés? Presque aucun d'entre nous ne vient du prolétariat et si Aragon dans ses Communistes, un Vailland dans son Beau Masque ont réussi le tour de force d'échapper à l'affreux 'populisme' où l'on 'se penche sur l'ouvrier' et malgré leur origine

bourgeoise, à peindre plausiblement des travailleurs, ce n'en reste pas moins un tour de force, et l'on ne fait pas toute une littérature avec des tours de force. (PPC p 92)

Now if the relevant sections of Colères are to be evaluated in accordance with this judgement, one is bound to conclude that Vercors has not himself pulled off 'un tour de force' in depicting working men and their families plausibly. There is the utmost goodwill and sympathy in Mirambeau's, and hence the author's, vision: the workers at the meeting are seen as uniformly decent, well-meaning and comradesly, and it is only the pressure of economic hardship that impels them to think of personal rather than mutual advantage. It is hard for them to give up a bonus in the face of 'ces dettes qui s'accroissent...' (Col p 149), and a few modest extras at home would clearly be very welcome:

Et un an, douze fois la prime, on pourrait se payer un nouveau lino, le vieux craque de partout, un manteau de lapin pour la petiotte qui va sur ses huit ans, et pourquoi pas, dans deux ou trois piges, une petite pétrolette d'occasion .... (Col p 149)

Even allowing for the economic difficulties that had affected the French working class in the immediate post-war years (as reflected in similarly sympathetic fictional terms in, say, Cebron's Les Saints vont en enfer), it is not easy to understand how workers in the mid-1950's with several years of steady employment behind them, an income presumably above the 'SMIC', and the benefit of family allowances, should be financially quite so hard-pressed<sup>23</sup>. But the scenes that confront Mirambeau when he visits the working-class district of Chaulieu (for the first time, rather surprisingly) are even more pathetic. The streets are grey and cheerless, the houses cramped, damp and ugly, and Mirambeau soon notices more particular signs of an all-embracing poverty:

.... un morceau de carton remplaçait une vitre, une tôle rouillée le haut d'une porte, du fil de fer tenait une gouttière. Une fenêtre ouverte laissait voir un matelas taché qui perdait ses entrailles sur un lit de fer. Un linge flasque pendait entre des volets disjointes, chemises décolorées, flanelles décrépitees, vieux mouchoirs élimés.  
(Col p 186)

As for the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, they present a similarly unprepossessing aspect. There is hardly one woman among those walking in the street whose face is not blemished in some way - hare-lipped, squinting or birth-marked; while two of them, exchanging gossip from their windows, seem to epitomize the depressing reality all around:

.... une femme sans âge (parlait) à une autre, en face d'elle. Ses cheveux défraîchis tombaient en mèches disgracieuses, qui paraissaient rongées aux mites. Son interlocutrice avait posé sur la barre d'appui une poitrine flasque, informe et volumineuse, une grosseur violâtre soulevait le bas du cou avant d'aller se perdre dans le coréage noir, déteint et brûlé aux aisselles.  
(Col p 187)

This cameo is followed by an alarming glimpse of a child too weak or too apathetic to enjoy his play, and of two little girls already showing signs of the adult appearance they would inherit: 'L'une d'elles avait le front déjà profondément ridé. L'autre, un peu obèse, ouvrait des lèvres pâles sur des dents gâtées.' (Col p 188).

The scenes presented here, in fact, are somewhat reminiscent of Orwell's Road to Wigan Pier, and this prompts the question as to whether Vercors's description is not anachronistic in relation to the 1950's and altogether more relevant to the 1930's. It is pertinent to recall his brief reference, in Les Occasions perdues, to the workers escaping for the first time from 'leur sordides banlieues' (OP p 111) thanks to the 'congés payés' negotiated under the Popular Front government. But the social realities of the 1930's which are thus evoked are not explored any further in his analysis of the period, and there is no mention whatever in Les Nouveaux Jours of the corresponding situation in the 1950's. It thus appears, in short, that

the author of Colères was attempting to recreate in would-be realistic terms an area of French life that he had little opportunity (and perhaps little inclination) to become fully acquainted with, and that a combination of social idealism, creative imagination and literary influences came together to complete - and to distort - his depiction. One possible literary association, for example, concerns the local dogs, which seem to Mirambeau to share the abject mood of most of the humans around them: 'Quelques chiens moroses, salis jusqu'au ventre, venaient pisser sans joie le long des murs' (Col p 186) - an image undoubtedly cognate with, if more specific than, the last line of Eluard's 'finir':

Même les chiens sont malheureux ....!

The poverty depicted here, it should be recalled, is the result neither of unemployment nor of the strike, which has not yet started: and the exaggeration of reality which it surely represents may be partly due to the author's need to demonstrate that only by the right collective action on the workers' part can they hope to turn the existing despair into the hope of a better future: a hope which indeed shows the first small signs of being fulfilled in the successful outcome of their industrial action. Certainly Mirambeau is emphatic in pointing out the importance of solidarity to those workers he talks to:

Rappelez-vous seulement une chose: ne lâchez jamais les copains. ... Quand on ne sait pas ce qu'on doit faire, ne pas lâcher les copains c'est une règle facile à se rappeler. Et elle ne trompe jamais. (Col p 191).

What partly detracts from the realism of these and similar encounters is that Mirambeau's words, like those of Pélion, never fall on deaf ears and that the fraternal impulses of the workers, even if temporarily inhibited by severe economic pressures, are never really in doubt. At no point in the novel does Vercors entertain the possibility that individual workers might be driven by selfish or acquisitive motives,

and in that respect indeed his method of demonstrating the importance of employee-solidarity is just the opposite of that of Vailland in 325,000 France<sup>24</sup>. In this novel, approximately contemporary with Colères, the protagonist Busard stubbornly pursues his personal ambition despite the advice, similar to Mirambeau's, that he receives from the union leader Chatelard; and in the end, of course, Busard pays a heavy penalty for his selfishness.

However, as J. E. Flower points out, Vailland's novel is not just a neat demonstration of a political tenet, and indeed, 'as a left-wing novel 325,000 France gives little immediate impression of being very positive'<sup>25</sup>. Colères by contrast, is more definitely a 'roman à thèse', and the lesson that it offers in respect of working-class unity also connects with the general notion of human progress that the author propounds, mainly through Dutouvet<sup>26</sup> but also through the reflections of Mirambeau during his visit to the slums. Again, the view that is offered of the Fourth Republic's social provision is extremely bleak: the educational system appears unable to help those born in the poverty-trap, and the result is not only the perpetuation of social injustice but a loss to the total complement of human intelligence<sup>27</sup>:

Les chances égales au départ, pensait-il, quelle blague! Je ne parle même pas des obstacles: l'école quittée trop tôt, l'argent qu'il faut gagner à quatorze ans ... Mais tout bonnement du fait que, sauf anomalies rarissimes, l'infrastructure de l'intelligence ne peut simplement pas se former avec plénitude .. L'espèce humaine peut-elle donc tolérer qu'on la prive de tant d'intelligences mort-nées, de toute cette pensée avortée, étranglée? (Col p 190)

Vercors thus portrays a working-class population handicapped by economic deprivation but sustained by dogged endurance and, when it is appealed to, the spirit of solidarity. The latter, indeed, proves strong enough

to overcome national and racial barriers when the employers attempt to transport a replacement workforce of North Africans, Italians and Poles into the strike-bound factories. One of the younger 'Norafs', the first to call on his fellows not to break the strike, is shot by the CRS in front of the massed workers; and this produces another dramatic demonstration of proletarian unity, Vercors's description of which is again consonant with some of the epic crowd scenes of Hugo or Zola. Fernand, the local CGT Secretary, picks up the injured 'Noraf' and starts carrying him towards the town's hospital:

Et derrière lui le mur se referma, et s'ébranla, et la foule silencieuse eut l'air de le suivre à la trace - le sang tombant goutte à goutte sur le pavé qu'il mouchetait d'une éclaboussure cramoisie, d'un saillage de Petit Poucet tragique. Fernand avançait dans l'avenue, tournant le dos à l'usine et avec lui les 'Norafs' et les grévistes, fraternellement mêlés, et derrière eux, mais à distance, les CRS furieux d'être intimidés, furieux de leur impuissance ....

La longue colonne s'enfonçait dans la ville, compacte, silencieuse, mais sur le bruit des pas roulait un autre bruit, sourd et insolite, une sorte de grande respiration, de vague grondement rauque qui emplissait l'avenue comme un gémissement .... (Eol p 267)

As in the earlier example, the echoes of Hugo or Zola here seem unmistakable, but it is perhaps necessary at this point to explore a little more precisely the actual influence of these two major figures on Vercors's writing. In the case of Zola, it was his concern for justice and readiness to defend it in the teeth of controversy that appealed to Vercors as to other French progressives, and it is of course primarily as humanitarian and polemicist rather than as the novelist of naturalism that he is so frequently invoked in Vercors's own published statements of commitment<sup>28</sup>. Victor Hugo, on the other hand, is cited at the end of the 1955 essay 'Les Problèmes des écrivains français', along with Voltaire, Vallès and Anatole France,

as one of the 'romanciers de combat' (PPC p 97) whose stories or novels offer direct testimony of their authors' political or social convictions. Vercors specifically evokes, in fact, the 'Hugo de Quatre-vingt-treize', thereby confirming once more the strong influence that that particular novel had always had on him because of its three-fold depiction of human conscience confronting a dilemma and in each case resolving it with exemplary self-sacrifice. This was the novel of Hugo's which Vercors celebrated in the article 'Oedipe et Cimourdin' written for the 150th anniversary of Hugo's birth (an anniversary which coincided with his own fiftieth birthday)<sup>29</sup>. A third of a century later, in 1985, it was the centenary of Hugo's death that Vercors was invited to honour, this time in a preface for the new 'Livres de Poche' edition of Les Misérables; and in this preface, 'Hugo et la Conscience', we find, after further reference to Quatre-vingt-treize, a succinct analysis of the struggles through which Jean Valjean's conscience passes, in direct reflection, in part, of Hugo's own earlier experiences. It is conscience, then, which Vercors sees (and has seen, since his youthful reading) at the heart of Hugo's inspiration and of his preoccupations in Les Misérables; but it is of course conscience being exercised against a background of social realities, the vivid and cumulative power of Hugo's depiction of which, as recollected by Vercors in his preface, can surely not have been entirely without influence on the latter's own attempt in Colères to portray the 'misères' of a later proletariat<sup>30</sup>:

.... avant tout, la trame des Misérables c'est la peinture monumentale des pauvres gens, la fresque de leur horrible état au sein d'une société impitoyable - celle de la bourgeoisie louis-philipparde - qui écrase de son égoïsme énorme ces "misérables" qui ne sont devenus tels, dans le sens péjoratif du terme, que parce qu'elle a fait d'eux des humiliés, des offensés ....<sup>31</sup>

And certainly Colères can offer us, apart from 'les pauvres gens', its

own twentieth-century version of a reactionary bourgeoisie: their attitudes are reflected most obviously in the tactics of the Coubez family and other members of the local 'patronat', as well as in the 'Préfet' and allied dignitaries, while more anonymously there are the respectable middle-class citizens of Chaulieu, briefly glimpsed at their windows or departing themselves with due decorum on their way to Church: '.... des messieurs en noir et leurs dames, pleins de gravité et de bonne conscience, en route pour confesser le Royaume de Dieu et sa Justice'<sup>32</sup>. (Col p 224)

But whatever the exact nature or extent of Hugo's legacy, it is of course the twentieth-century literary context that must most fully be taken into account in analysing a novel like Colères: and in this connection the major remaining issue for consideration is that of socialist realism. Vercors himself has had relatively little to say on this whole controversial doctrine, which, as J. E. Flower recalls, had for long engaged the attention of progressive artists and their communist mentors before reemerging in France with renewed vigour in the post-war years under the guidance of Aragon, Casanova and Kanapa<sup>33</sup>. It was in answer to André Wurmser, one of the less humourless watchdogs, perhaps, of the Marxist literary scene, that Vercors wrote (and had published in Les Lettres françaises)<sup>34</sup> a prescription for freedom in literature that sums up very effectively his general political position at the time (October 1954), together with his underlying determination to preserve a margin of independence from the Party that he still nevertheless saw as the guarantor of mankind's better future. He was, as he always had been, opposed to any 'littérature volontairement "dégagée"' (PPC p 243), as his story 'Les Mots' had been intended to demonstrate. And he could fully accept that 'la

construction du socialisme, ce que cette construction a d'exaltant' (PPC p 44) was a subject which if he were living in the Soviet Union might at first seem to offer, as it obviously did to Nurmer, an entirely sufficient framework and impetus for literary expression. However, a collective social enterprise, however noble in scale, could never cater for all of man's private needs or the many physical and emotional shocks that each human being is heir to; nor, since even in a model socialist society 'il y a des gens ... qui continuent d'être faits d'un étrange assemblage de protéines qui leur est inintelligible. Qui sont nés sans le demander et agonisent dans l'effroi et l'incompréhension' (PPC p 244-5), could it explain the mysteries of the human condition that the author would soon be exploring through Egmont and Cloots in Colères. And in concluding his defence of any literature which seeks to address men's innermost feelings and experiences rather than the drama of a great collective undertaking, Vercors points back once more, briefly but eloquently, to the nineteenth century:

.... que Musset renonce à écrire ce que ses douleurs lui inspirent (et à consoler tant de gens qui les subissent aussi) parce qu'il craindrait d'encourir le mépris de ceux à qui la hauteur de Vigny et la puissance de Hugo paraissent mieux s'accorder aux luttes de leur temps, ce serait à mes yeux, non seulement une bien grande perte, mais une forme encore de désertion. (PPC p 249) 25

Leaving aside the great revolutionary achievements in the East, however, to what extent can the depiction of French society in Colères be said to conform to, or simply to reflect, the notions of socialist realism as propagated in the 1950's by Daix, Stil and the other luminaries already mentioned? On the one hand, as we have seen, Vercors declined to be circumscribed in his choice of theme and subject-matter, and the diffuse and idiosyncratic content of the novel is

one of the features on which nearly all reviewers commented at the time of its publication<sup>36</sup>. Then there are the melodramatic overtones that can arguably be traced back to Hugo, and above all, of course, there are the qualifications and reservations built into the author's support for communist policy. On the other hand, the novel contains elements that Zhdanov's most orthodox apostles can only have found satisfactory: an exploitative bourgeoisie, repressive police-force and indigent but comradely workers are stereotypes which, whatever reality they may have or have had in a much broader sociological perspective, are here brought together all too neatly in the microcosmic setting of Chaulieu. Their actions and reactions have all too obviously been orchestrated in the service of ideology, and the overall loss to the novel is, of course, that of any true social realism.

In the conclusion to Literature and the Left in France, Professor Flower lists, without analysing them, a number of novels of the 1960's which centre on working-class life in France, and some of which, he claims, 'challenge readers' attitudes'<sup>37</sup>. It is perhaps worth briefly considering just two of them to see how they might be used to challenge, instead, Vercors's picture of the proletariat. Both Christiane Rochefort's Les Petits Enfants du Siècle and Claire Etcherelli's Elise ou la vraie vie<sup>38</sup> are the product of personal experience and of left-wing sympathies. But in the former, the view that the narrator, Josyane, gives of her family and those around her is totally un sentimental, indeed sharply ironic: she shows parents whose interests extend no further than the modern appliances that they obtain by enlarging their family (hence qualifying for additional grants and allowances) and who, even when economic pressures ease, lack the will and capacity to rise above short-term, mediocre goals. As for the Rouvier children, the HLM

environment and unavailing schooling may be further implicit causes of the failure of several of them to develop well; but in indicating the wide range of moral and intellectual differences between them, as well as among their neighbours and associates, Christiane Rochefort's treatment has nothing whatever in common with the broad brush of protective sympathy that Vercors applies to his working-class community. With regard to Claire Etcherelli's novel, her heroine's experience of work in a Parisian car-factory in 1957-58 is dominated by the contacts she makes among the Algerian immigrant workers, a few of whom, notably her lover Arezki, are clandestine members of the FLN. Here again, a realistic range of human types and interactions among the workers is recorded: some are more sympathetic than others to the novice Elise, while the long-standing sense of alienation of even the non-militant Algerians within French society is clearly conveyed. And although the reality of the Algerian conflict in the background of this novel must be given full weight in any comparison, it is difficult to imagine the different racial groups among these car-workers coming together quite as promptly or as single-mindedly over the shooting of an Arab as do those in Colères: the widespread indifference among ordinary Parisians to the police roundups and victimisation of Arabs in the capital, a historical phenomenon duly registered in Etcherelli's narrative, could after all be seen to offer something of a corrective to Vercors's optimistic scenario.

In their righteous (and eponymous) anger over the shooting of the young North African, the massed workers in Colères appear briefly to be on the point of rioting:

Il suintait, de cette masse silencieuse, couvant d'un seul regard la façade de la préfecture, une sorte de calme assez terrifiant. On sentait qu'elle n'attendait qu'un seul mot funèbre pour laisser éclater sa colère et se jeter à l'assaut en hurlant. (Col p 269)

But this moment of acute tension passes safely, and while the victim recovers in hospital, the strike proceeds towards the combined unions' eventual victory. As Pélion's and Mirambeau's concluding reflections bear out, the social system prevailing under the Fourth Republic need not be challenged to the point of revolution: the workers and their allies will need to exercise constant vigilance against injustice and the abuse of power, but social fairness and the security of the underprivileged can still be advanced through peaceful industrial action, as well as through the support of a local administration such as the 'Conseil municipal progressiste' of neighbouring 'Saint-Vaize', which throws its weight behind the 'Norafs' from its area (Col p 349). And thus it is that at the end of this major novel of political commitment, Vercors implicitly reaffirms his faith in French Republican democracy. The abuses perpetrated within that democracy may be serious, sometimes intolerable, and they may stem from a fictionalised capitalist conspiracy, as in Colères, or from actual government policies (towards the Communist Party, say, or in the colonies) that the author castigates in various of his non-fictional texts. But should the survival of the Republic itself be in jeopardy, then Vercors's instinctive response has always been to defend it - whether it be the Fourth Republic in May 1958, or the Fifth in April 1961.

For Vercors this has not simply been a matter of lining up with the Communists in what on their part may often have been no more than tactical support for the institutions of the Republic. Underlying his own reactions has been a real concern for the human rights

enshrined in French Republican democracy. These were the principles guarded at the very outset by Hugo's Gauvain and Cimourdain, defended later by Zola, and in due course championed against the Nazis by the protagonists of Vercors's own clandestine stories. The complex of allegiances to the Republican form of government has of course over the years embraced both conservative and left-wing elements; but in broad terms it is true that just as after the Revolution and throughout the nineteenth century the main threat to the Republic and its values came from the forces of reaction, so through the 1930's and the War it came from the agents of fascism. It is to such elements that Vercors has, as we have seen, been most strongly opposed; and it is accordingly against further extremism on the Right that the heroes of two more of his novels, Le Périple and Comme un Frère will in due course find themselves embattled.

Le Périple is the first novel in the trilogy Sur Ce Rivage... which also includes Monsieur Prousthe (likewise published in 1958) and La Liberté de Décembre. There is in fact no narrative link whatever between the three texts, and in the latter two a relatively small amount of direct political content or comment. All three of them, however, reflect the author's continuing analysis of human behaviour in terms of his now familiar dichotomy between rational revolt and 'jungle' impulse, as spelled out most clearly by the narrator of Le Périple:

Est-il possible, pensais-je, qu'il existe deux races sur cette terre, rien que deux, mais toujours et partout? Les hommes de la raison exigeante et rebelle et leur appétit de justice, les bêtes de la volonté native de la jungle et leur appétit de puissance? (Per p 149)

In the brief foreward to Monsieur Prousthe, Vercors himself answers

the above question in the affirmative, for such is 'l'amère découverte d'une réalité contraire à tous mes vœux' (MP p 7) that has been borne in on him by hard experience during and since the War<sup>39</sup>. Closest to his mind in this respect in 1957-58 was of course the issue of torture in Algeria, and it is this subject accordingly that occupies the last part of Le Périple. Retrospectively, indeed, in Les Nouveaux Jours, Vercors characterizes the work as 'le premier récit français entièrement consacré à la torture' (NJ p 314), a bold claim which he makes partly in explanation of his decision at the time to publish extracts from the text in Les Lettres françaises<sup>40</sup>. But in fact, although the story culminates in an episode of torture in Algeria, it is far from being entirely devoted to the subject. The central theme is rather the complex and changing relationship, from school days onwards, between the narrator and a certain Le Prêtre - in other words, and with all due allowance made for the changes of direction that mark 'le périple' of Le Prêtre's career - between a representative of each of the two 'races' identified above.

Cross-references between this novel and Vercors's own experience or other fiction can readily be made. Brought up in comfortable circumstances in Paris, the narrator, like the author, has a Jewish father and expresses his childish pride in this fact in identical terms to the young Bruller's<sup>41</sup>. On the other hand, there is perhaps an element of wish-fulfilment in the invention, on the narrator's mother's side, of a grandfather who fell at 'le Mur des Fédérés'. Le Prêtre, a rival in and out of the classroom<sup>42</sup>, eventually becomes a law-student and, not altogether unexpectedly therefore, a member of the 'camelots du roi'; while the narrator, neatly combining various of the author's own traits or aspirations, becomes a left-wing (but not Communist)

science-student who writes poetry which even Le Prêtre admires. Despite this, and despite friendship between himself and Le Prêtre's sister and her husband, the narrator at this stage is still alert to the underlying brutality of Le Prêtre's personality, and when the latter helps to lead the Fascists in the Paris street-riots of February 1934, relations between the two men are broken off. Like the Jean Bruller of the 1930's, however, the narrator finds things to respect in the character, if not the opinions, of some of his ideological opponents, and he thus maintains his friendship with Le Prêtre's sister and brother-in-law. Through the latter's military connections he one evening finds himself, perhaps for the curiosity value of his left-wing views and Jewishness, invited to dinner to meet Philippe Pétain: a fictitious occasion which proves as socially unrewarding but politically instructive for the narrator as had the author's own actual encounter with Weygand in 1935<sup>43</sup>.

Le Prêtre reemerges in 1942 when, utterly disillusioned with Pétain - 'le vieux tartuffe ... vieille canaille' (Per p 52) - he joins the narrator in the Resistance movement; a surprising volte-face, perhaps, but one seemingly not unprecedented among 'les camelots du roi': '... il leur avait fallu la patrie à genou pour les réveiller de fatales illusions' (Per p 54). Le Prêtre's work as a Resistance leader is highly effective, but he is eventually captured by the Germans and deported: while the narrator is left, first to enjoy the nation's immediate post-Liberation appreciation, then to experience the same kind of political disillusionment as is reflected in La Puissance du Jour and the author's other writings and stories of the post-war period:

La belle communion française se relâchait en même temps que la peur. La race disparue des fascistes réapparaissait çà et là .... J'éprouvais beaucoup moins d'amertume personnelle, que d'inquiétude pour la France que nous voulions faire.  
(Per pp 72-3)

Le Prêtre returns from Germany where, like Pierre Cange, he has endured the hardships of 'Hochawörth' concentration-camp. For him, however, the most decisive experience has been his contact with the Communists, who have earned his unreserved respect for the 'austère abnégation' and 'raideur janséniste' (Per p 82) by which, 'lucides et résolus' (Per p 83), they had been able to withstand the Nazis and the diverse ordeals of the camp.

Le Prêtre has not joined the Party and does not do so subsequently; but appreciated in return by the Communists for his conduct in the camp and now for the vigorous campaigning for progressive causes which, even as a 'bourgeois catholique' (Per p 86) he undertakes for several years after the War, he soon outdoes the more circumspect narrator in embracing the Party's orthodoxies (p 87). However, in parallel with an episode that occurred in real life and is repeated elsewhere in Vercors's fiction, Le Prêtre then takes charge of a new Progressive-Catholic weekly. The struggle between Church and Party and his own divided loyalties eventually force his resignation, whereupon he is accused by the Communists of embezzlement. There is a clear echo here of the character-assassination methods for which Vercors had reproached his communist friends, and a further echo of the Rajk and Slansky affairs when Le Prêtre demands that the narrator himself should break publicly with the Communists:

Naturellement, je lui rappelai combien de fois j'aurais dû rompre, quand on pendait des innocents. En ce temps-là, loin de me soutenir, il me traitait de trotskyste et de traître petit-bourgeois. Si je n'avais pas, en ces occasions, voulu confondre la révolution avec ses bavures sanglantes, si

si j'en restais un défenseur, malgré les crimes commis en son nom et malgré les injures, ce n'était pas pour la rejeter aujourd'hui pour une diffamation banale ...  
(Per p 89)

Besides which, the narrator recalls (again directly as the author's spokesman), no former supporter of Maurras can justifiably complain about calumny. But in any case, Le Prêtre's own breach with Communism is consummated, and in due course he marries for money and departs to North Africa - the setting for the narrator's final encounters with him.

Just as Vercors himself had been, the narrator is invited, as a prominent nuclear scientist of progressive views, to visit Algeria for a lecture-tour shortly before the nationalist uprising. Indeed, the visit related in Le Périple is patterned closely on that of the author in 1954: there is the same bland reception, the same initial audience of wealthy European ladies, and only afterwards the visitor's induction, through progressive contacts (the role of André Mandouze in the real-life visit), to the squalid reality of the Arabs' living conditions: 'les bidonvilles fétides de la banlieue d'Alger, et le soir, sous les arcades du quartier Bab-el-Oued, les milliers de dormeurs demi-nus serrés sur les trottoirs comme harengs en caque'. (Per p 104). A graphic evocation, this, of the scenes that are reproduced in very similar terms in Les Nouveaux Jours: '... l'Alger des Algériens, la Kasbah, Bab-el-Oued et, le soir sous les arcades, les interminables et sinistres théories des dormeurs arabes comme sardines en boîte, sur les trottoirs' (NJ p 252). And so the parallels continue, through matching accounts of a 'pied-noir' trade-unionist's outburst of contempt about the Arabs and, finally, the visitor's impatience to leave the whole uncongenial scene. But - and here fiction departs from fact - the scientist makes contact before he leaves with Esther

Latam, a young Jewish physicist with an acute social conscience. It is she who sends him an honest account of the Arab insurrection at the end of the year; and although Vercors had only limited sympathy for Camus's position over Algeria<sup>44</sup>, he does evoke at this point, in depicting Esther's dilemma, the kind of difficulty that constrained the 1957 Nobel Prize-winner and condemned him during the last few years of his life to virtual silence on the issue:

Algérienne de vieille souche, amie des Français, amie des Musulmans, elle assistait impuissante à cet écartèlement fatal. Elle haïssait le terrorisme, haïssait plus encore la répression, ignoble et aveugle, qui lui répondait. Elle s'attendait à être un jour traitée en ennemie d'un côté et de l'autre .... (Per p 112)

But in thus identifying in her own mind the greater evil (more easily, of course, than Camus was able to do), Esther has in fact also chosen her enemy, and it is accordingly after going to assist the enquiries of 'un caporal au béret vert, aimable et souriant' (Per p 112) that she vanishes from sight. The scientist-narrator, true to his creator's tradition, organises a small clandestine group to try to locate her and returns to Algeria. His early experiences there include a meeting with Le Prêtre and a visit to a restaurant just bombed by the FLN - a sight which fills him with indignation and revulsion:

.... c'était injustifiable, odieux comme toute férocité aveugle, inhumain comme tout fanatisme. J'avais le coeur chaviré, mais je brûlais de colère désespérée devant cet atroce gâchis. (Per p 127)

What is expressed here, of course, rather than the progressive partisanship sometimes exercised by the author on behalf of the FLN, is the revolt of a liberal conscience over man's inhumanity to man; but in pursuing his anxious scrutiny of ends and means the narrator now turns his attention to Le Prêtre, who, he learns, has an important anti-terrorist responsibility and, as at Hochaworth where his

decisiveness had saved many prisoners' lives, is still adhering first and foremost to his watchword of 'efficacité'. After the narrator himself is arrested by paratroopers and taken for interrogation in what is obviously the ante-room of a torture-centre, Le Prêtre tells him that he is concerned with one thing only - to end the terrorism. But for all the emphasis on Le Prêtre's single-mindedness at this juncture, there is no attempt by the author to invest him with the more appealing or persuasive qualities that Gillo Pontecorvo, for example, conferred on the paratroop leader Colonel Mathieu in the film La Bataille d'Alger<sup>45</sup>. On the contrary, for as he awaits torture at Le Prêtre's command the narrator perceives the equation between the brute urge to power and the betrayal of humanity that is encapsulated in the formula of 'les deux races'; and then, seeing Le Prêtre's face hovering above him, his thoughts revert, in the closing lines of the novel, to one of the more familiar classical paradigms of political confrontation:

Je voyais ce visage dévoré d'ombres, et je pensais:  
quel mal résiste à la connaissance, lequel résisterait  
à la pleine lumière? ... Antigone la perçoit, cette  
lumière, tous ces Créon l'ignorent, c'est tout.  
Pauvres Créon ... pauvre Le Prêtre. Je souris.  
(Per pp 156-7)

At the end of a generally favourable review of Le Périple in Esprit, Louis de Villefosse raises a point concerning the main political implication of the novel<sup>46</sup>. He queries Vercors's suggestion, expressed by the narrator after Le Prêtre's return from Hochawörth, that the erstwhile Fascist's new enthusiasm for the Communists was based on a misunderstanding. The relevant extract in the novel is as follows:

Au vrai, je me demandais en l'écoutant s'il avait bien  
'compris'. Et si c'était pour les bonnes raisons ... Ce qui avait  
séduit Le Prêtre, n'était-ce pas cette apparente subordination  
à 'l'efficacité', que les ennemis du communisme font profession  
d'assimiler à celle du fascisme? (Per p 84)

The crucial word here, of course, is 'apparente', which de Villefosse duly italicizes. Is such a subordination on the communist side, he enquires, merely 'apparent'? And in the light of recent events in Budapest, 'faut-il entendre que de "bonnes raisons" existent encore d'aller de ce côté-là...?' Although the reviewer concludes, no doubt with tongue in cheek, that these are questions 'qui ne souffrent pas d'être laissées en suspens', Vercors himself, in fact, has made his position in regard to the Communists clear enough in this novel. The familiar reservations are rehearsed, some more bluntly than before; but there is surely no irony intended in the word 'apparente' as quoted, and well aware as he was that he would allow *Le Prêtre* to reveal himself in his true colours at the end of the narrative, he made sure that the narrator's doubts about the new fellow-traveller's credentials were duly demonstrated and recorded: 'Était-ce bien sage de trop compter sur un ralliement ambigu? ... J'avais l'intention de rappeler combien le parti avait souffert de compter dans ses rangs un Gitton, un Doriot...'  
(*Per* pp 84-85)

However, the Foreword to Monsieur Prousthe, written only shortly after Le Périple, signals a move away from political controversy, and, it first appears, from any overt commitment on Vercors's part. Indeed, in evoking the trilogy's overall title, Sur Ce Rivage...., the author strikes an unwontedly tentative and non-prescriptive note. When human beings are passing through periods of calm and stability, remote from intense political experiences like the Occupation or the Algerian conflict, it is not always easy, Vercors maintains, to know to which of the two moral 'races' a given individual may belong. Since the diversity and opacity of the data that we acquire about others in real life should

be reflected in a fictional narrative, the central portraits in the remaining parts of Sur Ce Rivage... will be 'une sémiologie bien plus qu'un diagnostic' (MP p 10); and if he, the author, does still seem to offer conclusions of his own, they need not be taken as a definitive judgement that the reader is bound to agree with. All of which indicates, it seems, a distinct departure from 'la littérature d'idées' with which the Soviet critic had quite reasonably associated Vercors's fiction: while even more remarkable, perhaps, is the final observation in the Foreword:

Qui donc, pour oser juger, oserait se sentir tellement sûr d'être des deux pieds sur un seul rivage? Pas plus l'auteur que personne. C'est autant pour lui-même que pour ses personnages qu'il poursuit cette quête impérieuse. (MP p 10)

In writing P.P.C. Vercors had offered various reasons for his decision to withdraw from the public scene: the failure of the Left to unite against the fascist threat, the impossibility of communicating openly and frankly with the Communists, the erosion of his own prestige. He had not, however, questioned his own moral credentials, either for his progressive stance in the past or for his present departure from the arena. And to suggest, as in the quotation above, that he could stand on, or even approach, the same shore as 'les bêtes de la volonté native de la jungle' (for this, after all, is the logical implication of what the Foreword states) is a surprising and, in the overall context of his writing, wholly exceptional submission. It would not inhibit him, as we have seen, from continuing to pass stern judgements in the political sphere, as for example on extreme right-wing elements in France or on the methods used against the Algerian nationalists. On the other hand, to what extent did it, and the Foreword as a whole, perhaps herald a change in his general approach to fictional writing?

The concise answer to this, as far as the actual texts of Monsieur Prousthe and La Liberté de Décembre are concerned, is that there is a significant shift of emphasis in the subject-matter but that the elements of moral and political didacticism have not been entirely suppressed. Certainly both of these 'récits' could be categorized as 'scenes from the private lives of the bourgeoisie', and the close study of human relationships and emotional entanglements in them is more dominant than in any of the author's previous fiction: only in the background of each narrative do we have glimpses of political events or of the historical forces shaping society. The first story recounts the life of Monsieur Prousthe as it is pieced together over several years by the narrator. Prousthe, based on an actual acquaintance of Vercore's parents<sup>47</sup>, proves to have been a tragic figure, tainted by a minor sexual deviancy but fundamentally honourable and responsible. As a Radical senator before the First World War he had for a time been able to exert a just and humane influence; but his career having been destroyed through his eccentric vice, he had spent the rest of his life in exile abroad or in voluntary seclusion within his own estate, maintaining contact only with his daughters and sons-in-law. It was his high sense of honour which dictated this course of conduct, likened by a contemporary of his, André Visner, to that of Conrad's 'Lord Jim'<sup>48</sup>. In his old age, Visner is aghast at the destruction of ethical standards which the Nazis had precipitated, but to which others were still contributing: '... le sadisme et la torture portés à la hauteur d'une institution ... ce capitaine qui éteint en rigolant sa cigarette sur le sein d'une femme, et qui s'écrie: "Ici, c'est la Gestapo!"<sup>49</sup> On le sait, et on le maintient ... et même on le soutient ... et celui qui s'indigne est bon pour les tribunaux...' (MP p 130). And if, with his dark ruminations about 'ces gens d'aujourd'hui ... des rats pris

au piège ... la fin d'une société ... cette peste' (MP pp 130-1), Vianer aims his pessimism more widely than Vercors himself would have done, there is no doubt about the author's sympathy for Vianer's view of Proust as 'l'un des derniers représentants de l'honneur bourgeois' (MP p 131). For in a further reflection on Proust's rigorous code of honour, the narrator himself amply demonstrates the privileged status of that view:

... je pensais à ce que m'avait dit André Vianer, et à ce livre atroce que je venais de lire sur la torture en Algérie, à ces officiers tortionnaires ... Que je le veuille ou non je suis bourgeois, fils de bourgeois, et je suis patriote, et la dépravation, la dégradation de bourgeois patriotes me blesse au plus sensible de mon amour pour mon pays, de l'idée que depuis ma jeunesse je me fais de la France. Et je pensais que Monsieur Proust, s'il eût vécu, n'aurait pas trouvé, dans ces perversions innommables, une excuse à ses faiblesses; ni un allègement à son déshonneur dans l'indulgence qu'elles rencontrent, quand ce n'est pas l'assentiment, auprès des pouvoirs d'une société aux abois ... (MP pp 184-5)

Despite the disclaimer in the foreword, the tone of each line of the above is unmistakably that of the Vercors of 'Désespoir est mort', raging inwardly at the betrayal of France by most of the bourgeois officers around him; that of the Vercors, likewise, of 'La Marche à l'Etoile', lamenting his country's betrayal, in turn, of the faithful Thomas Muritz. It is, in other words, the authentic voice of the author, and there can surely be little doubt on which 'shore' he is taking his stance.

Like the two preceding volumes of the trilogy, La Liberté de Décembre presents early memories of its narrator's upbringing and relationships in Paris, following which virtually the entire 'récit' is taken up by the diverse and sometimes complicated love-affairs of the narrator, his childhood sweetheart, Edwige, and the latter's step-father, Hector

Granval. Hector, in fact, as the narrator only gradually comes to realise, dominates all the women around him, conducting long-running love-affairs both with his mother-in-law, Madame Dreige, and with Edwige herself, even after she has married another man. By profession a broker, by inclination a littérateur, art-collector and seducer, Hector discloses enough of his opinions in conversation with the narrator (duly embarked on a scientific career) to suggest that, ostensibly independent of authorial judgement though he may be, he is as antipathetic a figure to Vercors as Prousthe had been congenial. Yet the evidence does not, in this case, point all in one direction. The moral basis for Hector's present views, for example, clearly has some kinship with the early absurdist philosophy of Jean Bruller:

Nous savons bien que nous ne comprendrons pas, jamais, que nous mourrons, et nos petits-neveux aussi, sans avoir rien compris. Puisque dans ce tunnel il y a des coups à encaisser, il vaut mieux ne pas être de ceux qui les reçoivent aux fesses, non? Voilà la seule philosophie. J'ajouterais: la seule loi morale. Le reste n'est qu'illusion ... (LD p 105) 50

On being invited to support a young socialist group by the narrator (who had joined it, we learn, after the assault on Léon Blum by the thugs of 'Action Française')<sup>51</sup> Hector acknowledges that he too had passed through a socialist phase in early manhood. But now, while liking Blum personally well enough, he has no sympathy whatever with his ideas: and if the latter part of this statement marks the beginning of the divorce from Vercors's own positions as we know them, what follows puts the breach beyond doubt. Hector has no further interest in politics - 'C'est une occupation d'ilotes' (LD p 96) - but if he did have to choose between the young socialists and 'Action Française', he would opt for the latter:

La patrie, c'est au moins une idée où l'on peut mettre les dents. Tandis que le socialisme me paraît imbécile, que voulez-vous ... Pourquoi ne pas aimer la force? Et moi non plus je n'aime pas les faibles; et je ne peux comprendre pourquoi il faudrait les défendre contre les forts. La sélection naturelle ne s'arrête pas aux frontières de l'homme... (LD p 97)

Even the Communists, Hector points out, have the virtue of vigour on their side; although this, like the preceding comments, makes no difference to his cynical dismissal of any active or personal political involvement. In view of all of which, it perhaps only remains to consider to what extent Hector can be said to belong to the race of 'les bêtes de la volonté native de la jungle et leur appétit de puissance'. As Vercors himself pointed out subsequently<sup>52</sup>, Hector has rejected the option of solidarity with others and virtually accepted that 'tout est permis'; and indeed in the 'récit' itself the only qualification that the character would impose on Dostoevsky's aphorism is an aesthetic one: 'le vulgaire, voilà l'ennemi!' (LD p 106). It is a little harder, however, to see how, beyond his selfish and elitist impulses, he can be said to be fulfilling the 'appétit de puissance' that marks out, say, Paars, Le Prêtre or the Regent in Les Yeux et la Lumière. In Hector's case, we might conclude, power is exercised through his possession of women, and is also perhaps not unrelated to his pursuit of prestige and ascendancy in the artistic and literary circles of Paris. With Edwige and her mother both dead, possibly in a suicide pact, the narrator and his family have nothing more to do with Hector and his older mistress. But on the last page of the story we learn of Granval's steady rise to honours and celebrity in his chosen sphere: 'la croix de Commandeur .... un grand succès de presse ...'<sup>53</sup>, then finally, after a delay caused by the War and his Vichyite sympathies, his election to the Academy in succession to 'Cardinal Feuillard'.

Surely a parting confirmation of Vercors's scepticism towards the character is offered here, in the Flaubertian irony with which Hector's apotheosis is left to emerge unchallenged from the closing lines of the book:

Son élection .... a eu lieu le jour de ses soixante ans.  
Il a prononcé du cardinal un éloge délicat, que l'on cite  
dans les livres d'école pour la finesse de sa pensée. (LD p 176) 54

Two quite disparate texts by Vercors now need briefly to be reviewed for the different ways in which they, too, illustrate the author's political responses. Quota ou les Pléthoriens is dissimilar to any of Vercors's previous fiction, whereas Le Radeau de la Méduse has several points in common with at least the two latter works of Sur Ce Rivage... However, these new texts have a shared significance in terms of the present analysis in that they both lend a fresh fictional form to aspects of Vercors's political and social outlook.

The novel Quota ou les Pléthoriens had a long and unusual gestation before emerging in 1966 through the joint authorship of Vercors and his friend from schooldays, Paul Coronel<sup>55</sup>. It appears that Vercors did most of the writing in the final version, with Coronel supplying many of the ideas. The book is a sustained satire, some 335 pages long, of the materialism, high-pressure marketing and mania for gadgetry associated with the American way of life. According to an interviewer in L'Express, Coronel felt that it should be read, as it had been written, 'avec un grand rire', while Vercors added the slightly more cautionary note: '... un grand rire qui s'étrangle parfois dans la gorge'<sup>56</sup>. The 'Quota' of the title is an American of unbalanced genius and exceptional will-power who turns up in the small Central American republic of Tahualpa with some radical commercial ideas that he is

quite soon able to put into effect. The results are startling: the nation's economy is transformed, the populace swamped by consumer goods and equipment of every description, and as leader of a popular movement known as 'Piéthoriciens', Quota in due course defeats the opposing 'Malthusiens' to become President of the country. He now has the authority to impose his ideas comprehensively and so sustain the extraordinary consumer-boom that his methods have generated. One of his basic ideas is that salaries should rise continuously to keep pace with people's acquisitive drive, the latter being stimulated in turn by intensive salesmanship at every store and market in the country. Most of the inhabitants respond in a dazed, mechanical way to the pressure to absorb the myriad appliances, foods and drugs of modern civilisation - some real, others invented, like the 'Oxygénol: ... oxygène vitalisé, pasteurisé, vitaminisé et tout' (Q p 214) that people can periodically inhale from their own personal canister. The spiritual consequences of Quota's revolution are broached in a discussion between Florence, the heroine of the story, and a despairing priest, Father Espositos. No longer required to succour the poor and starving, Espositos has himself succumbed to the pressure to consume and to the 'Oxygénol' habit; despite which, however, he remains lucid enough to criticise what has occurred. Quota has abolished hunger and cold, but what has he made of the 'Tahualpèques' instead - 'ces automates repus, gavés comme des oies, jusqu'à la nausée, de radios, de frigos, de motos, de bateaux, de pianos, mais noyés dans un ennui si vertigineux qu'ils réclament encore de nouveaux supplices?' (Q p 221).

The conclusion of the novel shows such premonitions to have been well founded, but still leaves Quota firmly in control of an economy which maintains its inexorable growth, thanks now to a compulsory programme of

demolition, reconstruction and refurnishing of every home and building more than five years old. There has been some attempt at resistance by the people, including a nostalgic and snobbish return to 'la queuserie' led by the middle classes; but Quota has declared a state of emergency and enforced his measures through the strength of his security apparatus. Foreign workers are brought in in huge numbers to help cope with the unending cycle of reconstruction and to add their own weight to the total of consumer demand. A renewed spirit of conformity and even euphoria prevails, so that it is easy enough to forget those who break down under the strain; although as the last sentence of the book indicates, aptly reflecting the tenor of all that has gone before, it will perhaps prove less and less easy to remain oblivious:

La vie continuait pour les autres, dans une magnifique accélération, on n'abattait, on ne construissait jamais assez de maisons, d'usines, de bureaux, de magasins, de garages, d'hôpitaux, d'asiles de fous, jamais assez de maisons, de bureaux, de magasins, de garages, d'asiles de fous, jamais assez de magasins, de garages, d'asiles de fous, jamais assez .... (Q p 335)

In the main, the events of the story have been left to unfold at their own rapid pace and with little overt didacticism on the authors' part. However, the rôle of 'raisonneuse' is intermittently filled by Florence, a representative of European sanity, but close associate of Quota, 'ce magicien ... ce terrible dominateur' (Q pp 229, 230), who inspires in her successive feelings of fascination, fear, detestation, renewed fascination and finally rejection. Florence returns regularly to seek spiritual refreshment in Europe, and some of her experiences in Sicily are clearly based on a visit there by Vercors and his wife in 1959<sup>57</sup>. Apart from episodes such as this, however, there is little that is realistic in the development of the narrative. The 'croissance vertigineuse' created by Quota's policies is unchecked by any of the usual constraints on a nation's economic performance, or indeed by any

wider shortage of resources or commodities (though such 'limits to growth' admittedly only became a serious international preoccupation some years after the book's appearance). It is however the reality of such factors, and of the other checks and balances inherent in world trade, that will presumably ensure that whatever social ills attend advanced economies in the future, the tyrannies of Quota's particular form of 'brave new world' are unlikely to be experienced. Notwithstanding which, the more left-wing of the book's reviewers in 1966 did not hesitate to underline the seriousness of its critique of the American way of life. André Murmaer, for example, turned his irony towards Florence into an attack on the ruthless ethos of the capitalist system: 'Il est bien connu de tout un chacun, Florence exceptée, que la Bourse du Commerce n'est pas le siège social de l'Armée du Salut'<sup>58</sup>. And Vercors, with his own sceptical view of American society, would presumably have accepted willingly enough Murmaer's further reflection, irrelevant though it may have been in the actual context of Quota, that social relationships under capitalism 'dérivent de l'anthropophagie originelle la moins ragoûtante, l'homme se nourrissant de la sueur de l'homme...'<sup>59</sup>

On the whole, however, the direction of Vercors's own fictional writing from this time onwards remained that set by the last two volumes of Sur Ce Rivage...., with the study of human character and emotional development claiming altogether more attention than the themes of political involvement. Thus Le Radeau de la Méduse offers a relatively well-rounded and psychologically probing account of its central character, Frédéric Legrand, and of the key relationships in his life. Strong political attitudes are ostensibly signposted in the early pages by his reputation as a 'poète maudit et révolutionnaire' (RM p 16) and by 'le refus indigné du monde tel qu'il est' (RM p 24) that we learn

he shares with his wife, Marilise. But while social revolt had always seemed central to his outlook and, as demonstrated in the denunciation of his own bourgeois family in his first volume of poetry ('Le Radeau de la Méduse'), had been the foundation of his literary reputation, his social attitudes remain devoid of positive content or political commitment. It is Marilise's treatment for depression by the psycho-analyst Esther Aubagne that provides the inner framework of the book's complicated narrative structure, the outer 'cadre' being presented by a writer-friend ('V') of Madame Aubagne, who takes on the task of editing the psychiatrist's notes and tape-recordings after the deaths (in separate accidents) of Legrand and his wife and of Esther Aubagne herself. Among the earliest of the recorded extracts (pp 19-20), Marilise reaffirms her faith in her husband's moral and artistic integrity. Yet as the remainder of the book reveals (largely in Legrand's own words, as he recounts his life-story through a series of consultations), the truth about him is less reassuringly clearcut; and it is possibly her half-conscious realisation that Frédéric has feet of clay that has induced Marilise's depression and even, in due course, leads her to kill them both by driving their car into a ravine.

As in the case of the successive protagonists of Sur Ce Rivage..., Vercors seems to have based Legrand on a personal acquaintance<sup>60</sup>, and once again his own early environment helps to furnish the background of the main character's experience. Legrand's youth is complicated by repressed sexuality, the presence of a more brilliant and extrovert cousin, Rémi, and by insecurity over his school attainment. These continued tensions, compounded by the revelation of his elders' venality and hypocrisy, are released in the violent polemics of his first verses and the consequent dramatic break with his family<sup>61</sup>. Three key episodes or references, drawn

from the detailed account of his career thereafter, should suffice to indicate the degree to which, despite his public image and the love of several women that it earns him, Frédéric's revolt is both self-centred and superficial.

Bala, the young daughter of a rich mine-owner, Korninsky<sup>62</sup>, falls in love with Frédéric through his poetry, and the relationship between them is strengthened by their shared rejection of capitalist wealth. Bala's words about her family milieu: '... son faste, son opulence, ces fortunes mal gagnées, amassées sur le malheur des pauvres' (RM p 203) are echoed by the verse of Legrand that she then goes on to quote:

Fleuve océan de sueurs et de peines  
Où s'alimente un barrage de sang  
Dont la lueur brille sur vos corsages  
Dont le flux bat le pied de vos châteaux.

Frédéric's artistic stance is thus quite different from that of Vercors's earlier poet, Luc, in 'Les Mots'; but if the tone of his concern recalls that of the post-surrealist Eluard or Aragon, any real depth of feeling or commitment in him is harder to discern. Bala soon discovers Legrand's essential pusillanimity when she runs away from home to join him in Greece. Fearful of scandal (she is a minor, Korninsky a powerful and celebrated figure), Legrand sends the father a telegram and Bala is escorted home. Frédéric, in short, seems reluctant to risk the position that his literary successes have earned for him; indeed, he himself realizes that he has become as concerned over social appearances as those he had pilloried in his writing. He never sees Bala again, although her parting look, '.. De surprise incroyable. De bête blessée par son maître. De désespoir, de haine, de dégoût...' (RM p 262), remains fixed in his memory. Their fortunes in the War against Hitler also form a sharp contrast. Bala, now married to Rémi, works actively

in the Resistance and dies in Ravensbrück; Legrand, on the other hand, remains a prisoner-of-war throughout, making no attempt to escape and so failing anew, it could be inferred, to show the spark of rebellion when it is more prudent to adapt to prevailing circumstances. A brief verdict by Esther Aubagne towards the end of her consultations: 'Cet homme-là s'en tirera. Sa femme, c'est moins sûr' (p 299), and some concluding comments by 'V' from his own vantage-point as a fellow-writer, seem to point firmly in the same direction:

.... depuis lors, j'ai appris sur le compte de l'écrivain des choses bien curieuses. Aux invectives passionnées contre le pouvoir et ses valets, succédant les visites insistantes aux critiques influents; au refus éclatant de distinctions honorifiques, un silence consentant, quand les amis de la baronne Dessoud ont commencé de balayer pour lui le long chemin feutré qui mène à de hautes dignités. (RM pp 299-300)

However, although it appears that only death had cut Frédéric off from the honours that had marked out Hector Granval's prime, Vercors reverts at the end of this particular novel to the caution about judging others that he had expressed in the preface to Monsieur Prousthe. As for the more precise political issues and alignments of the period, these are evoked in a laconic and distanced fashion when Frédéric briefly recapitulates the career of his acquaintance 'Summer', who had started in 'Action Française' like Le Prêtre, but then, instead of following the latter's 'périple' to Algeria, had been drawn further into fellow-travelling's ideological vortex:

.... il devient stalinien convaincu jusqu'à l'affaire hongroise; après laquelle il démissionne et rejoint ceux qui l'avaient traité, après le procès Slanaky, de salaud, de tartufe tandis qu'il leur crachait dessus en les traitant de renégats; puis traitant à son tour de salauds, de tartufes ceux qui, après Budapest, ne s'en vont pas comme lui, et qui lui crachent dessus en le traitant de renégat; et qui un jour le rejoindront et traiteront de salauds, de tartufes ceux qui ne partiront pas comme eux et qui les traiteront de renégats... (RM p 283)

The irony here is partly Frédéric's, justifying his own aloofness from the political circus; but it also enables Vercors, in this basically non-committed text, to indulge in a mild, retrospective settling of scores with those who had tried his patience from within and without the CNE.

Of the several remaining works of fiction that Vercors has produced since 1970, only two reflect to any significant extent the author's established ideological positions: Comme un frère (1973) and, most recently, Le Tigre d'Anvers (1986). Although shorter (185 pages) than some of the novels discussed so far in this chapter, Comme un frère in fact has a remarkably varied narrative range. This is due to the 'miracle-prodige', akin to that in Sylva, which provides the story's starting-point: the instantaneous dividing of a single male character, Roger-Louis Touhoine<sup>63</sup>, into two separate and autonomous individuals, Roger and Louis. 'Ce partage en deux se fit entièrement et absolument: chair, esprit, et même veston et chaussures - sans plus de mal que dans un film truqué' (CF p 13). From the fantasy of this premise, the story develops through the separate experiences of the two young men, whose short but eventful lives move widely apart, converge briefly again at particular moments in the text and are finally brought permanently together in death. In following their different trails, Vercors manages to sketch in many of the social and political realities, as he saw them, of Pompidou's France; but if his narrative reflects in realistic enough terms the anxieties felt by many contemporary observers over, say, the ruthless development of Paris or the profiteering and corruption associated with it, the climactic events of the story and its violent dénouement can be seen rather as a safety-valve of melodramatic invention. Rottenness within the body politic is lanced and drained away, a militant right-wing

threat to democracy is overcome, and a new Government, albeit under the same (unnamed) President, assumes the guardianship of the Republic and its institutions. In achieving this consummation a centrist politician (Roger) is joined on the anti-fascist barricades by a radical trade-union sympathizer (Louis); and when both are blown up by an exploding grenade, they fall together 'en un seul mort pour la République' (p 181). The completion date of the novel, recorded at the end of the text, no doubt half-humorously, as '14 juillet 1972', serves to underline the political message that emerges from this unusual blend of realism and imagination: that the Republic, the guarantor of democratic values, must be protected both from its own intermittent weaknesses and from those who would seek to exploit them. Past battles in its name, if not explicitly evoked in the text, were doubtless in the author's mind: the pattern of events offers several parallels with February 1934, while the spirited camaraderie of Roger's barricade surely owes something to the Paris insurrectionists of 1832 as celebrated in Les Misérables<sup>64</sup>.

What the author was not particularly aiming to represent in his depiction of political street-fighting was 'les événements de mai'<sup>65</sup>: the specific cause of the crisis in Comme un frère bears no relationship to the key factors at work in 1968 and the development of the situation is likewise quite dissimilar. On the other hand, Vercors's interest in, and where appropriate sympathy for, the politically committed young is much in evidence in the novel. It is through Louis and his girl-friend Elisabeth, or 'Lisbeth', that the world of idealistic, romantic, but sometimes less than reassuring young revolutionaries is explored. While Roger accumulates wealth, influence and love-affairs in his chosen sphere<sup>66</sup>, Louis is drawn by Lisbeth into the administration of a small, avant-garde troupe of young radical actors. After initial hesitation, and while still to some extent

reserving his own political position, Louis has come to admire the young actors' spirit and dedication and the solidarity and interdependence that they have developed as a team. Now, however, the troupe is faced with the demolition of its premises, the overmighty 'promoteurs' of course being the villains of the scenario. A sympathetic member of the 'Conseil de Paris' warns Louis that he can expect no sympathy from that body: 'Vos spectacles sont "gauchistes", disons pour simplifier. Qui voulez-vous, ici, qui s'intéresse à votre avenir? Vous n'aurez pas l'appui même des communistes. Les autres n'en parlons pas. Et puis vos promoteurs sont financés par une banque trop influente.' (CF p 78) But public opinion might be stirred enough to achieve a stay of execution and Soubreny, 'un "gauchiste" ... spécialiste des mouvements d'opinion' (CF p 79), is accordingly consulted.

What follows is a cameo, somewhat stereotyped as befits its subject, of the outlook and lifestyle of a young left-wing activist of the period in question. The décor in Soubreny's room - in his lawyer-father's apartment - is conventionally progressive, with posters of Einstein, Dylan and the inevitable 'Che', whose portrait at that time hung like a modern Jesus Christ on the walls of students' bedrooms everywhere. And Soubreny, earlier alerted to the situation, has not wasted time in contacting the famous intellectuals who might be relied on to rally to the cause. Vercors, like Hitchcock in his brief walk-on film appearances, here wryly allots himself a small mention in the text:

J'ai déjà Jean Rostand, dit Soubreny. Barrault est absent, j'espère avoir Chéreau ou Planchon. J'attends les réponses de Kastler et de Jacques Monod. Sartre et Simone bien entendu, Aragon je ne veux pas, peut-être Clavel et Vercors mais c'est moins important. (CF p 94)

Having thus permitted Soubreny to damn him with faint praise, Vercors induces the thoughtful and honest Louis to speculate in turn on the

young revolutionary's moral integrity. The use of a wealthy and reactionary father's home rather than more basic accommodation in a proletarian neighbourhood, the hint of ruthlessness, seem to Louis to justify his own refusal to commit himself in the ideologically expected fashion:

.... ce mépris à l'égard d'une certaine pureté, ce rejet de toute conscience morale, l'honneur tourné en risée, cela déjà une fois a produit Hitler et Staline. Je n'aimerais pas voir ce genre de gars-là accéder à un pouvoir sans frein. Quelle forme de révolution nous imposeraient-ils? Par quels moyens? Je ne me sentirais pas la tête solide sur les épaules...  
(CF pp 95-96)

What we see here, of course, with all due allowance for the fictional transposition, is Vercors's long-standing moral concern over ends and means being applied to the ferment of left-wing ideologies that emerged in the 1960's<sup>67</sup>. At the same time, adding further realism and immediacy to the text, other luminaries in the politico-intellectual gallery receive more or less brief mention: Halimi, Krivine and Rocard, to say nothing of Trotsky and Mao. Help for the theatre's cause is also sought from Combat and Le Monde, but both of these newspapers fail to follow up the story, despite the interest of the individual reporters briefed by Louis. The reason, it is clear, is the fear of losing the advertising revenue from the developers' consortium, and Louis thus learns, more effectively than through 'des tonnes de propagande marxiste' (CF p 97), the limits to press freedom in the capitalist system.

Louis's story, in fact, is that of a political education. If he jibs at the ideological pressure from Soubreny, he is a willing enough pupil of Liabeth. She matches him in the honesty with which she tries to evaluate political issues and the choices that had to be made. Keen to join the Communist Party before she was twenty, she had been in turn inspired, then deterred, by successive events in 1968: 'Elle

allait le faire, d'enthousiasme, pendant le "Printemps de Prague", et puis mai 68 l'avait remplie d'un trouble que l'invasion du 21 août, en Tchécoslovaquie, avait porté à son comble.<sup>68</sup> (p 61). The conservatism of the PCF, and the Soviet boot on the 'human face' of Czech communism, had thus left her with no precise political 'home'. But her continuing idealism and indignation over social injustice gradually pervade Louis's own comfortable middle-class outlook. She ensures, too, that his assumptions are challenged by the evidence of his own eyes; thus, on some free days, she takes him on a bus-ride 'dans quelque morne et sordide banlieue, afin qu'il constatât de ses yeux comment vivaient les ouvriers' (CF p 61) (but where, however dispriting the environment, it must be assumed that people's income was rather higher than that indicated in Colères).

Louis's freshly-trained social conscience is eventually tested over the matter of the theatre's premises. A proposal is made by the developers that a warehouse in the 15th arrondissement, at present occupied by some thirty families of immigrants, should be taken over by the troupe; failing which the warehouse will be demolished for immediate redevelopment and the squatter families left on the streets. Appalled though he is by the latter's living-conditions, Louis realises that the warehouse provides them with essential shelter, and he refuses to proceed with the developers' proposal. Apart from Lisbeth, however, who warmly approves of his stance, the troupe decide to go ahead with the move - priority must be given to the long-term political end that they are serving through their art and, after all, 'on ne fait pas d'omelette sans casser des oeufs ...' (CF p 139). Louis and Lisbeth thereupon leave the troupe and organize a campaign of 'action syndicale' on the squatters' behalf. Louis finds complete fulfilment in this

activity (eventually crowned with success) and wins general respect among the activists of the 'Union des Travailleurs Confédérés' and their allies. He begins now to display the power to persuade and command others that has enabled his 'twin' Roger to succeed in his entirely different sphere. The latter's career in the art-dealing world and in banking has been detailed as fully as Louis's more altruistic work; but for the present purpose it is perhaps sufficient to say that Roger has seen at close quarters the profiteering and hard-faced practices of the developers and their financial associates and has not been loath to involve himself in and benefit from their activities and life-style.

However, having been elected as a député in the liberal centre-ground of politics, and after an initial period of intoxication over his newly-won status and influence, Roger finally awakens to the futility of his hitherto wholly self-centred pursuits. The undemocratic methods being adopted by the Interior Minister<sup>69</sup> to counter all opposition convinces Roger of 'le danger croissant d'uredictature' (CF p 166); and along with his new-found 'haine du despotisme', he conceives a growing disgust towards the men in power who are responsible for the accumulating scandals and corruption. Through Roger's eyes, Vercors now draws up a most damning indictment of France's rulers (not of the Republican institutions, however, nor, since this is the post-gaullien era, of the man who created them), who are allowing the country to fall more and more prey to 'les profiteurs du régime' and 'les forcenés de l'armement' (CF p 166). The formers' philosophy has led to :

...la faire d'empoigne, avec toutes ses malversations. Scandales immobiliers, scandales financiers, scandales d'une industrie dévorante et polluante, d'une police protégeant le proxénétisme, de pompiers incendiaires... (CF p 167)

The list continues, and it might be objected that Vercors is here in danger of erring by excess - or perhaps, in view of the last of his charges quoted above, of not seeing the wood for the trees. Possibly, in the context of the political melodrama that he was now embarked upon, this exaggeration or at least intensification of some of the social phenomena of the time need not be too closely dwelt upon. On the other hand, there can be no doubting the conviction with which he finally reasserts the positive, enduring values of the Republic, with Roger, full of 'ardeur républicaine', and Louis, at the head of the union forces, as his main standard-bearers. The soul of Roger-Louis Touhoine, divided for a time between two different individuals, thus prompts each of them to react in identical fashion at this decisive moment of experience. Vercors has made his political points, and it only remains for him finally to draw the psychological conclusions from the narrative fantasy on which the novel is built:

... même dédoublée, et même conduite par les vicissitudes sur deux versants opposés de la vie, cette âme n'en était pas moins personnelle et unique, faite des mêmes gènes, des mêmes atavismes, du même environnement d'enfance, de la même éducation et des mêmes lectures; et son noyau inaltérable, comme le diamant résiste aux acides, était plus fort que tous les hasards. (CF pp 184-5)

And so finally, with Le Tigre d'Anvers, to the present. Apart from a few changes of name, location and narrative detail, the story is essentially a reworking of Les Armes de la Nuit and La Puissance du Jour. Pierre Cange's experiences as a prisoner, his moral paralysis and only gradual return to normality are all basically as recounted in the earlier novels<sup>70</sup>. Pierre's eventual mission to Spain is replayed, albeit in considerably more detail, and Broseard (sic) makes the same escape to Indochina where he suffers the same mysterious death. As in La Puissance

du Jour, the record of Cange's 1946 reunion with his Resistance comrades is largely transmitted through his own diary entries; and as far as the political content is concerned, there are few changes to note between the two accounts. The poet Estévil (the erstwhile Saturnin) is shown to be undergoing the same tribulations as in the earlier version, and the young militant Manéon is still just as severe in judging his entry into the Party. However, Cange's reference to Manéon's views here bears one interesting new notation: '(Manéon) m'explique ... que la morale du parti (??) étant strictement de responsabilité, dès le premier accroc, inévitable, à la morale de pureté, Estévil claquera la porte ...' (IA pp 174-5) - the ironic double question-mark inserted here having its own retrospective significance no doubt in the light of Vercors's long relationship with the Party. Beyond the pages of the diary, however, there are further and more substantial embroideries on the original text. Pierre's fiancée Nicole, for example, one evening in the early post-war period, finds herself in the 'Coupole':

... à peine entrée elle tombait sur un groupe familial, celui des poètes Eluard et Aragon, Elsa, Marcenac, Tristan Izara. Estévil était avec eux, qui la fit assaillir presque de force. Le débat était animé. On discutait d'un texte contre la bombe atomique, que seul possédait encore le Pentagone. Un autre groupe en face, Cassou, Vercors, Farge, Guilloux, s'élevait contre des termes trop partisans. Le ton montait. Et déjà Aragon, blême de rage, froissait le papier en boule dans son poing, pour le jeter à la face de Guilloux dont le visage de Chouan, toujours plein d'ironie, lui semblait une provocation....(IA, pp 223-4)

It is interesting to see that in this small tableau Vercors assigns himself retrospectively one of the more moderate roles. Whatever his actual position at the time (which from the evidence of Plus ou moins Homme, for example, seems to have been rather less impartial than suggested here<sup>71</sup>) he apparently wanted among other things to dissociate himself symbolically from Aragon, whose intransigence over the CNE he found it hard to excuse.

But above all, Le Tigre d'Anversa has a new 'cadre' which distinguishes it from the earlier versions of the story. Its starting-point is the chance discovery, by a visitor to Brittany, of the gravestones of Pierre Cange and Nicole, drowned in a boating accident there some years earlier, in 1964. The chronological setting in which Cange's story is now retold to a new listener is, in other words, the 1980's. There are passing references to Chile and Lebanon and to the spread of Moslem fundamentalism. And in this context, the most significant new attitude is that expressed by the author's spokesman, Hector Lebraz, in talking about the infamies of the Nazi tyranny. Their systematic violence to the human spirit can duly be categorized as 'crôment pangermanique' (IA p 90); but such oppression could well be repeated at any time in the future - and might come from any source: '... demain, pourquoi pas? .. panislamique, ou panslave, panmixique, que sais-je? (IA p 90). Fanaticism in any cause, then, can now be perceived as the greatest begetter of evil, and Vercors accordingly seems ready to set Nazism, for all the scale of its iniquities, against a broad historical background. This point, indeed, is more explicitly developed a little later in the conversation:

...le programme du fanatisme nazi était de partager l'espèce en maîtres et en bétail. Comme, il y a peu, le fanatisme des rouges, khmers ou chinois, voulaient la partager en ouvriers et en parasites. Comme aujourd'hui le fanatisme islamique veut la partager en intégristes et en sacrilèges... (IA p 103)

That Lebraz is speaking here in the author's name is clear enough from Vercors's Foreword, 'au lecteur'. In briefly explaining why he has chosen to rewrite the story of Pierre Cange, he refers to the basic moral themes that he hopes to 'sauver de l'oubli'. And as for the forty or so years that have elapsed since the original publications, they have, he feels, made little difference to the threats that the human species poses to itself: '... la violence du monde, au cours de ces huit

lustres, n'a pas cessé, hélas, d'en confirmer (de ces thèmes) la constante et terrible actualité'. Humanity's irreducible unity, therefore, based on a common physical, psychological and emotional heritage, continues to be Vercors's most positive postulation. This unity is still ostensibly denied by the division between the Western and Communist blocs; while on one side of this divide, Soviet policies, even if not dangerous in the same way as the fanaticisms cited above, have been the source of the utmost disillusionment for the author, as for his spokesman, Lebraz. 'A Prague, en Pologne, sans parler du goulag' (IA p 103), these policies had dealt heavy blows to the future of socialism and to the hopes of human brotherhood and unity that it seemed to represent.

It is apparent, in conclusion, that the political threads that can be traced through Vercors's fiction offer a vivid and, in themselves, reasonably full picture of the author's evolving outlook. An intense opposition to fascism and collaboration informed all his clandestine writing and much of what followed in the early post-war years. Thereafter his warm but often uneasy alliance with the Communists inspired several of the key episodes and relationships in the novels, and there are precise echoes, as we have seen, of the dilemmas that his fellow-travelling commitment frequently entailed. The use of torture and other brutalities by the French in Algeria confirmed him in the awareness that 'tiger' propensities lurk in men of all nationalities; while in the fundamentalisms and other fanatical movements of recent years he has seen a potential threat to individual rights and to justice that could even match Nazi oppression. To offset this premonitory note in Le Tigre d'Anvers, Pierre Cange's proclamation of mankind's intrinsic unity - on the basis of our common past as meta-

physical rebels - reiterates the author's broad, non-ideological prescription for international understanding, while Soviet-style communism (of the pre-Gorbachov variety, at least) is as firmly rejected in this latest novel as it is in Les Nouveaux Jours and other non-fictional texts of the 1970's and 1980's. As for the younger generation, in whom the author of Sens et non-sens de l'Histoire somewhat conventionally invests his hope for the future<sup>72</sup>, the picture that is offered in the novels, even in respect of youthful revolutionaries, is realistically variegated. The idealism of Pélion, Bala or Elisabeth is counterbalanced by the hollowness of Frédéric Legrand, the opportunism of the young theatre troupe or Soubreny's unscrupulousness; and it is indeed a new kind of radical commitment, humanitarian and ideologically unespecific in orientation, that seems to win the author's approval at the very end of Comme un Frère, thereby perhaps providing a fitting note on which to conclude this survey of his political fiction:

... Elisabeth reprit courage dans son vieux rêve d'aller partager la lutte, quelque part dans le monde, d'un peuple déshérité. Et c'est ainsi qu'un matin de septembre, ... avec un petit groupe de volontaires, on la vit s'embarquer vers des horizons de terres arides et de forêts impénétrables où quelques hommes déterminés peussent la vie et la mort aux seules balances de leur liberté.... (CF p 185)

NOTES ON CHAPTER SIX

1. Vercors's brief study of Randois in 'Désespoir est mort' offers some parallels with another portrayal of a haughty, upper-class French officer: de Boeldieu, played by Pierre Fresnay in Renoir's film La Grande Illusion (1937). This is set in the First World War, but the class-divisions with which it deals were of course highly relevant to post-Popular front France and in the French Army of 1939-40.

De Boeldieu's wearing of white gloves in a key scene of the film suggests a further link, this time with de Gaulle. Jean Lacouture, in his article 'Un façonneur de l'Histoire', Le Monde, Paris, 11/11/70, p 1, evokes de Gaulle's first appearance as a junior Minister on the steps of the Elysée, on June 5th 1940: '...visage morose, regard brûlant, gants blancs.' Randois, with 'son grand nez coupant' (SM p 8), was based on an officer whom Bruller had known in Besayes (see La Bataille du Silence, p 98); but whether deliberately or by coincidence, his portrayal in 'Désespoir est mort' offers strong associations with these two other images of military stoicism and independence.

2. In Moi, Aristide Briand, Vercors makes Briand himself express contempt and hostility towards Doumer: '... cette espèce de fruit sec barbu, pompeux et hypocrite nommé Doumer.' (MAB p 150). Briand's feelings were of course to be compounded when Doumer, to general surprise, secured the Presidency of the Republic over him in 1931. Briand's superiority can be more objectively attested by reference once more to Alfred Cobban: 'Briand had hoped to crown his long service to the state with the highest of its offices. Once again, the most distinguished was rejected...' Cobban, op.cit., p 137.
3. The incident in question is related in 'L'Dubli', first published in Le Parisien libéré, 30/11/44, and reproduced in Le Sable du Temps and Les Pas dans le Sable. A reference to the episode is also to be found in La Bataille du Silence, p 334. On a train journey from Paris in June 1944 the author had seen Jewish deportees passing in a barred carriage, en route for Germany. At the next station, however, the prisoners' train had stopped: 'Comme suite de quelque tentative de fuite, ou de communication, on avait fait descendre et se dévêtir une douzaine de Juifs, et on les faisait courir nus à grands coups de cravaches'. This brief later account does not mention the bystanders who had laughed (and who had, in any case, been in the minority); but that detail, and Vercors's fear that his fellow-passengers would all too soon forget both the brutality and the laughter, were the main focus of the 1944 text.
4. 'Meurtre sans importance', written in 1946-7, was first published in 1948 as the sixth story of Les Yeux et la Lumière.

5. Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Sartre sur Sartre', Le Nouvel Observateur, Paris, 26/1/70, p 40.

Paul-Marie de la Gorce, in L'Après-Guerre: Naissance de la France moderne, Paris, Grasset, 1978, has an interesting section (p 196 ff) on the experience of those returning from the Resistance, their frequent sense of anticlimax and disillusionment and the difficulties of readjustment. See also note 12 in the present chapter.

Post-Liberation adjustment to political realities is explored on a larger fictional canvas in Simone de Beauvoir's Les Mandarins (1954).

6. Apart from this reference (PJ p 194), 'le fatum' is evoked by Vercors in the essay 'Oedipe et Cimourdin' (PS pp 183-193), where the author compares Hugo's protagonist favourably with Oedipus, who failed to rebel against the decree of fate (equated with Man's inherited condition, ever subject to Nature's tyranny). Oedipus and 'le fatum' are similarly referred to in Sens et non-sens de l'Histoire (p 72); whereas in the preface to Oedipe ou le fatum, his theatrical adaptation from Sophocles of the Oedipus tragedy (performed at La Rochelle in 1967 and Paris in 1970), Vercors states that he has revised his unfavourable view of Oedipus. There was considerable evolution in Sophocles' protagonist between Oedipus Rex and Oedipus at Colonus - from the character who submits and accepts to the one who

... ne subit plus la fatalité et ne la fait plus subir aux autres avec une obéissance stupéfiée; il choisit, il lutte, il raisonne, il est homme enfin.  
Vercors, Destin ou Liberté (Oedipe et Hamlet), Paris, Perrin, 1970, pp 23-4.

7. The most obvious examples from these authors' work would probably be Jean Blomart in Simone de Beauvoir's Le Sang des autres, Jean Tarrou in Camus's La Peate, and Hugo Barine in Sartre's Les Mains sales.
8. The tone of this, especially the reference to 'moines', recalls one of Hoederer's replies to Hugo in Les Mains sales: '... pourquoi viens-tu parmi nous? La pureté, c'est une idée de fakir et de moine.' Jean-Paul Sartre, Les Mains sales, Paris, Gallimard, coll: 'Folio', 1974, pp 193-4.
9. Altman reveals his antisemitism and readiness to compromise with Vichyite elements much more explicitly in Le Tigre d'Anvers: for example, he starts to stock and sell books by Glono, Montherlant and Céline in his bookshop very soon after the end of the War. (IA pp 189-190)
10. Vercors's arguments with the Communists over moral absolutes of this sort are to be found in Plus ou moins Homme and are mainly discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.

11. Saint-Sernin is the character's real name, 'Saturnin' his Resistance identity. The 'Saint' added to 'Saturnin' gives the name of an established Hérault wine - was this, possibly, in Vercors's mind at the time he wrote the novel? In Le Tigre d'Anvers the names of this character, like some others, are changed: to Estévil (real name) and 'Scipion' (nom de guerre).
12. Potrel, for example claims that 'on se fout pas mal de nous, les résistants' (PJ p 237); while the narrator, undoubtedly reflecting the author's own feelings at the time, talks of the loss of friendships that he has just endured:

Sur les cinq grands amis que j'avais, deux sont morts, deux autres m'ont trahi. Ce qui est pire encore, l'un d'eux s'est trahi lui-même: ces piètres lauriers sur ma pauvre tête, il ne me les pardonne pas. Lauriers empoisonnés: de tous les êtres que j'aimais, personne ou presque qu'ils n'aient plus éloignés que rapprochés de moi. (PJ p 209)

The two principal friendships lost for Vercors were, of course, Diego Broasat (through death) and Pierre de Leacure (by betrayal). The various other blows of this kind that he suffered within a few years of the War's end are detailed in Les Nouveaux Jours.

13. This is intended as a brief allusion to the difficulties experienced by those tarred with the 'progressive' brush in obtaining visas for entry to the United States. Vercors himself was to encounter the problem in 1960 (see Chapter Two, note 30, and for full details, Les Nouveaux Jours pp 353-5), and for this reason he had to postpone a planned lecture tour of the United States and Canada.
14. There are perhaps faint echoes in Péllion's situation of the story of Tom Joad in The Grapes of Wrath, and it is conceivable that the title of Vercors's novel derives from the French version of Steinbeck's work, Les Raisins de la Colère. Vercors records reading this novel in 1939, at the same time as he read Saint-Exupéry's Terre des Hommes (this latter text is definitely echoed in Colères - see Chapter Three, note 43), and 'Les Editions de Minuit' published Steinbeck's Nuits noires clandestinely. On the other hand, Vercors was disappointed by the American author's attitude during a visit he made to Paris after the Liberation (see Les Nouveaux Jours, p 104), and he may have had no intention of paying him an indirect compliment.
15. For further reference to the author's appreciation of rank-and-file militants' sincerity and integrity, see Les Nouveaux Jours, p 313:

... la sincérité de l'humble communiste, de la 'piétaille' qui, sans aucun profit, sacrifie son temps et sa vie à des tâches et des corvées sans gloire, cette sincérité-là je ne peux pas la mettre en doute. Ces communistes de l'ombre, je les aime trop, même quand ils se trompent - même quand les trompe - pour jamais leur tourner le dos.

In the context of Pélion's discussion with Mirambeau, it is interesting to note the ironic reference to the latter as 'une potiche' (Col p 49) - i.e. before the author applied his celebrated phrase 'une potiche d'honneur' to himself in P.P.C.

16. Pélion's criticism of Egmont is also referred to in Chapter Three of this thesis. Egmont, like Vercors, had become exasperated by, among other things, the Party's practice of character-assassination whenever it quarrelled with an associate. In real life this was illustrated by the Party's treatment of Jean Cassou in 1949 - see Chapter Four, note 43. In Vercors's fiction it recurs in the case of Le Prêtre when he falls out with the Communists after the War in Le Périphe (to be discussed later in this Chapter). In Colères, Pélion's dismissive words about Egmont (Col pp 53-5) recall Lucien's slighting reference to another ex-Communist, Glottin, in Elise ou la vraie vie:

'Ces gens-là, quand ils ont quitté le Parti, ils ne sont plus rien. C'est le Parti qui les vertèbre. Sortis de là, ils reviennent à leur état d'ectoplasmes.'  
Claire Etcherelli, Elise ou la vraie vie, Paris, Denoël, Coll: Folio, 1972, p 173.

(There is a further reference to this novel in connection with Colères later in the present Chapter).

17. 'Les Problèmes des écrivains français' is in P.P.C., pp 87-97. The name of the Soviet writer whose comment (about Les Mandarins) prompted Vercors's reflections is not mentioned. The reason why the article was not published in Moscow (as briefly mentioned in Chapter Four of this thesis) was that the Soviet authorities wanted to suppress a reference to Beria in the text. Vercors agreed, but explained that the article was thereby diminished for him:

... ma démonstration tronquée n'est plus tout à fait honnête, car elle semble admettre implicitement que de telles erreurs ne peuvent naturellement pas se produire en régime socialiste ... (PPC p 100).

Despite his consent to the omission of Beria's name, the article never appeared in the Soviet review. (See also note 20).

18. Jean-Paul Sartre, Qu'est-ce que la Littérature? Paris, Gallimard, coll: 'Idées', 1982, p 206.
19. Philip Thody, Albert Camus, 1913-1960, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1964 edn. p 174.
20. It may well have been the expression of reservations such as this, however mildly phrased, that explains why the article did not appear in Moscow even with the omission of Beria's name. A separate

point to be made is that until the publication of this text in P.P.C., Vercors seems to have abstained from divulging this particular reservation to his French readership.

21. There is a corollary to this: Pélion's assailants will escape further judicial attention. The 'CRS' receive critical treatment also in Comme un Frère, which is discussed later in the present chapter.
22. Mirambeau's playful allusions to 'metaphysics', the taboo area in rationalist debate, were referred to briefly in Chapter Three.
23. The 'SMIG' was introduced for industrial workers in 1950. The hardship among the lower-paid that led to its introduction did not, of course, disappear overnight, and indeed, as Rioux points out (op.cit. vol II, p 237), the inadequacy of the rate that it prescribed was a source of grievance in the mid-1950's. There were, too, serious inequalities in income and wealth-distribution in France throughout the 1950's and 1960's even while the country as a whole was passing through an unprecedented period of rapid growth: R. W. Johnson, for example, shows that French society has been one of the most unequal in Europe during most of the post-war period (see The Long March of the French Left, London, Macmillan, 1981, chapter 7). Nevertheless, as Rioux also indicates (op.cit. vol II, p 237), the income of the great majority of industrial workers in the mid-1950's was, if not generous, at least clearly above the SMIG level. His analysis also reveals that in 1956, the year of publication of Colères, real income per head rose by almost 6% across the working population as a whole, and that in the consumer boom that was then getting under way, the working class - starting admittedly from a low base - was registering the most rapid increase in the purchase of household goods and cars: 'cette consommation de prestige social et d'utilité domestique est résolument populaire.' (op.cit., vol II, p 248).

It seems, therefore, that while the standard of living was still low in some sectors of French society (for example, among unskilled labourers and agricultural workers), and though the average income of industrial employees was more modest in France in the 1950's than in many neighbouring countries, the stark, all-embracing poverty that Vercors depicts among the factory-workers of Chaulieu is, in the context of 1956, something of an exaggeration.

24. Roger Veillard's 325000 France was first published in 1955, the year before Colères.
25. J. E. Flower, Literature and the Left in France, London, Methuen (University Paperbacks) 1985, p 168.
26. For an analysis of Dutouvet's role and attitudes, see Chapter Three.

27. While Vercors's depiction here still seems unduly negative, it is true, according to R. W. Johnson, that the French educational system has not greatly encouraged social mobility: 'A study undertaken in the early 1960's showed that while 58.5 per cent of the children of higher executives and liberal professionals went to university, the same was true for only 1 per cent of the children of industrial workers and only 0.7 per cent of those of farm workers'. (Johnson, *op.cit.*, p 123).
28. The dichotomy suggested here between Zola's humanitarianism and the naturalist novel may to some extent be challenged in respect of L'Assommoir and Germinal - as J. E. Flower, in Literature and the Left in France, (Chapter 1) demonstrates.

Some of the references to Zola in Vercors's writings are as follows:

Plus ou moins Homme, pp 134-5;

Les Pas dans le Sable, pp 169-170 (in relation to the Henri Martin affair);

P.P.C., pp 48, 51, 54, etc. One brief example here, referring to the intellectual's duty of constant vigilance (on both sides of the Iron Curtain) is typical of most:

'Le frein, le seul, quand le pouvoir aveugle un peuple trop confiant, c'est Emile Zola.' (PPC p 54)

29. Les Pas dans le Sable, pp 183-193, also referred to in note 6 in the present chapter and in Chapter Two, note 6. Vercors's tribute to Hugo at the time of this anniversary was only one of many by former Resistance writers and by those in the progressive camp. See, for example, in successive issues of Les Lettres françaises of February 1952 major front-page articles such as 'Victor Hugo et la littérature de Résistance' by Pierre Paraf, and 'La Gloire de Victor Hugo', by Maurice Rostand, (both 21/2/52); 'Avez-vous lu Victor Hugo?' by Aragon, and 'Victor Hugo et le fantastique social' by Pierre MacOrlan, (both 28/2/52).
30. Les Misères was, in fact, the title Hugo originally intended for his novel. The revolutionary associations of Cloots's and Pélion's names are other possible links with Les Misérables, as discussed in Chapter Three, notes 22 and 23.
31. Vercors, Préface: Victor Hugo, Les Misérables, Paris, coll: 'Livre de Poche', 1985, pp xii-xiii.
32. These worthy bourgeois are perhaps reminiscent of Sartre's 'salauds' in La Nausée. However, Vercors's view of the bourgeoisie was much less intensely, indeed viscerally, hostile than that of Sartre, who was attacking the citizens of Bouville before he ever became politically committed. One of Vercors's most direct statements on his own position is to be found in La Bataille du Silence, referring to the disaster of 1940:

J'étais moi-même bourgeois, fils de bourgeois, je ne m'étais jamais senti solidaire de la classe à laquelle j'appartenais, mais son déshonneur m'atteignait malgré moi (BS p 95).

(See the very similar declaration by the narrator in Monsieur Proust, pp 184-5).

33. This is fully discussed in J. E. Flower, op.cit. Chapters 5 and 6.
34. 'Vercors répond à André Wurmser', Les Lettres françaises, Paris, 4-11/11/54, p 1. Reproduced in P.P.C. pp 242-249. Les Lettres françaises provided a warm introduction to Vercors's reply, referring to him as 'l'un des plus chers interlocuteurs qu'il (Wurmser) pût choisir', 'un des bons Français de notre temps', and stating that the discussion was between 'un grand écrivain et ... celui qui se réjouit de lui avoir donné prétexte d'écrire cette réponse'.
35. In fact this was not quite the author's last published word on the subject, since, in response to further comments from Wurmser, he wrote a brief reply which stated rather more directly, if still tactfully, his fear that

.... une terreur inverse ne se soit quelque peu exercée et ne puisse encore s'exercer autour du réalisme-socialiste; et que certains écrivains n'osent pas laisser en toute liberté s'exprimer leur tempérament, non certes par crainte de subir des sanctions ou simplement quelque ostracisme, mais par celle, très efficace, de perdre l'estime d'autres écrivains qu'ils admirent. (PPC p 250)

However, to Vercors's regret, as recorded later, this 'Note après une réponse' was not published by the newspaper. By the time he wrote P.P.C., in which these texts were included, he felt it appropriate to round the discussion off with some Villonesque stanzas, one of which, for example, contains the following lines:

Règles, consignes ou tabou,  
Anathème ou tradition,  
Ne prétez y attention.  
Ne plus l'inverse: injonctions,  
Rescrits, missions ni ukases,  
Totems desquels on vous écrase .... (PPC p 253)

36. This kind of comment was usually made irrespective of any consideration of socialist realism. See, for example, the review 'L'intellectuel et l'ouvrier' in L'Express, Paris, 13/7/56, p 14 (critic not named):

Tout y a été mis et tout y a été laissé. A la relecture de son manuscrit, on sent que l'auteur n'a fait aucun choix.

In general terms, Colères had a mixed reception from the critics. The right-wing and Catholic press was predictably hostile, while one of the most favourable reviews was that by Jacques Madaule in Esprit:

.... je suis sûr que ce livre mérite la plus méridienne attention ... le livre de Vercors ... a le mérite singulier de poser des questions que ne posent guère ses compagnons de lutte, et de les poser avec une très grande force parce qu'il les situe dans la trame même de la vie quotidienne ... Jacques Madaule, 'Vercors: Colères', Esprit, Paris, Oct 1956, pp 619-20.

37. J. E. Flower, p 185.
38. Les Petits Enfants du Siècle was first published in 1961 by Grasset. It won 'Le Prix du roman populiste'. Elise ou la vraie vie was first published in 1967 by Denoël and won the 'Prix Fémina' for that year.
39. Vercors was to establish the same dichotomy, in similar terms, in Assez Mentir! (1979), pp 28-9:
- Je sais, depuis trente-cinq ans, que l'humanité se partage en deux races. Celle qui se complait dans ses instincts, de haine pour l'autre et de violence; celle qui a dominé, étouffé ces instincts et lutte dans la dignité pour que le prochain soit heureux.
40. His other reason for this decision was of course to demonstrate to all the world that he had not turned his back on socialism or joined the camp of those right-wing critics, like Thierry Maulnier, who had exulted over the publication of P.P.C.
41. The words used by the child in Le Périphe are those of the five-year-old Bruller, as recollected in Ce que je crois: 'Bonzour, moi ze souis zouif!' (Per p 14, CJC p 12).
42. A similar account of schoolboy rivalry, also based on Vercors's experience, is to be found in the short story 'Sire', published in Sept Sentiers du Désert (1972) pp 109-158. The main character, who later adopts the name of 'Roy', shares several traits with Le Prêtre; and various details - an incident at school when he threatens the narrator's eyes with a pair of compasses, a business scandal, then an active and successful political career as a collaborationist Vichy politician - also link him with Bruller's acquaintance from 'L'Ecole Alsacienne', Jacques Benoist-Méchin, who attained high office under Pétain and pursued active cooperation with the Nazis. Vercors refers to Benoist-Méchin in Les Occasions perdues, pp 222, 245.

43. This meeting with Weygand is recounted in Les Occasions perdues, p 91.
44. See Les Nouveaux Jours, p 347.
45. One film-critic, for example, claimed that Mathieu is 'the character who comes closest to serving as a mouthpiece for Pontecorvo's view ... Again and again, he attests his respect for the men he is fighting, pronouncing to an astonished press what amounts to a funeral oration for his most illustrious victim...' (Jan Dawson, 'Battle of Ideas', The Listener, London, 25/3/71).
46. Louis de Villefosse, 'Vercors: Sur ce Rivage', Esprit, Paris, Oct. 1958, pp 546-7.
47. This was confirmed by Vercors in the interview included as Appendix II in this thesis (q.1).
48. A similar reference to 'Lord Jim's' exemplary sense of honour is made in Le Tigre d'Anvers, pp 100-1, where Hector Lebraz concludes that such scrupulous behaviour is a thing of the past.
49. This presumably alludes to torture carried out by French paratroops in Algeria. The method of torture mentioned here, coincidentally, bears some relationship to Prousthe's secret vice, which consisted of piercing girls' breasts with a gold pin.
50. The particular analogy with Bruller's pre-war absurdism is the link between Hector's 'seule loi morale', i.e. the avoidance of suffering, and Bruller's 'première règle, éviter de souffrir' (OP p 21).
51. This actual incident is recounted in Les Occasions perdues, p 101. The workers' rescue of Blum on this occasion possibly gave Vercors the idea for the way in which the factory-workers in Colères help Mirambeau to escape from 'les flics' after a disturbance caused by an 'agent provocateur'. (see Colères, pp 150-1).
52. See Appendix I for Vercors's comment to this effect in answer to a specific query.
53. Hector's successful publication was the study of an erotic frieze depicting Roman slaves disporting themselves in the full freedom of the December Saturnalia - whence the novel's title.

54. The short story 'Clémentine' was also published in the same volume as La Liberté de Décembre. It represents a reversion to Vercors's earlier preoccupations of wartime oppression, concentration-camp suffering and unpretentious heroism. Clémentine, a stereotypically golden-hearted whore, is deported by the Germans during the Occupation but shows remarkable resilience in helping others to survive the ordeal. On return to liberated France she works for a deportees' mutual-aid organization, then, falling on harder times, returns to the streets. At the end, through the words of a magistrate, the moral of the story is, perhaps superfluously, spelled out; there is no specific political partisanship, merely a broad reflection of the author's own disillusionment at the failure of post-war French society to match the altruism and devotion shown by many individuals in the worst moments of the recent past:

Une société qui ne sait pas, ne peut pas, ne veut pas  
obtenir le meilleur d'un être comme Clémentine et la  
jette aux orties, est bonne à jeter elle-même à la poubelle...  
(LD pp 250-1)

Clémentine's story was subsequently republished as 'Le Retour' in Sept Sentiers du Désert, pp 159-204.

55. Paul Coronel's long association with the author included a period helping to manage 'Les Editions de Minuit' in the financially-difficult post-war years (until the company was virtually taken over by the Lindon family in 1948). The novel Quota was originally drafted as a play and extracts from this version were published, under the heading 'Les Pléthoriens: une comédie inédite de Vercors et Coronel', in Les Lettres françaises, 7/12/50, pp 1, 4. Although this play, which was never performed, aimed to satirize the profit-motive, the target is less specifically American capitalism than in the novel; and one other notable detail is that Ésopositos was originally a hybrid character named 'Mac Hamisch'.
56. J-F Josselin, 'Coup de foudre et 400 coups', L'Express, Paris, 3-9/10/66, p 91.
57. See Les Nouveaux Jours, p 338.
58. André Wurmser, 'L'Homme, ce client', Les Lettres françaises, Paris, 13/10/66, p 6.
59. Ibid.

60. Further brief reference to Frédéric Legrand is to be found in Appendix II, q.2. There is also an allusion to 'faux révoltés' in 'Les Problèmes des écrivains français', where Vercors recalls the 'reactionary' writing which aped the style and form of the true rebels:
- 'D'ailleurs beaucoup de ces faux révoltés se prenaient à leur propre jeu, et se croyaient sincèrement des vrais.' (PPC p 93).
61. Significantly, the verses that so offended Frédéric's parents were found by accident in his room. Hence his departure 'in rebellion' from their house had not been by his own spontaneous choice.
62. There is reference in the novel (p 188) to Mendel as an associate of Korninsky. The industrial magnate François de Mendel is referred to briefly and critically in Le Silence de la Mer and in Les Occasions perdues, as mentioned in Chapter One.
63. Vercors's little joke. 'Touhaine' = 'Two-one', though he claims it to be a common surname south of La Vendée.
64. The action surrounding 'la barricade de la rue de la Chanvrière', with Enjolras leading the pro-Republican rioters, occupies the whole of the 'livre premier' of Part V of Hugo's novel, and it depicts the whole range of human emotions. Something of the same bustle and spirited comradeship is glimpsed, on a much smaller scale, at the 'Rue de Bourgogne' barricade in Comme un Frère.
65. As is noted in Chapter Five, Vercors's verdict on the 'événements de mai' was basically dismissive.
66. In describing Roger's activity as an art-dealer, Vercors gives a close account of his own successful process for making highly accurate reproductions of paintings and pastels - 'les callichromies'. He discusses his exploitation of this process in Les Nouveaux Jours, pp 203-4, 208, 219.
67. Nevertheless, as mentioned in Chapter Five, note 70, Vercors was prepared briefly to join the 'comité d'initiative nationale' formed by 'Le secours rouge' in 1970 to rally to the defence of radical left-wingers.
68. There is further reference to Elisabeth's political orientation, together with other aspects of the novel, in Appendix II, q.3.

69. The unnamed Interior Minister in the novel combines with the Préfet de Police to form a dangerous catalyst in the political crisis. In this respect, they play the same part as Jean Chiappe, the actual Paris Préfet de Police in the disturbances of January and February 1934. Just as Chiappe's dismissal by the Daladier government led to an intensification of violence from the Right, culminating in the major street-battle of February 6th, so, too, the removal of the Interior Minister and the Préfet de Police through Roger's campaign in the novel gives the signal for the final showdown between the extreme right-wing movement 'Ordre et Action' and the defenders of the Republic, including Louis and Roger, ('Résistance Démocratique').
70. One interesting change of detail in Le Tigre d'Anvers concerns the list of historic heroes that Cange recites to himself for inner reinforcement in the concentration-camp. In the 1986 novel the list has been shortened, excluding Lenin, Louis Blanc and Copernicus among others, substituting Saint-Just for Robespierre, and, in reflection of Vercors's recent interest in Tudor history (as in Anne Boleyn, 1985), now including the name of Thomas More.
71. See Chapter Four, note 29.
72. See the last paragraph of Sens et non-sens de l'Histoire:

Une jeunesse dont l'ardeur, certes, n'évitera pas non plus - nous le voyons bien et comment le pourrait-elle? - les excès ni les égarements; mais sans laquelle il ne serait ni changements ni progrès, autrement dit pas de marche en avant. Aussi est-ce en cette jeunesse, et en celles qui lui succéderont que l'auteur, avec sagesse, remet son espérance. (SNS p 188).

#### CONCLUSION

Despite the chronological gap between Le Silence de la Mer and Le Tigre d'Anvers, the two works share the same basic moral theme: resistance to Nazism for the sake of essential humanitarian and democratic principles. However, the values mutely represented by the narrator and his niece in Le Silence de la Mer are, in Le Tigre d'Anvers, both more broadly and more explicitly defined through the concept of 'la qualité d'homme'; just as the evil personified by Pierre Cange's Nazi tormentor and by the collaborationist préfet Brossard is seen in the later novel to be a permanent possibility in human nature, apt to emerge with renewed malignancy, like Camus's plague-bacillus, at almost any historical conjuncture. As was noted in Chapter Two of the present study, this universalising of the original moral struggle was already completed with the publication of 'La Sédition humaine' in 1949 and, in fictional terms, with La Puissance du Jour two years later; and accordingly, a review of the moral elements in Vercors's writings can identify two major phases - his search for a coherent philosophy of human value in the early post-war years, then the long subsequent period in which, with consistency and conviction, he has sought to expound and illustrate the basic notions of that philosophy.

However, in order fully to illuminate the development of the author's outlook, it is necessary also to take account of the attitudes that he held prior to his emergence as 'Vercors'; and in the pre-war context his own memoirs highlight the contradiction between his sense of the futility of human endeavour, of Man's insect-like insignificance, and his growing concern for the civilisation to which Nazism was both antithesis and threat. At a more personal level, there was his

surprising friendship with Diego Brosset, a confident man of action whose vitality and individualism drew Bruller out of his normal caution and gave him an inspiration he had hardly expected to find in human, let alone in military, companionship. Bruller's own contribution to France's military effort in 1939-40 was modest and was duly acknowledged to have been so; but Brosset's pre-war bearing and accomplishments had set a standard by which other officers could be judged, and, as 'Désespoir est mort' and La Bataille du Silence make plain, very few of those whom Bruller met seemed able to rise to the challenge.

The defeat of France's military and political leadership in 1940 was also a betrayal of the democratic values and liberties of which the French Republic had been one of the main bastions; and thus it was against both Nazi oppression and the reactionary anti-republicanism of Pétain that Bruller began to plan and carry out with others the intellectual resistance that his publications came to epitomize. He had realised that moral integrity could be further safeguarded in the long night of the Occupation if certain enduring but intangible values - those of balance and moderation, for example - could still be made to count, and it was to such values that 'Les Editions de Minuit' were intended to give expression. 'Le Nord', meanwhile, articulated the author's awareness of the contradiction between his recent philosophic negativism and his clandestine resistance initiative. This first essay represents Vercors's grasping of a firm ethical principle, derived from Kant, and it is from the starting-point of these ideas, subsequently explored through Les Yeux et la Lumière and 'La Sédition humaine', that he would develop his whole philosophy of 'la qualité d'homme' and 'la rébellion humaine'.

Against this pattern of a developing and then assured moral theory, however, must be set the rather more uneven tenor of the author's post-war political responses. Vercors has frequently stressed the interdependence between the moral and the political in his outlook, and it was on such a basis that he invariably proclaimed his support for progressive causes. In spite of which, of course, moral and political considerations could not always easily be reconciled, and the reality of political events and consequences created difficulties of judgement which, like other committed intellectuals of the period, he did not always find it easy to resolve. Many of the dilemmas were openly acknowledged by the author, while others seem sometimes to have emerged as uncertainties, hesitations or as unexpected shifts of emphasis in his stated positions.

One of Vercors's most urgent and consistent assertions throughout his period as a fellow-traveller was that the truth must be respected as a cardinal value in political discourse. It led him into the prolonged debate with communist spokesmen recorded in Plus ou moins Homme and P.P.C., and was an important theme in much of his fictional writing; and to this extent, the author's steadfast defence of his principles can only be regarded as admirable. However, it is easy in retrospect to see that through his basic sympathy for the Communists, and the wishful thinking that this engendered, he was not always as clear-sighted as he might have been in perceiving where, amid the conflicting claims and counter-claims of the moment, the truth actually lay. His refutation of Koestler's thesis in Darkness at Noon and of Kravchenko's charges in J'ai choisi la liberté must count as notable misjudgements on his part; and his continued support for the Communists over the

Slansky affair and over Hungary in 1956, while more cautious in the first case and critical in the second, seems similarly to have left him at the end voicing little more than pious hopes.

Vercors himself, however, would wish to be judged also on his reactions to the Rajk affair, and it is certainly true that in rejecting in Esprit the obvious fabrications in the Budapest trial, the author was presenting a strong public challenge to the official Party line. But his article in Esprit also reaffirmed in the clearest terms his continued endorsement of the communist cause; and however sincere this sympathy was, there was undoubtedly an element of political calculation in his reiteration of it at this particular juncture, as on various other occasions in the Cold War years. The calculation itself can be simply and briefly recapitulated: the Soviet Union represented the best hope for mankind's 'liberation', but while it remained the weaker of the two superpowers it needed to be given every moral support. It was a calculation which, even if it entailed stifling some of his doubts and thereby, arguably, ignoring at least part of the truth, Vercors still claims to have been an acceptably 'pure' one. After Rajk, as he recalls, (a time, admittedly, when he did not suspect more than a small fraction of Stalin's abuses of the revolution), he tried to desist from open criticism of the Soviet system:

.... car, en 1950 ... l'URSS, porteuse de nos espoirs, était trop fragile ... On a le droit de préférer une pureté intransigeante - mais irresponsable - à cette balance de ce qui est à dire ou à taire en vertu de la force ou de la faiblesse d'une nation, d'un régime. Mais c'est aussi une forme de pureté que d'être résolument avec son camp lorsqu'il est le plus faible. Ce fut la mienne, je pense. 1

Alongside this calculated 'strategic' support for the Soviet Union, of course, can be set Vercors's loyalty towards the leading French Commu-

nists, to whose defence he sprang when they came under governmental pressure in the early 1950's. His motivation here was obviously again partly ideological, but there seems, too, to have been a strong admixture of the personal loyalty towards friends which has always characterized him.

However, one further aspect of Vercors's reactions to the Rajk and Slansky affairs still needs briefly to be considered for the light it throws on the contrasting strands of the author's commitment. The fact is that, whether in attacking the deceptions in the Rajk case, or in striving to give the Soviet and Czech authorities the benefit of the doubt over Slansky, Vercors could be deemed to have lost sight of the many individuals - Rajk, Slansky and their fellow-'conspirators', together with their families - to whom a grave injustice was being done. No doubt Rajk himself had been a ruthless member of the Hungarian Party organization: nevertheless, he, like Slansky, Clementis and the other Czech defendants, was crushed on the basis of trumped-up charges and in complete disregard of human rights. Vercors might well argue that until 1953 or so his main concern was to defend the cause of the socialist revolution, and that thereafter, as Chairman of the CNE, he was above all anxious to keep open a channel of communication and dialogue between East and West. Nevertheless, even in these broad perspectives the interests of individuals like Rajk should not, perhaps, have been lost sight of as easily as they sometimes seem to have been in Vercors's polemical writings - particularly when Kant's postulation of the intrinsic value of every human being had been the foundation-stone of his whole moral theory. But in trying to respect both Kant's principle and the aims of the socialist regimes in the East, was not the author in any case seeking to embrace two quite incompatible

aspirations? One widely-held view of modern Communist societies would seem to suggest that he was:

Marx thought that the Socialist State would be the briefest and last phase of government, whereas it promises to be another extended phase in the history of government. It is a new form of the nation-state, another step in the dialectical process of history beyond the liberal national state. And in this Socialist State, the relationship between the individual and the State can be defined just as Hegel defined it. It is an end in itself, and the individual is a means to that end. 2

It is perhaps not surprising, in view of all this, that Vercors's political outlook reveals some uncertainty on the subject of revolution. As Ce que je crois and Sens et non-sens de l'Histoire make clear, the author retains a firm vision of the ideal socialist society that he would like to see established; but, like most of the progressive intellectuals and fellow-travellers discussed in David Caute's two studies, he has been, and remains, much less clear as to the steps by which such a society might be reached in the Western context. Even in the 1940's and 1950's, when he was championing the cause of the Soviet and Chinese revolutions, his respect for parliamentarians like Blum, Daniel Mayer and Mendès France indicated his attachment to some of the liberal democratic values nearer home; and a corollary to this can be seen in the unwillingness he expressed in 'Une Farce déshonorante' to accept the individual's total subjection to the will of the State. In fictional terms, Colères seemed to suggest that social progress in post-war France could be achieved through concerted but peaceful pressures, while Comme un Frère showed that the Republic's institutions were worth fighting for in the face of corruption and extremism.

On the other hand, Vercors still firmly rejects many of the social implications of capitalism (and a fortiori, one assumes, of the neo-liberal strategy of 'market forces'). He sees human society in general, like all other forms of energy and matter, moving slowly but inexorably through increasing degrees of organization, and this social perspective is one that, as a convinced socialist, he views in a wholly positive way. The contingent crises and haphazard injustices of capitalism must give way sooner or later to a more rational order: a progression which, even if it entails 'trial and error'<sup>3</sup> will, he hopes, be achieved without bloodshed. However if, as a last resort, 'quelque révolution violente' (CJC p 116) were envisaged as the means of ending the evils of exploitation, then this is a solution that the author would reluctantly endorse, provided that it was clearly aimed at greater social justice.

Apart from this, however, Ce que je crois, like Sens et non-sens de l'Histoire and Les Nouveaux Jours, gives little prominence, or credence, to the notion of revolution. Stalin's reign of terror and the much moderated but still extensive repression being exercised under Brezhnev could now clearly be seen as a betrayal of the revolutionary ideal of liberation (not least of intellectual liberation), and a similar aberration was being witnessed in the Cultural Revolution in China. Vercors, in short, seems to have suffered the same loss of belief in revolution as Jean-Marie Domenach has seen affecting French intellectuals in general:

Une pièce essentielle du dispositif intellectuel français a cassé: la Révolution, cette espérance du salut temporel que la France incarnait et qui, en 1917, s'était déplacée vers l'Est. Au fond, par-dessous la rupture avec le stalinisme, puis avec le progressisme, l'intelligentsia française en termine avec le travail du deuil de la Révolution de 1789. 4

One other date that Domenach does not mention in this particular context is, of course, 1968. Vercors clearly saw no true revolutionary potential in the students' uprising in that year, nor does he seem seriously to have entertained the idea that the French workers were ready to pursue anything more than their specific industrial demands. In the latter respect, therefore, if not in the former, he would have agreed with the 1968 analysis of Maurice Duverger, who suggested that a first revolutionary stage was reached by the young people, but that the workers' grievances by no means represented 'une volonté révolutionnaire'.<sup>5</sup> From which Duverger concluded - and there has been little evidence since then to challenge his view -

La masse de la population - prolétariat compris - s'intègre  
auffinement dans l'ordre établi pour n'en vouloir pas le  
renversement violent .... dans l'avenir prévisible, une  
révolution dans les pays surdéveloppés paraît encore  
improbable. 6

But 1968 for Vercors, as we know, was mainly significant for the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. This suppression of the one Communist regime that was ready to conduct a more open policy of information and democratic participation seems to have completed the author's disillusionment with the Soviet system. He has, however, lived on to see the introduction of Gorbachov's 'glasnost' and other reforms, and there can be no doubt that, like Alexander Dubcek himself, he will warmly have welcomed this major new departure in Soviet policy and the intriguing parallels it offers with the 'Prague Spring'. He will, too, share the general relief at the current East-West 'détente' and the increased opportunities for dialogue and cultural exchange that are now developing. On the other hand, as Le Tigre d'Anvers testifies, Vercors is aware of the deadly threats that men everywhere

continue to pose to their fellows, and he remains concerned that all the barriers of suspicion and fanaticism should be overcome.

The author's definition of mankind's common moral identity, that of 'l'homme rebelle', represents his own rational and constructive contribution to efforts for international understanding. It is Man's reason, developed over centuries through his unremitting struggle against the natural order, that has ensured the continuing progress of the human species and its ability to recover from the cataclysms of the past. But in any actual conflict, of course, whether its root causes be ideological, economic or religious, reason must share control with, and somehow accommodate, the surging force of emotion. Never perhaps has this been more intensely experienced than by the modern liberal conscience in striving to combat the worst of human wickedness. Vercors's own intended weapon to fight the Nazi Occupation was, after all, 'la pensée juste'; yet he soon found moral outrage submerging any sense of balance or objectivity, and similar emotions were undoubtedly reflected in his response to the tortures in Algeria. Certainly, these particular reactions cannot be considered to have diminished the record of his commitment. Vercors's passionate anger towards Nazism represents a wholly understandable, indeed indispensable, part of the humanist response to evil of such magnitude, and as a complement to cooler strategic thinking it made a necessary contribution to the effort of opposition and resistance. As a leading British politician wrote recently in the aftermath of a terrorist atrocity: 'I do not suggest that feelings are a proper basis for policy .... But thinking, like patriotism, is not enough. Whatever Descartes may have said, we only are what we feel as well as think.'<sup>7</sup>

It is, at the same time, important to discriminate; and Vercors's righteous indignation over Nazi crimes or the worst colonial excesses compares favourably, it might be thought, with the sectarian fervour with which, in seeking loyally to serve his chosen 'camp', he pursued certain ritual targets like Laniel, Mollet or American 'imperialism'. Some of Vercors's reactions as a fellow-traveller thus now appear, perhaps, rather predictable; but on the other hand, his attitude to de Gaulle did not wholly conform to more orthodox left-wing views of the General, and it is similarly interesting to observe the approval that he accords in Les Nouveaux Jours to de Gaulle's overall conduct of the Algerian conflict and to his efforts to preserve France's integrity and influence in the post-colonial era. As for European integration, Vercors was not too disturbed by de Gaulle's exclusion of Britain in the 1960's; for at that stage the Common Market of squabbling commercial interests bore little resemblance to the united Europe dreamt of by Briand, Schuman and Monnet, an aspiration to which the author himself could offer only encouragement tinged with scepticism: 'Y parviendra-t-elle un jour? L'espoir fait vivre'. (NJ p 433)

It is on such a note, indeed, that of Montaigne's 'sagesse', that Vercors concludes Les Nouveaux Jours and, with it, the first-hand account of his commitment. Without disowning the passion and partisanship of earlier years, the author has been content in the last part of his career to remain 'loin du tumulte et de l'agitation' (NJ p 434), tempted once more by the silence from which he first drew inspiration. Television, the modern platform of the literary celebrity, has never beckoned to him: 'Pas une fois en trente ans, pour aucun de mes livres, je n'y aurai paru dans les grandes émissions'. (NJ p 434).<sup>B</sup> In looking out at the political realities of the early 1980's, he condemns the

inequalities in Western society, but (since the book was completed before Gorbachov's accession to power) he is even more critical in viewing the societies of the Communist bloc. This pessimistic appraisal of the political scene both East and West contrasts rather paradoxically, it seems, with the more optimistic vision of progress towards universal economic and intellectual liberation that he offers in Le que je crois; although here, presumably, he would claim that his reflections refer to a much longer time-scale, and that the existing situation represents only a relatively brief stage in that progression.

Although Les Nouveaux Jours also reflects the author's satisfaction with much that he has achieved, it is the apparent pessimism of that final political survey that Pierre Daix highlights in his review of the book: 'Même si Vercors se veut partagé entre optimisme et pessimisme c'est ce dernier qui l'emporte...'<sup>9</sup>. But Daix has his more interesting observations to make, perhaps, in referring specifically to Vercors's literary career: he was, after all, in relatively close touch with the author for much of the post-war period. In particular, Daix makes the point that Vercors's writing, despite its qualities of craftsmanship and moral seriousness, remains in a marginal position in contemporary French literature:

... depuis plus de quarante ans, sauf rares accidents comme le triomphe international des Animaux dénaturés au début des années cinquante, on n'a plus cessé de le marginaliser. Notons que, marginal, Vercors l'a été depuis Le Silence de la Mer, qui n'appartenait à aucun genre reconnu ... Marginal, Vercors le fut de plus belle poursuivant des récits de moraliste au temps où ... il n'était plus de bon goût que l'absurde. Nul mieux que lui n'incarne en notre siècle la descendance du roman bref qui pourtant chez nous n'a plus besoin de lettres de noblesse depuis La Princesse de Clèves. 10

For all his achievements, therefore, Vercors has remained apart from

the literary mainsteam, a situation that has been reinforced to some extent by his natural predisposition: 'Son indépendance ombrageuse lui a fait franchir le seuil des quatre-vingts ans sans aucune de ces cérémonies protocolaires par lesquelles on sacre la longévité d'un auteur'<sup>11</sup>.

In his own review of Les Nouveaux Jours, it will be recalled, Fred Kupferman in L'Express had emphasised, certainly unduly, the element of grievance and settling of old scores to be found in the text<sup>12</sup>. But Kupferman, like Daix, takes the opportunity of assessing Vercors's career and of pointing out, once more, the disparity between the extent of his literary output and the undue specificity of his fame as 'l'auteur inoubliable du Silence de la Mer'. However, it is clearly to the whole of Vercors's writing that Kupferman refers in a bold concluding comment: 'De l'habit vert, promis à la Libération, il ne se soucie plus guère, mais, une telle oeuvre aurait dû depuis longtemps attirer l'attention du jury d'Oslo. Gide a eu le Nobel, puis Mauriac, puis Camus, puis Sartre, mais lui?'<sup>13</sup>. Leaving aside the reviewer's geographical vagary, his suggestion should not, perhaps, be too readily dismissed. If the Nobel prize is intended to be awarded to an author whose work embodies the humanist ideals that Alfred Nobel wished to encourage, then the moral purpose running through the main body of Vercors's work should earn serious consideration. But that moral purpose is, of course, by definition, motivation enough for a writer like Vercors to pursue his particular quest. The final words of this study, therefore, can quite appropriately be his own:

.... je veux pouvoir dire ce que je crois utile, même si c'est gênant pour les uns ou les autres. C'est souvent fatigant, déprimant, mais je ne vois pas d'autre rôle pour l'écrivain: être critique mais fidèle. Et j'ai foi: dans la volonté des hommes, à travers leurs plus sombres erreurs, de construire un univers humain. C'est pourquoi j'essaie de les y aider de mon faible pouvoir, et si j'y parviens tant soit peu, que demander de plus?  
(PPC pp 337-8)

----- THE END -----

NOTES ON CONCLUSION

1. Vercors, 'L'eau et le feu', Lettre internationale, Paris, no 2, Autumn 1984, 9-11 (p 11). This article discusses the controversy in the early 1930's when a disillusioned Panait Istrati published criticisms of the Soviet Union despite Romain Rolland's efforts to dissuade him.
2. Brian Redhead, Introduction to: Political Thought from Plato to Nato, London, BBC/Ariel Books, 1984, p 11.
3. '.... trial and error': Vercors uses this phrase in Appendix I in referring to his continued rejection of the 'contradictions du système capitaliste'.
4. Jean-Marie Domenach, 'La France, produit littéraire', L'Expansion, Paris, Oct/Nov 1985, p 435.
5. Maurice Duverger, 'Une Révolution impossible', Le Monde, Paris, 12/7/68, pp 1, 7 (p 7).
6. Ibid.
7. Roy Hattersley, 'Endpiece', The Guardian, London, 27/8/88, p 19. Hattersley's article refers to the IRA bomb attack on a soldiers' bus in Ballygawley a week earlier.
8. However, there have, of course, been various references on French television at different times to the intellectual Resistance and to Le Silence de la Mer. Furthermore, in the Spring of 1980, Jean Kerchbron made Vercors's 1979 récit Le Piège à loup into a television film. This short novel has a thematic link with the Occupation, although the story is set in the 1970's. It concerns an eighteen-year-old girl living with her father and aunt in an isolated woodland house, and the dramatic effect produced by a young man's arrival on the scene. There are no further parallels with Le Silence de la Mer, however - the father is revealed as having been an active collaborator and 'délateur'. As he himself says, Vercors has not appeared personally on television in studio literary discussions or other 'grandes émissions'. But consequently he has not been guilty of the charge, made by Jean-François Revel against contemporary intellectuals and authors, of simplifying or distorting their ideas

'pour "bien passer au tube"'. Revel makes this criticism after accusing intellectuals of both Left and Right in the 1930's and 1940's of being eager to promote one form or other of totalitarianism: 'L'intellectuel ne détient de par son étiquette aucune prééminence dans la lucidité...'. Vercors is not mentioned by name in this indictment, but Mauriac, Orwell, Koestler and Camus, among others, are given credit for a really authentic antifascism. (Jean-François Revel, 'Intellectuels ... en jugement', Le Point, Paris, 4/5/87, pp 32-3).

9. Pierre Daix, 'Vercors et la révision de l'histoire', Le Quotidien de Paris, 3/7/84, p 23.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid. Despite the lack of 'cérémonies protocolaires', one tribute that Vercors was presumably gratified by on the occasion of his eightieth birthday was that paid by Pierre Seghers, also in Le Quotidien de Paris. Seghers recalls the inspiration he drew from Le Silence de la Mer in the War, extols the story's qualities, and addresses the following remarks directly to Vercors:  

Vous venez d'avoir 40 ans. Pour moi et pour bien d'autres vous êtes né avec Le Silence de la Mer. Bon anniversaire, Vercors! ... j'aime les artisans. J'aime ceux pour qui l'action est la soeur du rêve'. Vous avez été l'un des meilleurs. Pierre Seghers, 'Billet à Vercors', Le Quotidien de Paris, 2/3/82, p 23.
12. Fred Kupferman's review, 'Les Rancœurs d'Alceste', L'Express, Paris, 24/8/84, pp 50-1, was referred to in the Introduction to this thesis.
13. Ibid.(p 51).

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Appendix I

Letter from Vercors to Russell Barnes, dated  
28 January 1984, answering a number of specific  
questions on his moral and political attitudes  
and on various literary texts.

(Adresse d'Hiver, jusqu'à Pâques):

22, QUAI DES ORFÈVRES, 75001 PARIS

Le 28 Janvier 1984.

Mr. Russell Barnes,  
24 Ellis Road  
Bedford MK41 9DW  
G.B.

Monsieur,

Votre lettre du 10 janvier m'attendait au retour d'un voyage à l'étranger.

Vous trouverez la réponse à la plupart de vos questions dans le IIIe tome de mes "Cent Ans d'Histoire de France" - LES NOUVEAUX JOURS - qui doivent théoriquement paraître au début du printemps.

Voici quelques réponses en attendant:

- Politiquement plus près de Sartre que de Camus? Oui, sous réserve que les rapports de Sartre avec le marxisme (cf. ses efforts plus ou moins heureux pour accorder le marxisme et l'existentialisme) étaient beaucoup plus contigus que les miens.

- Plus près de Camus sur les principes moraux? Oui, sous réserve de son entorse avouée à ces principes quand il a déclaré qu'entre sa mère (l'Algérie) et la Justice, il choisissait sa mère.

Scn "Je me révolte, donc nous sommes" est plutôt l'inverse de ma notion de rébellion, puisqu'elle signifie: l'existence de/autres hommes est nécessaire pour pouvoir se révolter (contre eux et l'injustice). La "rébellion" que je conçois est au contraire la lutte commune et solidaire de toutes les hommes contre leur commun adversaire: la loi d'entre-dévorement de la nature. Toute atteinte à cette solidarité est une brèche ouverte dans les bataillons rebelles. La "révolte" contre l'injustice n'est qu'une des faces (pour colmater la brèche) de la lutte menée par ces bataillons solidaires. (Camus d'ailleurs l'a bien senti.)

- Le paradoxe de "l'alliance" politique entre Sartre et moi tenait à ceci: il défendait la mise en pratique de sa doctrine existentialo-marxiste; je ne pensais qu'à défendre le camp à cette époque le moins armé (l'URSS et satellites) contre le plus armé (USA), l'expérience socialiste en cours contre l'offensive impérialiste.

- Oui, ma lutte comme écrivain dans le cadre du socialisme n'a jamais cessé d'être l'exigence de vérité authentique contre les vérités admises ou les fausses vérités des partis. Je me rencontre bien là-dessus avec George Orwell, sans toutefois partager toutes les conclusions qu'il en déduit.

- Quand j'ai écrit au général de Gaulle en 1955, l'Algérie n'était pas encore en état de guerre. Ce qui s'y passait restait comparable à l'état de la Tunisie un an plus tôt, quand Mendès France

y a fait sa visite impromptu. A ce moment De Gaulle pouvait réussir de même. Trois ans plus tard, en 1958, la guerre battait son plein, le prestige militaire de la France était engagé, les passions exacerbées des deux côtés et l'occasion manquée n'était plus rattrapable. De Gaulle pouvait-il faire autre chose que ce qu'il a fait? Je ne sais; mais les divers événements au cours de ces quatre années semblent plutôt montrer que non.

- Oui, à l'époque je craignais la possibilité d'un putsch fasciste en métropole même. S'il n'a pu avoir lieu, c'est grâce aux trancistors dans les troupes françaises, lesquelles ont préféré suivre De Gaulle plutôt que les généraux rebelles. Que serait-il arrivé sans cela?

- Après P.P.C. je ne suis resté à l'écart que des tribunes, manifestes et manifestations. Mais pas pour autant des événements, comment l'aurais-je pu? Ma participation à l'action clandestine contre la guerre d'Algérie (outre, comme écrivain, contre la torture, dénoncée dans Sur Ce Rivage...) a été ma collaboration à la diffusion de Vérité pour... Vous trouverez plus de détails dans LES NOUVEAUX JOURS.

- Oui, j'ai approuvé la position de De Gaulle à l'égard de la Chine et des U.S.A. Sa politique au pouvoir se paraît, a posteriori, malgré bien des erreurs ou des abus, "globalement positive" (je ne puis m'étendre ici sur chaque domaine particulier). J'ai observé l'accord De Gaulle - Adenauer avec beaucoup de circonspection, pensant toutefois que seul De Gaulle pouvait prendre ce risque sans... trop de risque.

- Non, mes propres idées politiques dans le domaine social ne coïncident pas toujours avec celles appliquées par Briand. Sans doute a-t-il agi du mieux qu'il le pouvait dans le cadre où il se trouvait. Mais c'est ce cadre justement qu'il faut changer. Et peut-être admettrais-je des méthodes plus radicales que le réformisme si l'expérience n'en montrait les dangers pour l'avenir du socialisme. Et je reste, certes, persuadé avec Lénine que "la vérité est révolutionnaire", à condition que l'aphorisme s'applique à tous les systèmes où règnent l'hypocrisie et le mensonge, y compris les régimes dits révolutionnaires.

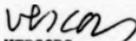
- Non, je ne suis pas davantage prêt à me résigner aux contradictions du système capitaliste. Je persiste à penser que si, comme je le crois, l'Energie-Matière n'existe qu'en tant qu'elle est auto-organisation, le fait humain ne peut en être qu'un avatar, avec seulement plus de liberté dans les moyens. Et que l'évolution sociale ne peut à la longue se faire - par trial and error - que dans le sens de toujours plus d'organisation.

- La Liberté de Décembre. Quand un individu est pénétré du sentiment de l'Absurde, il peut avoir deux attitudes: soit se sentir solidaire de tous les autres malheureux voués à l'Absurde; soit en tirer la conséquence que tout est permis. Hector appartient donc bien à cette seconde race d'hommes.

- Oui, Les Chevaux du Temps sont bien une récréation, une occasion au simple plaisir d'écrire. Dans les autres romans, postérieur:

À La Bataille du Silence, le thème général, sous-jacent à la peinture de mœurs ou de caractère, n'en demeurait pas moins, dans mon esprit, celui de la condition humaine (face à la "rébellion"). Une nuance d'amour courtois? Cela je ne peux ni le savoir ni donc le reconnaître ni davantage le nier. C'est toutefois bien possible: l'auteur dévoile toujours une part de son inconscient dans les fictions qu'il imagine. Mais je ne pense pas qu'on puisse inclure la pièce du Silence de la Mer dans cette optique: chez elle la communication, loin d'être "difficile", est résolument refusée (malgré le sentiment naissant). X

Bien attentivement à vous

  
VERCORS.

X C'était du moins ma intention. Mais qui sait?

Appendix II

Transcript of interview with Vercors in Paris, 19 March 1984, in which the author discusses a range of topics relating to his fictional and non-fictional writings.

VERCORS

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW, PARIS, 19th MARCH 1984

1. Sur 'Monsieur Prousthe' (deuxième récit de la trilogie 'Sur Le Rivage' ....)

Question Est-ce que la manie de Monsieur Prousthe dans ce récit est une pure invention de votre part? Sinon, quelle est l'origine de cette histoire?

Réponse L'histoire de Monsieur Prousthe m'a été racontée par mes parents, par ma mère surtout, beaucoup plus tard, mais ce que je raconte, ce parc avec les enfants, Monsieur Prousthe qui ne veut pas se faire voir, ça je l'ai connu, seulement simplement je ne savais pas pourquoi, pourquoi il ne se montrait pas, n'est-ce pas, et je ne me posais pas de questions. C'est beaucoup plus tard que ma mère m'a expliqué toute l'affaire.

2. Sur 'Le Radeau de la Méduse'

Question Frédéric Legrand, ce héros progressiste aux pieds d'argile .. est-ce que pour vous c'est un cas isolé, ou est-il plus représentatif? Avait-il lui aussi un modèle particulier?

Réponse Généralement, vous savez, l'auteur n'est pas le meilleur juge de ce qu'il écrit, c'est le lecteur qui est le juge en définitive. Mais moi, je tiens plutôt Frédéric Legrand pour un faux révolté, il ne l'a jamais été, il a eu seulement une révolte d'adolescent qu'il a prise pour une révolte sociale - il n'a jamais eu cette révolte sociale. Alors, il se l'est déguisée à lui-même. Ça m'a été inspiré par quelqu'un .... mais je ne veux pas le dire parce que c'est un nom connu, alors .....

3. Sur 'Comme un Frère'

Question A la fin de ce roman vous parlez du 'noyau inaltérable comme le diamant' de l'âme 'dédoublée' de Roger-Louis - cela malgré les carrières très différentes qu'avaient eues Roger et Louis. Est-ce qu'il faut voir là une autre allusion à l'idée de Montaigne, concernant la constance d'un individu, que vous avez citée dans d'autres contextes? S'agit-il d'une des clefs du roman?

Réponse L'idée était sous-jacente, bien sûr, mais c'est pas celle qui m'a, comment dire, inspiré le sujet. Ce qui m'a inspiré le sujet, c'est l'idée de ... combien notre vie est sujette au hasard. Presque tout ce que nous faisons se fait par suite du hasard, plus ou moins petit, plus ou moins grand, mais il y a toujours une question de hasard .... donc si on se dédouble au coin de deux rues et si on suit des rues différentes c'est fini, on n'aura plus du tout la même vie parce qu'on n'aura plus les mêmes hasards, on fera tout à fait autre chose. Mais le noyau indestructible, c'est le noyau de la personnalité, alors le noyau de Roger-Louis, de Louis-Roger, c'est sa conscience morale et sociale.

Question Même si Roger avait trahi dans sa carrière les valeurs morales et sociales dont Louis s'est fait le défenseur?

Réponse Il peut même avoir trahi, pendant un certain temps, ou côtoyé la trahison, parce que la vie l'a amené près de la trahison. Mais là au moment où il y aurait vraiment, c'est vraiment essentiel, alors là il est .....

Question A la fin Roger est un bon républicain, n'est-ce pas?

Réponse Il est républicain en ce sens qu'il coïncide avec ses principes moraux, n'est-ce pas, les principes .... l'idée qu'il se fait de la vie et de l'homme ....

Question Dans ce même roman, Elisabeth avait voulu entrer au parti communiste. Mais l'invasion de la Tchécoslovaquie en 1968 l'en avait découragée - et juste avant cela les événements de mai en France. Est-ce que les réactions du PCF lors des événements de mai l'ont beaucoup déçue?

Réponse Elle cherchait, je pense qu'elle cherchait dans le parti communiste un moyen, un moyen d'agir, le besoin qu'elle avait d'agir. Elle l'a trouvé en '68 et elle avait donc moins besoin du parti communiste puisqu'elle trouvait un moyen d'agir dans un contexte qui le lui permettait .... la Tchécoslovaquie, c'était le coup final.

4. Sur un plan politique plus général : de Gaulle, les événements de mai '68, etc.

Question Je crois que pour vous le bilan de la présidence du Général de Gaulle était 'globalement positif'. Alors vous ne partagez pas l'hostilité foncière de Mendès France et de Mitterrand vis-à-vis du régime gaulliste?

Réponse Si, j'étais hostile au régime de de Gaulle mais pas à de Gaulle, vous voyez ce que je veux dire, enfin à de Gaulle aussi dans une certaine mesure. Mais surtout pendant toute la guerre d'Algérie, j'ai pensé qu'il n'y avait que lui qui pouvait faire quelque chose, lui qui pouvait la finir, d'ailleurs comme il l'a finie. Sinon il y aurait eu une révolution en France, il y aurait eu une guerre civile, il a évité la guerre civile, comme il avait déjà évité que la France disparaisse après la débâcle, qu'il l'a sauvée une seconde fois, forcément j'avais un grand respect pour lui. Ça ne voulait pas dire que j'ai accepté tout de sa part, loin de là, et j'étais du côté de Mitterrand et surtout de Mendès France pendant cette période, mais d'un point de vue si vous voulez plus théorique que pratique.

Question Quelles ont été vos propres réactions lors des événements de mai '68? Est-ce que de Gaulle aurait pu faire autre chose devant cette crise du régime?

Réponse Qu'il soit parti à ce moment-là ou revenu, c'était fini. Il était visible que son règne était terminé, alors à ce moment-là, ça n'avait plus la même importance. Alors, ce que vous me demandez, c'est comment j'ai jugé cette affaire de '68? Eh bien, à la fois dans l'euphorie, parce que j'ai trouvé que c'était extrêmement euphorisant, n'est-ce pas, toute cette jeunesse qui tout d'un coup trouvait la parole, c'était très euphorisant, mais je dois dire aussi que j'avais .... quand j'ai assisté aux débats qui se sont produits à la Sorbonne et qui se sont produits au Théâtre de l'Odéon, j'ai été catastrophé, c'était une telle logomachie d'ébord, et confusion ensuite, et j'ai dit:

il ne pourra rien sortir de ça, il n'y a pas une idée directrice, ils ne sont liés par rien, sinon par un besoin d'éclatement, comme on le dit d'ailleurs maintenant, comme disent les jeunes en argot: "ils se sont éclatés," n'est-ce pas, ça veut dire qu'ils ont trouvé leur joie; mais j'ai senti très vite qu'il n'en sortirait rien.

Question Donc on pourrait dire que vous avez pris vos distances à l'égard de tout cela, tandis que Sartre, par exemple....?

Réponse Non, ce n'est pas que j'ai pris mes distances, en '68 j'avais déjà soixante-six ans, et quand j'ai vu Sartre s'en mêler, quand j'ai vu Aragon s'en mêler, j'ai dit; qu'est-ce qu'ils vont faire là-dedans? C'est pas pour eux, ils n'en feront rien, et ça va leur un peu abîmer leur propre image. Et moi, en tout cas, je les écouterai, je vais être un témoin extrêmement... sympathique et actif, si on veut, et peut-être que si on a besoin de moi, eh bien on viendra me chercher, mais je veux dire moi, m'imposer, essayer de prendre leur tête, non.

#### 5. Sur le Socialisme

Question Dans les années '50, vous étiez très proche du PC, comme compagnon de route, etc. Mais est-ce que vous vous seriez senti plus à l'aise avec les principes politiques du parti socialiste clandestin de Daniel Mayer, par exemple - s'il avait continué après la guerre? Je pense à son respect de certaines valeurs morales et spirituelles - les valeurs républicaines de la tradition française - son respect de la voie parlementaire, au fond. Et est-ce que c'est Guy Mollet seul qui vous a rebuté, qui vous a empêché d'appuyer la SFIO après la guerre?

Réponse Absolument, absolument, je suis socialiste, je ne suis pas du tout communiste, mais Daniel Mayer a été éliminé très, très vite et c'était Guy Mollet, et ce socialisme-là, eh bien, n'a fait que se trahir tout le temps, à chaque instant, il s'est trahi avec la guerre d'Algérie, il s'est trahi à Suez, il s'est trahi constamment .... tandis qu'au moins les communistes avaient des buts particuliers qui étaient les miens aussi. Le but général, non; mais au fur et à mesure qu'il y avait des choses à obtenir, ils cherchaient à l'obtenir et moi aussi je cherchais à l'obtenir, c'est ce qui me tenait plus à eux qu'aux socialistes, parce qu'avec les socialistes je ne pouvais pas m'entendre: en tant que parti pas en tant qu'idéologie, moi l'idéologie était socialiste ... c'était catastrophique que Daniel Mayer ait été éliminé.

Question Ce 'socialisme ouvert' que vous prônez, (dans Sens et non-sens de l'Histoire, par exemple), en voyez-vous la réalisation, ou les premiers signes de sa réalisation, en France actuellement - ou ailleurs?

Réponse Non, quand je parle de 'socialisme ouvert' je pense à ces quelques mois d'espoir qu'on a eus en Tchécoslovaquie dans ce qu'on appelle 'le Printemps de Prague'. c'est ça que j'appelle le 'socialisme ouvert' - c'est le socialisme réalisé, mais avec la possibilité de chacun de réfléchir et surtout d'interroger, de mettre en question. Pour moi, l'homme c'est l'animal qui interroge, qui met en question, pour moi c'était ça, c'est ça le socialisme ouvert. En France, il n'est pas question en ce moment de socialisme, je ne parle même pas du fait que le gouvernement a été obligé de faire un pas en arrière et de gérer la crise, bon ça c'est un accident, mais ce qu'on a pu croire, pas moi, ce qu'on a pu croire tout au début: les nationalisations différentes, les progrès que l'on faisait faire, pour moi c'était une amélioration du capitalisme, c'était pas plus, c'est pourquoi en France non je ne peux pas dire qu'il y a un début de socialisme ouvert, non, nous n'en sommes pas là .... Je désire quelque chose de beaucoup plus organisé. Parce que je crois que je l'ai dit dans ma lettre, je crois que ça fait partie du devenir pas seulement de l'espèce humaine mais de toute la matière, n'est-ce pas, je crois que l'auto-organisation fait partie de l'être, n'est-ce pas, l'être c'est l'auto-organisation.

Question Mais quel est le rôle du libre arbitre là-dedans? La liberté individuelle ne compte plus ....?

Réponse Bon, oui, mais ça c'est .... auto-organisation ne veut pas dire que personne n'a de libre arbitre. On en est maintenant à penser que les particules ont leur libre arbitre, elles ne s'en organisent pas moins, et elles s'organisent dans leur libre arbitre. C'est comme ça que je le vois, si vous voulez, dans l'espèce humaine - une auto-organisation qui se fait librement, c'est-à-dire qui n'est pas imposée d'en haut, qui se fait dans le corps même du corps social. Un peu si vous voulez comme se fait, peut s'organiser lentement une armée, c'est d'abord une bande, et puis cette bande se donne des chefs, et puis les chefs organisent leurs troupes, et puis on ramasse du monde et puis on commence également à hiérarchiser les chefs entre eux, ça se fait par ... de façon interne si je peux dire. Ensuite, une fois que c'est organisé, il y a le danger, une fois que c'est organisé, évidemment dans l'armée, allez, on ne peut plus ... on ne peut plus parler. Et c'est ce qui se passe dans les pays socialistes actuellement, c'est-à-dire que l'organisation telle qu'elle s'est faite maintenant, elle est coincée, elle est sclérosée - il faudra autre chose, c'est ce qu'on a espéré à Prague .....

Question La CEE va bien dans le sens d'une organisation accrue - il y a des éléments capitalistes, entreprises supranationales, etc., avec des économies mixtes. Qu'est-ce que vous en pensez, en somme?

Réponse Là ... j'ai pas de connaissances, et je n'ai jamais fait travailler mon esprit dans ce sens, mais je suis Européen aussi; en ce sens là aussi, que je suis plus socialiste que communiste, je suis pour une Europe, même pour une Europe politique, par conséquent, le marché commun, la CEE sont un début de cette Europe, alors je suis pour, mais je ne peux pas dire que je peux juger vraiment si ça réussit, si ça ne réussit pas; je ne comprends pas grand-chose à toutes ces histoires en ce moment de montants compensatoires...

6. Sur son attitude actuelle envers les Allemands

Question Bien sûr, la CEE a renforcé les liens entre la France et l'Allemagne - c'est un résultat positif donc. Mais avez-vous perdu toute votre méfiance d'autrefois vis-à-vis des Allemands?

Réponse Alors, là c'est très difficile de vous répondre, parce que .. ... les grandes préventions contre l'Allemagne, je les ai eues jusqu'à ces dernières années, tant que survivaient un très grand nombre de nazis là-bas, de nazis actifs, qui ne me rassuraient absolument pas, donc de redonner à l'Allemagne un statut de nation normale, alors je n'étais pas pour, parce que je ne savais pas ce qu'elle en ferait... Je garde une certaine prévention que je ne pourrai jamais effacer .... je dis d'abord maintenant les, bon, ces nazis-là, sont morts ou vieux, n'est-ce pas, donc, c'est une nouvelle génération qui n'a pas trempé dans le crime, mais je garde forcément une prévention que je ne peux pas, euh, comment, dirais-je, détruire tout à fait en moi parce que j'ai été un très grand ami de l'Allemagne pendant tout l'entre-deux-guerres, non, jusqu'en 1933, je pensais à ce moment-là avec Briand, vous le savez, que la paix du monde reposait sur l'entente de la France et de l'Allemagne, et cette immense trahison de l'Allemagne m'a marqué pour toujours, vous savez, quand un mari a été trahi, la femme peut être très, très gentille ensuite, il aura toujours un doute sur elle, voilà, je suis comme ça ....

7. Sur "Moi, Aristide Briand"

Question Est-ce que vous vous sentiez très à l'aise dans la peau d'Aristide Briand?

Réponse Oui, parce que c'est un homme que j'aimais énormément; je vais vous dire, je n'ai appris vraiment l'histoire totale de Briand, l'histoire complète de Briand, qu'en écrivant mon livre, c'est-à-dire avec tous les documents dont j'avais, que j'avais ramassés, surtout les ouvrages qu'il y a sur Briand, il y en avait énormément entre les deux guerres, j'ai appris sur Briand des tas de choses que je ne savais pas et qui toutes m'ont conforté dans le sentiment que j'avais pour cet homme-là, c'est pourquoi j'étais très à l'aise pour l'écrire.

Appendix III

Letter from Vercors to Russell Barnes, dated 25 August 1987, giving the author's views on the recent trial in Lyon of Klaus Barbie and on the approach adopted by Barbie's defence counsel, M<sup>c</sup> Jacques Vergès.

MOULIN DES ILES  
SAINT AUGUSTIN  
77120 COULOMMIERS

Le 25 août 1987.

Mr. Russell Barnes  
24 Ellis Road  
Bedford MK 41 9DW  
G.B.

Cher Monsieur Barnes,

Merci pour votre aimable lettre, qui nous a trouvés en bonne santé, après quelques accrocs sans importance.

Je suis heureux que vous ayez eu de bonnes vacances françaises, regrettant seulement qu'elles ne fussent pas dans notre région - non pour le temps: exécrable pendant un mois - mais pour vous encourager à passer nous voir.

L'attitude de Me Vergès a été extrêmement trouble. Nous avons été, c'est vrai, nombreux à dénoncer les crimes coloniaux français (comme dans toutes les colonies), crimes généralement restés impunis. Et il n'est jamais mauvais de le rappeler à l'opinion publique, trop portée à les oublier ou à vouloir les ignorer. Mais s'en servir pour minimiser le nazisme, en se faisant l'avocat ardent d'un des plus vils (et heureux) exécuteurs d'ordres abominables, a quelques choses d'odieux de la part d'un avocat, qui est le premier à savoir que c'est tourner la loi et la justice: est-ce parce qu'un policier meurtrier d'un cycliste est resté impuni, qu'il faut renoncer à condamner et même (selon lui) à juger, l'assassin d'une vieille dame? Le paradoxe est absurde, puisque alors plus personne ne pourrait être ni jugé ni puni.

Ceci dit, je n'ai pas été heureux de ce procès, pas plus que je ne le fus de celui de Nuremberg: il n'existe dans aucun code pénal civilisé rien qui soit à la dimension de crimes si gigantesques et si monstrueux. De fait et de plus, ceux-ci étant sans précédents, ils exigent en droit des lois rétroactives, contraires aux principes mêmes du droit. D'où l'incompatibilité avec tout procès dans les formes (ne serait-ce que parce que accusation, témoignage, plaidoiries deviennent dérisoires devant de telles énormités). Le seul comportement qui ne fût pas une parodie de justice, c'eût été (comme on le ferait des bacilles d'une épidémie de peste) la mise pure et simple hors d'état de nuire; et sur simple déclinaison d'identité l'exécution immédiate ou l'enfermement à vie. Le reste est silence.

Je vous souhaite bonne santé et vous prie de croire, cher Monsieur, à mes sentiments cordialement dévoués.

U / em

VERCORS.

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MORAL AND POLITICAL VALUES IN THE  
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