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MODERN FRENCH LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION

By

JACQUES HARDEÉ



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CHAPEL HILL

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**MODERN FRENCH LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION**

By

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## CHAPTER I

### HENRI ALAIN-FOURNIER AND RAYMOND RADIGUET

*The Wanderer (Le Grand Meaulnes)*, by Alain-Fournier, is almost unique in French literature. It is very rare, indeed, to find a Frenchman writing a novel that is completely dominated by the memory and the continuance of sensations which he felt in his childhood. We know by the letters which Alain-Fournier wrote to his friend Jacques Rivière that this book was conceived during his childhood, was brooded upon during his adolescence and was finally written when the author was in his middle twenties.

One should not fall into the error of accepting Alain Fournier's description of his work as "simply a novel of adventure and discovery." It is that on the surface; but beneath the surface lies the most eloquent descriptions of the nameless and overpowering impulses of youth which are to be found in any literature.

During the heyday of Dadaism and Surrealism, of Gide and of Proust, a young man in Paris was writing a book, about an adolescent love-affair, which was to create a stir in literary circles. *Le diable au corps*, by Raymond Radiguet, is not a great novel but it is a very remarkable one. The story it unfolds is told with great simplicity which links it to the line of French classical novels. Though it deals with a subject which could easily have been treated salaciously, there is not one sensational note in it.

Radiguet has depicted here a child's vision of the world with all the vividness and directness of a child and also with a child's ruthless disregard for other people's feelings.

Although it is the personal story which holds the attention of the reader, it is none the less worthwhile to note the author's attempt to give a picture of a particular moment in the history of France.

#### 1. *The Wanderer (Le Grand Meaulnes)*, by Henri Alain-Fournier

Sketch the biography of Alain-Fournier. Read aloud some of the comments from the Introduction of Havelock Ellis. What use did Alain-Fournier make of his background?

Show how Alain-Fournier has admirably fused the dream-world with the actual world.

How do you explain Meaulnes' flight after his marriage? Dissatisfaction with the dream-become-reality? Sense of guilt because of his affair with Frantz' fiancée?

Do you think that Yvonne de Galais' death is necessary? Would the message of the book be as plausible otherwise?

It has been said that *The Wanderer* is an excellent argument for Christianity. Can you justify that statement?

## 2. *Devil in the Flesh (Le diable au corps)*, by Raymond Radiguet

What is the symbolism of the madwoman episode at the beginning of the book?

What do you think of the attitude of the boy's parents?

Jot down some of the maxims that are found in this work. Comment on their appropriateness and on the sense of maturity which they reveal in the author.

What are the boy's feelings when he hears of Marthe's death? Are they in keeping with his attitude throughout the book?

## CHAPTER II

### FRANÇOIS MAURIAC

A Catholic novelist, Mauriac has specialized in depicting the life of the propertied classes of the region around Bordeaux where he himself was born in 1835. He was only 18 months old when his father died leaving him in the care of his mother who was a very devout Catholic. In 1906, after having obtained his *license* at the University of Bordeaux, Mauriac went to Paris to study at the *Ecole des Chartes*. It was during this period that his first poems and novels appeared. During World War I Mauriac saw action on the Balkan front. In 1922 his novel *Le baiser au lèpreux* was universally acclaimed. In 1933 he was elected a member of the French Academy.

Throughout all his novels Mauriac reveals a deep attachment to the Catholic faith and a burning preoccupation with the problem of sin. In fact, some critics have pointed out that Mauriac's entire output is centered around the sexual problem and that all the souls he depicts are struggling with carnal passion. However, Mauriac's style is singularly chaste and free from sensationalism.

The primary worth of Mauriac's books lies in the feeling which they give the reader of the tragic and infinitely serious character of man's existence; in the absolute sincerity of the author; in the feeling he gives of man's powerlessness to cope alone with his problems, but also in the affirmation of his faith in man and in liberty.

#### 1. *The Unknown Sea*

How does Mme Revolon learn of her husband's death and unfaithfulness? Do you think this passage is effective?

What changes are brought about in the life of the Revolon family?

What are the relations between the different members of the Costadot family? What do you think of Mme Costadot?

Why does Pierre Costadot wish to sacrifice himself?

Sketch the character of Landin. Do you feel sympathy for him?

What are the relations between Rose and her brother?

What information did you get from this book about French customs? Compare them to American customs.

## 2. *Woman of the Pharisees*

Knowing that Mauriac is a deeply religious man, comment on the way he has handled the theme of religious hypocrisy.

Show how Brigitte Pian, at the beginning of the book, is completely convinced of her righteousness. Read aloud the conversation she has with Octavia.

Sketch the character of Jean de Mirbel: Do you feel any sympathy for him in his revolt against his uncle? What about his attitude towards the priest?

How did Jean learn of his mother's affair with the dramatist? Read this passage aloud and point out the restraint with which Mauriac handles this episode.

How did Brigitte deal with the Abbé Calou? What were his reactions

What importance did Brigitte's love for Dr. Gellis have in her attitude towards life?

## CHAPTER III

### ANTOINE DE SAINT EXUPÉRY

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was born in Lyon in 1900. After having completed his studies at a Jesuit college he took the entrance examinations for the *Ecole Navale* but failed in the orals. For a while he worked in a business concern but his true vocation was flying and it was inevitable that sooner or later he would become a pilot. In 1926 he joined the Latécoère Company, which operated planes between Toulouse and Dakar, and participated in the heroic pioneering development of the mail routes between France and Africa. Later, with the Aéropostale, he was one of those intrepid French pilots who first flew across the South Atlantic and developed the mail routes across South America.

In 1929, St-Ex, as his friends called him, published his first book: *Courrier Sud* which, though it has an overly romantic plot, shows the author's original psychological insight into the relationship between man, woman and career. His second novel, *Vol de nuit*, was immediately hailed as a masterpiece and was awarded the Prix Fémina. In 1933, when Air France took over the Aéropostale, Saint-Exupéry was forced out of his job and spent the next five years as a journalist, flying around the Mediterranean and to Russia. He took part in an attempt to establish a mail route between Paris and Indo-China and during it crashed in the desert in Libya. This nearly fatal crash is described magnificently in *Night Flight*. In 1936 we find him again as a newspaper correspondent in besieged Madrid. In 1938 another crash nearly cost him his life, this time on a flight from North to South America.

In the midst of these adventures, Saint-Exupéry found time to write another book: *Terre des hommes*, which is considered his masterpiece. It is not so much a novel as it is a series of essays whose central theme is a glorification of the greatness of man.

During the first part of World War II Saint-Exupéry served in the French Air Force as captain-pilot and from his experiences during 1940 came the last novel: *Pilote de guerre*. After the defeat of France, Saint-Exupéry came to the United States and while there wrote his delightful *Le petit prince* which reveals to us the poetic side of the pilot-author. When the United

States entered the war, he returned to North Africa and, despite his age, insisted on flying again. It was while returning from a reconnaissance flight over Southern France that he was shot down by a German plane, just as he was within sight of his base in Corsica.

We have seen that Mauriac dwells in his books on man's misery and on his sinful nature. Saint-Exupéry, on the contrary, dwells on man's greatness and nobleness. His message may be summed up as a call to sacrifice and discipline.

### 1. *Airman's Odyssey: Wind, Sand and Stars*

Summarize the episode of Guillaumet's crash in the Andes. What does it teach us about Saint-Exupéry's humanism? Comment on Guillaumet's remark: "I swear that what I went through, no animal would have gone through." Compare it to Pascal's remark: "Man is a reed, etc . . ."

Summarize the episode of Bark, the Moorish slave. What were the author's feelings towards him? How did the other French pilots contribute to his liberation? What use does Bark make of his freedom?

What does Saint-Exupéry think of progress? Read aloud the passage in which he justifies man's achievements.

Summarize the recital of the crash in the Libyan desert. Compare it with Guillaumet's crash in the Andes. What prevents the two men from giving up?

Read aloud the first paragraph in section VI of *Barcelona and Madrid*. Comment on this aspect of Saint-Exupéry's philosophy.

### 2. *Airman's Odyssey: Night Flight*

Summarize André Gide's introduction to this book.

Sketch the plot of this novel briefly. Locate the place names on a map of South America.

Draw a character sketch of Rivière. Can you justify his attitude? How do the pilots feel towards him?

## CHAPTER IV

### ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY\* and ANDRÉ FRANÇOIS-PONCET

François-Poncet was born in Provins in 1887. After having completed his studies at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, he became director of the Society for the Study of Economic Information. Turning to politics, he was elected deputy for the Seine district in 1924. He held several cabinet posts and was, in 1930, appointed Associate-Delegate for France to the League of Nations. In 1931 he was named Ambassador to Germany and remained there until the outbreak of World War II. He was thus an interested witness to the rise of Nazism, to Hitler's seizure of power and subsequent attempt at world domination.

Today François-Poncet is once more in Germany, this time as France's High Commissioner. Not only does he have an intimate knowledge of Germany and the Germans (he was the only Western diplomat who could speak fluently to Hitler in German) but he is also a gifted writer. Before entering upon the political scene, he had already attracted attention to himself by his book: *Les affinités électives de Goethe* (1910).

#### 1. *Flight to Arras*, by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Give a brief résumé of the events in France during 1940. Under what conditions were the French fighting?

How does the defeat of France appear to Saint-Exupéry? Does he try to disassociate himself from those responsible for the defeat? Read aloud the passage at the end of section XVI.

Why do the pilots agree to go on missions which they know to be hopeless? Compare their attitude to the one of the pilots in *Night Flight*.

Comment upon the author's statement: Man is higher than the individual.

Sum up your opinions on Saint-Exupéry. Compare him with Admiral Byrd and with Anne Morrow Lindbergh.

#### 2. *The Fateful Years*, by André François-Poncet

Present the background for the Hoover moratorium and Brüning's visit to Paris. Give a portrait of Pierre Laval. What rôle did von Papen play in German politics? Describe Hitler's accession to power. Give a portrait of Joseph Goebbels.

\*See Chapter III for brief sketch of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

How did Hitler abolish regionalism in Germany? What steps did he take to reorganize his country?

Why did Germany withdraw from the League of Nations? What were the consequences of this?

What were the causes of the 1934 massacres? What were the results?

How was the plebiscite in the Saar organized?

What was the Stresa conference?

What was the significance of the remilitarization of the Rhineland?

How did France and England react?

How did Hitler and Mussolini get along? What results did this have on international events?

Give a portrait of Adolf Hitler.

Give your estimate of François-Poncet as an author.

## CHAPTER V

### ROGER VERCEL and ROGER MARTIN DU GARD

The province of Brittany is one of the most picturesque provinces of France and its people have many fascinating traits, of interest to tourists and to novelists. Among the contemporary French novelists who use Brittany and the Bretons as subject matter, Roger Vercel occupies the first place. Born in 1894, Vercel (whose real name is Roger Crétin) was doing graduate work when World War I broke out. He served in the French army for four years in the European theater and in the Balkans. After the war he continued his studies and received his *doctorat ès lettres* in 1927. While he was teaching literature in Dinan (Brittany) he wrote his first novel: *Notre père Trajan* (1930), which was so well received that he was encouraged to continue. Although this first novel and another: *Capitaine Conan* (1934), deal with the Balkans, the subject matter for most of his other novels is Brittany.

Vercel excels in descriptions of the sea and of the hard and dangerous life of sailors. He is also excellent in his psychological analyses of the Breton mind with its mixture of Christianity, mysticism, idealism and stubbornness. His remarkable gift of story-telling coupled with his vigorous, realistic style have placed him in the first rank of present-day French novelists.

Roger Martin du Gard was born in Paris in 1881. He was brought up by his parents in the Catholic faith from which he detached himself, he says, when he was about sixteen years old. He studied first at the *Lycée Condorcet*, in Paris, and then at the *Ecole des Chartes* (a school for archivists, paleographers and librarians). His first novel: *Devenir* was published in 1908. This was a youthful attack against the conventional *bourgeoisie* in which, however, was already apparent one of the characteristics of Martin du Gard: the use of two protagonists to represent the opposite sides of a problem.

His first important book, *Jean Barois*, received a great deal of attention since it portrays both the spiritual and political crisis known as the Dreyfus Affair and the conflict between the critical mind and religious dogma that was such a burning issue in the beginning of the century.

After the war Martin du Gard began writing *The Thibaults* for which he was to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1937. In this work, as in his others, the author has tried to escape from partisan ideologies and to be as objective as possible while at the same time portraying the tragic quality of individual life and of human destinies. Speaking of the characters of Martin du Gard, Gide says: "They do not make a single gesture that the reader does not see; they do not say one sentence that is not heard and soon, in the same way as the reader forgets him, the author forgets himself in them." It is for these qualities that Martin du Gard has been compared by most critics to the great Russian novelist Tolstoy.

### 1. *The Easter Fleet*, by Roger Vercelet

Sketch the plot of this novel. How does the author immediately set the mood of this story?

Why does Marie-Anne turn away from God? Do you think that this renunciation is plausible?

Point out how the author shows the effects of modern civilization in the life of the Bretons.

Read aloud the passage of the storm at sea. Comment upon the style and imagery of the author.

### 2. *Jean Barois*, by Roger Martin du Gard

Before sketching the plot of this novel comment briefly upon the Dreyfus Affair, its spiritual, political and social importance and upon the ideological conflict between religion and science at the beginning of the century.

At the frontispiece of this novel, in its French edition, Martin du Gard placed a reproduction of Michelangelo's *Slave in Chains*. Comment upon the appropriateness of this with Jean Barois' character.

When does Jean begin to feel doubts about his religion? Comment upon Cécile's attitude towards him. Could she have acted in any other way?

Why does Jean write his intellectual testament?

What are the causes of the misunderstanding between Barois and the younger generation?

Compare Luce and Barois. Comment upon Woldsmuth' statement: "After seeing Luce die, I am more convinced than ever that I have not been wrong in staking my faith in human reason."

## CHAPTER VI

### STEPHEN ALEXIS and ANTONINA VALLENTIN

#### 1. *Black Liberator*, by Stephen Alexis

Give a brief survey of the geography and history of Haiti. Bring out the influence of France and French civilization. Is French widely spoken there today?

What influence did the French Revolution have on events in Haiti?

What do you think of Toussaint's attitude towards his owners before and during the revolt?

What was Toussaint's original intention in revolting against the whites? When do you think he lost sight of that goal?

Toussaint was called the Black Napoleon. Do you find any justification for that title?

Comment upon Toussaint's death.

#### 2. *This I Saw: The Life and Times of Goya*, by Antonina Vallentin

Give a brief outline of the history of Spain during Goya's life.

What effect did Goya's marriage with Bayeu's sister have on his art? On his career?

Of what importance are Goya's letters to Martin Zapater?

Bring out the importance of Don Luis' patronage of Goya.

What were the results of the artist's deafness?

Comment upon his liaison with the Duchess of Alba. What effect did it have upon his art?

Why did Baudelaire write:

"Goya, cauchemar plein de choses inconnues"?

(Goya, nightmare filled with unknown things)

Show how Goya's art was influenced by the Napoleonic invasion of Spain.

## CHAPTER VII

### VERCORS and ROMAIN ROLLAND

Vercors is one of the several pseudonyms used during World War II by a young French painter who took an active part in the Resistance. His real name is Jean Bruller but he still uses the name of Vercors which became world-famous after the publication of the book *Le silence de la mer*. This work which, for Frenchmen, symbolizes the Resistance more than any other book, was the first to come out of the Midnight Press, a clandestine press which has now become a leading Paris publishing house.

Vercor's book affords us an excellent glimpse into the minds of the French people during the dark years of German occupation.

Romain Rolland was born on January 29, 1866 at Clamecy. After having completed his studies, mainly in history, in Paris, he became a member of the *Ecole Française* in Rome and in 1895 took his degree of *docteur ès lettres*. He taught history for four years at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* and was later, for nine years, professor of the history of music at the Paris *Faculté des Lettres*.

It was during his stay in Rome that he met Malvida von Meysenbug of whom he speaks in *Journey Within*. This remarkable woman, who had known many of the revolutionary leaders of 1848 (Kossuth, Mazzini, Louis Blanc, etc.) and many of the leading minds of the century such as Wagner, Liszt, Ibsen and Nietzsche, was captivated by the stimulating intelligence of this young Frenchman. Rolland has written in several of his works about the influence which Mme von Meysenbug had on him. Among other things she introduced him to the Wagnerian cult.

Having always been interested in music, it is not surprising that Rolland's first published works were about musicians. Among these should be mentioned the biographies of Beethoven (1903) and of Handel (1910). His prominence, however, is due principally to his own creative achievements in the drama and, especially, in the novel. His most celebrated story, *Jean-Christophe*, first appeared serially in the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, from 1904 to 1912, and soon became known and admired through-

out the world. Taking as his subject the life story of a German musician, Johann Christoph, Rolland depicts a creative genius struggling with himself and his age. At the same time, he describes the struggles of a new generation against old prejudices, the protest of a gifted artist against his materialistic epoch. Rolland established himself in this work as the champion of a rebirth of spiritual life. The France he shows to the world is the serious hard-working France, the one that longs for peace and world-understanding.

After World War I Rolland, who had remained aloof and neutral, turned his attention to the Far East and worked to further a closer mental contact between East and West. His book on Mahatma Gandhi aroused great interest.

His literary efforts were rewarded by the *Académie Française* which awarded him its *Grand Prix de la Littérature* and later by the Nobel Foundation. The Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to him because of "the noble idealism of his literary activity" and "the faithful and abundant characterization of mankind, giving evidence of great depth of sentiment."

### 1. *The Silence of the Sea*, by Vercors

Trace the development of the Resistance in France. Bring out how the attitude of the people made up a part of the Resistance movement.

Summarize the story of *The Silence of the Sea*. Show how effectively the author has placed the spoken dialogue in the mouth of the German.

What traits are brought out that are characteristic of the French? Of the Germans?

How does the story symbolize the spirit of France during 1940-1944? Bring out how, in the last ten pages, the author, who up to then has led the reader to accept the possibility of a Franco-Nazi alliance, sharply shows how wrong that would be.

### 2. *Journey Within*, by Romain Rolland

Why did Rolland write this book? What were his first impressions of childhood? What were the three revelations which were to have such great importance on his development?

Comment upon his statement: "The greatest book is not the one whose message engraves itself upon the brain . . . etc."

What influence did his mother have on him? Show how his other forbears left traces in him.

What was his attitude during the war of 1914-18?

Comment upon the influence that the trip to Rome had on him. What other French authors do you know for whom the same could be said?

## CHAPTER VIII

### FRENCH-CANADIAN LITERATURE

Franco-Canadian literature can be said to have begun around the middle of the XIXth century. At that time François Xavier Garneau wrote and published his *Histoire du Canada* which was instrumental in creating in Quebec, between 1870 and 1880, the first school of French-Canadian literature. In this city, a group of writers came together and published a literary magazine called *Les Soirées Canadiennes*. The prime movers of this group were the Crémazie brothers who kept a bookstore which served as meeting place for the group.

Octave Crémazie was the most gifted of these writers. His prose works, written in a clear and forceful style, celebrated the history and scenery of Canada.

The outstanding writer of the Quebec school was Louis Fréchette who wrote poetry, drama, history and prose satire. The national poet of the French Canadians, he wrote about Canada and the Canadians and was, in 1884, awarded a prize by the French Academy.

Another school of French-Canadian literature was founded in Montreal. There also literary magazines were published by different groups of writers. Among these the *Echo des Jeunes* upheld the literary doctrines of the French Parnassians, in opposition to the Quebec school which followed the French Romantics.

In 1900, the Montreal school published an anthology called *Soirées du Château de Ramezay* which was instrumental in bringing two young authors to the attention of the public. One was Emile Nelligan who wrote poetry in the manner of Edgar Allan Poe; the other was Albert Lozeau who, though a cripple, wrote cheerful poems expressing a stoical acceptance of life.

The writers belonging to, or influenced by, the Montreal school have, on the whole, achieved a greater artistic success than those of the Quebec school. The latter, however, have a greater appeal to Canadian readers because they have found their inspiration in love of their Canadian motherland.

The two novels to be examined in this chapter deal, one with Quebec, the other with Montreal. They were written by two

young contemporary authors, one of whom, Gabrielle Roy, was awarded one of the most coveted literary prizes of France: *Le Prix du Roman de l'Académie Française*.

1. *The Tin Flute*, by Gabrielle Roy

Sketch the plot briefly. Draw character sketches of the main characters in the novel. Which one appeals to you the most?

Comment upon Boisvert's statement, page 47: "That's what society gives us, temptations."

What is the attitude of the people in the novel concerning the War of 1939-45? Is it typical?

Read aloud Chapter IX.

In Chapter XV read aloud the passage from page 155 to page 158.

Could the setting of this novel have been elsewhere than in Montreal?

What does this book reveal about the ties between French-Canada and France?

2. *The Town Below*, by Roger Lemelin

Read aloud the Introductory Note by Samuel Putnam. Sketch the plot of the novel.

Do you think Denis and Jean are well-drawn? How about the other characters? Compare this book with Alain-Fournier's *The Wanderer*.

What effect does Jean's death have upon Denis? What do you think he will do later on?

What did this book teach you about French-Canadian customs? Can they be compared to American customs?

## CHAPTER IX

### ANDRÉ GIDE

André Gide was born on the 22nd of November 1869. On his mother's side he descends from a Norman Protestant family in which however, there had been a great many Catholics. On his father's side he comes from an entirely Protestant family originally from Southern France. The mixture in him of these two families coming from two quite different regions was responsible, he says, for the struggle which never ceased to torment him: between Catholicism and Protestantism, between worldliness and puritanism.

In his autobiography, *Si le grain ne meurt*, Gide describes his early youth: his strict Protestant upbringing, his feeble health, the suffering caused by the realization that he was different from other boys, his precocious sensitivity and his great poetic gift. His first work, written in 1889, *Les cahiers d'André Walter*, was composed during the last years of the Symbolist Movement and bears testimony to the influence of that school. So does his next work, *Le traité de Narcisse*. But, in 1893 *Le voyage d'Urien* proclaims that he has now ceased his cult for the *ego*, that he desires to live fervently and fully.

Turning his back upon symbolism and upon his past life, Gide in 1897 took a trip to Algeria. There he recovered his physical strength and at the same time discovered himself. This he related in *Les nourritures terrestres (The Fruits of the Earth)* upon his return to France. This work, which has been called the breviary of individual liberation, had an enormous influence on the youth of France.

In 1902 Gide wrote *L'Immoraliste* which expresses in a more concrete form the lyrical effusions of *Les nourritures terrestres*. It presents a personal case of revolt against the rules which are taken for granted in society.

Each of the succeeding works of Gide, in the novel, the short story or the drama, was to describe one of the many facets of this very brilliant personality. The one work in which he seems to have included most of his beliefs and ideas is his novel *Les faux monnayeurs (The Counterfeiters)*. This novel, which is a curious and exceptional one that is really a novel within a novel,

expresses Gide's rebellion against the family, against the laws of society, against marriage, religion and modern education. This pessimism is compensated however by a youthful and optimistic belief in the betterment of mankind and in the future. Indeed, youth and optimism are two of the dominant characteristics of Gide.

Another characteristic is his profound sincerity which has, over the years, earned for him the respect of all. The high regard in which he is held was demonstrated in 1947 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

### 1. *The Fruits of the Earth*

Summarize the preface to the edition of 1947.

Make a list of the principal themes in each section and comment upon them: fervor, departure, gardens, fruits, sensations, thirsts, etc.

Read aloud the following passages:

The Lay on the finest proofs of the existence of God

The Lay of the pomegranate

The Lay of my quenched thirsts

Book VIII: A Night in June

New Fruits: Pages 277 and 293.

Comment upon the difference of feeling between the *The Fruits of the Earth* and the *New Fruits*.

Read the Conclusion of Walter Pater's *Studies in the Renaissance* and comment upon the similarity of viewpoint between Gide and Pater.

### 2. *The School for Wives*

Summarize the plot of the three sections of this book. Show how Gide has depicted the crumbling of the love which Eveline felt for Robert. In *Robert* show how subtly Gide has ironically presented the husband's justification. What are your feelings towards Robert after reading his story? In *Geneviève* point out how the main thesis: the satire of marriage, gives way to a declaration of the rights of a young girl to experience maternity.

Compare this book to *The Fruits of the Earth*. A critic has said that Gide is not very successful when he tries to draw female characters. Do you agree?

## CHAPTER X

### JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

The name of Jean-Paul Sartre is one that is well known the world over. The philosophy which he has helped to popularize, existentialism, has been widely and passionately discussed since the end of World War II.

In brief, existentialism holds that Man is a helpless creature, a stranger in a strange universe, a stranger to himself and to others, condemned to liberty and to the necessity of inventing his own moral values. These thoughts are found in all of Sartre's writings, in his novels, his essays, his dramas and his literary criticisms.

His most celebrated philosophical work is a 700-page volume entitled *L'Être et le néant (Being and Nothingness)* in which he has expounded at length his views on the condition of Man. A shorter work appeared in 1946, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, in which Sartre tried to answer the many attacks aimed at his philosophy.

Sartre came to the attention of the public in France during the Occupation. At that time his play *Les mouches* was performed and immediately became popular since, under the disguise of a Greek setting and Greek names, it conveyed to the French a clear message of freedom and national independence. In 1944 a one-act drama, *Huis-Clos (No Exit)* was also a great success. In 1948, *Les mains sales (Red Gloves)* was acclaimed in Paris and New York. All these plays have a definite existential message and have helped to popularize that philosophy.

Sartre is also the author of a trilogy of novels called *Les chemins de la liberté (L'Age de raison; Le sursis and La dernière chance)* and of a collection of short stories, *Le mur (The Wall)*.

#### 1. *The Age of Reason*

Sketch the plot of this novel. Bring out the relationship between Mathieu and Marcelle, Boris and Ivich, Mathieu and Ivich and Boris and Mathieu.

Give a character sketch of the main protagonists: Mathieu, Marcelle, Ivich, Boris and Daniel. How does the latter grow in importance during the novel?

Bring out the symbolism in the constant references to knives and blood. How does Sartre treat the problem of human liberty? Show how Mathieu exemplifies those who do not understand that liberty is inside a man, not outside.

## 2. *The Reprieve*

Summarize the political events during the summer of 1938.

Sketch the plot briefly as it affects the main characters.

Sartre has written that he has been influenced by some modern American writers, Faulkner and Dos Passos among others. Can you see any such influence on the style in which this work is written?

How does Mathieu finally realize what liberty is?

Critics have reproached Sartre for having Mathieu, a professor of philosophy, reason as though he had never heard of philosophy. Do you agree?

## CHAPTER XI

### JEAN-PAUL SARTRE\* and SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

Simone de Beauvoir was born in 1908 in Paris. After having studied in a private school, she attended the Sorbonne where she specialized in philosophy. From 1931 to 1943 she taught philosophy in various *lycées* and then gave up teaching in order to travel.

In her novels, Simone de Beauvoir is concerned principally with the ethical implications of existentialism. To those who would avoid the ready-made values and who shun also the ethics of the egotist, she offers another method which consists of finding one's own values. The reproach that has been made to this method, namely that it leads to anarchy, is not a valid one, according to her. Man, she says, realizing his liberty, realizes also that in order for it to exist the other individuals must also have liberty.

It is therefore the problem of man's relation to other men that Simone de Beauvoir has studied in her novels. The latter are, in the opinion of most critics, superior to those of Jean-Paul Sartre. Mlle de Beauvoir has, so far, published three novels: *L'Invitée* (1943), *Le sang des autres* (1945) and *Tous les hommes sont mortels* (1947). She has also written two philosophical works: *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* (1947) and *La sagesse des nations* (1948). Of her three novels the one to be examined in this chapter is by far the best.

#### 1. *The Wall*, by Jean-Paul Sartre

##### a. *The Wall*

What was happening in Spain between 1936 and 1938?

How do the three prisoners react to their condemnation?

How does Pablo distinguish between the living body of the Belgian and the bodies of the prisoners? What did Tom do to make himself feel that he was going to die?

How did Pablo want to die?

Which of the three condemned men seems to you the most human?

What is Sartre interested in demonstrating in this story?

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\* See Chapter X for short sketch of Jean-Paul Sartre.

b. *The Room*

What are the sensations which stir up Mme Dardébat's memories? What do these memories tell us about her?

What traits of "bourgeois" morality are apparent in M. Dardébat?

How does Sartre show us the relationship between Pierre and the objects around him?

Why does Eve remain with Pierre?

How does Sartre indicate his sympathy for Pierre and Eve?

How do you interpret the last words in this story?

c. *Childhood of a Leader*

Sketch the plot of this story. Bring out how the emerging personality of Lucien is bound up with the history of his bodily sensations.

What attitude does his father try to instill in him? What influence does Berliac have on him? What effect does his experience with Bergère have on him?

How does Sartre present the nationalist complex, as identified with Barrès' *Les déracinés*?

Does Sartre allow the reader to have any sympathy for Lucien?

Does this study apply to American situations?

2. *The Blood of Others*, by Simone de Beauvoir

Sketch the plot of this novel briefly. Stress the significance of the prefatory quotation: Each of us is responsible for everything and to every human being.

Show how the author has made Hélène Bertrand evolve from an ego-centric into a person capable of accepting responsibility.

What is Blomart's attitude toward responsibility at the beginning of the book? What is his final attitude? What causes this change?

Basing your judgment upon this novel, show how the doctrine of existentialism could appeal to the people in France during the German occupation.

## CHAPTER XII

### ALBERT CAMUS

It is no exaggeration to state that Albert Camus is the most promising of present-day writers in France. Born in 1913 in Algeria, he came to France only in 1940 and then took an active part in the Resistance. His *Letters to a German Friend*, written in 1944, are among the best pieces of literature to have come out of that period.

What characterizes Camus is his great integrity, not only as a person, but also as an artist and philosopher. Indeed it is the tragedy of integrity in our modern world that Camus has expressed in his works and especially in *The Stranger*. Camus denies that he is an Existentialist but his writings have much in common with the doctrines of that school. In a philosophical essay entitled *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus upholds his faith in man's dignity but he points out that man leads an absurd and futile life. The question which he asks is: What can man do in this world which is intrinsically absurd?

The absurdity of the world and man's condition in it is the theme of his plays *Le malentendu* (1944) and *Caligula* (1945) as well of his novels *The Stranger* and *The Plague*.

#### 1. *The Stranger*

Sketch the plot briefly.

What are Meursault's feelings after the death of his mother? How does he feel towards Marie? Can you justify these feelings?

Is the character of Meursault convincing? Is his attitude at the end of the book in keeping with his attitude at the beginning?

Do you think the author should have written this work in the third person instead of in the first?

#### 2. *The Plague*

Summarize the plot of this novel. Read aloud some of the passages which describe the city at the beginning of the plague. Present character sketches of the main protagonists: Rieux, Rambert, Tarrou, Cottard and Grand. Show how each reacts to the plague.

What is the symbolism of the plague? Compare the attitude of the inhabitants of the city to that of the people in France during the Occupation.

Is the message of the book pessimistic or optimistic? Can you find any Christian sentiment in the author?

What do you think of Camus as an author?

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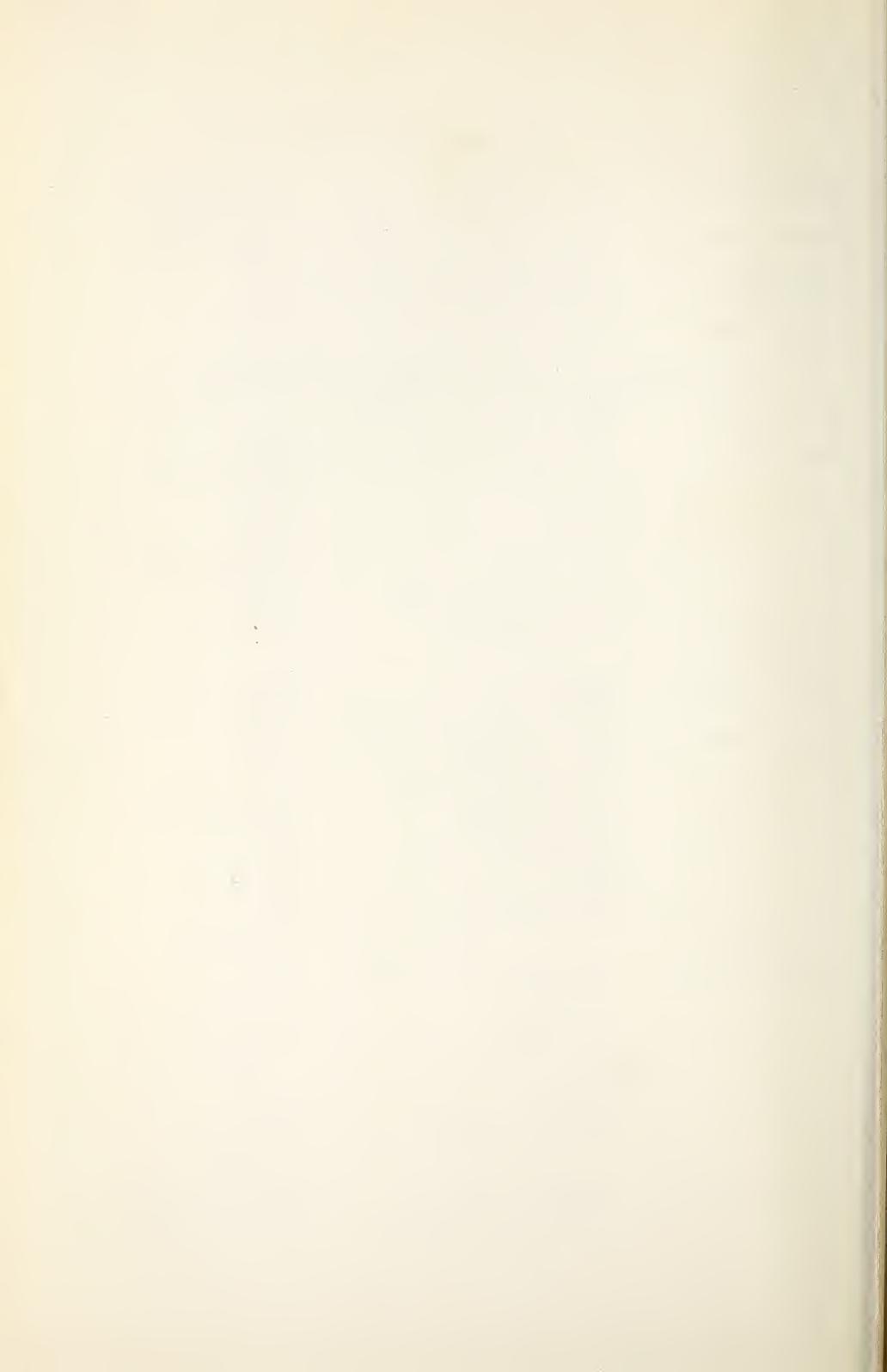
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