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**"FRENCH LITERARY IMAGES OF THE ALGERIAN WAR:  
AN IDEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS"**

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## ABSTRACT

The Algerian war of 1954 to 1962 is generally acknowledged to have been the apogee of France's uniquely traumatic retreat from overseas empire. Yet, despite the war's rapid establishment as the focus for a vast body of literature in the broadest sense, the experience of those years is only now beginning to be acknowledged by the French nation in anything like a balanced way. The present study seeks to contribute to the continuing elucidation of this historical failure of assimilation by considering the specific role played by prose fiction in contemporary and subsequent perceptions of the relevant events. Previous research into this aspect of the Franco-Algerian relationship has tended either to approach it as a minor element in a larger conceptual whole or to attach insufficient importance to its fundamentally political nature.

This thesis is conceived as an analysis of the images of the Algerian war communicated in a representative sample of French literature produced both during and after the conflict itself. The method adopted is an ideological one, with particular attention being given in each of the seven constituent chapters to the selected texts' depiction of one of the principal parties to the conflict, together with their attendant political mythologies. This reading is primarily informed by the Barthesian model of semiosis, which is drawn upon to explain the linguistic foundations of the systematic literary obfuscation of this period of colonial history. By analysing points of ideological tension in the fictional imaging of the war, we are able to identify and to evaluate examples of both artistic mystification and demystifying art. It is argued in conclusion that the former category of narrative has never ceased to predominate, thus enabling French public opinion to continue to avoid its ultimate responsibility for the war and its conduct.

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE ALGERIAN WAR : HISTORY, IDEOLOGY, MYTHOLOGY

On le sait: c'est une crise d'une singulière gravité qu'a provoquée, au plus profond de la conscience nationale, l'écroulement des grandes certitudes impériales. Devant la décolonisation et devant ses problèmes, l'opinion française a manifesté des réactions particulièrement vives. Les partis se sont heurtés, divisés à l'intérieur d'eux-mêmes, les passions progressivement exaspérées: c'est dans un climat de guerre civile que s'achève, en 1962, la dernière étape de la dissolution de la France d'Outre-Mer. Le fait a été décisif dans l'histoire morale de toute une génération et il prend, au regard de l'analyste, d'autant plus de valeur qu'il peut apparaître comme relativement singulier: dans aucun autre pays colonisateur de la vieille Europe, la fin des dominations impériales n'a suscité des débats d'une telle ampleur, provoqué des affrontements d'une telle violence. (Girardet 1972, pp.193-194)

It is in these terms that Raoul Girardet introduces the French experience of decolonization in his major study of *L'Idée coloniale en France*. For Girardet and all comparable historical commentators, the Algerian war of 1954 to 1962 represents the apogee of France's uniquely traumatic retreat from her overseas empire. In this study, we shall seek to make a modest contribution to the continuing attempt to explain the particular importance of the Algerian conflict and thus, ultimately, to define "la spécificité du cas français" (ibid., p.194).

It is undoubtedly difficult for the British observer fully to comprehend the social trauma occasioned in France by what the Algerians themselves refer to as the "Revolution". Only the troubled history of Ireland, Britain's oldest colony, comes anywhere near evoking the same range of conflicting opinions and emotions. Indeed, like the Irish question, France's painfully drawn-out withdrawal from her last and most important overseas territory has given rise to a set of competing histories which continue to be appealed to in response to both domestic and external political developments. Thus it is that organizations of *anciens combattants* may still complain about the presence of a French foreign minister at the celebrations held to mark the 30th anniversary of the Algerian insurrection, whilst *Le Canard Enchaîné* and *Libération* have sought in recent years to expose the past activities of the leader of the

far-right "Front National", ex-paratrooper officer Jean-Marie Le Pen (Planchais 1985, I, p.1).

The Algerian war's legacy of bitterness and ill-will is of particularly pointed relevance to any attempt to understand the relationship existing between the indigenous French population and those two to three million North African *immigrés* - as they are habitually referred to, irrespective of their actual immigration status - who constitute the nation's most obvious and permanent reminder of its past colonial adventures. The racist violence suffered periodically by members of this community has been catalogued by both sociologists and the press (e.g. Cohen 1980, pp.288-289). Less brutal but every bit as intense has been the extended *affaire du foulard*, which, like the October 1988 riots in Algeria and the whole theme of *intégrisme*, has provided ample scope for the rekindling of old animosities. It is therefore hardly surprising that the most recent cinematic interpretation of the 1954-1962 conflict, Gérard Mordillat's *Cher Frangin* (1989), should have given rise to both strongly expressed criticism and equally warm praise (Evans 1989, p.47). For, in the Algerian context, more than any other, perhaps, to make a contribution to the historical debate is to lay oneself open to partisan attack.

Not that the prospect of such a reception has in any way deterred those determined to have their word on the Algerian question. On the contrary, the war has become the focal point for a vast body of literature, in the broadest sense. Historical studies, *témoignages*, novels, and even *bandes dessinées*, have never ceased to be produced in the period since 1962; indeed, the flow of such works shows not the slightest sign of abating as France embarks on the 1990s. However, to point to the volume of material spawned by the Franco-Algerian conflict is by no means to assert that the experience has been properly assimilated by the French nation. This would be to confuse quantity and quality, for, as Jean-Pierre Rioux has recently reminded us: in this area particularly, "la mémoire méprise la statistique" (Rioux 1989, p.25).

So, it is necessary both to note the uninterrupted flow of publications inspired by the war since 1962 and to acknowledge what Rioux terms "les traumatismes muets ou les <<refoulements>> indicibles de cette guerre sans nom dans l'inconscient français" (ibid.). How may these apparently contradictory statements be reconciled? To begin with, by appreciating that "une guerre qui opposa irréductiblement Français et Algériens, et qui déchira la France toute entière" has become, over the years since it ended, the *chasse gardée* of old soldiers and frequently partisan historical commentators (Droz & Lever 1982, p.7). The real losers in this process have been those too young to remember the relevant events for themselves:

Quant aux nouvelles générations, elles en ignorent généralement jusqu'aux données fondamentales et ne devinent que par des prises de position extrêmes les contradictions qu'il [le conflit] recouvre. Car pour beaucoup les passions restent vives et les protagonistes du drame s'emploient inlassablement depuis vingt ans à justifier leur choix. (ibid.)

Criticism of such self-justifying accounts of the war had earlier been voiced by, amongst others, Charles-Robert Ageron and Jean-Claude Vatin (Ageron 1964, p.112; Vatin 1974, pp.240-241). Indeed, it was precisely in order to plug some of the gaps left by partisan academic histories of the conflict that Bernard Droz and Evelyne Lever produced their own, consciously modest, *travail de synthèse* (Droz & Lever 1982, p.7). So, what is undoubtedly the most complete account of the war from a purely documentary point of view, the three-volume study coordinated by Henri Alleg (1981), is seriously undermined by its principal contributor's transparent desire to justify, and even to exculpate, the PCF and its historical stance on Algeria. Paradoxically, this most celebrated European victim of French military brutality thus joins such pro-colonial historians of the war as Claude Paillat and Philippe Tripier (both 1972) in contributing to that extensive, well-documented, but fatally partial history which has so signally failed to serve the "nouvelles générations" evoked by Droz and Lever.

It was against this background, and in an effort to cut through the Manichaeic discourse of both former participants and previous historians that the "Institut de

l'Histoire du Temps Présent", building on its previous work in this area, held a major conference on "La Guerre d'Algérie et les Français" in December 1988 (Hargreaves 1989, pp.38-39). The proceedings of this important event are not yet available, but are sure to constitute a new and valuable source of historical objectivity; as are those of the similar event which took place at Loughborough in December 1989. The final word on the conflict will, nevertheless, have to await the opening and publication of the relevant official archives.

Fortunately, a number of non-French historians have sought to remedy some of the lacunae so obviously remaining in the internal coverage of the relevant events. Such diverse talents as Edward Behr (1961), W.G. Andrews (1962), Edgar O'Ballance (1967), Alistair Horne (1977), Tony Smith (1978), John Talbott (1980), and Raymond Betts (1985) have cast a more distant and thus a more dispassionate eye on the domestic *dialogue de sourds*. It is no coincidence in this light that the first and only television history of the conflict should have been produced in Britain and not yet have been shown on French screens (Rioux 1989, p.132n). The work of these and other Anglo-Saxon chroniclers of the Franco-Algerian conflict will be drawn on regularly in the following pages.

If Jean-Pierre Rioux detects a new objectivity in the most recent batch of works on the Algerian war - "C'est le ton, la distance, la méticulosité, la relative sérénité ... qui frappent à la lecture de toutes ces pages de 1989" (ibid., p.25) - there can be little doubting the uncomfortably powerful hold that the conflict continues to exert on the collective French psyche. For Droz and Lever, it is the intensity of the *drame algérien* that accounts for, amongst other things, the continued inability of historians properly to come to terms with its implications (Droz & Lever 1982, pp.343-346). Miles Kahler, for his part, has drawn attention precisely to the notion of a *drame* in his attempt to account for the peculiar trauma noted above by Girardet:

In France discussions of decolonization frequently evoke the word *drame*. Few would deny the tragic and apparently inexorable quality of the events that accompanied the end of the colonial empires... For the European states, decolonization seemed the



last precipitous act in their decline from world preeminence, leaving doubts about their place in the international order. But *drame* connotes more: an event on such a scale that judgments, particularly moral judgments, are difficult; an occurrence unique in its impact on the history of our century and the societies in question. (Kahler 1984, p.3)

For the French, the *drame algérien* came to symbolize the process of decolonization as a whole, and was infinitely more acutely felt than the country's successive withdrawals from the Levant, Indochina, Black Africa, Tunisia and Morocco. The intense passions aroused by Algeria are to be understood in terms of the specificity of the French colonial enterprise on the one hand, and of the colony's unique status on the other.

It has become something of a truism to contrast the intellectual, emotional, and even spiritual investment of the French in their overseas territories with the narrow mercantilism supposedly displayed by their British counterparts (Holland 1985, p.154). Nevertheless, such a distinguished commentator as Henri Grimal has rightly insisted upon the important difference in kind between French colonialism and that of the other European powers, drawing attention in particular to the notion of the *mission civilisatrice* and the avowed goal of *assimilation* to support his arguments (Grimal 1965, *passim*; cf. Hargreaves 1981, pp.8-17). The all-pervasive nature of this specifically French "modèle colonisateur d'humanisme et de grandeur" has been demonstrated by Rioux, drawing on earlier studies of the role of the national education system in the inculcation of colonialist values (Rioux 1984, pp.49-55). It was not by chance, after all, that Jules Ferry should have become at least as much associated with *le parti colonial* as he did with *l'école laïque*, for it was through the schools that the imperialist insistence on the necessity of overseas possessions as the basis of French claims to Great Power status was most systematically articulated. Indeed, the case of Ferry epitomizes the "colonization" of domestic French politics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a process which culminated in the triumphal Algerian *Centenaire* and *Exposition coloniale* of 1930.

As the momentous events of the following decade came to their disastrous

climax in 1940 with defeat and occupation, a preoccupied France forgot temporarily about its colonies. With de Gaulle's establishment of his Free French headquarters in Algiers following the Allies' TORCH landings of 1943, however, the Empire, and specifically Algeria, came back to the fore. Slogans like "Ici la France!" and "France, capitale Alger!" gave some indication of the troubles which lay in store when the time came to release the French hold on this particular territory.

The Liberation saw the fledgling Fourth Republic seek both to reestablish order at home and to reassert French authority abroad. As Bruce D. Marshall has shown, a crucial role was played in the Constituent Assemblies of 1945-1946 by what has been termed the "colonial myth": i.e. "the vision, held by virtually all of the French élite, of an indissoluble link between France and the colonies" (Marshall 1973, p.2). In the Algerian context, this "symbolic language [providing] a common universe of discourse to virtually all segments of the political élite, both metropolitan and colonial" (ibid., p.4) was to have disastrous implications and consequences. Indeed, the new Republic was not only born of the colonial myth, but was also destined to die by it, as Tony Smith has persuasively argued:

That France could not accept this change [in the post-war political complexion of Algeria] had to do, certainly, with the real importance of her stake in North Africa and with the character of her regime. But it had to do as well with the terms of a colonial consensus which cast up an image of France that drove the Republic to its own destruction. (Smith 1978, p.26)

For the time being, however, the new regime's most pressing colonial problem was not Algeria but Indochina, where the guerrilla forces of Ho Chi Minh had embarked in 1947 on a long, drawn-out, but ultimately successful war of national liberation against the French occupiers. The spectacular siege and surrender of the colonial army's northern garrison at Dien-Bien-Phu in the spring of 1954 finally brought the French to the negotiating table in Geneva. A government headed by Pierre Mendès-France and elected expressly to make peace signed away all French claims to Indochina, and with them, or so it believed, its colonial difficulties.

However, neither the newly sovereign state of Vietnam nor the still unconsolidated Fourth Republic was destined to live in peace for long: the Vietnamese would only have a respite of a few years, France barely a few months.

The outbreak of insurrectionary violence in Algeria during the night of 31 October to 1 November 1954 was inevitable given the chronic denial of an effective political voice to the Algerian nationalists in a period of global decolonization (Kahler 1984, pp.335-336). The Mendès-France administration's loudly self-assured and robustly repressive response was as ironic historically as it was predictable politically:

Une telle conviction dans le propos et tant de hâte dans le choix des moyens étonnent aujourd'hui, s'agissant d'hommes politiques qui s'étaient jusqu'alors opposés aux solutions de force dans le domaine colonial. [...] En fait, la vigueur de la réaction gouvernementale est affaire de contexte. En 1954 et pour plusieurs années encore, l'affirmation de l'identité française de l'Algérie ne choquait à vrai dire pas grand monde, tout comme il apparaissait normal de donner au pays les moyens de juguler une insurrection dont nul ne pouvait prévoir l'ampleur ni la durée. (Droz & Lever 1982, p.63)

The affirmation of Algeria's "French" identity is at the very heart of the latter nation's common perception or Durkheimian "collective conscience" of the complex of events which occurred in France and North Africa in the period 1954 to 1962 (Smith 1978, p.23). Like the vast majority of Frenchmen, in fact, Mendès-France and his ministers took for granted the prevailing orthodoxy as regards the territory's status: i.e. that Algeria was not a colony at all, but rather an integral part of *la plus grande France*, stretching all the way from Dunkirk to Tamanrasset.

This legal fiction has been most fruitfully described by Emmanuel Mounier as "le mythe des trois départements"; it dates from the 1848 juridical incorporation of France's principal overseas territory into the body of the French nation and is to be regarded as the foundation myth of *Algérie française* (Mounier 1947; cf. Hamon & Rotman 1979, p.35). It is in this more than anything else that Algeria comes closest to the Irish experience; a fact which goes some way towards explaining why these two colonies should have constituted special cases in the histories of the two imperial powers (Kahler 1984, pp.367-368). As in "British" Ireland, there was a demographic

reality to go with the legal fiction of "French" Algeria: i.e. a process of civilian colonial settlement on a scale and in a ratio unknown elsewhere in the French Empire. From a figure of 131,000 in 1851, the European population of Algeria rose to 578,000 in 1896, peaking at 984,000 in 1954; this last out of a total population of less than 10 million (figures from Ageron 1964).

It is difficult to imagine the occurrence of the Algerian war without the presence in the colony of this large settler population. However, at least as important in the calculations of successive French governments was the profound belief in the nation's right to administer the disputed territory. Indeed, this truth was founded on a principle sanctified by the French Revolution itself:

...renoncer à la souveraineté de la France, c'est trahir l'une des lois fondamentales du droit public français, celle de l'inaliénabilité du patrimoine national, de l'unité et de l'indivisibilité de la République. (Girardet 1972, p.237)

Not for nothing would the defenders of French Algeria constitute a string of *Comités de Salut Public* in May 1958 and take to the barricades in January 1961: in colonial Algeria, as Jacques Berque in particular has demonstrated, symbolism was all (see Berque 1962, *passim*). Against this preferred backcloth of Republican legitimacy, all deviations from the pro-colonial norm could be represented as evidence of a national *décadence*, which was in turn perceived as the prime cause of the nation's terminal decline from Great Power status (Girardet 1972, p.237). This conflict of images of national identity and self-esteem was greatly complicated by the seditious intrusion of the French military into civil affairs on and after 13 May 1958:

Non seulement en faisant de l'Algérie le bastion du nationalisme français, elle [l'Armée] devait inutilement déchirer la conscience nationale, mais cramponnée au mythe de la francisation, elle allait interdire aux Européens d'Algérie les réflexes qui eussent pu les sauver. Obsédée par la succession de ses défaites et les mythes qu'elle s'était forgés en Indochine, l'Armée tenta de faire croire à une conspiration du communisme mondial voire à une simple carence de l'autorité française; le seul résultat de ces faux diagnostics fut d'interdire au gouvernement toute tentative sérieuse de susciter une troisième force nationaliste modérée, et de lui imposer comme seul interlocuteur le F.L.N. [Front de libération nationale]. (Ageron 1964, p.113)

It was the French army's ideological leap from the defence of national sovereignty to the defence of the Free World which was to make the decolonization of Algeria such an intractable problem (Girardet 1972, pp.236-241). More specifically, it was the post-Indochina politicization of the military, its effective transformation from *la grande muette* into *la grande râleuse*, that so exacerbated the Algerian problems of both the Fourth and the Fifth Republics. Indeed, it was in Indochina that the seeds of French military *activisme*, and thus those of the Fourth Republic's demise and the Fifth's birth, were sown. Often referred to as *le mal jaune*, the after-effects of the army's South-East Asian *débâcle* are thus of prime importance in attempting to understand the doctrine subsequently adopted by a generation of French officers:

Expérience décisive où ils ont, à la fois, découvert sur le terrain les formes et les méthodes de la lutte subversive et puisé, dans la lecture des théoriciens soviétiques et chinois, la conviction des prétentions de l'expansion universelle de l'idéologie du marxisme-léninisme. La nouvelle pensée militaire va donc se trouver désormais dominée par la conception d'une <<guerre révolutionnaire>>, - guerre permanente, globale et multiforme, - menée par le communisme international dans des perspectives stratégiques de dimensions mondiales. C'est dans ce cadre doctrinal qu'elle va tendre à faire entrer l'interprétation de tous les conflits et de toutes les tensions du monde contemporain. (ibid., pp.239-240; cf. Horne 1977, pp.165-182)

Above all, it was the Algerian nationalists' revolt against French colonial rule that was disastrously misread as the latest, and, indeed, the decisive, battle in this imagined Third World War. It was this collective self-delusion, more than anything else, which ensured that Algeria became the setting for the next instalment in that periodic schism of French society which it has become fashionable to refer to as *la guerre franco-française* (see especially Droz 1985). Not that successive French administrations were prepared to admit that a state of war existed on either side of the Mediterranean; this for reasons which followed directly from the continued assertion of Algeria's "Frenchness":

Officiellement la France n'est pas en guerre. L'Algérie étant territoire français et un Etat ne se faisant pas la guerre à lui-même, la tâche de l'armée est théoriquement préventive et réparatrice. Là où l'adversaire apporte la terreur et le désordre, il lui incombe de ramener la paix dans les régions troublées et de rendre confiance aux populations égarées. Tâche de *pacification*, donc, d'autant plus nécessaire que la rébellion armée n'est apparemment le fait que d'une poignée d'irréductibles, et que la violence qu'elle exerce a pris la forme d'un terrorisme

particulièrement odieux dont les musulmans sont, du reste, bien plus victimes que les Européens. (Droz & Lever 1982, p.134)

The essential symbolism of FLN violence was rarely lost on the Muslim population of Algeria even if it was habitually unsuspected by both the Europeans and the military and civilian authorities (ibid., p.135; cf. Fanon 1961, *passim*). These defenders of *Algérie française* would opt instead to draw a linguistic veil over the frequently sordid reality of a low-intensity colonial war. Central to the range of euphemisms employed to distance this increasingly grim reality was *pacification*, a concept identified and exposed by George Orwell as early as 1946: "Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called *pacification*" (Orwell 1946, p.85). Whether it be the twisting of the English language to justify the continuance of British rule in India or the torturing of French in the name of *Algérie française*, there can be little doubt that official reliance on *pacification* and other such cosmetic terms effectively prevented an appropriately informed public appreciation of the historical situation in Algeria. Indeed, it is the systematic denial of "The War Without a Name" which constitutes its defining character (Talbot 1980, pp.51-52).

What is more, this discursive muddying of the historical waters continues to bedevil the would-be analyst of the Franco-Algerian conflict. Any attempt to make sense of the complex of events in France and North Africa in the period in question must, in consequence, come to terms simultaneously with the specific political discourse employed at the time, and subsequently, precisely in order to render comprehensible those same profoundly traumatic events. Gérard Vincent has summed up this central problem with admirable clarity:

...par quels mots nommer l'événement retenu? Pour désigner <<ce qui s'est passé>> en Algérie entre 1954 et 1962, parlera-t-on de <<rébellion>>, de <<guerre>>, de <<révolution>>, <<d'événements>>? On sait que ces mots ne sont pas neutres, qu'ils connotent ce qu'ils désignent, et ce faisant, révèlent les choix idéologiques du

locuteur. Qui plus est, les acteurs historiques ... ont eux-mêmes modifié leur discours en suivant l'évolution des choses: le gouvernement français parlera de <<rébellion>>, puis de <<guerre>>, ses adversaires étant successivement qualifiés de <<brigands de droit commun>>, de <<terroristes>>, puis de <<combattants du FLN>> auxquels le Général de Gaulle proposera la <<paix des braves>>. Si nous écrivons: <<18 mars 1962 - Par les accords d'Evian, le Général de Gaulle met fin à la guerre d'Algérie>>, c'est privilégier le rôle du Général qui aurait consenti une sorte de faveur aux combattants d'en face, c'est escamoter la lutte de ceux-ci, c'est exprimer toute une idéologie célébrant le volontarisme transformateur du chef charismatique. (Vincent 1977, p.16)

Whatever its official appellation, the reality of the Algerian war could not long be denied. As the insurrection spread from the mountains of the Aurès to the fertile plains and populous towns of the littoral, the chronically fragile ministries of the Fourth Republic committed ever larger number of national servicemen to the ultimately futile struggle against the FLN. Returning conscripts told tales of brutality of the kind common to all wars, but also revealed the widespread use in Algeria of torture for intelligence-gathering purposes. This phenomenon reached its height between January and September 1957 with the so-called *Bataille d'Alger*. Though undoubtedly successful in purely military terms, this single-minded dismantling of the FLN's urban bombing networks only accelerated the definitive alienation of the Muslim population. At home, meanwhile, the methods used by the French military gave rise to a wave of protests which marked a turning point in metropolitan attitudes to the war. Indeed, if the Algerian conflict was, in marked contrast to Indochina, "une guerre d'opinion" (Droz & Lever 1982, p.145), then it was largely because of the systematic use made by the French forces of torture and other similarly abhorrent pacification methods. Not that torture was unheard of in Indochina; on the contrary. However, the fact had not been broadcast by large numbers of often recalcitrant *appelés*. Thanks to conscription and torture, in fact, the Algerian conflict came to dominate French domestic politics almost to the exclusion of all else. It would lead directly to the collapse not only of successive Fourth Republic administrations, but also of the regime itself, as French public opinion went all the way from indifference to passion and back again (*ibid.*, pp.149-150 & 277-279). It would take a stronger mode of government and, perhaps

above all, the reemergence from the political wilderness of "France's master therapist" to bring about a set of circumstances which would finally permit the overdue decolonization of Algeria (Smith 1978, p.183). By the same token, he alone would have the necessary status to free French society of its ruinous colonial obsessions:

Only de Gaulle's return to power, as focus of loyalty and an ideological arbiter at the head of a revived Gaullist movement, could, when combined with the change to a presidential regime under the Fifth Republic, permit the final, painful decolonization of French politics. [French] electors, when offered a choice between de Gaulle and *Algérie française*, would choose de Gaulle. (Kahler 1984, p.355; cf. Girardet 1972, pp.281-284).

In the Algerian context, then, history is primarily understandable not in terms of rational economic or strategic interests, nor yet as a result of the shortcomings of a political system, but rather as a function of ideology (Smith 1978, p.23). Only within this ideological framework, in fact, is it possible to comprehend the often self-destructive impulses of many of the actors in the Algerian *drame*:

Political analysis typically favours the study of interests over images (assuming, not without reason, that the former usually dictates the latter) and in the domain of the image tends to favour the rational (for example, class consciousness or balance of power considerations) over the nonrational. But what must often be explained is how *perceived* interests may run counter to *objective* interests, indeed how frequently men follow their perceptions to the destruction of their interests. The stake in politics, it is often safe to say, is not interest but image. (ibid., p.30)

So, it is with the ideology of the Algerian war that the aspiring historian must concern himself, and more specifically with the non-rational images of the conflict projected both by and about the various parties to it. This is not so much to imply a rejection of historical materialism as such, as it is to acknowledge the Algerian question's importance as a privileged site of collective confusions, which we may variously refer to as *fantasmes*, instances of false consciousness, or myths. It is this last term which has been used thus far to refer to the French polity's preferred images of its colonial enterprise, Algeria's status and the Algerian war itself: i.e. *la mission civilisatrice*, *les trois départements* and *les événements*. It is this specific historical phenomenon moreover, which will constitute the primary focus of the present study.

It is important to make clear at this point that whereas the term "ideology" is



intended to be value-free for the purposes of our analysis, the term "myth" is not. Like Frederic Jameson, "...we take the term ideology here in Althusser's sense as a representational structure which allows the individual subject to conceive or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of History" (Jameson 1981, p.30). Ideology is not, therefore, something which may be avoided, but rather a basic given of human existence; what is available to the individual in society can never be the absence of ideology, but only ever a choice between competing ideologies. However, it does not follow from this that all of the available ideologies are equally appropriate in a given historical context. On the contrary, an ideology which has been rendered obsolete by historical developments will be a dangerous liability both to the individual and to the society of which he is a member. Thus, in the Algeria of the post-war period, the complementary ideologies of imperialism and colonialism would be tested to destruction. In the process, not only the various defenders of these redundant systems of thought, but also those who sought to distance themselves from them, if not always actively to overturn them, were called upon to suffer and very frequently to die for their beliefs; as, indeed, were very many Algerian men, women and children who by virtually any standards would be deemed wholly innocent. We shall argue that a major contributory factor in this pointlessly destructive end to the *présence française* in North Africa was the range of myths uttered by the French participants in the Algerian conflict: myths about themselves, about Algeria, and about the territory's indigenous population.

Jameson credits Althusser with the discovery - outlined in his 1970 essay on "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'Etat" - of the fact that "in this society what look like ideas require vigilant demystification as the messages of so many institutional or bureaucratic infrastructures..." (Jameson 1981, p.39). In fairness, he might also have acknowledged the important contribution made just a few years earlier to this area of

analysis by another Frenchman, namely Roland Barthes.

A natural point of departure for any consideration of the "mythical" element in the French experience of the Algerian war is the analysis of popular culture put forward by Barthes in his 1957 collection of essays, *Mythologies*. This choice might appear somewhat paradoxical given the historical failure of Barthes to express his opposition to the conflict in any of the ways typically available to French writers and critics. As Philip Thody points out, "Barthes is in fact one of the few well-established literary intellectuals who did not take a formal stand either for or against the war of 1946-1954 in Indo-China, the Algerian struggle for independence between 1954 and 1962 or the imposition of the Fifth Republic on the French nation by military blackmail in 1958" (Thody 1977, p.48). Thody goes on to draw particular attention to Barthes's failure to sign the so-called *Manifeste des 121*. This document was produced in September 1960, to coincide with the trial of nineteen members of the *Réseau Jeanson*, and was designed to enable a variety of cultural celebrities to express their support for those French soldiers who refused to serve in Algeria. The wide-ranging nature of the artistic backing for this *Déclaration sur le droit d'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie* is emphasized by John Talbott:

Among the 121 signers were names police agents expected to find on antiwar petitions: Sartre and Beauvoir, Mandouze and Vidal-Naquet. But many were artists and writer who rarely, if ever, put their names to a political statement of any kind: the composer and conductor Pierre Boulez; the filmmakers Alain Resnais, François Truffaut, and Marguerite Duras; the novelists Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute; some actors, and a handful of radio and television reporters. Not a single member of the French Communist party was a signatory. (Talbott 1980, p.172)

Barthes's absence from the list of signatories is all the more remarkable in view of his subsequent support for a much less outspoken "Call to Opinion for a Negotiated Peace in Algeria". As Paul Clay Sorum makes clear, "this latter manifesto ... avoided the crucial issues: it did not call specifically for independence and did not suggest how important a role the F.L.N. should play in the negotiations and in postwar Algeria" (Sorum 1977, p.175). Given the passionate nature of the Algerian debate and

the acute polarization of French public opinion which it produced, Barthes's signing of this non-committal document amounted to little more than political fence-sitting. However, this abstention from forthright public comment on the Franco-Algerian hostilities is profoundly misleading, as even the most cursory examination of the analysis of popular culture developed in *Mythologies* will make clear.

In his highly critical study of Barthes and his work, Thody states that "*Mythologies*, taken as a whole, is a profoundly political work [which] accepts the Marxist view that all cultures are political ideologies reflecting the interests of the class in power" (Thody 1977, p.38). If we simply ignore all that this description betrays in the way of a vested authorial interest - Thody does, after all, call his study "A Conservative Estimate" - we can agree with this reading of Barthes's work. Indeed, we can go further and state, with John Berger, that *Mythologies* is genuinely "subversive" (Berger 1972, p.407). For, if Barthes subjects French popular culture to critical analysis, it is in order to denounce *bourgeois* society and to encourage radical political change. This "revolutionary" concentration on the cultural superstructure, as opposed to the economic infrastructure focussed on by classical Marxism, may properly be labelled "neo-Marxist", and prefigures the structuralist reinterpretation of Marx subsequently undertaken by Louis Althusser (see Larrain 1979, pp.130-171).

Barthes's position has its theoretical roots in the Gramscian conception of the nature of *bourgeois* rule, with its insistence on the importance of the ideological "hegemony" of the ruling class: i.e. its ability to impose its own world-view or *Weltanschauung* upon the ruled. For Barthes, then, as for Gramsci before him, the foundations of the *bourgeois* state are to be found in those ideas which it manages to "naturalize" as unchanging, and unchangeable, givens of human existence:

...the system's real strength does not lie in the violence of the ruling class or the coercive power of its state apparatus, but in the acceptance by the ruled of a "conception of the world" which belongs to the rulers. The philosophy of the ruling class passes through a whole tissue of complex vulgarizations to emerge as "common sense": that is, the philosophy of the masses, who accept the morality, the customs, the institutionalized rules of behaviour of the society they live in. (Fiori 1973, p.238)

The originality of Barthes's contribution to Marxist thought consists in his acute analysis of the specific mechanisms exploited by French popular culture in order both to maintain and to strengthen the "philosophical" grip of the ruling class on that particular society. Central to this analysis is his particular conception of "myth", as discussed in "Le Mythe aujourd'hui", the major theoretical essay which follows, and serves to explain, the collection of individual "mythologies" (Barthes 1957, pp.191-247). This essay, an acknowledged cornerstone of later semiological (or semiotic) criticism, is sufficiently well known to need little in the way of presentation here. After all, as Catherine Belsey rightly suggests, with regard to the work as a whole, "Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* ... has come to be regarded as the classic exposition of the ways in which ideological myths are naturalized to form common sense in our society" (Belsey 1980, p.45; cf. Hawkes 1977, pp.10-11 & 130-133). Let us simply note, then, that the word "myth" is a metaphor (Barthes 1971, p.613) which Barthes uses to refer to a particular mode of social communication, or rather, to adopt his own terminology, a type of "speech": "*le mythe est une parole*" (Barthes 1957, p.193).

Barthes's definition of "myth" as a way of speaking (about) the world has some important implications which we would do well to bear in mind: "On voit par là que le mythe ne saurait être un objet, un concept, ou une idée; c'est un mode de signification, c'est une forme" (ibid.). Consequently, anything which is conveyed by a discourse can, at least in theory, be a myth:

Le mythe ne se définit pas par l'objet de son message, mais par la façon dont il le profère: il y a des limites formelles au mythe, il n'y en a pas de substantielles. Tout peut donc être mythe? Oui, je le crois, car l'univers est infiniment suggestif. Chaque objet du monde peut passer d'une existence fermée, muette, à un état oral, ouvert à l'appropriation de la société ... adapté à une certaine consommation, investi de complaisances littéraires, de révoltes, d'images, bref d'un *usage* social qui s'ajoute à la pure matière. (ibid., pp.193-194)

In his later theoretical work, most notably *S/Z* (1970), Barthes would seek to explain this kind of transformation in terms of the literary text's systematic exploitation of a complex structure of linguistic and cultural "codes" (see Hawkes

1977, pp.106-122). Although not explicit in his earlier analysis of the *Weltanschauung* communicated by the French mass media of the day, such thinking is clearly the basis of his proposed demystification of that world-view. This is recognized by Hawkes, who is surely justified in presenting *Mythologies* as a "remorseless analysis of the French mass media[']s] ... covert manipulation of the codes for their own purposes" (ibid., p.110). In what follows, we shall attempt to identify a number of crucial areas in which "mythical speech" determined the way in which French people understood the Franco-Algerian conflict. Our main source material in each case will be provided by literary texts, which we shall endeavour to demystify along the lines suggested by Barthes. To this end, we shall draw from time to time on the ideas developed in *S/Z*, and elsewhere, as well as on the work of other literary and political commentators, where appropriate. We shall aim neither at the depth of analysis to be found in *S/Z*, nor at the breadth of coverage demonstrated in *Mythologies*. Rather, we shall seek to provide an adequately detailed survey of a limited number of ideological myths: those which appear to be of genuinely central importance in the literary imaging of the French nation's final retreat from its overseas empire.

Before we can consider the first of these myths, however, we must briefly examine Barthes's comments on the precise nature of the leading role played by myth in the dominant ideology's transformation of "la réalité du monde en image du monde, l'Histoire en Nature" (Barthes 1957, p.229). To this end, we may most usefully consider the developed definition of myth provided towards the end of "Le Mythe aujourd'hui", where it is argued that "*le mythe est une parole dépolitisée*":

Le mythe ne nie pas les choses, sa fonction est au contraire d'en parler; simplement, il les purifie, les innocente, les fonde en nature et en éternité, il leur donne une clarté qui n'est pas celle de l'explication, mais celle du constat: si je *constate* l'impérialité française sans l'expliquer, il s'en faut de bien peu que je ne la trouve naturelle, *allant de soi*: me voici rassuré. En passant de l'histoire à la nature, le mythe fait une économie: il abolit la complexité des actes humains, leur donne la simplicité des essences, il supprime toute dialectique, toute remontée au-delà du visible immédiat, il organise un monde sans contradictions parce que sans profondeur, un monde étalé dans l'évidence, il fonde une clarté heureuse: les choses ont l'air de signifier toutes seules. (ibid., pp.230-231)

This characteristic ability of myth to depoliticize the world results in the wholesale alienation of the subject population. In the words of John Sturrock, the ruled are "deluded ... into believing that the social arrangements they live by are not a human product but the product of God or Nature" (Sturrock 1979, p.60). In this way, myth brings about a form of political paralysis: "The power of people to question and transform their institutions has been stolen from them: the eminently changeable has been secured in the interests of a particular group by being disguised as the necessarily permanent" (ibid.). In short, myth immobilizes the world, and thus fixes the hierarchies of both material possessions and ideological hegemony in favour of the ruling class.

It is no coincidence that the specific example of mythical speech referred to by Barthes in the foregoing quotation should be of direct relevance to our consideration of the literary imaging of the Algerian war. For, if Barthes sought, in *Mythologies*, to draw the attention of his readers to the disparity between the reality of French society and its collective self-image, then nowhere was that disparity more apparent than in the depiction of the mother country's relations with her overseas empire. As Thody suggests, "In *Mythologies*, it is especially the essays directly or indirectly concerned with France's colonial ambitions and misadventures which show how the French were encouraged to see their situation and themselves at this particularly frustrating period of their history" (Thody 1977, p.47). Leaving aside, for the time being, the details of these important anticolonialist pieces, we can now see why Barthes's analysis of popular culture should be the natural starting point for our discussion of *la guerre des mythes* (Duquesne 1958), in spite of his apparent abstention from public comment on French colonial policy. With this point established, we are in a position to consider the specifically literary orientation of the present study.

As previously noted, the peculiar *fantasmes* generated by the final stage of French decolonization have historically been communicated by means of a wide variety

of media: official pronouncements, parliamentary debates, newspaper articles, works of academic and popular history, personal memoirs, films, and so on. However, it is through the analysis of works of fiction, and predominantly novels, that we propose to consider the still uneasy Franco-Algerian relationship. It must be admitted at the outset that this choice of material betrays what the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka refers to as "Western European man[']s] ... chronic habit of compartmentalisation" (Soyinka 1976, p.6). More specifically, it confirms Soyinka's observation that "[the] idea of literature as an objective existence in itself is a very European idea" (ibid., p.62). Indeed, it is precisely this *myth* of literature itself which Barthes subjected to systematic scrutiny in *Le Degré zéro de la littérature* (1953). However, it is necessary for practical purposes to draw the line somewhere, and the distinction between fiction and non-fiction, although frequently blurred in the literature of the Algerian war, is a convenient one. By the same token, the sheer range and complexity of the available material has necessitated a concentration on *French* literature as opposed to Algerian literature *d'expression française*. Obligated to choose between the two, and with no real familiarity with Muslim culture, and still less knowledge of Arabic and Berber, it has seemed more appropriate to look as closely as possible at the work of metropolitan French authors, both military and civilian, and of the *pieds-noirs*.

Literature itself, for all the reservations about its objective status, undoubtedly constitutes a privileged and, moreover, a readily accessible site of ideological tension. This is particularly true as regards the literature of colonialism, as Astier-Loutfi (1971), Gourdon *et al* (1974), Hargreaves (1981), Calmes (1984) and Henry *et al* (1985) have all demonstrated with particular reference to French North Africa. Having noted at the outset of his study of the early colonial novel in Algeria that "[le] colonialisme, ce virus neurotrope, a causé d'immensurables catastrophes dans les cervaux occidentaux", Alain Calmes goes on to suggest that the contemporary study of now largely unread literary texts may perform not only an archaeological but also a therapeutic function:

...on ne rompt pas si facilement avec un riche passé colonial. Dans la France

contemporaine un certain nombre de mécanismes idéologiques s'y réfèrent implicitement et nous sommes enclin à penser que la lecture critique du roman colonial peut, à côté d'autres activités cathartiques, contribuer à lever les voiles épais dont la fausse conscience française, si empreinte de mauvaise conscience, a enveloppé son rapport à l'Algérie. (Calmes 1984, pp.5-6)

Such a rationale is most obviously appropriate as regards the study of the literature of decolonization and, *a fortiori*, the specific case of the literature of the Algerian war. For, as Hamon and Rotman conclude: "Dans nos cervelles engourdies ... la guerre d'Algérie est taboue" (Hamon & Rotman 1979, p.378). This, in spite of the great wealth of images put forward of the Franco-Algerian conflict, as Quézel recognized in 1982:

L'abondance des livres parus cette année sur la guerre d'Algérie, pour le vingtième anniversaire des accords d'Evian, pourrait laisser croire que nous sommes enfin parvenus au recul qui seul permet les synthèses sereines. Il n'en est rien, et vingt ans après, mémoires, études, albums et romans répètent le dialogue de sourds qui fit naître et durer si longtemps le conflit qui devait mener à l'indépendance de l'Algérie, en 1962. (Quézel 1982, p.61)

It may well be, as Rioux suggests, that this process of historical distancing is at last beginning to bear fruit, and that a new objectivity is starting to make itself felt (see above). In that case, the present study may be able to contribute to the necessary realignment of the collective French *imaginaire* in a very modest but nevertheless historically appropriate way.

To undertake an ideological analysis of the French literature of the Algerian war is to beg certain questions about the nature of the relationship obtaining between art and life. If few nowadays would share in Stendhal's celebrated condemnation of the political pistol-shot in the literary concert - notwithstanding the efforts of Robbe-Grillet and the other *nouveaux romanciers* - still fewer would imagine that Whistler's attempt to fling a pot of paint in the face of the public is likely to encourage a radical change in the way modern individuals and societies organize their existences (see Foulkes 1983, pp.62-63). Whether or not French writers were able to exert a direct influence on the relevant historical events is not, then, in dispute. Indeed, with a few very notable exceptions - such as Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber's *Lieutenant en*



*Algérie* (1957), Henri Alleg's *La Question* (1958), and Jules Roy's *La Guerre d'Algérie* (1960) - contemporary literary production was conspicuous above all by its political impotence. Even our three "exceptions" are undeniably special cases, being at least as much *témoignages* as they are *récits*; more obviously fictional works had little if any tangible impact on the daily course of historical events. As Gérard Vincent sums it up: "Les guerres d'Indochine et d'Algérie ont montré le faible pouvoir d'intervention des romanciers sur la politique" (Vincent 1977, p.90).

However, to approach the question in these terms is surely to misunderstand the nature of literature in its entirety. For, if we, following Jameson, "will argue for the priority of the political interpretation of literary texts" (Jameson 1981, p.17), this is most certainly not because we consider that French writers of fiction should, or could, have put a stop to the war or have exerted a comparable influence over its day-to-day conduct. Rather, we do so because we consider that the literary artifact is essentially a reflection, in the cultural domain, of socio-economic structures. Whether or not literature can change the attitudes of its readers, and if so how, has been the subject of continuous, intense, and frequently acrimonious debate since Aristotle; recent developments in critical theory have only served to fuel the speculative fire. We shall limit ourselves, therefore, to an intentionally modest statement of our terms of reference: the present study seeks to identify and to explicate a range of literary texts which *may* have tended to reinforce or, less frequently, to question the ideological stances of certain integrated readers. The term "integrated reader" we take to mean: "a reader [who] attributes to a text meanings which he considers to be totally natural and spontaneous, but which may in fact derive ... from [politically reactionary] integration propaganda" (Foulkes 1983, p.28; see also pp.29-36). In consequence, the specific aim of the present study will, throughout, be a doubly demystifying one, entailing both the critical exposure of literary mystification and the identification of demystifying art. The former task will be undertaken using the Barthesian critique already referred to,

and will necessarily dominate the following discussion. The latter objective, although less frequently to the fore, is undoubtedly the more problematic, and thus necessitates a brief examination of a number of theoretical questions.

The basis of our claim that certain literary texts may have been able to pierce the veil of false consciousness surrounding the Algerian war - as epitomized by the myths of the civilizing mission, the one and indivisible Republic, and the war without a name - is the belief that "art can actively demystify, can catch the forces of integration unawares as it were, and induce a moment of self-reflection, however brief" (ibid., p.35). Such a statement inevitably raises the question of how precisely individual texts may be able to accomplish this feat. For us, as for Foulkes, the answer lies in Shklovsky's concept of "defamiliarization", that is to say "the way in which art rearranges perception so as to dissolve the familiar but arbitrary structures of what we regard as reality" (ibid., pp.56-57). Such thinking may straightforwardly be likened to both Brecht's work on the *Verfremdungseffekt* and the Barthesian model of semiosis (ibid., pp.58-59). More specifically, what the Russian Formalist, the German playwright and the French semiologist all postulate is an artistically generated mode of perception which recognizes but is crucially distanced from habitual ways of seeing social formations:

The demystifying power of Brecht's epic theatre hinges on this concept of an "observing" audience, an audience, that is, which has been distanced from its normal role as participant in a sign process to the degree that it can see through the workings of its early consciousness. (ibid., p.59)

Such an approach to dealing with contemporary political questions raises in turn the problem of the relationship obtaining between ideological defamiliarization and formal innovation. Is it indeed the case, as Frye has argued, that "To bring anything really to life in literature we can't be lifelike: we have to be literature-like"? (ibid., p.80). This is the argument put forward by Jerome Klinkowitz in his celebration of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). As presented by Klinkowitz, this science-fiction novel, which was inspired by the author's experience of the Allied

bombing of Dresden in 1945, is of remarkable relevance in the Algerian context:

The art to break such a silence must ... be both indirect and extraordinary, cast into new tones; the recording of a personal and a historical horror in the world of fact calls for an act of style and fantasy. [...] Vonnegut had to embark on a new way of writing, factual *and* fantastic, dislocating and displacing reportage toward the functions and possibilities of the imagination, which might speak in the necessary silence, make pathetic, console. [...] Keeping himself inside the book is one way he can prevent traditional styles and structures of false feeling and false writing from intruding on the silence and simplifying the unspeakable. [...] Familiarity does level out our reactions; so, to write a truly startling and effective anti-war book, Vonnegut knows he needs the arts of the defamiliarization. (Klinkowitz 1982, pp.63-65)

As we shall see, only a small minority of French literature producers have looked, in fact, to radical formal innovation in order to cast new light on the Franco-Algerian conflict; with the overwhelming majority preferring the tried and trusted illusionism, closure and hierarchy of discourses of what Belsey refers to as the "classic realist" text (Belsey 1980, p.70). The extent to which writers as different as Pierre Guyotat, Jean-Pierre Millecam, and Robert Pépin have succeeded in their pursuit of the minority cause will be considered in the relevant chapters; as will the impact of the realist majority.

Whilst the French colonial novel has, as previously suggested, been considered in considerable depth, the fictional treatment of the Algerian war has, perhaps symptomatically, been less well served. Early French studies such as those of Boisard, Falcoz, and Rideau (all 1962) were remarkable above all for their lack of both substance and distance; whilst in more recent years the subject has been generally ignored - often in favour of an understandable concentration on Algerian literature in French - or reduced to the level of material for brief journalistic articles (e.g. Rinaldi 1979 & Quétel 1982). A proposed study of the relevant material by a group of C.N.R.S. historians including Benjamin Stora will be eagerly anticipated. Meanwhile, it is to non-French commentators that we must turn once again for an appropriate response to this body of French writing, with Stockwell's 1980 thesis standing as the most useful general survey of the literature of the Algerian war thus far produced.

It is particularly to be regretted that Jean Déjeux has not seen fit to make more

of a contribution to the critical literature on the period. The relevant section of his survey of *La Littérature algérienne contemporaine* (1975) is, nevertheless, an essential point of departure for a study such as this; whilst a familiarity with his remarkable essay "De l'éternel méditerranéen à l'éternel Jugurtha" (1977) is a basic given of any discussion of the mythical element in the fiction generated by the Franco-Algerian conflict. Even more fundamental, however, is Déjeux's virtually encyclopaedic *Bibliographie de la littérature <<algérienne>> des Français* (1978). Where texts referred to in the present study are not listed by Déjeux, they are generally drawn from the bibliographies of various other critics and historians, or are works which have only appeared relatively recently; a small number, however, are personal discoveries.

Of the hundreds, if not thousands, of literary texts spawned by the Algerian war, some thirty have been chosen for more or less detailed analysis in the pages which follow. What is intended is not a comprehensive general survey, much less a definitive one. Rather, the study of the relevant works is envisaged more as a thematic *sondage*, based nevertheless on a representative sample of texts. Our ideological terms of reference have tended to favour a dialectical approach in several instances, with a genuinely paradigmatic text like Jean Lartéguy's *Les Centurions* (1960), in particular, being considered within a number of distinct analytical frameworks. It is particularly appropriate that a best-selling novel like this should feature as a point of focus for a number of key ideological strands, underlining as it does the importance of non-canonical fiction in the present context. This is not to say that the work of a *monstre sacré* like Camus will not feature here, but it is to suggest that writing of such a calibre will be very much the exception to the general rule.

Our reading of the relevant literature will focus critical attention on the range of ideological myths habitually associated with the principal parties to the Algerian conflict: the French soldier, the metropolitan observer, the European settler, and the Muslim Algerian. As a reflection of its historical and thematic importance, the French

military presence in Algeria will be further subdivided into the *soldats d'élite* of the parachute regiments, the conscripted troops of the *contingent*, and senior army officers. Each of these categories of participant will be looked upon both as a socio-political entity and as a literary archetype; indeed, it is precisely in the tension between historical specificity and fictional image that we shall seek to identify both artistic mystification and demystifying art. Chapter 1 will thus concentrate on the central literary myth of the *para*. The critical arguments rehearsed in this opening section of the discussion will then be applied in Chapters 2 and 3 to the literary image of the *appelé*, whilst Chapter 4 will consider the role played by the myth of the *seigneur* in the treatment accorded to French staff officers. Chapter 5, meanwhile, will study the particular contribution made to the literature of the Algerian war by the metropolitan liberal, both as producer and protagonist. Finally, Chapters 6 and 7 will complete the picture by drawing attention to the respective images of the two groups most directly and permanently affected by events in Algeria, namely the *Français d'Algérie* and the territory's indigenous Muslim population. In this way, we shall endeavour to demonstrate the relevant literature's systematic distortion of the history of the Franco-Algerian conflict; this, we maintain, as part of a wider process of obfuscation enabling French public opinion to avoid ultimate responsibility for the war's conduct and continuation.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PARATROOPER

In his 1962 novel *Entre chiens et loups*, the liberal Catholic writer Gilbert Cesbron describes the experience of a metropolitan schoolmaster who sets his class an essay on a familiar enough topic: "Faites le portrait du Héros idéal... En justifiant les raisons de votre préférence" (Cesbron 1962, p.68). Expecting a range of variously conventional answers - "une armée de Cid escortée de quelques Leclerc..." (ibid., p.101) - the teacher is horrified to discover that his star pupil has chosen a disturbingly contemporary subject. The obvious dislike which he immediately takes to the composition in question draws the attention of both his widowed mother and the reader to a central mythical figure of the French literature of the Algerian war:

Alertée par une série de << Non... mais non... sûrement pas!>> Mme Guérin rompt son silence respectueux et demande:

<<Mauvais élève?>>

- Au contraire! Mansart...

- Ton cher Mansart! [...] Et... qu'a choisi Mansart?

- Un para.

- Un parachutiste? C'est assez normal.

- Normal? Ecoutez!... <<Il s'élançait du ciel, tel un archange: mais dans sa tenue bariolée d'homme-léopard, il règne aussi sur la jungle. C'est donc à la fois la légende dorée et la sorcellerie primitive qu'évoque ce guerrier dont les exploits...>>

- C'est bien écrit.

- Vous trouvez? Ce style d'épopée pour... (ibid., pp.76-77)

For the schoolmaster, we learn, the paratrooper is to be regarded neither as an "archangel", nor yet as a "leopard-man" - key terms which we shall shortly be referring to again - but rather as "une brute" (ibid., p.78). This near-hysterical reaction is clearly very revealing as, in its own way, is Madame Guérin's expressed opinion that the choice of a paratrooper is a perfectly "normal" one for a sixteen-year-old. For, by the time Cesbron wrote his novel of the Algerian war, the *para* had become well established as a subject of hero-worship; and this was by no means confined to the impressionable young:

Indeed, in the France of the 1950s, the paratrooper was as celebrated a figure as Brigitte Bardot. Like Bardot, he fulfilled escapist fantasies. As the retreat from empire created deep divisions in French politics and society, the paratrooper became as much a

political symbol as one of sex, violence, and adventure. Some detected in his image the lineaments of fascism; others saw the last remnant of virtue in an otherwise decadent society. So prolonged and intense did the controversy become that one observer was moved to remark that the paratroopers had spilled more ink than blood (Talbot 1976, pp.69-70).

In this first chapter, we shall examine in detail one specific aspect of this remarkable "outpouring of print" (ibid., p.70): namely, the literary imaging of the French paratrooper. In this regard, one novel exemplifies the myth of the *para* more obviously than any other, and that is Jean Lartéguy's best seller of 1960, *Les Centurions*. We shall consequently focus attention on this particular text for the bulk of the present chapter, drawing in material from other sources as and when appropriate. In this way, we shall attempt to illustrate and to explain the leading role played by the paratrooper in the French public's historical perception of the Algerian war.

At the outset, however, we must ask, and attempt to answer, one very basic question: just how had the French army's airborne troops acquired this central position in the nation's collective consciousness by the 1950s? There are two main areas in which we can look for an explanation of this crucial historical phenomenon.

To begin with, the paratroopers came to the Algerian conflict with their collective heroism already well established. One of the youngest elements of the nation's armed forces - their roots went back only as far as de Gaulle's Free French - the *paras* came to Algeria virtually direct from the disastrous Indochinese campaign. The great valour which they undoubtedly displayed at Dien-Bien-Phu, in the face of overwhelming odds, was only matched by the scale of their suffering: both in the catastrophic battle itself and on the awful forced marches to the camps in which they were destined to be "reeducated" by their Vietminh conquerors. Their bravery and dramatically heavy losses were widely reported in the press and by the other media. This was not yet the televised combat of the second Indochinese conflict (America's Vietnam war), but the "blow-by-blow" coverage of the siege and eventual collapse of

the Dien-Bien-Phu garrison undoubtedly brought about a comparable collective awareness of the fighting as it actually happened.

In *Entre chiens et loups*, a whole chapter is devoted to describing the hero's reaction to the news of the garrison's surrender ("L'événement", Cesbron 1962, pp.128-140). His interpretation of the "event" in the light of earlier "Great French Defeats", such as Sedan and the first battle of Verdun, can reasonably be taken as indicative of a wider preoccupation with what was, after all, "the most humiliating defeat suffered by any Western power since the Second World War" (Horne 1977, p.175). For Cesbron's schoolmaster - Roland Guérin, alias the political columnist "Fabrice" - as for the French nation as a whole, the collapse of the army's principal Indochinese fortress is a profoundly traumatic development, and one which must be rationalized if it is to be lived with:

Dien-Bien-Phu. L'histoire avait donc choisi ce plateau torride pour fair table rase. Roland le ressentit avec stupeur. Toutes les conquêtes désinvoltes du siècle précédent, ces colonies cueillies par une poignée de soldats, le coup d'éventail du Dey d'Alger et le pillage du Palais d'Eté - l'Empire français, chef-lieu Epinal - ces images de son enfance se trouvaient donc balayées aujourd'hui par la revanche tenace des peuplades silencieuses. Ho Chi-minh chassait des manuels d'histoire l'amiral Courbet; comme toujours, la fourmilière restait sur le terrain seule victorieuse.

Roland le ressentit, Fabrice l'écrivit, mais le public ne retrouva son confort moral que lorsqu'on lui donna de quoi s'apitoyer, admirer et haïr. L'héroïsme des vaincus et la cruauté des vainqueurs réussirent à inverser la balance: l'Indochine était perdue, mais l'honneur restait sauf - comme toujours! Car un peuple qui se mépriserait sincèrement cesserait aussitôt d'exister. (Cesbron 1962, p.128)

The paratroopers' own rationalization of their defeat in Indochina will be considered a little later. What we must insist upon at this stage of the discussion is the close identification, in the public mind, of these particular troops and the loss of the colony. As the above quotation suggests, this association of ideas was such that the potentially damaging impact of this colonial reverse on the collective self-image of the French nation was, in the event, deflected. A truly historic reverse became a source of pride, thanks to the gallantry of the *paras*. Yet this means of maintaining national pride was to prove extremely costly in the long term. For, the paratroopers, or at least those members of the corps fortunate enough to survive what Bernard Fall (1966) describes



as "Hell in a Very Small Place", would seek to expiate their Indochinese defeat by winning a decisive military victory in Algeria. This, either with the support of a grateful government and an admiring nation, or, if necessary, in spite of them.

The public prominence of the parachute regiments became all the more marked with their move into the Algerian theatre of operations. This may be explained in terms of the division of military labour characteristic of the French army in Algeria. In contrast to Indochina, which had been the exclusive preserve of career soldiers, the hostilities in Algeria were the affair of both regulars and conscripted troops. Indeed, the vast majority of the roughly half a million French troops committed to the territory at the height of the war were recalled reservists or national servicemen. Their duties were those associated with the strategy known as *quadrillage*, that is to say the spreading of large numbers of troops across Algeria, in an effort to protect both people and property. European farms, roads and railway lines, and other such strategic points and installations were typical enough postings for very many *appelés* and *rappelés*. Guarding the inhabitants and the economic infrastructures of *Algérie française* in this way may have been boring, but it certainly was not particularly demanding or dangerous; hence its appeal to successive French governments anxious to avoid conscript losses in an ever more unpopular colonial war.

The real fighting, in contrast, was done by the army's élite units: i.e. the paratroopers and the Foreign Legion, with the two overlapping in such regiments as the celebrated 1<sup>er</sup> REP (*1<sup>er</sup> Régiment Etranger de Parachutistes*). In much of what follows, our remarks may be taken to apply equally well to both the *paras* and the legionnaires, although we shall continue to focus on the former. (A consideration of the Legion in its own right will be undertaken towards the end of the chapter.) Just as with the public perception of Dien-Bien-Phu, it was the paratroopers who provided the French media and the French public with an image of colonial conflict that appeared to bear

out their preconceptions. Once again, this was ultimately to prove a very costly form of national escapism:

It was the paratroops, more than anyone, who quickly came to be identified with this [combat] role, who received more attention from the press than any other soldiers in Algeria (despite their being only three percent to five percent of the forces on duty there). It was the paratroops, roaming the length and breadth of Algeria, often carried to the assault in helicopters, who fulfilled the romantic image of war as an enterprise of danger, of continuous movement and action. And it was they who identified most closely with the diehards of French Algeria, who in the course of the crisis gave the designation "units of intervention" ironic overtones. (Talbot 1980, p.64)

The combination, in the person of the paratrooper, of military romanticism and political activism is typical of right-wing treatments of the Algerian war, as epitomised by Lartéguy's *Les Centurions*. As we shall shortly demonstrate, that text also attempts to reconcile this supposed romance with the sordid historical reality of the *paras'* counter-insurgency operations in North Africa. Faced with an invisible guerilla adversary on the one hand, and by a variously hostile Muslim population on the other, the paratroopers would resort to the use of torture to obtain essential military intelligence. This tactic was systematically applied during the Battle of Algiers, as was the summary execution of native "suspects". With the publication - and botched suppression - of *La Question* (1958), Henri Alleg's account of his own experiences at the hands of the paratroopers of General Jacques Massu's *X' Division Parachutiste*, and with the outcry over the disappearance of Algiers University science lecturer Maurice Audin, it became clear that the use of such methods was by no means restricted to Muslims.

The Battle of Algiers may properly be regarded as a watershed as far as the evolution of public and media attitudes towards the erstwhile heroes of Dien-Bien-Phu was concerned; and this on both sides of the Mediterranean. In metropolitan France, a torrent of accusations regarding the paratroopers' methods marked the beginning of the intellectuals' campaign against torture, which would contribute to the definitive polarization of an already sharply divided nation. Feared and hated by the Muslim population of Algiers, and branded the French equivalent of the Gestapo by their

metropolitan critics, the *paras* were nevertheless hailed as heroes and saviours by the *pieds-noirs*, understandably grateful for the removal of the threat of bomb attacks from the streets, cafés, cinemas and dance-halls of the capital. Thus was marked a crucial stage in the paratroopers' identification with the cause of *Algérie française*; a process which would lead many of their number to challenge the governments and institutions of both the Fourth Republic and its Gaullist replacement. In the case of the 1<sup>er</sup> REP, this commitment to the preservation of French Algeria would only end with the disbanding of the regiment and the execution of its most recalcitrant members (such as leading OAS figures Roger Degueldre and Albert "Bobby" Dovecar). This tragic outcome can in no small measure be attributed to the intoxicating effect on the officers concerned of their own paratrooper mythology.

It will have become clear by this stage of the discussion that this particular myth is a paradigm of the politically motivated imaging of the Franco-Algerian conflict.

This point is clearly appreciated by John Talbott:

As the French role in Algeria became the obsessive preoccupation of French politics, [the paratrooper] became a vehicle for comment on political and social issues of the war, a means of simplifying them and stripping them of their ambiguities. A war in which combat more often resembled a vast police manhunt than it did traditional notions of "warfare" was difficult to convey to the public. Articles on the guard duty which absorbed the time of so much of the army were as tiresome as the duty itself. Debates on the strategic importance of Algeria or on exploration for oil in the Sahara dealt in the main with abstractions. The *paras*, on the other hand, were colourful, they brought a heroic reputation with them to Algeria, they took part in the most dramatic episodes of the war, they were flesh and blood. Little wonder, then, that the large circulation dailies, which professed to be "non-political", made much of the paratroops in their coverage of the war. To be non-political also meant to be uncritical. Thus the image of the *paras* purveyed in the mass circulation press usually conformed to that which the government itself tried to sustain... But the paratrooper myth was a protean creation, changing shape according to the position of the observer and his views on the war. For the press of the Left, the *para démoniaque* became a symbol of the unequivocal opposition to the government's Algerian policy, just as the *para angélique* became in the columns of the press of the Right a symbol of *Algérie française*. (Talbott 1976, pp.79-80)

The mediatic "split personality" of the French paratrooper is attributable, at least in part, to the dual policy of repression and reform pursued by successive governments in Algeria, including that of de Gaulle himself up to September 1959. What this

approach entailed was the destruction of the nationalist guerrillas, whilst at the same time other members of the French army - most notably the supposedly non-military *Sections administratives spécialisées* or "SAS" units (see Horne 1977, p.109) - sought, as part of a wider package of political and economic improvements, to better the lot of the native population from which the rebels sprang. As the spearhead of the authorities' repressive apparatus, the *paras* were, like the Legion, given considerably more scope for displays of military force than of reforming zeal. Nevertheless, the fact that they did come to see themselves as the incarnation of both aspects of the army's "pacification" effort cannot be doubted. The symbolic importance of the title chosen by paratrooper Pierre Leulliette for his 1961 account of service in Algeria - *Saint Michel et le dragon, souvenirs d'un parachutiste* (1961) - is clearly revealed against this backdrop (cf. Stockwell 1980, pp.22-23). Part archangel (Michael was, in fact, the *paras'* adopted patron saint), part monster; an image of the paratrooper which accurately reflects the deep ambivalence of the colonial authorities' response to the armed challenge of the Algerian nationalists.

Both versions of the myth of the *para* are, by definition, distortions of the historical reality of the role played in the Algerian war by this type of soldier. Before going on to examine in detail the working of Lartéguy's exemplary mystification of that reality, we should simply underline the "touchstone" status of the *para* myth as uttered by the mass media. The preferred image of the paratrooper provides the key to an awareness of the competing, and often violently antagonistic, positions adopted by groups and individuals to the Algerian question as a whole; once the relevant stance on the *para* has been discovered, the associated political and ideological framework can frequently be assumed. This is as true of literary texts as it is of newspaper and magazine articles. In Lartéguy's *Les Centurions*, for instance, we shall encounter the *para angélique* alongside a determination to preserve French rule in Algeria, which itself reflects a broader faith in France's "civilising mission". In contrast, Georges

Mattei's *La Guerre des gusses* (1982) (which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3) features the *para démoniaque* in a particularly pure form, and is the fictional product of a real-life *porteur de valises*, with all that this implies in the way of criticism of the Algerian war. A novel like *Entre chiens et loups*, in which an overtly "non-partisan" image of the paratrooper is put forward, accurately reflects Cesbron's own liberal stance on the war. So, we discover a characteristic combination of support for the ends of the army's Algerian campaign (i.e. the preservation of *Algérie française*), with a humanitarian rejection of the means necessary for the successful pursuit of a counter-insurgency operation (i.e. the torture and summary execution of "suspects", the forced relocation of whole communities, censorship of the domestic press, and the like). Moreover, we shall see that this contradiction is itself mirrored in Cesbron's treatment of the *para* theme.

An examination of the literary imaging of the paratrooper, in short, does not merely draw attention to the position occupied by the Algerian war in the French collective consciousness; rather, it gets to the very root of that society's Algerian problematic. The *para* is either wholly good or wholly evil, much as his FLN opponent is either a barbarian or a valiant heir to the glorious tradition of the French Resistance. Hero or villain? Terrorist or freedom fighter? Such questions should not be dismissed as "merely" semantic considerations. For, a tendency to Manichaeism is very much a given of the French cultural identity, and it is no coincidence that the spirit of Captain Alfred Dreyfus should so regularly have been invoked by both contemporary critics of the Algerian war and later, less impassioned, commentators. The directly competing versions of the *para* myth reveal this black-and-white way of thinking (about) the war, and the world, in a strikingly clear fashion. It is for this reason that we now begin our discussion of the literary imaging of the Algerian conflict by looking in detail at Jean Lartéguy's *Les Centurions*.

The "centurions" of the novel's title are a group of paratroopers, of differing opinions and from various backgrounds, brought together by the novel's central figure, Lieutenant-Colonel Pierre-Noël Raspéguy, in order to fight the FLN in Algeria. What these men share is a common experience of defeat in Indochina, coupled with a sense of alienation from metropolitan French society. Taken in hand by Raspéguy, they will set about revitalizing a run-down colonial parachute regiment in their turn. In this way will be produced a new breed of French troops for a new type of "revolutionary" war: the "Soldats de l'An Zéro", as another member of France's "new model army" was to put it (Héduy 1960, p.19).

The character of Raspéguy himself is transparently based on that of Marcel Bigeard, the most celebrated of all the *para* colonels. He will be examined in his own right in our consideration of the place accorded to the French military *seigneur* in the mythology of the Algerian war. For the time being, however, he will be considered in the same light as ex-paratrooper Jean-Yves Alquier's commanding officer, "qui est comme nous tous avant tout <<para>>..." (Alquier 1957, p.25). With his junior officers, NCOs, and men, Lartéguy's colonel epitomizes the *soldat d'élite*, conforming to the right-wing image of the paratrooper as the incarnation of military efficiency on the one hand and the quintessence of patriotic courage on the other. This is most clearly evidenced by his masterly orchestration of an operation against a particularly tough rebel *bande*. Having located the guerrillas, who are responsible for a fatal ambush on one of his officers and a conscripted man, Raspéguy sets about destroying them:

Accroupi, les jambes croisées, à côté de son poste de radio, Raspéguy mâchonnait une vieille tartine de pain enduite de ce pâté des rations militaires qui semble avoir été fabriqué avec de la sciure de bois et des déchets. Devant lui une grande carte dans un étui de plastique sur laquelle il faisait des marques à grands coups de crayon rouge et bleu, à mesure que chaque compagnie lui donnait sa position.

Le commandant de Glatigny qui revenait des mortiers vint s'asseoir près de lui.

- Ça ne se présente pas trop mal, dit Raspéguy. Le bouclage se resserre et les gars se tiennent bien. Les pertes?

- Quatre morts et sept blessés. Les morts sont tous chez Esclavier. (Lartéguy 1960, p.368)

This image of the *para* officer is an interesting one in several ways. To begin with, the fact that Raspéguy should be seen to be "roughing it" with his men - he squats on the ground and eats the same rotten food as them - is obviously important. Here we see the new style of military commander, more concerned with results than formal hierarchies, and caring little for his creature comforts. That those results will be achieved is beyond doubt; his mastery of the situation is reinforced with every stroke of his symbolically coloured pencils. This control is based on the obvious superiority of his *gars*, courageously and efficiently putting his plan into practice in spite of their losses. The dead and wounded are only of significance in so far as their numbers may be a factor in the outcome of the battle. When Glatigny foolishly refers to the death, in the original ambush, of the likeable Lieutenant Merle, Raspéguy dismisses the subject in typically curt fashion:

D'un geste de la main, Raspéguy fit signe que tout cela n'avait plus d'importance et appartenait au passé. Maintenant seule l'intéressait la bande rebelle prise dans une nasse, mais qui allait faire l'impossible pour s'en échapper. (ibid., p.369)

This passage illustrates the historical obsession of the paratroopers with efficiency. Raspéguy does not object to the deaths of his men, provided always that they are useful. It is this which sets him against the criminal blundering of the military traditionalists in Algeria (ibid., pp.339-342 & 369-370), just as it leads him to condemn the French army's lack of mobility from Verdun to Dien-Bien-Phu (ibid., p.285). With his lightly equipped airborne troops, the Colonel will aim at new standards of *efficacité*; this, on the basis of a new military ethos. Consider the following account of Raspéguy's decoration of the *paras'* training camp:

Dans les quelques baraques qui servaient de salles d'instruction, un certain nombre de slogans, chers à Raspéguy, avaient été affichés:

<<Celui qui meurt a tout perdu.>> <<Pour gagner, apprends à te battre.>> <<Au combat, la mort sanctionne chaque faute.>> (ibid., p.326)

The Colonel's determination to indoctrinate his men with this conception of warfare is insisted upon by one of the conscripted members of his new regiment, as we learn from an entry in the soldier's diary:

Je commence à mieux comprendre le jeu du colonel Raspéguy.

Sans cesse on nous parle ici de la mort, non point comme l'aboutissement de la vie d'un homme, le grand pas que l'on franchit pour passer dans l'autre monde, mais comme d'une sorte d'accident technique dû à la maladresse, au manque d'entraînement...

Au cours d'un exercice à tir réel, deux parachutistes de la 3<sup>e</sup> Compagnie ont été tués. C'était de leur faute; ils n'avaient pas respecté les enseignements qu'on leur avait donnés.

Raspéguy a rassemblé les soldats de cette compagnie et, devant les corps que recouvrait une toile de tente, il a fait leur éloge funèbre: <<Ils sont morts pour la France, dit-il, et comme des ânes. Je vous interdis de faire comme eux.>> Puis il est parti en suçant sa pipe. (ibid., pp.326-327)

In this passage, and others like it, the *paras'* cult of *efficacité* is appealed to in the same breath as their cult of death. This latter obsession was, not surprisingly, by no means restricted to the French parachute corps of the 1950s and 1960s; a similar insistence on the ever present threat of death could be found in the military literature of any nation. However, in the particular literature of the Algerian war, this theme was to take on a quite unique political significance. For, to insist on *para* deaths was to invoke the heroic spirit of Dien-Bien-Phu and to underline the risks run, yet again, by the military defenders of France's overseas empire. Both that spirit and those risks would be contrasted with the "decadence" tolerated by a metropolitan society from which the paratroopers had been physically excluded by their years of combat abroad, and from which they had, in consequence, become wholly estranged. The cult of death was thus a crucial element in the *esprit para*, as the paratroopers' patent view of themselves, the war and the world was to become known (cf. Perrault 1961, pp.157-167). Such commonplace military sentiments as a belief in the élite unit's efficiency and an awareness of the permanent threat of violent death were transformed by the *esprit para* into components of an internally coherent, but historically disastrous *Weltanschauung*. The more original aspects of this particular "ideolect" will be considered in depth once we have briefly inventoried the various components of its conventional military romanticism.

Perhaps the most obvious of these military romantic clichés is the notion that the French paratrooper is somehow more masculine than his civilian counterparts: that



he is a "real man", as it were. This type of thinking is regularly demonstrated in Lartéguy's novel, which often dwells on the physical perfection of its heroes. In this way, a cult of the physique serves to stress the distance supposedly separating Colonel Raspéguy and his men from lesser mortals. Consider the following account of Raspéguy's first encounter with Michel Weihl, a Jewish intellectual and politician, who also happens to be the brother-in-law of one of the Colonel's junior officers:

Le colonel Raspéguy, en arrivant à Paris, s'était installé chez Philippe Esclavier. Il était arrivé dans la nuit. Michel Weihl, le lendemain matin, entrant dans le salon, le trouva en <<flottant>> de sport, qui faisait sa culture physique sur le tapis.

- Bonjour, dit Raspéguy... C'est vous, le beau-frère?

Il avait bondi sur ses pieds avec une étonnante agilité. Weihl ne pouvait qu'admirer ce corps puissant et svelte, sans une once de graisse. Les nombreuses cicatrices qui marquaient le torse et les membres, loin de l'enlaidir, lui donnaient une beauté barbare. (Lartéguy 1960, p.301)

This celebration of the *para's* physical "beauty" is of considerable mythical importance, in that it serves to encourage an irrational sympathy for the French military and its colonial cause. Such a response, on the part of the "integrated" reader, has its roots in the visceral appeal of a morphological type, as opposed to the reasoned political arguments of the Algerian debate (see Perrault 1961, pp.122-140). Viewed in this light, the literary cult of the paratrooper's body, exemplified by the treatment of the theme to be found in *Les Centurions*, resembles the myth of "Photogénie électorale", as identified and criticised by Barthes:

Dans la mesure où la photographie est ellipse du langage et condensation de tout un <<ineffable>> social, elle constitue une arme anti-intellectuelle, tend à escamoter la <<politique>> (c'est-à-dire un corps de problèmes et de solutions) au profit d'une <<manière d'être>>, d'un statut socialo-moral. (Barthes 1957, p.161)

By looking briefly at the character of Weihl, we shall be in a position to appreciate the originality of the text's use of this particular anti-intellectual weapon more fully. For, Weihl is presented to the reader as an archetypal Parisian intellectual - a social category historically singled out for particularly venomous attack by the paratroopers and their defenders - and as such is the butt of much of the criticism regularly aimed at the capital's intelligentsia in Lartéguy's novel. An intrinsically anti-

intellectual method is used, in short, to further the anti-intellectual aims of both the fictional text and its historical heroes.

A careerist, a cynical opportunist, and, above all, an interloper, Weihl has effectively usurped Esclavier's position in his own home during his enforced absence, to the point of shamelessly appropriating the officer's well-known family name in order to benefit from its prestige. His intelligence cannot be denied, but is of a coldly calculating and sterile kind, which contrasts sharply with the much more attractive *roublardise* of his "natural" adversaries, the *paras*. The fact that Weihl is a Jew is also of importance, despite Lartéguy's clear wish to avoid charges of anti-semitism: Philippe Esclavier denies the relevance of Weihl's Jewishness in the course of an outspoken attack, directly contrasting his alleged cosmopolitanism with the patriotism of another, sympathetically evoked, Jew (Lartéguy 1960, p.257). This is a right-wing theme which surely requires no further comment. Most damning of all, however, is Weihl's status as a champion of "defeatist" policies: he is the fictional representative of all those who would "abandon" the French population of Algeria, the friends of France amongst the indigenous community, and, most importantly of all, the nation's valiant military defenders, simply because they judge it politically expedient to do so. The holder of such views can only be depicted as rotten to the core, and this moral turpitude is outwardly manifested in his physical weakness. So, when Esclavier rounds on Weihl - having arrived home unannounced, only to discover that a leftist *salon* is taking place there - the accent is very firmly put on the physical nature of the latter's terror-stricken reaction:

Michel Weihl avait senti le sang qui abandonnait son visage, sa poitrine, ses membres pour se réfugier en un point mystérieux de son corps, une sorte de cuve où, quand ça allait très mal, il affluait soudain. Il s'attendait à cette rencontre, il s'y était préparé, mais le coup l'avait surpris. (ibid., p.256)

As the *para* continues his attack, the anti-war campaigner's smallness is seized upon, whilst his political stance is described in terms which suggest congenital ill-health; his associates fare just as badly:

- ...tu n'es qu'une sale petite ordure. Tu as le goût malsain du malheur, du pourrissement, de la défaite. Tu es né maquerele, complaisant et servile...

[...]

- J'ai la chance de voir rassemblé autour de toi un lot particulièrement choisi de petits salauds, de gogos et de snobs. Pas pu résister à ce plaisir. Demain on désinfectera ... au D.D.T. (ibid., p.257)

This abuse is uttered in tones which supposedly bring to mind nature and the great outdoors: "La voix de Philippe avait claqué, sèche comme un jour de gel le craquement d'un arbre de la forêt" (ibid., p.256). What must clearly be recognized here is an extremely simplistic, and properly fascist, line of political reasoning. For, on the mythical level, the paratrooper is deemed to be correct on account of his superior physical fitness. Barthes noted this same brand of "might-is-right" approach in his discussion of Pierre Poujade's anti-intellectualism in "Poujade et les intellectuels". Many common themes and techniques of mystification are to be discerned in this critique of the right-wing populist, but the single most relevant one in the present context is his observation that, "selon une crase bien connue, la plénitude physique fonde une clarté morale: seul l'être fort peut être franc" (Barthes 1957, p.186). This sort of thinking very obviously underpins Lartéguy's depiction of both his *para* heroes and their metropolitan critics. So, to take another example, the ex-seminarist Bistenave will note in his diary that the transformation of himself and his fellow *rappelés* into paratroopers entails a moral elevation just as much as it does a physical improvement. As he and his colleagues follow Raspéguy's training programme, they not only get fit, they also become "pure". The camp's radio station hammers this message home, we learn:

<<Radio Raspéguy>> insiste sur tout ce qui peut dégoûter le soldat de la vie civile. Le monde extérieur est présenté comme vil, pourri, sans grandeur, le pouvoir comme se trouvant aux mains d'une bande d'escrocs de petite envergure.

Mes camarades disent déjà <<nous autres>>, par opposition à tout ce qui ne porte pas la casquette et la tenue camouflée. Ils sont propres, nets, ils deviennent agiles; ils sont purs, tandis qu'en France règnent la corruption, la lâcheté, la bassesse, <<le monde du péché>> de nos monastères. (Lartéguy 1960, p.328)

Let us turn now to the narrative's regular celebration of the virility of these superb physical specimens. In fact, the reader of *Les Centurions* cannot but take note of this particular facet of the paratrooper's mythical persona, so often does it occupy the

foreground in Lartéguy's novel. For, Raspéguy and his men exert a powerful sexual attraction over all those women with whom they come into contact - be they Vietminh nurses, or the wives and mistresses of the metropolitan *bourgeoisie* - and the text abounds with examples of their womanizing. In the Algerian context, this will mean *para* conquests at all levels of colonial society: Raspéguy wins the heart of a Spanish beauty from Bab-El-Oued; Esclavier becomes involved with the wife of a pillar of Algiers high society; Glatigny falls for a glamorous FLN militant; handsome young soldiers charm the veiled Muslim women whom they transport to work in army trucks. In all cases, the virility of the *paras* is constantly emphasized. An example of this type of imaging will help us to appreciate its ideological significance. Consider the following passage, in which Esclavier, newly arrived from Indochina, is unwisely introduced to Mina, the mistress of a snobbish chance acquaintance:

Avec beaucoup d'affectation, Percenier se précipita sur elle, lui prit la main, la baisa (ou plutôt la lécha).

[...]

Philippe et Mina se regardèrent. Ils se serrèrent à peine la main, affectèrent de s'ignorer, mais ils sentaient déjà l'un comme l'autre qu'ils passeraient la nuit ensemble. Ils écoutaient le désir qui faisait bruire leurs oreilles; ils étaient prudents, évitaient de se frôler, tandis que Percenier-Moreau tournait autour d'eux comme une grosse mouche d'été.

[...]

«Je n'ai jamais senti <<ça>> aussi fort, pensait Mina. Qu'est-ce qu'il a donc ce type, avec sa gueule maigre et ses grands yeux gris? Quelque chose, en tout cas, que n'a jamais eu Percenier. Qu'est-ce que je peux le faire suer, Percenier, avec mon canard à l'orange. Le capitaine ... a cet air affamé du loup dans les livres d'images. Mina, ma petite, fais attention de pas trop te laisser aller. Achtung, Mina; off-limits, à toucher avec des pincettes. Il doit avoir des cuisses maigres, un ventre dur. Pas comme le petit bedon d'Albert, qu'il serre précieusement dans une ceinture de flanelle!>> (ibid., p.235)

Here again, the *para* is contrasted with a feeble specimen of metropolitan French decadence. Everything about Lartéguy's hero is healthy, strong, and natural; everything about his unsuspecting rival is sickly and affected. Both are described by means of animal imagery; but Esclavier is the only one to benefit from the comparison. The theme of the wolf is a common one, incidentally, in the relevant literature - compare the title of Cesbron's Algerian novel, for instance - and will be returned to

shortly. Let us simply note here that Esclavier's "angelic" persona, so beloved of the French right, does not preclude the possession of characteristics more suggestive of the "demonic" half of the mythical package. The *para* is vulpine, and a most definite threat to "little girls" like Mina. When Esclavier touches her, it is with "une main sèche et dure qui devait faire mal" (ibid.). Not that this in any way diminishes the Captain's attractiveness, in fact; on the contrary, the danger which he represents is all part of his romantic appeal.

Lartéguy's glorification of his heroes' sexual exploits should not be regarded as merely the cheap eroticism of French pulp fiction; rather, its profoundly political character must be emphasized. For, the *paras'* virility is an important element in the text's systematic denigration of any attitude which hinders the fulfilment of the army's imperial aspirations. By drawing attention to the superior manliness of Raspéguy and his comrades, the narrative seeks to stress the naturalness of both the men themselves and the ideas which they represent. Conversely, those who challenge the *paras'* political opinions are shown to be lacking in virility themselves and to advocate "sexless" political systems (cf. Perrault 1961, pp.154-156). Of the greatest significance in this regard is Lartéguy's permanent equation of "love" with the French colonial cause.

Throughout *Les Centurions*, Lartéguy is at pains to demonstrate that love is always able to triumph over politics. Provided, that is, that the "love" in question is that generated by the animal magnetism of his paratrooper heroes, and, furthermore, that the triumph is gained over "unnatural" political attitudes, i.e. colonial nationalisms and metropolitan anti-colonialism. By now considering the single most revealing occurrence of the theme, we shall be better able to note its particular contribution to the text's mystifying project.

The central figure here is not Raspéguy, nor Esclavier, but the aristocratic Glatigny. This officer is a particularly important one, in that he incarnates the

historical shift of the parachute regiments away from traditionalism and towards their own peculiar creed. A member of the landed gentry and a former officer of the General Staff, Glatigny has, as a result of his experiences in Indochina, turned his back on his class, and become instead a paratrooper. This transformation not only has obvious military implications; it also implies a political shift, and even a physical improvement on the part of the officer concerned. Typically, this last is made most obviously apparent in the bed of his wife, the frigid "comtesse de Glatigny":

C'était un étranger qui le premier soir l'avait approchée. Il s'était conduit d'une manière affreuse, et elle avait eu le sentiment de commettre un adultère. Il l'avait traitée comme n'importe quelle femme de rencontre, ahanant au-dessus d'elle, tandis que, renversée, elle regardait le crucifix sur le mur, un Christ réprobateur et outragé. (Lartéguy 1960, p.246)

However, Glatigny's newly liberated sexuality only achieves its full potential - both physically and mythically - in Algeria, following a chance encounter with Aïcha, who is both an FLN militant and, unbeknown to Glatigny and his colleagues, the sister of a fellow *para* officer. (This rather laboured irony is characteristic of the "fratricidal" image of the Franco-Algerian conflict purveyed not only by *Les Centurions*, but also, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, by very many other literary, and non-literary, works.) In the early stages of their relationship, attention is focussed on the well-bred civility and basic gentleness of the officer; an approach which enables Lartéguy to contrast his attitude to Aïcha with the mindless racism of some elements of the settler community. At the same time, the paratrooper is able to appear in a favourable light against the backdrop of the sexual harassment endured by Aïcha in the course of her contacts with her FLN *frères*. This repulsive face of Muslim sexuality is found in combination, it should be noted, with an antiseptic sexlessness on the part of the revolutionary leadership. Lartéguy thus manages to suggest that the *paras'* adversaries are simultaneously oversexed and undersexed: both of which are "unnatural" states of existence.

The narrative's initial insistence on the tentative nature of Glatigny's advances is a necessary preliminary in view of the violent nature of the couple's climactic sexual, and political, confrontation towards the end of the novel: a crucial encounter which will illustrate Lartéguy's characteristic equation of the love of a woman with the French colonial cause in a particularly striking fashion. The setting for this most unlikely couple's dramatic meeting is the paratroopers' operations centre at the height of the Battle of Algiers, and its basic justification is Aïcha's arrest on suspicion of involvement in terrorist activities. In response to her interrogation by two other *para* officers, Boisfeuras and Marindelle, she mentions her friendship with Glatigny, and the Major is consequently sent for. Stunned by the news of her arrest, and disinclined to regard her as a criminal, Glatigny is left in the difficult position of having to deal with the "suspect" by himself. Meanwhile, Boisfeuras, the X<sup>e</sup> RPC's resident expert on "revolutionary warfare", places the whole episode in the correct context for the benefit of Marindelle, and, through him, of the integrated reader of *Les Centurions*. As the principal advocate of "une nouvelle armée et une nouvelle nation" (ibid., p.311), the Captain inevitably insists on the fact that Glatigny, who has hitherto sought to avoid the unsavoury aspects of the Algerian conflict, is now up to his neck in the unpleasant reality of *la sale guerre*:

- Le voici à son tour dans le bain! Aucun de nous ne pourra y échapper, jusqu'au moment où nous serons de plain-pied avec les fellagha, aussi couverts de boue et de sang qu'ils le sont. Alors nous pourrons les combattre; nous y laisserons notre âme, si nous en avons une, pour que là-bas, en France, des petits rigolos continuent à s'éventer avec leur bonne conscience. (ibid., p.475)

Briefly, what follows is that Glatigny sets about interrogating Aïcha and very quickly establishes her guilt beyond any doubt. As he questions her, the Major is overcome by a not wholly unexpected, but surprisingly intense, desire for the Algerian woman. The fierceness of this longing is something that the aristocratic officer has never previously experienced; indeed, its intensity is such that the retaining walls of both personal conviction and social convention collapse and set free more elemental

forces. Glatigny may declare his marital fidelity - "Je suis marié, catholique, et je ne trompe pas ma femme" (ibid., p.476) - but the outcome is never in any real doubt. As he attempts to force himself upon Aïcha, he discovers that the FLN militant is aroused by his violent overtures; like him, in spite of both her principles and the norms of her family and social milieu. She thus not only allows him to have his way with her, but actively encourages the "rape".

However, it is not so much the sexual act itself which is of interest here as its political consequences. For, immediately after it, and with not the slightest prompting from Glatigny, Aïcha betrays her associates in the FLN bomb network. The Major will later attempt to rationalize this remarkable turn-around in terms of a mutual collapse of previously accepted values, itself perceived as the result of their spontaneous sexual liaison:

- Toute ma vie passée s'écroulait comme des façades de bois bouffées par des termites. Il n'y avait plus rien que cette fille près de moi. Un grand vide, un désert, et cette fille serrée contre moi, cet amour monstrueux.

[...]

- Tout s'est écroulé pour elle aussi: le Front, l'indépendance de l'Algérie... Elle m'a livré ses amis, elle se retrouve dans le même désert que moi. (ibid., pp.479-480)

Only on the most superficial reading of the relevant events can Glatigny's account carry any weight. Looked at a little more critically, the equation of Aïcha's nationalist apostasy with his own supposed loss of his previous identity is soon exposed for what it really is: a blatant example of literary mystification. Consider the following remarks by Dia, the paratroopers' Negro *toubib*, who, in the absence of a priest, acts as their confessor. Comparing Glatigny's experience with that of Esclavier and Souên, a Vietnamese nurse who paid for her illicit love of the desperately sick *para* with her life, Dia goes on to draw similar conclusions from the two incidents:

- ...encore une fois, c'est une victoire de la vie, la grande vie sereine et sexuelle, qui se fout des conneries, des saloperies et de la bêtise des hommes.

[...]

- Qui se fout que les hommes soient mariés ou se battent entre eux, qui se fout des causes et des indépendances, des races et des haines, parce que le destin des hommes c'est l'amour, et le reste ne vaut pas grand-chose. (ibid., p.480)



So, for Boisfeuras, Glatigny's sexual involvement with the FLN bomber constitutes the final stage of his transformation from a staff officer into a *para*: an Algerian *dépucelage*, as it were. For Dia, meanwhile, his actions, and Aïcha's response, are to be regarded as a victory of "life" over human foolishness. This was, no doubt, a doubly reassuring perspective for the defenders of *Algérie française*, but it is hardly a persuasive one for the critical reader of the text. For, the fact remains that the French soldier does rather better out of the deal than the FLN militant. Indeed, whilst Glatigny has allegedly been deprived of his "honour" and "soul" - necessarily ill-defined and flexible concepts - he has clearly lost none of his sense of military purpose, and is only too keen to make tangible use of his newly acquired intelligence:

Glatigny revint dans la <<salle de classe>>. Il lança sur la table de Boisfeuras le plan de la cache.

- Envoie des hommes là-bas. Les bombes s'y trouvent.

[...]

- J'ai perdu mon honneur et j'ai perdu mon âme, mais au moins que cela serve à quelque chose! Va faire ramasser les bombes. Il y en a vingt-sept prêtes à être posées. (ibid., pp.478-479)

Unlike Glatigny, Aïcha is unable to reconcile love (or lust) and her previously held political opinions. He may claim that he has sacrificed an important part of himself for her - and, more significantly, for the cause of *efficacité* - but her betrayal of herself, and of her nation, is of an altogether more radical kind. This objective transformation is itself imaged as merely a recovery from a temporary political aberration, as Aïcha returns to the French colonial fold. In this way, "love" is clearly seen to conquer, if not all, then at least all Algerian nationalist sentiment; just as, in the figure of Souên, it triumphed over Vietnamese nationalism. In the fictive world of *Les Centurions*, in short, *para* sexuality makes as great a contribution to the cause of *Algérie française* as anything achieved by the paratroopers' in their days and nights in the *djebel*.

Our comments thus far will have drawn attention to Lartéguy's continual confusion of political order and natural order. As Barthes explains in "L'utilisateur de la

grève", this tendency is characteristic of mythical speech: "C'est là un langage qui ... opère une sorte de crase entre la Morale et la Nature, donnant à l'une la caution de l'autre: de peur d'avoir à naturaliser la Morale, on moralise la Nature, on feint de confondre l'ordre politique et l'ordre naturel, et l'on conclut en décrétant immoral tout ce qui conteste les lois structurelles de la société que l'on est chargé de défendre" (Barthes 1957, p.134) At the root of this politically motivated confusion, Barthes goes on to argue, is a mistaken essentialism, which is itself a basic given of the French right's way of thinking (about) the world:

C'est qu'en effet nous retrouvons ici un trait constitutif de la mentalité réactionnaire, qui est de disperser la collectivité en individus et l'individu en essences. [...]

Ceci participe d'une technique générale de mystification qui consiste à formaliser autant qu'on peut le désordre social. (ibid., pp.135-136)

This mystifying strategy can be identified with no great difficulty in the case of Aïcha: Algerian nationalism becomes one particular activist, who in turn becomes a "Woman"; and thus in need of the "love" of the French military. The challenge historically posed to the French colonialist world-view by militant colonial nationalism is similarly deflected on the frequent occasions when the involvement of specific individuals in the struggle against French rule is revealed to be little more than sublimated personal bitterness (the life stories of the Vietminh officer known as "La Voix" and the Algerian guerrilla Si Lahcen are typical of this spurious rationalization). However, this characteristically mythical reduction of a collectivity - i.e. the politics of colonial war - to individuals, and of individuals to essences, is nowhere more apparent than in Lartéguy's extensive use of animal imagery to describe his paratrooper heroes.

We have already noted Mina's awareness of Esclavier's lupine air, as well as Gilbert Cesbron's reference to both this theme and that of the leopard-man. Indeed, as we suggested at the time, this approach to imaging the paratrooper is very much a commonplace of the French literature of the Algerian war. So much so, in fact, that it is worth taking note of a number of other literary depictions of the *para* as a wild

animal. Consider, for instance, Jules Roy's description of a paratrooper strolling along the Rue Michelet in Algiers:

En tenue léopard, sur les Champs-Élysées, on l'aurait regardé comme un Martien. A Alger il était un héros, un sauveur. Les habitants d'Alger, quand ils avaient envie de déguster une cassate ou une plombière, d'aller à la plage ou de se balader en bagnole, il leur suffisait d'appeler les parachutistes. (Roy 1975, p.15)

Though by no means immune to the *para's* mystique, Roy does accurately identify two crucial aspects of his mythical persona: the settlers' hero-worship of the parachute corps in the wake of the Battle of Algiers; and the "talismanic" function of the *tenue léopard* (Talbot 1976, p.73). It was the distinctive camouflage pattern of the paratroopers' uniforms which, with their special regimental berets, visibly set them apart from the rest of the French forces in Algeria. These mottled outfits were, together with the *paras'* supposedly cat-like way of walking, generally held to have given rise to the "leopard-man" tag. As Talbot rightly suggests, "the *paras'* camouflaged combat fatigues cast a spell that in retrospect seems extraordinary, and even faintly ridiculous" (ibid.). Nevertheless, the affective power of this attire was such that even the paratroopers' military critics, such as Colonel Georges Buis, could not entirely avoid it. In his novel *La Grotte* (1961), we discover the following testament to *para efficacité*:

On était tombé probablement dans le mille, c'est-à-dire, pour l'immédiat, dans du très dur. Les paras qui étaient cependant orfèvres ... ne se rappelaient pas d'accrochage équivalent. Ils le disaient au micro. Mais les paras étaient démonstrativement à leur affaire. Dans la lutte à main plate où deux lutteurs sont arc-boutés il faut que l'un des deux tombe à la renverse. Ce jeu convenait aux hommes peints que le reste de l'armée n'arrivait pas à aimer. <<Terminé avec la question paras>>, avait dit, la veille encore, Enrico à ses officiers qui protestaient en apprenant que les bariolés seraient héliportés en priorité, le lendemain, sur la falaise. <<Que vous les aimiez ou non, je m'en fous et ça n'a rien à voir avec leur emploi. Comme vous, je tiens pour paresse la solution des <<belles unités>>. Mais les sélectionnés n'y sont pour rien. Tels quels, ils font mon affaire. D'autre part, il n'y a pas trente-six catégories de combattant. Il y'en a deux. Il y a la frange infime qui va vraiment à l'assaut et les autres. Les paras vont à l'assaut. Pour moi, ça suffit, quand le problème est de donner l'assaut aux réguliers rebelles.>> (Buis 1961, pp.50-51)

What we find here is a combination of accurate historical analysis and military romantic mystification. So, whilst the paratroopers' effectiveness as fighters can hardly be denied, it is possible to criticize the terms in which that military efficiency is

evoked. The *paras*' small numbers, isolation from the main body of the army, experience of combat, and special transportation - both airborne and *en priorité* - all contribute to their heroic image. As does the suggestion that their battle with the FLN is a straight, one-to-one, contest. This is a view which is commonly echoed, but which completely fails to take account of the historical disparity between the armed forces involved in the Franco-Algerian conflict. For, whilst the notion of a contest of enemy equals may have a strictly limited numerical validity, it effectively ignores the might of the military apparatus backing up the French combatants. The *paras* may well have been the army's *frange infime*, as Buis suggests, but these few thousand "real soldiers" had the support of a huge army of occupation to fall back on, with all that this implied in the way of transport, supplies, medical care, rest and recreation facilities, and the like.

The references to *orfèvres* and *belles unités* clearly contribute to the *paras*' mythical appeal, by suggesting refinement and quality, but what really interests us here, in fact, is Buis's insistence on their distinctive uniform. Such descriptions of the paratroopers as *les hommes peints* and *les bariolés* play a leading role in the literary communication of their heroic image. As does Buis's likening of the camouflaged *paras* to tigers - "des soldat tigrés" (ibid., p.179) - and of their FLN opponents to jackals (ibid., p.176). This latter appeal to the familiar strength and grace of the big cats can be illustrated with material from a variety of sources.

The leopard is the usual choice of the writer seeking to imbue the paratrooper with the dangerous charms of the wild beast. Vladimir Volkoff, for instance, may criticize the *paras*' suicidal tactics in battle, but is no more able to resist their "animal" appeal than was Buis twenty years before him:

Les paras montaient à l'assaut; ils montaient, au sens propre, grim pant de rocher en rocher, déployés en ligne, sur deux vagues successives, debout, tirant en marchant.

[...]

Des petits gars français mourraient dans quelques instants, parce que les paras montent à l'assaut debout, que c'est un principe, que les divisions aéroportées sont fières de leurs pertes... Des léopards français tombèrent; leurs camarades jetèrent des

grenades; lorsque la deuxième vague arriva au même point, l'arme automatique s'était tue. (Volkoff 1980, p.267)

Note, once again, the insistence on the fact that the *paras* are "real soldiers". Their only equals in this regard are to be found in the Foreign Legion, as Volkoff's hero, himself a legionnaire, has already had occasion to make clear:

Parmi les soldats, il était légionnaire, c'est-à-dire deux fois professionnel, membre d'une des deux seules unités qui montassent encore à l'assaut. Cela aurait bien fait rire Monluc: qu'est-ce qu'un soldat qui ne monte pas à l'assaut? (ibid., p.127)

The importance of this particular perspective is only fully revealed, or at least hinted at, when the *paras*' previously quoted assault on a rebel hide-out is described. For, it enables Volkoff to adopt an apparently disabused attitude to the paratroopers' heroics, whilst contributing, at a deeper level, to the furtherance of the *para* myth. So, he may mock the paratroopers' "assauts à trente contre un, sur des positions intenablement complètement ratatinées" (ibid., p.266), but the image which endures in the reader's mind is one of military valour. The *paras* - *petits gars* and *léopards*, in Volkoff's version of their mediatic "split personality" - are pictured on the field of battle, bravely laying down their lives for a country which, typically, does not deserve their sacrifice, "puisque le chef de l'Etat [de Gaulle] avait décidé d'avance de faire sortir son armée battue et déshonorée de cette galère" (ibid., p.267). Moreover, the presentation of the battle as a clash between quelques *fauves humains* on one side (ibid.), and the French *léopards* on the other - and one, note, which takes place on a rugged mountain top, well away from civilians and "irregulars" of whatever stripe - cannot fail to suggest the very contest of enemy equals which Volkoff ostensibly denies.

It was no coincidence, then, that the first serious attempt at an academic history of the Algerian war - news reporter Yves Courrière's very journalistic study, *La Guerre d'Algérie* - should have included a volume entitled *Le Temps des léopards* (Courrière 1969). Yet the leopard is far from being the sole feline reference to be found in the relevant literature. Buis's use of a tiger image has already been noted; that of Jean Brune, in *Cette haine qui ressemble à l'amour* (1961), is even more worthy of note.

The subject of the following celebratory treatment is one Hoffman, an *officier de renseignements*. Having noted his magnificent physique, extreme virility, and imposing stare, Brune goes on to consider the Lieutenant's reputation amongst the local Muslim population:

Les rebelles l'appelaient Ennem'r - le tigre - non pas tellement à cause de la tenue tachetée comme la robe d'un fauve qu'il portait, mais parce qu'il avait acquis une terrible réputation de cruauté. Il était chargé de réunir et d'interpréter les renseignements qui permettaient de déjouer les plans des rebelles. Il surgissait à n'importe quelle heure du jour ou de la nuit, au volant d'un Dodge à quatre roues, accompagné de cinq ou six hommes et toujours flanqué du petit sergent rouquin. Il faisait halte près des campements nomades dispersés sur le plateau, au bord des franges de la ville où venaient échouer les épaves du désert, ou sur les pistes du djebel Hamra, au pied des mechtas accrochées aux falaises. Il sautait de sa voiture, allait droit à des maisons, des pailotes ou des taudis que paraissait lui désigner une miraculeuse divination. Il enfonçait les portes et ressortait, poussant devant lui, à grands coups de poing dans le dos, l'homme qu'il était venu chercher. Il repartait dans un nuage de poussière ... divinité redoutable capable d'apparaître par enchantement. Les gens murmuraient que ceux qui partaient ainsi avec Hoffman ne revenaient jamais ... et le Dodge couleur de sable figurait pour de foules terrorisées une sorte de char de l'enfer. (Brune 1961, pp.180-181)

In this particularly dense passage, the theme of the *fauve* is linked to that of the supernatural, via the emphasis on the soldier's terrible reputation for cruelty. That Hoffman is on the side of "Good" in Brune's fictive universe is never in doubt; however, he comes very close here to appearing in a monstrous light. Not that this detracts from his mythical appeal, for the overall impression remains one of strength, confidence, and robust efficiency in a noble cause. The key to this integrated reading of the foregoing extract lies in the distance established at the outset between the point of view of the rebels - who, like Hoffman himself, are the subject of the narrative's *énoncé*, i.e. the subject inscribed in the utterance - and the point of view of the subject of the *énonciation*, that is to say that of the narrator, or implied author (see Belsey 1980, pp.30-31 & 76-84). For, the terror engendered by Hoffman, especially during his lightning raids on Muslim homes, is clearly not shared in by Brune's European readers. On the contrary, his integrated audience is likely to be impressed by Hoffman's speed and mobility, by his "divine" insight into Algerian hearts, by his powerful grip on the imagination of a deeply superstitious native population. How can France possibly lose

the struggle for Algeria with such demi-gods on her side? Omniscient and omnipresent, Hoffman only conjures up images of hell for those foolish enough to take up arms against the colonial power. For the friend of *Algérie française*, in contrast, he is wholly reassuring. Elements of the demonic version of the *para* myth are, in other words, exploited in a pragmatic, or opportunistic, fashion here, in order to further the idea that the paratrooper is a superman. Whether he be a wild animal, or an avenging angel, or both, as here, he is clearly not like lesser mortals. Similar examples of both the divine and bestial themes will be found in *Les Centurions*.

Cesbron's linking of the archangel and the leopard in the person of the paratrooper has already been noted, as has his use of the theme of the wolf. However, it is his novel's account of the confrontation between the schoolmaster hero and the particular *para* who provided the inspiration for his favourite pupil's much maligned composition which is of the greatest interest from a mythological point of view. In the following extract, Roland Guérin, having spotted young Mansart talking to someone in the Luxembourg gardens, comes face to face with his accuser:

...il n'aperçut pas aussitôt le personnage. Il fallait que, s'écartant de l'ombre tigrée des platanes, l'autre apparaisse en plein soleil, panthère lui-même. Roland sursauta et cette image lui remit aussitôt en mémoire <<l'homme-léopard régnant sur la jungle...>> Un officier de parachutistes, en tenue camouflée de combat, le béret vert juste un peu trop étroit et très incliné sur l'oreille, s'avancait vers lui. Roland s'écarta; l'inconnu en fit autant comme pour lui barrer le chemin.

[...]

- Lieutenant Mansart, du 1<sup>er</sup> régiment étranger de parachutistes.

[...]

Ce n'était pas l'aigu de ses yeux gris qui les rendait insupportables, mais leur fixité. Comme aimanté par ce regard, le visage tanné de soleil et sillonné de rides blanches paraissait entièrement contracté. Roland senti une peur monstrueuse le gagner, et cette peur le démantelait: le coeur battait fou, les jambes le trahissaient; mais il tentait de maintenir droit son esprit, tel un navire dans la tempête.

[...]

Qui était-ce après tout? - Un homme déguisé dont le métier consistait à tuer des inconnus en pays lointain; et cependant le professeur Guérin, à quelque pas de son domaine, se sentait l'étranger, l'inutile. <<J'ai raison, se répétait-il au rythme d'un coeur affolé. Oui, c'est moi qui ai raison...>> Il avait raison mais peur, donc tort. (Cesbron 1962, pp.102-104)

Such a description is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that Cesbron's novel draws the attention of its readers quite overtly to the myth of the *para*, which it

rightly deems to be a suitable subject for critical attention (ibid., pp.136-137). However, this liberal goal is never, in fact, attained. Rather, all metropolitan criticism of the paratrooper is dismissed as fatally "partisan" (ibid., p.210 & passim), whilst Roland himself enlists and thus, as a result of his experience of combat in Algeria, comes to know "le secret du lieutenant Mansart" (ibid., pp.348-349). This last will be considered properly when we come to examine the literary depiction of the paratrooper as a member of what Philip Williams terms a "militant sect" (Williams 1970, p.93); but for the time being it may usefully be equated with Roland's realization that the *paras* are "des anges de proie" (Cesbron 1962, p.349). This characteristically antithetical image of the parachute regiments, and of their role in the Algerian war, does nothing to dispel their mystique, and, in fact, the ideological ascendancy of the *para angélique* is never seriously challenged in *Entre chiens et loups*. The mythified *para* who confronts Cesbron's hero in the Jardin du Luxembourg emerges intact, and if anything enhanced, from his brush with Cesbron's liberal conscience.

As depicted by Cesbron, Lieutenant Mansart is the epitome of *para* virtues. Associated in turn with the tiger, the panther and the leopard, the officer is not only a paratrooper, but a member of its single most prestigious regiment. Handsome and weatherbeaten, he possesses both the piercing gaze and the intimidating physical presence of Hoffman; whilst, like Esclavier, his evident bodily fitness reflects a moral superiority. Indeed, this particular mythical message - that only the strong can be in the right - is rendered explicit in Cesbron's novel, having remained largely implicit in Lartéguy's own celebration of the French parachute corps. For his part, Roland Guérin, the *para*'s physical and moral antithesis, experiences the most total defeat. Anticipating a beating from the officer, he is treated instead to an intellectual humiliation: his "petite dose de dialectique", as Lieutenant Mansart puts it (ibid., p.109). Consequently, when the schoolmaster comes to describe himself as a "dog" to the paratrooper's "wolf" (ibid., p.103), there can be little doubting either the justice of his assessment of their



respective roles, or the right of the *para* to the admiration of contemporary French society.

Whilst Cesbron images the *paras* as wolves, it is rather their various opponents that Philippe Héduy, the author of *Au lieutenant des Taglaïts* (1960), sees in this light. His description of the death of the eponymous lieutenant casts the paratroopers and their FLN adversaries, as well as the hated metropolitan "defeatists", in what will by now be increasingly familiar roles:

Il était mort au combat. Le combat continuait. Les loups étaient toujours là, des milliers de loups veules, efflanqués et féroces, et d'autres loups plus gras. Dans la bataille, les loups hurlaient, des lions tombaient. Et c'étaient les loups qui hurlaient encore. (Héduy 1960, p.36)

Both *paras* and *fellaghas* are *fauves*, once again, although their struggle for Algeria now appears less a contest between enemy equals and more obviously weighted in favour of the, wholly negatively portrayed, nationalist guerillas. The metropolitan doubters, meanwhile, are little better than the "rats" described by the narrator of José Vicente Ortúño's *Mort pour une chose morte* (1971), a novel whose hero shares with Cesbron's Lieutenant Mansart the distinction of belonging to the much celebrated 1<sup>er</sup> REP. The following comments occur as the protagonist and his comrades are nearing the port of Algiers:

Sur le pont, quelques centaines d'hommes attendaient d'apercevoir les côtes d'Afrique. Au fond, des rats, métisses de rongeurs indochinois, maltais, indous et autres produits échangés aux escales, poursuivaient leur vie tranquille. Dans un bateau, les rats sont les vrais occupants. Il y a des rats partout.

Dans le monde, il y a aussi les hommes rats qui se nourrissent du sacrifice des autres. Comme les rats, au moment des naufrages, ceux-là surgissent dans les grands mouvements d'une nation pour dépecer les autres et prendre leur part. (Ortúño 1971, pp.23-24)

The theme of *para* suffering in the cause of an undeserving nation will be recognized here, as will the suggestion that cosmopolitanism is a factor in the alleged decadence of metropolitan France. These are key elements in the *para* myth, and will shortly be examined in their own right. The image of the sinking ship, meanwhile, is worthy of note as a staple of right-wing criticism of the Fourth Republic, in spite of its

familiar, and even hackneyed, character. Similarly worthy of attention are the insistence on the *paras'* small numbers - "quelques centaines", in a life-and-death struggle with a huge army of "rats" - and on their elevated status, symbolized by their position high up on the bridge. (The *pont/fond* dichotomy is itself of interest, in that its homophonic quality serves to draw the reader's attention to a basic ideological opposition.)

Unlike so many of his contemporaries, Jean-Jacques Rochard depicts his legionnaire heroes not as cats, but rather as chameleons. Take, for instance, this description of a major, newly assigned to the command of his hero's unit:

Bourgeois appartenait à cette sorte d'hommes, caméléons dans l'action, et qui font merveille dans leur métier, comprenant si bien l'ennemi qu'ils s'assimilent à lui et le dévorent, sans que l'autre s'en aperçoive. (Rochard 1965, p.56)

The image may have changed, but the mythical concept remains the same: i.e. the deadly efficiency of the *para*/legionnaire in the French colonial cause. As for the notion that the paratroopers somehow came to resemble their Algerian adversaries, this has already been noted - as uttered by Lartéguy's Boisfeuras, when considering Glatigny's interrogation of Aïcha - and should be borne in mind as a basic tenet of the *esprit para*. Indeed, such thinking has its roots in the *paras'* defeat by the Vietminh (variously imaged, incidentally, as ants, termites, and rats), which led them to believe that they had to adopt the theory and practice of their nationalist opponents to have any hope of victory in a future colonial war. Rochard develops this point when he reverts to ideological type by characterizing the FLN combatant as the familiar *fauve*:

Sans doute sont-ils rares les hommes d'action qui ne sont pas dupes, comme ne sont pas nombreux les tueurs de *toros* de la vieille école, les purs, les solitaires revenus de la gloire et méprisant l'or, affrontant l'adversaire comme un autre soi-même, jetés au mufler du fauve par une force étrange dont ils ne savent si elle est malédiction ou bénédiction. Et l'étranger, l'autre, que s'insurge du fond de son fauteuil devant le sang de la bête de combat se couvre de ridicule lorsqu'il ouvre la bouche pour juger. (ibid.)

Exclusivity and isolation, action and purity: these are basic givens of the *para* myth. As, indeed, is the suggestion that the paratroopers and their FLN counterparts share a common identity as warriors; an idea that helps to give credence to the image

of the war as a contest of enemy equals. Moreover, this notion of a community of military adversaries has as its logical corollary that very same contempt for civil society displayed by Lieutenant Mansart in his confrontation with the schoolmaster: "Dans votre monde à vous, il n'y a <<finalement>> que ceux qui gagne de l'argent, et les autres - et c'est irrespirable" (Cesbron 1962, p.106). Like Roland Guérin, like Héduy's "loups plus gras", like Ortuño's "hommes rats", Rochard's armchair critics of the army are the physical and moral antithesis of *para* virtue, and are thus mythically disqualified from commenting on the military's élite units or their role in Algeria. That this role has a somewhat schizophrenic character is not denied; rather, the paratroopers' operations against the FLN are linked, as in the rest of the texts examined thus far, with notions of destiny and divine intervention.

As the most developed working of the *para* myth, *Les Centurions* is the site for a great deal of animal image-making of the kind described in our foregoing remarks. Raspéguy's appearance on the parade ground of the X<sup>e</sup> RPC's Algerian training camp is thus to be regarded as typical. As before, the conscript Bistenave is the commentator:

<<Avec son poitrail large et son arrière-train maigre, sa tenue camouflée et cette drôle de casquette, le colonel ressemble à un tigre, pensa le séminariste. Une bête de guerre cruelle qui prend possession de sa horde.>> (Lartéguy 1960, p.322)

The right-wing text's pragmatic likening of Raspéguy to a barbarian warlord should likewise be noted; as the title of Lartéguy's novel clearly indicates, the narrative's primary historical reference is to the defenders of Rome's North African empire, but this association of ideas by no means precludes passing references to other, more "savage", military traditions if mythical capital can be made from them. Moreover, such antithetical references conform to that pattern of thematic tension which characterizes the literature of the French paratrooper as a whole.

Raspéguy's *drôle de casquette* is a singularly flexible source of animal imagery. Plainly based on the headgear designed by Bigeard himself for his troops, these caps allow the *paras* to be imaged not only as tigers, but also as wolves (ibid., p.320 &

passim), and as lizards (ibid., pp.345-346 & passim). The single most striking example of this last image occurs, very significantly, in the wake of a punitive massacre of the male inhabitants of an Algerian *mechta*:

Et c'est ainsi que naquit la cruelle légende des <<lézards en casquettes>>, des guerriers au poignard plus redoutables que les <<mousseblines>> du FLN. Dans le fond des douars on commença à parler d'eux comme de démons à l'épreuve des balles, fils d'Alek et Azraël, l'ange de la mort. (ibid., p.356)

The implications of these lines for the integrated reader's view of the Muslim population of Algeria, military atrocities, and the likely outcome of the war as a whole are considered in Chapter 7. What needs to concern us here is rather the opportunistic attribution of "bestial", and overtly demonic, characteristics to the French paratrooper. From this point of view, the above extract is remarkably similar to the previously quoted description of Brune's Lieutenant Hoffman. In both cases, French military brutality is mythically sanctioned by dark supernatural forces; whilst the understandable terror of the indigenous population is evoked, not as a basis for sympathy, but rather as a source of satisfaction.

The reader's enjoyment of any such colonialist satisfaction is wholly dependent upon his prior conversion to the paratrooper's cause. It is that complex of political goals and ideological values which we must now examine, taking as our textual base Lartéguy's depiction of his *para* heroes' membership of Williams's "militant sect". Perhaps the best way to open this discussion is to consider the views of General de Gaulle, the military man personally responsible for breaking the potentially disastrous grip of the *esprit para* on the French army. His understanding of the attitudes prevailing in the élite corps in 1958 is recorded in his *Mémoires d'espoir*:

Ces unités de choc ... se font comme un apanage de leur rôle et de leur combat. Cadres et soldats en sont fiers, et à juste titre. Car il s'agit d'une lutte, à coup sûr périlleuse, souvent décevante, parfois épuisante... Mais il s'agit aussi d'une sorte de croisade où se cultivent et s'affirment, dans un milieu tenu à l'écart, les valeurs propres au risque et à l'action. (de Gaulle 1970a, p.79)

With this combination of ideas - the *apanage*, the crusade, and the cloistered existence with its own scheme of values - we are some way towards an understanding

of the *para* ethos. Indeed, each theme is worthy of consideration in a little more depth. This may best be achieved by reversing de Gaulle's order of presentation, and beginning with the idea of the paratrooper as the member of a quasi-religious closed community.

In his novel *Max Skoda*, Jean-Jacques Rochard describes the eponymous legionnaire's attitude to life in the following terms:

Le monde était simple. Il y avait le clan d'une part, dans lequel il incluait confusément l'adversaire, et de l'autre, le reste du monde. (Rochard 1965, p.28)

This is very much the spirit of *Les Centurions*, in which Raspéguy and his men live independently of the rest of the world. Self-contained and self-sufficient, their "clan" seems more like the rebel bands of the FLN than traditional French military units (cf. Perrault 1961, pp.98-106). Indeed, calling the roll of its principal members, its officers and NCOs, inevitably brings to mind other, similar clannish, communities: Raspéguy, *le patron*; the aristocratic Glatigny and the iron-hard Esclavier; cheeky little Lieutenant Merle and his best friend, the huge, red-headed Lieutenant Pinières; the mysterious Captain Boisfeuras, the regiment's intelligence officer, and Min, his oriental batman and bodyguard; "Boudin", the quartermaster, and "Polyphème", a tough little WO1 who wears a black patch over his blind eye and is responsible for drill; and last, but by no means least, Dia, the X<sup>e</sup> RPC's magnificent Negro *toubib* (Lartéguy 1960, pp.315-334 *passim*). What is this but a paratrooper version of Robin Hood and his Merry Men, with the Algerian *djebel* substituted for Sherwood Forest? For Raspéguy and his *paras* are very much outsiders, even if they are not quite the *hors-la-loi* that their nationalist opponents are deemed to be. As for the villainous Sheriff, who better to play this part than de Gaulle himself? This is precisely his role in *Les Prétoriens* (1961), Lartéguy's inferior sequel to his principal treatment of the *para* theme, in which his heroes become ever more involved in the political side of the Algerian problem, and are thus brought into direct conflict with *la grande Zohra* and his post-1959 plans for *une Algérie algérienne*.

In the interim, anyone and anything excluded from the *paras*' charmed circle - "tout ce qui ne porte pas la casquette et la tenue camouflée", as Bistenave puts it (Lartéguy 1960, p.328) - may be condemned by them. So, not only do murderous rebels and the "defeatist" Parisian intellectuals who aid and abet them come under attack, but also the traditional military structure in its entirety. What is needed now, Raspéguy argues, is a new type of army for a new type of war:

Qu'on nous donne une guerre qui soit la nôtre et alors nous la gagnerons. Mais finis les monocles et les guêtres, les installations somptueuses pour les ministres et les généraux en visite sur les champs de bataille. Tous dans la merde avec la même boîte de ration. Il nous faut dès maintenant une véritable armée populaire, commandée par des chefs qu'elle se choisit en quelque sorte. Que le vainqueur soit honoré et le vaincu foutu dehors ou fusillé. Nous n'avons pas besoin de stratèges, mais de victoires... (ibid., pp.295-296)

It is, we learn, precisely this form of military organization which Raspéguy will seek to institute in Algeria. As part of that process, the men under his command will be isolated completely from civilian society. Not surprisingly, it is Bistenave, the *rappelé* and ex-seminarist, who is primarily responsible for underlining the monastic side of the *paras*' existence:

Sous la tente camouflée, avec cette étrange casquette, nous commençons tous à nous ressembler, à avoir les mêmes réflexes, employer les mêmes mots, les mêmes expressions... Le colonel fait l'impossible pour éviter tout contact entre nous et le monde extérieur, nous conserver dans cet étrange monastère... Il limite les permissions et nous savons que lui-même ne sort jamais.

Des modes, je devrais dire: des rites, se créent. L'ivrogne est très mal vu, et aussi les piliers de maisons closes; on parle de moins en moins d'histoires de filles, de <<grands coups>>. Est-ce la fatigue qui incite à la chasteté ou cette ambiance de stade, de kermesse et d'église? (ibid., p.327)

The suppression of individual identities in favour of a communal mode of existence; the exclusion of the outside world and its distractions; the observance of rites; a new sobriety and chastity: all these features support Bistenave's monastic representation of the paratrooper's lifestyle. As do the numerous instances of religious terminology throughout the novel. Raspéguy's unit is actually characterized as a "sort of sect" by his former commander in Indochina, General Meynier. Though presented as the mild criticism of an otherwise sympathetic traditionalist, the relevant comments

only serve to exacerbate the text's religious mystification of the parachute corps:

Les unités comme celle que commande votre Raspéguy risquent de devenir un jour des sortes de sectes qui ne feront plus la guerre pour un pays ou une idée, mais pour elles seules, comme le moine se livre à ses macérations pour gagner son paradis. Vous avez entendu parler du Bataillon Sacré de Thèbes, où les amants s'enchaînaient à leurs amis pour se faire tuer ensemble? Rassurez-vous, il n'y a rien de trouble, rien de sexuel chez les parachutistes de Raspéguy, au contraire, plutôt quelque chose de religieux... (ibid., pp.293-294)

The "prophetic" character of the General's remarks is of obvious historical interest here, given that the French parachute regiments did, indeed, become something of a law unto themselves in the course of their participation in the Algerian conflict. However, even more striking is the way in which scenes from the life of the Christian Church are linked to classical mythology, thereby producing an even more powerfully affective image of the *para*'s existence. This mention of Thebes is just one of many such references to the history and literature of Greece and Rome. In fact, the paratroopers' most obvious initiation rite - jump-training - is described in terms of another classical myth. Having witnessed their conscript pupils' triumphant completion of that training, a few of the officers adjourn to a bar for a celebratory drink. In due course, their conversation turns to the Greek legend of the "saut de Leucade". This legend centres on a sheer cliff on the Ionian island of Leucas or Leucadia, and concerns what "appears to have been an expiatory rite" (Smith 1872, p.379). Captain Boisfeuras picks up the story, as told to him by an Oxford classicist:

- Connaissez-vous l'origine du parachute? Non, bien sûr! Et l'île de Leucade, en Grèce, pas plus, n'est-ce pas?

[...]

- Eh bien ... c'est à Leucade qu'est né le parachute.

<<Il y a à Leucade un rocher blanc dédié à Apollon ... haut de quarante-quatre mètres et à partir duquel, à une époque fort ancienne ... on précipitait des hommes en sacrifice au dieu du Soleil. C'étaient soit des jeunes gens, soit des jeunes filles, que l'on chargeait de tous les crimes de la collectivité, comme le bouc émissaire du Lévitique.

[...]

<<Celui qui survivait au saut de Leucade était lavé de ses fautes et certain d'obtenir ce qu'il désirait.

<<Les prêtres humanisèrent le saut, postèrent des barques pour ramasser les plongeurs. Mais un jour vint où plus personne ne voulut prendre de tels risques; les civilisations en se développant éliminent l'héroïsme...

<<Alors, à la place de ceux qui voulaient racheter une faute, ce furent les prêtres qui se proposèrent de sauter... Ils s'entraînèrent sérieusement, firent de la

gymnastique, fortifièrent leurs muscles, exercèrent leurs réflexes, apprirent à tomber. Pour ralentir leur chute, ils s'attachèrent des plumes, des oiseaux et je ne sais quoi encore ... le parachute, autrement dit.>> (Lartéguy 1960, pp.382-383)

The mythical appeal of this self-contained narrative is surely clear: not only does the *paras'* cause - and thus that of the "French" Algeria which they came to symbolize - benefit from the spurious weight of an heroic past; Lartéguy's heroes also gain by their association with the young "scapegoats" (note the Biblical reference) of a corrupt society. Like those earlier victims of collective guilt, Boisfeuras and his colleagues are obliged to suffer, and to be sacrificed, for the general good. Pure in thought and deed themselves, the *para*-priests devote their energies to training (described in admiring detail) in order that they may be in the best possible condition to risk their lives on behalf of those too decadent to aspire to such heroism themselves. As for the theme of expiation, this has both the general significance just described and a very specific one. In order to appreciate this latter dimension, we must return to the events surrounding the FLN's killing of Lieutenant Merle and the conscript Bistenave. Consider Lartéguy's account of the discovery of the mutilated bodies of the two paratroopers:

Ils découvrirent les deux corps allongés sur la butte, devant les mechtas, la gorge tranchée, le ventre ouvert, les parties enfoncées dans la bouche. Les phares des camions éclairaient cette scène d'horreur.

Le sous-lieutenant de réserve Azmanuan fit remarquer que les deux corps étaient tournés vers La Mecque, comme des bêtes sacrifiées en holocauste. On lui avait raconté que jadis les Turcs faisaient la même chose en Arménie. Il se détourna pour vomir. (ibid., p.354)

Leaving aside the mystifying association of the Algerian nationalist cause with the Turkish genocide in Armenia of half a century earlier - "Le sous-lieutenant de réserve Azmanuan", who has never previously been seen in the novel, predictably disappears once again after having performed his mythical function - what stands out here is the way in which throat-cutting is imaged by Lartéguy's narrative. Taken in combination with genital mutilation, with which it is typically linked, the practice is presented as proof of the FLN's barbarity. The reaction of Lartéguy's (civilized)



officer to "cette scène d'horreur" (a horror which can only be compounded by the scene's overtones of religious fanaticism) is surely one which is shared by the appropriately sickened reader of the novel.

The heroes of *Les Centurions* respond to this "outrage" by turning on the inhabitants of the native village nearest to the scene of the ambush (i.e. the *mechtas* referred to in the quotation). Their bloody revenge serves to draw attention not only to the supposed cowardice of Muslim manhood, but also to the mythical role of the knife in the Algerian context. Note the instructions given to his men by Esclavier, as he leads them into the "guilty" village:

- Rien que les hommes, dit-il de sa voix sèche. Ne touchez pas aux femmes et aux enfants, rien que les hommes, et au couteau - pour que ceux qui en auront le courage puissent se défendre.

[...]

D'un coup d'épaule, Esclavier enfonça une porte. Aucun Arabe ne se défendit. (ibid., pp.354-355)

Whilst the knives of the FLN killers serve to establish their essential barbarism, those of the paratroopers magically signal their valour and basic decency. For, not only are the women and children spared, but the men are given a seemingly sporting chance. That this presentation of military reprisals wilfully distorts the historical reality of colonial repression goes almost without saying. Less obvious, perhaps, is the manner in which French military atrocities may, through the text's insistence on the mode of killing, be presented in such a way as to affirm the uncivilized nature of the army's opponents. The scene of carnage which greets Raspéguy in the wake of the Rhalem massacre puts forward what amounts to a mirror-image of the earlier one in order to make its mythical points:

Le soleil se levait quand Raspéguy, prévenu par Dia, arriva suçant pensivement sa pipe. Vingt-sept corps de musulmans étaient alignés les uns à côté des autres, la gorge tranchée, tournés vers l'Occident, là où se trouvait Rome. (ibid., p.355)

What we are initially concerned with here is the appeal made to throat-cutting as a symbol of FLN barbarity; and this, even when it is perpetrated by French troops. For, not only are the paratroopers' reprisals rationalized as the minimum necessary

palliative for the dead soldiers' comrades - "Sans cela, ils auraient tout massacré, les femmes et les enfants..." (ibid., p.355) - they are also put forward as the inevitable result of the barbarism displayed by the Algerian enemy. The *paras*' commanding officer, Colonel Raspéguy, explains:

- J'aurais peut-être préféré les grenades et les mitraillettes et qu'ils nettoient tout. Le couteau transforme la guerre en assassinat. Et voilà que nous faisons comme eux, que nous nous salissons les mains comme eux.

Mais peut-être que c'était nécessaire et qu'il fallait commencer, parce qu'on nous a obligés de descendre des pitons dans la plaine, et parce que nous avons été outragés dans notre honneur d'hommes par la mutilation de Merle et de Fleur de Nave. C'est l'homme primitif et non le soldat qui a réagi en faisant cet holocauste. (ibid., p.355)

So Lartéguy's paratroopers would have preferred to have used their "clean" modern weapons rather than having to resort to the knife of the Muslim murderer. The fact that they have had to come down to their FLN opponent's level is therefore wholly attributable to the methods employed by that opponent: they have not "acted like soldiers" because they are locked in a life-and-death struggle with "primitives". As Esclavier will reflect a little later: "<<Peut-être pourrions-nous empêcher l'empire de s'écrouler en nous transformant nous-mêmes en barbares...?>>" (ibid., p.378).

Within this preferred optic, those paratroopers involved in the massacre of the unarmed civilian inhabitants of Rhalem are deemed to be haunted by a guilt which is more imagined than real. This is the main point of the expiatory rite of parachute-jumping as it is depicted in *Les Centurions*. It falls to Boisfeuras to underline the whole episode's mythical message with a self-congratulatory toast: "- Je bois au saut de Leucade que firent aujourd'hui les deux cents rappelés d'Esclavier pour se laver d'une faute qu'ils estimaient avoir commise" (ibid., p.384). As for the question of throat-cutting, reflections as to the historical basis of the colonialist literary insistence on the practice are really beside the point. To refer to FLN throat-cutting is, in fact, to state the barbarity of the nationalist guerilla, and thus to institute the rebel as a barbarian. The theme functions, in short, as a kind of mythical shorthand for the presupposed savagery of the French army's colonial adversaries.

By presenting the nationalist guerillas as barbarians, moreover, the French military is inevitably cast in a favourable light. So, to return to the earlier reference to Rome, Lartéguy relies on the *Algérianiste* notion of Algeria's Latin heritage to justify what is perhaps the most conscious and extended literary appeal to the myth of the *barbare*. As the title of his novel suggests, and as the text itself makes clear, the French paratroopers fighting in North Africa are to be regarded as "centurions", defending a decadent Rome against the hordes amassing on its frontiers:

Vingt siècles plus tôt, un centurion romain avait rêvé près de cette colonne et guetté au fond du désert l'arrivée des Numides. Il était resté là pour défendre le <<limes>> de l'Empire, pendant que Rome pourrissait, que les barbares campaient aux portes...

Les centurions d'Afrique allumaient de grands feux sur les crêtes de l'Atlas saharien, pour faire croire aux Numides que les légions montaient toujours la garde. Mais un jour les Numides apprirent qu'ils n'étaient plus qu'une poignée, et ils les égorgèrent...

Le centurion Philippe Esclavier du X<sup>e</sup> Régiment parachutiste, chercha les raisons qu'il avait d'allumer, lui aussi, des feux pour contenir les barbares et sauver l'Occident. (ibid., pp.377-378)

Lartéguy's appeal to Algeria's classical past provides us with an outstanding example of the mechanics of his mystification of the modern struggle for the territory. Taking as his starting-point the presence of Roman remains in North Africa, he proceeds to build an internally coherent, and consequently highly plausible, Latin myth of the Algerian war. The key to a demystified understanding of this figure is to be found, in fact, in the specious equation of each group of actors in the conflict with their supposed classical counterparts: metropolitan French public opinion, increasingly critical of both the conduct and the continuation of the war in Algeria, is conveniently equated with the terminal decay of the Roman state; the French parachute regiments, well equipped, constantly backed up by the modern military apparatus of a powerful Western nation, and with the better part of half a million troops on hand in Algeria to support them, are likened to the hugely outnumbered defenders of Rome's African outposts; whilst the forces of the nationalist rebellion become the marauding *barbares*

(cf. Perrault 1961, pp.74-76). This is an image of the Muslim Algerian to which we shall be returning in Chapter 7.

Lartéguy's references to Rome draw attention to the theme's double value as an instrument of mystification; for, both the Rome of antiquity and that of the Catholic Church are mythically exploited in *Les Centurions*. The second of these two approaches is, predictably, very closely associated with the notion that the war is in some way a crusade. With the idea of the paratroopers' Algerian *croisade*, we come to the second of de Gaulle's three analytical categories. This particular crusade is not restricted to the combatting of Muslim fanaticism; rather, the Algerian conflict is the direct continuation of an earlier struggle. This began with the defeat of Germany in 1945, then flared in Korea and, above all, in Indochina, and is nothing less than the defence of Western civilization against global Communism:

Boisfeuras n'avait aucun sens national; il ne pouvait donc invoquer la défense d'un pays, d'une <<France charnelle>>. Il lui fallait une cause plus universelle; il crut la trouver comme beaucoup de ses camarades dans la lutte contre le communisme. [...]

Boisfeuras avait le sentiment qu'il devait participer à cette défense de l'individu ... cette nouvelle forme de croisade... (Lartéguy 1960, p.216)

The presence of the verb *croire* should not be taken to imply a real separation of the points of view of the subjects of the *énoncé* and the *énonciation* here. The belief that the Algerian conflict constituted an integral part of a world-wide pattern of Moscow-backed aggression may appear hopelessly mistaken thirty years after the event, but was widely accepted in the climate of the Cold War. Indeed, the relevant literature fairly abounds with examples of this reading of the Franco-Algerian confrontation, which had, in fact, been accurately identified as mythical as early as 1958 (Duquesne 1958, p.105). So, in the case of *Les Centurions*, this basic tenet of "revolutionary war" theory will be echoed by other officers, and with no hint of narratorial scepticism. Raspéguy's remarks on the matter may thus be regarded as typical. His interlocutor in the following exchange is the despised intellectual, Michel Weihl:

- Philippe [Esclavier] n'est pas encore levé?
- Philippe se couche tard, mon colonel, quand il couche ici.

- Garçon qui court ne se marie guère et un officier qui se marie perd le plus clair de sa valeur, surtout dans une guerre révolutionnaire.

- Nous sommes en paix fort heureusement, depuis la signature de l'armistice de Genève.

- Et l'Algérie? C'est la même guerre qu'en Indochine. Vous n'avez pas lu Mao-Tsé-Toung? (Lartéguy 1960, pp.301-302; cf. pp.307-308)

When Raspéguy suggests that his men will, in order to win in Algeria, have to become "des missionnaires ... qui prêchent la main sur leur crosse de revolver" (ibid., p.286), we can have little doubt that it is the military's anti-communist gospel which he has in mind. The determination of the Colonel's historical counterparts to avenge their defeat in Indochina is, it transpires, regularly reflected in the fictional Algeria of *Les Centurions*. So, Raspéguy will insist on the importance of achieving a resounding victory in North Africa (ibid., p.311). In fact, like the German *Freikorps* of the interwar years, the *paras* see themselves as having been "stabbed in the back" by both politicians and intellectuals (ibid., p.328); a groundless rationalization which would historically encourage the growth of military "activism", and thus bring the French polity to the very brink of collapse.

At the heart of this mythical way of thinking the Algerian war is the idea of compensation, which brings us back to de Gaulle's interesting use of the term *apanage* to describe the *paras'* attitude to their role. For, although the familiar understanding of this word would be as a synonym for *privilège*, its original usage had to do with the allocation of crown land to those princes excluded from the throne (*Robert*). This ties in very straightforwardly with the text's monastic imaging of the *paras'* existence: in return for their isolation, asceticism, and surrender of individuality, Lartéguy's paratroopers become military supermen, and are thus in a position to win "their" war in Algeria. Something very like this has been analysed most revealingly by Roland Barthes in his essay devoted to the myth of the "jet-man":

...ce qui passe d'abord pour simples prescriptions diététiques apparaît bientôt muni d'une signification sacerdotale: continence et tempérance, abstention loin des plaisirs, vie commune, vêtement uniforme, tout concourt dans la mythologie de l'homme-jet, à manifester la plasticité de la chair, sa soumission à des fins collectives ... et c'est cette soumission qui est offerte en sacrifice à la singularité prestigieuse d'une condition inhumaine. La société finit par retrouver dans l'homme-jet le vieux pacte

théosophique qui a toujours compensé la puissance par l'ascèse, payant la semi-divinité avec la monnaie du <<bonheur>> humain. La situation du *jet-man* comporte si bien un aspect vocationnel qu'elle est elle-même le prix de macérations préalables, de démarches initiatiques, destinées à éprouver le postulant... Quant à l'endurance, on nous enseigne bien que comme dans toute initiation, elle n'est pas d'ordre physique: le triomphe des épreuves préalables est à vrai dire le fruit d'un don spirituel, on est doué pour le jet comme d'autres sont appelés à Dieu. (Barthes 1957, pp.95-96)

The negative side of the *para*'s "vieux pacte théosophique" should, by this stage in the discussion, be clearly established: his monastic mode of existence, his suffering and sacrifice in Indochina, his alienation from metropolitan society, his dirtying of his hands in a pitiless fight against a barbaric enemy; all of these factors have been identified and illustrated. The overall impression gained is one of an unhappy lot: the "tourmente et bagarre" of the famous "prière du parachutiste" (quoted in full in Bergot 1971, pp.148-149). As for the benefits accruing from the pact, these have been referred to solely in terms of *efficacité*: i.e. the fact that the paratrooper becomes a more effective combatant as a result of the dietary restrictions in force, and so on. However, as Barthes's comments on the pact make clear, we may reasonably expect to find a number of rather wider-ranging benefits, complete with their attendant mythology:

Basically, what we discover in Lartéguy's novel is a celebration of his paratrooper heroes' transcendence of every aspect of civilian social relations. This has already been noted in the sexual sphere: Raspéguy and his men are as much supermen and demi-gods in the bedroom as they apparently are on the assault course and in the field of battle. The *paras*' regular surpassing of accepted physical and military norms - as, for instance, when they are seen slogging across the parched highlands of the Aurès and the Nementchas, hard on the heels of their elusive rebel prey (Lartéguy 1960, p.376) - is, perhaps, less remarkable than the text's insistence on their rejection of the materialism so characteristic of the civilization which they claim to be defending. This notion appears particularly clearly in the case of Boisfeuras, who, as Glatigny points out to Aïcha, is far above all such venal considerations: "Il est très riche ... mais

l'argent ne l'intéresse pas; il préfère rester avec nous" (ibid., p.475). This, we learn, because money is a barrier to an understanding of a deeper truth. As Boisfeuras explains to his father: "...je ne suis pas à l'aise avec l'argent, j'ai l'impression qu'il me sépare de quelque chose d'essentiel" (ibid., p.218). The nature of this supposedly essential reality will shortly become clear. It is also interesting to note that the presence of this mythical theme does not prevent Lartéguy from depicting his heroes as *mercenaires* on occasion, as we shall see.

Even more significant, given the colonial situation in which they find themselves, is the paratroopers' self-evident lack of racism. Their community includes the Negro, Dia, of course, as well as Aïcha's brother, Mahmoudi. Moreover, they have not come across the Mediterranean to praise *Algérie française*, we are informed, but to bury it:

<<Nous ne sommes point venus ici pour défendre le colonialisme; nous n'avons rien de commun avec les gros colons qui exploitent les musulmans, nous sommes les défenseurs d'une liberté et d'un ordre nouveau [sic].>> (ibid., p.328)

So, the heroes of *Les Centurions* are above colonialism too. Not that this is to be equated with support for Algerian independence; on the contrary, Raspéguy and his men are committed to maintaining French rule over the territory. As the spearhead of the country's military efforts towards that end, the paratroopers are able to make particularly good use of one further aspect of their transcendent condition: namely their overcoming of bourgeois morality; a supposed achievement which serves to justify their use of "exceptional" methods in Algeria. Such methods - torture, summary execution, and the like - would be the central issue in the metropolitan intellectuals' criticism of the parachute regiments. For the author of *Les Centurions*, however, they are part and parcel of the "revolutionary" war in which Raspéguy and his comrades find themselves engaged. If they seriously wish to achieve a military victory in Algeria, they must, therefore, be prepared to go beyond received notions of acceptable military practice. As Raspéguy puts it: "Nous allons faire une guerre en dehors de tous les règlements"

(ibid., pp.308-309). This outlook may set the paratroopers against both the military traditionalists and the metropolitan liberals, but its validity is underlined by their rebel opponents. So, at the height of the Battle of Algiers, Boisfeuras will supervise the torture of an FLN bomber before having him disposed of; an approach which would be condemned in Paris, but which is appreciated by the Algerian nationalist:

Si Millial comprit alors qu'il allait mourir. Ce capitaine qui le regardait, la tête appuyée sur les deux coudes, en avait ainsi décidé.

A sa place il en eût fait autant et, pendant quelques instants, il eut pour lui une bizarre estime car, de tous ces officiers, celui-là était le plus proche de lui. Boisfeuras appartenait à son univers efficace et juste, juste d'une justice qui ne s'embarrasse pas des hommes égorgés, des femmes violées, des fermes brûlées. En même temps, Si Millial eut pitié de cet autre lui-même qui continuerait de vivre sans amis, sans femmes, dans la solitude glacée des hommes qui font et défont l'histoire. (ibid., p.472)

So, there we have it, the ultimate benefit of the *para's* "vieux pacte théosophique", Boisfeuras's "quelque chose d'essentiel", is the power to make "History". By renouncing the worldly pleasures of lesser mortals, Lartéguy's *para* attains a higher and more essential plane of existence. Indeed, the soldier's asceticism effectively transforms him into a key player in the global power struggle between Communism and the Free World. This is a theme to which we shall return in the course of our examination of the myth of the military *seigneur* in Chapter 4.

It is Philippe Esclavier who brings the themes of the anti-communist crusade and the Roman heritage together most strikingly in *Les Centurions*. As the officer himself puts it, when reflecting on the French paratroopers' self-appointed role in North Africa:

Il pensa: <<Nous autres centurions, nous sommes les derniers défenseurs de l'innocence de l'homme contre tous ceux qui veulent l'asservir au nom de la faute originelle, contre les communistes qui refusent le baptême à l'enfant, n'acceptent jamais la conversion de l'adulte et sont toujours prêts à la mettre en doute...>> (ibid., pp.377-378)

The principal themes and targets of Esclavier's polemic will, by now, be apparent. As will Lartéguy's skill at exploiting the spurious romance and authority of a mystified past to the contemporary political advantage of both the parachute regiments and the colonial cause with which they had become so closely associated. Elsewhere



in his novel, the author likens Raspéguy and his men to the mercenaries sacrificed by an ungrateful and fearful Carthage in 238 B.C. - as described in Gustave Flaubert's exoticist masterpiece, *Salammbô* (1862), to which Lartéguy's text overtly refers - to similar mythical effect (*ibid.*, pp.421-426). Yet, it is to the idea of Rome that the narrative returns time and again. The historical reasons for this thematic preoccupation are to be found in the myth of French Algeria's "Latin heritage", which was popularized by Louis Bertrand, the novelist and founder of the *Algérianiste* movement. This particular theme will consequently be returned to when we come to consider the role played by settler myths in the literary imaging of the Franco-Algerian conflict.

Lartéguy's references to the Augusta Legion and foreign mercenaries lead us to mention in passing the image of the French Foreign Legion. What we aim to explain here is the Legion's unique appeal for the literary defenders of *Algérie française*. Of course, the mystique of *la Légion* goes far beyond national boundaries, with its international character being reflected in international interest. Indeed, it is as much a theme of British military romanticism as it is of its French equivalent, with P.C. Wren's classic *Beau Geste* (1924), constituting an especially privileged point of comparison. The root of the Legion's wider appeal is, no doubt, its magical transformation of recruits: criminals, refugees, the lost and the lonely are all able to forget their past and escape from their former selves by joining the Legion and submitting to its celebrated "March or Die" ethos. Moreover, the Legion offers a new home to those who agree to respect its harsh rules and strange traditions. By this, we do not simply mean France, the adopted land of the legionnaire, but also the Legion's mythical existence as a family: "La Légion nous accueillait et donnait, à ceux qui en manquaient, une famille, une maison..." (Ortuño 1971, p.30) As for the prize of French nationality, this is not automatically acquired, but must rather be payed for in toil and suffering:

<<Une patrie à gagner>>, m'avait dit l'officier. Cela voulait dire aussi une carte d'identité, le droit de se promener sur le trottoir, le droit de ne pas se sentir en

cavale, d'avoir la gueule d'un honnête homme. Ça, on le payait à la Légion. On payait d'avance. (ibid., p.173)

It is this unique aspect of the Legion's charter - its ability to confer French citizenship - which is of the greatest mythological significance in the Algerian context. For, such elements of the Legion myth as its isolation, its harshness, its efficiency, and so forth, are, as we have seen, fundamental to the historically far more important myth of the *para*. By the same token, the legionnaires' long association with Algeria - Sidi-Bel-Abbès was not only their principal depot, but also their spiritual home - had, by 1958, been largely superseded by the paratroopers' symbolic identification with the cause of *Algérie française*. So, it was to the Legion's very foreignness that mythmakers turned for inspiration. Revealingly, the relevant theme is very sympathetically voiced in Gilbert Cesbron's "demystifying" novel *Entre chiens et loups*. The scene, once again, is the confrontation between the schoolmaster and Lieutenant Mansart of the 1<sup>er</sup> REP:

<<Ecoutez, fit-il [Roland Guérin] en se redressant, je connais ... l'espèce de gars que vous commandez... Tout ça...>>

Il allait dire: <<Tout ça, c'est la même graine>>, mais une serre d'oiseau de proie sur son poignet lui coupa la parole.

<<Ah! Non! Ne touchez pas à mes hommes!... Sans patrie? ajouta-t-il comme s'il ne parlait qu'à lui-même - C'est bien possible. Mais quoi! ils meurent pour la vôtre, et mieux que vous ne sauriez le faire. De quoi vous plaignez-vous?>> (Cesbron 1962, pp.107-108)

The mythical import of this passage is clear enough: the Legion's valiant foreigners are prepared to lay down their lives in the name of their adopted country, whilst the decadent Parisian intelligentsia can only look on and criticize. As ever, it is the supposed lack of patriotism of the French army's critics which is firmly to the fore.

We are now in a position to draw some general conclusions about Jean Lartéguy's particular contribution to the *para* myth, and, indeed, about the broader importance of the myth as a whole. To begin with, our reading of *Les Centurions* has borne out John Talbott's contention that the military romanticism of the *esprit para* was nowhere better exemplified than in Lartéguy's 1960 best seller (Talbot 1980, p.69).

We would argue, moreover, that the novel's sheer popularity - it could be found on every railway bookstall, as it were (see O'Connell 1972) - ensured that it did more than any other, before or since, to further the pro-colonial version of the *para* myth. It may usefully be noted that Lartéguy himself would later claim that this myth had outlived its usefulness by 13 May 1958 (Lartéguy 1961, p.55). Our argument would not be with the chosen date, but rather with the very notion of utility. The myth's distortion of the parachute regiments' historical role in the war undoubtedly contributed to a basic confusion as regards ultimate responsibility for events in Algeria. After all, "the paratroops were the executants of policy, not policy makers" (Talbot 1976, p.78). This is as true of the counter mythology of the *para démoniaque* as it is of the paeans to the *para angélique*. So, such consciously adversary *témoignages* as Henri Alleg's *La Question* (1958) and Benoist Rey's *Les Egorgeurs* (1961) were at least as wide of the historical mark as Lartéguy's fictional celebration of *para* virtues. To suggest that all such politically motivated variations on the theme may have contributed to prolonging the war would almost certainly be to overstate the importance of the myth of the paratrooper. Nevertheless, the *para* was one of a number of such preoccupations which effectively distracted metropolitan public opinion from the principle issue at stake in the Algerian war, that is to say the question of the colony's future status. As we shall see, the political debate about conscription and, above all, the intellectuals' campaign against torture fall into the same category of misleadingly Franco-centric methods of imaging the conflict in North Africa.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CONSCRIPT I

In the preceding chapter, reference was made to the division of labour which characterized the French army's Algerian campaign. We noted that the vast majority of troops were kept occupied by guard duties, transport details, and similar supporting roles, with only a very small minority of the French forces being actively engaged in hunting down and confronting an approximately equal number of FLN combattants. Whilst the army drew these élite troops from its most prestigious units (i.e. the parachute regiments and the Foreign Legion), it relied on conscripted labour to provide the large numbers of soldiers required for its role as an army of occupation. Having examined the literary imaging of those few combat troops, it is appropriate that we should now consider the treatment accorded to the very many *appelés* and *rappelés* who served in Algeria between 1954 and 1962.

It was, in fact, the French Revolution itself which gave rise to the concept of "the nation in arms", and thus to the practice of conscription. However, following its introduction under the *Directoire* in 1798, compulsory military service, attractive though it undoubtedly was in theory, gave rise to numerous difficulties in practice. In the modern era, French governments have continued to voice their faith in the benefits of non-vocational military service, whilst at the same time presiding over the emergence and growth of a genuinely professional military apparatus. The end result of this dual approach could logically have been predicted. For, the French army sought to resolve its internal contradictions through an undeclared division of itself into two, supposedly united, but in reality entirely separate, forces: an army in which those civilians called upon to serve the Republic could fulfil their patriotic obligations; and a very different army, the one which was relied upon to do the real fighting as France sought to re-establish her grip on an overseas empire profoundly affected by the Second World War. It was this latter army which had fought, and lost, in Indochina; and it was the

shattered remnants of this same army which set about avenging that defeat in Algeria.

The great difference, as far as successive Paris governments were concerned, between the French army's disastrous Indochinese campaign and its operations in Algeria, was, above all, the quite distinct juridical status of the two territories: Indochina may only have been a colony, but Algeria was a part of France itself. This belief, enshrined in law since 1848, was discussed as part of our introduction, where it was referred to as "le mythe des trois départements" and identified as the foundation myth of *Algérie française*. What interests us here, however, is the historical link between this fundamental ideological given and the use of conscripted military manpower in Algeria. For, the French authorities had never had recourse to the draft in order to continue the fight against the Vietnamese nationalists. Instead, that long and bloody conflict had been the exclusive preserve of France's professional army, with the paratroopers and the Foreign Legion, in particular, bearing the brunt of the hardship occasioned by the nation's belligerent colonial policies. Yet, in Algeria, where the army was not even supposed to be fighting a "war", the better part of half a million national servicemen found themselves committed to the struggle against the nationalists at its peak, with some three million in all being deployed over the eight years that the conflict lasted. The paradoxical use of large numbers of drafted men in what were, according to the official myth, merely operations designed to restore public order would itself be justified in terms of Algeria's unique legal status as an integral part of France. It fell to the then Interior Minister in the Mendès-France government, François Mitterrand, to defend the introduction of this unpopular measure before the National Assembly on 11 December 1954:

Cette mission pénible [de répression] incombe à de jeunes soldats qui appartiennent pour la plupart au contingent... Avez-vous le droit, le droit moral s'entend, de disposer du contingent à cette fin? m'a-t-on demandé. Cela me paraît évident puisqu'il s'agit d'une mission ayant pour objet de préserver l'unité de la nation, ce qui est le devoir essentiel des citoyens. (Hamon & Rotman 1979, p.25)

So, it was a second Revolutionary theme, that of the "one and indivisible" French Republic, now stretching from Dunkirk to Tamanrasset, which provided the rationale for this significant hardening in Paris's attitude towards the maintenance of its overseas empire: French citizens were being sent to Algeria to fight for the integrity of the nation. Or rather, they were not being sent to fight exactly, but rather to guard European farms and strategic installations; a role which owed almost as much to the wish of the terminally fragile ministries of the Fourth Republic to avoid upsetting public opinion as it did to the military's new enthusiasm for the "pacification" of Algeria on the basis of a territory-wide system of *quadrillage*. In the event, the issue of conscription would not only awaken French public opinion to the full extent of the regime's troubles in Algeria, but would become a source of disharmony in its own right. A measure justified in terms of national unity in Algeria would thus contribute directly to increasing disunity in France itself.

The earliest focus for such domestic discord was the Mollet administration's decision to escalate the war against the FLN in the latter part of 1955 and the first half of 1956. This escalation was principally reflected in metropolitan France by a dramatic increase in the number of reservists recalled to the colours. In spite of the undemanding, and generally unhazardous, nature of service in Algeria, the government's move met with angry and often violent protest across the country. These demonstrations against conscription were largely spontaneous and tended to centre on the railway stations, tracks, and rolling-stock used for the transportation of the unwilling *rappelés* to Marseilles and other Mediterranean ports. Although short-lived, this protest movement would nevertheless bring the question of conscription, and thus that of the Algerian war itself, to public attention. That it gave rise to considerable public disagreement as it did so was symptomatic of the profoundly divisive nature of the conflict as a whole.

Similarly divisive interest would be generated by the first serious losses in action of conscripted troops; this, in spite of both the general nature of the draftees' role in the war and the determined efforts of both the Paris government and the military authorities in Algeria to keep any such deaths to an absolute minimum. With the massacre on 18 May 1956 of Second Lieutenant Hervé Artur and twenty members of his *section* in the hills near Palestro, the place became a symbol of *rappelé* suffering and sacrifice; a symbol which was to be exploited by both sides, as the Algerian war became the major preoccupation of an increasingly polarized French polity.

If conscript losses helped to split French society, then the same can be said *a fortiori* of conscript revelations concerning the use of torture in Algeria. For Philip Thody, torture is the key to the Algerian war's specificity in the imaginations of both the metropolitan French and a world audience: "...this was the point which most caught public attention both in France and elsewhere, the half million French soldiers who were having to be kept in Algeria to repress the rebellion ... were making systematic use of torture in order to try to defeat the *Front de Libération Nationale*" (Thody 1985, p.13). This view is certainly a valid one, even if it is a little misleadingly expressed. For, in point of fact, very few of the large number of conscripts engaged in Algeria were to have any first-hand experience of torture, as Jean Planchais has made clear (Planchais 1985, I, p.1). Nevertheless, the testimonies of returning conscripts were to prove crucial in bringing home the reality of such methods to a metropolitan audience.

The documents which are principally of interest in this context began to appear in the early part of 1957, and would thus constitute the first weapons in the metropolitan intellectuals' campaign against the use of abhorrent pacification methods in Algeria. Such *témoignages* as the "Dossier Jean Muller", the collective *Des Rappelés témoignent*, Robert Bonnaud's "La Paix des Nementchas", and Georges Mattei's "Jours kabyles" were just the first shots in a battle of words which was to preoccupy the liberal and leftist intelligentsia until well into 1958. For Bonnaud, Mattei, and a

number of their fellow conscripts, opposition to both the conduct and continuation of the war would lead to direct action of some kind against the French war effort. Whether that action took the form of *insoumission*, desertion, exile, or aid to the FLN, or some combination of these responses, depended very much on the individual in question; as did the methods chosen to report such action, although Jérôme Lindon's "Editions de Minuit" frequently provided a common focus for the literary products of this *Nouvelle Résistance* (e.g. Bonnaud 1962, Favrelière 1960, Hurst 1960).

While it is notoriously difficult to obtain an accurate impression of the scale of conscript resistance to the war in Algeria - i.e. of refusals to serve, draft-dodging, desertion, and participation in pro-FLN clandestine action - it is easy enough to gauge French public reaction to it (Talbot 1980, pp.168-169 et seq.). This was predictably hostile, and especially so in the case of the activities of the *Réseau Jeanson*, which included a good number of deserters amongst its members. Yet, the widely publicized trials of these clandestine activists were to provide the anti-war campaigners with ample scope for the vocal denunciation of both torture and the enforced participation of French youth in a war which was held to be as barbaric as it was anachronistic. This potential was dramatically enhanced by the publication, to coincide with the opening of the trial on 5 September 1960, of the celebrated *Manifeste des 121*. In this "Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie", the 121 famous signatories not only expressed their sympathy with the predicament of unwilling conscripts, but also made plain their opposition to the war itself. Public opinion, both for and against, was thus directed once again to the wider implications of sending "the nation in arms" to Algeria.

Though the subject of far less media interest, the role played by the *contingent* in the failure of the April 1961 military putsch is of considerable historical importance. Indeed, it was the refusal of the conscripts to follow their seditious officers - a refusal which extended, in a number of cases, to direct counter-action - both before de



Gaulle's masterly "transistor" appeal to them, and, decisively, after it, which underlined the failure of the military's final challenge to the Fifth Republic's Algerian policy (de Gaulle 1970a, pp.114-115). Henceforth, the demise of *Algérie française* and its replacement by *une Algérie algérienne* were only a matter of time.

So much for the historical impact of conscription on the metropolitan public's immediate perception of the Algerian conflict. What we must now set against this contemporary backdrop is the more abiding literary image of the *appelé*. This is most satisfactorily done by considering a selection of texts produced during the war, and by then comparing them with various examples of material written in the intervening period. The first of our chosen texts has, in fact, already been considered in terms of its contribution to the myth of the *para*. However, an examination of Jean Lartéguy's depiction of the unwilling conscripts collectively known as the "mutins de Versailles" will repay our renewed concentration on *Les Centurions*.

The obvious place to begin is with the reader's introduction to the recalcitrant conscripts. Having concluded its Indochinese section with a description of Raspéguy's plans for a new type of French army, the novel opens its Algerian campaign by focussing on the rather unpromising human material which awaits the Colonel at the X<sup>e</sup> RPC's depot. For, it is here that some three hundred mutinous reservists have been dumped and left to their own devices. As Raspéguy says to his fellow officers in Paris: "Vous pouvez juger de l'ambiance qui doit régner au camp des Pins" (Lartéguy 1960, p.310). However, just in case the reader of his best seller proves incapable of this imaginative leap, Lartéguy spells its mythical message out for him:

Bucelier, Bistenave et Geoffrin, habillés de vieux treillis grasseux, mal rasés, les cheveux hirsutes, <<cassaient la graine>> avec appétit chez *Manuel*, un bistrot <<à brochettes>>, situé à la sortie du camp.

- Le rosé est bon, dit Bistenave, un peu fort, mais bon. Ce n'est quand même pas une raison suffisante pour garder l'Algérie.

Bucelier et Geoffrin n'avaient pu encore s'habituer à Bistenave. Il était plus crasseux que n'importe lequel des rappelés, mais il parlait avec recherche et ne fumait que des cigarettes blondes à bout de liège. (ibid., p.315)

From the outset, then, we are plunged into a mystified version of conscript

opposition to service in Algeria. What strikes the reader most forcefully is the dirtiness and self-indulgence of the *mutins*. As we might expect of Lartéguy, this lack of attention to personal cleanliness betokens a lack of political seriousness. This point is underlined by the narratorial irony of the little tongue-in-cheek precisions regarding the nature and location of the introductory tableau. The ironic tone is kept up by Bistenave himself, who comes out with his patently egocentric and inadequate "argument" for Algerian independence. The theme of drink, incidentally, is a standard one in contemporary reporting of the 1955-56 conscript disturbances. As is the belief that the demonstrations of anti-war feeling were (like the Algerian rebellion itself) nothing more than the work of a handful of ringleaders (Hamon & Rotman 1979, pp.16-17). Bistenave is clearly one such ringleader, and one, moreover, who appears tainted by intellectual sophistication of a particularly affected and even dandyish kind (the wine is too strong for him, as, presumably, are the *troupe* cigarettes which are good enough for other soldiers but which he refuses to smoke). Even more damning, however, is the text's insistence on the artificial nature of this particular conscript's anti-war stance, as evidenced by the clear contrast between his dirty appearance and the hinted-at deeper refinement. Bistenave is presented as an enigma, in need of solution. He is not simply a critic of the Algerian war, as the fact that his fellow conscripts cannot understand him goes to prove. They cannot make sense of Bistenave, and at this stage neither can the integrated reader. But he will come to do so as the young man's mystery is gradually unravelled by Lartéguy's narrative. It goes almost without saying that, in the process, not only his criticism of the war, but the whole range of conscript-centred protest will be effectively defused.

Having thus set the tone, the author of *Les Centurions* proceeds to develop his preferred image of these and all such recalcitrant draftees. Of prime importance, not surprisingly, is the actual display of opposition that led to their present position and gave rise to their nickname in the French press. Intriguingly, Lartéguy presents his

version of events via an intermediary, who is none other than Bistenave himself. It is thus through "his" eyes that we see the 1955-1956 *rappelé* protests, and in "his" words that we find confirmation that they were, as we have been led to suspect, the work of a few determined militants. So, we read, for instance, that "Jusqu'ici Bistenave n'avait eu qu'à utiliser les fautes de l'adversaire pour créer partout où il était passé le désordre et ce qu'il appelait avec emphase et une certaine ironie <<l'anarchie et la révolution au service de la paix>>" (Lartéguy 1960, p.316).

In reality, we do not so much identify with the point of view of Bistenave himself, as with that of the omniscient narrator who situates and comments on the conscript's thoughts and remarks. We are thus encouraged to take a critical view of Bistenave's anti-war agitation, and to see it as both artificial and lacking in seriousness. We are further encouraged to view with concern his ill-advised, even if well-intentioned, flirtation with those traditional bogeymen of the French right, the anarchists and the communists. These and other mystifying themes are developed as Bistenave continues with his account of his group's arrival at an ill-prepared Versailles barracks. In the face of the scandalous incompetence, not to say cowardice, of the officers and NCOs on the spot, the agitator has no difficulty stirring up trouble. His task is made all the easier by the reservists' visceral anger at having their domestic routines disturbed in the name of national integrity: "Les rappelés, qui était déjà furieux d'être arrachés à leurs habitudes, leurs femmes, leurs apéritifs, étaient devenus enragés" (ibid.).

Here again, the conscripts' anger is stripped of all potential for adversary political interpretation. It is revealed to be little more than inertia, the gut irritation at being jolted out of a comfortable rut of young men grown old before their time. Concerned only with life's distractions, they cannot see further than the end of their collective nose, and fly all too easily into a blind, animal-like, rage. With the situation exacerbated by woefully inadequate accommodation and catering, it is a very simple matter for Bistenave and a few like-minded agitators to set events in motion. The

"anti-war" demonstration which results is consequently mythically defused in advance:

Bistenave n'avait eu qu'à donner le signal et tout avait valsé: les gamelles et les quarts, les tables et les bancs, tandis que les rappelés reprenaient en chœur le slogan: <<A bas la guerre d'Algérie>>. Quelques-uns avaient chanté deux ou trois couplets de l'Internationale, mais leurs camarades n'avaient pas suivi. Chanter l'Internationale dans une caserne leur rappelait des souvenirs vagues de Commune et de pelotons d'exécution à l'aube, dans les fossés du château de Vincennes. (ibid., p.317)

Lacking in spontaneity and patently half-hearted, the conscripts' demonstration does far more harm to the sacred cows of the French left than it ever does to the cause of French Algeria. Its lack of seriousness is only underlined by the perpetrators' response to the arrival of the CRS. For, the riot police meet with not the slightest resistance, and it is only on the train, and in the safety of merely token gestures, that incidents once again occur. These are portrayed in such a way as to re-emphasize the anti-war militants' basic *manque de sérieux*, and to pour more scorn on their self-conscious appeal to the cherished icons of a characteristically dilettantist brand of socialism. Quite clearly, the conscripts' protest movement can only lose out in a comparison with the momentous events recounted in Eisenstein's epic, whilst the implicit accusation of mimetism does still further harm to their anti-war cause:

Il y eut quelques scènes savoureuses ou révolutionnaires, dans le style du *Cuirassé Potemkine*, que Bistenave apprécia en amateur de cinéma d'avant-garde; femmes couchées sur les rails du train, sonnettes d'alarme tirées toutes les demi-heures, cris, chants, inscriptions. (ibid., p.318)

When the *rappelés* eventually arrive in Algeria, after a particularly rough sea crossing, their complete ignorance of the situation prevailing in the territory is immediately made apparent. Having evoked *Alger la Blanche* in time-honoured fashion, Lartéguy thus loses no time in making an equally standard point about metropolitan misconceptions as regards both Algeria and the Algerian war:

Les rappelés s'attendaient à la guerre. Ils trouvèrent un port en pleine activité, une ville aux rues calmes.

Une sentinelle, à laquelle le casque et la mitrailleuse conféraient des allures de guerrier, voulut bien leur expliquer que les attentats n'avaient jamais lieu le matin, mais que dans la nuit, au clos Salembier, il y avait eu sept morts et douze blessés.

- Tous égorgés, dit-il.

Et il fit de la main le geste de trancher la gorge. (ibid.)

The use of throat-cutting as a kind of shorthand for the FLN's way of waging the Algerian war has been discussed previously, but may usefully be noted once again here. As for the "mutins de Versailles", the message is surely very clear. As the popular history magazine *Historia* was to put it, when attempting to come to terms with the 1955-1956 *rappelé* protests: "Tous ces faits révèlent un certain état d'esprit régnant à l'époque, mais ils ne constituent pas un phénomène politique d'une ampleur décisive, car qu'ils soient pour ou contre leur départ vers l'autre côté de la Méditerranée, les <<bidasses>> qui endossent l'uniforme ignorent tout, en général, de l'Algérie et de ses problèmes" (*Historia/La Guerre d'Algérie*, no.214, 7 février 1972, p.654). So, the conscripts' protests against their enforced participation in the war were "not political"; and, in any event, the *rappelés* were so ignorant of the territory and its troubles as to render their expressed views invalid. What we are faced with here, in short, is an interpretation of the relevant historical events which is calculated to undermine conscript-centred criticism of the conduct and continuation of the Algerian war. This approach will be maintained as the "mutins de Versailles" are taken in hand by Raspéguy's paratroopers.

Sent to a parachute regiment as a disciplinary measure, Bistenave and his associates merely find themselves in the midst of slackness and low morale which bode ill for the French war effort. Suitably encouraged by this, Bistenave takes it upon himself to accelerate the process of decomposition. In doing so, he deepens the mystery surrounding his own origins by again demonstrating his "natural" capacity for leadership, as well as his artificially suppressed taste for order and discipline; both of which are eminently military virtues, moreover. It is against this background, and seemingly through Bistenave's own eyes, that the reader participates in the arrival of Raspéguy and his fellow officers. Portrayed in a consistently heroic fashion (as described in Chapter 1), the paratroopers quickly gain the grudging admiration of Bistenave and the other rebellious conscripts. The superficially adversary narratorial

perspective adopted by the text is thus revealed to be a particularly powerful means of propagating the *paras'* mystique.

As Lartéguy's heroes get to grips with the X<sup>e</sup> RPC's regular soldiers, the conscripts keep up a show of defiance; with the paradoxical result that their own eventual integration into the *para* community will be at once striking and plausible. A particularly interesting case in this regard is that of Bucelier, who is one of Bistenave's co-conspirators and an avowed communist sympathizer. Not actually a Party member, the young soldier can still be "saved" by Lartéguy's quasi-evangelical brand of military romanticism. His sneering at what he perceives to be the servility of the X<sup>e</sup> RPC's regular troops - "Tous des larbins, ces engagés..." (Lartéguy 1960, p.319) - is thus ironic in view of his own subsequent recuperation by Raspéguy and his associates. As for the conscript's expressed sympathies with the PCF, these should be understood as part of a broader tendency on the part of the French right to explain away the 1955-1956 *rappelé* protests, and, indeed, all such conscript-centred criticism of the Algerian war, as a communist plot. So, when Raspéguy and his staff, having got the regulars back on the right track, are able to turn their attention to the *mutins*, they soon discover that the ringleaders include the usual quota of *cocos* (ibid., p.320).

The agitators identified by Esclavier in his report on the conscripts' rebellion also include Bistenave: "le véritable meneur des rappelés", as the young man himself sees it (ibid., p.318). In this way, the narrative enigma surrounding the conscript is finally pierced by the Captain:

...curé, enfin séminariste. Il n'a pas encore terminé son peloton, pas ordonné, quoi. Bonne famille; son père était colonel d'intendance; oui, c'est le fils de Fleur de Nave que de Latre a vidé d'Indochine quand il a débarqué de l'avion. (ibid., p.320)

These bare bones will subsequently be fleshed out by Bistenave *fils* (ibid., pp.323-324). We learn that his father, himself only recently arrived in Indochina, was singled out quite arbitrarily by the famous officer, who was looking for a sacrificial victim to help him impose his authority on the French forces there. The Colonel's

career was therefore broken, at a stroke, in order to further de Lattre's *légende* and thus, so Bistenave junior believes, to prolong an unjust war. For the militant Christian pacifist, Raspéguy falls into the same category of vainglorious commander, and the Algerian hostilities into the same category of dishonouring conflict.

We are here at the heart of Lartéguy's treatment of conscript-centred opposition to the Algerian war. What is of paramount importance is the mythically blinding revelation that Bistenave's criticism of the French military and its role in the conflict is fundamentally personal, rather than political, in nature. The moment this "fact" is appreciated by the integrated reader, the adversary potential of Bistenave's revolt simply evaporates; and with it that of all the historical *mutins*, whose sole representative he is. The social disorder of 1955-1956 is thus reduced in turn to the antics of the "mutins de Versailles", to Bistenave's dislike of Raspéguy, and finally to filial ire. This is further evidence of the leading role played by depoliticization in Lartéguy's literary mystification of the Algerian war, as well as of myth's previously noted general tendency to formalize social disorder by dispersing the collective into the individual and the individual into the essential (Barthes 1957, p.135).

Having determined the identities of the ringleaders, Raspéguy is able to undertake the integration of this regiment's conscript element into the paratrooper community. Using the time-honoured principle of "divide and rule", he first splits the regulars from the reservists, leaving the latter to "stew in their own juice" for some time. Whilst the career soldiers are smartened up, freshly kitted out, and subjected to rigorous discipline and hard training, the conscripts are left to languish on their own. In this way, they come to feel that they have been excluded from the "real" life of the "camp des Pins", and are living instead in a kind of limbo; an impression that is shared by the integrated reader. As time goes on, their exclusion becomes more pronounced and gives rise to various expressions of a common will to enter the society of the regular military men. Bucelier's attempt to establish a semblance of order in the ranks

of the parading conscripts is especially revealing in this regard. In particular, the mythical value attached to language in the communist sympathiser's "spontaneous" (i.e. natural) expression of his desire to become a "real person" is of some importance. Consider the text's account of the relevant act of regimentation:

Les sous-officiers aboyaient pour ranger leurs hommes et faisaient sans cesse rectifier les files. Les parachutistes se trouvèrent bientôt alignés impeccablement, tandis que les rappelés ressemblaient à un troupeau de chèvres parqué là par hasard.

- Ça ne peut pas durer, dit Bucelier.

- Toi, tu vas te faire avoir, lui dit doucement Bistenave.

- M'en fous. De quoi a-t-on l'air? Les gars, vous laissez pas faire.

Il sortit des rangs et essaya d'aligner ses camarades.

- Allez, quoi, en rangs. Rentrez le ventre. Toi, pousse-toi et toi, avance...

Polyphème était apparu, derrière Bucelier:

- On dit: <<En colonne, couvrez.>> C'est le commandement réglementaire.

Et Bucelier s'entendit hurler:

- En colonne, couvrez.

<<Dans tout coco, il y a un militaire qui s'ignore>>, pensa Bistenave. (Lartéguy 1960, pp.321-322)

Having been systematically excluded from the paratroopers' society hitherto, the "mutins de Versailles" are now given the opportunity of joining it. Those who accept - and all of them will, sooner or later - must undergo a mythical apotheosis: from men into demigods; or, to make use of Lartéguy's preferred animal metaphor, from reservist "goats" into *para* "wolves". This transformation occurs in a number of stages, which culminate with the narrative sequence linking the deaths of Merle and Bistenave, the punitive massacre of civilians at the Rahlem *mechtas*, the destruction of Si Lahcen's guerrillas, and the final expiatory ritual of parachute jumping. These climactic expressions of conscript "*para-ness*" were described in Chapter 1, and need not be discussed again here. In contrast to them, the reservists' first indications of a sense of shared identity with their regular counterparts are somewhat less dramatic, but are no less important. So, in the case of Bucelier's attempt to impose some military discipline on his fellow conscripts, the *coco* earns the right to be integrated into the *paras*' linguistic community, thereby escaping from the isolation in which his peers continue to languish; this, in spite of his conscious, "artificially politicized", self and in response to deeper, more "natural", promptings. In the process, he establishes the relevance in the present context of remarks



made in a rather different one by Peter Foulkes:

A recurrent and interesting feature of capitalist integration literature, where it sometimes seems to become conscious of itself as an aspect of integration, lies in the role it assigns to language. As a highly complex structure of social agreement concerning usage, meaning and sound, language can become a metaphor for the intricate rules and combinatory relationships which determine the position of the individual vis-à-vis society. (Foulkes 1983, p.49)

This is very much the case in *Les Centurions*, where the paratroopers' eventual offer of integration is phrased in such a way as to stress the importance of linguistic homogeneity. Bucelier's use of Polyphème's "commandement réglementaire" is a case in point, as is the subsequent exchange between Raspéguy and one of the formerly rebellious reservists:

- Ça te plaît d'être déguisé comme ça?

- Non, mon colonel.

- Eh bien, fais-toi couper les cheveux, à ras comme moi, rase-toi, lave-toi, balance ton calot à la mer, va trouver Polyphème et dis-lui: Je ne suis plus un rappelé, mais un volontaire qui s'engage pour le temps que durera mon rappel dans le X<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Parachutistes. Alors tu seras habillé comme les autres, mais comme les autres tu marcheras, tu souffriras et peut-être tu mourras. Je te laisse le choix, à toi et à tous tes camarades...

Ce matin-là, les deux tiers des appelés balancèrent leurs calots à la mer. (Lartéguy 1960, p.324)

What we must note here is not only the appeal to a more authentic and more pure mode of existence, communicated through the themes of disguise and cleanliness, but also the use of a preferred nomenclature to negate the conscripts' potential for adversary representations of the Algerian conflict. This appears to bear out Roland Barthes's claim that "le mythe est fondamentalement nominal, dans la mesure même où la nomination est le premier procédé du détournement" (Barthes 1957, p.142). In the present context, what this means is that by replacing the troublesome *rappelés* with *volontaires*, Lartéguy is able to sidestep the moral and political questions raised by their recall for service in Algeria. Moreover, he is able to embark on an entirely self-consistent denial of a distinctive conscript identity; with their symbolic casting off of their *calots* in favour of the *paras*' distinctive berets, the *rappelés* effectively deny their own existence *qua* conscripts, as it were.

It is worth remembering at this point that other writers have looked to the conscript's humble kit precisely in order to assert the specificity of his Algerian experience. Philippe Labro, for instance, is quick to see in the despised *calot* a means of communicating his own, inevitably complex and problematic, historicity. His autobiographical introduction of the motif in *Des feux mal éteints* (1967) constitutes an effective and singularly appropriate affirmation of what we might describe as the "multiple individuality" of the Algerian *bidasse*:

Sur le bateau, à Marseille, notre paquetage sur l'épaule, nous portions tous des calots que nous avons cassés pendant nos classes. Je portais le mien sur le bout du nez, le front entièrement dissimulé, à la Jean Gabin, ou à la Burt Lancaster - selon le film auquel on se réfère. Les types qui vinrent après nous avaient des bérets un peu ronds et clairs, un peu mous, pas tout à fait comme ceux des paras, mais presque. Un génie authentique et anonyme avait décidé, quelques mois après les troubles au sein de l'armée française, que le seul moyen de réunifier les paras, l'arme dissidente, au reste de la troupe, était de donner au reste de la troupe l'uniforme et le couvre-chef des paras. Et, de fait, cette décision eut l'effet psychologique prévu. Les paras perdirent leur singularité, leur mythe, leur prestige. Entre-temps, l'Algérie était devenue indépendante. Cette histoire de calots et de bérets n'avait rien à voir à l'affaire mais elle marqua, pour le bidasse moyen, le passage d'une ère à une autre.

S'il fallait donc définir ma génération, ou plutôt les garçons dont j'ai envie de parler et que j'ai connus, je dirais que ce fut la dernière de celles qui portèrent un calot - et je ne m'aventurerais pas plus loin. (Labro 1967, p.39)

Wholly accurate from an historical point of view, Labro's comments on the differences between the uniforms worn by the representatives of "the nation in arms" and the military élite serve to draw attention to the literary mystification of the roles played by both elements of the French forces in Algeria. His examination of the conscript experience - which, he has suggested, caused him personally to age ten years (Planchais 1985, II, p.8) - will be returned to in the second half of this consideration of the theme. As for the complacent and distorted version of that experience to be found in *Les Centurions*, our discussion can now be brought to a close.

By exchanging their own distinctive headgear for that of Raspéguy's X<sup>e</sup> RPC, the "mutins de Versailles" signal their surrender of *rappelé* specificity in return for temporary admission to the *paras*' community. A few, like Bucelier, will become NCOs, and, rejected in their turn by a "decadent" France which favours the FLN, will

even enlist as regulars at the end of their period of compulsory military service. Others, and most notably Bistenave, will be even more permanently recuperated in death. The majority, however, will become *paras* only for as long as is required for the defence of the nation and by Lartéguy's plot. It is as *paras*, nevertheless, rather than as conscripts, that they will enter the fight against the forces of Algerian nationalism. They will not, therefore, be represented as avengers of the 28 *rappelés* massacred by Si Lahcen and his men near the town of "P..." - an obvious reference to events at Palestro (Lartéguy 1960, pp.336-337 & 340) - but instead as paratroopers in their own right, and thus outraged by the FLN's murder and mutilation of two of their number: Lieutenant Merle and "le petit Bistenave", as he is affectionately remembered by Raspéguy (*ibid.*, p.356). It is as *paras*, above all, that another seven of the *rappelés* will give their lives for France in the eventual confrontation with Si Lahcen's guerrillas (*ibid.*, p.373). This sacrifice will, in turn, permit the conscripts' final symbolic integration into the paratroopers' community; as Raspéguy makes clear:

- Vous vous êtes très bien battus. Vous avez payé cher le droit d'être des nôtres; aussi tous ceux qui en feront la demande sauteront en parachute dès que nous serons rentrés à Alger. (*ibid.*, p.374)

Having jumped, the "mutins de Versailles" have come to the end of both their tour of duty in Algeria and their *para* apotheosis. No longer representing the slightest threat to the continued existence of *Algérie française*, they are free to leave the territory and the novel. The historical challenge of conscript-centred criticism of the conduct and continuation of the Algerian war, of which these *mutins* are but a tamed incarnation, is thus finally denied.

Lartéguy's extended negation of the conscript's historicity, and thus of the figure's potential for adversary historical interpretations, may usefully be compared with an earlier, and consequently more optimistic, pro-military treatment of the theme of conscription. *L'Algérie quand on y est* (1958), by "Cécil Saint-Laurent" - the best-selling pseudonym of the more consciously literary Jacques Laurent - is presented as a

piece of accurate reportage in which only the names of individuals and locations have been changed (Saint-Laurent 1958, p.10). Yet, in point of fact, this prefatory claim to documentary status may safely be ignored, as the text is a novel in all but name.

The fact that *L'Algérie quand on y est* should be an "optimistic" pro-military text while *Les Centurions* is a "pessimistic" one is readily understandable in terms of de Gaulle's epoch-making speech of 16 September 1959. Prior to this crucial date, it was still possible for the advocates of a military solution to France's Algerian problems to believe that the sibylline utterances of the Head of State indicated his support for their perceptions and policies. De Gaulle's statement of his intention to pursue the goal of Algerian *autodétermination* removed all such illusions. In consequence, Lartéguy's *paras* are depicted as the increasingly restive victims of a decadent French nation's disastrous approach to unrest in its overseas territories; while Saint-Laurent's military protagonists can still emerge as, on the one hand, the efficient upholders of *pax gallica* in the face of rebel outrages, and, on the other, the caring administrators of social and economic improvements designed to better the lot of the Muslim population.

Yet, the very optimism of this image of the familiar "repression and reform" package contains the seeds of its own destruction, or, more accurately, of its critical deconstruction. For, the text's portrayal of "pacification" is not merely optimistic, it is stridently, suspiciously, so. In fact, *L'Algérie quand on y est* constitutes a booming reply to an unasked question, a loud denial of an unspoken criticism. In Machereyan terms, the text's evocation of the French army's activities in Algeria can be made to reveal its unconscious: a "silence" which, by definition, it is incapable of voicing. It is by focussing on the treatment of the historically problematic issue of conscription in *L'Algérie quand on y est* that we shall best be able to give voice to its particular silence, and thus to reveal the conditions of the text's production.

The overt aim of Saint-Laurent's work is, as its title suggests, to convey an accurate image of the situation prevailing "on the ground" in Algeria. Its unstated

project is scarcely less obvious: to generate support for the preservation of *Algérie française*; this, on behalf of both the military and the colony's European population. To this end, regular criticism is made of those metropolitan individuals and organizations foolish enough to make pronouncements on a problem of which they know nothing. Such seemingly different tourists as the dizzy actress Natacha and the self-serving *haut fonctionnaire* are seen, in this light, to be fundamentally similar, and it is therefore appropriate that they should both be invited on the same army-organized tour of Kabylia; an arrangement which allows Saint-Laurent's military spokesmen to "correct" a range of metropolitan misconceptions about the territory and its troubles (ibid., pp.51-73). These mistaken views include, most significantly, those voiced by a questioning section of the metropolitan press. Indeed, critical publications of this kind are subjected to a remarkable attack very shortly before the entrance of *l'aspirant* Niprotsky, the reservist officer cadet who provides the focal point for the text's treatment of the conscript theme. The following exchange is sparked off by a Kabyle mayor's criticism of the "defeatist" Paris press:

- C'est exact, reconnaît le capitaine. On se demande comment l'Algérie tient alors qu'on y lit <<Le Monde>> et <<L'Express>>. Heureusement, le mois dernier, on a enregistré ici une baisse de leur vente...

- Comment le savez-vous? demande le haut fonctionnaire.

- Nous tenons un diagramme de cette vente pour savoir s'il faut ouvrir l'oeil.

- Pardon?

- Vente forte, beaucoup d'attentats. (ibid., p.72)

The objectively ludicrous arithmetic suggested in this passage is less an indication of the motive impact of the Parisian press on the FLN than of the French military's developed paranoia as regards metropolitan enquiry in this period. The fact that *Le Monde* and, even more significantly, *L'Express* should be singled out for criticism here is itself a major clue to the nature of the silence which, we have suggested, lies at the heart of *L'Algérie quand on y est*.

Immediately prior to Niprotsky's first appearance, the reader is presented with a series of favourable images of the French army's presence in Algeria: a group of

soldiers wave cheerily to Natacha from a passing train; others live with their machine-guns in isolated little posts. The route followed by the visiting guests' convoy then takes a turning with particular mythical significance:

- C'est drôle, dit le haut fonctionnaire après avoir considéré une plaque Michelin, ce nom de Palestro me dit quelque chose. Un souvenir historique, je crois... Pendant la campagne de Bugeaud, non?

- L'année dernière, dit Burt. Une embuscade. Une section française démolie. (ibid., p.73)

It is clearly no coincidence that the single tourist capable of stating the contemporary significance of Palestro should be an American journalist; his foreignness serves to reinforce this latest, and quite implausible, revelation of metropolitan ignorance of the Algerian situation. For, in spite of the incidental accuracy of the civil servant's critically evoked query - Palestro was, indeed, the scene of a much earlier clash between indigenous and colonial forces - the real affective power of the name clearly resides in the French public's undoubted awareness of the events at the Ouled Djerrah on 18 May 1956. As Yves Courrière put it in the first real history of the Algerian war: "Le massacre de Palestro fit découvrir la guerre d'Algérie à la Métropole" (Courrière 1969, p.321). In short, virtually any contemporary consumer of this text can be assumed to have been aware of the standard "shock-horror" connotations of the town's name; that the *haut fonctionnaire* should be so conspicuously ignorant of the relevant historical events is indicative of the extent of the mystification effected by *L'Algérie quand on y est*.

Having parted company with the *haut fonctionnaire* and his group, Natacha is being driven back to Algiers when a lonely figure appears beside the road:

Alger se rapproche. Les voitures se multiplient. A la hauteur de Maison-Carrée, un petit aspirant fait de l'autostop. A la demande de Natacha, le chauffeur accepte de le laisser monter. (Saint-Laurent 1958, pp.73-74)

We are not merely introduced to a new character here; we are invited, rather, to consider the whole French military presence in the light cast by this image of one particular conscript's attractively vulnerable entrance onto the Algerian stage. Thus

regarded, Natacha's gesture takes on a quasi-maternal character; a reading supported by the text's insistence on Niprovsky's smallness. Similar overtones are communicated as the narration seems to adopt Natacha's point of view to develop the portrait of the young soldier:

Il est mignon. Il porte un charmant béret avec deux rubans qui penchent derrière. Il expose à Natacha qu'il vient de sortir de l'école de Saumur, qu'on l'a affecté au 5<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs d'Afrique, qu'il est au dépôt depuis la veille, que d'ici quelques jours il va rejoindre son régiment qui campe à l'intérieur dans des régions dont personne n'a jamais entendu parler, le Sersou et l'Ouarsenis. (ibid., p.74)

Of course, the text's hierarchy of discourses ensures that the integrated reader of *L'Algérie quand on y est* is constantly aware of the gap between the characters' view of the world and that of the implied author, and therefore of the position which he himself is required to adopt (see Belsey 1980, pp.70-72 & 77-78). Faced with the above passage, in consequence, the consumer of the text appreciates the conscript's youthful enthusiasm, laughs at Natacha's stereotypical femininity, and is flattered by the appeal to his own knowledge of Algerian geography. As the conversation continues, further ideological capital will be made from this unavowed relationship between the reader and the text. In the following extract, Natacha is continuing to quiz Niprovsky:

- Ce n'est pas votre métier alors de faire la guerre?
- Non, je suis étudiant.
- Moi, je viens jouer la comédie. Si vous voulez, je vous donne une place pour après-demain. C'est du Labiche.

Elle griffonne sur un morceau de papier, et lui demande son nom.

- Niprovsky, je suis d'origine polonaise ... et je vous remercie bien. Est-ce que je pourrai venir vous voir dans votre loge, après? Oui? Décidément mon séjour en Algérie commence mieux que je ne le pensais.

L'aspirant Niprovsky ne devait pas assister aux *Petits Oiseaux*, comédie en trois actes d'Eugène Labiche. (Saint-Laurent 1958, p.74)

So, having served to effect Niprovsky's entrance, the meeting with Natacha is brought to an abrupt close. This essentially civilian episode - the metropolitan and non-military status of both parties is clearly underlined - will immediately be juxtaposed with an image of military life in Algeria, as the scene changes and we join Niprovsky on the way to his first operational posting. The civilian *traction* thus gives way to an army jeep, whilst the actress is replaced as an interlocutor by an *appelé* driver; a

private whose experience of the Algerian conflict serves to establish him as an authoritative guide for the new arrival. It should be noted in passing that the switch of scene is accompanied by connotations of destiny and self-sacrifice, as well as by the suggestion that Niprotsky has now embarked on a more authentic mode of existence. All three of these themes are evidenced by aspects of the final sentence of the above quotation: i.e in the use of the modal *devoir*, the idea of foregoing a (civilian) pleasure, and the distancing of Niprotsky - and, with him, the reader - from the *comédie* of civil society. All of which helps to integrate the *aspirant* into the text's pro-military problematic.

The initial "unmilitariness" of Niprotsky both ties in with the text's presentation of SAS units as "non-military" (*ibid.*, p.65) and with a general tendency to represent the FLN as the aggressors in the Algerian conflict. The conscript's stated activity in civilian life represents a particularly interesting narrative option, it should be added; this, for both connotative and historical reasons. As the representative of those young Frenchmen obliged by successive administrations to participate in the Algerian war, Niprotsky fulfils an essentially symbolic function in the narrative. It is therefore no coincidence that he should lack both the certitude and the plenitude of an established profession. His status is that of the negative pole in the educational relationship: i.e. that of the supplicant who does not know, but is willing to learn from his betters in order to transcend his ignorant condition. As a student, the young man "aspires" to a higher state of learning; in the army, he will "aspire" to an officer's rank. What better subject could be imagined for a pro-military and pro-colonial *éducation algérienne*?

Thanks to the narrative's hierarchy of discourses, the reader will be encouraged to believe that he can both share in Niprotsky's discovery of the military situation "on the ground" in Algeria, and, magically, see beyond it. This will in turn permit him to construct, apparently by and for himself, a comprehensive "history" of the Algerian conflict. There is considerable irony in the fact that Niprotsky should, *qua* student, be



an ideal vehicle for the communication of this mystified account of the war. For, the French student body exhibited the national antagonisms generated by this most difficult phase of the retreat from empire in a particularly visible fashion (Hamon & Rotman 1979, pp. 218-224 & 312-318). So, a novel like Gilbert Cesbron's *Entre chiens et loups* (1962) accurately draws attention to the frequently violent confrontations between the right-wing supporters of *Algérie française* and their leftist opponents; as does a film like Pascal Kané's *Liberty Belle* (1983).

Not surprisingly, those students who marched against torture and for peace in Algeria were, as directly interested parties, particularly to the fore in the metropolitan protests against the use of conscription. Indeed, the leaders of their organizations were even liable to punitive incorporation into the army as the penalty for their dangerously visible agitation. However, in contrast to *Les Centurions*, which elects to foreground opposition to the deployment of conscripted troops in Algeria, *L'Algérie quand on y est* effectively denies the problem by the simple expedient of ignoring it. Niprotsky, in short, never gives the slightest indication of even a personal opposition to his enforced participation in the Algerian conflict, far less a political one.

While Niprotsky's journey to his posting in the Sersou region is made up of three distinguishable sections - pre-convoy, convoy, post-convoy - it is best regarded as a single "voyage of discovery". The jeep trip provides the *rappelé* officer, and thus the reader, with an ideal opportunity for the assimilation of the text's preferred vision of the Algerian war. So, having revealed himself to be incapable of reading the signs of an ever present danger, Niprotsky is treated to a series of favourable images of "l'Algérie quand on y est". These representations of the colony and the conflict are essentially formulaic and follow a pattern which will become increasingly familiar. (Some of its principal themes will be considered systematically in our consideration of settler mythology.)

The colonial Algeria of Saint-Laurent's text is the setting, then, for an idyll of rural peace and fruitful cultivation; the result of constant effort on the part of the European population, and a function of the colonial enterprise's ascendancy over native passivity. Nevertheless, both communities have prospered thanks to this difficult taming of North African nature, and therefore have a mutual interest in the preservation of the status quo. In consequence, they are equally liable to become the target of the enemies of colonial progress, as marauding bands descend from the barren mountains each night to replace French peace with blind terrorist violence. As likely to cut down telegraph poles as they are to cut throats, the rebels only underline the absurdity of their challenge to French order and progress.

As for the *pieds-noirs*, their comfortable exterior - the friendly banter over glasses of *anisette* - hides a toughness and a determination to protect their achievements which the rebels would be well advised to respect. Backing them up in their courageous endeavours, moreover, is the French army, as represented by Niprovsky's driver. A Parisian florist, the young man has, in common with civilians from other regions, come to Algeria to preserve peace and the French way of life. His boyish innocence has consequently had to be replaced very quickly with a hardened awareness of the horrors which he may one day have to face as a result of the French nation's refusal to bow to the brutal exigencies of the FLN (Saint-Laurent 1958, pp.74-91 *passim*).

This particular war, in short, is hell. It takes its variously physical and psychological toll on the innocent youth of a peace-loving mother country which knows only too well about making such sacrifices. Algeria and the French conscripts stationed there thus fit into a tragic historical pattern:

Devant un petit café, une automitrailleuse rêve. Sur le bord des trottoirs, des soldats sont assis et fument, de la boue jusqu'aux genoux, peu rasés, le casque sur l'oeil, la ceinture de flanelle autour du cou. Ce ne sont plus les soldats de Saumur, ce ne sont plus les soldats d'Algérie. (*ibid.*, p.77)

The conclusion drawn by the integrated reader will surely be that "Ce sont des

soldats (de France) tout court"; that is to say, not the objective agents of colonial repression, but rather the valiant heirs to the legacy of military sacrifice of the *poilus de Verdun*, whom they so inescapably resemble. If Niprovsky's own *prestige guerrier* is overtly debunked (*ibid.*, pp.77-78), it is only in order that it may be covertly, and all the more effectively, restated in due course.

The principal factor to be underlined in all this is that Niprovsky's voyage of discovery involves both a geographical and an ideological displacement. So, whilst the metropolitan specificity of the *rappelé* may be affirmed, it is only appealed to in order to provide further evidence of the mainland's profound ignorance of Algerian realities. As the young newcomer travels, he rapidly rids himself of his preconceptions and prejudices, replacing them with a more informed awareness of the territory and its problems. This fresh knowledge is reflected in a new ability to read the previously obscure signs of the war's presence, coupled with a gradual acquisition of the language appropriate to the milieu into which the *aspirant* is being integrated. So, not only does Niprovsky discover the "oriental" complexities of relations between local businessmen (from both communities) and the FLN; he also starts talking about the guerilla tactics of the *fellagha*, begins to get used to being called *mon lieutenant*, and learns, amongst other things, how to distinguish a *zone pacifiée* from a *zone pacifique* (*ibid.*, pp.75-90 *passim*). In the same way, he will learn, in the course of his duties in the Sersou and the Ouarsenis, to differentiate between *Moudjaïdines* and *Moussebilines*; to be careful with his choice of terms to describe the native and settler populations of Algeria, because "Tout le monde est Français ici"; and to understand the meaning of the word *mechta* (*ibid.*, pp.100, 102 & 177).

The military's use of Arabic terms in this connection is worthy of particular note, as it is a constant of the literature of the Algerian war. Bearing in mind Barthes's account of the mystificatory role played by nomination, we should point out that the army's reliance on what was, in reality, a colonial jargon serves three

complementary purposes in the relevant texts: to integrate colonial sympathizers through the establishment of a "code of reference" (Barthes 1970, pp.210-212); to ward off adversary discussion of what appears to be a forbiddingly specialized area of knowledge; and, most importantly, to tame, by means of an apparently comprehended *étiquetage*, that which is in reality beyond the colonial imagination. (The persistence of a term like *bled* in modern French usage is an indication of the pervasiveness and durability of the linguistic code adopted by the *Armée d'Algérie*; while its pejorative connotations are symptomatic of the reductive forces at work in all such labelling.) These three projects coincide perfectly in the text's description of the two arms of the Algerian nationalist forces; Niprotsky's informant is Lelong, another young lieutenant:

- Quelle est notre mission? demande Niprotsky
- D'abord parcourir un certain itinéraire de piste. Il s'agit de rendre difficile le déplacement nocturne des fellagha.
- Mais d'où viendraient-ils?
- Ça dépend. Nous pouvons tomber soit sur des Moudjaïdines soit sur les Moussebilines.
- Des tribus?
- Mais non! Les Moudjaïdines c'est l'armée proprement dite de la rébellion. Ils portent en général un uniforme voisin du nôtre. Ils sont constitués en sections et en compagnies. Les Moussebilines, je ne saurais trop les comparer aux U.T. que vous avez vus à Alger. Ce sont des paysans qui demeurent dans leur maison, qui continuent leur travail puis qui, sur un ordre, se rassemblent pour participer à une opération brève après laquelle ils se remettent à garder leurs troupeaux ou à gauler leurs figuiers. Il y a des Moudjaïdines dans la partie montagneuse, l'Ouarsenis. Il n'y en a pas dans le Sersou, zone un peu trop plate pour eux. En revanche, il leur arrive de traverser le Sersou. (Saint-Laurent 1958, p.100)

The political challenge which the nationalist regulars and irregulars jointly represented is here denied by the act of naming as authoritative labelling. Simultaneously, Niprotsky's ignorance of the situation "on the ground" is revealed, corrected, and exploited so as to integrate still further both the conscript himself and the increasingly "expert" reader. The equation of the two elements of the rebel forces with the military and the territorials renders the frightening reality of the nationalist insurrection safely comprehensible; that is to say in terms which actually serve to reinforce, rather than to question, the ideological "deep structures" of the colonial ascendancy. More specifically, the popular nature of the FLN's challenge to continued

colonial rule is lost as the independence movement is reduced to the status of a military mirror-image, an ironic affirmation of the grasp on the colonized's imagination of the forms which characterize the colonizer's apparatus of repression. All of which ties in, moreover, with the chronic identity crisis afflicting the nationalist guerrillas; at least, as diagnosed by such pro-military texts as *Les Centurions* and *L'Algérie quand on y est*. Here again, we encounter a mythical figure - the "identification" of the Self and the Other, as Barthes puts it (Barthes 1957, pp.239-240) - which will be considered in depth in a subsequent chapter.

In the course of his introductory journey, Niprotsky learns to understand the various indications of French civilization and nationalist barbarism that are encountered along the way. At the same time, he comes to recognize, with the reader, that as a "sandwich de plaines et de montagnes, l'Algérie est également un sandwich en ce qui concerne la sécurité" (Saint-Laurent 1958, p.89). Thus equipped with a politics-denying view of the nationalists' armed challenge to colonial authority (i.e. one which puts the stress on the French army's *maintien de l'ordre*), the *aspirant* finally arrives at his regiment's operational headquarters and takes up his duties. Yet, here especially, the conscript is the focus for an extended attack on metropolitan misconceptions as regards the Algerian war.

Still extremely gullible, Niprotsky is the perfect target for the *brimades psychologiques* lined up for him at the Sersou depot of the 5<sup>e</sup> Chasseurs d'Afrique. This variation on the familiar theme of ragging the new boy consists in the projection of an intentionally misleading image of the French army's activities in Algeria. So, the *rappelé* is duly appalled to discover two captains arguing over the fair distribution of a murdered Arab's money. With a growing sense of horror and outrage, he goes on to encounter a drunken and disgracefully disrespectful NCO, to see the shallow graves of Muslim prisoners summarily executed to make up the periodic *bilan*, and to hear of the debauched revelry of his fellow officers (ibid., pp.91-94).

The "joke" is only revealed when Niprotsky's lack of understanding threatens to lead to serious embarrassment with a local Arab mayor. One of the apparently feuding captains then explains to the bemused newcomer that everything was a hoax:

- C'est la plaisanterie classique, vous savez, pour ceux qui arrivent de France. Ce qui est un peu pénible, c'est qu'elle réussisse toujours aussi bien.

Niprotsky s'excuse.

- Vous savez, en France, on dit tant de choses que...

Le capitaine a presque la même intonation que le maire pour dire:

- Eh! oui. (ibid., p.97)

The underlying project of the *brimades* episode cannot seriously be doubted: i.e. further to denigrate metropolitan criticism of the French army's goals and methods in Algeria. Any attempt to question its role in the implementation of the official policy of *pacification* is dismissed as, at best, the result of ignorance, and, at worst, the expression of a wilful desire to mislead for political ends. The real point here is that the integrated reader is never at any time taken in by the officers' stunts: he may not fully understand them, but he will nevertheless be able to see through them sufficiently to realize that all is not as it appears to the conscript. This, through the prior establishment for the reader of a position of identification with the subject of the *énonciation* (the implied author), over and above his alignment with the subject inscribed in the *énoncé* (Niprotsky) . The end product of such textual manipulation of the reader is the feeling of satisfaction experienced by the latter when the nature of the officers' deception is finally revealed. With this confirmation of his carefully nurtured suspicions, the consumer of *L'Algérie quand on y est* is effectively rewarded for playing the narrative's pro-military game.

In the Sersou and the Ouarsenis, Niprotsky's Algerian education will be continued, with the various "lessons" all being weighted in favour of the French colonial cause. As he participates in night-time patrols and day-time arrests, his metropolitan ignorance gives way to a properly military appreciation of the situation "on the ground". However, as he becomes a cog in the machinery of colonial "security

operations", he is exposed to such troublesome historical realities as that of Muslim poverty:

Niprovsky est impressionné par les haillons de ces hommes, par le morne silence de leur regard. <<Algérie française>> est une belle expression mais en ce moment, par chaque détail vestimentaire, par chaque geste, les deux <<communautés>> sont aux cinq cents diables l'une de l'autre. Seulement comment se faire une idée générale? s'inquiète Niprovsky. (ibid., p.183)

As Jean Planchais has pointed out, such feelings of shock and outrage in the face of "le scandale du Tiers-Monde" are profoundly typical of the metropolitan conscript's experience of Algeria (Planchais 1985, II, p.8). However, in the fictive universe of *L'Algérie quand on y est*, this characteristic, and potentially devastating, discrepancy between colonialist rhetoric and colonial reality is rendered innocuous even as it is voiced. Niprovsky's lack of faith in his own ability to judge the "real" situation will, on the basis of his record to date, be readily echoed by the reader. Moreover, a very different version of inter-communal conflict will be put forward by Colonel Jasson, who is both the Lieutenant's commanding officer and an authoritative commentator on the colony and the war. Most significantly, his remarks are prompted by the death, in an FLN ambush, of a conscripted driver. Though not in a position to do so, Jasson would like to explain the wider historical significance of the humble soldier's death to the local Muslim population:

Le colonel voudrait leur dire: il ne s'est rien passé. Il y a seulement un Français de plus qui est mort en Algérie. Mais, en France, beaucoup d'entre vous sont morts quand il s'agissait de défendre notre pays. Le bien et le mal n'ont rien à voir avec cette histoire. C'est d'ailleurs pour ça qu'elle est une tragédie. Au fond de tout ça, qu'est-ce qu'il y a? Un pays qui, grâce à la France, a suffisamment progressé pour s'indigner de n'avoir pas progressé davantage. (Saint-Laurent 1958, pp.190-191)

The poverty of the indigenous population of Algeria is represented in these lines as a temporary failure of French paternalism, rather than as a structural flaw in the fabric of colonialism. At the same time, the historically vexed question of *rappelé* losses in an unpopular colonial war is dismissed as a *tragédie*, i.e. as something which is the result of forces beyond the control of mere humans (and specifically the French government). As Jasson himself points out, Thébaud's death will soon be forgotten by

his comrades (ibid., p.187). They will then be able to return to their temporarily interrupted enjoyment of the war's more "exotic" moments. Consider the following account of the deployment of native cavalry against a group of fleeing "suspects":

Parmi les soldats, une véritable rumeur s'élève:

- Bon Dieu! c'est un film de Far-West!

Sous ce soleil qui s'est durci, dans cet âpre entonnoir de montagne sans arbre, sans chemin, où les quelques mechta éparses ont la couleur du roc, la longue file des cavaliers arabes, le fusil en bandoulière, donne aux petits paysans de la Sarthe comme aux ouvriers de la banlieue parisienne l'impression de vivre un film. Assis sur la pente, comme sur les gradins d'un théâtre, ils suivent la progression de l'assaut que la cavalerie donne à la montagne. (ibid., p.182)

What more reassuring image of military service could be put forward than this one of "little peasants and workers" at the cinema? Where are the horrors evoked by the metropolitan liberals and leftists? Questions which must inevitably lead the integrated reader to the conclusion that conscription is not something to be protested against, but rather a formative experience to be borne manfully, to be profited from, and, even, as here, to be enjoyed; a view which is as open to question as it is discursively imposed.

As the narrative comes to a close, we discover that Niprotsky, though still the "new boy", has now taken sole charge of a section of Muslim troops based at a lonely mountain outpost (ibid., p.245). The reader of *L'Algérie quand on y est* is thereby left to ponder an enduring image of one such successful integration of the *rappelé* into the machinery of French military repression. For a contrasting view, we must look elsewhere, as a crucially important passage in Saint-Laurent's own treatment of the theme may be shown to indicate with remarkable precision.

The relevant exchange occurs towards the end of the text, when the Colonel agrees to a planned operation to rescue "une vieille petite musulmane" who has been abducted by the rebels (though for what reason is never made clear) (ibid., p.202). The regiment's interest in the safety of this particular "little old lady" derives from the friendship which has developed between her and a young NCO. Jasson predictably remarks that it would be difficult for the cynics in metropolitan France to believe that



so much time and effort could be expended in a purely humanitarian cause of this kind. At this point, Lieutenant Lancien, the "jeune et paisible officier" placed in charge of the mission, virtually explodes with rage. What follows is worth quoting in full:

- Ça tient, mon colonel, à ce que les officiers qui écrivent des livres ou des articles sur l'armée française en Algérie ne sont en général que des... que des...

L'indignation l'a privé de vocabulaire. Il termine sa phrase par un regard vers le capitaine Malet qui secoue rageusement la tête.

- Ah! c'est vrai! murmure le colonel en riant, j'oublie toujours que vous avez servi avec le lieutenant Servan-Schreiber et que vous n'êtes pas près, vous, de l'oublier.

- C'était à un tel point, explose Malet, que dans notre popote le nom de Servan-Schreiber nous rendait malades. On mettait à l'amende celui qui le prononçait.

Sans plus se soucier du colonel, les deux officiers se débondent parlant chacun pour soi. De leur double fulmination, il ressort que si, de concert avec un colonel et un général, il a pu faire le procès d'abus commis par les soldats, ces abus avaient eu lieu précisément chez les siens, sans que ni lui ni les deux autres officiers ne cherchassent à les sanctionner. Il est question de la comédie des <<commandos noirs>>. Malet et Lancien éclatent réellement quand ils en viennent à la citation du lieutenant Servan-Schreiber.

- Moi, je ne devrais pas m'en plaindre, constate railleusement Malet. Pour pouvoir citer Servan-Schreiber qui n'avait fait qu'une apparition, on a été bien obligé, comme j'avais été là d'un bout à l'autre, de me citer aussi. Mais je m'en plains parce que ça me fait mal au coeur d'avoir récolté une citation pour une opération de rien du tout qu'on aurait oubliée depuis longtemps, Lancien et moi, sans l'histoire des galons.

- Quels galons? s'enquiert Daubourget.

C'est Lancien qui doucement énonce:

- Il restait un rebelle qui tirait. Le lieutenant Servan-Schreiber devait redescendre avec des soldats une pente dont un morceau était à découvert. Il a pensé que des galons, ça brille bêtement.

- Comment le savez vous, il vous l'a dit?

- Oh! non, mon capitaine, nous le savons parce que nous l'avons vu les retirer.

Le colonel a un mouvement de contrariété. Il arrête sèchement les exclamations de Daubourget.

- Nous voilà loin de votre petite vieille. Allez vous occuper d'elle, messieurs. (ibid., pp.202-204)

There are a number of points to be made immediately about the above extract, although their full development will only be possible after some discussion of Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber's personal contribution to the literature of the Algerian war. The first thing which will surely strike the modern reader is the fact that this passage, in marked contrast to the bulk of the text, verges on the unintelligible without a prior knowledge of Servan-Schreiber and his work. The contemporary consumer's familiarity with the relevant material is clearly assumed by the text, and there would seem to be no real reason why we too should not take it as read.

The second point that must clearly be made concerns the unprecedentedly personal and vitriolic nature of the attack on Servan-Schreiber. That this particular *rappelé* should be singled out for such abuse is hardly surprising, however; as both the publisher and editor-in-chief of the most important liberal weekly, *L'Express*, he could have been expected to come in for the critical attention of the military and its literary defenders. Yet, it was as the author of a book based on his own experiences of service in Algeria that this most celebrated *rappelé* was to make his mark on the history of the conflict:

Servan-Schreiber was recalled to active duty in June 1956... Some of his friends believed that the ministry of defense put him in uniform in order to silence his editorial criticism of Algerian policy. At any rate, for six months he went off to war and kept quiet. On his return in early 1957, just as the storm over torture broke, he began publishing in weekly installments an account of his experiences.

*Lieutenant en Algérie* - half novel, half reportage - became the best known, and probably the most widely read, of all the memoirs on the war. (Talbot 1980, p.96)

Not surprisingly, the work met with outrage on the part of government and military alike. Such eminent officers as Massu were to blame Servan-Schreiber personally for instigating the campaign against torture, while the courts would prosecute him for "demoralizing" the army. In fact, as Talbot goes on to explain, the text does not constitute anything like a radical critique of the French presence in Algeria:

Despite its criticism of army and settlers and its discussion of some of the cruelties of the war, *Lieutenant in Algeria* does not question whether France ought to remain in North Africa. Servan-Schreiber shared with Germaine Tillion and other liberals the view that social and economic reforms might bring an end to the revolution and leave a place for France in Algeria. Pacification, its excesses removed, might still be made to work. (ibid., p.97)

Yet, to say this is to misrepresent the text's impact on metropolitan perceptions of the war. For, it was not the liberal conformism - and thus the contradictions - of *Lieutenant en Algérie* that struck its metropolitan and world audience, but rather the fact that its author was both an established figure and a *rappelé* with first-hand experience of the situation obtaining in North Africa. In a political atmosphere characterized by the official refusal to admit that the troubles on the other side of the Mediterranean even constituted a war, this trusted commentator's insistence that there really was a war

raging in Algeria, and a singularly horrifying one at that, was bound to have major repercussions. If, as Horne suggests, it was conscription that awakened a hitherto uninterested French public to the Algerian conflict, then *Lieutenant en Algérie* was certainly a prime factor in the emergence of that new, *rappelé*-focussed, consciousness (Horne 1977, pp.231-232). Small wonder, then, that generals like Massu, and writers like Saint-Laurent, should have "insisted on reading *Lieutenant in Algeria* as a stinging attack on the army" (Talbot 1980, p.97). In what follows, we shall seek to argue that Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber's *Lieutenant en Algérie*, though only overtly acknowledged in the one passage quoted above, is rarely, if ever, out of the mind of the author of *L'Algérie quand on y est*. Or, to put the issue in more directly text-centred terms, the 1957 account of the situation "on the ground" in Algeria is permanently present in the "unconscious" of its 1958 counterpart as an unvoiced contradiction, or a "silence".

*Lieutenant en Algérie* is made up of three sections: "La guerre", in which we are introduced to the brutal and politically counter-productive reality of Algerian *pacification*; "L'espoir," which focusses on a vain attempt to tackle FLN violence in a more humane and politically intelligent way; and "Entre Français", in which attention is drawn to the moral degeneration of French society as a result of events in North Africa, as evidenced by the military's sordid attempts to silence Servan-Schreiber and other critics with first-hand knowledge of the war. This last section serves to situate Saint-Laurent's slanders, which now appear as part of a much wider pattern of military-led denigration. Having described the clumsy attempt made by two senior staff officers to intimidate him personally - by means of a threat to "reveal" his supposed financial interest in the operation of the local BMC (*bordel militaire de campagne*) - Servan-Schreiber comments as follows:

Je notais, ce soir-là, cette anecdote très ordinaire - certains camarades en ont connu de bien plus étonnantes, dans cet ordre - précisément parce qu'elle l'était. Plus peut-être que l'absurdité des opérations militaires, et plus que l'existence de certaines méthodes d'interrogatoire, elle me paraissait significative de ce que nous avons rencontré.

Elle me faisait découvrir comment, sans imaginer une armada à la Franco, ni un coup d'Etat spectaculaire, un empoisonnement subtil, progressif, du sang des Français, pourrait mener de la dégradation de cette guerre à celle de la nation. (Servan-Schreiber 1957, p.239)

The author of *Lieutenant en Algérie* is, if anything, understating his case here; for, the political activists in the French military would, in May 1958, achieve what was in effect a bloodless coup, thanks precisely to the threat of intervention by just such an Algerian armada. It is not surprising, therefore, that those same army officers should have reacted with outraged indignation to all three aspects of Servan-Schreiber's criticism of their pacification efforts; i.e. the absurdity of military operations, the use of dubious interrogation methods, and the moral cost of the war for the whole French nation. Indeed the reservist had accurately predicted their reaction in his fictionalized account of his Algerian experiences. As the "Lieutenant en Algérie" put it to a group of like-minded officers:

- Après, je ferai ce que je pourrai. Mais vous n'ignorez pas que l'armée en Algérie a été transformée en un tabou national, auquel il convient seulement de rendre hommage. Qui en critiquerait les méthodes serait aussitôt soupçonné des arrière-pensées les plus noires... Nous sommes dans un cercle vicieux: les militaires, dont l'opinion sur l'emploi de l'armée aurait un grand crédit, ne peuvent pas la faire connaître; les civils, quand ils peuvent parler, sont discrédités. Le tabou peut dormir tranquille. (ibid., p.69)

With this adversary image of the French army as a national taboo, the author of *Lieutenant en Algérie* is getting very close to the consciously demystifying project of Roland Barthes. In the latter's *Mythologies* - also published, as a collection, in 1957 - particular attention is paid to this very myth of the army in such essays as "L'opération Astra", "Le bifteck et les frites", and "Grammaire africaine". Servan-Schreiber's great advantage over the professional critic, however, is his ability to transcend the military-civilian barrier which, as he explains so succinctly, disbars critics from both sides and thereby allows the myth to remain unchallenged. As a *rappelé*, a civilian transformed into an officer, Lieutenant Servan-Schreiber was uniquely placed to observe and to comment on the French army and its supporting system of myths; by simply identifying the army as a taboo subject he had already taken the first step towards demystifying its

activities in Algeria. As we shall now show, his literary expression of that demystificatory aim owes much of its strength to its treatment of the theme of conscription; and not only that of the author, but that of a generation as a whole.

The narrative opens with an account of the gratuitous murder of a harmless old Arab by an otherwise agreeable enough French soldier. After relating the episode itself in a strikingly matter-of-fact way, the text draws a thumbnail sketch of the old man's aggressor. Sympathetically treated, Private Geronimo is anything but the demonic military bogeyman of the French left:

Geronimo était un garçon plus attirant que la plupart des autres soldats. D'abord il frappait: il était d'une grande beauté, légendaire dans le régiment. Notre colonel, qui avait de l'affection pour lui, l'avait baptisé <<l'Ange noir>>. Il aimait ce qu'on appelle d'un euphémisme pudique la <<bagarre>> et lorsque elle ne venait pas - cette guerre est si monotone - il la provoquait. Mais il n'était pas le seul: tout le monde aime ça. Et lui, au moins, était très courageux: quand une vraie bagarre arrivait, quand il y avait en face de nous des hommes armés, certains de nos camarades devenaient prudents et parlaient moins haut, mais Geronimo était encore plus content. Ce qu'il aimait, c'était tirer. (ibid., p.17)

So, the Arab's killer is rather better looking than the majority of his comrades, and also rather more aggressive; he may start fights, but is at least prepared to risk his life in real battles. Geronimo is no psychopath, then, but rather a representative of a common type: "tout le monde aime ça". His murder of the old man may have sexual overtones, in consequence, but it is concentrated on as a guide to the psychology of the group concerned, rather than to that of the specified individual. This soldier's guilt, in short, is an indictment of the army ethos itself; and, more specifically, of the system of myths which lies behind nicknames like *l'Ange noir* and such euphemisms as *bagarre*. Before we go on to consider the role played by the *rappelé* in Servan-Schreiber's critique of that myth system, it is worth noting the demystification of military action in the above extract. As we pointed out in our earlier remarks on the implications of the historical division of military labour in Algeria (see Chapter 1), the mass of French conscripts led far from exciting lives during their period of service there. John Talbott's interviews with conscripts actually assigned to *quadrillage* duties are the basis

of his conclusion that "the main feature of this task ... was its boredom" (Talbot 1976, p.71). Small wonder then, that some troops should, like Geronimo, periodically take it upon themselves to "liven up" the situation. The fact that many such would-be belligerents should have proved to be of little practical worth in genuine combat situations is not, in itself, a phenomenon exclusive to the Algerian war. Its value as an antidote to the military romantic celebration of battle is, nevertheless, of obvious significance in the present context.

*La bagarre* is just one of many such euphemisms critically examined in *Lieutenant en Algérie*. Several of the most important ones are looked at in terms of their contribution to the creation of what Servan-Schreiber terms "le visage officiel de la guerre d'Algérie" (Servan-Schreiber 1957, p.11). This government-generated and media-uttered account of the Franco-Algerian conflict is very like what Barthes has in mind when attacking French officialdom's mystifying use of "Grammaire africaine" to describe (and defuse) social unrest in France's overseas territories (Barthes 1957, pp.137-144). In particular, Barthes draws attention to the systematic denial of both the existence of the war itself *qua* war and of the politics which lie behind it. Servan-Schreiber's response to official mystification is similarly twofold: to show the messy reality behind the military's sanitized terminology; and to foreground the war's political dimension. These twin approaches inevitably overlap; as in the following extract, which represents a particularly clear example of the narrative's attention to the linguistic detail of the conflict. The speaker is Galland, a liberal-minded colonel who decides to complain to the military authorities about the grave damage done to the French cause in his sector by the brutal behaviour of passing combat troops. His view of the army hierarchy's likely response is a particularly revealing one:

- Comme d'habitude: une enquête... Quand il y a une <<bavure>> (c'est comme ça qu'il faut dire, paraît-il) qui se voit un peu trop, on commence par gagner du temps; on demande un <<rapport>>... Quand le rapport fait un peu trop de bruit, on décide, avec la lenteur voulue, d'ouvrir une <<enquête>> - ça, ça gagne carrément du temps... Quand il y a beaucoup d'enquêtes, et qu'elles finissent tout de même par confirmer, on n'est pas au bout des trucs, il y en a encore un: <<la commission

d'enquête>>, chargée d'enquêter sur les enquêtes et << proposer>> des mesures...  
D'ici là!...

[...]

- Ils refusent de voir que ce ne sont pas des <<cas>>, mais tout le système. On s'indigne hautement devant les <<abus>>, les <<exactions>>, les <<incidents déplorables>> - comme si c'était *l'exception*. L'exception c'est l'inverse... (Servan-Schreiber 1957, pp.196-197)

The Colonel's demystification of military terminology brings about an awareness of the Franco-Algerian conflict which, as his insistence on an entire system makes clear, is properly political. Towards the end of *Lieutenant en Algérie*, the author-narrator presents his own analysis of that political dimension. Arguing, quite rightly, for a view of the war as a watershed in French social history, Servan-Schreiber underlines the rationale behind the attribution to the relevant events of that pivotal status:

...au fond il y a la politique.

Plus exactement, il y a l'expression politique de l'épreuve humaine.

L'inefficacité des méthodes militaires employées, qui dressaient ce peuple contre la France au lieu d'isoler la rébellion - cela était clair. La corruption morale qui, à partir de cette guerre en décomposition, menaçait d'atteindre la nation - cela aussi était clair. Mais insuffisant.

Si vraiment ce qui se déroulait en Algérie devait orienter le destin national, comme nous l'éprouvions, c'est qu'il devait y avoir au-delà de la lutte armée avec les Arabes, du comportement de certaines autorités, au-delà même du sort de ce territoire, un conflit profond, touchant à la structure de la vie collective - c'est-à-dire un conflit *politique*. (ibid., p.244)

The political conflict referred to in this remarkably prescient passage is nothing less than a full reappraisal of the world role of the French nation: i.e. the shift away from the pre-1940 image of France as an imperial Great Power, and towards that of the "natural" leader of an integrated European Community. Colonialism's power to persuade metropolitan public opinion had already been put to a very severe test by the Indochinese conflict and, above all, the débâcle of Dien-Bien-Phu; events in Algeria were to negate it once and for all. As previously noted, the issue of conscription was of prime importance in drawing the attention of the French people to those events, with no one text having a greater impact in this regard than *Lieutenant en Algérie*. It is to this central aspect of the work that we must now return.

The great strength of Servan-Schreiber's account of the Algerian conflict is, we have suggested, the author's refusal either to dismiss atrocities as "exceptions", or to lay the responsibility for them at the door of a few, demonized, individuals. This pattern is maintained as the French army's killing of more Muslim civilians is described. With harsh irony, it is the military's desire to exculpate the guilty Geronimo that leads to the deaths of a truckload of Muslim workers; these innocent men become the latest victims of French brutality as the death of the old Arab is blamed on the FLN. Mauré, a reservist sergeant, is given the task of intercepting the fleeing "rebels". Having never previously been involved in combat, and having suffered the abuse of his comrades as a result, the *rappelé* is determined to make the most of this long-awaited opportunity:

Mauré, les ressources de son esprit et de ses nerfs mobilisées vers un objectif passionnément désiré, tendu vers l'espoir merveilleux d'être, aux yeux de tous, un <<homme>>, d'avoir essuyé le feu et victorieusement, comme d'autres camarades - le sergent rappelé Mauré, tranquille bureaucrate de Limoges, devenait un brutal et habile chef de guerre. (ibid., p.40)

What is truly shocking here, as in the ensuing massacre of the group of unarmed Muslims, is the banality of the soldier's motive: innocent men must die, not to preserve "Western civilization", nor to save the lives or even the property of European settlers, but simply to satisfy a limited individual's desire to conform to the norms of his peer group. For, Mauré is basically well-intentioned, and, indeed, often chats to the local natives as he goes about his business. It is not he who must bear the ultimate responsibility for his murderous actions, then, but the political system which puts him in this brutalizing situation.

Himself a recalled reservist, the author of *Lieutenant en Algérie* is consistently at pains to affirm the specificity of the conscript's experience of the Franco-Algerian conflict. Mauré may become integrated into the apparatus of colonial repression, in consequence, but only at a cost which the reader of Servan-Schreiber's *témoignage* will find unacceptable. The transformation of communist militants into "les plus résolus des



chasseurs de fellagha", always eager to "bouffer du bougnoule" (ibid., p.103), will, as a result - and in direct contrast to the similar metamorphosis in *Les Centurions* - be seen in an equally unfavourable light.

Without going as far as some of Servan-Schreiber's contemporaries in assessing the damage done to French youth by their experiences in Algeria, we can nevertheless state that service in the war did constitute a major source of moral uncertainty for many young men (see Sorum 1977, pp.124-125). Perhaps even more worthy of note, however, were the grave worries posed for liberal-minded army officers by the generation of soldiers entrusted to their care. Servan-Schreiber's Major Marcus is a case in point; as his remarks to Captain Julienne, another liberal, make clear:

- Rends-toi compte: ces rappelés, ces appelés, ces maintenus, c'est une génération entière qui passe par nos mains. Nous en faisons moralement des ratés, quelquefois des monstres. Nous pourrions en faire des héros... Mettons, plus simplement: des hommes. Pour ça, il n'y a pas de système, seulement l'exemple. (Servan-Schreiber 1957, p.78)

Yet, for the bulk of the conscripts depicted by Servan-Schreiber, the Algerian war is not so much an ethical problem as a practical nuisance. Not for them the liberal *crise de conscience*, but rather a stolid materialism that bears the hallmarks of historical accuracy. Take the case of Lieutenant Bodard, a reservist whose attitude contrasts nicely with that displayed by the keen officers in *L'Algérie quand on y est*. The author-narrator takes up the story:

Bodard était un sympathique rappelé de vingt-six ans, sorti des Arts-et-Métiers, que j'avais bien connu dès le début de notre séjour. Un garçon consciencieux, courageux même, mais regrettant chaque jour - il n'en faisait aucun mystère - sa planche à dessin d'une grande usine chimique des Pyrénées: il n'avait toujours pas découvert la nécessité de son exil immobile sur un <<piton>> du Sud algérois. (ibid., p.99)

Bodard's pragmatic opposition to his participation in the Algerian war is not particularly edifying, but it does reflect a convincingly conscript-oriented view of events. As does the even more obviously self-centred stance of the men represented by Sergeant Baral, himself a *rappelé*:

...ils sont pas contents d'être ici, c'est tout... sont pas *contre*, mais ils trouvent qu'on les traite pas bien. Vous savez: on mange pas bien, on a des baraques promises

depuis deux mois et qui viennent toujours pas, on arrive souvent à plus de trois heures de garde par nuit, tout ça, c'est fatigant... Les gars sont pas contents, ils râlent. (ibid., p.110)

Attitudes like this will lead the traditionalist Captain Henry to conclude that "Finalement, les rappelés - c'est de la merde". This view may be a source of comfort for himself and like-minded members of the army establishment, but it is the liberal Julienne's silent rejoinder which surely meets with the agreement of the reader: "Non, bien sûr - les rappelés, c'est la Nation" (ibid., p.114). That this is an unflattering image of the French "nation in arms" can hardly be denied, but then nor can its value as an antidote to the contemporary exploitation of that Revolutionary myth.

It is doubtless no coincidence that the condition of the *appelé* in Algeria should provide the point of focus for the closing pages of Servan-Schreiber's *témoignage*. Moreover, it is typical of the text's treatment of the theme that this parting shot should seek further to defamiliarize, and thus to demystify, the conscript's period of service in North Africa. In fact, the *rappelés* are considered from two unusual angles: as the variously troubled clients of an *assistante sociale*; and as the audience for a visiting show. This juxtaposition of images of chronic unhappiness and fleeting pleasure, of present military constraint and future civilian freedom, produces a durably persuasive image of conscription with which to counter the familiar advances of military romanticism:

Ce que décrivait cette jeune fille était la réalité plus profonde. La monotonie des lettres, l'angoisse de la solitude, le vide de tant de têtes et de tant de coeurs, l'argent réclamé avec une insistante douceur et qu'il est cruel de ne pas savoir où trouver, les camarades là-bas qui ne savent plus qu'on existe et ceux d'ici qui vous prennent pour un être que l'on ne reconnaît pas, le mal au ventre, le désir d'être à l'infirmerie, ailleurs, la difficulté de vivre et la simplicité des drames - toute la jungle inhumaine, inévitable, acceptée, derrière les prétentions d'une société organisée.

[...]

Tous ces visages, face à nous, reflétaient l'impression oubliée d'être heureux. Mauré, Lapin, Gambert, Bodard, Canu, l'Ange noir ... étaient là, loin des difficultés de leur combat et des angoisses de leur condition - et les nouveaux étaient là, plus jeunes, qui avaient encore à découvrir ici, avec humilité, la patrie asservie et la bête qui est en eux... Dans ce rire sans fin qui les secouait, vibrant dans l'air autour de nous, nous retrouvions une joie de vivre et la passion d'espérer. La fraîcheur de cette jeunesse s'écoulait dans cette salle, tirée par le plaisir. Puisée jusqu'au fond d'eux-mêmes, au-delà de l'impuissance et des craintes de chaque jour, elle semblait traverser le mépris du monde organisé pour jeter vers l'avenir, plus fort que la servitude, plus profond que

l'angoisse, plus permanent que la guerre, l'appel d'un autre destin, libre. (ibid., pp.254-255)

Without wishing to overstate the extent of conscript suffering in the Algerian theatre, we would suggest that this image gets much closer to communicating the specificity of the *rappelé* experience than the integration myths of either Lartéguy or Saint-Laurent. As the second part of this discussion will show, Servan-Schreiber's contemporary imaging of conscription bears comparison with later literary variations on the theme. Before going on to consider a selection of these texts, however, we must conclude our discussion of *L'Algérie quand on y est*.

The historical significance of Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber's 1957 challenge to the official reporting of events in Algeria will be evident by now; as will the importance of his questioning of the prevailing orthodoxy as regards the central issue of conscription. The antithetical relationship obtaining between the (relatively) demystifying *Lieutenant en Algérie* and the myth-bound *L'Algérie quand on y est* will, by the same token, have become more obvious. The special nature of this relationship can now be made fully apparent by returning to our consideration of the latter text's unconscious (and, by definition, adversary) project: its "silence", as it were.

Saint-Laurent's conscious reference to Servan-Schreiber's work is, in fact, of prime importance in revealing the very specific mode of intertextuality operating within his narrative. However, it is as the representative of a genuinely mass movement that Servan-Schreiber, through his work, is permanently present in *L'Algérie quand on y est*. For, his was the most authoritative voice of *rappelé* protest; and, he, as a result, becomes the overtly nominated target of what is, in fact, a much wider ranging attack on conscript-centred criticism of both the government and the military. So, whilst Servan-Schreiber is only referred to by name on a single occasion, it is the unavowed presence of the "Lieutenant en Algérie" - and of the critical conscripts he speaks for - throughout Saint-Laurent's narrative that really counts. Indeed, the text's obsessive preoccupation with metropolitan ignorance bears witness to this unavowed critical voice;

as does its systematic integration of the new conscript, *l'aspirant* Niprovsky.

As the best-known challenger of the army's guiding principle in Algeria - i.e. that suitably dedicated military men can come to a unique awareness of the colony and its problems - Servan-Schreiber inevitably becomes the foremost target for Saint-Laurent's properly reactionary outrage. It is to his adversary account of military service in Algeria, therefore, that the latter's narrative seeks constantly and stridently to reply, whilst at the same time claiming for itself the objectivity of a factual *reportage* (ibid., p.10). *Lieutenant en Algérie*, in other words, functions as a kind of undeveloped negative to the positive images of pacification put forward by *L'Algérie quand on y est*. It is in this sense that the former work can be equated with the "silence" at the heart of the latter text.

Perhaps the best way of concluding our study of the two opposed texts is to consider one final episode from *L'Algérie quand on y est*. In fact, the nature of the relevant action is underlined by the title of the work's penultimate chapter: "Lieutenant Rocher contre Mata-Hari". As we might expect, this section of the narrative centres on the said lieutenant's foiling of a female agitator engaged in an undercover operation - against the army in Algeria; the comic title is an accurate reflection of the degree of seriousness with which such anti-war militancy is regarded by Saint-Laurent and his military heroes. As outlined by the predictably likeable Rocher, the agitator's objective is twofold: "...saper le moral et se renseigner sur les effectifs et le dispositif" (ibid., p.228). The fact that the second of these aims cannot be justified solely in terms of a concern for the well-being of young Frenchmen should be noted, as it ties in with a wider attack on the supposed lack of patriotism of those who criticize the military. Here, quite clearly, opposition to conscription goes hand in hand with spying for the FLN.

Passing himself off as a disgruntled *appelé*, the Lieutenant allows himself to be plied with drink and incited to disaffection. Once the militant has told him all he

needs to know - "...qu'elle est une institutrice communiste révoquée, qu'elle lutte pour l'Algérie libre" (ibid., p.237) - he promptly has her arrested. The episode is readily revealed to be emblematic of the text's approach to conscript-centred opposition to the Franco-Algerian conflict: *appelé* protest is not spontaneous, but rather imposed by "politicized" outsiders; the PCF simply constitutes the most readily assimilable target for the contemporary French readership. As regards the feminization, intellectualization, and criminalization of (pre-1959) metropolitan support for the goal of *une Algérie algérienne*, these conform to an established historical pattern of denigration (Hamon & Rotman 1979, pp.16-17). In this way, one more reassuring image of conscription is provided for domestic consumption; a highly convenient fiction which is, once again, to be contrasted with the conscript-focussed veracity of Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber's *Lieutenant en Algérie*.

Servan-Schreiber was, however, by no means alone in seeking to give voice to a generation of conscripts. Indeed, the steady stream of novels devoted to this subject is one of the most striking features of the literature of the Franco-Algerian conflict. That such works should still be produced so regularly is, in itself, indicative of the abiding social significance of the war; a general impression that will be made more precise as we now turn our attention to images of conscription in novels produced between the end of the hostilities and the present day.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE CONSCRIPT II

In this second part of our examination of the literary imaging of the metropolitan conscript's role in the Algerian war, we shall concentrate on a selection of texts produced in the two decades which followed the end of the conflict. More specifically, we shall contrast two early attempts at demystification with a number of rather less convincing later treatments of the *appelé* theme. Whilst the frequently elaborate ideological strategies resorted to by these more recent texts are by no means straightforwardly mystifying, they do all seem to involve some form of *récupération*; by which we would understand a process whereby the conscripts' Algerian experience is brought into line with predetermined political positions and goals, and thus deprived of its (broadly conceived) potential for subversion.

Our approach, then, will be a thematic one, with the primary thrust of our analysis being aimed at what may conveniently be termed the disjunction of homogeneity and heterogeneity in the relevant literature. Within this conceptual framework, the conspicuous desire of military apologists like Lartéguy and Saint-Laurent to integrate the metropolitan conscript into the community of the *Armée d'Algérie* should be regarded as the suppression of an historical difference coupled with the assertion of a mythical sameness.

Clearly, no conscripted man could have long remained an island in the Algeria of the war years. Moreover, the transformation of disparate individuals into a unitary fighting force is very much a stock theme of military literature, both in France and elsewhere. What we shall seek to show, however, is the way in which this basic *topos* was manipulated to particular sectional advantage in the Algerian context. (A similar, and even more important, exploitation of the dialectic of identity and otherness will be discussed in Chapter 7.) Our attention to this underlying figure will, in the event,

result in two overlapping readings of the selected material: i.e. as an account of the conscripts' experiences in Algeria on the one hand, and as an analysis of their place in the collective consciousness of the French nation on the other.

Xavier Grall, whose 1962 novel *Africa Blues* will itself be considered in a subsequent chapter, was responsible that same year for the publication of one of the first, and still most important, surveys of *appelé* opinion. Himself a veteran of Algeria, Grall drew on information gleaned from a poll conducted by the magazine *La Vie catholique* to come to some very revealing general conclusions about the nature of military service in North Africa. Indeed, for the author of *La Génération du djebel*, the Algerian experience is what sets French youth apart from an increasingly homogeneous Europe:

C'est cette expérience qui les distingue déjà dans ce monde que s'unifie, se planifie, de la jeunesse de Munich ou de Dusseldorf, de La Haye ou de Rome. Autrement dit, il n'était pas possible de faire la guerre d'Algérie sans en être profondément marqué. A l'âge du bal et des surprises-parties voir crever un copain, assister à des interrogatoires, toucher du doigt la détresse des gosses, porter le feu et la mort et souffrir et pleurer, je vous assure, comme le disait l'un de mes camarades, <<c'est quelque chose>>. Stalingrad fume dans nos coeurs, des milliers de Stalingrad. (Grall 1962a, pp.7-8)

Even allowing for a little artistic licence - particularly regarding the excessive equation of conscript suffering with that occurring at the Battle of Stalingrad - such remarks serve to underline the traumatic nature of the Algerian war for many of those young Frenchmen sent to take part in it. This impression is borne out by the writer's detailed analysis of the thousand or so written replies to *La Vie catholique's* questionnaire. It is also supported by the testimony of the journalist, novelist and filmmaker Philippe Labro. Labro's *Des feux mal éteints* (1967) was referred to in passing in Part I of this discussion. It must now be examined at greater length and in rather more detail.

It will be recalled that our earlier reference to Labro concerned his insistence on the specificity of the conscript experience, both with regard to that of other elements of the French military, and, moreover, to that of other members of the *contingent*. The

*calot* worn by Labro and his comrades not only distinguishes them from the paras, after all, but also from later *classes of appelés*. This is an important point, which, as Jean Planchais's analysis of service in Algeria makes clear, goes some way towards explaining the peculiarly disparate character of the conscript experience of the war:

Dans le bled, la communauté de base, c'était la section. Des mois sur un piton, coupés de tout, ou dans les services, ou sur les routes. Pas de front - on ne peut pas qualifier ainsi les barrages aux frontières - pas de tranchées, pas de chevauchées héroïques, sauf pour les unités opérationnelles - le petit nombre. Des expériences très partielles, très individualisées et très différentes. Pour les uns, des opérations souvent décevantes. La plupart des autres n'ont jamais tiré un coup de fusil. (Planchais 1985, I, p.1)

For the author of *Des feux mal éteints*, it is precisely this lack of homogeneity which distinguishes the veteran of the Algerian campaign from his counterparts in two world wars; it also explains the ease with which the bulk of the returning conscripts were reintegrated into metropolitan society:

Paris et la France les gobèrent comme des boeufs font des mouches: par paquets de dix. Ils furent avalés, absorbés, car ils n'avaient pas d'identité. Une génération ne peut se définir sous le prétexte que trois millions d'enfants perdus ont vécu trois millions d'expériences solitaires, singulières et contradictoires... On peut avancer que 1914 et 1940 furent des expériences quasi unanimes. Mais l'Algérie, non: une multitude de solitudes. Aucune universalité, chacun pour soi. (Labro 1967, p.354)

The principal contribution made by Labro's novel to the literature of the Algerian war is precisely its attempt to give a voice to this lost generation of French youth; that of Labro himself, of those aged between twenty and thirty in the period 1954 to 1962. So, the text's distinctive opening section does not concentrate so closely on the minutiae of daily life in the France of the time simply in order to convey a convincing period atmosphere, but rather to lay the ground for its extended attempt at a literary redefinition of that generation's seemingly "non-existent" identity (ibid., pp.15-39). Central to this project is conscription, which will be approached in such a way as to foreground its essentially partial quality. So, for instance, the narrator is himself a *rappelé*; with all that this implies in the way of a rejection of omniscience in favour of an authentically limited perspective. In consequence, we will not be asked to consider



the whole of the Algerian "experience", but merely "une petite portion, un segment, la fin, les derniers sursauts" (ibid., p.38)

Having managed, by means of a series of ploys, to delay being sent to North Africa, the narrator eventually arrives there just as the European terrorism of the OAS is beginning to dominate the life of Algiers. From the outset he is alone, having lost touch with the rest of his *classe* as a result of his attempts to avoid service in Algeria. His civilian background in journalism will exacerbate this marginality by causing him to be "detached" from the mass of conscripts in order to work on the army weekly, *Djebel*. In this way, his presence in what he calls "cette fausse guerre et ce faux pays" (ibid., p.39) is rendered even more artificial. His own description of the group responsible for the review underlines both its heterogeneity and its artifice:

...cette hétéroclite phalange de faux soldats, les *détachés*, comme on nous appelait - car nous étions quasiment détachés de l'armée -, espèces d'exilés temporaires, vaguement comparables aux expatriés américains de Montmartre en 1925, sauf qu'à Montmartre il n'y avait pas la guerre, et qu'au lieu d'aller à la *feria* de Séville pour nous distraire, nous allions plus souvent - et moins volontiers - recueillir les récits des accrochages en Kabylie ou compter les victimes - musulmanes et européennes - des coups de mortier tirés sur les grandes villes de l'intérieur. Sauf que nous n'avions pas choisi notre terrain pour y jouer les *générations perdues* et que nous n'étions pas conscients ni de notre perte, ni de notre génération. (ibid., p.59)

It is precisely by focussing on the inadequacies of these estranged individuals, and a number of their friends and acquaintances, that Labro will seek to bring the reader of *Des feux mal éteints* to an awareness of the specificity of an entire generation. To say this is not, however, to imply that the experiences of the group are straightforwardly representative of those of the mass of metropolitan conscripts. Rather, it is to suggest that their very individuality conforms to a broad historical pattern: namely, the *multitude de solitudes* accurately identified by Labro himself, as well as by historical commentators like Planchais. A general typicality is, paradoxically, contained within and, indeed, articulated by, an historically accurate diversity.

For Labro's conscripts, Algeria will mark the painful transition from adolescence to manhood, and will thus entail an inevitable loss of innocence. For the narrator in

particular, this transformation will also involve the correction of basic misconceptions about the nature of his relationship with his peers. He may, therefore, be at one with them on the surface - they share a common existence as "des Parisiens transplantés, désorientés mais séduits, un peu effrayés et assez juvéniles" (ibid., p.49) - but his contact with the daily reality of the Algerian war will cause him to grow away from his former friends. In short, as he experiences for himself "la fin d'un monde" (ibid., p.110), he will come to see through the illusion of solidarity generated by superficial similarities in tastes and interests. Consider his mature reflections on the many hours spent discussing films with his fellow *détachés*:

Mon Dieu, comme tout cela paraît lointain aujourd'hui et comme nous nous trompions lorsque cette même tendresse pour un cinéma déjà dépassé, périmé et conventionnel, entretenait l'illusion que nous étions tous semblables et tous solidaires! (ibid., p.144)

The whole thrust of Labro's narrative is conditioned by this properly dialectical tension between the group and the individual, solidarity and solitude. Of particular interest in this regard are the linguistic codes employed by both the professional military and Labro's fellow conscripts in an attempt to establish a communal identity. In the case of the former, this integrating tactic will achieve its desired end, but only imperfectly and temporarily. Compare Labro's treatment of this theme with the directly competing account presented by Bistenave, Lartéguy's "tame" conscript:

...nous commençons tous à nous ressembler, à avoir les mêmes réflexes, employer les mêmes mots, les mêmes expressions, tirées le plus souvent du code-radio. *Oui* se dit: <<affirmatif>>, *non*: <<négatif>>, *tout va bien*: <<cinq cinq>> en levant le pouce en l'air. (Lartéguy 1960, p.327)

*Terminé*: adjectif typique du militaire - je m'aperçois que je l'ai utilisé trois fois en quelques paragraphes. Mais cela devait disparaître facilement, de même que vous alliez vite réapprendre à répondre oui ou non, plutôt qu'*affirmatif* ou *négatif*. (Labro 1967, pp.348-349)

While Lartéguy picks up on this linguistic homogenization in order to suggest the establishment of a genuinely durable community of interests between his *rappelés* and their *para* mentors, Labro refers to it - in a notably self-conscious fashion - precisely in order to deny its power to integrate the military's conscript element in

anything other than a superficial and short-lived way. The author's description of the draftees' own attempts to achieve unity through linguistic conventions is to be regarded in this same, demystified, light. So, a familiarity with "le langage inexplicable de l'Armée d'Algérie, c'est-à-dire en gros, celle des gosses qui y vécurent et y clamecèrent de 1956 à 1961" (ibid., p.52), does not imply a profound relationship with one's fellow "kids". By the same token, the fact that "Tous les soldats s'appelaient Max, entre eux" may well be "le tic d'une génération" (ibid., p.128), but it does not follow that this same generation had anything approaching a common experience of the Algerian conflict. If a shared identity is to be revealed by the veterans' language, in fact, it will only ever be negative: i.e. capable of showing what the veterans are not, but not what they are.

This is very much the thrust of the narrator's closing reference to the returning conscripts' collective ignorance of the very latest linguistic conventions (ibid., pp.375-376). For, while this sort of sociological precision may serve to draw attention to a common alienation from metropolitan society, it cannot hope to define the group's particular *expérience algérienne*. As the narrator himself puts it elsewhere: "Nous avions les mêmes goûts, certes, et les mêmes manies de langage, mais cela suffisait-il?" (ibid., p.201).

In the same way, Labro's *appelés* may all yearn for *la quille* (demobilization), but they will be obliged to come to terms with their enforced presence in Algeria as essentially isolated individuals. So, the authorial central figure will find himself "quasiment seul" when given his first taste of terrorist violence and thus exposed to his first corpse (ibid., p.49). The solitary character of his experiences will only become more marked as the frequency of such attacks increases (ibid., pp.64-65). Indeed, this profound isolation in the face of these traumatic events will be insisted upon retrospectively by the author-narrator:

Bien sûr, je partageais avec ceux de mon âge le souvenir de découvertes communes, d'enthousiasmes et de premières décisions... Néanmoins, tout ce que j'avais vécu qui me semblait aujourd'hui important, je l'avais, au fond, vécu seul... [...] Et,

bien que je ne l'aie pas su en ce moment précis, n'allais-je pas vivre la dernière période d'Algérie tout seul? (ibid., p.202)

For the narrator, and all those who, like him, had hoped to grow into "les hommes que nous n'étions toujours pas" in North Africa (ibid., p.39), the Algerian experience typically proves to be a mixed blessing. Having been sent to an "ersatz" war (ibid., p.91), the conscripts meet with varying degrees of success in their individual quests for some compensatory form of personal authenticity. This theme is very much to the fore as the narrative turns its attention to Seb, a close friend of the narrator and the only conscript in *Des feux mal éteints* with first-hand experience of combat. Like Lartéguy's "mutins de Versailles", Seb owes his incorporation into an operational unit to a disciplinary measure; unlike them, however, he can hope for no mythical transformation into a military demi-god. Characteristically, the severe trauma which Seb will suffer is not represented as a standard feature of the metropolitan conscript's *expérience algérienne*. On the contrary, the narrator is at pains to point out the unusual nature of the character's exposure to the sharp end of the Franco-Algerian conflict:

Il avait fait partie, pendant la plus grosse portion de son temps à l'Armée, d'unités opérationnelles. Même lorsque la *pacification* avait marché à sa plus forte cadence, sur les six ou sept cent mille soldats du contingent stationnés en Algérie, une cinquantaine de mille seulement avaient été *opé*, les autres se contentant de monter les gardes, distribuer le courrier, faire la classe aux enfants des écoles, jouer les sous-préfets, les flics, les bâtisseurs et les garde-chiourme. Mais Seb n'avait connu autre chose que le ratissage, le nettoyage, l'accrochage ou le crapahutage. (ibid., p.186)

Seb, in short, is very much the exception to the conscript rule. Not that this invalidates his version of the Algerian conflict; rather, it is against this backdrop of disparate, and variously mundane, experiences that his personal contribution to the war's "vérité multiple" (ibid., p.121) must be set. As for the inherent romance of the combination of a rare individual and a dangerous situation, this can hardly be excluded from the equation entirely; nevertheless, Labro does his best to reduce its mythical impact by underlining both the general unpleasantness and the mechanical regularity of Seb's combat experiences, summed up as "la même routine avilissante" (ibid., p.188). As Seb bitterly and ineloquently tells his tale, an image of pacification emerges which

will be familiar enough to any reader of *Lieutenant en Algérie* and other such *témoignages* (see Chapter 2). Both the content and the tone of the relevant section can be appreciated on the basis of the conscript's determinedly unromantic conclusion:

Mais surtout, ce que je retiens, en dehors de la connerie générale et l'injustice systématique, c'est l'attente et la marche et le manque de sommeil et la faim et la pluie et le soleil et la crasse et toujours l'attente et la marche et encore le froid. (ibid., pp.190-191)

What the reader of *Des feux mal éteints* is encouraged to reflect upon most systematically, however, is not so much the war itself, as its catastrophic impact on Seb's personality. In particular, it is the psychological retreat of the conscript in the face of an unacceptably awful Algerian reality that is insisted upon:

- J'ai arrêté de réfléchir, j'ai jamais trop réfléchi, remarque bien, mais j'ai arrêté, j'ai fait que marcher, bouffer et dormir pendant deux ans. Tous les types répondaient *cherche pas à comprendre* quand quelqu'un posait une question et j'ai pas cherché à comprendre; je me suis laissé abrutir, j'ai suivi le mouvement, j'étais engourdi, endormi, cassé. [...]

Et il ajouta, à bout de souffle:

- Je suis fatigué. Ils m'ont ôté le goût de vivre. (ibid., p.189)

Seb's final comment is literally true, and effectively prophesies the still troubled conscript's suicide upon his return to France (ibid., pp.281-300). What primarily interests us in all this is the attempt to turn in upon oneself, and even to deny one's own humanity, in order to escape from the pain of the Algerian experience. Here, as throughout, such pain is characterized by its incommunicability; this single conversation with the narrator apart, Seb never feels able to unburden himself of the load of suffering and guilt which he bears: "il ne s'était fait aucun ami, il n'avait éprouvé qu'épisodiquement ce que d'autres intitulaient la grande fraternisation des combattants" (ibid., p.190). Moreover, Seb quite accurately predicts that the narrator will react similarly to his first experience of Algeria's *sale guerre*:

- Tu verras, m'avait-il dit avant de me quitter, la première fois que tu sortiras, tu n'auras envie de parler à personne. Tu feras un petit effort au début, et après tu laisseras tomber. Même si la merde dans laquelle on t'a fourré depuis un ou deux mois n'a rien à voir avec celle dans laquelle j'ai pataugé pendant deux ans, tu verras, t'auras le même phénomène, t'en voudras à tout le monde et surtout tu te dégoûteras d'en parler. (ibid., p.198)

The combatant's words are borne out as the narrator is separated from his friends on *Djebel* and obliged to enter "le petit univers clos et sordide des patrouilles de nuit et des quadrillages de boulevards" (ibid., p.199). Not surprisingly, it is this most intense experience of the Algerian conflict which will dominate the subsequent reflections of Labro's spokesman as he, together with the rest of the *contingent*, leaves North Africa and returns home, "magistralement dépaysé" (ibid., p.360). His realization that the French nation will make not the slightest attempt to understand the experience which it has imposed on its young men is stated with the usual insistence on the role of language:

...la France n'était pas au rendez-vous de son contingent. Le contingent, comme son nom l'indique, n'intéressait plus grand monde. Je jetai un coup d'oeil sur mon petit dictionnaire illustré, un vieux modèle dont je m'étais servi très longtemps pour faire mes *rédactions*. Je pus lire: *Contingent: qui peut arriver, qui peut échoir, qui peut être ou n'être pas. Part que chacun doit fournir ou recevoir.*

D'ailleurs, à votre retour d'Algérie, vous aviez comme une grande fringale de Larousse. Fallait-il y chercher ce que personne n'avait pris la peine de vous définir: responsabilité, dignité, générosité, liberté? *Qui peut être ou n'être pas...* Considérez que vous aviez une marge de choix assez large: être ou n'être pas, c'était la question. Arrivés en France, vous n'étiez pas, et voilà tout! (ibid., p.348)

Two points of general importance may be made with regard to the above passage. Firstly, the text's preoccupation with, and, indeed, indictment of, metropolitan France are only to be expected given the home country's status as the prime determinant of *appelé* specificity: the conscripts are, after all, the incarnation of French faith in the Republican ideal of "the nation in arms". Secondly, it is singularly appropriate that the task of repoliticizing both an army and a war which had become shrouded in mystification should have fallen so often to the *contingent*. For, as Barthes has pointed out, it is precisely the ability of myth to deprive the world of its "qualité contingente" that characterizes it as "une parole dépolitisée" (Barthes 1957, p.230). What could counter myth's eternalized and essentialized image of the world more directly, then, than the *contingent*: i.e. a body of men whose collective identity is characterized by their being called up for a predetermined period, and whose condition inevitably connotes changeability and an absence of necessity?

As for the humorous allusion to *Hamlet*, this belies the importance of the theme of suicide in *Des feux mal éteints*. As previously suggested, Seb will return to his childhood home, in the Tarn region, after finding it impossible to *raccrocher* in Paris (Labro 1967, p.295). Having spoken to no one since getting off the boat in Marseilles - with the exception of a very brief exchange with his mother - the traumatized conscript sits under a poplar planted by his father, in a garden which now belongs to somebody else, and blows his brains out. The symbolism of this alienation from metropolitan society extends even to the length of time required for the discovery of Seb's corpse, which remains undiscovered until the following evening (ibid., pp.281-300). The young man's death is, like the narrator's less dramatic experience of *le néant*, a logical corollary of the metropolitan failure to face up to its responsibilities as regards the *contingent*. So, having been marked for life by its period of service in North Africa, the generation of the Algerian war is condemned to collective and individual oblivion by a guilty nation:

...quelque expérience qu'il ait eue, à peine en était-il sorti que chaque bidasse se voyait enveloppé dans le silence et dans l'oubli, car aucun adulte ne voulait franchement assumer la responsabilité de l'avoir envoyé là-bas, n'acceptait de préciser au nom de quoi cet enfant avait vécu ce qu'il avait vécu. (ibid., p.354)

The *appelés* returned home not so much as pariahs, but rather as an unfortunate reminder of colonial ambitions which had been discarded in favour of a new, "hexagonal", vision of France and its future role in the world. This distinction helps to explain the difference between the French experience in Algeria and the American experience in Vietnam:

Si la guerre du Vietnam a tant marqué une génération d'Américains, c'est, non seulement parce qu'elle fut sanglante, souvent atroce, mais aussi parce que les vétérans ont été accueillis aux Etats-Unis comme des pestiférés. Les vétérans d'Algérie, eux, sont rentrés au bercail dans l'indifférence. (Planchais 1985, I, p.10)

Much like the million or so European *rapatriés*, the members of the *contingent* were essentially a source of embarrassment to the nation that had encouraged them to believe that Algeria was an inalienable part of a Greater France. However, by splitting

the returning conscripts into small groups - as previously noted - their potential for disrupting de Gaulle's newly prosperous Republic could be kept to a minimum; the full employment of the day would further facilitate their reintegration, just as it would ease the mass immigration of the *pieds-noirs*. Nevertheless, the conscripts themselves had still to come to terms with the nation's erstwhile Algerian obsession in order to understand, and thus to assume, their own contradictory experiences of the war. Labro's explanation of metropolitan reluctance to consider the problems faced by the returning *appelés* provides a welcome antidote to the mystifications of both left and right:

Puisque aussi bien l'Algérie avait été un rêve: de la droite comme celui de la gauche. La droite rêvait que l'Algérie lui permettrait de replonger dans le passé glorieux d'une Histoire pourtant irréversible et de sauvegarder ainsi un avenir confortable. La gauche rêvait que l'Algérie symboliserait toutes ses luttes et ses principes et que, si cela se déroulait selon ses désirs, elle pourrait dire: voyez, quand même, nous avons contribué à la réussite de quelque chose! Au bout du compte, l'Algérie devait décevoir les rêves de chacun pour devenir une réalité très incertaine mais en tout cas indépendante: c'était peut-être mieux ainsi, plus simple, plus logique, plus vrai. (Labro 1967, pp.354-355)

In Labro's "simpler, more logical, more real" world, grand gestures are replaced by less palatable truths. It is thus the youth of France who, together with the Algerian people, must pay for the delusions of an older generation. Not only is the author's "lost generation" obliged to serve in Algeria, in short, but also to pay for the privilege of doing so. This is the demystifying message of *Des feux mal éteints*.

The pathos of the conscript's predicament becomes bathos in the hands of Georges Perec, who was undoubtedly one of the most innovative contributors to the French literature of the Algerian war. His treatment of the *appelé*, in particular, is both properly demystifying and highly original. Having satirized Parisian demonstrations of anti-war militancy in a few densely-packed pages of *Les Choses* (1965) - his critique of the "developed" world's frenetic materialism, which won that year's Prix Renaudot - Perec turned his attention the following year to the related issue of conscription. In *Quel petit vélo à guidon chromé au fond de la cour?*, the author of such celebrated



experimental works as *La Disparition* (1969) puts on a characteristically dazzling, and hugely enjoyable, display of verbal pyrotechnics suggestive of such diverse talents as Rabelais and Queneau. This mock heroic tale of an archetypal *deuxième classe* and his vain attempt to avoid posting to Algeria provides the author with the perfect vehicle for a humorous examination of the competing myth-systems of left and right; and this just a few years after a protracted colonial conflict which had resulted in, or at least revealed, profound schisms in mainland French society.

The tone of Perec's depiction of the efforts made by metropolitan youth to avoid military service in Algeria is set with the opening paragraph's introduction of the central figure:

C'était un mec, il s'appelait Karamanlis, ou quelque chose comme ça: Karawo? Karawasch? Karacouvé? Enfin bref, Karatruc. En tout cas, un nom pas banal, un nom qui vous disait quelque chose, qu'on n'oubliait pas facilement. (Perec 1966, p.11)

Thus begins a madcap jaunt through the Paris of the final days of the Algerian war, with the focal point being the café society of those young Frenchmen most liable to conscription. "Karatruc", having learnt of his imminent departure for Algeria, appeals to his sergeant, a fellow *appelé*, for help. The NCO, one Henri Pollak, himself seeks the assistance of his friends in Montparnasse; which is when the fun really starts. For, this group, which includes the narrator, takes it upon itself to "save" the luckless private. Their valiant efforts are doomed to failure, however, and the story closes with Karatruc leaving for Algeria with his regiment.

The abiding interest of Perec's seemingly lightweight narrative is to be understood in terms of the opportunities which it gives the author to undermine a variety of metropolitan mystifications of the recently ended conflict. Whilst it amuses us, in other words, *Quel petit vélo?* simultaneously passes serious comment on the sacred cows of the day. It is not necessary to detail every instance of Perec's sympathetic debunking of the nation's Algerian fantasies; a representative sample will give us an adequate indication of its general flavour. A typical example is provided by

Karatruc's initial appeal to Henri Pollak. As reported by Perec, this is not only very funny, but also subtly demystifying:

- Il est venu à mes oreilles étonnées cette nouvelle, qui me laissa tout à la fois pantois, perplexe, piteux, podagre et presque putréfié: le Haut, le Très Haut (béné soit-il) Commandement aurait décidé, l'on ne sait avec précision si c'est sur le coup d'une impulsion subite ou après maintes et mûres réflexions, aurait décidé donc, le Haut Commandement, de confier à M. le Capitaine Commandant le Service des Effectifs l'exténuante tâche de préparer la liste de ceux-là d'entre nous qui, à la prochaine occasion, iront nourrir de leur sang ces nobles collines d'Afrique dont notre histoire glorieuse a fait des terres françaises. Il ne serait pas impossible, il serait même probable que le nom que ma famille porte avec honneur et dignité depuis cinq générations, et qu'elle m'a livré sans tache, figurât sur cette liste.

Et l'infortuné Karaplastm se mit à sangloter comme un petit enfant. (ibid., pp.17-18)

Here, Perec is exposing to ridicule not only such familiar targets as the pretensions of the military hierarchy and the nation's much-vaunted North African "heritage", but also the contemporary exaggeration by liberals and left-wingers of the terrors of conscription. The young man's overreaction to the bad news - signalled by the comic alliteration, the reference to spilling his blood, and his absurdly childish tears - alerts us to the existence of a myth of conscript service in Algeria. The particular mystification suggested here is the anti-war lobby's distortion of the facts of *appelé* life in Algeria. As we have already made plain, the vast majority of men sent to the colony neither shot nor were shot at; still less did they rape, torture, murder, and the like. As a result, the average conscript's period of service in North Africa led neither to his death nor to that of his perceived enemy. Nor, for that matter, did it often bring about serious mental trauma of the kind insisted upon by such commentators as Servan-Schreiber and Labro. To say this is not seriously to detract from their respective treatments of the conscript theme, but it is to suggest their limitations. The theme of suicide, above all, is particularly problematic in the context. For, the extreme reaction to conscription of Labro's Seb is, though not without a minimal historical foundation, highly exceptional, to say the least.

In *Quel petit vélo?*, Perec exposes both this adversary myth of conscript service in Algeria and the network of anti-war mystifications into which it fits. So, for

instance, the *honneur* of the intellectual class is the object of a little healthy scorn in the following passage:

Mais quoi, grands dieux! Allions-nous laisser un brave ami dans le besoin? [...] Serait-il dit que nous manquerions à cet engagement implicite que l'un de nous avait pris - ô funeste inconséquence! - au nom de nous tous? Serait-il dit qu'encore une fois l'intelligentzia française, dans ce qu'elle avait de plus écrémé (c'est-à-dire nous), serait mise en défaut?

Non, tout cela ne serait pas dit. (ibid., pp.27-28)

In spite of their initial reluctance, then, Pollak's friends agree to help him for the sake of French intellectual solidarity and integrity. The use of the word *engagement* is clearly not coincidental in this light. Indeed, spurred on as they were by the Sartrean insistence on the necessity of commitment, the Parisian intellectual establishment seemingly felt obliged to engage in regular bouts of soul-searching while the war lasted (Sorum 1977, p.105). Perec's gentle brand of mockery is not to be confused, however, with the habitual anti-intellectualism of some sections of the French right (see Chapter 1). It is rather to be seen as an essentially self-critical reaction to the endemic pomposity of the author's own peer group. Thus regarded, the narrator's description of the café intellectualism of the day testifies to a refreshing honesty:

[Henri Pollak] venait nous retrouver, nous ses potes, dans le café d'en face, où l'on parlait Lukasse, Heliphore, Hégueule et d'autres olibrii de la même farine, car on était tous un peu fêlés à l'époque, jusques à des heures aussi avancées que nos idées. (Perec 1966, p.16)

One by one, the principal articles of metropolitan anticolonialist faith are critically scrutinized by Perec. Take, for instance, the punning treatment of the repressive apparatuses of the state in the following extract, which relates to the group's plan to break Karatruc's arm, having first obtained and administered an appropriate anaesthetic:

Nous écrivîmes une belle lettre pour un copain qui était médecin à Pau (précisons tout de suite qu'il n'était pas dermatologue, et que sa femme n'était pas écuillère), belle lettre à mots couverts, car nous nous méfions de la D.S.T. dont on disait qu'elle avait des hommes à elle dans tous les bureaux de poste. (ibid., p.31)

The committed intellectuals' unswerving belief in the peculiarly "dirty" nature of France's final colonial war is likewise a target for a little judicious irony. In what

follows, Pollak's friends are putting forward a variety of suggestions, all aimed at enabling Karatruc to avoid going to Algeria:

La troisième ne voyait de salut qu'au sein d'une prise de position politique hautement proclamée: courageusement, Karaniette déclare d'une voix forte et si possible intelligible qu'il est contre la sale guerre, et se couche le long de la sale voie ferrée jusqu'à ce que les sales gardes-barrières l'aient mis dans un sale état. (ibid., p.56)

The Marxist left's insistence on ideological purity as the only basis for acceptable action is further derided as the members of the Montparnasse group quiz Karatruc about his motives for not wishing to serve in Algeria. The reader has, from the outset, been left in no doubt that the soldier's reasons are wholly personal. Such an attitude is not good enough, however, for this particular band of committed intellectuals - although they do subsequently soften their line somewhat. What they require, rather, is that Karatruc's opposition to his service in Algeria should be properly political: that is to say overtly founded on a solid appreciation of the importance of "...la Liberté, ...la Démocratie, [les] Idéaux humains, [le] Socialisme et tout le tremblement" (ibid., p.67). The outcome of the questioning is described by the narrator, who, like his friends, remains less than wholly enthusiastic:

Mais malheureusement pour nous, qui y eussions trouvé là matière à bel apologue, Karagidouille était moins con qu'il n'en avait l'air. Conscient de cet aspect décevant de sa personnalité, il fit quelque effort pour se mettre à la hauteur, et dit très exactement ce que nous nous voulions lui faire dire en espérant qu'il ne le dirait pas, c'est-à-dire qu'il convint avec nous qu'il était, lui aussi, de ce genre de types qui, en d'autres circonstances, et si on les en eût intelligemment priés, auraient <<porté la valise>>, allusion si claire que nous ne jugeons pas utile de la paraphraser. (ibid., pp.67-68)

As the narrator rightly suggests, no one in the France of 1966 could fail to appreciate this obvious reference to the Jeanson network's direct aid to the FLN. The attitude of the Montparnasse group - they would have helped if they had been asked nicely - is, moreover, the very one adopted by Sartre himself in his defence of the "porteurs de valises" (see Péju 1961, pp.116-119). Perec thus pokes gentle fun at what we might reasonably call the Sartrean left - an orientation centred on Sartre himself and the review *Les Temps modernes* - and especially its espousal of the cause of the "New

Resistance". Just like the original model appealed to by this mythical figure, Jeanson and his group attracted very few fellow activists at the time, and very many aspirants to their historical integrity after the event.

The ultimate target of Perec's playful irony is the abiding metropolitan ignorance of the real nature of the Algerian *événements*. Coming from a sympathetic observer - as opposed to, say, a right-winger like Lartéguy or Saint-Laurent - this is an important criticism. A humorous passage such as the following one is therefore to be regarded as voicing a very serious point: namely, that mainland French attitudes to both war in general and the Algerian conflict in particular may have contributed indirectly to prolonging the latter. Revealed as a tissue of romantic misconceptions and "war-is-hell" truisms, the group's inadequate grasp of Algerian realities leads all too easily to what, in the "real" world, might be regarded as a politically paralysing self-pity. Here, their various schemes have all ended in failure, and the wretched conscript is about to set off for North Africa:

Ce pauvre Karadine! Lui qui croyait qu'il allait rester à se la couler douce dans les bras de celle qu'il avait dans la peau, et qu'il irait jamais sur les pitons rocheux, voilà-t-il pas qu'il était peut-être dans ce train, tout seul, tout triste. Nous pensâmes à la guerre, là-bas, sous le soleil: le sable, les pierres et les ruines, les froids réveils sous la tente, les marches forcées, les batailles à dix contre un, la guerre quoi.

C'est pas joli joli la guerre, ça non. Parole, on avait envie de pleurer (je crois l'avoir déjà dit). (ibid., pp.105-106)

The broader historicity of Algeria - a real war fought by real men on both sides, rather than by the traditional right's "glorieuse armée française (la meilleure parce que la plus vendue)" (ibid., p.82) and the radical left's "braves moujahids" (ibid., p.84) - effectively defeats the collective imagination of the Montparnasse "intellectuals"; as does the specific experience of conscripted service in that war. This is a source of amusement in Perec's fictive world, but a cause for concern in the real one. The text's parting image of metropolitan opposition to the use of conscription in the Algerian war is, therefore, worthy of special attention. Having agreed to simulate a suicide attempt in a final bid to avoid being sent *là-bas*, Karatruc eventually takes the terrible knockout

potion produced by his new-found "friends". Miraculously, the conscript wakes up the following morning none the worse for the experience:

Karacrack se leva, se lava à grande eau, prépara ses affaires, et foutut son camp comme tout un chacun.

Preuve, s'il en est besoin, que la discipline fait bel et bien la force principale des armées. (ibid., p.103)

With this disabused image of metropolitan passivity, Georges Perec comes as near to a demystified image of conscription, and the historical campaign against it, as we are likely to get. The fact that his treatment of the theme should entertain at least as much as it "educates" is surely all to the good.

The highly individual approaches of Labro and Perec to metropolitan conscription may very usefully be compared with the treatment of the theme found in two novels published rather more recently. In the pages that follow, Guy Croussy's *Ne pleure pas, la guerre est bonne* (1975) and Claude Klotz's *Les Appelés* (1982) will be shown, in spite of a variety of essentially superficial differences of scope and style, to be operating within the same ideological framework, and thus to come to very similar conclusions about the nature of the conscripts' Algerian experiences. A common problematic, in short, will be seen to produce fundamentally similar images of military service in Algeria; images, moreover, which are directly at odds with those generated by the effectively complementary writing of Philippe Labro and Georges Perec.

As its title suggests, *Ne pleure pas, la guerre est bonne* relies to a great extent on irony to make its critical points about the French use of conscription in the Franco-Algerian conflict. In this very oppressive narrative, attention is focussed exclusively, and, indeed, obsessively, on the hunt for a single FLN guerrilla by a small commando unit. As the central figure and narrator, Pierre Rose, puts it: "Nous étions quatre hommes réunis pour capturer Amirouche mort ou vif" (Croussy 1975, p.47). It is this mission which will dominate the action of Croussy's novel, with the four principals only giving up their vain *traque* when they are killed.

Nevertheless, scope is provided by the text for comments of more general

relevance. We thus read of the reaction of the narrator to that "scandalous" Third World poverty cited by Planchais as a typical feature of the *appelé* experience of Algeria: "<<Pauvres, très pauvres, ai-je pensé, la misère profonde, ils n'ont même plus d'espadrilles, ils ne mangent plus que des racines et des mulots, ils ne tiendront plus le coup longtemps>>" (ibid., p.19). If Rose's reflections are reminiscent of an earlier, and rather more noteworthy, account of Muslim hardship, then that is hardly surprising. For, Croussy chooses to preface his text with two quotations, one of which is drawn from Albert Camus's celebrated report on the "Misère de la Kabylie" (1939). The other is taken from the work of Jean Grenier, who was both Camus's philosophy teacher and his early mentor. The relevant extract from *Les Iles* is worthy of note:

<<Il me semble que la suprême félicité pour certains êtres ne se sépare pas du tragique, elle est le sommet ... à ce moment même il se fait dans l'âme un grand silence.>> (Croussy 1975, p.7)

This notion of a peak of human experience at which joy becomes indistinguishable from tragedy is not an uncommon one in the literature of the Algerian war. It is, however, appealed to in a particularly striking fashion in the two novels presently under discussion. In *Les Appelés*, as in Croussy's novel, in fact, the theme is presented before the main body of the text, thereby serving to establish a theoretical framework into which the narrative itself may be set. This is in the nature of a preface, or a "prologue", as Klotz describes his presentation of the theme. Yet, to say this, and no more, is to fail to appreciate the relevant concept's potential for mystification: presenting the enforced participation of some three million young Frenchmen in a brutal colonial war in terms of "supreme happiness" or, in the case of Klotz, "le plus beau jour" (Klotz 1982, pp.7-8) is, to say the least, of doubtful historical validity. This argument will be developed as we now examine each of the novels in turn, concentrating, as before, on the disjunction of homogeneity and heterogeneity in their imaging of the conscript in Algeria.

Croussy's intense concentration on a very small group of soldiers - one volunteer in charge, with three conscripts under him - does not preclude the odd comment on the nature of the *contingent* as a whole. So, for instance, the account of the regimental parade which sees the establishment of the "Commando Pivoine" includes the following description of the assembled *appelés*:

Il y avait là tous les gus, les cargaisons humaines de gus débarqués dans le port blanc, égarés dans la montagne. Il y avait les insoumis, les idéologues, les non-violents, les hommes généreux, ceux qui allaient vivre, témoigner et mourir, les humanistes qui voulaient rester des hommes libres, les gus qui ne voulaient pas <<décaniller les zigs>>, que la vue des tortures rendait fous, prêtres ou jeunes communistes, et d'autres, sans croix et sans drapeau, la fièvre aux yeux; il y avait des sous-lieutenants du contingent victimes des sociétés hiérarchisées, des employés et des instituteurs fanfarons ou peureux qui souhaitaient un peu de grade, pas beaucoup, pour une année ou deux, et ce serait fini, à vie, moyennant salaire et le droit de manger au mess ils acceptaient de surveiller les jeunes soldats qui les tournaient en dérision parce qu'ils avaient rompu le code de la loyauté... (Croussy 1975, pp.34-35)

This disabused image of conscript heterogeneity and frailty is quite an attractive one, which chimes well with our impression of the historical make-up of the *contingent*. However, it is only the starting-point for an account of the emergence of something very like the *fraternité d'armes* beloved of the military's defenders and derided by its critics. Indeed, it is this soldierly transcendence of civilian relations between individuals which is the key to an understanding of Croussy's particular version of the tragedy-as-joy theme. So, as the "Commando Pivoine" sets out on its mission, its members will exchange the company of the mass of men for an ever more intense awareness of themselves and each other. The narrator, Pierre Rose, focusses the reader's attention on this process:

Que ce soit l'impression d'isolement complet, que ce soit la vue de ces montagnes désertes brûlées de lumière, chaque jour je pressens un peu plus fort que viendra le temps où une solide amitié nous unira tous les quatre, que si l'un de nous venait à souffrir les autres souffriraient aussi, que la douleur de l'un appartiendrait à tous et que c'est cela que nous appellerons l'amitié et qui ne sera, en fait, qu'une simple connaissance des autres, comme si l'amitié était une fonction de la connaissance. Quel miracle pourrait unir, un jour, un comptable devenu accordéoniste dans un orchestre musette avant de s'engager, un médecin pressé de rentrer dans sa famille et qui accepte l'épreuve du commando pour accélérer sa libération, un prêtre - venu d'où? - et le jeune homme que je suis encore? (ibid., p.47)

The four make up a strange and, indeed, rather implausible group; and one



which is hardly made to appear any more likely by the thumbnail life histories which follow the foregoing quotation (*ibid.*, pp.47-55). We learn, for instance, that Eugène Borie has volunteered for the army in the hope of becoming an officer and thus earning enough to keep his wife in the style to which she became accustomed when she ran off with the trombone player in her husband's band. Edouard Grenier, meanwhile, is in disgrace as far as the Church is concerned, following his arrest on charges of carrying out abortions; it is only thanks to the intervention of his bishop that he has been called up rather than sent to prison, in fact. Jean Poussin is a rather more conventional character, but one who nevertheless reveals an obsessive preoccupation with both God and Mammon.

The narrator, for his part, is a *muté disciplinaire*, like Labro's Seb and Lartéguy's "mutins de Versailles", as well as the conscript heroes of Yves Boisset's stridently anti-war film, *R.A.S.* (1973). Rose's "crime", we know, was to have refused to "finir un zig" (Croussy 1975, p.53), which is readily understandable as an expression of his belief that "c'était la guerre qui était un crime" (*ibid.*, p.54). However, this conscientious objection to the war does not prevent the character from participating very effectively in it. Indeed, Rose's rare single-mindedness and skill as an *éclairneur de pointe* is insisted upon by his superior, Borie (*ibid.*). Taciturn in the extreme, with neither friends nor family ties, Rose is very much an enigma. He is, for example, as apparently contradictory in himself as he is in his attitude to the war: "toujours triste et toujours heureux", as Grenier, the unfrocked priest, puts it (*ibid.*, p.55). By the same token, Rose may, as the narrator, be the voice of the text, but, as an actor in the narrative's drama, he avoids speaking any more than is absolutely essential. This attitude will, together with the silence of the mountain setting, contribute to the silence which is both an important part of the novel's atmosphere and one of its principal motifs. Most mysterious of all, however, is the strange injury which Rose has in the palm of his left hand. This is frequently referred to as the action progresses, but will

only be "explained" at the very end of the novel: it is a tattoo of the word *Non*, and thus a symbol, it would seem, of the conscript's abiding opposition to the war in which he has been made to fight (*ibid.*, p.189).

The point here is that these variously remarkable characters will, thanks to their mission, come to know that "miraculous" unity longed for by the narrator. The tragedy is that they must die in order to come to this new awareness of one another; as is made clear when, after spending many months on the trail of Amirouche, and having got completely cut off from the rest of the army, the group loses Borie in an ambush. They refuse to surrender his body, however, even to their own side:

Le silence qui nous avait unis avait établi entre nous, plus que les deux années que nous avons vécues ensemble, plus clairement que si nous avions pu nous exprimer par la parole, une entente secrète qui ne se briserait plus jamais. Tout de suite, au premier bruit, nous avons compris que personne de nous trois ne voulait livrer notre mort, que personne ne méritait de recueillir le corps de Borie, qu'il nous appartenait, que personne n'y toucherait jamais. Jamais. (*ibid.*, p.166)

The process of isolation which begins with the selection of the group for the "Commando Pivoine", and is intensified as it moves higher into the mountains and loses touch (including radio contact) with the outside world, is here shown to effect a marvellous unification of the four men. This new togetherness goes beyond both the military and the war, and can only be fully appreciated in the wake of the deaths of all four members of the hand-picked unit. As they die, one after another, their bodies are picked up and carried by those who survive, to prevent them falling into the hands either of the enemy or of an army from which the group has grown hopelessly estranged. Their continued progress towards Amirouche becomes steadily more absurd, with its value as a symbol to the war's senselessness becoming ever more apparent in consequence. It will fall to Rose himself to be the last survivor, and thus to take responsibility for his three comrades. This is a role which he valiantly assumes, with the assistance of a captured mule, until he too dies. The four men, mere *bidasses*, are thus united eternally in a life-transcending death; like the four buzzards which now soar effortlessly above both their dead bodies and the other signs of human suffering in

Algeria, they have sprouted wings, as it were (ibid., p.189).

Our objection to this treatment of the Franco-Algerian conflict is solely concerned with its treatment of conscription. Both from a formal point of view and as a depiction of the absurdity of colonial war, Guy Croussy's narrative is of considerable merit. However, as an image of service in Algeria it must be reckoned profoundly misleading. For, while the Grenier preface may only speak of "certains êtres", and the novel's action limit itself to four, very unusual, individuals, the fact remains that the experience of Rose and his comrades is the only image provided of the lives lived by "tous les gus" assembled on the parade-ground that fateful day (ibid., p.34). On that occasion, their heterogeneity was insisted upon; for the remainder of the narrative, in contrast, it is the growth of a mystical communion between fellow combatants which is described. As we shall now see, this is a pattern of mystification which has been continued into the 1980s.

Where Croussy's novel sought, perhaps, to make a more general point about the French experience in Algeria, Claude Klotz's *Les Appelés* makes a point of displaying its conscript credentials. As in the text just considered, the action focusses on only four *appelés*; a fact which might be dismissed as a coincidence, were it not for the romantic connotations of this arrangement of characters. So *Le Monde's* reviewer, for instance, was moved to compare Klotz with Dumas *père*:

Comme dans *les Trois Mousquetaires*, les héros des *Appelés* de Claude Klotz sont quatre, que les hasards de la guerre ont réunis dans l'Ouarsenis, en cette année 1959 marquée par le tournant de la politique algérienne du général de Gaulle. (Alliot 1982, p.19)

The ease with which Klotz's novel is assimilated to an earlier tradition of military romanticism is a cause for serious concern. Indeed, it is an important critical clue which can lead us to a proper awareness of the text's mystification of the conscript experience. Naturally, we do not expect to find an old-style romance complete with happy ending in a contemporary chronicle of war; *Les Appelés* closes rather with the absurd deaths of its four principals, accidentally killed by their own

side. However, this is no more than is to be expected in a novel of the 1980s, given "the general demythologizing tendencies which the Vietnam War precipitated in western intellectual circles in the late 1960s and early 1970s" (Foulkes 1983, p.64). (We might say the same of Croussy's novel, of course.) What we have in Klotz's novel, in short, is a minimal demystification of conscript service in Algeria: i.e. the very least that can reasonably be expected in a post-Vietnam account of service in a colonial war. The fiction's closing nod at the horrors of war is revealed in this light to be a recuperative device intended to steer the disabused consciousness of the contemporary reader away from its profoundly romantic treatment of the central theme. For, even if we take the narrative's tragic finale into account, the image of the Algerian experience which emerges from *Les Appelés* is a wholly positive one. Indeed, the tragedy is really the apogee of the joy experienced by Klotz's four heroes, just as it is in Croussy's novel. Algeria, for all its horrors - and we are shown the full range of military errors and atrocities - remains the seat of a higher existence, a privileged space where the barriers variously imposed by metropolitan society can be transcended.

In Klotz's fictive universe, individuals who would normally be mutually hostile or indifferent are brought by their common lot to an experience of their shared humanity. A Parisian philosophy teacher rubs shoulders with a second-hand dealer from the *banlieue*, an aristocratic doctor from Bordeaux, and a country priest from the Vendée coast; with the end result that all four come to a new awareness of both self and others. Whatever the varied origins of its conscripted participants, whatever their personal failings and private obsessions, the Algerian adventure brings about a qualitative improvement in their respective conditions. Labelled and pigeon-holed by themselves as much as by the metropolitan society from which they originate, Klotz's *appelés* come, through their common experience of Algeria, to attain a mythical homogeneity. Their simultaneous demise, which brings the novel to a close, thus sees them transformed from individual conscripts into the Algerian incarnation of the

universal soldier. This mythical distortion of lived experience is particularly apparent at the level of narrative form.

The following extract from the text will provide an adequate platform for our analysis of its articulation of a myth of conscript homogeneity. It brings together the leftist philosopher Berlier, "homme de livres et de théorie" (Klotz 1982, p.19), and Debard, "Personnage balzacien" (ibid., p.54), and the representative of "une race triomphante, plantée dans l'écorce de cette planète, comme un cep de vigne, le front tourné vers le ciel de l'empire" (ibid., p.156). Berlier is the narrator:

Si l'on excepte les militaires de carrière, remarquablement peu nombreux d'ailleurs dans les zones de combat, je suis le plus vieux de tous: vingt-six ans... C'est cela qui m'a rapproché de Debard avec lequel je n'ai que l'âge en commun, et cette sorte de sagesse pâlotte qu'il confère et qui nous permet d'être ensemble sans parler beaucoup, du moins jusqu'à présent.

Il a dû manifester pour l'Algérie française, avec ses congénères cravatés et sportifs, tandis que je m'égosillais pour la paix en Algérie dans les rues du Quartier latin, déplumé toujours, fébrile et mal bâti, belle droite harmonieuse, ointe et musclée, pauvre gauche trébuchante et malingre.

[...]

Pourtant, je l'aime bien cet ennemi de classe, lui qui a tout ce que je n'ai pas. (ibid., p.32)

What stands out here, clearly, is the Algerian comradeship of two born adversaries. The moral is simple enough: the conflictual politics of metropolitan France cannot long survive exposure to the elemental realities of conflict in the country's North African territory. For, the Algeria of *Les Appelés* is a place where the physical heavily outweighs the philosophical; as Berlier soon realizes:

...ici règnent sans conteste une nature, une matière d'une solidité plus que tangible. Voilà ce qui est peut-être ma plus grande découverte depuis mon catapultage dans ce pays: je dois prendre en compte la véracité des choses, leur densité.

[...]

On en apprend tous les jours.

Ici, les pantalons grattent les jambes, le soleil brûle et les crosses des fusils écrasent les clavicules. L'Algérie 1959 a décidé de ne plus rien avoir à faire avec Spinoza, Kant et Aristote. (ibid., p.19)

In Klotz's Algeria, then, "nature" is deemed to be more powerful than culture. It is on this basis that a spirit of community, born of shared suffering, comes to transcend the habitual animosities brought by each *appelé* from the mainland: an

Algerian "substance" and a conscript "essence" thus replace the "accidents" of metropolitan existence and allegiance. In this light, the previous extract's establishment of the regular army as the negative value in Berlier's new world is seen to be of the greatest significance, mythically relegating the left-right polarity of metropolitan political life to the rank of social and psychological curiosity. Age is most certainly not the only thing that the teacher and the doctor have in common, then; they are united, above all, by and in their new-found *appelé* identity.

Bernard Alliot's critical comments on Klotz's characterization will serve as a convenient bridge between content and form. *Le Monde's* reviewer remarks that "on s'agace de personnages trop convenus pour ne pas relever du cliché ou de l'archétype" (Alliot 1982, p.19), and thereby reveals the need for an examination of the deeper structures of *Les Appelés*. For, if the four principals are archetypal, as they undoubtedly are, it is for the simple reason that such characters fit most easily into the novel's symmetrically ordered universe and accede most readily to the demands of its mythifying project. Berlier, Gino, Debard and Barret - this is the order in which they are repeatedly presented in the novel - are not so much concrete individuals as representatives of the modern nation's constituent estates. Klotz's characterization conforms to an essentially feudal model, in fact: Debard, the hereditary ruler (he is the only officer of the four, note); Barret, for the clergy; Berlier, representing the Republican tradition of the lay educators; Gino, who incarnates the vital wit of the lower orders. Alternatively, the protagonists can be set against a preferred map of France: the capital with its intellectual pretensions and commercial realities, its boulevards and its *banlieue*; the traditions and solidity of the provinces; the peace of the rural heartland. Other, equally valid, taxonomies - spiritual, philosophical, political, even physical - could be provided.

The real point of all this should by now be obvious: the four principals are chosen for their radical disparity, according to the standard terms of reference of

mainland France. This is so in order that their metropolitan differences may be all the more dramatically reconciled in Algeria; a reconciliation which will be perceived by the parties to it as paradoxical, and rationalized for the reader via the myth of an essential Algerian "camaraderie". Prompted by his wife, Debard reflects, like Berlier before him, on his "surprising" choice of friends:

C'est vrai, elle a mis le doigt sur quelque chose qui aurait dû m'étonner: pourquoi Barret et ses simplicités, ses origines paysannes, Gino et ses cafés de banlieue, Berlier et ses opinions si contraires aux miennes? (Klotz 1982, pp.152-153)

Having now been transmuted into a military *toubib*, the erstwhile *châtelain* is in a position to voice the preferred answer to his own question, thereby resolving the enigma upon which the text as a whole is based: "Nous sommes tous des soldats" (*ibid.*, p.153). This appeal to a myth of conscript homogeneity is reiterated and reinforced a few pages later. The four men's military identity is here presented as their essential, indeed their only, characterizing feature. Debard, once again: "Nous ne sommes que quatre soldats trop débraillés au coeur de cette nuit imprévue" (*ibid.*, p.159). It would not be difficult to imagine Croussy's Rose uttering these words; nor is it coincidental that we may so readily link the two texts in this way. There, as here, in fact, what we are faced with is the mythical glossing over of objective social disparities.

How much more aesthetically pleasing to have four such different representatives of "the nation in arms" brought together by the Algerian adventure than a less heteroclitic group; and how much more appropriate to the articulation of the myth of conscript homogeneity. It is, however, at the level of form that the mythological implications of Klotz's undeniable literary craftsmanship become most apparent, as we shall explain.

In *Les Appelés*, a spurious order and wholeness are imposed by the narration on the essential fragmentation and partiality of the conscript experience of Algeria. Moreover, this imposition of unity and coherence masquerades, at the level of content,

as an exposition of the very differences that it formally denies. Here again, Alliot's review provides a useful point of departure:

Dans ce récit brillant, l'auteur déploie une grande virtuosité. Comme d'autres romanciers de la guerre ... il use du monologue intérieur en tant que technique narrative: chacun intervient à la première personne. On se prend aussi au petit jeu des références quand tel ou tel passage évoque Claudel, Sartre, Péguy, Joyce, etc., sans oublier Patrick Cauvin, pseudonyme qu'emprunte Klotz pour signer des ouvrages destinés à un large public. (Alliot 1982, p.19)

The familiar pleasure of the narrative as intertextual jigsaw puzzle, then, is what characterizes this novel's depiction of the Algerian war. Considered in this critical light, the interior monologue so admired by Alliot does not, by any means, necessarily appear as a privileged mode of extra-referentiality - a means, that is to say, of defamiliarizing the conflict by shattering the habitual illusion of coherence and unity engendered by omniscient narration. Indeed, it may properly be regarded as a way of containing the essential fragmentation of the conscripts' Algerian experience whilst purporting to focus on it; rather than providing a fresh insight on this particular war, as Alliot seems to imply, the form of Klotz's narrative renders it comfortably familiar. In particular, it is the text's establishment for the reader of a position of identification with the subject of the *énonciation* - i.e. over and above any identification which might be felt with its four first-person narrators - which explains its ability to contain the surface heterogeneity of its content within a deeper formal homogeneity (see Belsey 1980, pp.30-31).

So, *Les Appelés* is just as easily able to construct a unified and unifying subject-position for the integrated reader in those sections of the narrative devoted to dramatic monologue (the bulk of the text) as it is in those characterized by omniscient narration (the Prologue and the Epilogue, plus a number of passages in the main body of the novel). Throughout his narrative, in other words, Klotz formally denies the conscript disparity insisted upon by Labro, whilst seemingly all the while to foreground it. That the historical fragmentation of the Algerian experience should be susceptible to usurpation by a mythical universality is a function of the text's homogenizing structure.



Of primary importance in this regard is what we might, by analogy with the *loi-cadre*, conveniently refer to as a *mythe-cadre*: a "blueprint" or "outline" myth, establishing an appropriate framework for subsequent mythical developments. This is, in fact, none other than the notion of "le plus beau jour", which we mentioned earlier.

Klotz's novel opens with the Prologue, in which the four principals, as yet unidentified, are introduced. Out on patrol in the Ouarsenis one day, they decide to halt at a village well, where they are greeted by a suitably venerable local. He it is who introduces them to the notion of "le plus beau jour":

Une légende peut-être, une tradition ou le résultat d'une sagesse propre à ces pays où les roches sont nues.

Il avait raconté qu'une fois, une seule fois au cours d'une vie d'homme, se produisait un fait unique: la clarté du ciel, la fraîcheur du vent, la chaleur du soleil, tout s'équilibrait avec une harmonie telle que ce jour était le plus beau que puisse connaître une vie.

Jamais les couleurs ne sont si vives ni si tendres que ce jour, jamais le monde ne se donne avec un tel élan, il n'est plus rien qu'une caresse géante et parfumée. Lui-même n'avait pas encore connu cet instant. Il arrivait que les hommes meurent avant que naisse le jour qui leur était réservé. Il attendait encore, guettant dès l'aurore le don suprême de ces heures divines. Cela viendrait peut-être.

*Inch'Allah.*

A partir de cet instant et sans que jamais ils ne se le soient avoué l'un à l'autre, aucun des quatre soldats n'oublia l'histoire du vieillard des plaines, et chacun se demanda, dans les longs mois qui suivirent, si, parmi les jours qu'ils allaient vivre, se trouverait celui qui leur était destiné, celui-là même qui serait leur plus beau jour. (Klotz 1982, pp.7-8)

The foregoing extract is remarkable for several reasons. To begin with, its establishment of a position of identification for the reader with the omniscient subject of the enunciation is readily apparent; as is the particular contribution made by the standard narrative tenses to this process of alignment (see Belsey 1980, pp.77-78). Similarly obvious is the passage's connotative appeal to a tradition of orientalist romanticism in the literary depiction of North Africa: the natural world is so feminized as to conform to this cliché-ridden vision, in which a central role is played by the exotically imagined harem. Deeply rooted in this hackneyed orientalism is the familiar invocation of Islamic fatalism. A basic given of so many western accounts of the Muslim world, and articulated, typically, in "schoolboy" Arabic calculated to flatter the

metropolitan reader, this eminently debatable presupposition provides *les Appelés* with the mythical foundation for its fictive universe, in which divine predestination is most definitely not to be scoffed at. On the contrary, a belief in destiny - a common military destiny, that is - is clearly indicated here; ultimate vindication for this view will come with the Epilogue's conclusion of the unusually overt mythification begun by the Prologue.

The narrative introduced in this fashion displays a rigid structural parallelism throughout. First, the departure of each of the four central figures is recounted with equal brevity. Though depicted in the particular styles appropriate to the characters and their milieux, each one of these *tableaux vivants* culminates in an essentially similar expression of a common Algerian destiny (Klotz 1982, pp.9-16). The four *livres* which follow are, in turn, each dominated by one of the principals, in the order established in the Prologue: Berlier, Gino, Debard, Barret. This format serves both to develop the characters and to forward the action, resulting in a narrative which respects an age-old formula: the teacher's tale is thus followed by those of the *brocanteur*, the doctor, and the priest.

The homogenizing symmetry of the narrative's structure may most easily be appreciated by reconstructing its unstated *table des matières*:

Prologue:       1. "le plus beau jour"  
                  2. departures: Berlier, Gino, Debard, Barret

Livre I: Berlier, Août, Simone, Septembre

Livre II: Gino, Septembre, Dora, Octobre

Livre III: Debard, Octobre, Isabelle, Novembre

Livre IV: Barret, Novembre, Andréa

Epilogue

Having, from the outset, established the principals as a military unit - thanks to the episode of "le plus beau jour" - the text's subsequent concentration on them as individuals serves only to emphasize the process of coming-together in Algeria. The

narrative's structure provides the necessary formal framework for this mythical homogenization: the respecting of the order of appearance established in the Prologue; the repetition of the Protagonist / Month 1 / Female Counterpart / Month 2 formula; the *enjambement* effected between books through overlapping accounts of the relevant months (this is impossible in Barret's case, where the second month is consequently replaced by the Epilogue's account of their deaths); all make for the integrated reader's perception of apparently foregrounded individuality as essentially secondary to a common military identity. "One for all, and all for one", as it were.

It is only with the Epilogue that Klotz's conscript pilgrims, having told their stories on the way, finally complete their Algerian journey. In so doing, they both fulfil the mythical promise of the Prologue, and reveal just how close their own odyssey comes to that of Croussy's heroes. For, Klotz's *appelés* are destined to die absurdly just as their own finest day dawns; a joint demise which may be read, we would suggest, on two levels. On the more obvious of these, the *dénouement* is to be regarded as straightforwardly ironic, with its political message being an equally uncomplicated statement of the senselessness of war. On a rather deeper level, however, the conscripts' deaths conform to the tragedy-as-joy ethos of *Ne pleure pas, la guerre est bonne*. What is of importance here is the second-level depiction of this common fate as the culmination, and, indeed, the consummation, of a genuinely communal destiny. The textual signal for this reading is the increasingly rapid oscillation of narrative points of view which occurs in the minutes leading up to and in the very moment of the principals' deaths (Klotz 1982, pp.249-259). This formal device has the mythical effect of unifying the individual *appelés*, and thus transforming their individual experiences into a transcendent *appelé* consciousness: an eternalized expression of the text's foundation myth of conscript homogeneity. The fact that the Algerian war was, historically, singularly lacking in danger for the vast majority of its drafted participants only serves to underline the mystification effected by the tragic

finales of both this novel and Croussy's variation on the theme. And what more typically Romantic climax could be imagined, in fact? Here, after all, we are confronted with a very familiar figure: the achievement by socially disparate individuals of a transcendent and everlasting harmony in death.

This said, one genuinely demystified aspect of Klotz's novel remains to be discussed. This concerns metropolitan opposition to the Algerian war, particularly in so far as that opposition centred on the issue of conscription. As we shall see in the final part of this chapter, the question is still far from dead; indeed, in the years since the war, the intelligentsia's support for *insoumission* has been regularly presented as a source of satisfaction (e.g. Droz & Lever 1982, pp.281-283). The fact of the matter, however, is that the vast majority of metropolitan conscripts went quietly off to the Algerian war, whilst the bulk of the mainland population looked on with equanimity. Labro puts this general failure to resist the *rappel* down to a combination of passivity and inertia (Labro 1967, pp.226-229); a version of the relevant events which is typically persuasive. As for those conscripts who did try to avoid service in Algeria, the contrasting accounts of Lartéguy, Saint-Laurent and Servan-Schreiber were noted in the preceding chapter. In *Les Appelés*, it is the generally half-hearted nature of the draftees' own opposition to the call-up that is brought to the fore. As is so often the case, comedy proves to be a most effective means of demystification as the attempts of Berlier and Gino to avoid being sent to Algeria are detailed. The malingering of each *appelé* is wholly in character; so, whilst Berlier seeks to convince the military doctor that he is mentally ill, Gino feigns jaundice (Klotz 1982, pp.45-47 & 81-82). Needless to say, neither is particularly successful. This type of military humour is not particularly original, of course, but it does serve as a useful antidote to the French left's glorification of its own record on conscription.

Our preoccupation with form in much of the preceding discussion leads us to mention what is, beyond any doubt, the most formally ambitious attempt to capture the

Algerian experience in literature, Pierre Guyotat's *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats* (1967). This text's treatment of the war raises a number of the pivotal theoretical questions referred to in our general introduction - questions bearing on the relationship between fiction and reality, and more specifically between formal innovation and socio-political defamiliarization - in an unusually dramatic fashion. For, in marked contrast to the limpid realism of *Des feux mal éteints*, published the same year, Guyotat's narrative obliges the reader to search for the Algerian experience in a peculiarly dense thicket of words. Indeed, the author of *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats* would seem to believe that for literature to talk usefully about the world, it must consciously and constantly stress its own fictionality.

In the case of Guyotat, who is himself a veteran of the Algerian campaign, such thinking has resulted in some 500 packed pages, sub-divided into seven *chants*; a solid block of text in its manuscript form, paragraphs were only inserted later by a typist, at the insistence of the publishers ("Avertissement" : Guyotat 1967, p.3). The general character of the narration is suggested by a reviewer of a later (and otherwise unrelated) Guyotat product:

L'immensité de l'entreprise, celle qui se fait jour depuis *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats*, cette volonté d'inventorier, de recenser, de comptabiliser, de faire entrer l'univers tout entier dans le livre comme Noé le fait dans l'Arche - ou, au contraire, par la profération, de tout expulser, d'en finir avec le mal et la souffrance, d'atteindre cet état <<d'autovidage permanent>> dont parle [Guyotat] et qui est le propre du saint (la seconde Arche, celle du Saint des Saints est vide) - ce projet bute sur l'infini et s'y épuise. Entre ciel et terre, quelque part dans la confusion de l'Histoire, de la langue et de la vision, l'écrivain, à bout de forces, s'interrompt. (Alphant 1984, p.38)

Small wonder, then, that *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats* should have an "unfinished" quality; dramatically demonstrated by the editorial decision to make the text a little more readable by introducing paragraphs. In Barthes's terms, it eschews the comforting closure of the (traditional) *lisible* narrative, in favour of a radical openness or *scriptibilité*. So, mystery is not generated in Guyotat's text in order that it may be divertingly resolved, but rather so that it can be foregrounded by the narration's "torrent énigmatique" (Alphant 1984, p.38). The end product is a nightmare vision of

the Algerian war, in which the stream of an omniscient narratorial consciousness combines with a Sadian attention to the detailing of sexually inspired violence, especially of a homosexual kind and frequently involving children, to produce a fictive universe lit only by "la pénombre excrémentielle" (Guyotat 1967, p.213). Familiar military jargon thus appears alongside allegorical elements and brutally graphic descriptions of perverted sexuality as "les soldats de l'armée d'occupation et de maintien de l'ordre" are sent from "Ecbatane" to suppress the rising in "le profond de l'île" (ibid., p.55). (N.B. "Alger"/"Algérie" = "Al-Djazair" = "l'île".) While reference may occasionally be made to identifiable persons or events - such as the allusion to the historical "Opération Résurrection" (ibid., p.437) - the reader is not permitted to maintain his bearings for too long, and the overall impression produced is one of unrelenting turmoil and confusion.

Such an approach does not preclude more direct political commentary on the relevant historical events, however. So, for instance, we come across the following critical image of the use of metropolitan *appelés* in the "pacification" of Algeria:

Chaque jour, chaque nuit, des jeunes gens d'Ecbatane, à peine sortis de l'enfance, meurent, mutilés, châtrés, égorgés, crucifiés, hachés, pour conserver à leurs chefs civils et militaires, en les justifiant par la violence de leur sacrifice, richesse et dignité politique, honneur. Des reporters étrangers filment ces restes tout vibrants de mouches. Les commandos brûlent le village le plus proche de l'embuscade. (ibid., p.61)

This is a powerful image of conscript suffering, and one which points an accusing finger very obviously at government and military hierarchies alike; it also offers a nicely disabused view of the mechanics of the pacification effort. Yet, even here, the text's insistence on sexually-oriented violence dominates its fictive space; socio-political concerns are thus forced into the background by an intrusive Freudianism. This is equally true of the following account of the same boy-soldiers' off-duty hours:

Au soir, dans le bordel, ils saccagent les chambres, et martèlent les putains demi-mortes sur le crin, la bouche gonflée de sperme, la gorge étranglée; puis ils rentrent au camp, ivres, le ventre et les reins en feu. La nuit, tout au long de l'embuscade, ils vomissent dans le noir, sur les cactus, sur les fleurs blanches et

ouvertes la nuit au bord des rivières rapides; les taillis sont pleins de bruits de vomissements et de crosses heurtant les galets, d'écoulements de vomissures. (ibid., pp.64-65)

Just how a passage like this is meant to further our understanding of either the communal or the individual experience of Algeria, or indeed, whether or not it is even intended to achieve this, remains unclear. As an hallucinatory vision of the brutalizing impact of the war on the youth of France, the episode might be said to possess a certain critical force, but such a conclusion is rendered problematic by the fact that the troops were every bit as destructive and debauched on the boat which brought them to "Sebaou" (ibid., p.51). Indeed, we must conclude, on the basis of these, very typical, passages, that Guyotat's radical formal innovation is not readily compatible with the goal of demystification; or, at least, not on any large scale. Aimed at a very restricted public, *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats* is plainly intended for consumption as High Art, first and foremost, and only secondarily, if at all, as socio-political commentary.

A literary evolution of this kind is, perhaps, only to be expected as the Algerian conflict recedes further into the depths of the past and the collective memory. Nevertheless, a number of novels have been published in recent years which, for all their changes of perspective, continue to keep the issue of military service in Algeria high on the literary, if not the political, agenda. Claude Klotz's 1982 contribution to this body of literature has already been discussed; we shall now look briefly at those of Richard Liscia (1980), Robert Pépin (1981), Georges Mattei (1982) and Pierre Bourgeade (1983).

A common feature of several of these texts is a shift away from overt socio-political commentary and towards a psychoanalytical representation of the Algerian experience. So, in Liscia's *Le Conscrit et le Général*, the eponymous soldier provides the reader with a blow-by-blow account of his infatuation with a seditious senior officer and consequent unwitting involvement in the shadowy underworld of military plot and

counterplot. (This novel will be looked at in more detail when we come to discuss the literary image of the military *seigneur* in the following chapter.) As for Pépin's *Pavillon 114* and Bourgeade's *Les Serpents*, both seek insights into the war in the neuroses of a single conscript participant. Moreover, both end with the Seb-like suicide of their respective central figures following their unwilling implication in the torture of Muslim "suspects". For both Léon Mercadier and Albin Leblanc, in short, Algeria becomes their *tombeau*, and it is no coincidence that the final part of Bourgeade's narrative should bear this title.

As a translator of Kurt Vonnegut, Pépin was perhaps influenced by the American author's *Slaughterhouse-Five* in writing his own war story. Such stylistic trademarks as the repetition of catchphrases, the inclusion of material from outside and apparently unrelated sources, and the striking juxtaposition of different linguistic registers are all present in his work; as is the seemingly flippant tone frequently adopted by Vonnegut when dealing with the most serious subjects. Whether or not Pépin's text defamiliarizes the Algerian conflict in quite the way that the ex-GI's story undoubtedly did with regard to the Allied bombing of Dresden in World War II is not quite so obvious, however.

In *Pavillon 114*, just as in Guyotat's work, Algeria is never referred to by name, becoming instead "le Territoire National et Démocratique et Colonial" (Pépin 1981, p.XX & passim). However, the principal interest of the narrative lies not in this and other examples of ironic naming, but rather in its central conceit: i.e. the idea that Algeria has infected the protagonist and many of his fellow conscripts with a strange, and apparently incurable, disease:

L'E.S. [Etablissement de Soins] 114 était déjà très étendu à cette époque: les membres des Services Compétents du Ministère du Bien-Etre National qui y exerçaient leurs fonctions de sauvegarde étaient capables de gérer n'importe quelle affection, maladie ou catastrophe psychéthicosomatique contemporaine qui se puisse imaginer. Rien ne leur échappait hormis certaine atteinte au physique, à l'intellectuel et au moral dénommée <<gangrena major>> à laquelle aucun remède n'avait été trouvé. (ibid., p.37)



In the particular case of Pépin's hero, the onset of this *gangrène* will lead directly to the murder of both a Muslim "suspect" and the army officer in charge of the interrogation (ibid., pp.CCI-CCIV). He is arrested, not surprisingly, and then sent to the *Pavillon 114* of the title for "rééducation de la personnalité" (ibid., p.CLXLIX). It is here that we find the central figure as the narrative opens, and it is here that he will hang himself as it closes (ibid., pp.CCX-CCXI). The details of his service in Algeria - which displays the usual quota of FLN atrocities, brutal pacification methods, and fear - will thus emerge gradually and in flashback; indeed, the war has long ended when Léon Mercadier eventually commits suicide at the end of 1963. Moreover, these details will emerge in a series of letters to the protagonist's "brother Robert", a figure who, we finally discover, is none other than the lost half of his own, irremediably split, personality. As he explains in his parting "Déclaration de Défense":

...ce <<Robert>>, c'était moi.

Moi, avant de partir.

Moi, avant de découvrir, là-bas, de l'<<autre côté>> des Mimosas de la Guerre Démocratique le cadavre mutilé d'un autre moi-même. (ibid., p.CCIV)

The theme of the Algerian *gangrène* afflicting metropolitan youth is a particularly important one in the relevant literature (e.g. Servan-Schreiber 1957, p.239; cf. Belhadj *et al* 1959). Generally used to refer to "the slow spread of fascist attitudes to the government and to the people from their breeding ground in Algeria" (Sorum 1977, p.146), the metaphor is given a new vitality in Pépin's work by being made concrete: in *Pavillon 114* it really is a disease, as well as a symbol of the Algerian corruption of French youth. Whether it is, in fact, a valid image of conscript service in the war is altogether less obvious; for, as we pointed out at the outset, experiences of this kind were very much the exception, with severe psychic trauma of the kind evoked by Pépin being virtually unheard of. Criticism of this kind could also be levelled at Labro, in fact, although he is at pains throughout to stress the uniqueness of each conscript's experience of Algeria, and in particular that of Seb. Nevertheless, the linking of abhorrent military methods, especially torture, and conscript suicides remains

a feature of his treatment of the theme. In any event, the figure clearly exerts a powerful influence over later writers, as Pierre Bourgeade's reworking of the conscript theme makes clear.

To a certain extent, *Les Serpents* exploits the Algerian conflict as a backdrop to its principal theme, which is the oedipal relationship between a virginal country teacher and his widowed mother - the phallic symbolism of the work's title is thus an accurate indicator of its real preoccupations. Through a series of short tableaux - *les gendarmes*, *le quartier*, *les feuillées*, *le départ*, and so on - written in a prose style that is pared to the bone, the boy's service in Algeria will be put forward as the basis for an understanding of the most profound psychological processes. These are clearly meant to be seen to have a general applicability, as, in a final conceit, the "author" himself takes over from both the late husband and the dead child in the mother's bed, his foetal position underlining the inevitable tomb-womb connotations of her son's recent burial (Bourgeade 1983, pp.269-271).

However, Bourgeade's Algeria is rather more than a convenient setting for his exercise in Freudian psychoanalysis. In particular, the text's insistence throughout on the youth, immaturity, and, above all, the innocence of Albin Leblanc - the double emphasis on whiteness is of obvious significance - enable it to make points about conscription which are of abiding socio-political interest. The most important of these is, once again, an indictment of metropolitan public opinion, characterized in turn by belligerence and indifference. Albin, his rural idyll forever shattered by the delivery of his *rappel*, will, in short, have to suffer and die to expiate the unavowed guilt of the French nation. It is this France, the France of the *anciens combattants* and other such armchair warriors, which is represented by M. Mazurier, the seedy old master sent to replace Albin at the school. Consider his valedictory address for the patriotic improvement of the pupils:

M. Mazurier parla d'abondance, les mains croisées sur le ventre, les paupières lourdes, le verbe paisible et convaincant: «Votre maître vous quitte pour aller accomplir son devoir en Algérie. Vous l'appréciez (il fit distinctement sentir les deux

i) pour sa magnanimité, sa compétence, son besoin de servir. Nul doute que ces qualités ne lui soient utiles dans la contrée lointaine où il va, pour sa part, représenter la France.>> Sur ces derniers mots, sa voix trembla. [...] J'eus un mouvement de recul. M. Mazurier se méprit. <<Je comprends votre émotion. On se détourne, pour écraser une lame discrète. J'ai vécu cela, moi aussi, quand j'ai dû quitter ma classe, en 39. Ah, la guerre!>> (ibid., pp.49-50)

M. Mazurier is, in fact, a complete fraud, who incarnates to perfection Johnson's famous dictum that patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel. Rumoured to have had to retire from teaching as a result of unspecified *histoires*, he is subsequently revealed to be both wholly unscrupulous and completely debauched (ibid., pp.33 & 262-263 respectively). His sexual proclivities aside, the pedantic verbosity of his speech is by itself sufficient to show up the mythical character of a whole tradition, as much cinematic as literary, of tearful classroom departures. For its part, the complacent warmongering of the *ancien combattant* - a stance which itself denies the specificity of the Algerian experience through the recuperative myth of *la guerre* - is revealed to be doubly culpable, manifesting itself in the metropolitan elders' dealings with not one but two generations of French youth.

Having been called up, the first thing that Albin does is to buy a map of the territory where he will soon be sent, but of which he, like the majority of his age group, remains wholly ignorant (ibid., pp.16-17). His lack of awareness is typical of a national obliviousness as regards the rumours of a distant and low-intensity war. This point is brought out most clearly in the course of Albin's rail trip to Marseilles:

Les voyageurs somnolaient, écrasés de chaleur, indifférents aux événements du monde. Des journaux froissés, ou roulés en boule, attestaient que les catastrophes naturelles, les guerres, n'avaient aucune influence sur les voyageurs, ni les voyageurs sur elles. (ibid., pp.53-54)

The fact of the matter, however, is that it is just such Frenchmen and Frenchwomen as these who, while only too ready to give the *contingent* the traditional heroes' send-off (ibid., p.129), will prove themselves to be incapable of the sustained effort of national consciousness needed to appreciate the Algerian conflict's potential for inflicting psychological damage on those young Frenchmen obliged to take part in it.

So, lacking the determination of conscripts like the Alsatian forester, who prefers self-mutilation to separation from his beloved trees (*ibid.*, pp.117-126), Albin goes meekly off to war, with the blessing of an effectively uncaring nation.

Many of Albin's initial impressions are commonplace in the literature of conscription: the surprising discovery that Tizou-Ouzou is "en tout point une petite ville française", for instance (*ibid.*, p.137); the first experiences of FLN attacks on European civilians (*ibid.*, p.148); the reality of a *ratonnade*, a word noted previously in the French press but never understood (*ibid.*, pp.153-155). His first exposure to the army's pacification methods will, likewise, not be long in coming:

Albin sort dans la nuit. Il va jusqu'à l'extrême bord de l'éperon. Il regarde le camp dont les lumières semblent aussi proches que les étoiles. Tout est calme. On n'entend absolument aucun bruit. Peut-être a-t-il rêvé. Peut-être n'y a-t-il jamais eu de guerre. Peut-être n'a-t-il pas quitté l'école du village. [...] Albin tressaille. Il est en Algérie. Il est debout sur le bord extrême de l'éperon. Il a failli perdre l'équilibre. Est-ce qu'on n'a pas crié? Il attend, une, deux, trois secondes, les sens en éveil. Le cri, de nouveau. C'est un cri déchirant. Un cri d'hyène. Un cri de bête qu'on égorge. La torture. (*ibid.*, p.185)

This will be familiar enough territory for anyone acquainted with the writing of the metropolitan anti-torture campaigners (see Chapter 5). To the general reading public of the 1980s, however, it may still be able to communicate a demystifying image of the nation's "forgotten" Algerian experience; and this at a time when the daily realities of North African immigration are high on the domestic political agenda. In any event, the text certainly makes a number of socio-political points which are liable to further the awareness of the Algerian conflict of appropriately receptive contemporary readers. So, when Albin first takes a stand against the French military's use of torture, and then, in a dramatic reversal, is led by the evidence of rebel atrocities to offer to interrogate the men responsible himself, we can be sure, at least, that such an image of conscript service in Algeria does have the power to awaken a new audience to the multiple contradictions of the conflict, if nothing else:

On apporta deux chaises et des cordes. On fit asseoir les deux prisonniers, qu'on attacha. Un soldat apporta une batterie électrique qu'il posa à côté d'eux. Les rebelles avouèrent, au bout de quelques temps, où était enterré le corps mutilé du

lieutenant. La nuit venue, Albin se tira une balle dans la tête. (ibid., p.247)

The historical implausibility of Albin's Algerian war is tempered, to a certain extent, by the character's personal uniqueness: he is a very strange individual altogether, so it is only perhaps to be expected that his experience of conscription should be so extreme. As an image of the wider participation of French youth in the conflict, *Les Serpents* must be reckoned wholly unconvincing; but this is perhaps to misunderstand its significance. For, it might be argued that this text, like *Pavillon 114*, serves to focus attention on an unavowed national neurosis by presenting the reader with an image of an individual's mental collapse in Algeria. Thus, it is the failure of the French people as a whole to assimilate the largely unacknowledged experiences of the millions who served there, and who now form the middle-aged backbone of the nation, which is brought to the fore by Pépin and Bourgeade. Indeed, this would seem to be just what the historian and novelist Gilles Perrault had in mind when remarking in 1987 on France's undischarged burden of guilt as regards its final colonial war:

Que Massu et Bigeard aient eu des carrières honorifiques a placé la guerre d'Algérie dans un placard et ça pue. Il faut vider les abcès. (Perrault 1987, p.23)

In marked contrast to both Pépin and Bourgeade, Georges Mattei has not limited his attempt to lance the country's Algerian boils to the literary domain. Indeed, *La Guerre des gusses* is the product of his own experiences of both the war itself and metropolitan resistance to it:

*La Guerre des gusses* est un roman vrai. Son auteur, rappelé en 1956, a participé aux manifestations contre le départ des troupes pour l'Algérie, il a porté témoignage, à son retour, dans *les Temps modernes*, il a été <<porteur de valises>> pour le F.L.N. Il n'a pas oublié. (Contat 1982, p.13)

But do Mattei's biographical credentials make his novel the "roman vrai" that Contat claims? Is the work really capable of filling in "le trou noir" which *Le Monde's* reviewer, in common with other critics, says has been left in the French collective consciousness? (ibid.). Our reading of the text suggests not, in both cases, and for

reasons which have to do precisely with Mattei's membership of the "Sartrean" left - the left of *Les Temps modernes* and the Jeanson network.

As the title suggests, *La Guerre de gusses* seeks to draw attention to the Algerian experience of the conscripts, or at least to that of a representative sample of them. In fact, the *gusses* depicted in the novel are very much exceptions to the historical rule; but this is not the basis of our objection to Mattei's treatment of the conscript theme. For, the fact that very few, if any, *appelés* were to follow the path trodden by "Nonosse" - who demonstrates against being sent to Algeria, witnesses the brutal repression of the Muslim population, deserts, joins the FLN, and is finally captured, tortured, and murdered by the *paras* - is not really an objection in this case. Some of the *contingent* did do such things, and, indeed, Mattei himself was one of this select band. If he is not consequently entitled to focus on such exceptionally active responses to service in Algeria, then it is difficult to know who is.

Our objection to *La Guerre des gusses* centres rather on the text's tendency to demonize every supporter of the French colonial cause. More particularly, it is in the discussion of the Algerian conflict in terms appropriated from the lexicon of the 1939-1945 hostilities that Mattei most clearly lays himself open to the charge of far-left mystification. So, whilst the reactionary right's appeals to the mythology of World War II may be steadfastly exposed, his own left-wing exploitation of this common mythical stockpile is presented as accurate reportage. A few examples of this trend will be sufficient to make our point.

A readily apparent mythical thread links, for instance, the *ancien combattant* who launches himself at the demonstrating conscript narrator growling "Mort aux Juifs!" (Mattei 1982, p.16), and the "trois Mousquetaires" who torture Nonosse in the wake of his desertion to the FLN:

Le troisième, chauve et rondouillard, était sergent-chef, il arborait une décoration bizarre sur sa tenue camouflée. Nonosse reconnut la croix de fer, une décoration allemande. (ibid., p.162)

Nonosse's reasons for deciding to go over to the enemy are repeatedly voiced in a similarly loaded fashion:

Dans mon enfance, j'ai été élevé dans l'admiration de ceux qui luttèrent contre les nazis dans la France occupée, ceux qu'on appelait les <<résistants>>. Ici, je sais à présent de quel côté se trouvent les résistants. J'ai choisi mon camp. (ibid., p.111)

- Tu te souviens, pendant la guerre, les boches et la résistance? Et bien, ici, les boches c'est nous. (ibid., p.172)

The Nazi theme is reiterated as Nonosse is eventually led away by his paratrooper tormentors towards the inevitable *corvée de bois*. With his (Algerian) fellow prisoners crying out their solidarity and fraternity, the *paras*' respond with their own, wholly mythical, expression of faith:

Pour couvrir les cris des compagnons de Nonosse, les militaires entonnèrent lentement un chant aux accents germaniques.

*Ce monde vétuste et sans joie*

*Croulera demain devant notre foi*

*Nous luttons pour notre idéal*

*Pour un ordre nouveau*

*Pour un ORDRE idéal...* (ibid., p.175)

This inability to resist the clichés associated with the myth of the *para démoniaque* (see Chapter 1) detracts from Mattei's discussion of the Algerian conflict in exactly the same way that the demonization of the Third Reich lessens the impact of accounts of World War II: that is to say by replacing the relativity of politics with a spurious absolute evil. Moreover, the implications of the text's tendency to demonize the author's real-life adversaries - the military, police, and other repressive apparatuses of the French state; the traditional left (including especially the PCF); the essentially passive and conservative mass of the metropolitan population - are clear: the caricatured presentation of historical actors necessarily implies a similar distortion of the relevant events.

Mattei's mythical equation of "l'Etat français du maréchal" and de Gaulle's Fifth Republic (ibid., p.214) is, in itself, seriously misleading. As are both the comic-book goodness of Nonosse - a far cry from the messy historical reality of desertion and direct action in the Algerian nationalist cause, as epitomized by the case of *l'aspirant*

Maillot (see Courrière 1969, pp.286-299) - and the unrelenting badness of his enemies. In fact, our reading of *La Guerre des gusses*, whilst not denying the text's ability to make a contribution to the historical awareness of a younger generation of Frenchmen and Frenchwomen, suggests that some thought must be given by such readers to the narrative's own "ignorance": i.e. the convenient omissions and simplifications necessitated by the far-left stance of its author.

So, where Guyotat's determinedly literary image of conscript service in Algeria was rendered politically ineffective by its abstruseness, those of Pépin and Bourgeade are undermined by their historical implausibility. As for Mattei's treatment of *appelé* resistance to the French colonialist project, it has been seen to be bedevilled by a surprisingly old-fashioned tendency to demonization. Taken with the work of Croussy and Klotz, these novels suggest that a range of variously elaborate forms of coping with the trauma of the Algerian war have consistently suggested themselves to those French writers attempting to chronicle the draftee's experience in North Africa; and, moreover, that such visions continue to be preferred to more clear-sighted analyses of the kind represented, in their very different ways, by the writing of Georges Perec and Philippe Labro.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE SEIGNEUR

Having considered the respective treatments accorded by writers of fiction to the main constituent elements of the French military presence in Algeria - i.e. the *élite* combat units on the one hand, and the mass of conscripted troops on the other - we can now complete our consideration of the army's literary image by turning our attention to the men responsible for deploying these forces "on the ground". What we shall focus on in this chapter, in other words, is the senior officers in charge of the paratroopers' search-and-destroy missions, the conscripts' *quadrillage* duties, and the like. The ranks we will concern ourselves with, then, are those from *commandant* (major) upwards. Of these ranks, that of colonel is by far the most important, both historically and in the relevant literature. The explanation of the literary significance attached to this particular rank is, typically enough, to be found in the leading historical role of the French colonel in Algeria. This, in turn, may be understood in the light of the post-Indochina politicization of the French officer corps, and especially of those commanding the parachute regiments.

As we noted in our discussion of the literary imaging of the *para*, the military's Indochinese experiences led many of its senior members to reject the traditional conception of the French army's role - the vision associated with the term *la grande muette* - in favour of the doctrine of *guerre révolutionnaire* and the *activisme* which it encouraged. The rigid structure of the traditional military, with its insistence on unquestioning obedience and formal hierarchies, was thus subjected to considerable strain: no longer did officers treat the word of their superiors as law, any more than they considered the will of democratically elected governments to be sacrosanct; rather, this new breed of French officer swore allegiance only to those fellow officers who shared its radically political view of the army and its duties.

The internal tension which inevitably resulted was to manifest itself most

obviously at the level of the individual regiment. With a colonel as its commanding officer, the regiment was the largest unit upon which those suffering from *le mal jaune* could impose their new vision of the French army. Above this level, power continued to reside with the general staff, whose collective attitudes were perceived, accurately it would seem, to derive in equal measure from an uncritical reliance on precedent and a highly developed sense of the demands of personal advancement. The aristocratic products of Saint-Cyr and the Ecole de Guerre would thus be brought into ever more regular conflict with such brash upstarts as Colonel Marcel Bigeard, who rose from the ranks to become perhaps the most romantic figure of the Algerian war. The power and prestige of men like Bigeard, both inside and outside the army, were based on two foundations. Firstly, in a war which the politicians were ever anxious to deny, and in which the large-scale use of conscripts for combat was deemed politically unacceptable, Bigeard and his "boys" actually did the fighting and other dirty work. The second point, following closely from the first, is that the paratrooper colonels were encouraged by short-sighted governments to become media personalities, thus providing an acceptably dashing image of an all too sordid war for domestic consumption (see Talbott 1980, pp.64-65).

The combination of an élite combat role and a high media profile was to confirm the *para* colonels in their belief in the special nature of themselves and their units, on the one hand, and in their mission to defend and preserve French Algeria, on the other. When the governments of the Fourth Republic attempted to depart from what the colonels saw as their Algerian vocation, they would plot both the downfall of individual administrations and, eventually, of the regime itself. When de Gaulle's Fifth Republic introduced a stronger and more determined form of government, they would seek to preserve their power to wage war in Algeria as they saw fit; a process that was to result in the April 1961 putsch, the failure of which signalled de Gaulle's definitive triumph over his military opponents, and thus their own downfall.

Both militarily and politically, then, these men were to become inextricably associated with the cause of *Algérie française*, and would come to dominate the war in consequence. Alistair Horne sums up their leading role as follows:

These were the legendary para colonels of Algeria; loved by their men and venerated by the *pieds noirs*, dreaded almost equally by the F.L.N. and French politicians. Ducournau, Trinquier, Bigeard, Brothier, Meyer, Jeanpierre, Fossey-François, Château-Jobert, Romain-Desfossés and Coulet: magnificent combat leaders all, their names read like a record of honour of French arms from the post-1940 resurgence onwards. Before Indo-China most had distinguished themselves in the Liberation and the final battles of the Second World War, and several had been deported to concentration camps for their work in the Resistance. They were to bestride the Algerian scene like demigods until the tragic peripeteia of 1961, and even such a pro-F.L.N. film as the remarkable Pontecorvo-Yacef production, *La Battaglia di Algeri*, comes reluctantly close to vesting its French para colonel, "Mathieu", with heroic qualities. (Horne 1977, p.167)

It is with the specific contribution made by French literature to the propagation of the colonels' popular image - one which cast them as "demigods" and "heroes", to use the terms unquestioningly adopted by the preceding commentator - that we shall concern ourselves in the present chapter. To this end, we shall examine in detail a range of literary treatments of the senior army officer, presenting the relevant texts not in chronological order, but rather as a progression from mystification to thematic enlightenment. To begin the discussion, we can do no better than to return to the person of Raspéguy, the *para* colonel who so dominates the action in Jean Lartéguy's *Les Centurions*. As Horne rightly points out (*ibid.*), Lartéguy's hero is based jointly on the historical figures of Bigeard and Ducournau. Not surprisingly, the fictional paratrooper colonel displays the principal mythical attributes of his celebrated historical counterparts. In the pages that follow, we shall seek to demonstrate that these qualities may themselves be most fruitfully regarded in terms of their systematic appeal to a primary mythical figure, that of the *seigneur*. In its French military incarnation, this archetype may be seen to be characterized by a combination of any or all of the following features: heroism; a sense of mission; the making of History; acts of creation; sitting in judgement; self-sacrifice; strong leadership; and paternalism. It will be argued that an insistence on such characteristics is typical of the French literature of the

Algerian war, and that Raspéguy and his fictional peers are, therefore, only fully understandable on the basis of a properly informed reading of this underlying myth.

We are already familiar with Lartéguy's romantic creation, Colonel Pierre-Noël Raspéguy, in so far as his contribution to the myth of the paratrooper is concerned. What we have not previously considered, however, is the specifically "seigneurial" element of his mythical persona, and it is this which we shall now attempt to isolate. We must therefore consider Raspéguy's personality along the lines suggested by the foregoing list of character traits.

Raspéguy's heroic status is largely self-evident: whether it be his background of valiant actions against the Germans and the Vietminh, or his skilful and single-minded pursuit and destruction of the FLN, the Colonel cuts a consistently heroic dash. As a fellow colonel remarks, Raspéguy is no less than "le plus beau soldat de l'armée française" (Lartéguy 1960, p.448). However, an obvious aptitude for military heroics may be a necessary condition for considering the Colonel as a *seigneur*, but it is not, in itself, a sufficient one; he must also be seen to conform to some, if not all, of our additional criteria. In fact, three of these - those identified as a sense of mission, the making of History, and acts of creation - are particularly closely intertwined in the person of Raspéguy, and centre on his attempt to produce a new type of French soldier for what he and his fellow *Indo* hands perceive to be a radically new type of armed conflict. The doctrine of *guerre révolutionnaire* underpinning this type of thinking will be familiar by now, as will the critique of French military traditionalism to which it gives rise. Its implications for would-be army commanders have likewise been referred to in terms of a new code of military leadership (see Chapter 1).

It is Raspéguy himself who puts this new code of military leadership into practice most dazzlingly. Relying on his own qualities rather than on accepted military structures, he will first gather round him a group of ex-Indochina disciples, then embark on the creation of the new French military man. The account of his remarkable

transformation of the "X<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Parachutistes Coloniaux" from a ragbag of slovenly regulars and recalcitrant conscripts into an élite combat force - "le régiment qui ira le plus loin dans cette bataille d'un nouveau genre" (ibid., p.444) - details this creative process (ibid., pp.315-334). In particular it draws attention to the special quality of the relations which obtain between the members of Raspéguy's "new model army" and their commanders. The Colonel's attempt to "reprendre en main" the X<sup>e</sup> RPC (ibid., p.323) proves to be brilliantly successful, and he and his fellow officers are effectively plebiscited by the men under their command (ibid., p.329). As for Raspéguy himself, his dominion is not the product of some abstract notion of rank; it is based, rather, on his subordinates' appreciation of his innate superiority. The Colonel is the paratroopers' commanding officer, in other words, not because the High Command says that he is, but rather because he is demonstrably the best man amongst them. This superiority is physical, first and foremost, and is evidenced by such things as their C.O.'s record time on the new assault course (ibid., p.326).

Raspéguy's physical presence is the basis of what we might refer to as the "animal magnetism" which binds his men to him. In combination with the undeniable fact that the Colonel is the finest soldier in the regiment, it accounts for the unique form of compliance demonstrated by those under his command. What we are presented with here is not the soldier's habitual fear of authority, but a new - or, more accurately, a very old - respect for the person of the individual war-lord. The control thus exercised is more akin to a brand of supernatural possession, we learn, than it is to conventionally hierarchical military authority (ibid., p.322). "Possession" is a singularly appropriate term in this context, for the X<sup>e</sup> RPC is very much Raspéguy's personal property: a conception of command which, as Horne notes, is distinctly atavistic, being a hangover from the system of military organization which existed in the days of the monarchy; it was also, incidentally, one which was apparently taken for granted by many of the paratrooper colonels cited earlier (Horne 1977, p.170). Such

proprietary tendencies are often found combined with expressions of paternalist concern for the troops: the Colonel typically refers to the men under his command as "mes soldats" (Lartéguy 1960, p.375) and "mes gars" (ibid., pp.53 & 67). When the time comes for the conscripted section of "his boys" to go home, he goes to the trouble of seeing them off himself, and remains on the quayside, father-like, until the ship actually leaves the dock (ibid., p.382).

Raspéguy's paternal affection for his subordinates has its roots in the peculiar *esprit de corps* of the parachute regiments created by fictional colonels like himself and historical ones like Bigeard. It was this belief in a common *para* identity which explained the willingness, and even the desire, of senior officers to give up the luxuries to which their rank entitled them. Unlike the traditional officer, then, the *para* colonel chooses to share the deprivation and suffering of his men. As Raspéguy himself puts it: "Je vis avec mes hommes, je marche comme eux, je mange comme eux, comme eux j'ai trop chaud, trop soif" (ibid., p.338). In this voluntary self-sacrifice, we are presented with further proof of the essential nobility of Lartéguy's *chef*.

In the Algerian context, seigneurial self-sacrifice necessarily goes far beyond mere physical suffering. Given the need for exceptional measures in the struggle against an enemy who shows no respect for the accepted decencies of warfare, the *seigneur* must not shrink from the use of torture, summary executions, and the like. Indeed, for those who find themselves in command of the French war effort in what Raspéguy calls the Algerian "merdier" (ibid., p.432), there must be no shirking of responsibility for atrocities, no seeking to avoid what is an inevitable dirtying of military hands. So, the Colonel, having been obliged by the army chiefs to "descendre des pitons dans la plaine" (ibid., p.355) - both literally and metaphorically - is ready to take the burden of guilt for the previously noted massacre of Algerian civilians off his men and onto his own broad shoulders. In the process, he demonstrates both his

innate nobility and his Solomon-like ability to judge guilt in the most trying matters of life and death:

- Messieurs, vous avez agi sous le coup de la colère, mais moi ce matin, à froid, après y avoir bien réfléchi, j'aurais donné l'ordre de fusiller tous les hommes adultes de ce douar, et c'est vous que j'aurais chargés de l'exécution. De ce côté-là, l'incident est clos. (ibid., p.356)

In time of war, and above all in the particular circumstances of *la guerre révolutionnaire*, the rules of peacetime morality no longer apply. It is the duty of the *seigneur* to decide on appropriate replacements for these ethical principles: he is thus not only established as judge and jury, but also as a lawgiver. This role may rightly be assumed by the Colonel because, in common with the rest of Lartéguy's *paras*, he has transcended the familiar "conventions ridicules... faiblesses... hésitations... crises de conscience..." (ibid., p.466). Guided by the demands of military efficiency, Raspéguy replaces conventional morality with an altogether more robust code of practice. As he puts it a little earlier: " - C'est pas le moment de faire de l'esprit. On est en guerre" (ibid., p.462). Freed in this way from the constraints of both peacetime morality and Republican legality, the *seigneur* is able to make History. However, just as the non-commissioned paratrooper must pay for his special powers with personal suffering - the mythical figure of "le vieux pacte théosophique" (Barthes 1957, p.95) - so his C.O. must, *a fortiori*, somehow sacrifice himself in return for his ability to change the world.

As previously suggested, this self-sacrifice consists for Colonel Raspéguy in a willed, and willing, participation in the suffering of his troops, on the one hand, and in a readiness to "s'enfoncer dans la merde" and thus to "se salir les pattes" in the interest of the nation (Lartéguy 1960, p.492), on the other. He is consequently spared the radical isolation from his fellow men experienced by Boisfeuras, an officer who, as Horne correctly suggests, is modelled on another *para* colonel, the notorious Antoine Argoud (Horne 1977, pp.176-177). It is this mysterious soldier who experiences this aspect of the seigneurial condition most fully, living as he does "dans la solitude glacée

des hommes qui font et défont l'histoire" (Lartéguy 1960, p.472). Raspéguy may not be cut off from the mass of humanity in this total fashion, but, as we shall see in due course, other military *seigneurs* most certainly are. For his part, Lartéguy's paratrooper hero suffers quietly: *noblesse oblige*. Content with his rank in an army which he would gladly see rid of generals altogether (ibid., p.469), just like the FLN, the Colonel provides us with a solid foundation for our consideration of the various faces of the French army's Algerian warlords.

A somewhat different character, but one who appeals, nevertheless, to the same mythical concept, is Cécil Saint-Laurent's Colonel Jasson. Jasson was first introduced in *L'Algérie quand on y est* (1958), and would subsequently reappear in Saint-Laurent's reworking of this early material in the much longer (but inferior) novels, *Les Passagers pour Alger* (1960) and *Les Agités d'Alger* (1961). Presented as being based on a real colonel that the author was introduced to by the *pied-noir* writer Jean Brune (Saint-Laurent 1958, p.9), Jasson was not significantly developed between 1958 and 1960/61, and it is therefore on the treatment accorded to the character in the first of these novels that we shall concentrate our attention. The briefest description of the figure will readily reveal his seigneurial qualities, as defined above.

From the outset, Jasson is presented as a kindly father-figure, concerned for the well-being of all, be it the Muslim children to whom he distributes sweets in the market-place (ibid., pp.119-121), the European settlers whose morale must be kept up (ibid., p.152), or his men on their mountain *pitons* (ibid., pp.133-134). It comes as no great surprise, in particular, to learn that Jasson is regarded as the "father" of his regiment. Thus, when one of its members is buried after an ambush, "il [le Colonel] reçoit des poignées de main, comme s'il était le père de la victime" (ibid., p.189).

With his habitual air of "malice" and "un sourire paternel" (ibid., p.196), Jasson seeks to be all things to all men. Ceaselessly on the move, he gives the impression of omnipresence as he darts from place to place, ministering to the varied needs of the



Muslim, European, and military communities. What he brings to each of these groups in turn is, first and foremost, an apparent certainty in a period of profound change. So, for those native villagers who worry about the possibility of the army's ever leaving Algeria, he is French military resolve incarnate: "Pas question" (ibid., p.233); whilst the *pieds-noirs* are assured that "Tout va bien" (ibid., p.152). As for the men under his command, he is the personification of authority, and, it would seem, an inspired judge of the appropriate course of action in any situation. Consider the following account of an exchange with one of his junior officers regarding the necessity of personally visiting a particular European farmer:

- Mon Colonel... ce n'est vraiment pas la peine que vous y alliez vous même.

[...]

- J'y vais.

- Mais pourquoi mon colonel!

- Parce que c'est comme ça.

Les voitures s'échelonnèrent. Elles roulaient doucement. Le colonel avait fermé les yeux. Il se régalaient du <<parce que c'est comme ça>> assené à Daubourguet. L'un des plaisirs que le métier militaire lui réservait tenait à l'autorité de ce genre de formules sur des subordonnés qui ne pouvaient les discuter et qui, du fait même qu'ils les respectaient, leur conféraient les qualités d'une certitude. Depuis sa réplique, le colonel était sûr qu'il avait raison d'aller voir Desaix lui-même. (Saint-Laurent 1961, I, p.30)

As omniscient as he is omnipresent, Jasson is typically seen to be in possession of indisputable evidence of the wrong-doing of others: in a military campaign historically characterized by a critical lack of sound intelligence - hence the army's need to resort to the systematic use of torture - the *seigneur* once again provides much-needed "certainty". So, to Desaix, the *colon* just mentioned, the Colonel is able to state with complete confidence: "- Vous payez le F.L.N. [...] Epargnez-moi toute dénégation... Mes preuves sont irréfutables" (ibid., p.32). Yet, this man is further possessed of a "bienveillance" which sets him apart from the common run of humanity (ibid., p.33), and which is therefore to be regarded as a major factor in the construction of his mythical persona. For, Jasson is not only able to look into the sinful hearts of lesser men, but also to find in himself the nobility of soul required to forgive those sins. He will thus judge Desaix with a mixture of compassion and pragmatism, and

will urge others to do likewise. As he says of the case to a new arrival in his *secteur*: "Nous avons suffisamment d'histoires sérieuses sur le dos pour que vous ne perdiez pas votre temps à..." (ibid., p.306). The (mythical) message hardly needs to be spelled out.

Similarly, the Colonel will extend the offer of his forgiveness to a group of Muslims who now regret their involvement in various anti-French activities:

- Je suis content de vous voir. Vous vous êtes décidés à comprendre quels étaient vos vrais amis. Je vous pardonne presque. Pas tout à fait. Parmi vous se trouvent des hommes qui, avant-hier encore, sabotaient le pont. C'est mal. C'est très mal. Je ne vous pardonnerai complètement que quand je vous aurai vus à l'oeuvre sous les ordres du chef Si Membarka. Vous avez commis des crimes graves. Il faudra les réparer par votre bonne conduite. (Saint-Laurent 1958, p.232)

Yet, for all his goodness of heart, this *seigneur* can also be a stern and unforgiving judge when circumstances dictate. In common with his junior officers, he is prepared to forget "le règlement" and to countenance the use of "des moyens exceptionnels" in the struggle against an adversary guilty of "cette introduction de l'assassinat dans la guerre" (ibid., pp.165-169).

However, it is as a city-builder that Jasson the *seigneur* really comes into his own: "le colonel bâtit sa ville", as the relevant chapter-heading has it (Chapter XI, ibid., pp.137-148). The "city" in question, Sidi-Rhalem (renamed Sidi-Omar, for no obvious reason, in the later novels) is not only a model *village de regroupement*, it is the Colonel's pride and joy. As such, it is very much the product of exceptional foresight, as a civilian contractor involved in the project makes clear:

- Mon colonel... mon devis est à revoir... Je suis décidé à faire sauter mes bénéfices... C'est trop beau! Ce que vous avez fait est extraordinaire!

[...]

- Il y a trois mois, reprend Richter, quand vous m'avez fait venir ici, que vous m'avez montré auprès de deux ou trois maisons de boue séchée la demi-douzaine de tentes que vous veniez de planter pour accueillir les musulmans décidés à fuir la zone rebelle, je me suis dit que vous... que vous vous faisiez des illusions. Croyez-moi, moi, je suis entrepreneur, on n'improvise pas une ville. Et vous me donnez un beau démenti! (ibid., pp.135-136)

As the creator of Sidi-Rhalem, Jasson is firmly established as what he himself terms "le soloïste" to the French army's "orchestre" (ibid., p.137), or, as another artistic

simile would have it, as the "auteur" of a new reality in Algeria (ibid., p.140). The dazzling success of this project - which is clearly a very far cry from the sordid historical reality of the implementation, frequently by means of force, of the French policy of native resettlement (see Horne 1977, pp.338-339 & Talbott 1980, pp.185-186) - compensates the Colonel for the hardships which are so often the lot of the *seigneur*. It is only by virtue of his disregard for the "profonde fatigue" occasioned by "Cette guerre décourageante" (Saint-Laurent 1961, I, pp. 29 & 32), in fact, that Jasson is able to impose himself as a History-maker. The personal quality of his contribution to the French war effort is insisted upon in a passage such as the following one, in which Saint-Laurent's hero outlines his achievements for the benefit of another colonel:

- Sur le plan militaire, la pacification du Sersou est... satisfaisante. Sur le plan politico-administratif, je crois avoir détruit, sinon détruit du moins entamé sérieusement, le dispositif du réseau rebelle. Et d'un point de vue positif j'ai obtenu que des hommes, des musulmans ayant une influence notable, se mouillent à nos côtés, deviennent maires notamment. Bref, ça se dégèle. [...] Je maintiens des postes. Je fais subsister les villages de ralliés... (ibid., p.13)

"Je... je... je... je... ": omniscient, omnipresent, and quasi-omnipotent in his *secteur*, Colonel Jasson is very close to achieving the "demigod" status described by Horne. This impression is given added weight by the repeated references made to the officer's *baraka*. This notion - which indicates a belief not so much in the good fortune of a particular individual as in the special protection accorded to him by God as a member of His chosen few - is introduced to explain Jasson's miraculous escaping of injury in a grenade attack on the café where he and some of his fellow officers were having a drink (Saint-Laurent 1958, p.96). It is then brought up again when the Colonel's narrow avoidance of a murderous ambush is discussed (ibid., p.154). Something like a myth of the divine right of French army colonels is thus appealed to in Saint-Laurent's treatment of the *seigneur* theme.

Yet, it is through the creation of Sidi-Rhalem that his hero's seigneurial credentials are most clearly established. It is thus no coincidence that *L'Algérie quand on y est* should close with Jasson, who is just about to leave Algeria for a period of

rest in metropolitan France, learning of a rebel attack on "his" village:

Sidi-Rhalem! Il lit lentement.

A une heure du matin, le village de Sidi-Rhalem a été attaqué par plusieurs centaines de rebelles. Le poste a aussitôt ouvert le feu. [...] Les harkistes ont bien tenu. Sidi-Rhalem n'est pas une invention de l'esprit. Français et musulmans ont combattu côte à côte. Ainsi, dans la guerre, naissaient les cités antiques. (ibid., pp.243-244)

Having created his own equivalent of the mediaeval *fief* at Sidi-Rhalem, Saint-Laurent's *seigneur* is able to see the new community come of age in its "antique" struggle for survival against the FLN. With this appeal to Algeria's classical past, the mythical stakes are effectively raised: if Sidi-Rhalem is a new Rome, then Jasson must be a new Romulus, ensuring the existence and ascendancy of his city in what is a most forceful reassertion of North Africa's Latin "heritage".

A very similar ideological foundation underlies the work of Jean Brune, a writer who, incidentally, appears as a character in Saint-Laurent's narrative (Saint-Laurent 1961, I, p.61 & 1961, II, pp.149-152 & passim). The historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet describes Brune's major novel *Cette haine qui ressemble à l'amour* (1961) as being "[un] roman (délirant) de l'Algérie française et de sa mythologie" (Vidal-Naquet 1972, p.196). In what follows, we shall attempt to prove that the specific myth of the French military *seigneur* is at the heart of Brune's literary treatment of the Algerian war.

The central figure in Brune's narrative is an unnamed French colonel. This character - whose individual identity is, as the lack of a name suggests, entirely constituted by and subsumed in his rank - dominates the action of the novel from beginning to end. The opening lines of the novel thus introduce us to the perspective which will be adopted throughout:

Le colonel tendit la main vers l'abat-jour posé de guingois sur une douille d'obus transformée en lampe de bureau. Il déplaça deux fois le cône lumineux d'un geste machinal, plutôt destiné à distraire l'esprit qu'à modifier l'éclairage; puis ayant lâché la lampe il passa sa main sur son front, le revers des doigts effleurant les sourcils, comme pour les lustrer. Il recommença à compter des fiches dont la lumière enflammait le jaune trop vif. Il y en avait sept. Il les étala devant lui, comme des cartes à jouer juxtaposées pour une patience. Il savait que celle qu'il souhaitait trouver ne figurait pas dans le lot. Mais il s'obstinait à la chercher, feignant de croire qu'il l'avait égarée pour retarder le moment où il serait contraint de reconnaître l'évidence et,

désormais, conduit à en tirer les plus redoutables conclusions. (Brune 1961, p.9)

As these lines make clear, the point of view of the narration coincides to a very large extent with that of the central figure: we see the world in general, and the Algerian war in particular, through the eyes of Brune's colonel. The conflict itself is thus reduced to the status of this one man's problem; for, the files described in the text's first paragraph contain clues towards the possible solution of the puzzle which will preoccupy the Colonel - and with him the integrated reader of *Cette haine qui ressemble à l'amour* - for the remainder of its 700 and odd pages. The Colonel's "obsession" (ibid.) concerns his immediate counterpart in the FLN, the local leader of the military wing of the nationalist rebellion, Kim ben Kim. His hunt for this clearly identified adversary will give the rest of the novel's action its basic shape, thereby demonstrating the text's support for what we might call the *traque* school of thinking the Franco-Algerian conflict (the most developed single example of which is Guy Croussy's 1975 novel *Ne pleure pas, la guerre est bonne*, as discussed in the preceding chapter).

As the narrative follows the progress of the man-hunt, ample scope is provided for the Colonel's elucidation of the text's preferred interpretation of the war. (A good deal too much scope, perhaps, given the repetition which is a regular feature of this novel.) In view of Brune's background of *ultra* militancy (see Dessaigne 1983, pp.50-70), it is only to be expected that the Colonel's views should be very favourable to the cause of *Algérie française*. Typically, it falls to him to fire the text's parting political shot when the action finally draws to a close following the death of Kim ben Kim and the destruction of his *bande*:

- Nous sommes tous au fond d'un tunnel, dit le colonel... et tous ensemble... nous marchons désespérément vers la lumière! (Brune 1961, p.706)

So, the figure of the Colonel, which has dominated the novel throughout, presides over its closure. But what of the character himself? Let us consider the

description provided by Ben Driss, a Muslim army officer who deserts the French cause to join the FLN:

Le souvenir du colonel l'obsédait. Il lui gardait un respect qu'il n'avouait pas, mais dont la secrète conscience le grandissait à ses propres yeux. Il méprisait l'ordre que servait l'officier, mais il admirait la façon dont celui-ci le servait, l'indomptable énergie tempérée par une indulgence puisée aux sources de l'amour et accessible à la pitié et la souriante simplicité de grand seigneur qui dissimulait à la fois derrière la même élégante mesure de l'humeur, la détermination ou la lassitude, la colère, l'affection, l'impatience, ou la résignation. Ben Driss devinait où se nouait chez le colonel le secret de cette noblesse. Le guerrier cédait toujours devant l'homme et l'homme donnait un sens à la guerre parce qu'il l'empêchait de se dégrader dans l'atroce férocité des combats de bêtes fauves. Le rebelle avait vu trop d'assassinats, trop d'éborgements, trop d'inutiles mutilations. (ibid., p.506)

This passage is genuinely capital to our understanding of the French literary imaging of the role played by the senior army officer in the Algerian war. Here, we see the myth of the *seigneur* presented in an exceptionally self-conscious and developed fashion. As conceived by Brune, the French military's "grand seigneur" is characterized by a combination of desirable attributes, the most telling of which would seem to be a mythical trinity of indomitable energy, quasi-paternal forbearance, and a cheery unaffectedness. These should all be familiar enough qualities by now, and are regularly embodied by the Colonel as the story unfolds. Less familiar is the somewhat ironic insistence on the protagonist's ability to temper the otherwise ferocious struggle between the FLN and the French security forces. It is in this self-imposed code of military conduct, we are led to believe, that resides "le secret de cette noblesse".

Revealingly, the examples of savagery put forward by the text all relate to rebel atrocities: the army and its various auxiliaries are not actually accused of any particular impropriety. The questions which spring to mind most obviously in this regard are those of torture and summary execution, which together characterize the French military's contribution to *la sale guerre* in Algeria. Now, whilst Ben Driss might claim that, in the case of the Colonel, humanitarian considerations always take precedence over military ones, we have already been informed by the text itself that this is not, in fact, the case. Indeed, long before this particular claim is made, Brune's hero has

revealed himself to be a military realist of the purest stripe. As such, he is prepared to countenance both the torture and the summary execution of FLN "suspects" in order to protect innocent lives. The arguments in favour of this stance - which was historically adopted by a majority of officers serving in Algeria, both regulars and reservists - are regularly rehearsed in Jean Brune's novel.

They are to the fore, for instance, in an extended argument between the Colonel and a liberal priest, referred to simply as *le Père*. Once again, the lack of an individual name is indicative of the character's representative status, and the confrontation between the two men is very much a set-piece debate in which military realism defends itself against the criticisms of the liberal humanists. It may thus be compared with similar arguments elsewhere (e.g., Simon 1958, pp.114-126 & Ikor 1961, pp.277-287). Here, as there, the military's determination to "protéger les innocents" is of prime importance:

- D'un côté des hommes meurent... des innocents... des femmes, des gosses sont mutilés... Ceux qui tuent et qui mutilent les innocents se dissimulent dans une clandestinité que nous ne parvenons pas à percer. Tant qu'ils sont libres, c'est-à-dire tant qu'au fond de leurs repaires ils fabriquent des bombes... tant qu'ils les déposent dans les cafés où les écoles, des milliers d'innocents... des milliers des gosses et de femmes sont des morts en sursis... J'ai le devoir de protéger ces vies... de les sauver... et pour les sauver il me faut découvrir le secret des repaires où l'on fabrique les bombes. Ce secret, ce sont les prisonniers qui en détiennent la clé... Il faut qu'ils me la livrent!...

Le colonel frappe du poing sur la table.

- Il faut qu'ils me la livrent... c'est une question de temps... une course... une question d'heures... de minutes... de secondes peut-être. Alors l'équation se pose ainsi: d'un côté la mort des innocents, de l'autre la souffrance des suspects qui ne va pas jusqu'à la mort. D'un côté des innocents que je sauve... de l'autre un suspect que je ne tue pas... qui vivra au-delà de l'épreuve de la douleur... Choisissez... Moi, j'ai choisi... quand je tiendrai l'un de ceux qui détiennent la clé, je n'hésiterai pas... J'arracherai la vie des innocents à la souffrance des suspects!... (Brune 1961, pp.265-266)

The Colonel's robust theoretical defence of torture is duly borne out in practice, or more accurately in a carefully contrived "concrete" situation which, very conveniently, meets all the preconditions which he has effectively laid down for its use: i.e. the certain guilt of those involved, the clear and specific threat to innocent lives, the urgent need to know, and the effectiveness of torture in extracting the required

information (ibid., pp.442-458 passim). So, Brune's hero sanctions the use of torture, and is presented as having no real choice in the matter. Not that this relieves him of the burden of guilt; on the contrary, the *seigneur* suffers for his high-minded "sacrifice" of the civilized values which he has been brought up to revere:

- Comprenez, - dit le colonel, - si je cède, si je refuse d'entrer dans la mêlée au nom de valeurs qui m'interdisent les compromissions du corps à corps... je serai vaincu... et ma défaite sera d'abord celle des valeurs que j'aurai voulu sauver... Au contraire si je prends sur moi, au prix d'un sacrifice douloureux, dont je vous [le Père] supplie de mesurer l'importance... presque la cruauté... de désobéir provisoirement à certains des commandements sur lesquels se fonde l'idée que nous nous faisons de la civilisation... pour répondre à l'assaut de la force... rendre coup pour coup et assurer la victoire... Je sais que cette victoire acquise je rendrai les commandements un instant négligés à toutes leurs exigences! (ibid., pp.266-267)

In short, the *seigneur* takes the heavy burden of torture upon himself in order that civilization as we know it may be preserved for lesser mortals. The French army's systematic recourse to such techniques as *la gégène* and *le bain*, not to mention even more inhuman and degrading methods of extracting information from prisoners (see Horne 1977, pp.198-200), is thus magically transformed into a duty which cannot be shirked: *noblesse oblige*, once again.

Going a crucial step further, the Colonel is prepared to circumvent judicial procedures in deciding not only the guilt of these same native "suspects", but also the punishment which they should receive. The case of the café bomber Miloud ben Hadj Abdallah - whose responsibility for the deaths of two European civilians, including a six-year-old girl, is, once again very conveniently, beyond any possible doubt - is typical of this rough and ready justice:

Le colonel revoyait la scène... la fureur de la mère et la petite fille couchée dans le café au milieu d'une mare de sang.

- Si nous le livrons à la justice, dit [le lieutenant] Hoffman, il passera six ou quinze mois en prison. Puis l'horreur de son crime effacée par d'autres horreurs, il sera condamné à deux ans de prison. Surtout les gens de la montagne auront oublié l'affaire. Le crime paraîtra impuni... Et d'autres grenades rouleront dans les cafés...

- Je sais, dit le colonel.

C'était toujours le même problème. D'un côté la même carence... le même temps perdu... de l'autre la guerre et la mort qui frappaient partout à la fois... plus vite... toujours plus vite...

- Fusillé, dit le colonel. (Brune 1961, p.88)



On the basis of this evidence, Brune's protagonist must be regarded as an adherent to the *efficacité* school of thought (as described in our consideration of the paratrooper). Thus defined, it is difficult to see how he may simultaneously be considered to be an exponent of warfare which might reasonably be deemed *chevaleresque*. Nevertheless, this is precisely the mythical tack taken by Brune's novel, as our earlier examination of Ben Driss's attitude to the Colonel made clear. Let us now briefly consider the way in which these seemingly conflicting ideological demands on the character of the *seigneur* are reconciled, albeit superficially, by the text.

There are two main ways in which the text manages to appeal to the myth of war as an essentially knightly pursuit, whilst simultaneously permitting the description of historically "effective" military methods. To begin with, the Colonel, as the occupier in place, with the combined might of the army and civil administration behind him, is able to refrain from using the terrorist tactics adopted, out of necessity, by his militarily weak and numerically inferior opponents. He has little need of *assassinats*, *égorgements* or *mutilations* to exercise his authority over the disputed territory, and may therefore be plausibly represented as keeping the French military campaign clean by "refusing" to resort to such savagery. Whenever Brune's hero does use methods not sanctioned by the Geneva convention, such as the torture and summary disposal of Muslim suspects, then the relevant course of action appears always to be imposed on him, either by clearly defined circumstances or by a higher justice. So, the Colonel only tortures in order to protect innocent lives, whilst his unauthorized killings are to be regarded as executions, rather than murders.

The second source of the Colonel's mythical *grandeur* has already been discussed. Brune's hero does not enjoy having to make use of "dirty tricks" against his adversary: on the contrary, he suffers for it. This point is made particularly clearly in the section of the novel which deals with the Colonel's use of *bleuite* against the local FLN *katiba*. This tactic consisted in the spreading or the encouragement of unfounded

fears of betrayal within the forces of the rebellion, and met with considerable historical success (see Horne 1977, pp.254-261, 322-325 & passim). In the fictive Algeria of *Cette haine qui ressemble à l'amour*, the ruse is similarly effective, but is considered with disdain by the figure responsible for its operational use. This narrative ploy - which is at least as crafty as anything the Colonel can come up with - enables the genuinely contradictory demands of *efficacité* and *chevalerie* to be met, or at least to appear so. The relevant exchange between the central character and his O.R. (*officier de renseignement*) is a mythical *trompe-l'oeil* of considerable interest:

- Il y a beaucoup de façons de tuer, celle-ci n'est pas très élégante!
  - Hélas, dit Hoffman, l'élégance n'a plus cours dans cette guerre!
  - Si... elle a cours pour nous... par conséquent elle a toujours cours!
- Il s'arrêta pour dire:
- Il faut que ces méthodes soient une exception... si elles sont monnaie courante elles privent de sens la victoire qu'elles nous permettent de remporter.
- Il ajouta:
- Il en est de même pour la torture!... (Brune 1961, p.678)

Here, as in his argument with *le Père*, Brune's colonel is confronted with one of the characterizing ethical problems not only of the Algerian conflict, but also of every military response to insurrectionary violence in the colonies in the post-war period: i.e. whether or not uncivilized means may legitimately be used to preserve Western civilization outside the mother country. This crucial issue was to become the rock on which the French liberal intelligentsia would founder (as we shall see in the following chapter). For Brune, the diehard supporter of *Algérie française*, there were to be no such qualms about the use of *des moyens exceptionnels* against a "barbarous" enemy. The Colonel may nod in the direction of the anti-torture campaign and its arguments, but his adherence to the military realists' line is never in doubt. He tortures, he executes summarily, he deceives; all the rest is mythical window-dressing.

The notion of sacrifice just referred to is also present in the text's frequent descriptions of the Colonel as a monk. Like Lartéguy's paratroopers, to whom the term was also applied, Brune's hero is depicted as a man who has foregone conventional human society in return for the power to make History. As the following

passage makes clear, it is in this sacrifice that a major part of his *noblesse* resides:

Hoffman tourne les pages des dossiers, appelle des noms... et le colonel s'informe... commente... décide... explique les nécessités de l'indulgence quand il pardonne... tranche parfois avec une soudaine rigueur qui fait lever les yeux des officiers et de Si-Ali. Ils ne voient alors qu'une tête baissée... une frange de cheveux courts ramenés sur le haut du front et la tache d'une calvitie précoce. Ils pensent irrésistiblement à un moine... et, effectivement, le colonel est ce moine, enfermé avec ses méditations et ses angoisses... et pour qui rien ne compte plus que le salut dont il rêve pour les hommes de la montagne et des plateaux. (ibid., p.336)

With this sanctification of the Colonel, Brune goes just about as far as he can with the notion of the French military's self-sacrifice in the cause of a "new" order in Algeria. Interestingly, the foregoing extract also suggests the independence of the *seigneur* of both of the Algerian communities. This notion is clearly of some importance in so far as the reader's perception of the senior officer as a disinterested political arbiter is concerned. It is not surprising, therefore, that Brune should be at pains to represent his hero as being both above and apart from the two civilian populations of Algeria. However, it is only the nature of the military's links with the *pieds-noirs* which is in any real doubt, and so it is in this area alone that the text provides the reader with a little "clarification". The vehicle for this last is the murder by one Pescada, a European *ultra*, of a liberal *imam*. Refusing to bow to settler pressure, the Colonel states his determination to see justice done (ibid., pp.523-524). He thus confirms the autonomy of both the army in general and of himself in particular, having previously hinted at it by means of observations about his unwillingness to defend the settlers' privileged position, as opposed to the French colonial *oeuvre* (ibid., pp.411 & 460). This theme also occurs in the work of both Lartéguy and Saint-Laurent, but will be seen most clearly in that of Vladimir Volkoff. The same is true, *a fortiori*, of Brune's treatment of the potential perils of seigneurial power.

What we have in mind here is the corruption of the individual which is commonly held to result from the exercise of power. This theme, which ties in straightforwardly with that of self-sacrifice, is only really present in embryonic form in

Brune's novel. Nevertheless, it does occur, and will provide an appropriate foundation for our discussion of the theme as it is developed in Volkoff's narrative. Three references only need to be borne in mind at this stage: the foregoing account of the Colonel's brilliantly successful use of *la ruse* (the significance of this sub-theme will be made clear in due course); the belief of Brune's priest (*le Père*) that the practice of torture constitutes a surrender to "la tentation d'arracher à ces hommes, par n'importe quel moyen, ce qu'ils ne veulent pas dire... ou ce qu'ils ne peuvent pas dire!..." (ibid., p.265); and the Colonel's own remark that arming the local Muslims against the FLN, "...c'est tenter le diable et jouer à pile ou face avec le destin..." (ibid., p.364). What we have here, albeit in an undeveloped form, is the idea that the Colonel - "[le] seul juge de la façon dont les hommes doivent servir..." (ibid., p.524) - may, one day, have to account for his actions before a higher authority, or, more accurately, the ultimate one. The risk of perdition run by the *seigneur* thus provides one more indication of his essential *noblesse*: by chancing his soul, he proves its mettle, as it were.

Two somewhat less abstruse aspects of the Colonel's persona will serve to complete this demonstration of the character's mythical identity with Raspéguy, Jasson, and their likes. First, Brune's protagonist displays all the qualities of omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence noted previously. Consider his surprise arrival - alone, as befits the *seigneur* - at a lonely mountain village:

- Dieu soit loué!  
 - Dieu soit loué!  
 Un homme montra du doigt les crêtes de Yemma Halima.  
 - Nous t'attendions de l'autre côté, dit-il, au bout de la route... Et voici que tu tombes du ciel... Tu est le Diable!... *el chitanel* (ibid., p.478)

Once again, the reference to the devil is to be retained for future discussion. What interests us here is the suggestion that the Colonel is everywhere present within his *secteur*, and may pop up whenever and wherever he is least expected. Meeting Muslim representatives in the mountains, or visiting their European counterparts on their farms; handling his troops on the ground, or directing operations from his H.Q.;

whisked over the rugged terrain by helicopter, bounced over it in a jeep, or slogging through the bush on foot, the Colonel is the complete man of action, seemingly in command of everything and everyone at all times. His omniscience is as obvious in his dealing with the settlers as it is with the Muslims, whether it be a question of the former group's clandestine payment of the FLN, or that of the latter (*ibid.*, pp.531 & 482 respectively; cf. Saint-Laurent, above). Small wonder that the local Muslim population should be prompted to think that "...décidément ces Français sont des diables... Ils savent tout... Des chitanes... Des diables... Comment peuvent-ils savoir?" (Brune 1961, p.483).

To this all-seeing knowledge of his *secteur* and those who live in it, we must add the characteristically seigneurial ability to provide certainty: the Colonel has only to assure his listeners that "la France ne partira pas" (*ibid.*, p.492), and the wish becomes the subject population's new reality. The fact that his assertion was to be denied by subsequent historical developments is not really to the point; rather, what counts is the way in which the myth of French colonial permanence is uttered by the text. The Colonel's actual voicing of the myth is only part of the story, and further relevant material is to be found, in fact, in the narrative's depiction of the *seigneur* as a city-builder.

As with Sidi-Rhalem, Colonel Jasson's model village, "Sohane" has little in common with the sordid *camps de regroupement* which were its historical counterparts. Here too, the community's mythical antecedents are soon established to be the city-states of the classical past, as the Colonel's plans for "his" city make clear: "Il rêvait de rendre Sohane a son passé romain et de la reconstruire comme ces castellae dont les ruines jalonnent encore les djebels et les steppes d'Afrique" (*ibid.*, p.585). The significance of the *pieds-noirs'* regular appeal to the myth of Algeria's Latin heritage is discussed at length elsewhere. What is of interest to us at this time is the emphasis laid by Brune's novel, like that of Saint-Laurent before it, on the need apparently felt

by the French army's senior officers on the ground to engage in the building of personal colonial empires. In the case of Brune's protagonist, this typically seigneurial trait can be understood in the light of his desire to create a new colonial order in Algeria. As he himself explains to Ben Driss:

Il parla de Sohane et, se laissant emporter par la passion de convaincre qui le dévorait, il dit que le temps scellerait seul cet ordre nouveau qui s'ébauchait partout, le modèlerait lentement, en modifierait à la fois l'ensemble et les détails... Mais que cet avenir ne pouvait naître que des disciplines collectives dans lesquelles se fonde l'obstination des peuples. Il chanta les vertus de la patience et parla de cette grandeur de l'obéissance qui prête un sens au mot servir! (ibid., p.651)

So, the salvation of Ben Driss - and with him Muslim Algeria - lies in discipline, and obedience of a quasi-feudal kind: the *ordre nouveau* sounds suspiciously like the old one. Nevertheless, the future role of the Algerian people is at least spelled out: to serve. But what of the *seigneur*, what will be his role in the new Algeria? Fortunately, Brune's colonel makes "le rôle du chef" equally plain. His interlocutor is, as ever, the liberal priest, whilst the focus of their argument is the Colonel's decision to establish Sohane as a *centre de regroupement*:

- Pourquoi?

- Parce que je suis le seul ici à faire la guerre... et que la guerre exige que je me préoccupe à la fois de priver Kim ben Kim des ses refuges et d'assurer la sécurité des innocents. [...] C'est pourquoi j'ai pris la responsabilité de rassembler les Ouled Misratine à Sohane...

[...]

Il y a, dit-il, une autre raison. Les gens seront mieux ici, groupés en une société cohérente, que dispersés dans la montagne.

[...]

Ils seront plus heureux icil

- C'est vous qui en décidez!

- Je le sais.

- On n'a pas le droit, dit le Père, de faire le bonheur des hommes malgré eux!

- Si! cria le colonel.

[...]

Le rôle du chef est de hâter ces prises de conscience! (ibid., p.588)

So, there we have it, the Colonel's plans for Sohane and for the country which it is deemed to represent in microcosm: an Algeria which will prove to the world "que la synthèse est possible entre l'homme d'Europe et l'homme d'outre-mer, que la haine n'est pas inéluctable..." (ibid., p.673). Provided, that is, that the old vision of

paternalist colonial advance is never challenged by the Muslim majority of Algeria's population. So much for the "brave new world" of Jean Brune's anonymous hero.

Brune's extended expression of his faith in the colonial enterprise leads us inevitably to consider the single most developed treatment of the seigneurial theme in the literature of the Franco-Algerian conflict: Vladimir Volkoff's *La Leçon d'anatomie* (1980). At the heart of this novel - set in the final, senselessly bloody, days of the war - is one particularly sordid historical episode, and one truly imposing fictional character. The relevant factual background centres on the vexed question of *le sort des harkis*, i.e. the fate at the hands of the FLN of those Algerian Muslims variously implicated in the French colonial cause; a preoccupation which it shares with Bernard Moinet's *Ahmed? Connais pas...* (1980). The novel's sustained attack on French callousness and cynicism in this regard may reasonably be considered to be a continuation of the critique of de Gaulle's handling of the Algerian problem to be found in Volkoff's best-selling thriller in the *Le Carré* mode, *Le Retournement* (1979). The work's central figure, in contrast, requires detailed examination in his own right. To begin this process, let us merely note one commentator's description of Volkoff's fictional colonel, François Beaujeux, as "le plus étonnant personnage de la littérature d'aujourd'hui, héros révolté caché souvent sous les masques du bouffon, seigneur, héritier des croisés..." (Bruller 1982, pp.29-31). Although we would probably not wish to go quite as far as Jacqueline Bruller in our estimation of Beaujeux's standing in modern literature, her remarks do give some indication of the character's pertinence to the present discussion. The most straightforward way of making this broad relevance more specific is to consider the Algerian campaign of Volkoff's military *seigneur*.

François Beaujeux is a regular officer of senior rank and extensive experience who, at the height of an impressive career, is offered the singularly unglamorous mission of guarding an oil pipeline and its associated port facility in the period leading up to Algerian independence. The Colonel's posting *là-bas* is not designed to combat

the FLN, but rather to keep the violent outbursts of the various factions still involved in the conflict - whether Muslim or European, military or civilian - within acceptable limits, in order that the imminent transfer of sovereignty should be achieved as smoothly as possible. In Beaujeux's own, profoundly anti-Gaullist, opinion, he is essentially required to *bazarder* what he considers to be "la vocation islamique de la France" (Volkoff 1980, p.89). The protagonist's resolutely pro-colonial stance is thus made clear. What remains to be explained are his reasons for agreeing to undertake a task which is, as far as he is concerned, wholly inappropriate for a French officer: "Qu'une proposition pareille puisse être faite à un officier non encore déshonoré indiquerait clairement aux yeux d'un historien ce que valait l'armée, le siècle et le pays auxquels l'officier appartenait" (ibid., pp.57-58).

Jacqueline Piatier has accurately described the image of the Algerian conflict put forward by *La Leçon d'anatomie* as that of "une absurdité assortie d'une terrible souillure" (Piatier 1980, p.17). For Beaujeux - as for Volkoff himself (see Bruller 1982, pp.128-129) - the root cause of this *souillure* is to be found in the shabby treatment accorded by France to those Muslim Algerians gullible enough to believe in the promise, regularly reiterated by both the politicians and his fellow officers, that, as Brune's colonel puts it, "la France ne partira pas". He explains his thinking on the subject to a junior officer, Miloslavski, in the following passage:

- Il y a, dans la vie, bien des choses qu'il est en notre pouvoir de faire. Supplicier un enfant, violer une jeune fille, ne pas protéger un innocent qu'on martyrise, prendre un engagement et oublier de le tenir. Mais, pour ma part, je n'imagine rien de plus abominable que la situation suivante. J'ai une querelle avec Pierre, qui est plus fort que moi. Je vais demander à Paul de me défendre. Remarquez que Paul aussi est moins fort que Pierre, mais à nous deux, nous espérons en venir à bout. Nous commençons la bagarre, et, au bout d'un certain temps, j'en ai assez, et je dis à Paul: <<Je rentre à la maison. Débrouille-toi comme tu pourras.>> Je rentre, et je laisse Pierre étrangler Paul sans me faire plus de souci. Voyez-vous, cela me paraît encore beaucoup plus ignoble, beaucoup plus déshonorant pour moi, que si j'avais commencé moi-même par étrangler Paul. (Volkoff 1980, p.380)

Having outlined the situation in this mock-childish fashion, Beaujeux goes on to detail the torture, mutilation and death which await those Muslims naïve enough to



have believed in France. He then puts a question to his youthful interlocutor:

Vous imaginez un instant les malédictions qui monteront au ciel contre la France, proférées pas ces écorchés, ces salés, ces châtrés, s'ils peuvent proférer encore quelque chose de leurs lèvres découpées en dents de scie? Vous croyez qu'une nation peut encore être une nation après un lâchage pareil?... (ibid., pp.381-382)

The answer to this question, as far as Beaujeux himself is concerned, is no; or, at least, not without some form of expiation of the nation's burden of guilt. It is the responsibility for this mammoth task which Volkoff's protagonist will seek to assume in *La Leçon d'anatomie*. He is prepared to accept his dishonourable posting only because it will put him in a position to do something about the lot of the unfortunate *harkis*. This fact is only made plain late on in the novel, although the Colonel's plans for a mysterious operation named *Riwbeodeam* ("Expiation" in his private code) are referred to throughout. In this way, a good deal of interest is generated in Beaujeux's project, not to mention a fair measure of old-fashioned suspense. By the time the nature of the operation is revealed, in consequence, the integrated reader may safely be assumed to be solidly behind the sympathetically evoked central figure: his attempt to repay what he calls "la dette d'honneur de la France" (ibid., p.451) has become "our" project, as it were.

In fact, Beaujeux's operation is really a very modest one, for all the grand - not to say, grandiose - ideas with which it is surrounded. As the Colonel himself puts it, with hindsight, and in characteristically facetious style:

Il s'agissait de faire passer la flaque d'eau à 1 456 musulmans fidèles, dont 443 combattants et 1 023 femmes, enfants et autres impedimenta. Difficultés majeures: primo, trouver un tonnage suffisant pour transporter tout ce petit monde-là d'un coup; secundo, amener le troupeau à pied d'oeuvre sans que les rebelles aient le temps d'intervenir s'ils en avaient envie; tertio, avoir la population et la troupe française bien en main, pour pallier tout incident s'il en éclatait un. (ibid., p.441)

The story of Beaujeux's achievement, via a series of intermediate operations, of this self-imposed humanitarian goal is at the very heart of *La Leçon d'anatomie*, where, indeed, it takes up the greater part of the novel's action. Moreover, it is as the author, in every sense of the word, of this daring scheme that Beaujeux is primarily able to

demonstrate his noble qualities. These will be considered in turn, as we now examine the mechanics of Volkoff's treatment of the seigneurial theme.

The first thing that should be noted about Volkoff's handling of the myth of the *seigneur* is as follows: where Lartéguy, Saint-Laurent, and Brune only make use of the myth in a fairly indirect and essentially haphazard fashion, Volkoff appeals to it directly and systematically. This process begins with his physical descriptions of the protagonist - we read, for instance, of "la masse seigneuriale du colonel Beaujeux" (ibid., p.180) - and extends to take in the very form of the novel. This last point requires some explanation.

We have already described the clandestine operation, *Riwbeodeam*, which forms the narrative core of *La Leçon d'anatomie*. We have also referred to the series of intermediate operations which enable Beaujeux to carry out his prime objective. Each of these operations - of which there are five, or six if we count the *montage* described in the film script which Beaujeux subsequently produces - forms the subject-matter of one of the novel's constituent chapters, and each describes a different aspect of the Colonel's pursuit of *Riwbeodeam*: his taking in hand of the local military, his wooing of the civil administration, his breaking of the *ultras*, his establishment of a *modus vivendi* with the leadership of the FLN, and the like. This format has the effect of separating and simplifying the many intertwined strands of a complex historical reality: the Algerian war is laid out and dissected, as is the body in the Rembrandt painting which supplies the title for both the Colonel's film and Volkoff's novel. Order - or, at least, a readily comprehensible interpretation of history - is thus imposed on the apparent chaos of France's final and most traumatic colonial war. Unfortunately, the patient must be dead before a post-mortem can be carried out, and it is a dead Algeria that we are presented with in *La Leçon d'anatomie*, frozen for ever by the ubiquitous myth of the *seigneur*.

However, the "compartmentalization" of the conflict, its artificial division into seemingly discrete units, is not the only means by which Beaujeux manages to impose order on the final days of his nation's Algerian *débâcle*. In addition, and most significantly, the Colonel himself is writing the war, as the foregoing reference to his screenplay will have suggested. For, Volkoff's is a thoroughly modern novel, in which the author is given considerable scope to display his virtuosity. Jacqueline Piatier, once again:

Cette fin de la guerre d'Algérie ne nous est pas contée directement, mais rétrospectivement par le colonel six ans plus tard, et il s'interroge sur les moyens de transcrire la réalité vécue en oeuvre d'art. A travers deux carnets, le temps de l'écriture se mêle au temps des faits. Cela donne au roman une architecture assez compliquée. Cela permet aussi à l'auteur de varier les tons, les modes, les points de vue de sa narration. (Piatier 1980, p.20)

A complex, self-conscious text, then, in which the central figure's subsequent search for an appropriate literary form for his Algerian experiences is given almost as much space as the experiences themselves. It is this which explains the novel's quite remarkable opening section, in which the first ten pages of the narrative are given over to the most abstruse theoretical speculation on the problematic relationship between literature and life. Such a presentation of the Franco-Algerian conflict can scarcely fail to have profound mythological implications. Indeed, we would go so far as to suggest that this particular formal option is nothing less than a structural manifestation of the text's adopted historical vision. This may best be described in terms of its systematic evaporation of mass history: that is to say, its characteristic tendency to denigrate the historical role of collectivities, in favour of a view of history as the privileged domain of an élite band of Great Men - *seigneurs*, in other words. The quintessentially mythical nature of this strategy has been pointed out by Barthes:

...un trait constitutif de la mentalité réactionnaire... est de disperser la collectivité en individus et l'individu en essences. [...] Ceci participe d'une technique générale de mystification qui consiste à formaliser autant qu'on peut le désordre social. (Barthes 1957, pp.135-136)

In what follows, we shall seek to demonstrate that Volkoff's novel is only properly comprehensible in the light of its systematic appeal to the myth of the *seigneur*. Central to its treatment of the myth is the text's depiction of Beaujeux as a maker of History, with the other constituent parts of the Colonel's mythical persona largely subordinated to this key theme. Nevertheless, it is worth considering these secondary aspects of Beaujeux's seigneurial make-up before concentrating on the treatment accorded to history itself.

The central figure's imposition of a literary order on the chaos of Algeria is mirrored, in the main body of the narrative, by his assertion of his control over *la Ville*, as the port is intriguingly referred to throughout. And it is the image of the anatomy lesson which binds these two elements of the theme of seigneurial creation together. Consider the following passage, in which Beaujeux explains the resemblance which he perceived between the clandestine meeting which he attended with a group of  *pied-noir*  activists and the Dutch masterpiece:

*...egama Tomadani, Leçon d'anatomie...* C'était après la rencontre avec les <<amis>> de Richard qu'il avait noté ces mots, frappé sans doute par l'extrême intensité d'expression qu'il avait trouvée sur les visages de ces gens peu intelligents mais avides d'apprendre quelque chose de lui, et d'ailleurs artistement groupés par le hasard dans le salon clair-obscur des Oliviers. <<Le professeur, c'était moi, pensa-t-il, se rappelant le tableau qu'ils formaient ensemble, et le cadavre, c'était ce pays que nous avons aimé. (Volkoff 1980, p.227)

Immediately apparent, here, is the insidious suggestion that an *Algérie* which is no longer *française* is little better than a corpse. Of greater interest, however, is the depiction of the protagonist's involvement with European extremists as a form of academic instruction, and the further association of this involvement with the artistic achievement of Rembrandt. Basically, the theme of the anatomy lesson serves to place Beaujeux on a mythical pedestal. As the professor of anatomy, he is established as a superior intelligence, isolated physically and intellectually from those lesser mortals who surround him, hanging on his every word and desperately in need of his magistral guidance. In addition, the imaging of the Colonel's activities in terms of a great work

of art serves to reinforce the text's underlying equation of political power and art: Beaujeux's imposition of his order on *la Ville* is to be regarded as an essentially artistic *oeuvre*, resembling in kind not only Rembrandt's "Anatomy Lesson", but also his own film script, and, indeed, Volkoff's novel - both of which share its title.

Of particular importance in this regard is the text's suggestion that the Colonel's political/military *oeuvre* participates, as do both the final product of his literary endeavours and Rembrandt's painting, in the divine ordering of the universe. Whilst works of art fill gaps left by God in the universal continuum (*ibid.*, pp.191-192; cf. Bruller 1982, pp.14, 28 & 69), Beaujeux exercises nothing less than a God-given right to rule. As he explains to a captured rebel fighter:

- C'est très bien que vous n'avez jamais vu de rebelles, lui dit-il. C'est très bien, parce que chez moi ceux qui n'ont pas fait le mal ne sont pas punis. Ceux qui ont fait beaucoup de mal sont punis beaucoup. Ceux qui ont fait un peu de mal sont punis un peu. [...] Ceux qui avouent leur mal sont punis à moitié. Parce qu'ils sont humbles, et que Dieu aime les humbles, et moi aussi. [...] Mais si vous avez jeté des bombes, égorgé des vieux sans défense, violé des femmes: il est mal de pardonner ce mal-là. Dieu fait ce qu'il veut là-haut, mais pas moi ici: je n'ai pas le droit. Moi, je suis puni. [...] Le bien, c'est le bien, et le mal, c'est le mal. Un jour, si Dieu veut, Hamou Aslam viendra vous juger. Mais tant que ce n'est pas lui, c'est moi que Dieu a placé ici. Et je suis responsable devant lui de ce que je juge. (Volkoff 1980, pp.246-247)

As is so often the case, it is by and through the dispensation of French colonial "justice" that the military administrator is able to establish his seigneurial credentials. This repeated appeal to divine authority - God is, in fact, the ultimate *Seigneur*, before whom the Colonel himself will one day be judged (*ibid.*, pp.125 & 451) - insists upon the "godly" nature of Beaujeux's Algerian "reign". Moreover, it suggests that the Colonel is not only sanctioned by God, but also resembles Him in certain key respects: "Dieu aime les humbles, et moi aussi". If Beaujeux is not actually God himself - as the Colonel's observation on their respective rights makes plain - he is, perhaps, the next best thing: a combination of Solomon and Caesar. As for the deity, there can be little doubting his credentials as Barthes's "Forme sublimée du gouvernement français" (Barthes 1957, p.139).

Given the particular circumstances in which Beaujeux appears on the Algerian scene, his ability to influence the situation is necessarily limited. He had dreamed of being the *dictateur providentiel* of a "new" Algeria (Volkoff 1980, p.57), and had he taken charge of this particular *secteur* at an earlier stage in the conflict, as he was asked to do, he might well have been able to prevent the transfer of local Muslim allegiances to the FLN:

S'il avait accepté ce commandement à l'époque de l'idylle, alors, il n'en doutait pas, il aurait pu s'approprier chaque rocher, chaque motte de terre, chaque olivier, non pas tant par le quadrillage des postes et des patrouilles, par l'ouverture d'écoles et de pistes, par le pourchas inlassable du terroriste, mais par sa propre présence dans chaque village, dans chaque maison, dans l'âme de chacun de ses sujets. Ah! il les aurait tous séduits, les vieux moustachus qui rêvaient d'un passé féodal, et les jeunes rasés qui voulaient l'égalité des droits, et même les femmes, si profondément influentes en pays berbère. Il aurait su comment inspirer à la fois plus de confiance et plus de terreur que les chefs rebelles. Il aurait su quand châtier, quand gracier... Il aurait créé dans certains villages les industries nécessaires pour absorber une pléthore de main-d'oeuvre... Bref, il aurait fait à 150 000 hommes le seul cadeau véritablement royal: la prospérité dans la paix. (ibid., pp.50-51)

A properly seigneurial reign of this kind is inevitably precluded by the troublesome historical realities of the Algerian situation in 1961, as Beaujeux himself is the first to admit (ibid., pp.50 & 57). Nevertheless, the Colonel remains convinced of his ability to exert his authority over the sector's Muslim population: "La seule manière dont je puisse encore régner sur ces gens - c'est-à-dire la seule manière dont je puisse leur rendre service, puisque régner est servir, mais royalement - c'est de leur faire savoir que j'existe et que je suis juste" (ibid., p.50). In this "regal" fashion, Beaujeux will be able to exert just enough influence over the natives to permit the successful undertaking of his clandestine operation, *Riwbeodeam*. He may not be omnipresent, nor yet in a position to build his city, but the Colonel will bring order and justice, albeit temporarily, to the Muslim population of the port and the surrounding countryside.

Beaujeux's reign over the local elements of the other relevant social groups must be similarly narrowly motivated and imperfect: the Colonel will only command his soldiers and officers, and only take charge of the *pieds-noirs*, in such a way and to such an extent as is dictated by the imperatives of his rescue plan for the *harkis*. As a

strictly temporary ruler, Beaujeux must naturally restrict himself to the limited number of clearly defined and realistically attainable goals previously cited: to arrange adequate transportation for the *harkis* and their families; to prepare this group for departure whilst avoiding possible interference from the FLN; and to have both the local populations and the military well in hand in order to be in a position to cope with any problems that might occur (ibid., p.441). The achievement of these goals has less to do with conventional military operations than with a combination of image-building and psychological *montages*, and it is to these facets of Beaujeux's Algerian reign that we must now turn. In fact, it will not be necessary to consider the full range of techniques resorted to by the Colonel in order to cast his seigneurial spell over *la Ville* and its various inhabitants: a brief consideration of the range of terms used will, together with one or two specific examples, be adequate for our purposes.

It is no coincidence that the third of the intermediate operations undertaken by Beaujeux in preparation for *Riwbeodeam* should be named *Casanova*, for seduction is the corner-stone of the Colonel's seigneurial rule. As the protagonist says early on with regard to the troops under his command: "Je ferai ... mon numéro pour les conquérir..." (ibid., p.49); this strategy is applied with equal relish in his dealings with the other social groups embroiled in the Algerian conflict. Central to Beaujeux's manipulation of the military and civil administration, of the OAS and the FLN, is his scrupulous cultivation of his public image. So, for his fellow senior officers, the Colonel adopts a spurious air of stupidity: "il savait qu'il vaut toujours mieux passer pour moins malin qu'on ne l'est si on fait métier d'être malin" (ibid., p.126). While, in contrast, *la troupe* is provided with ample scope for marvelling at the many talents of their new *patron*. Take, for instance, his very carefully staged demonstration of his skill on the regimental assault course. Having decided that such a display "servirait sa réclame" (ibid., p.170), Beaujeux takes advantage of the discomfort of one of the conscripts to make his dramatic entrance. Turning on an unfortunate NCO, who is

content to mock his young charge in time-honoured military style, the Colonel climbs the apparatus to help the soldier himself. This done Beaujeux goes on to tackle a selection of the remaining obstacles. His calculated performance may lack the supreme athleticism demonstrated by Lartéguy's Colonel Raspéguy, but it establishes the protagonist's seigneurial credentials even more surely:

Il se garda bien de franchir les obstacles qui, l'autre soir, l'avaient essoufflé, ou lui avaient coûté trop d'efforts. Rien n'est plus lamentable qu'un chef essoufflé. Il ne rampa ni sous les barbelés, ni dans les buses, et laissa le sous-officier jeter des cailloux aux postérieurs proéminents. Il ne se hasarda pas sur la poutre d'équilibre, et contourna, comme toute la troupe le faisait, la fameuse fenêtre, réservée aux parachutistes et aux élèves gradés; mais il escalada le mur, que sa haute taille et la détente de ses cuisses lui facilitaient, et s'offrit même le luxe de sauter dans la fosse aux lions, se retrouvant aux pieds de la troupe, la tête à la hauteur des croquenots, et d'autant plus seigneur de la situation. Il fit une belle démonstration d'agilité sur la planchette irlandaise, la franchissant dans la foulée, trouvant de la joie à la façon dont ses cuisses et ses jarrets projetaient son gros corps vers le haut. Il s'abstint du sprint final, et marcha posément vers le poteau d'arrivée...

A la troupe, il ne dit rien, croyant en avoir fait assez. Il savait bien que, dans huit jours, la légende le décrirait franchissant la fenêtre la tête en avant et dansant une gigue sur la poutre d'équilibre. Il ne lui en fallait pas plus. Une troupe hypnotisée, un chef légendaire, et il aurait, sur ce plan-ci, la situation en main. (ibid., pp.174-175)

Beaujeux's systematic imposition of his multi-faceted *légende* on the officers and men of the 159<sup>e</sup> RI, on the one hand, and on the European and Muslim populations, on the other, is such that his status as "le chef de ce grand corps à têtes multiples qu'est un régiment, de cet autre corps qu'est un secteur" (ibid., p.128) is established beyond any possible doubt by the time he is ready to implement his planned "repatriation" of the *harkis*. Acutely aware of the importance of his personal prestige, Beaujeux is constantly at pains to respect the codes and conventions of *la bienséance*. This principle is extended to such readily visible trappings of power as his house and car. So, the former is selected as "une maison digne d'un grand chef" (ibid., p.77), whilst the latter is chosen above all for its impact on public opinion:

Il avait toujours aimé les grosses voitures, mais se serait peut-être contenté de la 203 de service, par économie, s'il n'avait eu à tenir son rang devant les pétroliers. Il serait inadmissible, pensait-il, que le colonel commandant le secteur, investi de pouvoirs capitaux sur tout un département, fit moins grande figure que ce qu'il appelait avec dédain les pompistes de première classe. S'ils roulaient en DS ou en 404, le colonel ne pouvait faire moins que d'avoir une Pontiac verte, ressemblant à un crapaud géant,



et tenant toute la largeur des petites rues de la Ville, si bien qu'il fallait lui céder le passage, malgré qu'on en eût. (ibid., p.152)

Through this constant attention to the creation of a favourable image of himself and his office, Beaujeux is able to exert real authority over the various populations and interest groups present in his sector. He backs up these public relations activities with overt military operations against the FLN, and covert *montages* directed not only against the rebels, but also against the OAS, the oilmen, and even the police. The thinking behind just one of these clandestine operations - that recounted in the film script entitled "La Leçon d'anatomie" - reveals the extent to which they too are ultimately motivated by considerations of personal prestige.

The *montage* in question is a particularly complex one designed to make an example of a brutal European police inspector who is foolish enough to challenge Beaujeux's seigneurial authority. The outcome is a foregone conclusion:

A cette époque, Beaujeux entreprit une nouvelle tournée de ses postes. Il aurait dû la faire depuis un certain temps déjà, mais il l'avait remise de semaine en semaine, attendant d'avoir retrouvé la face par la disparition de Gonzalès. Il s'était peut-être exagéré l'importance de l'avanie qui lui avait été faite, mais il savait trop de quels détails, de quelles nuances est tissée l'autorité, et il appréhendait de revoir des officiers qui lui avaient donné leur confiance et auraient pu la regretter. Or, la mort tient de l'avalanche: elle emporte avec elle non seulement la vie mais encore bien des agglomérats qu'elle ne vise pourtant pas directement. Gonzalès mort, Beaujeux redevenait Ks ks l'Invincible, même si ce n'était pas lui qui avait tué Gonzalès. (ibid., p.399)

It is through the shrewd cultivation of his personal prestige, then, coupled with a genuinely Machiavellian willingness to exploit men and situations for his own ends, that Beaujeux is eventually able to exercise sufficient authority over the various forces in play to ensure the success of *Riwbeodeam*. In fact, his subsequent description of the actual implementation of his rescue plan reveals that the *seigneur's* real reign over the city is only destined to last the space of a single night. The quasi-carnal nature of this ultimate possession of *la Ville* is insisted upon by the Colonel when he recollects his finest hour some years later for the benefit of Solange, the love of his life:

- Cette nuit-là?... Ah! ma chérie, ç'a été une des plus belles de ma vie. La plus belle peut-être, sans vouloir vous vexer. [...] ...tout cela m'apparaît comme une nuit d'amour... Oui, ma petite fille, une nuit d'amour, avec cette Ville que je courtais

depuis quelques mois déjà.

[...]

...Ah! c'était une belle ville, Solange. Et jusqu'à cette nuit-là, j'avais feint de régner sur elle, j'avais faim de régner sur elle... et je ne faisais qu'en partager la jouissance platonique avec le sous-préfet et une douzaine d'autres. Et puis voilà que, moi... je la possédais. Oh! je la possédais, Solange. Vous n'avez pas idée de la sensualité que c'est. (ibid., pp.448-449)

Volkoff's protagonist is singularly well placed to discourse on the sensuality of power: throughout the novel, we are regularly treated to accounts of his sexual adventures, details of his enjoyment of food and drink - both of which are consumed in appropriately "noble" quantities - and the like. Not for Beaujeux the ascetic existence of other literary *seigneurs*. This last is reserved, rather, for Miloslavski, the chaste young *aspirant* whom Beaujeux decides to take under his wing. His subsequent involvement in *Riwbeodeam* will serve as a seigneurial apprenticeship, with particular importance being attached to his command of *Force di Frappe*, the model *village de regroupement* set up by Beaujeux to provide temporary accommodation for his *harkis* (ibid., pp.414-423). It is made clear from the outset that this camp is very much the younger man's *fief*:

Lorsque le lieutenant Miloslavski aperçut pour la première fois l'ancien village Tabburt devenu le poste Force de Frappe, il se crut devant Tolède vue par Greco...

<<C'est ma ville>>, pensa-t-il.

[...]

C'était sa ville, en effet. Pendant quelques semaines, il allait y régner aussi absolument qu'un baron féodal sur ses états. (ibid., p.414)

What these vividly contrasted officers share, in fact, is a common experience of the loneliness of the *seigneur*. We read, for instance, of Miloslavski's lack of friends (ibid., p.48), and are not surprised to learn that, in *Force di Frappe*, "il dormait seul, avec cent kilos de plastic sous son lit Picot" (ibid., p.414). Compare Beaujeux's disappointed realization that he is not even able to relax during a day's shooting in the company of old friends:

<<Je croyais que j'allais pouvoir me reposer dans l'amitié pendant cette journée, pensait Beaujeux, mais non, on dirait que je suis croisé. Ni amitié ni repos.>> (ibid., p.195)

The text's appeal to the myth of the crusades is of obvious interest, but more properly central to its depiction of the sacrifices made by the military *seigneur* in return for the right to rule is the insistence on his isolation. Beaujeux, we discover, feels "seul et vieux" and even "effroyablement seul" (ibid., pp.280 & 263). Moreover, in common with Raspéguy, Jasson, and Brune's anonymous colonel, he is acutely aware of the moral - and, indeed, spiritual - implications of his profound personal involvement in the sordid side of the Algerian conflict, i.e. *la sale guerre*: "J'ai les mains sales... très sales", as he will put it years later to Solange (ibid., p.357). Not that Beaujeux has ever either tortured himself or sanctioned its use by others. This point is made plain in the course of a major discussion of military ethics with Miloslavski: " - Tant que je commanderai ce secteur ... tout homme placé sous mes ordres qui torturera un prisonnier recevra une balle dans le crâne" (ibid., p.141).

It is worth noting at this point that Beaujeux's account of the thinking behind his refusal to torture includes an interesting dismissal of the *cas concret* so beloved of such military-realist defenders of French Algeria as Lartéguy and Brune (ibid., pp.139-140). The Colonel himself never has need of torture, we learn, thanks to his truly remarkable - and suspiciously convenient - ability to extract information from even the most determined suspect without resorting to the use of force. This wonderful gift is generally referred to by the humorous name of *le toboggan Beaujeux* (ibid., pp.94-95 & passim), and it is the Colonel's possession of it which accounts for his career-long involvement with *le renseignement*; moreover, it is the underhand nature of much of this military intelligence-gathering which explains his sense of personal *souillure*. Like the anonymous hero of *Cette haine qui ressemble à l'amour*, in other words, Beaujeux feels dirtied by his own recourse to deceit as a weapon of war, (both in Algeria and elsewhere). For Beaujeux the professional intelligence officer, the sense of personal *salissure* which results from such activities must be in direct proportion to the length and scale of his participation in the shadowy, but, nevertheless, truly seigneurial, world

of *le renseignement*. In what follows, the Colonel's interlocutor is Miloslavski, once again:

<<On peut être soldat, marcher au combat, prendre une douche, aller à confesse et se retrouver propre. Je le crois et vous le croyez: nous n'allons donc pas en discuter. Mais on ne peut pas, mon petit vieux, faire du renseignement pendant vingt ans et rester propre. Quand je vous ai demandé de prendre le deuxième bureau, je vous ai dit deux choses: primo, que vous n'auriez jamais à triturer personne; secundo, que le renseignement était un métier de seigneur. Je ne retire rien de tout cela, mais il arrive aux seigneurs de se salir jusqu'à l'occiput, et sans avoir jamais trituré ou fait triturer.>> (ibid., p.374)

*Le renseignement* is just as *seigneurial* an activity, then, as the exercise of power which it renders possible. It is intelligence, indeed, which constitutes the vital foundation of Beaujeux's Algerian reign, and upon which the *séduction* and *montage* elements of his rule inevitably depend (ibid., pp.386-387). It must consequently be obtained, whatever the cost in individual self-sacrifice, if the *seigneur* is ever to be in a position to make History.

Beaujeux's right to make History - the primary characteristic of the French military *seigneur*, as conceived for the purposes of the present discussion - is regularly suggested throughout Volkoff's Algerian narrative. So, we discover, for instance, that the Colonel is able to discern "le sens (quelque peu zigzaguant) de l'histoire", and that he understands his own life in terms of both the ancient and modern history of Europe and the world (ibid., pp.57-58). We go on to learn that he conceives of himself as the very last in a long line of French colonial history-makers that stretches back to the Renaissance:

Ce qui avait commencé avec François Premier, ce qui avait absorbé tant d'âmes d'élite, sans pourtant que la tentation allât jusqu'au reniement - Charles de Foucauld n'était pas Philby père - allait mourir. Toute une légende militaire, encore pénétrée de chevalerie, grâce à la spiritualité de l'Islam, mourrait par la même occasion. Bournazel et sa baraka, la guerre du Rif, tous les Abd-El..., derniers chevaliers à passer dans les manuels d'histoire primaire. Beaujeux se revoyait à son pupitre de l'école communale, s'enivrant du récit d'aventures encore si proches. Et cela, qu'il avait admiré sans le connaître, dont il était tombé amoureux plus tard, quand le destin de son pays l'avait conduit sous ce ciel sarrazin, il avait accepté la mission de le sacrifier. [...] <<Je suis le dernier des miens à devoir régner sur cette terre à qui nous avons tant pris et tant donné... Et je suis François Dernier!>> pensa-t-il amèrement. (ibid., p.89)

This is Volkoff's myth of the military *seigneur* at its most dazzling: Beaujeux's name is linked with the monarchy, the Church, and the *noblesse d'épée*. Like François I<sup>er</sup> and *le Père de Foucauld* - the Colonel is, as ever, not only "le père du régiment" (ibid., p.55), but also the "father" of both the European and Muslim populations (ibid., p.222) - Beaujeux is clearly to be regarded as an *âme d'élite*. Like Bournazel, like Saint-Laurent's Jasson, he too is possessed of *baraka* (ibid., pp.262 & 387). Moreover, Beaujeux shares both in the *légende militaire* of the French conquerors of North Africa - foremost amongst whom must be *le Père Bugeaud*, a name suggested by the protagonist's own, perhaps - and in that of the historical resistance to French rule. He is thus imaged as the spiritual descendant of both Bugeaud and Abd-el-Kader, the man whose 1847 surrender to the *Maréchal* marked the beginning of the French colonial ascendancy in Algeria. Such is the power of myth.

The evaporation of mass history brought about by the myth of the *seigneur* should by now be apparent. As "François Dernier", Beaujeux is individually responsible for the winding-up of *Algérie française*: what other *âmes d'élite* have built, he must now demolish. This élitist view of historical change is backed up in a variety of ways. For instance, the contribution made by one of the Colonel's ancestors to the earlier history of France is revealed and compared to his own situation (ibid., p.441). In addition, the contribution presently being made by another member of the Beaujeux clan to the historical evolution of Algeria is evoked, albeit in wholly unflattering terms. Here, the Colonel is considering the nature of the Algerian role offered to him by the French authorities:

<<Dans ces conditions, pensait Beaujeux, en suivant à pied la Seine nocturne, accepter le commandement qui m'est offert reviendrait à accepter de faire ce pour quoi on me l'offre:

[...]

...guerroyer gentiment contre des adversaires temporaires en se préparant à tomber dans leurs bras lorsque mon frère Alain aura aidé à signer un torchon de papier, dans je ne sais quelle ville d'eau...>> (ibid., pp.57-58)

The real point here is not that Beaujeux is predictably critical of the 1961 Evian *accords*, but rather that the agreements which led to a cease-fire and to the emergence of an independent Algerian nation are represented as the (scandalous) results of the efforts of a few highly placed individuals, including especially government ministers like his brother. The military and political pressure exerted by the Algerian nationalists and their supporters on the colonial regime is thus effectively denied; as is the impact of world opinion (as reflected primarily by the United States of John F. Kennedy and at the U.N.), which was ever more critical of French intransigence in Algeria in a period of global decolonization.

The implicit appeal of this and similar passages to the familiar idea of history as the privileged domain of Great Men becomes explicit on one notable occasion. Beaujeux is addressing Gherlout, a local Muslim politician whom he knows to be very close to the regional leaders of the nationalist rebellion, and who asks Beaujeux what he thinks of the peace negotiations currently in progress:

- Monsieur Gherlout, répondit-il, les Français ont eu un écrivain appelé Pascal. Pascal, parlant un jour d'une reine d'Afrique du Nord, dont la beauté séduisit plusieurs grands hommes européens, remarqua ceci: <<Si le nez de Cléopâtre avait été plus court, la face du monde en eût été changée.>> Vous avez, j'en suis persuadé, étudié l'histoire, et vous avez probablement constaté que, dans la majorité des cas, lorsque les masses en présence sont très différentes, la longueur du nez des rois et des reines ne fait pas grand-chose à l'affaire. Mais il y a des limites où  $A = B$ , et où un centimètre de plus de nez d'un côté ou de l'autre fait basculer la marmite. Quant je parle de nez, ce n'est pas au sens figuré, mais, en l'occurrence, au sens propre. Pour le moment, le nez penche d'un côté, et s'il persévère, les pourparlers ne manqueront pas d'aboutir. Mais si, par hasard, le nez se trouvait mal, je pense étant donné son poids spécifique, que les pourparlers n'en réchapperaient pas. (ibid., pp.103-104)

Here, at last, Volkoff's *seigneur* admits the historical importance of the collective; but only long enough to render more palatable his reassertion of the power to make History of certain key individuals. Cleopatra, de Gaulle, Beaujeux: their common mythical identity is very amusingly suggested, but is no less persuasive for that; and whilst the ability of such *âmes d'élite* to influence events may be restricted, it is nevertheless "real". In the particular case of Colonel François Beaujeux, this making of History will be limited to just one place and to a single night (ibid., pp.386-387).

Yet, this fact does not detract from the importance mythically attached by the text to the Colonel's personal contribution to the final days of *Algérie française*; rather, it serves to concentrate the attention of the integrated reader of Volkoff's novel upon it. This point is clearly brought out by Beaujeux's own final summary of the difficulties which he had to overcome in order to achieve *Riwbeodeam*. The Colonel's interlocutor is Solange, the tone is light, but the myth of the élite History-Maker shines through:

- Mais mon seul ange, vous n'imaginez pas la situation! Rappelez-vous que le cessez-le-feu était déjà signé. J'avais un bataillon de feds en armes, déchaînés dans la Casbah. La population musulmane faisait des pieds, des mains et du reste pour amadouer les nouveaux maîtres. La population européenne, vexée à mort, et paniquée au-delà de ce qu'on peut dire, poussait des cris d'orfraie à chaque bateau pneumatique qui prenait le large. Vous devriez tout de même comprendre un peu: vous étiez là. Vous savez bien que tous les Européens s'attendaient à avoir le cou coupé s'ils restaient après l'indépendance. Dans ces conditions, j'allais accaparer deux bateaux pour transporter mille cinq cents bicots! Le plus illégalement du monde, d'ailleurs. Vous croyez qu'il y avait un seul homme dans tout le secteur qui se serait levé pour m'appuyer, si je ne les avais pas mis dans une situation où ils n'avaient pas le choix?

- Vous étiez le maître.

- Le maître? C'est à croire que ceux qui n'ont pas exercé le pouvoir ne peuvent pas figurer ce que c'est. J'étais Gulliver, mon petit ange, justement parce que j'étais, comme vous dites, de flatteuse façon, le maître. (ibid., pp.445-446)

The fact that Beaujeux is prepared to go to such great lengths to save the lives of these *bicots* is an indication of the importance attached by his creator to the French government's historical *lâchage* of its locally recruited troops in Algeria. So, where Saint-Laurent's Jasson had been able to revel in the army's successful *mouillage* of the Muslim population (Saint-Laurent 1961, I, p.13), Volkoff's hero can only dwell on the tragic consequences of its eventual withdrawal from the territory. As spelled out for the benefit of Miloslawski, in fact, the problem of *le sort des harkis* underpins the novel's extended critique of de Gaulle's handling of the Algerian question:

La France, vous m'entendez bien, la France désarmera ses amis. Elle leur ôtera ces malheureuses armes qu'elle leur a fait porter pour défendre ses intérêts. Et elle les abandonnera. Et elle signera des traités et bouffera le couscous avec leurs assassins. (Volkoff 1980, p.382)

Beaujeux's *Riwbeodeam* is an attempt to save a very few of those *ralliés* most seriously compromised in the eyes of the new masters of Algeria. At the heart of the Colonel's, and the author's, thinking in this regard is the notion, voiced towards the

end of the novel by Miloslavski, that France has a duty to the *harkis* above all because "Ce sont des soldats français" (ibid., p.435). This claim leads us to ask two basic questions about the nature of the *seigneur's* relationship with those Muslims under his command. Firstly, are racial differences of any real importance? And secondly, does the fact of fighting for France constitute a sufficient proof of "Frenchness"?

In *La Leçon d'anatomie*, great mythical capital is made of the central figure's supposed lack of racism. So, for instance, when Beaujeux's Muslim batman announces an unexpected European visitor to the Colonel's villa one evening, Volkoff's hero gently mocks the Arab's French and forcefully states his personal aloofness from the colonial situation and its racial conflict:

- Mon colonel, il y a un homme qui veut vous parler. [...] Qu'est-ce que c'est je fais? C'est un hieuropin.

[...]

- Qu'est-ce que c'est vous faites? Vous le priez poliment d'entrer. Et si je vous appelle, vous le priez de sortir, moins poliment. Et à propos, hieuropin ou musulman, je ne sais pas la différence. (ibid., p.81)

The notion that Beaujeux is, as a military *seigneur*, in some magical way above the conflictual race-awareness which constitutes the principal given of the Algerian war is a central one in Volkoff's novel. The theme is regularly reiterated, and is even symbolized in the colonel's choice of residence: "la villa des Oliviers" is selected, above all, for its proximity to and yet independence of both the European and Muslim districts of the town. Beaujeux's new home and headquarters is situated, we learn, in a run-down public garden:

Ce jardin, où jouaient ensemble les enfants européens et musulmans, était situé à flanc de coteau, à la limite de la ville indigène qui le surplombait, et de la ville française qu'il dominait, s'enfonçant entre les deux comme une lame triangulaire entre deux organes. Presque au sommet du triangle, accotée à la Casbah, mais séparée des maisons européennes par une quarantaine de mètres, pas plus, s'élevait la villa des Oliviers.

[...]

[Beaujeux] aima l'emplacement. A la limite de la Casbah et de la ville européenne, avec une porte de chaque côté: que pouvait-il désirer de mieux? (ibid., pp.76-77)



In an ideal world, the colonial *seigneur* would have been able to ensure that European and Muslim children continued to play together in Algeria's gardens. Above and separate from both sides in the conflict, Volkoff's "Prince" is ideally suited to reconciling the warring communities, and might well have been able to do so, had not the situation deteriorated to the extent that it has by the time the action of the novel opens in 1961. A consummate psychologist, Beaujeux demonstrates his profound understanding of European and Muslim alike in order to manoeuvre both in such a way as to permit the unhindered implementation of his secret operation, *Riwbeodeam*.

However, it is in his treatment of native psychology that Volkoff reveals that not only is his hero perfectly well aware of the difference between a Muslim and a "hieuropin", but also that this difference is constitutive of the former's colonizability. For, if Beaujeux, like the French public as a whole, must appreciate the nation's Islamic vocation, and thus its collective duty to guide the development of its North African territory, then the indigenous inhabitants of Algeria are similarly called upon to be guided: the colonial *seigneur* is born to rule and the colonized to serve, in short. This genuinely feudal vision of the colonial relationship has as one of its principal articles of faith the belief that the native population of Algeria has respect only for the strong hand of a clearly identified master, whether he be a French officer or an FLN guerrilla. Liberalism will consequently be interpreted as weakness, as an American informant confirms when he describes the impression made by Beaujeux on the native population of the town:

Tu leur plais bien... Toi, tu ne t'occupes pas d'eux. C'est un bon point. Tu es donc un seigneur, et pas un lèche-bottes dangereux comme certains qui t'ont précédé. (ibid., p.199)

It is Beaujeux's carefully nurtured aura of strength which enables him to control the Algerian masses and thus to look after their best interests in an appropriately paternalistic fashion. This responsibility for the Muslim is none other than the properly feudal duty of *noblesse oblige*, as Beaujeux is well aware: "Il savait trop à quel point la

féodalité est contraignante pour le suzerain" (ibid., p.402). In return for their subjection to the colonial Prince, therefore, the benighted Muslim populace will be ruled benignly: the twin gifts of *pax gallica* and the *mission civilisatrice* will reward their obedience to the *seigneur*, or at least would have done had the situation in Algeria not been allowed, by criminal mismanagement, to deteriorate so dramatically. Yet, even in the final days of the war, there is still room for a little "piecemeal social engineering" - as Popper might have put it - of the Muslim's world. In the case of Volkoff's novel, the most striking opportunity for this is afforded to Lieutenant Miloslavski when he is put in sole charge of "Force de Frappe", a fortified *village de regroupement*. In spite of some initial hostility, Miloslavski's right to rule is soon recognized by his new subjects:

Les vieux, les respectés, les sages, les non-buveurs, et surtout les femmes, se déclarèrent soudain pour lui: ils reconnurent du même coup que cet officier-là méritait de les commander, et que, par conséquent, c'était à eux de s'adapter à ses habitudes, même si elles leur déplaisaient. (ibid., p.417)

This image of native Algerian feudalism may serve the purposes of Volkoff's seigneurial myth, but it is not so straightforwardly reconciled with the belief that service in the colonial cause constitutes proof of the *harkis'* Frenchness. Indeed, it is precisely as soldiers that these local troops constantly reveal just how unlike their French counterparts they really are. Whether it be a question of "l'art du terrain ... ce prodigieux instinct du soldat musulman, qui lui fait trouver spontanément la pierre qui le protégera, la buisson qui le cachera" (ibid., p.426), or of the *harkis'* remarkable ability to remain motionless for extended periods - "Les Européens n'en sont pas capables" (ibid., p.279) - the very qualities which most distinguish the *rallié* as a soldier unfailingly signal his "otherness". So, when Miloslavski is planning the march from *Force di Frappe* to the town, it is the wholly un-French stamina of this particular brand of "soldats français" which marks them out as Algerians:

Il n'était pas question de s'arrêter toutes les heures, comme c'est l'usage dans les armées européennes. Miloslavski avait prévu en tout trois arrêts de dix minutes chacun, et ses hommes, à vrai dire, s'en seraient passés. Ils marchaient à longues foulées rapides, le dos courbé, l'arme balancée à bout de bras, allongeant à peine le pas dans les montées, le raccourcissant à peine dans les descentes, le souffle égal. Mais leur chef, si entraîné qu'il fût à la marche, ne serait peut-être pas arrivé au bout sans

ces trois pauses. (ibid., p.426)

In fact, Volkoff, writing the better part of two decades after the war, is perfectly well aware of the specificity of these locally recruited French troops. Just how acute his awareness actually is is hinted at by his account of Beaujeux's reaction to a description, by his old friend and former colleague, Rabah, of a European woman as "Française, quoi":

Beaujeux étouffa un cri de douleur devant ce lapsus: voilà des gens à qui on avait dit qu'ils étaient Français eux-mêmes, et à qui, maintenant, on arrachait cette qualité, et on s'attendait à les voir résignés, d'abord à devenir Français malgré eux, puis étrangers de force, et ils y mettaient un tact et une bonne volonté sans limite, se traitant successivement d'indigènes, de F.S.N.A., de musulmans, de Français-musulmans, de Français, et maintenant ils ne savaient plus de quoi... (ibid., p.202)

This passage is primarily remarkable for its profound insight into the plight of the Other in the face of the dominant race's constant and seemingly whimsical revision of the colonized's status, and thus of the whole colonial relationship: it is as moving as it is demystifying. Indeed, the author's insistence on the variety of names applied to the native inhabitants of Algeria by their European colonizers can only serve to underline the fact that the vast majority of *indigènes* - Arabs and Kabyles, *harkis* and civilians - were never French, and, moreover, could never hope to become French. This string of names is to be regarded as so many failed attempts to resolve the conflict at the heart of the colonial relationship. As such, Beaujeux's litany bears out Memmi's assertion that "dans le cadre colonial, l'assimilation s'est révélée impossible" (Memmi 1957, p.140).

The hopelessness of colonial dreams of *assimilation* is further evidenced by Volkoff's account of the nature of the welcome which awaits those few Algerian troops lucky enough to be "repatriated". The "otherness" of these *soldats français* becomes ever more apparent as Beaujeux stresses the alien nature of the land for which they are bound and the profound hostility of its inhabitants:

Pour qu'ils puissent demeurer dans leur patrie, il faudrait qu'ils nous aient tiré ou du moins craché dessus. Non, nous les déracinerons, nous les arracherons à leur petit village, à leur petite mosquée, nous les jetterons dans un pays qui n'est pas de leur foi, qui est à peine de leur langue, où ils ne connaîtront personne...

[...] Nous tenterons de leur faire passer la mer et puis nous en ferons des égoutiers, des balayeurs de métro, des valets de ferme, et nous les paierons le moins que nous pourrons, et nous les exploiterons le plus que nous pourrons, et quand nous les croiserons dans la rue, nous marmonnerons <<Sales Nord-Afs! Tous les mêmes.>> Et vous savez le plus curieux, Miloslavski...!

[...]

Le plus curieux, c'est qu'ils nous seront reconnaissants, et qu'ils auront raison de l'être. Parce qu'ils auront encore, grâce à nous, conservé leur peau. Et je l'entends au sens propre... (Volkoff 1980, pp.385-386)

Small wonder, given the reception that awaits them in France, that some of Volkoff's exiles should be destined eventually to risk even their skins by returning home:

La plupart ne reverraient jamais leur soleil natal. Quelques-uns ne supporteraient pas la pluie, la nourriture, la langue étrangère et reviendraient: Dieu seul savait si, à force d'humilité, ils se feraient pardonner leur passé, ou si la vengeance les attendrait encore sur ce rivage. (ibid., p.390)

The fate of the *harkis* is no less scandalous for their being clearly depicted as Algerians, rather than Frenchmen, but it is altogether less mystifying. This demystified aspect of Volkoff's treatment of the theme may usefully be compared with that to be found in Claude Bonjean's novel, the intriguingly titled *Lucien chez les barbares* (1977), which is considered in Chapter 7. For the time being, suffice it to say that Beaujeux's unsentimental awareness of the likely outcome of his strictly unauthorized intervention on behalf of "le petit Mohammed" (Volkoff 1980, p.381) in no wise detracts from its mythical appeal for the integrated reader of *La Leçon d'anatomie*.

Vladimir Volkoff's uniquely developed and self-consciously modern celebration of the military *seigneur* may very fruitfully be contrasted with some of the critical images of the senior officer put forward over the years. Paradoxically, we shall both begin and end this comparison with novels produced in 1961, Roger Ikor's *Les Murmures de la guerre* and George Buis's *La Grotte*. For all their differences in style and scope, these two works reveal a common ideological project: i.e. the demystification of the French military *chef's* role in the Algerian conflict.

At first sight, the French colonel depicted by Ikor would seem to fit very straightforwardly into the seigneurial mould. Consider the extract which follows, in

which the novel's central figure, Sergeant Ludovic Fenns, is introduced to Colonel Berriou. The latter's self-assurance - he makes no attempt to appear busy when Fenns knocks at his door, in contrast to others in similar positions of authority - is taken as evidence of a higher quality:

Le colonel Berriou, lui, ne semblait pas redouter le discrédit: il se situait fort au-dessus. Il agissait en chef indiscuté et indiscutable, parfaitement sûr de lui, parfaitement indifférent à l'opinion d'autrui. (Ikor 1961, p.114)

In the pages which follow, Berriou's seigneurial persona will be established and demolished: the text will simultaneously both erect a monument to this senior French officer and show the subject's feet of clay. This second-level critique of the *mystique* of Berriou, and those like him, begins immediately the character has been introduced. Indeed, the treatment accorded to the Colonel in this opening encounter with Fenns (ibid., pp.114-127) reveals that profound ambivalence which will become the principal feature of their relationship as a whole. So, Berriou's fame is referred to; his broad culture and rare intelligence are noted; his affability, candour, and apparent concern for his hierarchical inferiors are established. In addition, his paternal quality is insisted upon, with an unusual twist being provided by the revelation that Berriou and Fenns's father were close friends during the 1939-1945 conflict, when they were fellow inmates of a German POW camp. However, this superficially positive imaging of the *chef* will be systematically undermined, as we shall now illustrate.

At this early stage, the narrative lays the ground, as it were, for its developed demystification of Berriou's seigneurial persona. The process begins with a series of observations on the part of Fenns: these either serve to draw attention to ways in which the reality of the Colonel falls short of his carefully cultivated image, or hint at the line to be taken by subsequent developments. We read, for instance, that Berriou's record in the Second World War was not all that it might have been. His failure to participate in Fenns senior's escape from the camp is presented as the source of

particular embarrassment in this regard:

- Etiez-vous l'un de ses compagnons d'évasion?...

Aïe! Juste la question à ne pas poser! Le colonel Berriou répondit sur un ton parfaitement égal qu'il n'en avait pas été. Mais il ne parvint pas à cacher entièrement un léger embarras. Peut-être l'officier casse-cou qu'il était devenu regrettait-il de n'avoir pas eu jadis l'innocente audace de l'instituteur. C'était quelque chose comme une tache sur son passé, ou un démenti à la figure qu'il se forgeait. Ou autre chose? (ibid., p.118)

Similarly, the vulgarity periodically displayed by Berriou - particularly where women are concerned - encourages Fenns, and with him the reader, to regard the Colonel's regular shows of culture with more than a little scepticism (ibid., pp.123-124). Thus is established a pattern of tension between surface appearances and deeper realities that will continue throughout.

Like Volkoff's Beaujeux, whom he resembles in a number of ways, Ikor's Colonel is described as a bear-like individual, whose cuddly exterior belies his real ferocity (ibid., p.116). This image adds to the dialectical tension just described, and, moreover, hints at its ultimate importance. As does the increasing disquiet felt by Fenns as the exchange with his commanding officer continues: "...pour amicale qu'elle fût à l'égard de son père, cette conversation le mettait à la torture" (ibid., p.123). Given the historical importance of torture in the Franco-Algerian conflict, the use of this particular metaphor can hardly be taken as coincidental. On the contrary, this reference to the characterizing problem of the French military's 1954-1962 campaign is of great and obvious significance. As are the observations made by Berriou as he eventually brings this first interview with Fenns to a close:

- Il ne faut lâcher une affaire que réglée... Il faut tout accepter, tout revendiquer de ce qu'on a fait. Même les conneries, surtout les conneries peut-être. Sinon, on traîne tout un poids d'ombre, repentirs, regrets...

Etait-ce une illusion? Sa voix s'était un peu troublée sur ces derniers mots. Elle se raffermit pour continuer.

- Ce qu'il y a de mieux chez les curés, c'est la confession. Non parce qu'elle nettoie tout, mais parce qu'elle proclame tout. Que rien ne reste dans l'ombre!... (ibid., p.127)

In these lines, we may discern a combination of totalitarian rigour and imperfectly repressed guilt which, in the light of the previously noted reference to

torture, may reasonably be regarded as a second nod in the direction of the Algerian war's most regularly debated ethical dilemma. Subsequent developments will bear this reading out.

As the action of the novel progresses, we will learn more about the Colonel and his background. We read, for example, that his post-war army record is an outstanding one. Fenns's father - for whom Berriou visibly represents "une sorte d'idéal, celui que lui-même, par excès de moralité, ne réaliserait jamais" (ibid., p.188) - has kept up with the progress of his former friend's career, and is able to pass on the information to his newly inquisitive son:

M. Fenns avait donc expliqué que l'ancien instituteur, de manière très conforme à sa légende, s'était mué en un aventurier fort pittoresque, sinon inquiétant. Recherchant les coups durs aux quatre coins du monde, il avait fait la guerre partout où elle était à faire. Son seul regret officiel était de n'avoir pas été accepté comme parachutiste, pour cause d'astigmatisme. Normalement, il aurait dû prendre plus vite du galon; mais sa réputation de tête brûlée, qui le servait d'un côté, lui nuisait de l'autre. Des histoires de femmes, un ou deux jolis scandales n'avaient pas arrangé les choses. Surtout, il avait son franc-parler, ce mépris dégoûté qu'il affichait tant pour les ministres que pour les officiers politiques. [...] Si bien qu'avec sa puissante personnalité, il se voyait sans cesse devancer par quelque malin mollasson. (ibid., pp.187-188)

Valour, toughness, and an obvious integrity all combine in Berriou's seigneurial *légende*. However, Ikor's military adventurer is not only *fort pittoresque*, he also appears *inquiétant*. For the reader of *Les Murmures de la guerre*, the explanation of this worrying aspect is to be found in that very absence of moral restraint so admired by Fenns senior. It is not the Colonel's womanizing, then, that will eventually put paid to his prestige, although its vulgar character does not add to that renown in the way that Beaujeux's sexual exploits, or even those of Raspéguy, might be said to do; this last is particularly significant in the case of Berriou's reference to his "droit de cuissage" as regards the "petites amies" of his subordinates (ibid., p.248). Nor yet is it the Colonel's uncertain political affiliations which will bring about his mythical downfall (ibid., p.188). Rather, Berriou's loss of seigneurial face will come about as a result of his lack of moral insight, a facet of his personality already noted by Fenns's father during their time together in the POW camp (ibid., p.152).

Whilst Berriou might be "un personnage dans l'armée" (ibid., p.199), for that section of it directly under his command, and this includes Fenns himself, the Colonel is, quite simply, "le <<patron>>" (ibid., p.201). The nature of this role is made plain in a major consideration of the regime which prevails under his command:

Le colonel Berriou appliquait avec constance le grand principe sur lequel reposent toutes les sociétés hiérarchiques, spécialement l'armée: un chef ne fait rien, fait tout faire et assume tout. D'où suit que les vrais chefs se reconnaissent non à leur qualité personnelle, mais à celle de l'entourage qu'ils se sont choisi. Leur vertu la plus nécessaire consiste donc à savoir juger les hommes. (ibid., p.201)

There follows a description of "<<l'équipe à Berriou>>", which serves to demonstrate the validity of the foregoing analysis of the mechanics of military authority (ibid., pp.201-205). The Colonel's authoritarian reign over his men is thus presented, as are its attractions and dangers. So, we discover that Sergeant Fenns is able to enjoy the unique atmosphere that prevails in the "team" without losing sight of the risks entailed in the surrender of individual wills to the higher vision of the *chef* (ibid., pp.202-204). For better or worse, however, the Colonel is most certainly the *patron*, a position justified by his obvious ability to motivate, and, above all, to make History:

[Berriou] appartenait à cette race d'hommes à vues larges et ardeur impatiente qui ne permettent pas à l'humanité de s'endormir dans son confort présent. Homme des cavernes, Berriou eût poussé ses congénères vers la construction de huttes; anthropoïde, il les eût poussés vers l'humanité. Il vous faisait éprouver concrètement que l'Homme est encore en pleine croissance, que l'Evolution continue... (ibid., p.244)

On the basis of this description, we can hardly argue with Fenns when he suggests that the Colonel is well equipped to take a leading role in the future historical development of Algeria: "Lancé dans des circonstances favorables, un coup de force signé Berriou pourrait fort bien réussir autant, ou plus, que celui de mai 58" (ibid., p.204). Still less can we take exception when he describes his C.O. in the following terms:

Berriou était un chef, un vrai, et d'envergure. Cela signifiait que chacun de ses subordonnés, quasiment privé d'existence autonome, avait pour charge unique de présenter au monde une facette de son être, dont il était le prolongement pur et simple; leur ensemble figurait de la sorte son image agrandie, dont chacun n'était qu'un élément. (ibid., p.252)



So much for Berriou the *seigneur*. What then of his fall from mythical grace? To answer this question we must turn now to the novel's handling of the problem so neatly side-stepped by Volkoff's *chef*: torture. In fact, Ikor's colonel resembles Beaujeux in seeing *le renseignement* as the key to the war. However, where Volkoff's hero obtained his information by quasi-miraculous means, Berriou is obliged to resort to more familiar methods. The precise nature of these methods is hinted at throughout, and becomes the cause of ever greater concern for Fenns:

Berriou n'était pas un chef d'opérette et commandait pour de bon à ses troupes, et avec une prompte efficacité. Par exemple, le colonel savait tout avant ses subordonnés; c'est lui qui les renseignait - tantôt l'un, tantôt l'autre d'entre eux, de sorte que chacun croyait en toute bonne foi que c'était l'autre qui avait apporté l'information. Mais le colonel lui-même, d'où les tenait-il, ses informations? (ibid., pp.251-252)

The Sergeant's increasingly obsessive preoccupation with this central issue is the focus for considerable discussion of the problems raised by the Algerian nationalists' recourse to terrorist violence in their fight for independence. Berriou, like the other military *seigneurs* discussed thus far, does not merely impose his will upon his fellow soldiers, he also brings his brand of order to a town. As is so often the case, this "new" order consists, first and foremost, in the restoration of security for the town's European inhabitants. So, whilst uncertainty reigns elsewhere in the *secteur*, Berriou's *ville* is relatively free of trouble: "...la ville de Descartes, elle, était sûre. Etait redevenue sûre, relativement. Grâce à Berriou." (ibid., p.223)

There can be no doubting either the success of Berriou's offensive against the FLN bombers or the esteem in which he is consequently held by the grateful European population of Descartes (ibid., pp.232-234). However, whilst the *pieds-noirs* may feel able to ask no questions about the means used to restore *l'ordre* in the town, Fenns is compelled to know more. With very little to go on in the way of personal experience, and dissatisfied with official accounts of the anti-terror campaign, Ikor's hero is left with a few bare facts, some worrying rumours, and a set of ever more nagging doubts:

Les faits nus? Berriou avait été nommé à la tête du régiment tout de suite après le ratissage; il avait pris en main le secteur de Descartes; quinze jours plus tard,

le terrorisme urbain, qui faisait rage jusque-là, était muselé. Par quels moyens? D'après des bruits qui couraient, son équipe travaillait si durement les terroristes arrêtés qu'elle obtenait d'eux ce qu'elle voulait: les renseignements les plus profitables. Mais son équipe, Fenns en faisait partie. Or Fenns n'avait rien vu. On parlait à mots couverts d'installations spéciales. Fenns n'en connaissait pas. Où se trouvaient-elles, si elles existaient? Et qui torturait, si torture il y en avait?

[...]

Comment? Comment? Comment?

• Et par qui? (ibid., pp.234-235)

In practice, the reader is able to "guess" the answer to the hero's questions long before he himself learns the truth. The eventual "revelation" that Berriou uses torture to extract information from Muslim suspects is anything but a surprise, in consequence (ibid., pp.263-272). This confirmation of the Sergeant's darkest fears will give rise, nevertheless, to a classic set-piece confrontation between liberal humanism and military realism in the final chapter. In their last encounter, which is the mirror-image of the one that first introduced the Colonel, Fenns states his total opposition to the use of torture, whilst Berriou makes out the familiar case for exceptional methods against an exceptional enemy (ibid., pp.277-287). This debate will be considered in detail in the course of our examination of the French liberal response to the Franco-Algerian conflict. For the time being, what interests us is the way in which the confrontation between Berriou and Fenns is used by Ikor to cut through the prevailing mythology of the military *seigneur*, as we shall now explain.

Interestingly, the structure of this climactic final confrontation appears, initially at least, to favour the Colonel rather than the Sergeant. For the only time in the novel, in fact, the narrative adopts Berriou's point of view in preference to that of Fenns. We see the opening exchanges through the older man's eyes and within his preferred frame of reference. His is the voice of experience and sweet reason, whilst the Sergeant's verbal assault is merely the latest in a long line of similarly self-righteous onslaughts; he maintains his affability in the face of an objectively intolerable breach of military discipline; his is the calm of the father-figure, to be contrasted with the impetuosity of his young adversary. The scene opens with Fenns's dramatic outburst:

- On ne torture pas. C'est tout.

Fenns se tenait au garde-à-vous, très droit, très haut, face au colonel Berriou assis derrière son bureau. Il avait refusé de s'asseoir, malgré l'aimable insistance de son chef, et tout de suite attaqué... A vrai dire, Berriou avait deviné dès l'arrivée du sergent qu'il se passait quelque chose, et ce qui se passait... le petit flairait depuis longtemps que papa Berriou savait appuyer sur le champignon quand il le fallait. Il serait instructif de voir ses réactions, et de les confronter avec celles qu'eût pu avoir ce bon Henri [Fenns]. Et le colonel Berriou s'était disposé à entendre, avec la résignation convenable, et sa propre argumentation toute prête, les belles indignations auxquelles l'avaient habitué les pauvres types des commissions d'enquête et autres journalistes; curieux par surcroît de voir comment le petit s'en tirerait. (ibid., p.277)

The fact of the matter, however, is that Fenns has captured the moral high ground with the first shot of the exchange, namely his categorical denunciation of torture, and Berriou is henceforth on the defensive. The theoretical weakness of the liberal humanist position on torture (to which we shall give appropriate attention in the following chapter) is, in consequence, of no real importance to the reader. Indeed, the Colonel's line of argument will be seen as not so much "toute prête" as *toute faite*, its glibness only underlined as the Sergeant's anticipated "belles indignations" signally fail to materialize. The previously suggested lack of an appropriate moral dimension in Berriou's character will thus be underlined in the dramatic contrast between the ease with which he considers the question of torture and the emotional turmoil experienced by the Sergeant. He will rehearse the standard military-realist arguments about innocent lives, but it is Fenns's unswerving refusal to countenance torture which will ultimately prevail in the mind of Ikor's reader. The dispute is ended decisively, and in the Sergeant's favour, as the novel closes. Fenns may have walked in on a *seigneur* some months previously, but he is most certainly walking out on a very different man now:

Fenns rassembla toutes ses forces, prit une profonde inspiration:

- On ne torture pas. Jam...

- Et pourquoi ça, je vous prie? coupa Berriou sans précipiter sa voix. Au nom de la dignité de l'homme, n'est-ce pas? Eh bien moi, je sauve la dignité du moutard qui serait éventré... Allez! Dites-le-moi, pourquoi, même pour sauver les moutards, vous, le petit délicat, vous ne travaillerez le type à la bombe! Dites-le donc à la fin!

- Parce que c'est comme ça. On ne torture pas.

- Je commence à comprendre pourquoi votre plus grand souvenir, c'est une chapelle!

La voix du colonel était chargée de mépris.

- On ne torture pas, répéta Fenns obstinément. Jamais, en aucun cas, en aucune circonstance.

Il s'arrêta, regarda Berriou, ramassé et comme retranché, prêt à bondir, derrière

le somptueux bureau.

- Jamais! exhala-t-il avec l'adhésion de son être entier.

La bouche de Berriou s'incurvait un peu, ses narines battirent. Puis, tranquillement, il s'assit, ouvrit son livre, remonta ses lunettes qui avaient glissé sur son nez; il oubliait qu'il devait les ôter pour lire. Fenns observa que ses mains tremblaient.

- Je vous remercie, dit-il d'une voix froide, les yeux baissés sur le livre. Vous pouvez disposer.

Fenns claqua des talons, fit son demi-tour. Au moment où il allait sortir, il entendit la voix calme du colonel derrière lui:

- Vous me rappellerez au bon souvenir de votre père.

Comme si rien ne s'était passé.

- Je n'y manquerai pas, mon colonel.

<<Si, se dit Fenns, j'y manquerai. Sans aucun doute.>> (ibid., pp.286-287)

Whatever the objective merits of Berriou's arguments, he has clearly lost both his grip of the situation and his seigneurial mystique. In the face of his subordinate's stubborn refusal to back down, he resorts to personal abuse and appears on the verge of attacking him physically. The Colonel's desperate attempt to reestablish his ascendancy by means of a display of self-control is a transparent failure: his attempted show of indifference is patently as spurious as his return to "normal" topics of conversation is doomed. The Sergeant's parting reflection is thus to be regarded as merely the final nail in the coffin of Berriou's mythical persona.

Perhaps one of the most fascinating literary demystifications of the role played by the senior French officer in Algeria is to be found in *Le Tonnerre et les anges* (1975), the sixth and final volume of *Les Chevaux du soleil*, Jules Roy's epic account of the whole 130-odd years of the colonial *présence* in Algeria. Roy is principally remembered, of course, for his masterful contribution to the Algerian debate, entitled simply *La Guerre d'Algérie*. As both Talbott and Vidal-Naquet make plain, this little book - half *témoignage*, half *récit* - is one of the very rare works of literature to have played any objectively discernible part in the outcome of the Franco-Algerian conflict. For Vidal-Naquet, "son succès fut très significatif du tournant de l'opinion à l'automne 1960" (Vidal-Naquet 1972, p.195); a view of the best seller that is shared by the American historian, who sees its public acclaim, and the fact that the de Gaulle administration for once made no attempt to suppress it, as evidence of a sea-change in

metropolitan and government thinking (Talbot 1980, pp.175-176). *La Guerre d'Algérie* is considered in its own right elsewhere. For the time being, we propose only to note the unique qualifications of the work's producer: "[the] novelist and playwright Jules Roy - veteran of Indochina, retired air force colonel, son of *pieds noirs*, close friend of Albert Camus..." (ibid., p.175).

As a *pied-noir* and a senior military man, Roy - who quit his beloved air force during, and in protest at, the Indochinese conflict - is perfectly placed to comment on the army's prosecution of its latest colonial campaign. More specifically, he is uniquely able to tackle the myth of the French military *seigneur*, and this is precisely what he does in *Le Tonnerre et les anges*. His ally in this personal battle is, paradoxically, a paratrooper captain, the aristocratic Xavier-Marie de Roailles, and his intermediate target is the latter's commanding officer, Colonel Grass. The consciously demystifying project behind the Captain's sustained criticism of his superior is clearly revealed by the following passage:

Le seigneur Grass menait le combat à sa guise, poussait ses pions sur l'échiquier et ne commandait qu'à la voix. De chef à chef. <<Chez moi, rien de vague. Les messages impersonnels et sans vie, d'opérateur à opérateur, je laisse ça aux autres.>> Toujours des jugements féroces pour tous ceux qui n'étaient pas le lieutenant-colonel Grass, le commandant d'un régiment de parachutistes qui jouait les maîtres avec l'emphase d'un maréchal de France, omniscient et obstiné à employer la première personne du singulier: je, je, je... Les autres? Des jean-foutre, des incapables. Si les fells interceptaient son nom, ils sauraient qu'ils étaient tombés sur lui, Grass, seul à connaître la guerre révolutionnaire, avec sa condescendance méprisante pour les théoriciens en chambre qui exploitaient, mal, ses idées à lui. <<C'est au ton d'un réseau radio qu'on juge de l'âme d'une unité>>, concluait-il. (Roy 1975, p.33)

The principal elements of Roailles's / Roy's critique of the *seigneur* are all visible in this early description of *le style Grass*. The egotism and self-importance of the character are plain to see, as is his smug belief in his own unique comprehension of the Algerian conflict. Vanity is also very much to the fore, with the Colonel's scorn for others appearing as merely the logical concomitant of his overweening satisfaction with himself and his abilities. The ironic tone adopted by the narrator is, in itself, a clear enough indication of the adversary stance of the text: the reader is left in no

doubt as to the value to be attached, here and throughout, to such terms as *chef*, *maître*, *maréchal de France*, and, above all, *seigneur*.

However, it is important to note that Grass is by no means portrayed in a wholly negative light. His bravery in Indochina, and especially at Dien-Bien-Phu, is noted, for instance (ibid., pp.20-21), as is his undeniable military prowess (ibid., pp.23-24). Having risen from the ranks, he displays scant respect for the conventions of *les cyrards*, and is not to be bound by the timid assessments of others; ever willing to take risks and to attempt the impossible: "Sa devise: croire à l'incroyable" (ibid., p.343). In addition, the Colonel is not only physically impressive, but also incredibly determined. His refusal to let a nagging leg injury prevent him from playing a full part in the life of his regiment is a case in point: "... [il avait] la démarche un peu déportée vers la droite par une légère claudication (une jambe brisée au cours d'un mauvais saut), ce qui ne l'empêchait pas de se taper comme les autres ses quarante kilomètres à pied dans la journée avec une canne ferrée et, quand il souffrait trop, des cachets" (ibid., p.73).

Yet, as Roailles is the first to appreciate, the surface impression communicated by Grass is not to be mistaken for the underlying reality of the man:

Chez le capitaine de Roailles, toujours cette déception à confronter le mythe à l'image de Grass. On pouvait discuter Grass, l'idée qu'on avait de lui était considérable. De loin, presque sublime. Le capitaine de Roailles espérait toujours que Grass se révélerait le premier de tous, supérieur à Bigeard, enfin humain, élégant, moins tatillon. Et chaque fois, on se remettait à détester cet adjudant qui fourrait son nez partout, ce pion acharné à trouver quelqu'un en défaut.

Avec sa gueule et l'empire qu'il avait, il aurait pu se montrer grand. Il aurait pu, au terme d'un combat heureux, laisser percer indulgence ou tendresse. Rien. Grass l'inflexible. Grass la terreur. Toujours prêt à déceler le moindre signe de tiédeur ou de désaveu, et ne supportant pas la contradiction. Grass l'autocrate, Grass le despote. (ibid., p.72)

As this extract demonstrates, Roailles does not so much take issue with the myth of the *seigneur* itself, as with the failure of Grass to live up to its chivalrous ideals. This approach is plainly a highly problematic one, given the theoretical weakness of the military idealist's position; as Pierre-Henri Simon showed to perfection

in his 1958 work, *Portrait d'un officier* (discussed in Chapter 5). Yet, in spite of the essential ambivalence of his own stance, Roy is able to undermine the myth of the *seigneur* to a certain extent in *Le Tonnerre et les anges*. Roy's / Roailles's main argument, as the foregoing quotation indicates, is with the brand of command exercised by Grass. Whatever his reasons for disliking his C.O.'s style of leadership, the Captain's criticisms of it ensure that no mystique can be attached to it by the reader. Far from being the *seigneur* we have come to expect from other authors, Roy's colonel is revealed to be an *emmerdeur* (ibid., p.35), wholly incapable of delegating authority to his more than capable juniors: "Car Grass ne laissait aucune initiative à ses subordonnés" (ibid., p.23). Where Beaujeux had let Miloslavski serve his seigneurial apprenticeship, encouraging him to lead in appropriate circumstances, Grass can never efface himself and must always be in the limelight.

The explanation for this behaviour is to be found in the Colonel's long-running, and all-consuming, rivalry with the historical archetype for the literary *seigneur*, Colonel (later General) Marcel Bigeard:

Grass ne pensait qu'à sa carrière, à sa rivalité avec Bigeard. Rattraper Bigeard à tout prix. Espérer vaguement que Bigeard allait se casser la gueule. Mais Bigeard semblait invulnérable... (ibid., pp.34-35)

It is hard to sympathize with Grass in his desperate, and, in the event, wholly vain, competition with Bigeard. We are not, in fact, surprised to learn that he is permanently the loser in this clash of personalities, nor to discover that his methods of waging war, for all their undoubted *efficacité*, show none of the *panache* associated with his celebrated counterpart:

Technique rudimentaire mais implacable. <<Ne jamais chercher midi à quatorze heures>>, répétait-il, alors que Bigeard fignolait des ruses et des esquives. Si simple avec Grass, si grossière mise en place que l'ennemi s'y trompait. On se demandait ce qui se cachait derrière ça. Rien. La vérité. La guerre. La mort. (ibid., p.55)

Grass may be a more than competent soldier, but he is clearly not the stuff of military genius. Indeed, we are inevitably left with the suspicion that, in the moment of truth described by Bigeard - "...où un grain de sable détraque la machine. C'est

alors que le génie ou la connerie du chef se manifeste. Tout bascule... " (ibid., p.35) - Roailles's *chef* would be shown up in the latter, wholly unfavourable, light.

The brutal *honnêteté* of Grass's operational tactics is to be understood as part of a broader ethical robustness as regards the proper conduct of war. Not only does he favour the use of torture and summary execution against the Algerian *barbares* (ibid., pp.73-77), he is also more than willing to cross the Mediterranean and *casser du coco* in France itself (ibid., p.126). As far as his own men are concerned, *le reître Grass* (ibid., p.40) would like to see his very considerable authority over their existences extended even further: "Car s'il était interdit de bouger, de tousser, de fumer pendant les heures d'affût, il n'était pas interdit de penser. <<Et ça, disait Grass, c'est dommage...>>" (ibid., p.34).

This brand of totalitarianism has its roots in the Colonel's unshakeable belief in his own interpretation of history: a belief which will allow him to participate in the sedition of 13 May 1958, and thus enable him to extend his rivalry with Bigeard into the political domain (ibid., pp.126-129). However, the Colonel's historical vision is fatally flawed, as Roailles repeatedly makes clear. For all his experience of the French army's Indochinese *débâcle*, the Captain is not taken in by the advocates of *guerre révolutionnaire* (ibid., p.21). On the contrary, his attitude to the Franco-Algerian conflict is the one which is borne out by anything like an objective reading of colonial history. Consider, for instance, his appreciation of the radical difference in the situations of the conflicting armed forces in Algeria. Both *paras* and *fellaghas* must suffer for their causes, but their common experience of suffering does not mean that the two sides are similarly implanted in the land, still less in the "hearts and minds" of the Algerian people:

Souffrir. Oui, mais, à la fin du raid, les camions ou les hélicoptères, tandis que les autres, rien. Peut-être, mais les autres étaient chez eux, on les abritait dans les mechtas, on les nourrissait, on les renseignait, on les cachait. Le poisson dans l'eau, c'étaient les gens des katibas. Pas les parachutistes, comme le prétendait Grass. (ibid., p.23)



This turning of Mao's celebrated dictum against Grass - and with him Colonel Antoine Argoud, and all those other post-Indochina theorists who sought to harness the politics of national liberation in the French colonial cause - is deeply persuasive. As is Roailles's subsequent critique of his commanding officer's arrogant dismissal of the FLN and, indeed, of Algerian history as a whole. As ever, the army's Indochinese experiences constitute a privileged point of reference:

- Le terrorisme a eu les os cassés. On a gagné.
- Pour le moment.
- S'ils recommencent, nous recommencerons. Ferhat Abbas n'est pas Ho Chi Minh, ni Boumediene le général Giap...

[...]

- Ces gens-là, on ne peut pas les traiter d'égal à égal. Si seulement ils représentaient quelque chose, s'ils avaient une Histoire, s'ils étaient une nation... En Indochine, est-ce qu'on les aurait eus si facilement? Des incapables, des jouisseurs, les types du F.L.N. Regarde ça, ajouta-t-il avec un mouvement de sa canne vers les cadavres qu'on allait abandonner aux chacals et vers les crêtes vides. Des ombres. Du vent. Rien.

- Négatif, mon colonel. Nous n'aurons pas disparu que les bergers et tous les gus de la montagne vont se précipiter pour baiser leurs vêtements, comme à des martyrs. Ils chanteront des sourates du Coran et nous maudiront. Nous allons réussir à leur en donner une, d'Histoire. Ça servira à quoi? (ibid., pp.75-76)

Born of violent conflict, that national history would eventually form the solid foundation upon which Algerian political sovereignty could be established. The much maligned Ferhat Abbas may have maintained in 1936 that he was not prepared to die for the Algerian nation because no such nation existed - a declaration of which the defenders of French Algeria would regularly, and gleefully, remind him - but he was sure enough of its existence by 1958 to become the first president of the "Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne" (G.P.R.A.) (Horne 1977, pp.40 & 316-317). Roailles's analysis of the role played by the forces of colonial repression in the emergence of Algeria's nationhood is, in short, wholly consistent with the accepted history of the period. As for the Colonel, his mythical fate is sealed: the candidate for seigneurial honours must understand history before he can hope to be in a position to make it.

Unfortunately, Roy's demystification of the military *seigneur* does not extend to the one figure most in need of it: i.e. Bigeard himself. Whilst the *légende* of the fictional Grass is systematically undermined in *Le Tonnerre et les anges*, that of his historical "rival" is permitted to emerge intact. As we have already suggested, every comparison of the two officers is loaded in the latter's favour, with the result that the former's claims to seigneurial status are consistently denied. Bigeard's own right to that mythical rank is, in contrast, taken for granted. So, Bigeard's celebrated Indochinese campaign is treated with due respect (*ibid.*, pp.20-21); as is his waging of the Algerian war. Roailles may not share either his "Maoist" analysis of the conflict (*ibid.*, p.21), or his willingness to use methods more worthy of a *flic* in the fight against the FLN (*ibid.*, pp.74-77), but he cannot deny the man's class: his is the authentic voice of military genius, characterized by subtlety in the use of force, on the one hand, and by a delight in improvisation, on the other (*ibid.*, pp.35 & 55). The ever cynical Grass may dismiss Bigeard's decision to honour the captured rebel leader Larbi Ben M'hidi as a piece of "Comédie", acted out by a "Cabotin" (*ibid.*, pp.39-40; cf. pp.74 & 127), but its favourable impact - not only on the "chevaleresque" Captain de Roailles (*ibid.*, p.75), but also on the integrated reader - is not to be denied. Imaged as a Roman god by an adoring French press (*ibid.*, p.39), he is portrayed no less mythically by Roy's, otherwise perceptive, intermediary:

Un vrai baron de Louis le Gros, Bigeard. Il aurait dû épouser une princesse syrienne et mourir d'une chute de cheval... (*ibid.*, p.36)

Instead, he became a general and, on his retirement, went into French domestic politics; an arena in which the former idol of the *pieds-noirs* continued to be assisted by the literary myth-makers' celebration of his twin colonial campaigns. That this group should include Jules Roy, as it would seem to do, is all the more remarkable when the author's continued criticism of the war is considered: all of ten years after the war, Roy still felt sufficiently strongly to write *J'accuse le général Massu* (1972b), his stinging riposte to Massu's self-justificatory account of *La Vraie Bataille d'Alger*

(1971). We would do well not to underestimate the insidious hold of myth, it appears.

For all that old troopers like Roy and Massu may have continued to slug it out into the 1970s, Algeria inevitably faded fast in the collective memory. What are we to make, then, of a novel produced in 1980 which focusses on the quasi-filial devotion shown by *un simple soldat* towards his *chef*? More specifically, is there still socio-political interest attaching to the Algerian war by this date, or has it become a picturesque and convenient frame for wholly different types of interest? Our reading of Volkoff's *La Leçon d'anatomie*, also produced in 1980, would suggest that these two options are not, in fact, mutually exclusive. Volkoff's novel, after all, both makes an important point about the French nation's unacknowledged burden of guilt as regards *le sort des harkis* (as does that of Moinet, also 1980), whilst at the same time pursuing its own thematic and formal objectives. The fact that Liscia should adopt a psychoanalytical approach does not, in consequence, necessarily imply any reduction of a collective political phenomenon to a purely personal one. Indeed, we shall seek to reveal the properly ideological dimension of Liscia's literary psychoanalysis of the *soldat/seigneur* relationship.

Recounted in the first person, and with a rigidly chronological development, *Le Conscrit et le Général* (1980) is the tale of a distinctly unhealthy obsession: the diary not of a seducer, but of a seduction as experienced by the victim. As the anonymous narrator will put it, when he comes to reflect on the circumstances of his surrender to the spell cast by his, likewise unnamed, commanding officer: "Peut-être n'ai-je été séduit que par ce désir presque maladif qu'il avait de vouloir faire de moi son admirateur fanatique, par cet exercice somme toute dérisoire qui consistait à ne négliger aucun effort pour me convaincre, comme si mon adhésion à ses idées importait plus que les affaires dont il s'occupait" (Liscia 1980, pp.117-118).

The success of this simple strategy is undeniable, as is the role played in the conscript narrator's subjection by his uncritical acceptance of the myth of the military

*seigneur*. His eventual casting off of the General's yoke will, in consequence, involve the undermining of his master's seigneurial mystique. It is this demystifying aspect of the narrative's treatment of the theme that we shall now examine.

The terms used in Liscia's novel to describe the person of the *seigneur* will be familiar enough by now: *vrai chef*, *chef naturel*, *suzerain*, and the like (ibid., pp.48, 112, 117 & passim). Possessed of the usual imposing physique, the General is, like Volkoff's Colonel Beaujeux, a masterly seducer of women (ibid., p.112). Moreover, his physical presence serves as an external reflection of a more essential dominance of all those subordinate to him:

Quelquefois nous parlions debout et comme il était plus grand que moi, je devais lever mon regard vers lui, comme un enfant qui s'adresse à son père. Sa supériorité était donc en grande partie incarnée. Son corps massif, son crâne absolument chauve, sa haute taille suffisaient à lui donner l'apparence d'un chef. (ibid., p.59)

The General's powers of seduction are most importantly manifested in the political domain. It is here, just as in *La Leçon d'anatomie*, that the *seigneur* will be able to make his mark on History:

Il était le point de convergence de toutes les tendances. Les généraux se pressaient à sa porte; les hommes politiques venaient de Paris pour le rallier à leur cause ou lui demander conseil; on le sollicitait, le suppliait, et il restait énigmatique, ami de tous, compréhensif et froid, plus enclin à décrire le rapport de forces qu'à s'abandonner à la foi malade des uns ou des autres. Il était l'arbitre suprême, militaire mais féal, plein d'amour pour la France mais aussi pour l'Algérie, proche des autochtones mais sensible aux craintes des <<pieds-noirs>>, pressentant le sens de l'histoire mais désireux d'atténuer la force de son courant et enfin, surtout, capable de soulever l'armée pour la cause qu'il indiquerait un jour. Laquelle? La France attendait le souffle coupé. (ibid., p.113)

As described here, the General's seigneurial power to influence events is properly regarded as the product of a combination of opportunism and what the narrator will term *illusionnisme*: "ce magnétisme illusionniste du Général qui avait construit sa légende sur de simples déclarations neutralistes... cette façon qu'il avait eue de deviner l'occasion historique et de l'avoir saisie avant qu'elle disparût, de s'être situé à la croisée de tous les désespoirs pour en recueillir tous les débordements" (ibid., p.115). A talent for cynical deception and manipulation of this kind could be regarded as the

single most important prerequisite for political success in the particular circumstances of the Algerian war. It was de Gaulle himself, after all - *the* General - who turned the sybilline utterance into an art form. His famous, or, depending on the point of view, infamous, declaration to the crowds assembled on the Algiers *Forum* on 4 June 1958 - "Je vous ai compris!" - is just one of many such enigmatic statements (see Horne 1977, pp.300-303). As Volkoff suggests in *Le Retournement*, de Gaulle's personal motto might very well have been "<<Je feins de feindre pour mieux dissimuler>>" (Volkoff 1979, p.150). Liscia's General, like Volkoff's Beaujeux, is clearly following in some very distinguished footsteps.

However, the charmed life of the General is not destined to last. His fall from grace, which results in his trial and conviction for sedition, reveals that "un homme qui a prouvé cent fois ses talents de meneur, de fin politique et d'illusionniste" (Liscia 1980, p.149) is not immune to the vagaries of that history which he seeks to influence, or at least to the Gaullist state's conception of it (*ibid.*, p.183; cf. p.172). His trial may be initially regarded by the conscript as a show trial, the "sacrifice" of an innocent man on the altar of de Gaulle's ambition - "un grand spectacle judiciaire pour vider l'abcès algérien" (*ibid.*, p.207) - but the sordid reality of the General's plotting becomes all too clear before long. The *appelé*, hitherto blinded by his C.O.'s seigneurial dazzle, will thus embark on what the General's legal defenders have already established as a necessary task: "notre devoir est de démythifier le Général" (*ibid.*, p.139).

Gradually, the conscript will break the mythical hold of the General's seigneurial persona. Recognizing the fascination exerted by the General as a product, at the deepest level, of his own psychic disturbance or inadequacy (*ibid.*, pp.59 & 207), he will successfully undertake his own, inevitably painful, but very necessary, demystification of his erstwhile idol: "Le Général n'était donc plus le personnage immense qui m'avait dominé de toute sa hauteur pendant près d'un an... j'avais réussi à le démythifier" (*ibid.*, p.196). Having decided to refuse "une aussi totale aliénation de

moi-même", and intensely aware of the psychological potential of "des procédés mensongers ou magiques", the conscript will ultimately reject both the General and "la perpétuation de sa suzeraineté sur moi" (ibid., p.241). From this new freedom will come a fresh historical insight into the Franco-Algerian conflict; one which reassesses the role played by the General and all such seigneurial figures:

Avec le recul du temps, je mesurais la dimension de notre fol orgueil. Loin de contribuer de quelque manière que ce fût au déroulement de l'Histoire, le Général assistait du fond de sa chambre d'hôpital à des événements d'une importance capitale sur lesquels il n'avait aucune influence... De toute son âme, il voulait être associé à quelque fait stupéfiant. Mais les mécanismes déclenchés par le rapport de forces avait broyé toutes les volontés humaines. Mon idole gisait en miettes dans les oubliettes de la justice. (ibid., pp.201-202)

With this reiteration of the importance of mass history, we may very appropriately bring Georges Buis's 1961 novel *La Grotte* into the present discussion. Unlike Liscia, Buis did not have the benefit of twenty years of hindsight when he attempted to describe the role played by senior members of the French officer corps in Algeria. What he did have, however, was first-hand experience of the conflict, coupled with the remarkable ability to see through the mystifications uttered by his fellow officers and by the French colonial authorities. It is this rare combination of insights which explains the rare power of *La Grotte*, which Talbott rightly deems to be "as vivid a description of military operations as exists in the literature of the war" (Talbott 1980, p.187). This vividness is attributable in no small part to Buis's treatment of his central figure, *le commandant Enrico*, as we shall now explain.

*La Grotte* focusses on a single military operation in Algeria: the location and destruction of a major rebel headquarters (the cave of the title), together with its occupants. The scale of this operation can be gauged from the fact that the cave houses nothing less than an entire *katiba*, i.e. a batallion-sized force of *Armée de libération nationale* (ALN) regulars. As for the narrative's wealth of detail and general air of authenticity, these may reasonably be attributed to the impressive military credentials of its author:

Colonel Buis, a combat soldier of long experience and distinguished

accomplishment - a seasoned warrior, despite his scholarly mien - in 1959 commanded a sector in the Hodna, whose wild and rugged terrain made it the ideal repair of guerrillas. *La Grotte* is an account of a military operation that might have taken place there. (Talbot 1980, p.187; cf. Horne 1977, pp.324 & 342)

The novel opens, *in media res*, with the latest in a long succession of frustrating near-misses for Major Enrico and his men in their struggle against an adversary who is typically *insaisissable*. The months spent combing the mountains and caverns of the Major's sector have proved fruitless, whilst a large-scale operation organized by army corps headquarters meets with no more success. Nevertheless, Enrico remains convinced of his own unique ability to influence events:

Enrico savait que, seul dans ce coin, il pouvait se trouver un jour en mesure de rompre l'équilibre. Mais pour cela il fallait mettre la main sur la vanne, il fallait trouver l'entrée du repaire.

Il cherchait. (Buis 1961, p.33)

The very personal nature of Enrico's search for the illusive *grotte* is underlined later in the novel:

Enrico se rendait compte à présent qu'il avait ausculté, tâté cette montagne, des mois durant... Il essaya toutes les ruses, variant les approches à l'infini. Il poussa sur les flancs, aux parages de pistes improvisées, les raids brutaux d'éléments blindés. Sous tous les croissants de lune, par des temps de glace, ou, encore, sous les cataractes nocturnes tendues à l'horizontale par le vent, il tenta de glisser jusqu'aux articulations des falaises les ridicules chenilles de son infanterie. Il se révéla sur l'énorme calotte du sommet par de petits matins limpides, sous un ciel qu'aucun peintre n'aurait osé peindre tant il était, d'un seul coup, au lever du jour, uniment turquoise. Alors le soleil se levait sur une terre élastique au pas des brebis et chaque avoine folle était un joyau.

Mais surtout, cette montagne, il l'avait vécue et elle l'avait envahi.

...Il lui semblait parfois n'avoir été créé que pour deviner quelle roche de ces étendues revêches révélerait à l'apposition de la main l'ouverture... (ibid., pp.147-148)

The image of Enrico the commander, alone on the mountain-top, in the sight of God and the face of the rising sun, is clearly suggestive of those same qualities that we have highlighted in other texts and have sought to characterize as "seigneurial". The crystallization of the French military effort in Algeria into a campaign personally waged by a single, exceptionally gifted, senior officer is a characteristic literary ploy, whilst the appeal to a notion of superior destiny will by now be familiar. As for the chronic

solitude of the *chef*, this is stressed in *La Grotte*, just as it was in those novels discussed earlier:

La camaraderie laissait Enrico indifférent... ici, il commandait. Il n'était pas un pion qui se mêlait à d'autres... Chacun pourrait parler, raconter ses petites histoires, croire qu'on l'avait écouté. Et puis lui, Enrico, prendrait ses responsabilités. (ibid., pp.222-223)

The circumstances leading to the eventual discovery of the rebels' hide-out provide ample evidence of Enrico's ability to assume those responsibilities to considerable military effect. Making full use of a much needed stroke of luck - the capture of FLN documents revealing the presence of a number of major nationalist leaders in the area - Buis's protagonist makes use of a suitably magistral ruse in order to trick the rebels into revealing the location of the elusive *grotte* (ibid., pp.44-52). (He thus manages to avoid the thorny problem of torture, which is effectively sidestepped in *La Grotte*; rather, intelligence is always conveniently gathered by alternative means: captured rebels talk freely, important documents are captured, local Muslim attitudes are shrewdly interpreted, and the like.) Once this breakthrough has been achieved, the Major is able to besiege the cave, thus pitting his talents and resources directly against those of his FLN opponents. Talbott describes Enrico's reduction of the cave as "a virtuoso performance", noting that Buis's hero "is everywhere at once, coordinating artillery barrages and air strikes, helicopter-borne para assaults and the ground movements of his company commanders" (Talbott 1980, p.187).

As omniscient as he is omnipresent, Enrico leads his forces to the inevitable victory after seventeen days of bitter fighting. The account of this polished implementation of his plans often draws attention to the character's seigneurial qualities, but nowhere more obviously so than in the description of his regular helicopter flights over the battle-zone and the surrounding area. Leaving the ground, Enrico - "divinité mineure voletant à grand tapage sur cette Ilion étriquée" (Buis 1961, p.219) - enters what is supposedly another universe:

Le sien, actuel, était celui, supérieur et condescendant, de la Very High



Frequency, plus familièrement: V.H.F. Là, règnent les leaders-hélicoptères et autres seigneurs. (ibid., p.123; cf. p.250)

Enrico is similarly seigneurial in his dealings with the local Muslim population. A cavalry officer, he compares the inhabitants of the native villages below to a horse which, in its own best interests, must be ridden with a firm hand (ibid., p.133). However, this properly "cavalier" attitude does not prevent Enrico from recognizing a number of fundamental political truths about that same Muslim population, nor about the war as a whole. Indeed, it is in his dissent from the prevailing orthodoxies that the character reveals a brand of nobility not previously noted.

The primary given of Enrico's analysis of the situation in his sector - and, come to that, in Algeria as a whole - is that the Muslim population is a profoundly political entity. This is a view which inevitably sets him apart from, and at odds with, the majority of his peers, and particularly the theorists of *guerre révolutionnaire*. Having realized that the local villagers, for all their denials, are profoundly implicated in the nationalist revolt - "Ils sont dans la rébellion jusqu'aux yeux" (ibid., p.63) - he can have little sympathy for those who advocate a decisive show of military force to win Muslim hearts and minds over to the French colonial cause:

Pauvres gens - désespérés sans doute - que ceux qui, ne pouvant mordre sur ces paysans depuis des années que durait la révolte, feignaient de ne voir en eux qu'une masse politiquement inculte à la remorque innocente ou terrorisée d'une poignée de meneurs! Sur cette analyse incroyablement fausse ils se fondaient à croire qu'une autre minorité - la leur, celle des augures durs - pouvait gagner à elle ce tiers-état par l'affichage d'une détermination plus grande et par la magie d'un slogan.

Enrico songeait que la réalité - quotidiennement assenée depuis quatre ans - se situait exactement à l'opposé. Ces paysans constitueraient, peut-être, dans dix ans, dans vingt ans, une société économique dépolitisée, maniable, à prendre et à encadrer. Pour l'instant, ils étaient des politiques, même s'ils n'étaient pas politisés. (ibid., p.228)

This remarkable awareness of the political culture of the Muslim population of Algeria sets Enrico apart from every other *seigneur* considered in the present chapter. And it is precisely this awareness which will lead the Major to take up an outspoken stand against the army high command's policy of *regroupement*. There is no "Sidi-Rhalem", or "Sohane", or "Force di Frappe" to be found in *La Grotte*, in consequence,

but rather an impassioned denunciation of this, historically counterproductive, but nonetheless fashionable, strategy:

...Enrico n'ignorait pas qu'il était à contre-courant. Quinze jours plus tôt, il avait été bouleversé de lire, à la <<une>> d'un grand quotidien d'Alger, un article consacré à un pacificateur à la mode. Ses méthodes étaient célébrées sur le mode majeur, considérées comme neuves, originales, et comme devant avoir un effet décisif. Une phrase mise en valeur dans le texte avait fait rougir Enrico de colère: <<J'ai compris à présent! Ce n'est pas autour du fortin qu'il faut mettre les barbelés: c'est autour du village!>> (ibid., pp.240-241)

Heretical views of this kind will, inevitably, bring Enrico into direct conflict with his hierarchical superiors: his punitive posting back to France will be the price which he has to pay for his political insight (ibid., pp.311-312). Not that such official retribution in any way diminishes the Major's power to persuade; on the contrary, his critical opinions are merely rendered that much more attractive by their evident nuisance value.

The most important of these same opinions is, without doubt, Enrico's properly historical appreciation of the durability of the nationalist rebellion in Algeria. In an army obsessed with *le bilan*, Buis's hero can see beyond the totals of enemy dead and captured weapons to a deeper reality: a military *seigneur* to the core, he is nevertheless able to recognize that the decisive *coup de maître* dreamed of by himself and other senior French officers must always remain a fantasy (ibid., p.310). His rejection of the convenient interpretation of the disappearance of a number of key FLN commanders known to have been trapped in the cave is typical of this systematic refusal of the easy political option:

Sans doute, la montagne s'était refermée, définitivement, sur le dernier carré des rebelles. Sans doute, en ce moment, Moustache, Marseillaise et leurs hommes mouraient doucement de folie and de faim, asphyxiés par l'oxyde de carbone, par la fumée, dans le noir, au bord de la source.

<<A moins, songeait Enrico, à moins qu'en ce moment même, Moustache ne surgisse précautionneusement d'un buisson, dans l'autre vallée comme le voudrait la légende.>> (ibid., p.296)

It is against this background that the little spring which continues to flow in the darkness of the cave - "une source qui ne tarirait jamais..." (ibid., p.197; cf. p.307) -

can be seen to stand as a symbol of the Algerian nationalist cause. Enrico's subsequent death at the hands of Tahar Marseillaise, one of the rebel leaders referred to here, serves a similarly symbolic function. Ironically, the fatal ambush occurs shortly before Enrico is due to leave Algeria. The Major is out exercising his horse one morning when he is killed instantly by a burst of machine-gun fire. In classic fashion, the FLN fighter proceeds to slit the dead officer's throat: "par habitude, pour l'édification des patrouilles, et, tout bonnement, pour le plaisir" (ibid., p.317). The political implications of this final outcome are usefully underlined by John Talbott:

With Tahar Marseillaise administering *le grand sourire* to Enrico, Colonel Buis ended his novel dissenting from the military leadership's optimistic assessment of the army's accomplishments in Algeria. In his battle against the cave, Buis's fictional major came up with just the kind of statistics that, in the aggregate, enabled Challe and many of his aides and commanders to see victory over the ALN near at hand. What these wishful thinkers ignored, *La Grotte* maintained, were realities that lay beyond the reach of quantitative measurements of success. They mistook pledges of allegiance made under duress for pledges freely given. They mistook peasants keenly aware of their own self-interest for credulous country bumpkins. They mistook killing off the revolutionary rank and file for crippling the revolutionary leadership. They mistook promises made against the future as adequate compensation for injuries done in the past. They underestimated the difference between coercion at the hands of foreigners and coercion at the hands of neighbors and relatives; they underestimated how long it might take ever to come to an end of the rebellion. (Talbott 1980, p.191)

There can be little doubting that Major Enrico dies as he lives: as a *seigneur*. But neither can the real importance of Buis's contribution to the Algerian debate, via the mouth of this seigneurial character, be reasonably denied. For, this particular *chevalier* distinguishes himself by attaining something very close to enlightenment before he dies. Written in the heat of the battle, yet displaying both a political insight and an historical objectivity conspicuously absent from many later works, *La Grotte* is to be regarded as one of the most significant novels of the Algerian war.

## CHAPTER 5

### *NI VICTIMES NI BOURREAUX : THE LIBERAL DILEMMA*

In his study of *Intellectuals and Decolonization in France*, Paul Clay Sorum writes:

The Algerian war was the climax of the agony of French decolonization. France was torn apart by the disputes over the future status of Algeria. The intellectuals were tormented by the moral dilemmas Algeria presented. (Sorum 1977, p.105)

It is with the literary manifestations of this intellectual soul-searching that we shall concern ourselves in the present chapter. As before, our critical approach has a doubly demystifying aim: the exposure of artistic mystification, and the identification of demystifying art. Three core texts have been chosen for the purposes of this study, and will be discussed in chronological order: Pierre-Henri Simon's *Portrait d'un officier* (1958), Gilbert Cesbron's *Entre chiens et loups* (1962), and Bernard Clavel's *Le silence des armes* (1974).

Pierre-Henri Simon first came to public prominence in the wake of the Battle of Algiers, as one of the foremost metropolitan critics of the French army's systematic use of torture for the gathering of intelligence. With the memory of the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis still fresh in their minds, he and other liberal Catholic intellectuals were spurred into take a leading role in the denunciation of abhorrent pacification methods in Algeria. Simon's personal response centred on his influential pamphlet *Contre la torture* (1957), which made a major contribution to the increasingly heated debate on the subject (Sorum 1977, p.115).

Yet, *Contre la torture* was only one aspect of the moralist thinker's political agitation. He was also active in the *Comité de Résistance Spirituelle*, for instance, a body which included amongst its members such leading Catholic figures as Mauriac, Beuve-Méry, Domenach and Massignon, and which sought to coordinate Christian opposition to military atrocities in Algeria. In addition to which, he produced a

properly literary response to this specific period of French history - *Portrait d'un officier* - and it is this that we now intend to study in detail.

Simon produced his *récit* over the twelve months to September 1958, and saw it published before the year was out. We shall seek to show that this text embodies an ideological contradiction which the author and others like him experienced as the "liberal dilemma". Our precise understanding of this term will become clear in the course of the present chapter. In the meantime, an appropriate description of the moralist intellectuals' quandary is provided by Talbott, who revealingly singles out for our attention "Such men of two minds as Pierre-Henri Simon" when sympathetically evoking the difficulties experienced by those "critics of the war who recognized the predicaments of the soldiers and defenders of the army, who understood the yearnings of the terrorists" (Talbott 1980, p.248; see also Talbott 1978 & Hargreaves 1986). Simon, in short, is the epitome of the "tortured" liberal.

As the title suggests, *Portrait d'un officier* focusses on a single military man, the aristocratic Jean de Larsan. From a long line of career soldiers, the protagonist sees service in the European and North African theatres of World War II - defeat in France, imprisonment in Germany, escape and return to action with the Free French - before being sent to fight the colonial revolutionaries in both Indochina and Algeria. It is the trauma occasioned by his involvement in this final conflict which will lead him to resign his commission, thus following in the footsteps of such celebrated figures as General Jacques Paris de Bollardière. The background to his fateful decision will be revealed in the course of a train journey, following a chance encounter with the narrator, an older man who was once a fellow POW; the tale is a transparent vehicle, in short, for the reiteration of those liberal attitudes already voiced in *Contre la torture*. However, to state this is by no means to deny the abiding interest of Simon's literary response to the Algerian war. On the contrary, it is to assert the need for a particularly close reading of the relevant text.

The key to a demystified understanding of Simon's short novel lies in its ambivalent attitude as regards military romanticism; indeed, this is the point on which the officer's story turns. More specifically, the brand of military romanticism underpinning the depiction of Larsan is to be comprehended in terms of the long-established myth of the Christian knight. Interestingly enough, this mythical ancestry is made clear by the protagonist himself. The young soldier, who has already proved himself to be of the stuff of heroes, is discussing his background with the narrator in the German prison camp:

<<Je suis un soldat, voyez-vous, et je ne crois pas qu'on puisse l'être davantage. Ma famille ... a toujours été pauvre ... mais, au sens le plus précis du mot, elle est noble; c'est-à-dire vouée au service des armes et à l'honneur militaire. [...] Pour moi, il n'y eut jamais la moindre hésitation: j'étais voué à Saint-Cyr, au baroud. Il suffisait d'ouvrir les yeux pour voir arriver la guerre; je m'y préparais consciencieusement, comme à mon métier; vous moquerez-vous de moi si j'ajoute: comme à une entrée en religion? Je ne puis concevoir la guerre autrement que dans la forme d'une action où les vertus ne sont pas celles de la paix, parce qu'elles les dépassent.>> (Simon 1958, p.16)

For Larsan, then, the army is "un domaine du sacré" (ibid., p.57), much as it was for the Crusaders. Such imagery will readily be seen to mirror aspects of the romantic treatment accorded by writers like Jean Lartéguy to the "monastic" lifestyle of the French army's élite units. However, Larsan's creed should not be confused with the views expressed in such hymns to *efficacité* as *Les Centurions*. For, this version of the myth of the saintly warrior will not be presented as an image of the French army in Algeria, but as its antithesis. Moreover, the potentially dangerous inappropriateness of such an anachronistic concept of war will be insisted upon as soon as it is uttered:

- Si je vous comprends, mon cher, j'ai la chance et l'honneur d'avoir pour camarade de taule le dernier des chevaliers chrétiens.

- Oui, mon lieutenant, il m'arrive de penser ainsi, à mes heures d'orgueil. A d'autres moments, je m'accuse de sentimentalité, d'irréalisme. Je suis Don Quichotte.

- Il est certain ... que la hauteur de vos vues ne va pas sans péril. En idéalisant la guerre, vous contribuez à la justifier, c'est-à-dire à en immobiliser le poids fatal. Or, elle n'a sans doute jamais été, en tout cas elle ne saurait plus être ce grand tournoi loyal que vous imaginez; elle est devenue sordide et cruelle, une espèce de boucherie scientifique où ce ne sont plus des soldats qui affrontent des soldats, mais des ingénieurs qui écrasent des villes, qui brûlent des foules comme nos ancêtres à l'âge des cavernes et les généraux de Louis-Philippe enfumaient des tribus.

- Oui, avec cette aggravation des nombres multipliés par cent mille. (ibid., pp.16-17)

Two points must be made with regard to this exchange between the protagonist and his principal interlocutor. Firstly, Larsan is basically an implausible character, who is to be regarded as the personification of a debating posture rather than anything else. Secondly, the rational counter-arguments of the narrator cannot durably affect his idealistic stance, as is made clear by the fact that he so readily agrees with the other's criticisms. Indeed, he can accept his detractor's point of view precisely because it is not liable to influence his own position, which is based on faith rather than facts. In consequence, a single example of chivalry in combat - such as that which he had the great good fortune to experience in 1940, when, having been seriously wounded, he was taken to safety by a German tank commander - is all the evidence he requires. As the officer puts it: "il suffit d'un miracle pour rassurer un croyant" (ibid., p.20).

The fundamental ambivalence of *Portrait d'un officier* will not yet be fully apparent, but is at least hinted at by the foregoing exchange. The text, in fact, simultaneously utters both a familiar myth and what would seem, at least, to be the necessary antidote to it. However, the quasi-mystical basis of Larsan's romantic conception of war means that it cannot be debunked by the older man's worldly-wise comments. Indeed, though the specific experience of the Algerian conflict ultimately leads Larsan to resign his commission, this outcome does not imply that he renounces his noble vision of warfare by the same token. Rather, it is the radical discrepancy between his personal code and the conduct of the mass of the French forces in North Africa which will be used to criticize the army's conduct of the campaign. This unresolved tension between two competing and, indeed, mutually exclusive, approaches to the waging of war is, we shall argue, symptomatic of an unavowed contradiction on a deeper level; one which takes us to the heart of the liberal dilemma. For, what Larsan is really seeking in Algeria is a clean war, in direct contrast to the *sale guerre* which is actually being fought out there. Thus regarded, the hero of *Portrait d'un*

*officier* stands revealed as a metaphor for the tortured liberal conscience, which historically supported the ends of colonial repression in Algeria, but could not bring itself to accept the brutal means necessary to crush the nationalist insurrection. Larsan is only too keen to fight in Algeria, in short, but not this, particularly unpleasant, war. The very same could be said of Simon and those Catholic intellectuals who, whilst continuing to believe in France's *mission civilisatrice*, were unable to countenance the methods actually used by the army in an attempt to preserve that "civilizing" ascendancy. These are points which will be made clearer as the argument is developed.

Although we learn quite early on that Larsan has quit Algeria and the army (ibid., p.23), it is only towards the end of Simon's narrative that we are informed of the reasons for his decision. We do know, however, that a decisive role has been played by the recent death of one Kadour Sadoun (ibid., p.24); an apparent revelation which is in reality the source of the narrative's basic enigma. Having thus been set in motion, the action of Simon's work will lead the reader inexorably towards the solution of the mystery with the full detailing of the protagonist's Algerian "tragedy". This textual disclosure will, in the event, coincide with the novel's most developed expression of Simon's liberal critique of the war as a whole. If we are to be in a position to appreciate that final political content, however, we must first give some consideration to Larsan's pre-resignation experience of Algeria.

Whatever the practical problems encountered by the idealistic Larsan in World War II and Indochina, he nevertheless manages to arrive in Algeria with his noble vision of chivalrous combat still miraculously intact. The officer will thus be in a position to "vote with his feet", as it were, when he finally realizes just how far short the conflict in North Africa falls of "la grande aventure concrète et vitale où le courage des combattants collabore obscurément à l'histoire" (ibid., p.27). Motivated by the wish to attack pacification methods, the resilience of Larsan's military romanticism is entirely



plausible within the mythical framework identified for it; the religious orientation of the relevant myth ensures that an absolute minimum of objective correlation is required in order to preserve the romantic military model: as we have already noted, historical exceptions are enough to establish the validity of the myth-system. So, whilst Larsan's romantic vision may be regularly challenged, it is never demolished; this, in spite of the text's attention throughout to the theoretical and symbolic fallacies which habitually underlie the military's rationalization of violence. In the following example of this demystifying aspect of the work, it is, as ever, the narrator who takes the professional soldier to task:

- Je ne contesterai jamais la vertu du soldat, Larsan, ni son idéalisme: plutôt lui reprocherai-je d'équilibrer trop aisément sa soumission naturelle à la violence par un abus d'abstractions à majuscules, Honneur, Devoir, Patrie, ou par des images symboliques, uniforme, drapeau, épée en forme de croix, qui lui font un commode écran de signes sacrés entre sa conscience et son acte, entre son humanité et ses meurtres. (ibid., pp.35-36)

We are very close here to the sort of demystification of military *manas* (taboos) advocated by Barthes in "Grammaire africaine" (Barthes 1957, pp.137-144). Nevertheless, Simon's hero will continue to uphold his romantic view of the soldier's condition. So, despite both frequent exposure to the sordid side of war in both Europe and Indochina, and the narrator's criticism after the event, the ethos which will inform his account of "his" Algerian war remains that associated with the tradition of *chevalerie*.

Larsan's resignation might be prompted by the death of Kadour Sadoun, but his link with the family goes right back to the spring of 1942, when he was put in charge of training a group of native troops in Algeria:

Brahim approchait de la trentaine quand je l'avais vu arriver à Mansoura, peu de temps après le débarquement, dans la compagnie que j'avais mission de former. Il appartenait à une famille d'artisans de Sétif, corroyeurs de père en fils, gens assez à leur aise qui envoyaient leurs enfants à l'école et tenaient bien à la France. (Simon 1958, p.88)

A number of points must be made regarding this first image of Brahim. To begin with, although no particular significance is explicitly attached to the choice of

home town, its nationalist implications - as the scene of the bloody anti-French agitation of 1945 - can hardly have been overlooked by the author. The family's pro-French sympathies are not made to appear implausible, however; rather, they are given a certain edge which will be constantly sharpened as the narrative progresses. The relative prosperity and cultivation of the Sadouns must be noted, in addition, as the objective correlatives of their expressed allegiance to the colonial power: they have clearly benefitted from the *présence française*, both materially and culturally. The overall impression, indeed, is one of paternalist colonial advance, with the condition of the colonized being evoked in wholly positive terms. The text thus reveals its liberal inspiration, with the emphasis on the need to provide schooling for the native being of particular significance. In fact, what we see here is nothing less than the principal strand of the liberal ideology: i.e. a belief in the *mission civilisatrice* of the French nation. So, whilst the colonized's aspirations to political and economic emancipation may be sympathized with, they will only be thought about within the established framework of paternalist values: hard work and French education are the proper route to Algerian well-being, as it were, rather than FLN-inspired revolution.

This characteristically liberal approach to the Algerian question has two additional strands which are only implicit here, but which will be made explicit before very long. They are therefore worth noting at this stage:

- Colonial strife is rationalized in terms of abuses, or failures of paternalism, rather than predictable products of the colonial system. This point of view fails to deal adequately with the politics of national liberation, and results in the inability to comprehend major areas of the anticolonialist struggle, most notably violent challenges to French cultural domination (e.g. the burning down of schools and the killing of teachers).

- Faith is expressed in the restorative powers of reformist policies in dealing with cases of colonial unrest, provided always that such measures are adopted early

enough. Once begun, colonial wars cannot durably be resolved by the colonizer's use of military force. Political solutions are thus needed, although these will always stop short of the outright independence demanded by the colonial nationalists.

These, then, are the three corner-stones of the liberal intellectuals' approach to Algeria: a belief in the nation's *mission civilisatrice*; a tendency to see colonial problems as failures of the system; and faith in the power of reform to avert revolution. It is within this frame of political reference that *Portrait d'un officier* will make the moralist case against torture and other such abhorrent pacification methods.

From Algeria, the two men's relationship takes in shared experiences of combat in North Africa and Europe, before the armistice sends each his separate way. The nature of their military kinship is described by Larsan in terms which typify his Vigny-like conception of the soldier's vocation: "...en vérité, ce qui s'était passé entre nous ... est infiniment simple et tient sous un mot: frères d'armes ... et cela dit tout: une confiance absolue, une certitude de connaître l'autre..." (ibid., p.86). For all its supposed simplicity, however, this point will be subsequently developed, along familiar mythical lines:

- Oui, je pense que cela ne peut pas se produire en dehors de la vie militaire, pas en tout cas en dehors de la vie dangereuse, cette communauté totale de deux hommes, ce sentiment assuré d'une présence loyale. Nous étions des frères, et pourtant nous n'étions pas des égaux: non par l'âge, mais par le grade et l'expérience du métier, je dominais Brahim; sa soumission n'en était que plus totale, mais sans amertume, sans l'ombre d'une rancoeur ou d'un refus, comme mon pouvoir était sans dédain ni orgueil. Entre le capitaine de Larsan et le sergent Sadoun, un lien très simple et très antique, familier et vénérable, s'était naturellement noué: le dévouement de l'homme à l'homme, l'amitié dans la hiérarchie, en somme l'honneur féodal. (ibid., p.88)

The insistence on the supposed simplicity, antiquity and, above all, naturalness of this relationship between colonizer and colonized alerts us unmistakably to the presence of myth. Larsan's mythical identity with such "feudal" warlords as Volkoff's Beaujeux and Saint-Laurent's Jasson will be underlined shortly. For the time being, let us simply note that the young officer, before losing touch with Brahim, does two significant things: he arranges to have the Muslim sergeant made up to lieutenant; and

he discovers that Brahim has a son. His reward for the former act is the Algerian's decision to stay on in the French army after completing his wartime service. The latter event, meanwhile, provides him with what will turn out to be a glimpse of what the future holds in store, not only for both Brahim and Kadour Sadoun, but also for himself:

...il en paraissait très fier, c'était un luron, toujours premier à l'école. <<Lui, je vous jure qu'il fera des études, qu'il aura sa place et ne sera pas humilié.>> Je devais me rappeler plus tard cette phrase qui m'avait surpris sur le moment. (ibid., p.89)

The nature of Brahim's experience of colonial humiliation will only be revealed when the two men, having lost touch in the interim, meet up once again in the Indochina of 1950. No sooner has Larsan taken command of the battalion in which Brahim is serving, than the Algerian unburdens himself to his old friend and new C.O. We thus learn that this faithful servant of France has decided to leave the army, for reasons which have at least as much to do with the situation in Algeria as they have with the war in Indochina:

...là-bas, vous savez, on n'est plus content de la France. Pour aider à la délivrer, nous n'avions pas marchandé notre sang, nous, les Africains, n'est-ce pas? Alors, on espérait que quelque chose allait changer, que les promesses seraient tenues, que nous serions de vrais Français... Vous savez ce qui s'est passé: on a fait semblant de voter des lois, on ne les a pas appliqués; et les bicots sont toujours les bicots. [...] Il faut dire le mot: je suis d'une autre race, d'une autre patrie. Et c'est pourquoi mes camarades, au mess, en service, ne me traitent jamais tout à fait en égal; c'est pourquoi j'avancerai toujours à l'ancienneté... [...] Alors, je me suis dit... : que les Français s'arrangent avec les Viets, ça les regarde; mais ce n'est pas mon affaire d'empêcher des Jaunes de reprendre leur liberté, quand nous n'avons pas encore la nôtre... (ibid., pp.92-94)

This is a typical liberal mixture of accurate historical analysis and underlying mystification. For, if the impact on Muslim political awareness of service in the French forces between 1939 and 1954 is reasonably reported, the fact remains that this image of Algerian discontent is, at bottom, a reassuring one. Brahim does not seek independence, after all, but *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité (d'armes)*, flexible concepts which do not pose a threat to the continued French domination of Algeria and the Algerians; on the contrary, they are the very essence of that mythical "true Frenchness"

to which Brahim now aspires. That many of the most integrated Algerians did, indeed, wish to become real Frenchmen is, in itself, beyond dispute; as is the fact that such views may have been commonly held by Muslim members of the French military in 1950. However, this type of thinking was rapidly overtaken by events from 1954 onwards, and was hopelessly out of date by 1958, when *Portrait d'un officier* was published. For a commentator of Simon's stature to continue to focus on this outmoded expression of pre-nationalist consciousness at a time when such key figures as Ferhat Abbas had renounced their former liberalism in favour of joining the revolutionaries of the FLN is one indication of the French liberals' chronic inability to face up to the uncomfortable political realities of the Algerian conflict (see Horne 1977, pp.140-141). The real contradiction inherent in the expressed wish of a man who refers to himself as an *Africain* - "d'une autre race, d'une autre patrie" - to be *un vrai Français* is further evidence of this liberal mystification.

It is only a personal appeal to Brahim not to desert his comrade at a particularly dangerous time that persuades him to stay on with Larsan in Indochina. Four days later, the Algerian is killed in action; an outcome which results in some predictable self-recrimination on the part of the protagonist (Simon 1958, p.96). More important than this latest variation on the theme of liberal soul-searching, however, is the structural parallelism of Simon's narrative, which will be revealed as Larsan makes contact for the first time with the family of his dead subordinate. For them, he and we discover, he has become "une sorte de personnage mythique" (ibid., p.98). This expression is peculiarly apposite, in the event, and will become more clearly so as Larsan describes the Sadoun family's reaction to his role in Brahim's death:

...il ne semblait pas que l'idée leur fût seulement venue que j'étais comptable de sa mort; le fatalisme de leur religion et le sens féodal qui leur était naturel convergeaient pour me mettre hors de cause; bienfaisant ou malfaisant, Lieutenant Jean était toujours pour eux le chef, le seigneur, l'instrument vénérable d'Allah. (ibid., p.99)

Although supposedly the products of Islamic fatalism and a natural feudalism - two received notions which will be considered in their own right in Chapter 7 - the

views expressed here are entirely consistent with the position adopted hitherto by Larsan himself. In particular, his own belief in God and Destiny have been stressed throughout, as has his "comportement seigneurial" (ibid., p.35). Thus regarded, Larsan shares a common mythical identity with Beaujeux, Jasson, and other such military *seigneurs*. The primary importance of the family myth of "Lieutenant Jean" resides, however, in the way in which it is exploited to further the action of *Portrait d'un officier*. For, by encouraging Kadour Sadoun to follow in his father's footsteps by joining the French army, Larsan will compromise himself a second time; as he himself will come to understand in due course (ibid., p.101). Moreover, the consequences will be much farther reaching both for the Sadoun family and for himself in the case of Kadour's service on the French side.

At this point in the novel, however, Larsan has no doubts about the legitimacy of the French military's Algerian campaign. So, his statement of the army's position as regards the territory's troubles is primarily remarkable as an indication of the clearness of his own conscience:

Je leur assurai que nous, les soldats, nous n'étions pas là pour les écraser, mais pour étouffer la terreur et la révolte, et ensuite, dans l'ordre rétabli, nous voulions leur donner leurs droits. (ibid., pp.99-100)

It is worth noting that Larsan's optimistic combination of repression and reform accurately mirrors the historical pattern of governmental responses to the challenge of militant Algerian nationalism. His claims also reflect the prevailing orthodoxy's tendency to criminalize, and thus to depoliticize, the FLN and its activities. More specifically, the nationalists' waging of a low-intensity guerrilla war is reduced to an attack on a mythified *Ordre*, rather than on a very specific political order, namely French colonial rule in Algeria (cf. Barthes 1957, p.237). This myth of Order is the ideological twin, in fact, of the colonizer's *Loi*. Those who oppose that order will, quite "naturally", render themselves *hors-la-loi*, and thus place themselves beyond the pale of the *civilisation* so regularly vaunted as France's principal gift to the colonized

peoples. The rather too convenient implications of such thinking for the war effort are soon to be spelled out for the idealistic Larsan by the advocates of a robust military realism: "Moyens exceptionnels ... non illégitimes: contre des hors-la-loi, nous ne sommes pas tenus d'appliquer la loi; contre une entreprise terroriste, nous avons l'obligation de choisir les instruments efficaces..." (Simon 1958, p.120)

We are here at the very heart of the "liberal dilemma": namely, the pivotal question of how best to respond to terrorist violence in Algeria (Sorum 1977, pp.126-128; cf. Talbott 1978 & Hargreaves 1986). In the event, only two responses were to prove politically viable: either to accept torture as a necessary evil in order to preserve the greater good which *Algérie française* represented; or to reject torture completely and thereby resign oneself to Algerian independence. The moralist intellectuals would, nevertheless, pursue the chimerical goal of a humane pacification effort. They would thus find themselves embroiled in an endless, and ultimately futile, discussion of means, while failing to give proper attention to the real issue of ends. It is against this background that Simon's account of Larsan's Algerian war is to be set. So, to return to the protagonist's reassurances as regards the French army's Algerian role, we can see that the most Simon has to offer those Muslims unhappy with their lot is colonial jam tomorrow, but absolutely no nationalist jam today. Only when the colonized's challenge to the established order has been crushed will the military be prepared to consider his, conveniently unspecified, rights. Paternalist reform will be imposed, from above, on the colonial power's terms; revolutionary change, forced from below, is to be regarded as a crime and dealt with accordingly.

Larsan's initial optimism is rapidly modified by his first contacts with the daily realities of the Algerian conflict. With the blind use of military might ruled out as counterproductive in the battle for native "hearts and minds", and with legalistic inaction rejected as likely to encourage the spread of the insurrection, the military is left with a difficult path to tread:

Restait à prendre une côte mal taillée, à combiner la sévérité et la bienveillance,

les exécutions et les distributions, la torture et l'hygiène; c'est ce que le style officiel appelait la pacification et qui était, au vrai, l'extension de la guerre, dans la forme d'une lutte sans pitié entre des gangsters fanatiques et des soldats policiers. Je n'aimais pas cela... (Simon 1958, p.103)

Larsan's displeasure is particularly closely linked to the army's use of torture, of which he, quite predictably, disapproves; this, even with regard to the "fanatical gangsters" of the FLN. In the event, his first encounter with the practice leads him to seek a *modus vivendi* which will allow him to keep his own hands clean, if nothing else (ibid., pp.103-111). However, his attempt at remaining above the Algerian *mêlée* is destined to collapse in the face of what is a stock challenge to the liberal military conscience: i.e. the dilemma which sets the torture of guilty men against the loss of innocent lives. Larsan takes up the story:

Ce compromis un peu lâche nous laissa vivre en paix jusqu'à la prise d'un certain Achour. Celui-ci s'était rendu sinistrement célèbre, dans la province algéroise, comme exécuteur des basses oeuvres du F.L.N.; on le savait lié à un réseau dangereux, et l'affaire fit du bruit quand [le lieutenant] Chédozeau, ayant tendu un piège audacieux, le cravata de nuit dans une ferme en ruine. Je vis le gars, et sa gueule ne me fut pas sympathique: un illuminé fébrile, avec des yeux bridés et sournois, de longs doigts d'étrangleur; assez couard aussi, pleurant et mentant pour se sauver; en somme, le sale tueur. (ibid., p.111)

Thus described, Achour is clearly the utter antithesis of the Christian knight, as conceived and exemplified by Jean de Larsan. In fact, the prisoner is scarcely a human figure at all, and more a caricature of the Arab terrorist. As sinister as he is dangerous, this demonic creature of the night displays a low cunning which is strikingly contrasted with the *audace* of his dashing captor. Both physically and morally repellent, the rebel combines fanaticism, mendacity, and abject cowardice in a whole which could hardly be less attractive. A patent villain, this thoroughly abhorrent specimen of militant Algerian nationalism is radically unable to elicit a sympathetic response on the part of either the protagonist or the reader. Here, in short, is a most suitable subject for the use of "exceptional methods", if ever there was one. And yet, Larsan, Voltaire-like, is prepared to defend the despised Achour against Lieutenant Santelli and the rest of the military torturers:

Ce gorille sanguinaire, je n'aurais pas eu le moindre scrupule, j'aurais plutôt



éprouvé une satisfaction à le voir, en plein baroud, sous le point de mire de ma mitrailleuse; davantage: si j'en avais eu l'autorité, je l'aurais fait fusiller sans hésitation, pour deux ou trois crimes atroces que j'étais certain qu'il avait commis; mais, je n'admettais point qu'on le battît au sang, qu'on lui fît boire de l'eau à l'en crever, qu'on le couchât nu sur une table avec une électrode au sexe pour tirer de ses hurlements une cache d'armes ou la planque d'un complice, même si cela importait à savoir. (ibid., pp.111-112)

Having rejected the use of torture, regardless of its practical military utility, Larsan continues with an important statement of the case against the practice as he understands it. The terms in which the officer's argument is couched would seem to indicate the relevance of Pascal's thinking in the present context:

Cette casuistique de l'honneur, je ne suis pas assez philosophe pour la justifier en raison: ce sont des choses que l'on sent non pas dans les brouillards de la conscience où les notions larvaires ne sont encore que des préjugés, mais à son plus clair foyer, où les idées éclatent dans un si grand jour d'évidence qu'elles n'ont pas à s'expliquer, et c'est justement pourquoi on les appelle des principes. J'en avais un, c'est qu'un officier d'une nation baptisée et civilisée ne torture pas, ne laisse pas torturer un homme désarmé, fût-il une brute comme cet Achour... (ibid., p.112)

Given Simon's established position as one of the prime movers of the liberal Catholics' anti-torture campaign, what is immediately striking about the foregoing quotation is not so much the specific nature of Jean de Larsan's single inflexible principle, as the rejection of rationalism which underlies it. In place of reason, the Christian conscience's "plus clair foyer" is, like Pascal's *coeur*, installed as the ultimate source of ethical authority. Indeed, the remainder of *Portrait d'un officier* may properly be regarded as the story of the conflict between Larsan's heartfelt principles and military pragmatism. What is more, the young officer's eventual resignation from the army is emblematic of the failure of Simon and the other metropolitan liberals to come to terms with the pivotal colonial myth of the French nation's *mission civilisatrice*. For, together with its associated system of ideas, the notion of mission underlies not only the intellectuals' opposition to torture - perceived as both "an assault on the ideological bonds of French society" and "a betrayal of its soul" (Sorum 1977, p.125) - but also their collective position on the Algerian war as a whole.

It is only to be expected that Larsan's stand against the use of torture should swiftly bring him into confrontation with the advocates of *efficacité*. In *Portrait d'un officier*, the theorists of *la guerre révolutionnaire* have as their principal secular representative Colonel Dhagondange, Larsan's immediate superior and another former inmate of the POW camp; their spiritual champion, meanwhile, is the regimental chaplain, Father Legouey. Having overridden Larsan's objections to Santelli's use of torture to interrogate Achour, Dhagondange orders the protagonist to his headquarters to discuss the matter's implications. The resulting set-piece debate of the issues raised by the military's attempted pacification of Algeria is, as we shall now see, remarkable not so much for the arguments voiced as for the profound lack of confidence which it reveals in the liberals' anti-torture case.

True to form, it is *efficacité* which will provide the foundation for Colonel Dhagondange's own position on the torture question. This is practically illustrated by the recovery, thanks to the information extracted from Achour by Santelli, of twelve guns and two cases of grenades, not to mention the smashing of a major rebel network; concrete achievements which enable the Colonel to consider Larsan's chivalry from a position of some strength and with not a little irony (Simon 1958, p.115). His junior's determination to foreground the logic of the military realist's stance is, perhaps, initially surprising, but will readily be seen to conform to the irrational, or perhaps supra-rational, Christian problematic just considered. So, we will learn, for example, that Dhagondange has brought to the Algerian conflict that same intellectual rigour that he applied to the 1939-1945 hostilities; whilst his thorough grounding in the principles of "revolutionary war" puts him at a considerable theoretical advantage to the liberal humanist (*ibid.*, pp.114-115).

It is thus in the full knowledge of the certainty of his own defeat in the debate that Larsan embarks upon his critique of abhorrent pacification methods, in which he relies upon the usual liberal assertions of torture's counter-productive impact on the

Muslim population in Algeria, together with the threat which it poses to Christian civilization at home (*ibid.*, pp.115-117). Inevitably, he has no *bilan* to set against the numerically-minded Colonel's arms and intelligence; whilst as far as the alleged threat to the nation's Catholic heritage is concerned, his C.O. simply replies that such theological considerations go beyond his own competence, inviting the protagonist to take them up with Father Legouey instead. All in all, Larsan's patent inability to come up with anything like a convincing counter to the robust materialism of Dhagondange bodes ill for his subsequent confrontation with the equally solid Legouey.

While Dhagondange and Legouey are to be regarded as Christian positivists, Larsan is presented as a Christian mystic. So, their self-assured faith in dogma, law and ritual, in the acceptance of order and discipline, is to be contrasted with his experience of "l'irruption d'une soif et d'une faim qui exaltent l'âme en la troublant" (*ibid.*, p.118). Their certainties are to be set against his doubts, in short. This adds weight to our suggestion that the protagonist, like both his creator and the broad intellectual establishment, urges the rejection of rational conclusions, based on mutually accepted colonialist premises, in favour of an intuitive stand against specified aspects of the military's pacification effort. It also indicates that Larsan's arguments will cut as little ice with Legouey as they did with Dhagondange; the priest will be able to develop a reasoned argument which the hero may challenge occasionally, but which he is radically incapable of demystifying on account of his own ideological confusion.

For Legouey, it is the Algerian war's specificity which inevitably determines the character of each individual's participation in it. Seen as a crusade against the twin evils of Islam and Communism - which are themselves perceived to be readily compatible - the conflict makes its own harsh rules. The use of torture and associated methods is, according to this view, justified both on practical and moral grounds. Those liberals who refuse to apply "effective methods" are, in consequence, guilty of what the priest terms "sentimentalité pseudo-chrétienne", a costly scruple which must be

paid for with "[le] sang des innocents livrés aux malfaiteurs que nous avons épargnés" (ibid., p.121). As ever, the FLN is cast as the criminal aggressor, while nationalist targets are its guiltless victims; the French army, meanwhile, is the impartial upholder of civilized order: the colonial policeman, as it were.

Legouey's totally self-consistent version of the Algerian conflict is further revealed as he outlines the reasons for his righteous outrage at the liberalism of Larsan and those like him. We thus learn that only civilized people can expect to receive appropriately civilized treatment from the colonizer's law; colonized primitives will be dealt with in a fashion commensurate with their low level of development. Opposing the vengeance-theology of the Old Testament to the non-violence of Tolstoy, Gandhi and Romain Rolland, the priest goes on to berate "...ceux qu'il appelait tantôt, en termes techniques, les <<chrétiens libéraux>>, tantôt, avec une ironie griffue, les <<bêlants>>" (ibid.). For Father Legouey, in fact, liberal Catholic opposition to the rigorous defence of *Algérie française* is grounded on something like heresy:

...l'erreur fondamentale d'un certain christianisme, véritablement émasculé, est de falsifier l'ordre voulu par Dieu, de supposer que la paix est le plus grand des biens et la guerre, par conséquent, le plus grand mal. [...] Croyez-vous que la brutalité militaire de Charles Martel ait été désagréable à Dieu? Elle correspondait strictement aux desseins de sa Providence et à l'intérêt de son Royaume... (ibid., pp.121-122)

Legouey's evocation of a "neutered" brand of Christianity conforms to a previously noted historical pattern of feminization as regards the media's reporting of criticism of the army's role in Algeria (see Chapter 2). His appeal to the spurious weight of a mystified past is likewise familiar territory, although the particular appropriateness of this reference to the French defeat of the Arabs at Poitiers in 732 is, itself, not to be overlooked. For his part, Larsan is surely right to see in all this "la vieille ruse des maîtres durs de la terre, qui demandent aux contemplateurs du ciel de rassurer leur conscience" (ibid., p.123). However, this is about as far as his attempt to demystify the priest's military realism is able to go; an appropriately political understanding of such attitudes is never undertaken in *Portrait d'un officier* - and,

moreover, it cannot be. For that possibility to exist, it would be necessary for the protagonist - the spiritual representative of the metropolitan liberals - to acknowledge that Christianity can never, in the Algerian context, be anything more than Althusser's "relatively autonomous" reflection, in the colonizer's cultural superstructure, of the colonial economic base (Althusser 1970, *passim*). As it is, Larsan can do no more than set his intuitive humanism against the colonialist logic of Legouey and those for whom he speaks. In this light, his despairing parting criticism of the priest's stance is revealed to be emblematic of the profound contradictions inherent in the liberal position:

- Intuition aiguë, soit! mais alors on voudrait sentir dans le jugement final quelque chose de tendu, de déchiré, et non pas ce consentement paisible et joyeux à l'ordre de la force... (Simon 1958, p.125)

What Larsan is really objecting to here, then, is not the objective political import of the priest's views, but rather their subjective expression; the liberal officer regrets Legouey's lack of a sense of *déchirement*, that is to say his failure to utter a key colonial myth (Barthes 1957, p.138; see below). It is, in other words, the robust intellectual integrity of his opponent that Larsan finds so distressing. Were he only to have made a display of tortured Christian conscience as he sanctioned the military's pacification effort, then the officer would, we must assume, have been reassured; an ethical nicety which would, no doubt, be wasted on an actual victim of French torture. In short, modalities of expression are what really preoccupy Larsan's Christian conscience, rather than underlying goals: verbal forms are focussed on to the exclusion of political ends. This is not particularly surprising, given the fact that the basic premises of the French colonial project are accepted by the realists and the humanists alike.

To give Simon's hero his due, his confrontation with the theorists of *la guerre subversive* does, in fact, lead him to consider the justice of France's Algerian policy as a whole: "...l'axe de ma pensée et la nature de mon inquiétude allaient changer: ce qui

me troublait désormais ce n'étaient plus tant les procédés de la lutte que sa légitimité" (Simon 1958, p.126). Yet, no sooner has Larsan noted this long overdue change of critical perspective, than he demonstrates his radical inability to take his doubts about the war to their logical political conclusion:

Non que je fusse gagné à la cause de l'adversaire: je détestais ses moyens, et je voyais beaucoup d'impatience téméraire chez les hommes de la rébellion; c'est de la France qu'ils tenaient les principes et les sentiments qui les poussaient à évincer les Français, dont ils avaient encore besoin, et leur politique était plus passionnelle que raisonnable. (ibid.)

This is surely the ultimate irony of *Portrait d'un officier*: Larsan, the intuitive opponent of torture, taxes the Algerian nationalists with a lack of rationality. In so doing, he reveals the sway held by the myth of the *mission civilisatrice* over the metropolitan liberals: French civilization is hailed, while the system responsible for its propagation is vindicated. As for the rebels themselves, their very rejection of the *présence française* is taken as a sign of their communal debt to France and French culture. This liberal faith in the colonial enterprise itself is further evidenced by Larsan's subsequent attempt to rationalize his patently contradictory stance:

Je n'ai cessé de faire la différence entre les terroristes assassins et mutilateurs, et les garçons armés avec qui nous nous confrontons dans le djebel. Hors-la-loi, en droit formel, sans doute; mais, dans leur stature d'hommes, soldats; et leur recours à la violence militaire, s'il est criminel à nos yeux de Français et nous contraint à nous défendre, il faut admettre, honnêtement, qu'il est la réponse à une autre violence invétérée, plus subtile et non moins absurde: celle dont les nôtres se sont rendus coupables en refusant trop longtemps son droit à leur peuple. (ibid., p.130)

As ever, a genuinely valuable insight is buried in a mass of liberal equivocation: Larsan recognizes the violence inherent in the colonial system, but still manages to assert the colonizer's right, even duty, to defend that system against the nationalist challenge. More specifically, the distinction made between "good" and "bad" opponents of the colonial regime is not only artificial, but also, as Fanon has pointed out, of no objective relevance in any case (Fanon 1961, p.48). Such mystifications cannot shield Larsan indefinitely, however, and he will thus be obliged to acknowledge the failure of his military humanism both in theory and, as we shall now see, in practice.

The first in what is a series of dramatic reverses for the officer has already been referred to, in fact: Larsan's defence of Achour might delay but it certainly does not prevent the nationalist "bandit" from undergoing "le quart d'heure un peu ennuyeux" reserved for him by Santelli (Simon 1958, p.115). Larsan's next test occurs when he attempts to impose a more humane style on the Algerian war, characterized for him by its propensity to military "massacre" (ibid., p.131). The terms in which the protagonist introduces this episode reveal both its negative impact and his own ideological confusion: "Je me rappelle un engagement où j'ai failli laisser ma peau pour avoir essayé, bien inutilement, de conjurer la fatale inhumanité de cette guerre" (ibid.)

The details of Larsan's vain attempt to spare the lives of a cornered squad of nationalist guerrillas - with characteristic "treachery", they pretend to surrender, only to attack as soon as the officer and his men break cover (ibid., pp.131-132) - are less important than the double mystification at work here. For, what we are presented with is an Algerian war that is neither human nor avoidable: the work of Destiny, in other words, rather than the result of political decision-making.

As a result of this and similar incidents, Dhagondange will be forced to remind his subordinate of the fundamentally non-negotiable nature of military service: "...ce qu'il appelait <<la règle d'or du soldat>>: exécuter" (ibid., p.135). This, then, is the basic principle of every army, not just of *la grande muette*; and, as such, it inevitably precludes the sort of conditional obedience attempted by Larsan. For the Colonel, whose "morale rigoureuse" is justly appreciated by the junior officer - "je lui tire mon chapeau, il ne veut être qu'un soldat" (ibid., p.136) - a situation of this kind cannot be allowed to continue. His ultimatum will bring the contradictions inherent in the liberal's position into exceptionally clear focus:

<<Si vous pensez ainsi ... si vous entendez référer systématiquement vos actes aux injonctions singulières de votre conscience, il y a une question qu'à la place où je suis, je dois vous poser nettement: estimez-vous avoir encore le droit de commander une unité en campagne? En termes plus clairs ... puis-je considérer que j'ai votre parole d'honneur que, dorénavant, vous ferez sans arrière-pensée et sans hésitation notre guerre - je dis la nôtre, comprenez-vous, et pas la vôtre?>> (ibid., p.138)

The short answer, it transpires, is "No", and Larsan's melodramatic compromise - he will obey or kill himself (ibid.) - is not presented as a serious solution to his problems. We are here at the very heart of the liberal officer's dilemma, which is now revealed to consist in a futile wish to be more than just a soldier in the *Armée d'Algérie*: namely, a civilized warrior, a Christian knight, fighting his own, clearly just, Algerian war. This primary contradiction in terms was highlighted by the narrator, doubling as Larsan's interlocutor, at a very early stage:

...il demeure la distance entre ce qu'on est convenu d'appeler civilisation, et qui est empire des lois, accroissement des biens et justice aux personnes, et la guerre, qui ne peut être que royauté de la force, destruction des choses et oppression des plus faibles. Il y a d'ailleurs une évidence de l'étymologie: la civilisation cesse quand la militarisation commence. (ibid., p.36)

The account of Larsan's military decline is the record of his attempt to come to terms with this unpalatable historical truth; his conspicuous lack of success in this endeavour is, we shall argue, a function of this character's lack of ideological rigour *qua* liberal.

Larsan's final crisis is triggered by the FLN's killing of a likeable French officer, notable above all for his record of selfless social work with the natives. The spontaneous reprisals carried out by Larsan's men cause the officer to undergo his fullest experience of the liberal dilemma. Faced with the spectacle of military brutality and destruction, Larsan believes himself to be neither personally responsible, nor wholly innocent of guilt. In the terms of Camus's celebrated liberal dichotomy, he is neither one of the victims, nor yet one of their executioners:

Que leur dire? Je ne pouvais ni les accabler sous la terreur de représailles que je n'avais pas voulues, ni blâmer publiquement la colère explicable de mes hommes: seul, au coeur de la tragédie obscure, je portais en silence ma honte et mon chagrin. (ibid., p.141)

In the absence of an appropriately political response, then, the hero will seek temporary refuge in silence. Not that this inability to speak about his own role in the war - and, above all, to recognize that, as a member of the French forces, he must inevitably be on the side of the colonial *bourreaux* - prevents Larsan from commenting



on the nature of the conflict as a whole. His appeal to the notion of tragedy, though a common enough one in the French literature of the Algerian war, is particularly worthy of demystifying attention. Roland Barthes's analysis of the idea of *déchirement* - itself a constant not only of Simon's treatment of the war (as we noted above), but also of most liberal commentaries - is of considerable value in this regard:

Ce terme aide à accréditer l'idée d'une irresponsabilité de l'Histoire. L'état de guerre est ici escamoté sous le vêtement noble de la tragédie, comme si le conflit était essentiellement le Mal, et non un mal (remédiable). La colonisation s'évapore, s'engloutit dans le halo d'une lamentation impuissante, qui reconnaît le malheur pour mieux s'installer. (Barthes 1957, p.138)

Lacking this kind of political insight, the liberal hero will have to rely on the promptings of events and those around him to cut through the mystification with which he surrounds himself and his role in Algeria. As we shall now see, it is Kadour Sadoun who emerges as the most cogent critic of the officer's military humanism.

Having been hinted at periodically, Kadour's nascent nationalism will be fully revealed in the wake of the punitive reprisals which follow the death of Captain Astruc. Like his father in Indochina, he will unburden himself to Larsan and state his own case against continuing his involvement in an obviously unjust colonial war. Unlike Brahim, however, Kadour does not limit himself to criticism of his own role in the repression of the colonial nationalists:

<<Vous, Commandant Jean, vous désapprouvez les représailles, les tortures; et vous êtes quand même avec ceux qui les font. Le capitaine Santelli, le lieutenant Chédozeau ne sont pas vos ennemis, mais vos camarades; vous mangez et vous buvez avec eux; et vous tirez aussi bien qu'eux sur les Arabes. [...] C'est votre devoir de faire la guerre avec les vôtres, Commandant Jean, et personne ne peut vous le reprocher.>> (Simon 1958, p.145)

No one, that is, with the crucial exception of the tortured liberal himself; he remains incapable of accepting such an analysis of his self-contradictory stance, and is, once again, obliged to lapse into a guilty silence. Kadour's subsequent desertion, taking with him a truckload of arms and ammunition, will only serve to intensify this effective retreat into the self, which culminates in Larsan's decision to turn his back on army and war alike.

It is only to be expected that Larsan himself should be put in charge of the hunt for the deserter. Eventually tracking the Algerian down in a lonely *mechta*, Larsan is able to capture his man without bloodshed. This outcome is put forward as evidence that a more humane way is, after all, open to the two sides in Algeria:

Se voyant perdu, le garçon semblait prêt à mourir en soldat, en prenant une vie pour la sienne; prêt aussi à livrer au massacre ces pauvres gens qui l'avaient recueilli; tout entier livré à cette guerre, à son style horrible... Tout entier, non! car alors il aurait tiré le premier, encore invisible, sur l'adversaire découpé en silhouette dans le trou de lumière. Mais Kadour Sadoun avait reconnu Commandant Jean. (ibid., p.149)

However, this image of a humane war is destined to be a fleeting one, and we are soon reimmersed in the familiar "lutte atroce et insensée" (ibid., p.151). So, Kadour will be tortured - though not, of course, by the protagonist - before being tried and executed for treason. Yet, one final appeal to the notion of historical irresponsibility will allow Simon's hero to deny his own guilt even now:

Le drame nous dépassait l'un et l'autre, et le jugement suprême n'appartient qu'à la souveraine intelligence qui regarde d'en haut, avec pitié je l'espère, les hommes s'agiter et souffrir au fond de leur nuit. (ibid., p.152)

The officer's long-awaited resignation finally occurs on the day that Kadour's execution is announced. Here again, Larsan will appeal to some of the most typically liberal mystifications of the Algerian conflict in an attempt to explain his decision:

Blessure d'amitié, déchirement de la conscience, fatigue du corps et de l'âme, défaillance du courage sous la pesée d'un doute devenu trop écrasant, oui; et je ne sais quoi encore de plus obsédant et de plus subtil: sentiment d'avoir été fourvoyé, par la bêtise des puissants et l'obscurité des destins, dans un tragique qui ne jaillit pas, créateur d'héroïsme et de poésie, d'un conflit d'absolus, mais, destructeur et désespérant, d'un mélange d'absurdités. Pas commode de vivre Corneille au siècle de Kafka! (ibid., pp.152-153)

The most striking feature of the hero's exit from this version of the cruel Algerian drama is the total absence of politics; Larsan's climactic experience of the liberal dilemma amounts to a final parade of the great moralist themes. Chief among these is the notion of the *déchirement* of the humanist conscience in the face of the conflict's tragic absurdity, as the officer, with characteristic *noblesse*, sacrifices body and soul in a pointlessly fratricidal war, a prey to the stupidity of politicians and the

whims of destiny. The certainties of a military golden age have given way to the equivocations of *la sale guerre*: the days of chivalry have been replaced by ones in which it is painfully obvious that "war is hell". Most importantly of all, for the purposes of the present study, well-founded doubts about the overall legitimacy of the French military effort are voiced, but, crucially, not developed. More specifically, it is Larsan's failure to appreciate that the Algerian war does, in fact, involve a conflict of absolutes that is of the utmost significance. For, whilst the hostilities in North Africa may have been perceived by metropolitan commentators like Simon as the product of something less threatening than "un conflit d'absolus", those on the receiving end of the French drive for *pacification* had no such illusions about its total nature (Fanon 1961, p.186). Indeed, Kadour Sadoun's drawing of Larsan's attention to the basic fact of the liberal officer's participation in the Algerian conflict - i.e. his inevitable implication in the atrocities of his own side - has already been noted. The failure of the protagonist to draw the appropriate, politically-aware, conclusions from experiences of this kind is symptomatic of a general liberal reluctance to acknowledge the war's totality. In the colonial context, the primary distinction to be made is between colonizer and colonized; everything else is secondary refinement. Moreover, these irreducible elements of the historical dialectic *are* absolutes, representing the diametrically opposed interests of the only possible social categories: *soit victimes soit bourreaux*, as it were, but not both, and not neither. Larsan's explicit denial of this historical truth is some indication of the depth of mystification which underlies the liberalism of *Portrait d'un officier*.

Larsan, the "mauvais prêtre", will seek a way out of the liberal dilemma by quitting the military "église" (Simon 1958, p.153). As the text draws to a close, he reiterates both his acceptance of the logical basis of military realism and his abiding conscientious objection to the methods it sanctions:

Je ne conteste pas la vérité de Dhagondange, je vois seulement qu'elle ne pourra plus être la mienne; il y a quelque chose de cassé définitivement; cela se sent dans l'évidence du corps. (ibid., p.155)

Evoking the cleanness, solidity, and joyful simplicity of the idyllic rural life which awaits him on the family estate, Larsan finally takes his leave of the narrator. It thus falls to the latter to provide the closing image of the tortured liberal:

Ceux qui l'attendaient dans ses vieux murs et qui l'eussent accueilli avec tant de tendresse et de fierté si la guerre le leur eût rendu mutilé dans son corps, allaient-ils comprendre qu'ils voyaient revenir un grand blessé? Oui, Jean de Larsan rentrait chez lui brisé dans son âme, fatigué d'avoir fait honnêtement et lucidement son métier de soldat, avec le projet d'y sauver l'homme. Tel, je suppose qu'il devait plaire au regard de Dieu. (ibid., p.157)

So, Simon's narrative closes with this image of the objective defeat of the hero and his liberal creed; his supposed spiritual integrity does not detract from this negative impression. The contradictions inherent in his theoretical position are thus starkly revealed in practice: the protagonist has vainly attempted to combine participation in the repression of Algerian nationalism with the maintenance of a principled approach to the treatment of individual rebels. The incompatibility of these two aims reveals a basic flaw in the liberal way of thinking the Algerian war: namely, a desire to preserve colonial order whilst simultaneously rejecting the means necessary for the preservation of the colonial edifice. This self-contradictory stance betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the "deep structures" of colonial power, of which the most important is colonialism's historical reliance on massacre to suppress colonial nationalism. Indeed, it was the colonial powers' wish to preserve their overseas empires while at the same time laying claim to the custodianship of liberal values which led directly to the loss of the relevant territories. As Lapping puts it: "The moral sensitivity ... of the most powerful nations, expressed by the reluctance of their leaders to be publicly revealed as mass murderers, brought the End of Empire" (Lapping 1985, p.xiv).

Simon's failure to appreciate this basic truth of post-war imperial decline results in an analytically disastrous confusion: i.e. the ideology which justifies and reinforces colonial power is mistaken for its socio-economic base. This original error is to blame for the writer's failure to establish a causal relationship between colonialism and torture,

and thus to recognize its use as an integral part of the repressive colonial apparatus. This may have been a typical enough liberal mistake, but it was by no means an inevitable one. Indeed, there is every reason to suppose that Simon himself had already seen through moralist attempts to humanize the pacification effort by the time he came to write *Portrait d'un officier*. As Sorum explains:

Soon after the publication of *Contre la torture*, Simon was persuaded by military realists to agree that "methods more severe than those of normal inquests" should be permitted in Algeria; that is, he recognized the necessity of using moderate torture, though he refused to call it that. In his short novel *Portrait d'un officier* ... the hero was confronted by a similar moral dilemma... No longer did Simon offer the possibility of purifying the war in Algeria; he could offer only escape. After having tried to act humanely while admitting that the military realists were more logical than he, Simon's hero left Algeria, as Bollardière had done, and left the army, as Bollardière was to do in 1961. (Sorum 1977, pp.127-128)

Sorum's properly political reading of Simon's text is surely the correct one. In historical terms, the position adopted by the author and by his fictional spokesman could lead only to despairing resignation and withdrawal from both the Algerian conflict and the intellectual debate it aroused. This response was variously displayed by such great liberal figures as Mauriac and Camus: Mauriac by delegating moral responsibility for torture to de Gaulle, Camus by lapsing into silence (*ibid.*, pp.128-129). In Simon's case, the fact that one of the prime movers of the metropolitan campaign against abhorrent pacification methods could create such a tragic figure as Larsan, doomed to failure and evasion, was symptomatic of the political bankruptcy of many of the moralist intellectuals at this time.

Roger Ikor's *Les Murmures de la guerre* (1961) provides us with an obvious parallel, in that it too combines a colonialist inspiration with moralist soul-searching as regards its practical military implementation. In this work, as in *Portrait d'un officier*, "the wrestling of the Christian conscience with torture is of central importance" (Obuchowski 1978, p.284), with the central figure, Sergeant Ludovic Fenns, joining his immediate superior, Lieutenant Plaa, in a stand against the robust military realism of their C.O., the seigneurial Colonel Berriou.

In fact, both Plaa and Fenns will be led to quit the fight in Algeria as a result of their personal experiences of torture. Plaa goes first, and in the more dramatic fashion, having himself been obliged by Berriou to torture an Algerian suspect (Ikor 1961, pp.263-272). The Lieutenant had previously denied the very existence of the practice in Algeria, but is now forced to admit that it is both widespread and routinely used. He tells of his traumatic experiences in a letter to Fenns, before leaving Algeria and the army for a new life in a monastery. Thereafter, it falls to the reservist Fenns to take up the narrative's anti-torture standard.

For Plaa, we learn, the ultimate victim of abhorrent intelligence-gathering techniques is, quite simply, Christ Himself: "...ce qui m'affole, c'est qu'en agissant mal, en pensant mal, c'est Lui, Celui qui est toute bonté, que j'offense, que je blesse, que je fais saigner, que je torture (ibid., p.267; cf. Mauriac 1984). This realization has a predictably shattering impact on the staunchly Catholic officer: considering and rejecting in turn the murder of Berriou, suicide, and madness, he vows instead to give the rest of his life over to the imitation of Christ. The officer thus leaves the Algerian stage, having taken a stand against torture, but, crucially, against nothing else. Given the abiding liberal faith in the French nation's *mission civilisatrice* - regularly contrasted with the "barbarie anté-coloniale" of the FLN (Fanon 1961, p.153) - such a response is only to be expected, perhaps.

Like Simon's hero before him, Plaa sees enough of the Algerian war - perceived, symptomatically, as "cet univers de l'Enfer" (Ikor 1961, p.266) - to convince him that he personally does not wish to continue his active commitment to the French colonial cause. What he does not get the chance to appreciate is enough of the conflict's politics to transform that strictly limited opposition into a more thoroughgoing one: i.e. the advocacy of Algerian national independence. This is equally true of Fenns, who is deeply moved by Plaa's letter and resolves to act:

La guerre, la paix.

Jusqu'à ce soir, il n'avait pas cru réellement faire la guerre, la vraie. La vraie, c'est son père qui l'avait faite. Ou, plutôt que son père, son grand-père, en 14. La

guerre sans phrases, qui ratisse tout. Ou bien celle de la Bombe. Lui, il n'avait connue qu'une amulette de guerre, ces combats, ces <<coups de tampon>> où l'individu conserve ses émotions, ses pensées, ses passions - et ses chances...

Eh bien quoi? La torture, est-ce que cela ne reste pas au niveau individuel?

Les mains sous la nuque, Fenns, les yeux grands ouverts, contemplait par la fenêtre le ciel velouté de la nuit. Les lumières de la ville s'étaient éteintes, les bruits s'étaient tus. Il n'y avait plus que le sang à battre et bruire régulièrement au fond des oreilles.

A force de se hausser dans l'aigu, les murmures de la guerre, d'abord supportables, avaient fini par atteindre à l'inaudible, l'intolérablement inaudible des ultra-sons.

Aussi intolérable dans l'inhumain, pour des oreilles humaines, que le fracas de la guerre cosmique.

La boucle était bouclée. (ibid., pp.271-272)

Ikor's persuasive depiction of an average reservist's experience of a low-intensity colonial war is negated by his characteristically liberal insistence on an individual's response to military means to the exclusion of collective political ends. Moreover, his attaching of cosmic significance to a very specific aspect of modern French history - i.e. the military's use of torture in Algeria - patently furthers the mythical depoliticization of the conflict. For its part, Fenns's own campaign against such methods will merely serve to underline the contradictions inherent in the liberal position.

Acting on the basis of Plaa's letter, the Sergeant decides to confront Berriou outright. He states his total opposition to his C.O.'s approach to waging the war and is treated to an impassioned rehearsal of the classic military realist argument in favour of using "exceptional methods" in Algeria. Having detailed the rebel atrocities which occurred in the town before he was put in charge of security, Berriou invites his young critic to reconsider his liberal certainties:

Eh bien moi, colonel Berriou, j'ai mis un terme à ces abominations, et j'en suis fier. Grâce aux interrogatoires renforcés, parfaitement, mon garçon, et appliqués non pas au hasard, mais à des gens dont on sait qu'ils sont coupables, et informés... Alors vous la resservedez, votre tarte à la crème? (ibid., pp.285-286)

In the event, this is precisely what Fenns proposes. No attempt is made to refute Berriou's logical statement of the military realist case; no alternative solution is suggested for practical military problems. The liberal's unbending principle is

reiterated; but, like Larsan's before it, it is no substitute for political debate: "On ne torture pas... Jamais, en aucun cas, en aucune circonstance" (ibid., p.286).

It is very convenient, to say the least, that Ikor's anti-torture campaigners are able to quit the Algerian conflict once they have come to their moralist conclusions about the unacceptability of such methods: Plaa, a career officer like Larsan, is similarly able to resign his commission; whilst Fenns, the reservist, has only a few weeks remaining before *la quille*. They are therefore able to evade both the war itself and, most importantly, its only substantive problem: that is to say, the future status of the territory. Once this question has been answered honestly, the appropriate response to torture, summary justice, and the like, effectively ceases to be an issue: either Algeria must remain a French colony, in which case *des moyens exceptionnels* are to be looked upon as a necessary evil; or Algeria is destined for independence, which means that such tactics are as unjustifiable as the rest of the pacification effort in Algeria. Viewed in this light, Ikor's novel can be seen to conform to a general pattern of liberal evasion of the conflict's one real issue:

But the atrocities did not end. The only way to end them, even the moralists came to see, was to end the war, but, since the army was unable to eradicate the rebels, the only way to end the war appeared increasingly to be to agree to the independence of an Algeria that was likely to be controlled by the rebels. Mauriac, Simon, Camus, Folliet, and (until 1958) Servan-Schreiber refused such a solution. They took the increasingly untenable position of desiring the goal of a French Algeria but despising the necessary means. (Sorum 1977, p.128)

It is especially to be noted that the adopted retreats of both Larsan and Plaa are symbolically closed: walled domains from which troublesome political issues are magically excluded. Thus, the tortured advocates of military humanism take refuge in a splendid isolation, their individual *crises de conscience* unhampered by Algerian realities. For his own part, Fenns disappears quietly into civilian obscurity. Whether it be the family seat, the cloister, or metropolitan anonymity, no support will be forthcoming for either the FLN or those members of the French army less well placed than our three liberal heroes.



The moralist intellectuals' rejection of both torture and nationalism is to be understood against the background of a characterizing liberal rationale: i.e. the necessity of avoiding extremism of whatever kind. This notion articulates a mythical duality which serves to transform the liberal commentator from a political agent into an arbiter. Barthes has drawn attention to this key figure of liberal rhetoric in a particularly appropriate way:

*Le ninisme.* J'appelle ainsi cette figure mythologique qui consiste à poser deux contraires et balancer l'un par l'autre de façon à les rejeter tous deux. (Je ne veux *ni* de ceci, *ni* de cela.) C'est plutôt une figure de mythe bourgeois, car elle ressortit à une forme moderne de libéralisme. On retrouve ici la figure de la balance: le réel est d'abord réduit à des analogues; ensuite on le pèse; enfin, l'égalité constatée, on s'en débarrasse. Il y a aussi une conduite magique: on renvoie dos à dos ce qu'il était gênant de choisir; on fuit le réel intolérable en le réduisant à deux contraires qui s'équilibrent dans la mesure seulement où ils sont formels, allégés de leur poids spécifique. (Barthes 1957, p.241)

Neither/Nor mystification of this kind is clearly at the heart of the liberals' image of themselves as *Ni victimes ni bourreaux*. In the case of Ikor's *Plaa*, it is taken to surreal lengths. Consider his account of the scenes which follow his unwilling torture of the Algerian suspect:

...nous avons tous ensemble, après la séance, sablé le champagne, tous, la victime avec les bourreaux. Le Colonel a rendu hommage au courage de la victime, a salué loyalement son honneur, et je ne sais quoi encore. De son côté, la victime avait l'air plutôt flattée, je n'oserais dire satisfaite, mais enfin ... en accord avec le Colonel, si vous voyez ce que j'entends par là; comme après un baroud d'honneur, ils semblaient se comprendre tous les deux, et c'est moi qu'ils tenaient en pitié... (Ikor 1961, p.266)

The image of an unholy alliance between opposing men of violence is a variation on the traditional military romantic theme of the communion of enemy equals and, as such, is a constant of war literature. In the Algerian context, it would doubtless have been highly attractive to Ikor and his liberal consumers. Fanon's unsurprising psychiatric observation that, for all the fears of the metropolitan liberals, it was the personalities of torture victims which were most profoundly upset by the experience is enough to give the lie to such mystification (Fanon 1961, p.186n). As, for that matter, are the disabused remarks of Philippe Labro's Seb:

...qu'est-ce qu'ils nous racontent avec leurs salades des *rappports* entre torturés et

bourreaux, c'est de la frime tout ça, du vent, il y a pas d'estime possible pour un type qui vous applique la gégène ou qui vous casse les poignets dans la baignoire d'une villa à Hussein Dey, il y a pas de sentiments possibles entre la victime et le salaud. C'est bidon. La réalité, c'est l'horreur que les uns dispensent à petite dose et que les autres reçoivent à forte pression. Qu'on vienne pas me raconter des histoires. (Labro 1967, p.190)

Ikor's account of the alleged suffering of the military humanist does not stand up to demystifying comments of this kind. Once again, the liberal dilemma can be seen in the moralist intellectuals' ability to glimpse, but not properly to comprehend the quite devastating implications of humanist thinking for the future of the colonial order (Sartre 1961, pp.14-15). That the explosion of revolutionary violence in Algeria inevitably resulted in the subordination of metropolitan sensibilities to more elemental historical forces was never fully grasped by the moralists, who consequently sought to escape from their predicament by artificially opposing FLN barbarism and military fascism; they could then imagine themselves to be the incarnation of moderation between the two. This liberal perspective is best exemplified by Gilbert Cesbron's very significantly titled *Entre chiens et loups* (1962).

For Cesbron, a prolific producer of best-selling novels with a strong sense of their author's liberal Catholic social conscience - worker-priests, juvenile delinquency, cancer and euthanasia are all typical Cesbron topics - the Algerian conflict never became the all-consuming passion that it was for some of the better-known liberal commentators. Rather, the war was just one of a range of ills perceived to be afflicting contemporary French society, and which his writing sought to set in a properly Christian context. We can go further than this, for, in *Entre chiens et loups*, Algeria becomes one more setting for the author's literary exploration of his privileged theme: namely, the difficult path followed by the individual on the way to self-knowledge and spiritual enlightenment. Indeed, Algeria is only one of four *milieux* considered in the novel, the others being education, political journalism, and prison. So, the protagonist, Roland Guérin, will be shunted around, as it were, in order to suit the needs of the narrative development of his spiritual dimension. Not that Algeria is a

mere backdrop to this modern version of *Pilgrim's Progress*; still less is the text's treatment of the Algerian theme politically neutral. It is to the politics of Cesbron's text, then, that we must now turn our attention.

At a pivotal stage in his career as a columnist on the left-wing review *Le Voltaire* - in the wake of Dien-Bien-Phu and the outbreak of war in Algeria - the protagonist sets out his guiding political principle, which can safely be attributed to the text as a whole. Confronted with evidence of the military's use of torture, Roland resists his natural inclination to "rester dans son coin sans choisir", endeavouring instead to "Prendre parti sans devenir un partisan" (Cesbron 1962, p.139). Rooted in Cesbron's liberal humanism, this tenet is the key to an understanding of his portrayal of the Algerian conflict. More specifically, it explains the author's attempt to combine criticism of the nation's involvement in a self-evidently futile colonial war with the most sympathetic possible analysis of the motives and actions of individual French participants; this, in line with his guiding principle of Christian *réconciliation*.

It comes as no great surprise to discover that this approach should include an extended condemnation of political extremism. Indeed, Cesbron's rejection of the partisan mentality and what he perceives to be the socially disastrous politicization of the Algerian question is, quite simply, an attempt to resolve the liberal dilemma; the revenge of the moderates on the antiwar radicals and the theorists of *guerre révolutionnaire* alike. Put another way, the slogan "Prendre parti sans devenir un partisan" encapsulates the moralist author's ideological project, which is to reassert liberal humanism in the face of the recent challenge of various brands of realism. Yet, the fact remains that the principal contention of the realists, both on the left and on the right, was the one borne out by history: the war in Algeria could not be made more humane; the conflict's political logic defied liberal attempts to impose moral limits on it. (The failure of Camus's plan for "une trêve civile" is exemplary from this point of view.) Cesbron's espousal of the cause of moderation can, in consequence, only result

in further liberal mystification of the relevant historical issues; his text does not so much escape from the liberal predicament as epitomize it. So, whilst the novel's portrayal of specific historical incidents is basically accurate, its situating vision of a fratricidal war means inevitably that the narrative can only ever generate a distorted image of Algerian realities. This will become clearer as we now concentrate on the text's articulation of its Christian pacifist message.

For Cesbron, Algeria is to be regarded as a cancer in the French body politic, and as such is the product of chronic colonial mismanagement and neglect (ibid., pp.136-137). This appeal to the regularly uttered myth of an improvable colonialism is characteristically phrased in terms of all the *occasions manquées* for avoiding the present historical crisis. Nevertheless, the text not only recognizes the legitimacy of the nationalist cause, but also hints at the inevitability of its success (ibid., p.312). Such a stance is not altogether surprising, however, in view of the fact that Cesbron only completed his novel in April 1962 (ibid., p.382). As for the liberal experience of Algeria, this is variously approached. For instance, Roland's own service in Algeria will allow the presentation of images of innocent civilian suffering and absurd military deaths, as well as permitting a Larsan-style denunciation of those priests prepared to sanction French atrocities in the struggle against the FLN (ibid., pp.237, 203-204 & 349 respectively). However, Cesbron is not himself immune to military romanticism, as our earlier reference to his admiring treatment of the *para* theme will have made clear (see Chapter 1). His hero's Algerian war will thus be dominated by "des anges des proie", as the title of the relevant section puts it: men like Mansart and, eventually, like the protagonist himself, sharing in the same communion of enemy equals so roundly condemned by Labro (ibid., pp.262 & 307). Yet, if we wish to appreciate Cesbron's originality as a producer of myth, it is to his depiction of journalistic commentary on the conflict that we must turn our attention.

In Part 2 of *Entre chiens et loups*, Roland becomes "Fabrice" and is consequently admitted to "le royaume des borgnes". As a columnist on *Le Voltaire*, Cesbron's hero will be seen to pander to the prejudices of one half of a bigoted French public opinion, while all the time claiming to demystify the militarism of the other half. Rooted in his desire to avenge the profound humiliation inflicted by Lieutenant Mansart, Roland's condemnation of the Algerian war and the French army, along with the metropolitan defenders of both, will appear from the outset to be a product of personal inadequacy rather than of political conviction. The protagonist's reaction to his editor's critical remarks about *le para* makes this point particularly clear:

<<Mais pourquoi m'en parle-t-elle?>> se demandait Roland. Il connaissait bien les motifs de sa propre hargne, et ils étaient bas; mais pour quelles raisons, guère plus avouables peut-être, d'autres partageaient-ils son humeur?

Il écoutait Simone Ardant avec une admiration méfiante: il éprouvait brusquement la certitude que ses opinions, si célèbres, n'étaient que des humeurs pétrifiées, et qu'en elle le parti pris s'alimentait à toutes les ressources de l'esprit. (ibid., p.105)

This type of depoliticization of metropolitan criticism of either the conduct or the continuation of the Algerian war will be familiar by now. What is particularly interesting here, however, is the fact that Cesbron is clearly preparing to weigh what Barthes terms the "essential" myth of the right against the "inessential" myth of the left - using the figure identified above as *ninisme* - and thus to dismiss both in favour of a supposedly non-partisan liberalism (Barthes 1957, pp.233-244). The specific myth of the paratrooper will serve as a liberal touchstone in this regard, with Roland rejecting both the angel of the French right and the demon of the left, in favour of a personal knowledge, arrived at through combat in Algeria, of "le secret du Lieutenant Mansart" (Cesbron 1962, p.262). Thus it is that a text which is overtly committed to spreading the gospel of Christian pacifism comes to utter the foundation myths of military romanticism: such as the transcendent nature of the combat experience, *la fraternité d'armes*, the communion of enemy equals, and the like.

The principle ideological error made by Cesbron in his *Entre chiens et loups* is to underestimate the extent and the resilience of the military romantic tradition. The wish to "Prendre parti sans devenir un partisan" is, in the Algerian context, the moralist equivalent of the search for the philosopher's stone: a foredoomed quest for a magical means of escape from the liberal predicament. Given the historical background of colonial war, no middle way was ever open to intellectuals like Cesbron; either/or was the only option: for or against Algerian independence; for or against the colonized in his struggle with the colonizer. To pursue an illusory golden mean of moderation was, almost inevitably, to expose oneself to the risk of repeating the standard themes of military romanticism. This is precisely what happens in Cesbron's novel.

The text's case against partisan ways of thinking the Algerian war is most dramatically illustrated when Roland is finally brought face to face with his left-wing audience at a meeting, organized by *Le Voltaire* "Pour sauver l'Honneur" (ibid., p.158). Appalled by the partisan audience at a rival meeting, which he wanders into by mistake, Roland is reassured by the thought that his own listeners will be very different. However, the extremism which he encounters at *Le Voltaire's* rally against torture dashes his comfortable expectations, thereby producing a major shift in thinking:

Belle soirée! En ce moment même, des musulmans dont il confond les noms, geignent de souffrance dans des cachots infects et leur corps, jusque dans leurs secrets, porte témoignage des tortures subies. En ce moment, de jeunes officiers veillent ou prient, se demandant où est leur devoir et si l'honneur commande vraiment de faire tuer leurs hommes pour épargner des terroristes. Mais les bourreaux dorment tranquilles, et les politiques se font applaudir, et les partisans recuisent leur haine mutuelle. Tous sont à leur affaire - oui, une belle soirée. <<La France>>, <<l'Honneur>>, <<l'Occident>> - on lance en l'air les mêmes mots, ici et là: ils ont perdu leur poids entre les mains de ces jongleurs qu'on applaudit. Mais le visage d'un musulman et celui d'un officier qui ont fermé les yeux parce que l'un souffre et que l'autre s'interroge, qui se les représente, ici ou là, jusqu'à ce que son coeur batte à l'étouffer? Qui, sauf Roland l'imbécile, lequel s'est laissé prendre au piège des roués? (ibid., p.162)

Roland's newly "non-partisan" appreciation of the moralist case against torture gives rise, then, to a classic *crise de conscience*; it is on the basis of this experience that the protagonist will himself volunteer for the conflict which he has hitherto merely

commented on, both at no risk to himself and in the most socially divisive fashion. Here, the ethical and spiritual costs of torturing terrorists are weighed against the lives of innocent servicemen. Carried out by *bourreaux* who are as conveniently anonymous as they are uncaring - rather than by the pious young officers who are clearly to be regarded as its French victims - torture is plainly perceived by the liberal hero to be at the very heart of his personal experience of the Algerian problem. France, Honour, and Western Civilization are meanwhile reasserted as abiding values by means of a neither-nor double negation, whilst a note of Cornelian tragedy is introduced with the idea of a despairing choice between *moral* absolutes. The intensity and authenticity of the military experience are thus contrasted with the shallowness and mendacity of civilian politicizing. Moreover, Roland's beating - or perhaps bleeding? - heart points unequivocally to the text's proposed solution to the liberal dilemma: love of one's fellow man. His attempt to communicate this humanist insight to his left-wing audience may be an absolute failure, but Cesbron's hero is thus spiritually armed for his personal experience of the military struggle in Algeria.

Having been prompted to enlist by the news of Mansart's death (*ibid.*, p.187), Roland soon finds himself involved in a major operation against the FLN. This latest metamorphosis may be highly implausible, but it does at least allow the author to draw the attention of the reader once again to that characterizing liberal *dada*: torture. Following the success of "Opération Albertine", Lieutenant Guérin and his men are rewarded with a few days of rest and recreation at a small seaside town. However, for the central figure this respite from the war proves to be extremely short-lived. Having spent the evening with a friendly European family, Roland is walking back to the barracks when he passes a prison where one of his fellow officers is torturing an Algerian suspect. Overcoming his instinctive cowardice, he attempts to put a stop to the interrogation, but only succeeds in getting himself badly beaten up. Nevertheless,

as soon as he recovers consciousness, Roland resolves to try again. His reasons for doing so are particularly clearly stated:

C'est un dessein absurde; il sait qu'il va recevoir une seconde correction à laquelle il résistera moins bien encore. Il sait aussi que cela ne changera rien, que le général l'éconduira, et qu'il est absolument seul. <<J'y retourne... >> Il murmure alors un nom, presque malgré lui... Il murmure:

- Mansart.

Oui, c'est pour l'honneur du lieutenant Mansart qu'il va retourner gifler ce salaud et se faire rouer. Il remet à plus tard de comprendre lui-même pourquoi, mais respire encore une fois jusqu'au ventre et marche vers la porte qu'il ouvre toute grande... (ibid., p.273)

The above is to be regarded as a masterpiece of liberal mystification. For, this account of Roland's, typically irrational and solitary, stand against torture actually contrives to transform the figure historically responsible for its perpetration - i.e. the French paratrooper - into the principal reason for avoiding its use. As ever, the military emerge as the secondary victims of the practice; whilst it is to be noted that *paras* do not torture in *Entre chiens et loups*, only *salauds*.

Although Roland will continue to fight in the war after this episode, the stage is now set for his final transformation, which sees him complete his spiritual development by becoming a persecuted advocate of Christian non-violence. It is thus as an opponent not of the conflict in North Africa but of all war that Roland leaves Algeria. This, then, is the text's definitive antiwar statement: an optimistic call for a total rejection of violence, but not of individual combatants, in favour of tolerance and solidarity based on Christian love. Such an ingenious evasion of one specific war's political questions may be intended to encourage a post-1962 reconciliation of the interested parties, but can only produce more liberal mystification. This, in spite of the hero's assertions that his brand of radical pacificism is the sole means of coming to terms with the nation's role in the Algerian conflict. In the following extract, Roland, now imprisoned for his conscientious objection, receives a visit from his former employer, Simone Ardant:

Le premier mot de notre première entrevue, vous le rappelez-vous? [...] <<Démystification.>> Il s'agissait des paras; vous vouliez tuer ce mythe, sans même le connaître. Moi qui le connais à présent, je vous dis: au delà du para, il y a la



Violence, et c'est elle qu'il faut viser. Tous les enfants aiment jouer avec les allumettes; pour l'éviter, supprimez les allumettes, pas les enfants!... Vous attaquez les généraux? C'est facile, et surtout bien vain: car il faut bien des chefs de guerre, mais c'est de guerre qu'il ne faut plus... (ibid., p.342)

It is in order to be in a position to deliver this single message, we now see, that Roland has undergone his successive metamorphoses; the student has become in turn a schoolmaster, a political columnist, a soldier and a prisoner in order to gain the experience necessary for the plausible communication of this statement of liberal Catholic faith. His final martyrdom at the hands of an OAS-style commando will add further weight to his words, powerfully reinforcing their impact with the formal pressure of narrative closure. The inhabitants of Cesbron's fictional *métropole* are duly shocked by this outcome, which represents the climax of a series of non-violent protests against the Algerian war, and would seem, at the novel's close, to be ready to learn from it. The text thus encourages the integrated reader to trust in the capacity of the metropolitan population to come to terms with its ultimate accountability for the conflict in Algeria, and, on a more general level, promotes faith in Christian love and human solidarity. The end product of *Entre chiens et loups*, in short, is a cosy sense of *réconciliation*; an image of French society which, appearing against the backdrop of OAS-inspired terror in Paris, as well as in Algiers and Oran, seems somewhat paradoxical, to say the least.

In Cesbron's novel, then, a global pacifism is presented as a liberal substitute for a properly specific, and inevitably traumatic, critique of French colonialism. The impossible improvement of the human condition is clearly preferred to the inevitably painful, but nevertheless practical, politics of Algeria; human solidarity - "ce mythe ambigu de la <<communauté>> humaine, dont l'alibi alimente toute une partie de notre humanisme" (Barthes 1957, p.173) - is the replacement for the harsh realities of colonial power. As Sartre argued, metropolitan non-violence could never be radical, still less a solution to colonial conflict; those liberals who advocated it failed to appreciate their objective community of interests with the colonialist *bourreaux* and

against the colonized *victimes* (Sartre 1961, p.18). Roland's response to the liberal dilemma finally amounts to conscientious objection in the classic mould: a basically state-tolerated - because formalized, controllable, and self-limiting - type of dissent.

The fictional world of *Entre chiens et loups* is a world of stone in many ways; Roland's tragic death - following his discovery of "un courage de pierre" - merely adds the finishing touch to its mythical immobility. The only solutions proposed by the text are God-centred ones to its preferred, and supposedly universal, problems; the man-centred practical politics of Algeria evaporate into the rarefied atmosphere of its Christian humanism. Stoical resignation to mankind's earthly lot - "Ce mythe de la <<condition>> humaine" (Barthes 1957, p.164) - replaces the will to political change as historical dynamism gives way to mythical stasis. Ordered progress may be a feature of the narrative's structure, then, but only in the sphere of the numinous; political advance is consistently mystified and effectively frozen. The avowed aim of Cesbron's novel may be to "Prendre parti sans devenir un partisan", but its mythical impact is to rationalize the historical incapacity of the metropolitan liberals to find a genuine solution to their ideological dilemma. The text's critique of the partisan mentality is therefore to be regarded as a magical balancing act: the corollary of its creator's personal refusal to take the side of politics.

Cesbron's broad-spectrum pacificism may usefully be compared with the ideas expressed in Bernard Clavel's *Le Silence des armes* (1974), a novel which recommends itself for a variety of reasons. To begin with, here is a narrative produced by another prolific and best-selling pillar of the liberal establishment, but this time with the benefit of a good ten years' of hindsight. Secondly, the text picks up on the story where Simon, Ikor, and, to all intents and purposes, Cesbron leave off: i.e. with the return to metropolitan France of the Algerian veteran. The particular relevance of this text to the present discussion is further underlined by Clavel's open admiration for Cesbron's treatment of the theme; his use of an extract from *Entre chiens et loups* as a preface to

his *Lettre à un képi blanc* (1975) - a defence of his own novel against military criticism - bears witness to their ideological affinity. The deeper significance of this intertextual relationship will become apparent as we seek to demonstrate that *Le Silence des armes*, while avoiding some of the liberal pitfalls established thus far, does not manage to sidestep all of them. Moreover, close reading of the text will reveal the existence of a number of previously unconsidered difficulties as regards the liberal position.

The novel opens with the return of the protagonist, Corporal Jacques Fortier, to his native village in the Jura mountains. A regular soldier on convalescent leave from active service in Algeria, he arrives with the intention of disposing of the family home and land. Yet, haunted by the ghosts of his recently deceased parents - lifelong pacifists, from whom he had been definitively alienated as a result of his determination to enlist in the army - as well as by his traumatic memories of the war, the NCO comes to see the need to reestablish, and to preserve, his contact with the inherited soil. Having determined to continue the family tradition of working the land, he is understandably dismayed to discover that he cannot now go back on the legal arrangements for the sale. His fragile mental stability gives way under this new strain, and he decides to resist any attempt to make him return to Algeria, come what may. A series of increasingly dramatic displays of opposition to the conflict has its climax in a suicidal last stand against the local *gendarmerie*. Such is the basic plot of *Le Silence des armes*, a novel which fits readily into the pattern of regional and historical preoccupations which we associate with this author's fiction. As we shall see, this basic literary formula lends itself equally to the mystification and the demystification of the Algerian war.

Referring to the torture allegations made in 1985 against (former 1<sup>er</sup> REP lieutenant) Jean-Marie Le Pen, as well as to the protests sparked by the French foreign minister's presence, the previous year, at the celebration in Algiers of the 30th

anniversary of the *Toussaint* rising, Jean Planchais adopts a tone which is equally evocative of Simon, Ikor, Cesbron and Clavel: "Le bruit léger de ces réactions rend d'autant plus sensible, comme un murmure dans la nuit, le silence de toute une génération" (Planchais 1985, I, p.1). As part of his attempt to explain "la volonté d'oublier" of so many of those who served in Algeria, Planchais points to the fact that "La <<déprime>> sous l'uniforme n'est pas un sujet de conversation en famille" (ibid., I, p.10). It is on this popularly suppressed aspect of the Algerian experience that Clavel chooses to focus the reader's attention in *Le Silence des armes*, much as Sartre had sought to do in 1960, when he transposed this particularly delicate subject to the Germany of the immediate post-war period in his play *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*. An invaluable summary of the psychic impact of colonial war on combatants like Jacques Fortier is to be found in the investigative journalism of America's Indochina war. "Just Don't Fit", Larry Heinemann's article on the "tripwire" Vietnam veteran, provides the following description of a condition known to psychiatrists as "post-traumatic stress disorder":

...undeniable self-destructive impulses, unresolved grief, and unrelieved survivor's guilt (virtually a collective sense of guilt). These symptoms may appear separately or together, beginning as a malaise, then blossoming into withering cycles of crushing, debilitating depression; psychic numbing (the "crust" many veterans seem to have); spontaneous flashbacks - momentary or prolonged - brought about by everyday occurrences; supra-vigilant suspicion; bouts of self-medication with alcohol and drugs; and a craving for isolation. (Heinemann 1985, p.56)

These observations are clearly relevant to the psychological treatment of conscript experiences found in both Labro and Bourgeade (see Chapter 3). However, it is Clavel's account of Jacques Fortier's psychic deterioration that conforms most closely to this pattern of mental illness. The following extract, for instance, is quite typical:

Lorsque la fraîcheur tira Jacques de son sommeil, l'aube n'était pas loin. Les étoiles scintillaient encore, mais le bas du ciel pâlisait, découpant dans un gris délavé la silhouette des buissons.

Un instant, Jacques demeura allongé sans bouger, cherchant ses camarades.

Personnel! Les copains l'avaient laissé tomber en plein djebel. Il allait crever là, comme une bête. Il allait être pris et torturé.

Il y eut, en lui, un élanement de peur. Mais, en même temps qu'il

reconnaissait le chien couché à deux pas, il retrouva sa terre et le spectre des djebels s'évanouit. (Clavel 1974, p.98)

The respite accorded to Jacques can only ever be temporary, however; the dog which brings him out of his flashback here is just as likely to have the opposite effect at another moment. Indeed, the old stray (which he discovers guarding the deserted house and decides to adopt) provides the heading for the first of the novel's two constituent sections and is to be regarded as an extended metaphor for the protagonist's post-combat trauma. This reading is borne out by episodes such as the following one, which once again occurs when Jacques wakes from a troubled sleep:

S'il restait là, le rêve continuerait de se dérouler. Il se leva sans allumer l'électricité et descendit lentement. Sur le seuil, il buta et faillit tomber. Le chien était allongé devant la porte. Il grogna puis reconnut Jacques et se dressa pour lui faire fête.

- Salut, chien rouge, dit Jacques.

Et sa voix parut emplir tout l'immense espace de la nuit. Il pensa à l'indicatif radio, et il lui sembla que tous ses copains se trouvaient aux aguets à la sortie de la reculée, scrutant la plaine. Sur le versant opposé, il y avait une autre section, et les radios s'appelaient de loin en loin.

- Chien Rouge 2 à Chien Rouge 3, parlez...

- Chien Rouge 3. Je vous reçois 5 sur 5... (ibid., p.216)

As Jacques retreats increasingly from society, he moves ever deeper into a private universe inhabited by deceased relatives, the dead of Algeria and all other wars, and the animal victims of human cruelty. The psychic trend is always downward, with the protagonist's ultimate act of self-destruction the only logical outcome. Clavel's narrative manages to combine this close attention to the mechanics of mental disturbance with the author's patent brand of transcendentalist lyricism, thus producing an image of the Algerian conflict which is genuinely defamiliarizing. It does not follow from this, however, that it is uniformly demystifying.

At the heart of Jacques Fortier's terminal depression is his sense of guilt at being implicated in *la mort des autres*. The importance of this theme - which is a direct reference to Camus's *Combat* articles of 1946 and, as such, is very much a constant of liberal and leftist treatments of the Algerian war (as epitomized by Buisson

1978) - is indicated by the fact that Clavel prefaces *Le Silence des armes* with this quotation from Jean Guéhenno:

La mort des autres nous fait honte. Il y a en nous un refus profond de tout ce sang, de toute cette mort, mais nous n'avons jamais osé, je ne dis pas le crier, mais seulement l'avouer. (Clavel 1974, p.4)

Jacques's specific responsibility for the deaths of his peace-loving parents is an inspired departure from the pattern of generalized guilt noted in the three liberal texts considered earlier. Indeed, by linking the damage done by a single French combatant at home to the more vaguely defined culpability of the French nation in Algeria, Clavel succeeds in focussing the contemporary reader's attention on the latter in a way which is original and thus potentially unsettling. This point is borne out by the following oblique reference to the destructiveness of the French military machine *là-bas*. Jacques is working on his dead mother's overgrown kitchen garden when he remembers that he should be able to make out another parcel of Fortier land from this vantage-point:

...lorsque sa vision se fut éclaircie, il fixa son attention sur un petit toit brun qui émergeait des hautes herbes. La vigne avait déjà disparu et la baraque était pareille à une épave charriée par un torrent. C'était là-bas comme ici. Là-bas où son père avait tant peiné. Là-bas où son père l'avait emmené tout enfant pour lui enseigner le travail de la vigne et tenter de lui faire partager son amour de la terre.

Le vent et le soleil donnaient vie à cette friche où apparaissait de loin en loin l'ombre plus dure d'un piquet incliné.

Rien. Il ne restait rien. En quatre années, la mauvaise herbe avait effacé les dernières traces de plusieurs générations de labeur. Lui, le soldat, le volontaire par ailleurs, il avait également tué ça. Il avait tué jusqu'au souvenir des vieux. Son oeuvre à lui, c'était ça. Là-bas: une oeuvre de mort pas sa présence. Ici: une oeuvre de mort par son absence. (ibid., pp.52-53)

The power to defamiliarize of this variation on the "death-of-others" theme derives from its linking, in a single troubled consciousness, of individual and collective culpability. Its juxtaposition of pastoral creativity and military destruction, of an idyll which cannot be recaptured and a vision of horror which cannot be forgotten, serves to underline this fundamental linkage. The process is continued and intensified as the protagonist's mental condition deteriorates. So, for instance, in the following hallucinatory passage, we see the familiar symbolism of the vineyard used to startling effect:

Jacques regardait les vignes et les friches. Ce temps faisait émerger des souvenirs de vendanges. Le coteau en terrasses se peupla de bandes joyeuses. Le père fut sur le sentier, la bouille au dos chargée de grappes dorées, le père et d'autres Fortier morts depuis des siècles, qui avaient fait la gloire du vin jaune et donné son prix à cette terre. Ils montaient en file, ployant sous la charge. Seul le dernier ne portait pas la bouille. Il n'avait qu'une mitrailleuse suspendue à son cou. Il riait de voir tous ces Fortier user leurs forces à cette tâche de bagnard tandis qu'il quittait le sentier, gagnait la plaine et s'en allait vers des villages tout blancs pour procéder à d'autres vendanges. Au sang du raisin, il préférait le sang des hommes, des femmes et des enfants. Il s'en allait le piétiner comme les vigneronns foulaient la vendange. (ibid., pp.190-191)

The conscious appeal to Christian imagery in a passage such as this - the Father, the Way, the tramping of the vintage - is not the primary source of its strength. Rather, it is its establishment of a community of interest between the Fortier dead and the French military's nameless Algerian victims that gives the fate of these last a fresh immediacy. This basically thematic link becomes a part of the narrative's structure thanks to its principal conceit: that is to say, the idea that the protagonist's decision to volunteer for the war in Algeria "avait conduit le père à sa propre mort et le fils à la mort des autres" (ibid., p.192). It will also lead inevitably to his own death; a fact which will be returned to when we come to consider the ideological pitfalls of Clavel's approach.

Similar use is made of ironic juxtaposition throughout Clavel's determinedly unromantic account of the French army's activities in Algeria. There is no question of a communion of enemy equals in his depiction of the war, nor is there any suggestion of a Yeatsian terrible beauty being born of this colonial conflict. Whenever images of wonder do occur, in fact, they are restricted to the natural world and appear in stark contrast to the scenes of human destruction with which they are formally linked. So, for example, there is no possibility of misinterpreting the observation that "Le crépuscule incendiait le ciel et la plaine comme les soldats incendiaient les villages des djebels" (ibid., p.167). Any beauty that may exist resides exclusively in the tranquillity of the Jura; unmitigated horror is all that may be associated with this glimpse of Algerian rural life.

Yet, paradoxically, it is precisely in so far as *Le Silence des armes* insists on the slaughter of the innocents that the text reveals its liberal inadequacies. To begin with, this concentration on those deemed guiltless by moralist commentators effectively denies the total nature of the Algerian war *qua* colonial conflict, by which we understand one in which racially defined political affiliations constituted the only relevant criterion of innocence and guilt: colonizer or colonized; this was the real test of individual responsibility in the Manichaean discourse of *Algérie française*. This failing is only the more surprising in view of Clavel's specific dismissal, in *Lettre à un képi blanc*, of those earlier intellectual attempts to impose humanitarian limits on the fighting in Algeria (Clavel 1975, p.59).

Secondly, and altogether more seriously, the narrative's insistence on civilian fatalities fails to take proper account of the conflict's political specificity; this, to the extent that it encourages both a demonic view of colonial repression and a conception of the Algerian war as a whole which may be referred to as a "symphony of death" (see Foulkes 1983, p.80).

The text's demonic element derives from its tendency to "Nazify" the French army's record in Algeria: that is to say, *Le Silence des armes* demonizes the *Armée d'Algérie* by likening it to the forces of the 1940 German occupation. Clavel is far from alone in this regard - Mattei's appeal to this mystifying figure was noted in Chapter 3 - but his demonization of the 1954-1962 hostilities is no less serious a failing for that. And it is demonization, in fact, in that the Third Reich has been mediated to a point where its historicity has effectively ceased to count; history has been replaced by a complex of myths all turning on the notion of Evil. The passage of terms such as SS and *Gestapo* into the rhetoric of domestic political life, and, indeed, everyday conversation, is one indication of the myth-system's hold over the popular imagination. So, although a passage like the following may be intended to



expose the activities of French troops in Algeria to public scrutiny, it can only encourage historical confusion:

C'était bien l'arbre du maquis. [...] ...cet arbre avait été laissé pour témoigner de la guerre. Il portait les traces des messages que les gens du maquis avaient gravés dans son écorce. Jacques évoqua ces garçons qui s'étaient battus ici à la manière des fellagas en Algérie, contre des soldats de son espèce qui les avaient torturés, déportés ou fusillés exactement comme ses camarades et lui le faisaient aujourd'hui. Lui aussi appartenait à une armée d'occupation. Et cette occupation, l'oncle Emile en avait pris sa part. Il s'était même couvert de gloire à couper quelques têtes de salopards qui appartenaient eux aussi à la Résistance. [...]

Est-ce que les SS étaient venus jusque-là?

Est-ce que des maquisards étaient morts au pied de cet arbre? (Clavel 1974, pp.179-180; cf. pp.43-44)

It might be argued that Clavel's equation of the French and Algerian national liberation movements is merely a device to encourage the breakdown of the barriers of racism which even today prevent metropolitan sympathy for the FLN and its activities in the period 1954-1962. Yet, if the price of generating any such sympathy is to be a denial of the war's specifically colonial nature - as Fanon's criticism of the Occupation figure suggests (Fanon 1961, pp.185-186) - then it must always be too high. It is, in any event, no substitute for a proper awareness of Algerian nationalism on its own terms.

The symphony of death is really a logical extension of Nazification: the imagery of Oradour and the Resistance leads easily to that of *Blitzkrieg* and the Holocaust. By "symphony of death", we understand a treatment of the Algerian war which encourages an apocalyptic vision of events and thus a belief in what, as we noted above, Barthes terms "l'idée d'une irresponsabilité de l'Histoire" (Barthes 1957, p.138). For, if the armed confrontation between the racial blocs in the colony is regarded as an unstoppable and inescapable maelstrom of destruction, no individual or group can be held to be responsible for it, or, in consequence, to be anything other than its victims. Thinking of this kind is what underlies the protagonist's description of the war as "cette folie de meurtre ... cette ivresse de douleur et de sang" (Clavel 1974, p.203). It is also clearly present in the following account of his attempt to come to terms with the fact

that he will not be allowed to go back on his decision to sell the family property:

Il avait passé quelques heures dans l'illusion que cette bâtisse solide serait pour lui un rempart qui le protégerait du mal. Il l'avait considérée comme un asile où il pourrait s'abriter de la guerre. [...] Il avait pris seul la décision de s'engager dans cette aventure où un vent de folie attisait les incendies, soufflant des villages entiers sur des enfants innocents.

Le pays s'efface. Il n'y a plus devant lui que des ruines et des morts. Et il se retrouve parmi ceux qui s'acharnent sur ces ruines d'où montent des gémissements et des appels au secours. La fumée noire des incendies obscurcit le ciel. Elle se rabat sur lui. Elle sent la souffrance et la mort. Elle l'étouffe. Pour se libérer, il crie:

- Retourner là-bas! Merde alors, plutôt crever! (ibid., p.201)

It is "un vent de folie", then, that has swept Jacques and those like him across Algeria, rather than political decisions. They themselves are as much its victims as the suffering natives, and no more able to resist its pressures than the baited hounds which are at the origin of the idea of *acharnement*. Thus perceived, the *bourreaux* may finally join their *victimes* in a mystical, and quintessentially liberal, *fraternisation* after death. So, "l'oncle Emile", previously criticized for his military romanticism and his participation in earlier atrocities, will join Jacques, his dead comrades, and various other victims, for the protagonist's last stand, and climactic hallucination, at the "Fontaine aux Daims":

La mère tenait dans ses bras l'enfant brun. L'étudiant pacifiste en tenait d'autres par la main. Il portait à sa boutonnière la grosse fleur rouge que douze fusils avaient plaquée sur sa poitrine. Il y avait aussi les Arabes aux têtes coupées, les copains tués en Algérie qui fraternisaient avec leurs victimes et leurs bourreaux. Leurs blessures ressemblaient aux décorations qu'arborait l'oncle Emile. Ils accueillaient Jacques et sa troupe avec des gestes d'amitié. (ibid., p.279)

The durability of the liberals' rhetoric appears very clearly in this extract. In particular, the *ninisme* used to describe the protagonist's dead comrades - fraternizing with both their victims and their executioners, they appear as neither one nor the other - is evidence of its direct ideological descent from the Camus of the 1946 *Combat* articles. The fact that they appear alongside a pacifist martyr, meanwhile, serves both to emphasize Clavel's affinity with Cesbron, and to show how an apocalyptic vision of Algeria leads to melodramatic "solutions" to the problems raised by the conflict. Clavel's response to the Algerian war, in fact, is the same all-

embracing pacifism put forward by Cesbron. As he puts it himself in *Lettre à un képi blanc*: "...c'est la guerre dans sa totalité que je rejette" (Clavel 1975, p.59). His fictional advocates of this pacifist line - the conscientious objector and Jacques himself - will, like Cesbron's Roland Guérin before them, be obliged to die for their belief in non-violence. Denied the cloistered retreat from the war of a Larsan or a Plaa, the protagonist is led, as we have already seen, and as if inevitably, to consider suicide. Such an outcome conforms very straightforwardly to the apocalyptic logic of the symphony of death, in that the returned veteran is only temporarily able to resist the demands of the conflict.

For the author of *Le Silence des armes*, in fact, just as for Cesbron, there is no such thing as a legitimate war; this, in spite of his unequivocal recognition of the justice of the nationalist cause (Clavel 1975, p.23). At the root of this attitude is the contention - disproved by history, not only in the Algerian conflict, but in every war of national liberation - that "...la seule arme noble et vraiment efficace des révolutions est la non-violence" (ibid., pp.60-70). Once again, moralist outrage is preferred to the socio-economic realities of colonial power, and the specificity of the Algerian struggle against colonialism is cut to fit a ready-made critique of The Evil of War. This broad antimilitarism is clearly a considerably less demanding response to the French nation's Algerian experience than an appropriately thoroughgoing anticolonialism would be. Like the author of *Entre chiens et loups*, Clavel finds it easier to lament the generalized "absurdity" of combat deaths than to identify their political logic in a specific historical context:

Etait-il donc nécessaire que chaque génération connût sa guerre pour que quelques hommes en sentent l'absurdité? Le père n'était-il pas mort parce que le départ de son fils lui prouvait que la guerre était immortelle et que le combat qu'il menait restait vain? (Clavel 1974, p.180)

The spurious timelessness so characteristic of mythical discourse has here replaced the less easily assimilable specifics of French decolonization. Its eternalizing effect may also be noted in the closing account of the central figure's suicidal shoot-out

with the local *gendarmerie*; an episode which betrays the author's inability to resist altogether the charms of what he himself has termed "le lait empoisonné des récits glorieux de nos aînés" (Clavel 1975, p.16).

It is not by chance that suicide figures so prominently in chronicles of tortured youth like *Le Silence des armes* and Labro's *Des feux mal éteints*: James Dean is, after all, a contemporary role-model for both Jacques and Seb. Moreover, the taking of one's own life is as much a part of the global tradition of military romanticism as it is of the Western cult of the youth rebel. (The Japanese writer Yukio Mishima might be said to constitute a literary archetype in this regard.) In addition, this brand of romanticism also draws on the modern literary myth of the Outsider, with Meursault's murderous/suicidal alienation providing an appropriately Algerian exemplar for French combat troops.

In spite of Clavel's avowed determination to avoid it, then, military romanticism threatens - "at the death", as it were - to undermine his otherwise persuasive treatment of the Algerian conflict. The underlying problem may be identified as the fact that the traumatized colonial combatant is, in France as in America, not only a historical phenomenon, but also a figure of contemporary folklore. It is to this myth of the tripwire veteran that Clavel unmistakably appeals in the final act of his drama. Compare the attitude adopted to intruders by Heinemann's mythical "vet" and Jacques's preparations for the defence of the family home:

...he keeps the rest of humanity at arm's length with booby traps made of monster deadfalls, homemade Claymore mines as big as manhole covers, and other such things he learned to manufacture in the Special Forces of the Navy SEALs or the Army LRRPs. He rigs these contraptions with tripwire (hence, the newspaper nickname) as thin as spider's silk. The wires crisscross the perimeter of his territory like a long trellis, laid flat. He squats in his dirt-floor cabin and stares out a gun slit the size of a mail slot. (Heinemann 1985, p.56)

Il enfila une chemise kaki et un pantalon de combat, qu'il avait dans sa valise, puis il mit ses brodequins de marche. Il s'habillait ainsi parce qu'il avait décidé de se battre. [...]

Quand il fut habillé, il monta au grenier, prit le revolver dont il emplit le barillet, le glissa dans sa ceinture et vida une boîte de cartouches dans l'une de ses grandes poches. Dans l'autre, il mit des balles pour le fusil. Puis il chargea les armes de chasse et descendit le tout dans le couloir du premier étage. Il ouvrit l'armoire qui

obstruait la fenêtre et, avec le canon du Lebel, il fit un trou dans le fond. Par-là, il pouvait surveiller la rue et tirer. De la fenêtre de sa chambre, il pouvait observer le jardin. Il ferma les volets, laissant seulement un espace assez large pour le canon d'une arme. (Clavel 1974, p.247)

Clavel's close attention to military detail as his hero digs in is an accurate indication of what is to come. For, Jacques's decision to take on the might of the French war machine single-handed provides scope for the vicarious enjoyment of romanticized violence. This episode also reveals a comic aspect as the soldier is transformed into a familiar figure of pacifist folklore: the peace-loving man prepared to fight for his beliefs. So, it is as an Arthur McBride *à la jurassienne* that the hero tackles the forces of militarism with their own weapons. Making the most of his fitness, skill and experience, the wily underdog outwits the bumbling civil authorities and the plodding *gendarmerie* alike. Or rather, he does for a time, at least; comedy gives way to a familiar liberal tragedy the nearer he comes to his inevitable demise. Both facets of this tragi-comic account of the episode are compatible with a lingering military romanticism; as, for that matter, is the text's foregrounding of its sympathy for the Algerian nationalist cause:

Ces lueurs fauves du crépuscule répandaient partout une odeur de guerre. Il fixait surtout le point de l'horizon d'où venaient les éclairs qui n'étaient déjà plus, pour lui, des lueurs d'orage mais des éclatements de bombes. De ces puits de ciel qui trouaient les nuages, des avions allaient jaillir qui piqueraient sur lui. Il n'était plus Jacques Fortier, mais un fellouze solitaire, isolé de sa katiba, assiégé dans un village perché sur un piton, quelque part dans l'Aurès. Il attendait la nuit. Cette nuit qui rendait aux gens du pays la totalité de leur terre. La peur allait gagner les autres. Elle les paralyserait dans leurs retranchements et lui, l'homme du pays, il deviendrait maître du terrain. Il allait régner en souverain absolu sur cette nuit que le ciel préparait pour lui. (ibid., pp.260-261)

The implications of the conceit that the hero has become a *fellouze* will be considered in Chapter 7. What concerns us here is rather the passage's evident enjoyment of the dubious thrills of the Algerian war. Jacques's increasing derangement should not be allowed to mislead us in this regard: his mental condition only serves to render the excitement of combat more acceptable to a liberal readership; as, indeed, does the fact that the protagonist is now on the right side, historically speaking. In

fact, this particular rebel's ideological companions on his Aurès *piton* are not the FLN guerrillas of history, but rather the glamorous combat troops of French popular mythology.

The author of *Le Silence des armes* sets high standards for himself. In his *Lettre à un képi blanc*, he states: "Je ne dis pas qu'il m'arrive encore d'être repris par l'envie de porter un képi, mais si je n'y prenais garde, peut-être m'advierait-il de lâcher un mot qui puisse laisser croire à ceux qui ne l'ont pas connue que la guerre peut être une aventure exaltante" (Clavel 1975, p.21). The historical idealism which underpins this statement - i.e. the belief that it is the popular image of armed conflicts which makes them occur, rather than the economic and political forces insisted upon by the historical materialist - is not what concerns us here. Rather, it is the extent to which Clavel's novel falls short of his own standards that we would wish to insist upon. For, with the intrusion of military romanticism at its close, *Le Silence des armes* reveals, once again, how easily liberalism may be recuperated by a more robust and more coherent myth-system.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE WILL TO BELONG: THE MYTHS OF THE *PIEDS-NOIRS*

It was Pierre Mendès-France who, having only a few months earlier wound up the French army's catastrophic Indochinese campaign, first committed his country's forces to the defence of *Algérie française*. The Prime Minister's seemingly illogical reaction to the Algerian insurrection was, in fact, unavoidable given the presence in the territory of some one million well-established settlers (Talbot 1980, p.10). Without the *pieds-noirs*, in short, there would have been no Algerian war; it was they who constituted "French Algeria", and it was their entrenchment which made the 1954-1962 conflict both so inevitable and so intractable.

In this chapter, we shall attempt to outline the system of myths developed by the settler community, and repeated by its metropolitan defenders, in an attempt to legitimize European minority control of the colony. These myths may have served to reassure the *pieds-noirs* when their ascendancy was challenged by the FLN, but they also prevented them from comprehending the political roots of Algerian nationalist violence. For our purposes, the relevant themes may be formally divided into four types - myths of origin, place, identity, and mastery (cf. Chennells 1982) - but will often be found to overlap in practice; a phenomenon which is best understood in terms of the common political motivation of the individual mythical concepts. To say that the *colon* was courageous and hard-working was, from an ideological point of view, the same thing as saying that he had been a valiant defender of France in two world wars: both themes established his "right" to a privileged position in Algeria. In the event, of course, the various settler myths would be rendered similarly ineffectual by historical developments: generated both to justify European dominance and to eternalize it, they first contributed to the demise of *Algérie française* and then, in the wake of the settlers' political defeat, primed the desperate violence which was to make impossible their continued presence in an independent Algeria. In this way, the myths of the *piéd-*

*noir* community, designed for its self-assertion and self-preservation, served in the long run to compound its downfall and to hasten its final evacuation.

By setting the relevant mythical themes against the background of the colonization of Algeria, it will become possible to see how the European settlers responded to the basic questions posed by their presence in a manifestly foreign land: "Qui sommes-nous? Comment prouver que le pays nous appartient et que nous sommes chez nous?" (Déjeux 1977, p.725). Such properly ideological considerations obviously pre-dated the 1954-1962 conflict, but would take on a fresh immediacy as the FLN's challenge to French rule intensified. Some commentators would respond to this test with new mystifications; others, less numerous, would attempt honestly to come to terms with the new Algerian reality. We shall consider these contrasting reactions in turn.

The most fruitful way of approaching the complex of myths which, over the years, became attached to the settler presence in Algeria is to look in the first instance at their development in the literature of "French" Algeria. Jean Déjeux identifies three main phases in the emergence of this "Algerian" literature, which may be straightforwardly related to changes in colonial demography (Déjeux 1975, pp.13-53). To begin with, in the early years of military occupation and small-scale civilian settlement, Algeria was seized upon by metropolitan writers as the perfect setting for the literary expression of their variously imperialistic and/or romantic preconceptions: military adventures alternated with the exotic charms of a new Orient. So, whilst the likes of Barrès and Maurras lauded the triumphs of the *Armée d'Afrique*, such celebrated literary tourists as Fromentin, Maupassant and Gide made the trip to North Africa in search of highly personal forms of spiritual exultation and earthly delight.

As colonization spread, French Algeria became both more economically independent and more politically assertive. A corresponding attempt was made by the colony's artists to establish its aesthetic autonomy. The moving spirit behind this



challenge to metropolitan cultural hegemony was Louis Bertrand, who, in novels like *Le Sang des races* (1899), presented the territory as a *terroir* for the first time, thereby promoting the European cultivator of the land to a new and leading role in colonial mythology. Bertrand was convinced that a *peuple neuf* had come into being in Algeria and that it should begin to voice its own values in a "national" literature drawing on its past experiences and its future aspirations.

This thesis was taken up and developed by the *Algérianistes* in the first three decades of the 20th century. Robert Randau's 1905 novel *Les Colons*, for instance, was intended as a "roman de la patrie algérienne" (Memmi 1985, p.266). The work's title accurately reflects this homegrown literary movement's characterizing feature: that is to say, its preoccupation with and glorification of the European settler of Algeria. *Algérianisme* remained in the ascendant until well into the 1930s, when a combination of domestic pressures (such as the stagnation of the wine industry and the growth of Muslim nationalism) and international developments (most notably global economic depression and the rise of Fascism) contributed to its decline. The movement's mythical thrust may be summed up as an insistence on the "Latin" heritage of French Algeria; a figure which will shortly be considered in terms of its particular contribution to the literature of the Algerian war.

With the progressive shift of the European population away from the farms of the hinterland and into the urban centres of the littoral, the colony's mythical preoccupations underwent a second major change. New literary themes emerged from about 1935 onwards to reflect this reorientation of the settler imagination: the "Mediterranean" sensibility of Albert Camus and the lesser lights of the *Ecole d'Alger* replaced the paeans to *Algérianité* of Bertrand, Randau, and their followers. This too will be examined in due course.

To these three distinct phases of European myth-making must be added a fourth: the period of violent conflict, 1954-1962. The liberation war would lead the settlers'

literary spokesman to appeal to all of these myth-systems in an ever more desperate attempt to defend the colonizers' ideological hegemony. To use a military metaphor, these were the broad strategic options open to the colonialist psyche once the threat of militant nationalism had been revealed by the *Toussaint* rising. The small number of myths developed in response to specific political and military developments - such as those which centre on the notions of *les occasions manquées*, *la fraternisation*, and *l'abandon* - appear in this light to be basically tactical in character: temporary holding-operations, intended to stave off the inevitable defeat just a little longer. As Jean Déjeux correctly suggests, such behaviour is very much a characteristic of societies in crisis: "On essaie de le faire durer [le mythe], jusqu'au jour où le jeu des masques cesse et où tous les acteurs se retrouvent ensemble affrontés, le visage nu, pour le dénouement" (Déjeux 1977, p.725).

In the particular case of French Algeria, we might go even further and suggest that, for some actors in the drama at least, the masks never fell away. Indeed, even in the treatment accorded to the seemingly naked racial violence of the OAS, we shall find ample evidence of an uninterrupted process of settler self-mystification. Works produced after 1962 will, for their part, reveal examples of what Montherlant referred to in *La Rose de sable* (1967) as *nostalgérie* (Montherlant 1982, p.179; cf. Azoulay 1980) - the exile's veneration of a mystified past - and *post facto* attempts to uphold, or excuse, the historically discredited world-view of *Algérie française*.

As we turn our attention now to the major mythical themes of *Algérie française*, we might very usefully bear in mind Iain R. Smith's remarks on the nature of the relationship obtaining between all such myths and the historical events upon which they draw:

All societies develop myths out of their past history and use them to justify their present attitudes and beliefs and to legitimize their political and social orders. It is because they have this function that myths survive. [...] Even when a myth is shown to be incompatible with the historical evidence about the specific past events out of which it grew, the myth may continue to flourish. For ultimately myths are not true or false but living or dead. (Smith 1986, p.18)

The essential autonomy of ideological myths is particularly evident in the case of the French Algerian theme of settler dispossession. So, whilst an historian like John Talbott may explain that "immigrants of crisis" were not responsible for the large-scale settlement of Algeria (Talbott 1980, p.10), the literary defenders of *Algérie française* regularly appeal to a communal foundation myth which states exactly the opposite. According to the myth, the characterizing feature of the lot of the first colonizers of Algeria was its injustice: dispossessed, through no fault of their own, by the old continent, the early colonists were obliged to seek their salvation in a hostile Africa. It was this background of *misère*, rather than a desire for profit, which explained the European presence in Algeria; suffering at home was the motive force behind the colonization of the territory. So, for instance, in Jeanne Montupet's *La Traversée de Fiora Valencourt* (1961), the heroine's impoverished parents are obliged to flee their native Corsica by the spectre of imminent starvation. They are thus united in the mythical pantheon of French Algeria with such disparate groups as the political exiles of the Second Empire, destitute Spanish peasants, Southern winegrowers ruined by the phylloxera, and the victims of the Prussian annexation of Alsace-Lorraine.

The myth of dispossession is an inherently attractive one. By suggesting injustice and the victimization of people who have in no wise deserved their fate, it encourages the maximum sympathy on the part of the integrated reader for a minimum literary outlay. Moreover, the myth actually denies the historical importance of the colonial profit motive (cf. Memmi 1957, pp.34-36). And this both as regards the original colonizers of Algeria and their mythical descendants: these Europeans are not in North Africa to make their fortunes, but to "survive"; "they have nowhere else to go". However, its real potential for the legitimization of the French colonial enterprise only becomes fully apparent when the personal advancement achieved in Algeria by these dispossessed Europeans is taken into account. Here again, the approach adopted by Montupet's novel is exemplary: the contemporary prosperity of the *pieds-noirs* is

presented as the product of the boundless energy and unstinting hard work of earlier generations of colonists, such as Fiora's parents.

If the colonizers started out with nothing, and have built up their prosperity and power thanks only to their own enterprise and effort, then who can reasonably deny their right to their present privileged position? In characteristically "button-holing" fashion (Barthes 1957, p.210), colonial injustice is legitimated by means of the complementary myths of dispossession and pioneering creation. The two myths are exploited to the full in Cécil Saint-Laurent's *Les Passagers pour Alger* (1960) and its sequel *Les Agités d'Alger* (1961). Take, for instance, the following account of the Desaix family's origins:

...en 1848, avec la bénédiction des ministres, aux applaudissements de la foule, des ouvriers républicains quittent Paris pour Alger afin d'y fortifier de leurs bras la démocratie. Quelques années après, d'autres Républicains, proscrits par le régime impérial, viennent les rejoindre. Ils vivent dans la misère, éparpillés sur des terres incultes et si peu sûres qu'il faut labourer le fusil sur l'épaule. A peine marié, le Desaix de 1848 fait beaucoup d'enfants dont la plupart meurent, mais l'un d'eux épouse, en 1872 ou 73, une petite Alsacienne à Tizi-Ousou. Car dans l'intervalle des milliers d'Alsaciens, pour ne pas devenir allemands, ont atterri sur les contreforts de la Kabylie et y ont planté de la vigne. (Saint-Laurent 1960, I, p.30)

The leading role played by wine production in the economy of *Algérie française* is a matter of historical record (see Isnard 1954). The broader political and psychological importance of viticulture must now be considered in the light of the above quotation. The sociologist Jacques Berque - who is perhaps the most astute analyst of French North Africa and its *imaginaire* - has described the typical European farmhouse, surrounded by vineyards, as being the single most provocative symbol of French colonial exploitation (Berque 1962, p.33). Although Berque himself does not dwell on the vineyards themselves, there can be little doubt that it is their symbolism which is the most powerfully attractive to the integrated reader of novels like *Les Passagers pour Alger*. It is here, after all, that the French national beverage is produced, with all its attendant mythology:

Le vin est senti par la nation française comme un bien qui lui est propre, au même titre que ses trois cent soixante espèces de fromages et sa culture. C'est une

boisson-totem, correspondant au lait de la vache hollandaise ou au thé absorbé cérémonieusement par la famille royale anglaise. (Barthes 1957, p.74)

What could be more "French", then, than vineyards? And, precisely because of their totemic significance, what more potent symbol of Muslim dispossession could be imagined than these same vineyards, each one a microcosm of the colonist's expropriation of the indigenous inhabitant? As Alistair Horne points out:

Although it [the Algerian wine industry] had come to account for half of Algeria's exports to France and had granted considerable power to the wine lobby (as personified by Senator Borgeaud), it hardly helped the economic predicament of the Muslim, providing him with but little steady work, and producing a crop which did not nourish him and offended his religion. (Horne 1977, p.62; cf. Barthes 1957, p.77)

Small wonder, then, that the settlers' vineyards should so often have been the target for FLN attacks; or, indeed, that such attacks should have been perceived as an affront both to the European proprietors and to France itself (see Droz & Lever 1982, p.135). Rather less predictable, but no less important, is the regular association of this most potent symbol of a real, and abiding, Muslim expropriation with a largely imagined, and clearly past, European dispossession. A very specific strand of unexpiated colonial guilt would seem to underlie this literary combination of themes, in fact: it is as if the colonizer, subliminally aware of the vine's historical role in the subjugation of the colonized, seeks to deflect its symbolic force by linking it to the supposed *misère* of his own community. Compare Jean Lartéguy's remarkably similar appeal to the theme. The speaker is an old *colon*:

- Ici, vous êtes en France, capitaine. Mon grand-père était alsacien, chassé de chez lui par les Allemands en 1870, on lui a donné un lot de colonisation. Je m'appelle Kelber et notre village en Alsace s'appelle Wintzenheim. On y fait aussi du vin. Mon grand-père a emporté avec lui les plants de vigne quand il est parti, avec pour toute richesse cinq cents francs or. (Lartéguy 1960, p.403)

So deeply ingrained in the colonial psyche is the myth of dispossession, in fact, that even Jules Roy, that most clear-sighted and self-critical of *pièdes-noirs*, continues to cling to it in his epic treatment of the French presence in Algeria, *Les Chevaux du soleil* (1967-1975). We shall have occasion to discuss Roy's major non-fictional contribution to the Algerian debate, *La Guerre d'Algérie* (1960), later in the present

chapter. Here, however, it is his novel cycle, which is of interest. In addition to the unity inherent in an extended treatment of a single historical theme, very considerable continuity is achieved by focussing on the development of various military and colonial dynasties. One such settler clan is the Paris family, whose name is taken from a branch of the author's own family. The grim circumstances of their arrival in Algeria are contemptuously described by another immigrant, Antoine Bouychou, who is himself an ex-lumberjack from the Ariège and a veteran of the 1830 Algiers Expedition:

Ces Francs-Comtois avec qui il s'était lié au camp de Birmandreis, les Paris, avaient souri quand il leur avait ... laissé entendre qu'il n'était pas venu comme eux sans vert, attiré par le miroir aux alouettes du gouvernement qui offrait des primes pour défricher les terres d'Algérie et se débarrasser des têtes brûlées, des républicains. Les yeux du père Paris s'étaient emplis de vinaigre et peu à peu les yeux des fils étaient devenus comme ceux du père. Ils avaient raison, ces misérables que le sergent Hugon avait poussés vers l'Afrique... (Roy 1968, p.34)

It is only to be expected that this background of *la misère* should be evoked by later generations of Roy's settlers once the seriousness of the Algerian nationalist challenge to the colonial ascendancy has become apparent. Thus, in the concluding volume of *Les Chevaux du soleil*, the direct descendants of "ces misérables", Dr Paris and his widowed mother, look back through the pages of the family photograph album to the coming of their forbears to Algeria in 1854 (Roy 1975, pp.41-43). With the outbreak of war in the colony exactly a century after their ancestors' landing in North Africa, the myth of dispossession acquires a new poignancy for the Paris family and their fellow *pieds-noirs*: it is they themselves who now face the threat of expropriation and eviction. The injustice of the situation is plain to the doctor as he drives along the country roads on his rounds in May 1958, in the midst of the seemingly omnipresent Arabs:

Rien ne serait plus comme avant. On avait protégé les fourmis, donné ses droits aux fourmis et les fourmis finissaient par vous boulotter. (Roy 1975, p.27)

The spectre of this new dispossession - "Paradise Lost", as Roy's rather hackneyed image has it - brings the myth full circle. The predisposition of the European population and its metropolitan allies to image past generations of colonists in

terms of *la misère* led them almost inevitably to look on their own difficulties in a similar manner. Rather than accept their communal responsibility for the collapse of *Algérie française*, the settlers preferred to appeal to the final version of the myth of dispossession: *l'abandon*.

Jules Roy would, in his non-fiction, be one of the very few Europeans to oppose this sort of mystification; nevertheless, he does not seem to be totally immune to its spell in his fictional production. Other, and lesser, literary representatives of the *pieds-noirs* would have no such redeeming side to their work, and de Gaulle and his supporters would thus come to replace such long-established villains as Louis-Napoléon and Bismarck in the settlers' catalogue of infamy. Hence the proliferation, in the wake of their defeat, of what Jean-Claude Vatin has termed "les plaidoyers ou <<larmoyers>> français" (Vatin 1974, p.309). With such patently lachrymose products as José Castano's *Les Larmes de la passion* and Micheline Susini's *De soleil et de larmes* (both 1982), the same resonances that first made the theme of dispossession attractive come to exercise a masochistic appeal for the definitively exiled settler (see Cabridens 1985 & Siblot 1985).

One of the more readable of these *pied-noir* "tear-jerkers" is Gabriel Conesa's *Bab-El-Oued* (1970), which is typically subtitled "notre paradis perdu". Here again, great play is made of the widowed mother, a stock figure in settler mythology whose archetype is no doubt Dr Rieux's mother in *La Peste* (1947) and thus Camus's own. The opening lines of Conesa's narrative provide a particularly clear illustration of the ultimate, double-stranded, form taken by the myth of dispossession in the imagination of the European inhabitants of colonial Algeria:

Ma mère et l'Algérie ne sont qu'une seule et même personne.

L'une et l'autre ont commencé à vivre vers 1885. Ensemble elles ont grandi et ont servi la France: ensemble elles sont passées du néant à l'épanouissement. Aujourd'hui à quatre-vingt-quatre ans, elles retournent ensemble au néant.

L'une et l'autre ont ouvert les yeux au moment où on commençait à traverser la Mitidja à pied sec et sans se faire égorger. L'Algérie manquait d'hommes. Personne n'y venant, elle se peuplait des fils des Quarante-Huitards que les Français y avaient déportés et des Alsaciens et Lorrains que les Prussiens avaient chassés de chez eux.

Elle se décidait à peine à entrebâiller ses portes que sa maison s'emplissait déjà de tous les fils de la Méditerranée.

Ma mère qui est née près d'Alicante arriva à Alger parmi ses frères et ses soeurs. Son père était, je crois, carrier, et la misère l'avait poussé à l'exil. Pour les gens ruinés, l'Algérie était une terre fertile où enfouir leur passé et où semer le grain de leur faim et de leur courage. Sa famille s'installa à Bab-El-Oued qui n'était qu'un rassemblement de baraques que les maisons en dur remplaçaient lentement. Mais c'était déjà un village, un univers, une patrie. (Conesa 1970, pp.9-10)

This remarkable introductory passage is particularly rich in mythical significations. Not only are dispossession and the theme of the widowed mother appealed to, but also the myths of pioneering creation and of the eternal Mediterranean, as well as two distinct brands of *pied-noir* patriotism; not to mention Conesa's central preoccupation with his personal version of the myth of Bab-El-Oued. Dispossession itself is here perceived to be a return to an original, and indeed constitutive, state: an ultimate and immutable destiny, from which the settlers' years of relative plenty, though paid for in blood, sweat and tears, could only be a temporary respite. Both *Algérie française* and the *pieds-noirs* grew from nothing, flowered briefly, and now return to nothing.

For Henri Martinez, it was precisely the spectre of "nothingness" - the supposedly total loss of identity habitually associated with the end of French Algeria - that gave rise to the European terrorism of the *Organisation armée secrète* or OAS:

Que pouvions-nous faire d'autre? Choisir la mort des moutons dans les égorgoirs? Partir dès cette époque vers une métropole qui nous repousse? [...] Mais comment déménager les meubles de presque 2500 familles tous les mois? Et les biens intransportables? Toute une vie, tout l'héritage d'un passé délibérément abandonnés? Et pour s'installer où? Quel métier? Quel avenir? En quelle ville ou village? Rien! Rien! Le néant...

[...]

Nous étions seulement piéds-noirs; c'était comme une corporation. Et nombre d'entre nous eurent, dès le début, le réflexe malheureux de vouloir défendre jusqu'au bout, et contre le simple bon sens, les avantages acquis par la vieille misère, et leur courage récent. (Martinez 1982, pp.44-45)

Communal dispossession was to lead, via the OAS, to individual "perdition" in a final mythical development: the last-ditch defence of the settlers' *patrie* would result, in the relevant literature at least, in the loss not only of *pied-noir* lives, but also of the sanity and even the "souls" of the defenders. This terminal twist might conveniently be



thought of as a loss of personal identity with the collapse of the community: when the colonial edifice crumbles, so does the psychic and even the spiritual integrity of the individual colonizer (Martinez 1984, pp.13-18 & passim). Yet, as we shall see now, the theme of dispossession is only one aspect of the European population's quest for a mythical origin.

A constantly recurring feature of the literature of the Algerian conflict is the appeal to the ancient history of the territory in an attempt to legitimize the contemporary colonial presence: that is to say, the "heritage" of the Roman conquerors of North Africa is looked to by the settlers to provide them with a communal origin, and thus both an identity and a rationale for their privileged position in Algeria.

Gabriel Conesa's *Bab-El-Oued* is a case in point. Time and again, Rome is presented as a fundamental point of reference for *pied-noir* Algeria. So, for instance, Conesa's native *quartier* is likened to a "Forum romain", whilst the 1930 Centenary of the Algiers Expedition becomes "le triomphe romain de la France en Algérie" (Conesa 1970, pp.22 & 47-48 respectively). At opposite poles of peace and war, a child's street game is attributed to the Romans, and the European stronghold of Bab-El-Oued becomes, "in the hour of its death", "un théâtre romain déserté, mangé de soleil et parcouru pas des lézards et où, à la place de la voix des acteurs, ne résonne plus que celle des cigales" (ibid., pp.54 & 215-216).

At no stage does Conesa make explicit the significance of these regular allusions to the Roman occupation of the Maghreb, nor need he do so. Rather, their mythical import will be readily apparent to any reader familiar with the *imaginaire* of French Algeria. Indeed, these textual references to classical antiquity - so obviously inspired by Camus's "Noces à Tipasa" (1939) - conjure up the familiar images of the colony's *héritage latin*: i.e. the ruins found at Tipasa, Timgard, and the lesser Roman sites. More importantly, such images inevitably communicate the French colonialist propaganda historically attached to these archaeological remains. This turns on what

Déjeux calls the myth of the "éternel méditerranéen", the timeless incarnation of Bertrand's *latinité*, which has never ceased to be present in North Africa (see Déjeux 1977, *passim*). The region's Arabic and Islamic dimension is thus reduced to an historical parenthesis: i.e. an inessential phase during which the conquering Arab hordes did little more than "camp" amid the remains of Roman Africa. With the 1830 invasion, the parenthesis is deemed to be closed, with France taking on the civilizing mantle of Rome (Gourdon *et al* 1974, p.152).

The myth of the eternal Mediterranean man has a clear-cut ideological function: "fonder l'unité d'un groupe social sur une origine mythique" (*ibid.*). The community in question - Louis Bertrand's *peuple neuf* - would not only incorporate this foundation myth in their fiction, but also in their political writings, and even in the academic history of the colony (see Calmes 1984, pp.13-18; cf. Vatin 1974, pp.8-56). Their reasons for doing so, or at least some of them, will be self-evident. However, before discussing the full implications of the myth, it is worth underlining the fact that the figure is inherently self-contradictory. As Gourdon *et al* put it, in terms which are particularly appropriate to a demystified understanding of Conesa's Roman imaging of the demise of Bab-El-Oued: "Il [le mythe] véhicule pourtant en lui-même ses propres contradictions: les ruines romaines sont aussi le témoin de la mort d'une colonisation minoritaire, et les <<siècles obscurs>> arabes ne se laisseront pas mettre entre parenthèses par la réalité" (Gourdon *et al* 1974, p.152).

Louis Bertrand, at least, was clear in his aims: what he sought was a "Roman" Algeria, to be ruled forever by the colony's European minority (Gordon 1962, pp.25-26). Subsequent defenders of the *pied-noir* cause would fight shy of such honest racism, coming to prefer such illusions as *intégration* to Bertrand's thoroughgoing supremacism (Horne 1977, p.545). Nevertheless, these later partisans of *Algérie française* would continue to play the Latin card to the fullest mythical advantage. The theme's most obvious attraction, simply stated, was that it transformed a conquered land

into a French legacy: Algeria was not so much being taken from the Arabs as restored to the heirs of classical Rome. This type of thinking is the first of the two closely linked, but ideologically distinct, brands of "Mediterraneanism" which we shall encounter in the present chapter. Its mythical importance may be gauged on the basis of the following passage from Saint-Laurent's *Les Passagers pour Alger*. Here, one of a group of young metropolitan enquirers is having her Algerian misconceptions corrected by Omar Benboulaïf, a francophile Muslim *évolué*:

- ... [vous avez tendance] à voir l'Algérie comme un pays africain, n'est-ce pas?... Oh! vous n'êtes pas la seule. Si, en métropole, on n'a pas davantage pris goût à l'Algérie, c'est qu'on n'a jamais senti qu'entre Alger et Dakar il y a la même différence qu'entre Marseille et Dakar. Il existe une unité méditerranéenne. J'ai eu un prof autrefois ... qui était très fort quand il faisait le procès des fausses unités géographiques instaurées depuis des siècles aux dépens des unités réelles. La Méditerranée en est une, alors que l'Afrique en est une fausse. D'ailleurs, le Magreb, c'est une île. Le Maroc, l'Algérie, la Tunisie forment une île bornée par la Méditerranée, l'Atlantique et, au sud et à l'est, le désert. Le désert, surtout celui du sud, est de nos jours plus hermétique que la mer. L'Afrique noire n'a jamais eu la moindre influence sur nous, alors qu'au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle des Magrébins ont été empereurs à Rome et que nos querelles religieuses s'arbitraient à Arles. J'ai assisté, quand j'étais jeune, à des fouilles à Ti-Paza. Les ouvriers, en voyant apparaître sur les pierres des lettres identiques à celles du français, criaient <<du roumi, du roumi!>> C'était drôle, parce que <<roumi>> pour eux veut dire <<français>>, mais il a commencé par signifier, il y a près de deux millénaires, <<romain>>. De sorte qu'ils ne se trompaient pas. Et ils interrogeaient notre professeur ... s'étonnant d'apprendre que les Français étaient en Algérie depuis si longtemps!... (Saint-Laurent 1960, I, p.86)

The political thrust of this developed statement of the myth of *pied-noir* Latinity is clear enough. To begin with, as the rightful heirs to the glory that was Roman, the European settlers of Algeria cannot reasonably be considered to be invaders or usurpers. Indeed, on this mythical plane, their presence magically pre-dates that of the Arab conquerors of North Africa. Even more dramatically, as a Mediterranean region, the Maghreb ceases to be a part of Africa and becomes a natural European colony. Geographically divided from Black Africa by the Sahara, North Africa is, in contrast, linked to Europe and the West by a sea which unites more than it separates. Enshrined in their own language's debt to that of ancient Rome, the modern colonizers' *latinité* serves to transform a historical expropriation into a mythical inheritance, and thus to

legitimize and eternalize the contemporary injustice of *Algérie française* (Vatin 1974, pp.41-42).

The influence of the myth of Latinity on French military perceptions of the war has already been noted (see Chapter 1). Also worthy of mention is the historical link between this type of thinking and the militant Catholicism and antisemitic ultra-nationalism of the *Action française* movement (Déjeux 1975, pp.18 & 38). Of the greatest importance in this regard is Charles Maurras's concept of the Latin West, the pro-fascist associations of which are entirely appropriate given Mussolini's historical attempt to impose Italian hegemony over the Mediterranean, and thus to reestablish its status as *mare nostrum*. As we shall see, those literary commentators who rejected this far-right version of Mediterraneanism in favour of its later, Camusian, form would not necessarily avoid its inherent contradictions.

The primacy of the land in the settlers' quest for legitimacy will be apparent by now. What is the myth of Latinity, after all, but a means of establishing ownership of the Algerian *terroir*? In the next stage of the discussion, we shall show how the Algeria of 1830 came to be depicted as a wilderness for precisely the same reason. Of course, there can be little doubting the hardship encountered by the early settlers of Algeria, nor of the frontier grit needed to overcome them. What is open to dispute, however, is the extent to which later generations of *pieds-noirs* - living predominantly in the urban centres of the littoral, and variously employed in the manufacturing or service sectors, or as *fonctionnaires* - were entitled to image themselves as the heirs to those first pioneers, whose glorified exploits were appealed to in an attempt to legitimate their own presence.

The theme of creation *ex nihilo* is the real essence of the European claim to the land; indeed, it constitutes the most obviously self-justificatory aspect of the settlers' insistence on their *mise en valeur* of the territory (cf. Marshall 1973, pp.44-49). As such, its debatable historical validity is of less importance than the use made of it by

the literary defenders of *Algérie française*. Of particular symbolic interest in this context is the Mitidja, which is taken to epitomize the achievements of the early pioneers. This is clearly true, for instance, of Conesa's reference to the region in his introductory remarks (quoted above). For him, as for the majority of French commentators, the Mitidja is to be regarded as the "chef-d'oeuvre colonial de la France en Algérie" (Mutin 1984, p.84). There is thus no question of the European settlers' having seized the most productive lands from the indigenous population of the territory in the way suggested by historians and recognized by Jules Roy; an objective expropriation, even in the case of the much-vaunted draining and cultivation of the malarial swamps of the Mitidja:

Du côté de Boufarik une fumée montait, que le ciel aspirait et couchait vers l'ouest, devant les montagnes où d'autres fumées s'étiraient, car les montagnes, où les colons n'allaient jamais, étaient habitées. Là s'étaient réfugiés les Arabes qu'on avait chassés de leurs terres en occupant la Mitidja. (Roy 1968, p.25)

On the contrary, for the chronicler of Bab-El-Oued, pre-colonial Algeria may be summed up as "ce pays où tout manquait" (Conesa 1970, p.52). A wholly negative entity - uncultivated and undeveloped - the Algeria of 1830 was clearly destined to attract a force for positive change. The end product is, as Saint-Laurent puts it, "un pays où les Français ont déjà fait beaucoup, asséchant les marais, fertilisant les plaines incultes, dressant des villes, lançant des routes" (Saint-Laurent 1960, I, p.87). The proprietorial implications of this preferred view of the colonial *mise en valeur* are spelled out by the same author. His spokesman is a small-scale European farmer in the Sersou region:

<<Autrefois, pense Bateur, tout ce pays était inculte. Les tribus n'habitaient que les minces vallées. Sur le plateau, les moutons erraient avec les nomades...

<<Avons-nous eu raison de cultiver cette terre? Autrefois, le plateau s'appelait le Pays de la Faim. Les premiers colons y ont campé à leur fantaisie. Pour leurs besoins, ils ont poussé des pistes aux carrefours desquelles s'est bâti un bistrot d'abord, puis une mairie...

<<Qu'ont fait mon père et mon grand-père, dans ce pays? se demande Bateur. Du bien ou du mal? Ils ont créé. Ils ont sorti des choses durables du néant.>> (Saint-Laurent 1958, p.114)

At the heart of this presentation of the colonial *oeuvre* is a *pied-noir* reworking

of the biblical myth of Cain, who was not only the first murderer, but also the first tiller of the soil (Genesis 4. 2). So, the French conquest of Algeria may have involved an element of *le mal*, but the subsequent fertilization of the land can only be perceived as *le bien*. *Batteur*, whose very name has connotations of both combativity and construction (*battre* and *bâtir*), is thus seen to be the legitimate owner of the land which his forbears created from the pre-colonial chaos and which he continues to make productive. The Muslims, meanwhile, may possess something like an "original innocence", but, like the nomadic shepherd, Abel, have done nothing to make the earth bear fruit. That they should now threaten the property and indeed the lives of *Batteur* and his family - the above thoughts occur when the *colon*, unable to sleep, is lying listening for the sounds of a possible FLN attack - can only strike the integrated reader of *L'Algérie quand on y est* as profoundly unjust. For the myth-makers of French Algeria, in fact, it is the perceived failure of the Muslims to cultivate that land over which they nomadically roamed that disqualifies them from ownership of it. Moreover, in a mythical reversal of historical truth, the early colonizers are deemed to have settled not on the richest farming land, but on the most marginal. Take, for instance, Saint-Laurent's later description of the Sersou and of his principal settler representative, Kléber Desaix. The seigneurial Colonel Jasson is the speaker:

- Le Sersou ... est une invention française. Ce n'est peut-être pas une invention géniale. Autrefois, cette terre était une steppe où les nomades du Sud remontaient en transhumance. [...] On s'est obstiné à faire pousser du blé et à faire pousser des gens en dépit des impératifs économiques de ce territoire. Résultat: le blé pousse mal, et les gens ne vivent pas comme les Beaucerons.

[...]

- Desaix ... est un de ces colons couverts de dettes, ne tenant le coup que grâce aux banques et aux prêts officiels... (Saint-Laurent 1961, I, pp.304-305)

So, Desaix, "colon ... assez typique sous bien des rapports" (*ibid.*, p.304), is very far from enriching himself as a result of his labours in this inhospitable environment. Like *Batteur* and his wife (Saint-Laurent 1958, p.103), he faces as much of a struggle against bankruptcy as he does against the FLN. That he and they should remain in Algeria at all, in fact, is to be understood in terms not of profit, but rather of

the *pied-noir's* love of his native land: that is to say, a passionate sense of belonging which transcends every other consideration. It is along these lines that Isabelle Pélissier, Jean Lartéguy's "<<passionaria>> de la terre algérienne" (Lartéguy 1960, p.403), will argue for the legitimacy of the continued European ascendancy in Algeria:

- ...nous tenons à cette terre parce que nous y sommes nés, parce que nous l'avons défrichée. Nous y avons droit tout autant que le colon du Far-West qui arrêta ses chariots au bord d'un ruisseau, là où il n'y avait rien que quelques Indiens. Il bâtit sa baraque et commença ses labours. Seulement le colon américain a tué les Indiens et nous avons soigné les Arabes. (ibid., p.415)

On the basis of this argument, the young woman's conclusions appear quite plausible:

Ce serait fou, injuste, impensable de nous chasser de ces terres que nous avons été les premiers à cultiver depuis les Romains, de ces maisons que nous avons construites... (ibid.)

Heirs to the Romans, creators of Algeria *ex nihilo*, Isabelle Pélissier and her compatriots are, on this reading of colonial history, great humanitarians into the bargain. Moreover, if guilt does attach to the colonial enterprise at all, it is not to such small-scale farmers as "le vieux Pélissier", Bateur and Desaix, but rather to those anonymous *gros colons* who have really profited from the colony's good times. The Arab foreman employed by Saint-Laurent's Desaix will thus quiz his local FLN contact as follows in the wake of an attack on his employer's farm:

- Je suis un bon musulman, dit Bachir. Je vous aide, mais je ne peux pas comprendre, et les paysans du coin ne comprennent pas plus, que l'on s'acharne contre de petits colons comme Desaix, alors qu'on ne touche pas aux grandes entreprises. (Saint-Laurent 1960, II, p.542)

The short answer is that the agribusinessmen of Algeria managed temporarily to avoid trouble by paying protection money to the FLN, thereby revealing the essential pragmatism of their capital-oriented attachment to Algeria. It was these large-scale *exploitants*, the argument ran, who were responsible for those colonial *abus* which did occur, who were opposed to change, and who would be the first to quit the country when the going got tough. History might suggest that agricultural production was dominated in the Algeria of 1954 by a cartel of industrial growers and that the small

farmers would prove to be at least as reactionary as the major producers, but as far as the myth-makers are concerned it is the *petit blanc* who incarnates the vital spirit of the European community (see Gourdon *et al* 1974, p.144). Henri Martinez is therefore repeating a familiar *pied-noir* refrain when he puts forward an outraged defence of the settler record in Algeria. The Borgeaud referred to is the Mitidja wine baron, Henri Borgeaud, the most infamous of the *gros colons*:

Borgeaud! Oui, je sais, Borgeaud. Je n'ai pas de commentaires à faire sur lui. J'ignore si ce que l'on a dit avant et après 1962, sur le compte de cette famille, était fondé. Mais combien de Borgeaud cristallisateurs de toutes les animosités de gauche, pour les centaines, les milliers de <<petit blancs>>...? Petits agriculteurs riches en cailloux et en poussière, tout fiers de se nommer eux-mêmes colons. Ce mot signifiait pionnier, défricheur; alors que l'opinion française les verra toujours gros, sans doute pour mieux pouvoir porter la montagne de mensonges et de malédictions dont elle les couvrira, pas toujours de bonne foi. (Martinez 1982, pp.26-27)

The myth of the *petit colon* is clearly a more palatable version of the colonial exploitation of Algeria's agricultural potential than the oligopolistic reality represented by Senator Borgeaud. By the same token, the underlying paradox of this legitimizing strategy - its invocation of pioneer virtues in support of a process of (ultimately unsuccessful) stabilization (Berque 1962, p.29) - was never apparent to the mass of the *pied-noir* community, nor to their literary spokesmen. Indeed, the myth would, true to form, survive both the eviction of the European population of Algeria from the land which they had supposedly created, and their relocation in new, and still less plausible, wildernesses (see Grassin & Mazières 1987, p.9). Proof, if it were needed, of the durability of the myth-systems of *Algérie française*.

As heirs to the twin traditions of dispossession and pioneering creation, the Europeans of Algeria are able to see themselves as the possessors of what Chennells, working in the Southern Rhodesian context, has called "an identity forged from hardship" (Chennells 1982, pp.242-257). This mythical theme draws its material from both the heroic past of Algerian colonization - as celebrated in novels like Marcel Moussy's *Arcole ou la terre promise* (1953) - and more recent French and world history. In particular, a debt of gratitude is deemed to be owed by the mother country



to the *pieds-noirs*, on account of their blood sacrifices in two world wars (see Horne 1977, p.53; cf. Johnson 1981, pp.531-532). The appeal made to the theme by Gabriel Conesa is thus properly regarded as exemplary. In the following extract from his *Bab-El-Oued*, we find what is a typical blend of self-glorifying patriotism and smug intransigence:

L'histoire de ma famille n'est pas intéressante. Elle n'a que la valeur d'un exemple répandu chez nous à des dizaines de milliers d'exemplaires.

La première fois que mon père a mis les pieds en France, c'était pour faire la guerre; la première fois que j'ai mis les pieds en France, c'était aussi pour faire la guerre. Pendant qu'il se battait, sa mère est morte; pendant que je me battais, il est mort. Il avait choisi la France et cela nous a coûté à tous les deux dix ans de nos vies dont sept de guerre.

Qui prétend nous enseigner la France? (Conesa 1970, p.17)

Military service holds pride of place in Conesa's scheme of values as the supreme test of patriotic sentiment, with combat itself perceived as the high point of the *pieds-noirs*' "roman d'amour avec la France" (ibid., p.51). Its political implications are spelled out when the author, having sung the praises of French education - which was not available to the naturalized immigrants of his father's generation, but which has benefitted their children - goes on to develop his point as follows:

C'était justice. C'est ce qu'avaient voulu nos pères depuis le fond de leurs tranchées. Chassés de leurs pays par la misère, attirés par l'Algérie parce que les Français n'y venaient pas, ils avaient payé d'avance des places pour leurs enfants sans vérifier la facture en se battant pendant quatre ans. Leurs fils pouvaient maintenant devenir ce qu'ils devenaient. Bientôt ils prendraient leur relève, tiendraient les rênes de cette Algérie qu'eux avaient tirée de sa broussaille. Les pères avaient, baïonnette au canon, conquis le droit de faire de leurs rejetons autre chose que de pauvres fils d'immigrants condamnés aux travaux forcés de la terre et de la misère. (ibid., p.78)

As this extract makes particularly clear, the historical contribution made by *Algérie française* to the French war effort in both 1914-1918 and 1939-1945 is simultaneously glorified and integrated with the foundation myths of the settler community to form the composite myth of an "Algerian" identity forged from hardship. In the case of World War II, however, that contribution must also be "sanitized". The most troublesome aspect of French Algeria's war record is its support for Pétain and Vichy, against de Gaulle and the Free French, in the period 1940-1942, and Conesa's

attempt to excuse it meets only with limited success (*ibid.*, pp.134-135). Nevertheless, the settlers' war service may still be plausibly appealed to in order to justify their privileged position in Algeria. It need hardly be added that the historically denied rights of those Muslim Algerians who fought and died for France in two world wars are, like those of their children, not a subject for Conesa's outspoken protest.

Conesa's insistence on the Frenchness of the European population must inevitably lead us to ask some basic questions about the nature of the settlers' attachment to a "mother country" which, in many cases, had never been their ancestral home. How precisely did the *pieds-noirs* feel themselves to be "French"? In what ways did their communal self-image resemble that of the inhabitants of metropolitan France? And, most importantly, in what respects did they consider themselves to differ from their mainland counterparts?

Central to the settlers' sense of self is the legal fiction that Algeria is not a colony at all, but rather an integral part of *la plus grande France*. The literary assertion of this central mythical concept has a long pedigree, as the following extract from Daudet's comic masterpiece of 1872 reveals:

Aux premiers pas qu'il fit dans Alger, Tartarin de Tarascon ouvrit de grands yeux. D'avance, il s'était figuré une ville orientale, féerique, mythologique, quelque chose tenant le milieu entre Constantinople et Zanzibar... Il tombait en plein Tarascon... (Daudet 1977, p.74)

Later commentators were to confirm, as had Daudet before them, that the debunking of metropolitan exoticism was no guarantee against colonial mystification (Gourdon *et al* 1974, p.133). Indeed, this image of the Southerner "coming home" to Algeria is one which exemplifies the literary obfuscation of the colony's status. The precise nature of the territory's Frenchness is, not surprisingly, far from obvious; and if the *pieds-noirs* are to be regarded as provincial Frenchmen, then it is as profoundly troubled and ambivalent ones.

In her essay "Les livres comme patrie", Janine de la Hogue has put forward the

following view of those Europeans who left Algeria after the war for the territory had been lost:

Provinciaux sans province, les pieds-noirs cherchent cette province à tous les échos. Les livres la leur restituent parfois. (De la Hogue 1982, p.112)

This explanation of the exiles' abundant literature of nostalgia must be respected. However, we would go a step further and suggest that the European population of Algeria were always searching for that mythical province in their literature: the real site of *Algérie française*, after all, was never the objective reality of the colony, but always the colonial *imaginaire*. Indeed, the inherently problematic nature of the *pieds-noirs'* communal identity is revealed by their very insistence on the Frenchness of both the land and themselves. Like the threatened settler populations of other colonies - most notably the Rhodesians and the Ulster British - they loudly proclaim their national allegiance to a metropolitan audience whose own identity is beyond question. Conesa's distillation of the mythology of French Algeria, *post mortem*, will already have suggested its relevance here. So, whilst the young author and his contemporaries may be "des Français différents, [des] Pieds-Noirs qui étonneraient et choqueraient les Français métropolitains", their war service will subsequently put their common nationality beyond doubt: "La suite prouverait que nous étions bien des Français puisque nous entrerions sans peine dans le même uniforme" (Conesa 1970, p.78).

The belief that Algeria is just another French province, albeit a very special one, underpins the writing of *pied-noir* and metropolitan authors alike. So, while Martinez likens rural Algeria to "la plaine alsacienne, le Soissonnais ... le vignoble champenois ou [la] Beauce" (Martinez 1982, p.27), Saint-Laurent celebrates the Sahel as "un supplément à la Provence en plus italien, en plus grec, mais en plus parisien aussi à cause du climat humide" (Saint-Laurent 1960, I, pp.85-86). As for the settler of this "provincial" colony, "[il] aime sa terre avec l'âpreté d'un paysan cévenol, sa ville comme un bourgeois du Moyen Age toujours prêt à prendre la pique et le casque pour

monter sur les remparts, et la France avec la naïveté d'un sans-culotte" (Lartéguy 1960, p.386)

The settler preoccupation with being French and loving France betrays a profound uncertainty as to the community's identity. Moreover, it may readily be made to reveal the essentially conditional nature of European allegiance to the French nation. Henri Martinez revealingly insists on the settlers' love of France on the occasion of the historic events of 13 May 1958: i.e. at a moment when their ascendancy seemed once more to be assured. Here again, the accent is firmly placed on the *pieds-noirs'* supposed *naïveté*:

Que la France est aimée à cet instant-là! Que grande est notre chance d'être Français! La ville n'offre plus au ciel que l'image d'un vaste drapeau tricolore. [...] Notre avenir est lié à celui de la France, et l'Algérie doit aider la France à se donner un nouveau chef. La Providence nous en prépare un, très grand. (Martinez 1982, p.32)

What we are faced with here is the myth of the *peuple maudit* (Brune 1961, p.536). According to this myth, the *pieds-noirs*, simple and loyal, were betrayed by de Gaulle - *la grande Zohra* - whom they, together with the French army, had foolishly entrusted with the future of *Algérie française*. In fact, the settlers' much-vaunted patriotism was only ever offered on their own, permanently preferential, terms. A mythical France could thus be invoked to legitimize the European population's systematic refusal to accept the authority of the elected administrations of the real France whenever colonial privilege was threatened. This was the real message of *le 13 mai*, an occasion which more than any other revealed the determination of Algiers to resist the decolonizing will of Paris, come what may. Like the allegiance to the Crown, but not to Her Majesty's Government, of the Ulster Unionists, the Europeans' devotion to France was patently self-serving, and thus in constant need of reassurance. For this reason, it was the historic refusal of de Gaulle to continue to meet the settlers' conditions which provoked their final, and most dramatic, identity crisis.

De Gaulle's return to power meant that unconditional French support for the European population had ceased to be a given of the Algerian political equation. A new response now suggested itself, *in extremis*, to the beleaguered settler community, in the form of a separatist assertion of *pied-noir* "national" independence. Though confined to a radical minority, such as Martinez, this position is the logical outcome of the communal *différence* so loudly proclaimed by a mainstream loyalist like Conesa. Indeed, the tendency of commentators such as Saint-Laurent to ascribe an Algerian national consciousness and identity to the *pieds-noirs* - as opposed to the *Français de souche nord-africaine* - is indicative of a similar confusion in metropolitan thinking. So, as late as 1961, the author is able to ask of a settler protest against the Fourth Republic: "Pourquoi, avant-hier, des dizaines de milliers d'Algériens ont-ils manifesté? [...] ...parce que les Européens sont réduits au désespoir" (Saint-Laurent 1961, II, p.93). Algerian nationhood is here magically transformed into the exclusive preserve of the settlers, who, if they are French, are clearly also the possessors of a second, properly colonial, identity.

This leads us naturally to consider the Europeans' assertion of their individuality and independence as a *race*. Young, energetic and virile, the *peuple neuf* is to be contrasted with both the Muslims - perceived as the representatives of a "dead" Algeria - and the inhabitants of a supposedly decadent *métropole*. So, writing half a century after Louis Bertrand, Gabriel Conesa emphasizes the physical and moral health of his community: "un peuple sain et fort" (Conesa 1970, p.102). The robust well-being "de ceux qui ont trop de problèmes à résoudre pour prendre le temps de les penser" (*ibid.*, pp.176-177) is deemed to derive from the European population's mixed Mediterranean ancestry, which is itself a major theme of the settler *imaginaire*. Take, for instance, the account provided by Henri Martinez of his own ancestry:

A ma naissance, les fées qui se penchèrent sur mon berceau y déposèrent ... une grosse tranche d'Espagne, pimentée peut-être d'une pincée mauresque de Grenade, une part d'Europe centrale légèrement saupoudrée de juifs réchappés des pogroms polonais et une lichée alsacienne pour justifier ma carte d'identité française. Si le pavillon de Breteuil recherche un jour un modèle typique de la race pied-noir, je crois qu'il ne

ferait pas une mauvaise affaire avec mon cas. (Martinez 1982, p.25; cf. Bacri 1971, p.17)

While other racial elements are clearly present here, it is nevertheless the Mediterranean one which predominates. The fact that this aspect of the author's ancestry should be specifically Spanish is only to be expected of a native of French Algeria's second city, Oran. The Spanish reference would be equally appropriate to the working-class districts of Algiers, such as the Belcourt of Camus and his mother, Catherine Sintès. Above all, it could be applied to the Bab-El-Oued of Cagayous and his literary descendants. So, for instance, the *Hernandez et Perez* of popular lore are represented in Lartéguy's *Les Centurions* by Raspéguy's girlfriend, Concha Martinez, and her family and friends (Lartéguy 1960, p.407 et seq.). As for the quarter's principal contemporary chronicler, Conesa recalls that "quoi que je dise, j'étais toujours l'Espagnol" (Conesa 1970, p.169).

However, the *pied-noir* society depicted by such writers is neither an entirely Spanish entity, nor yet a Franco-Iberian hybrid. Rather, it is a properly Mediterranean amalgam, in which the French and Spanish stock combine with elements from every shore washed by *mare nostrum*. So, the Algeria described by Conesa is peopled by "tous les fils de la Méditerranée"; in whose veins "coulent les sangs les plus généreux de la Méditerranée"; and whose racial memory goes back to "Valence, Alicante, Majorque, Ischia, Malte, Naples ou Palerme" (ibid., pp.9, 25 & 77 respectively). To do full justice to this type of thinking, we must now consider the brand of Mediterraneanism associated with the work of Camus and the other members of the *Ecole d'Alger*.

The diverse origins of the *Français d'Algérie* are a matter of historical record; as, indeed, is the importance of that "mixed birth" in the community's mythology. As Alistair Horne puts it:

If there was one single common denominator for the *pieds-noirs*, they were, in the expression coined by the French army, *méditerranéens-et-demi*. It was an important

factor in understanding their motives and behaviour from 1954 onwards. (Horne 1977, p.51)

Such characteristics of the settler community as Spanish family names and a taste for aniseed-flavoured spirits are not our prime concern here, but rather the mythical capital made out of such accidents of demography. As we noted earlier, the transformation of the colonial *imaginaire* which occurred around 1935 was a response, at least in part, to the shift of the settler population away from the rural hinterland of Algeria to the European cities of the Mediterranean littoral: as the occupations of the *pieds-noirs* changed, so did their preoccupations. More specifically, the settlers' move away from the land and towards the sea meant that the *colon*-centred mythology of the *Algérianistes* ceased to be appropriate; the "solar" vision of the *Ecole d'Alger* emerged to replace it.

Although Albert Camus springs most readily to mind in this regard, it is the work of an older member of the Algiers "School" which must first be considered. In two essays published in 1935 and 1936, in fact, Gabriel Audisio signalled the end of the ascendancy of Louis Bertrand's Latin myth. *Jeunesse de la Méditerranée* and *Le Sel de la mer* make the case for a new ideology based on *mare nostrum*: his Mediterranean is the property not of Rome (be it Imperial or Catholic), but of all the nations which border on it. Indeed, Audisio goes so far as to suggest that the sea itself is the true *patrie* of all the Mediterranean peoples (see Déjeux 1975, pp.36-37).

It is, of course, no coincidence that this new brand of Mediterraneanism should have made its first appearance in the 1930s. This, above all, was the period in which modern Algerian nationalism emerged to challenge both the political and ideological assumptions of the colony's minority rulers. Given this historical context, the mythical potential of Audisio's thinking is not difficult to define. For, if the Mediterranean is the real *patrie* of the *pieds-noirs* and the Muslims alike, then Algerian nationalism is based on an enormous fallacy: that of Algerian nationhood itself. Indeed, the proposition that an Algerian nation did not exist was to become a basic premise of

*pied-noir* thinking. There is, according to the myth, no essentially French, nor even European, community in Algeria; still less an essentially Muslim one. On the contrary, both ethnic groups belong, on a deeper level, to a single *peuple méditerranéen*. A number of the specific forms taken by this mythical integration of the indigenous population will be discussed in the following pages; their common ideological function should, however, be plain: namely, to dissolve a nascent national political consciousness in a Mediterranean sea of French liberal humanism.

Crucial to Audisio's dream of a single Mediterranean people was his faith in the inevitable *métissage* of its two constituent races. The emergence of such a system of blood relations was precluded, however, by the radical division of colonial society. (This is a theme to which we shall return in Chapter 7.) To his credit, Audisio was able to come to terms with the increasing gulf between his vision of Algeria and its colonial reality. Indeed, the Algerian war, when it came, was to affect the writer deeply and would rid him of his Mediterraneanist illusions. By 1957, when he published *Feux vivants*, he had recognized that the single Algerian community he dreamed of had not, and could not, come into being; this, precisely because of the historical absence of *métissage* in Algeria. The same cannot be said, unfortunately, of some of the subsequent literary proponents of Mediterraneanism.

Audisio's themes were taken up and elaborated by such younger members of the *Ecole d'Alger* as Claude de Fréminville, Emmanuel Roblès and, most famously, Albert Camus. Camus's Mediterranean sensibility is too well documented to require much by way of an introduction here (see Quilliot 1970 & Bousquet 1977). Explicitly in his collections of essays, such as *Noces* (1939) and *L'Été* (1954), and implicitly in his novels and short stories - one has only to think of the mystical significance attached to the sea in *La Peste* - this most celebrated son of *Algérie française* developed his own version of Audisio's myth of the Mediterranean *patrie*. In the final chapter of this study, we shall undertake a close reading of Camus's short story "L'Hôte", but plan to



concentrate for the time being on his contribution to the "solar" Algeria of the Mediterraneanists.

There is, it would seem, no need to look too far for the author's literary influences when the narrator of Daniel Saint-Hamont's autobiographical *La Valise à l'eau ou le voyage en Alger* [sic] (1981) thinks back to a striking incident in his youth. Now exiled from his native Algeria, he recalls the poem once told to him by an old Spaniard nearing death in Alicante:

Quand le moment sera venu  
 je regarderai vers la mer,  
 (et quelle autre, bien sûr,  
 que Méditerranée?).  
 J'y entrerai en frissonnant  
 de peur ou de plaisir,  
 sans doute un peu des deux...  
 Dans l'onde molle  
 et tiède,  
 ainsi que furent ma vie,  
 mes actes et mes pensées,  
 je nagerai longtemps  
 jusqu'en un lieu mythique,  
 un mystérieux milieu  
 où je retrouverai  
 dans l'aveuglant éclat d'un midi  
 algérien, tous mes êtres  
 et mes bruits, et mes chiens,  
 et parfums de naguère.  
 Je n'aurai plus alors qu'à me laisser  
 couler. Parti de nulle part,  
 revenu quelque part.  
 Non plus seul. (Saint-Hamont 1981, pp.26-27)

The choice of the term "lieu mythique" to describe both the Mediterranean and the Algeria of this Camusian "solar" vision is particularly apposite. As death approaches, the old man envisages a reconciliation of himself with the physical world, other people, and his own mortality in and through a communion with the maternal element. (Rieux's celebrated swim with Tarrou provides an obvious point of comparison.)

Another *pied-noir* writer quite clearly - indeed, self-consciously - influenced by Camus is Gabriel Conesa. In his celebration of the Algiers beaches, for instance, he

includes a direct reference to "Franco où Camus a fait se dénouer *L'Étranger*" (Conesa 1970, p.151). It is in this quintessentially Mediterranean setting that his heroes will, like Meursault, live out their "solar" destiny:

C'est dans ce paysage au paroxysme, illuminé comme pour une retraite aux flambeaux en plein midi, au son des grandes orgues du soleil, que nous nous asseyons discrètement sur nos strapontins d'hommes méditerranéens. (ibid., p.153)

When Conesa turns his hand to a little philosophy, his intellectual mentor is consequently not too difficult to identify:

Les hommes sont un soleil qui se lève sur une nuit glacée: ils dégagent de la chaleur et de la force. Mais il faut le ciel incomparablement pur de la Méditerranée pour bien l'apercevoir, le regarder en face, et se laisser traverser par ses rayons. (ibid., p.149)

The profound irony of this passage will readily be apparent in view of the historical indifference of the *pieds-noirs* to the Muslim Algerian community (Horne 1977, p.54). The relevant mystification has its roots in the humanist universalism of Camus, as a single illustration of his primordial influence on the literary imaging of *Algérie française* will show. In his essay "Le Minotaure ou la halte d'Oran", Camus describes the twin local *voluptés* of having one's shoes cleaned then showing them off in a stroll along the city's *boulevards*. As for the Arab boot-blacks who actually do the necessary work, "great-hearted Camus" (Horne 1977, p.55) has this to say:

Juché sur de hauts fauteuils, on pourra goûter alors cette satisfaction particulière que donne, même à un profane, le spectacle d'hommes amoureux de leur métier comme le sont visiblement les cireurs oranais. (Camus 1965, p.816)

Camus's "curious blindness, almost amounting to indifference, towards them [the Muslim inhabitants of Algeria] as human beings" (Horne 1975, p.55) is surely plain for all to see. For all his reputation for humanity and intellectual integrity, the great *piéd-noir* liberal emerges as the archetype of Memmi's "colonisateur de bonne volonté" or "le colonisateur qui se refuse" (Memmi 1957, pp.47-69). This leads us to consider the mythification of Camus himself: i.e. the posthumous critical canonization of the writer; his installation as "un saint sans Dieu", to use his own famous phrase. This sanctified version of the author and his work has been periodically debunked to some extent by

literary commentators. Conor Cruise O'Brien, for instance, has emphasized the socio-political context of Camus's writing and thus sought to reestablish this supposedly most universal author's *pied-noir* specificity (O'Brien 1970). It is, however, the mythical Camus - the Camus celebrated by generations of French and foreign readers and critics - that is regularly appealed to by Gabriel Conesa to lend his own literary production a spurious weight. In particular, the latter's treatment of the shoe-shine theme reveals his indebtedness to Camus's version of the Mediterranean myth:

Monter sur une estrade et s'asseoir dans un fauteuil pour faire cirer ses souliers est un plaisir qu'on ne comprend pas hors de la Méditerranée où, tout de suite, on parle de dignité, ce qui n'a rien à voir à l'affaire. (Conesa 1970, p.193)

Whereas Camus's indifference was unconscious, that of Conesa is both conscious and genuinely self-assertive; the literary apologist of a defunct *Algérie française*, he chooses attack as the best form of defence for the exiled European community's blinkered vision. Writing at the time of the Algerian war, Cécil Saint-Laurent appeals to the myth of *l'éternelle Méditerranée* in terms which are just as obviously indebted to Camus's writing:

Vous verrez les Arabes comme les Français se faire cirer leurs chaussures. La passion de la chaussure éclatante distingue tous les bords de la Méditerranée! (Saint-Laurent 1960, I, p.217)

The key to a demystified reading of these three treatments of shoe-cleaning in colonial Algeria is, in fact, the establishment of a quite spurious community of interest between the two parties to this specific economic relationship. Thanks to the myth of the eternal Mediterranean, historical conflict is replaced by a magical identity: the shoe-shine boy and his customer, the Muslim and the European, the colonizer and the colonized are deemed to be the same in essence, namely "Mediterraneans". The nature of this mythical integration of the Arabo-Berber majority into the European minority's world-view will become ever clearer as we concentrate now on Conesa's depiction of the Mediterranean world of Bab-El-Oued.

The reader of Conesa's paean to this most celebrated *quartier* of *Algérie française* is immediately struck by the regular insistence on the ethnic blend that is deemed to have existed in the Algiers suburb in the golden age before the onset of racial hostilities. Consider, for instance, this description of the view from the author's childhood home:

Mon panorama, c'était Bab-El-Oued qui n'était pas encore une cité mais n'avait jamais cessée d'être le coeur de la ville... En sortant sur mon balcon, j'avais mon héritage à mes pieds. Le balcon tenait une grande place dans le style de vie des Bab-El-Ouédiens... On s'y reposait sur une chaise longue, on s'y asseyait sur le carrelage et surtout on y étendait son linge sans façon, le soleil effaçant ce que d'autres cieux auraient rendu sordide. Au coup d'oeil sur le linge qui séchait, ma mère reconnaissait ses propriétaires pour des Espagnols, des Musulmans, des Juifs, des Maltais ou des Italiens. (Conesa 1970, pp.125-126)

The clear implication of this passage - i.e. that the European and Muslim populations of Bab-El-Oued live together in a truly Mediterranean harmony - is made explicit in Conesa's account of the fun to be had at the local barber's:

L'un des moteurs increvables de notre bonne humeur était l'origine des clients. Elle les classait une fois pour toutes en Italiens, Espagnols, Juifs, Maltais, Kabyles, Grecs et les plaçait automatiquement sous l'artillerie d'arguments pointés à l'avance ou puisés dans le journal. [...] Nationalité ou race n'avaient pas plus d'importance que la couleur d'un maillot de bain, chacun se sentant avant tout Méditerranéen et membre d'une même et vaste famille. (ibid., p.196)

This rosy image of a genuinely integrated community is at odds with the reality described by disinterested historical commentators. In particular, the fact that working-class Europeans lived next door to working-class Muslims did not mean that they experienced a community of interest with them. This truth may have been suppressed in times of peace, but when the settler ascendancy was challenged, ethnicity would prevail over any such socio-economic considerations. So, in time of crisis, the much-vaunted Mediterranean amalgam would be revealed to have been no more than a temporarily peaceful coexistence (Talbot 1980, p.13). Moreover, it becomes clear on closer inspection that those "Mediterranean" aspects of Bab-El-Oued so regularly celebrated by Conesa are wholly European in origin. Indeed, the essential character of the *quartier* derives exclusively from the national particularities of its constituent

European populations; the Muslims of Bab-El-Oued - and, for that matter, the Jews - are only admitted to its community occasionally, and always to "prove" a clearly defined mythical point. So, for instance, we are offered the following image of Bab-El-Oued at play:

Pour Pâques, Pentecôte, le 14 juillet ou le 15 août, tout Bab-El-Oued se transportait comme un seul homme sur les plages et, en se promenant dans les groupes, on se serait cru sur l'avenue tant on marchait de visages connus en figures familières. On partait pour la journée en voiture chargé de tomates fraîches, d'oeufs durs, de jambon, de soubressade (une saucisse rouge et piquante inventée aux Baléares), d'omelette froide, de pizza et de fruits. (Conesa 1970, p.152)

The phrase "tout Bab-El-Oued" is crucial in that it virtually obliges the reader to conceive of the suburb as precisely that "one big happy family" suggested by Conesa. Yet, the supposedly all-encompassing Mediterraneanism of Bab-El-Oued is manifested in a remarkably ethnocentric fashion: Christian festivals, French national celebrations, private cars and European picnic food are the very particular signs of *l'éternelle Méditerranée*. The distortion of historical reality brought about in this way will surely be self-evident.

Conesa will go on to explain that the male inhabitants of Bab-El-Oued divide their spare time between the beach and the café. He hardly needs to underline the fact that only one choice of drink is really open to the true Mediterranean man who frequents such establishments:

Tout le monde connaît l'anisette, la boisson même de la Méditerranée. En Grèce, en Italie, en Espagne, en Turquie, on la siffle avec entrain sous des noms différents. (ibid., p.156)

"Everyone" drinks aniseed-flavoured spirits *ergo* "everyone" is deemed to be Mediterranean. In fact, it is Conesa himself who, in detailing the various cafés and their respective *clientèles*, gives the lie to the myth of an integrated Algeria: French war veterans, Spanish socialists, Italian HLM-dwellers, all contribute to the distinctive atmospheres of their adopted locals; the only people missing are the Arabo-Berber 90% of colonial Algeria's population (ibid., pp.153-156).

In marked contrast, Conesa attaches great importance to the contribution made

by those indigenous Algerians to the dialect spoken by *le peuple neuf*. This is the famous *pataouète* of Bab-El-Oued, celebrated by Audisio in his 1972 edition of Musette's *Cagayous* (1931), and traditionally put to literary use by *pied-noir* writers like Edmond Brua, whose *Parodie du Cid* (1941) is particularly renowned. Conesa says of this *langue*: "Il [le pataouète] se dégage naturellement du français, du provençal, de l'espagnol castillan, du valencien, de l'italien, du napolitain et du sicilien, du maltais et aussi de l'arabe" (Conesa 1970, p.119; cf. Bacri 1971, pp.144-145, and see also Bacri 1982 & 1983).

If the discussion thus far has proved anything, it is the value of treating "nature" with a good deal of scepticism; Conesa's "natural" language is no exception to this rule. The great importance attached to the "miracle" of *pataouète* from Louis Bertand on suggests that the dialect's historical function as the *lingua franca* of Algeria's *petits blancs* is by no means the end of the story. Conesa likens the *patois* to Bab-El-Oued's favourite sport - "La Méditerranée est une civilisation du football" (Conesa 1970, p.65) - as well as to the stream which gives the district its name, in an attempt to capture its feel and to make clear its leading role in the life of his community:

Dans ce jeu où il n'y a aucune règle, chacun domine la balle comme il peut, dribble à travers les arrières qui s'appellent vocabulaire, syntaxe, grammaire. L'important, c'est d'arriver à portée pour marquer son but, c'est-à-dire de se faire comprendre. L'étonnant c'est que malgré les décombres, les cadavres, les objets hétéroclites qu'il charrie, le torrent du pataouète amène une eau assez limpide et assez fraîche pour étancher la soif de tout le monde. C'est sur cet oued que les Bab-El-Ouédiens poursuivent leur navigation périlleuse. (ibid., pp.120-121)

Here again, it is the contention that the speech of *le peuple neuf* is adequate to the communication needs of "tout le monde" that is of the greatest importance. For, despite the presence of a few words of Arabic origin in *pataouète*, the fact remains that it is a brand of French; and one influenced essentially by other Romance languages. So, the linguistic specificities of the Arabo-Berber population are now denied by Conesa, just as their religious, national and cultural affiliations have been suppressed

throughout (cf. Camus 1965, p.1325, and see O'Brien 1970, p.12).

One final aspect of the Europeans' search for an "Algerian" communal identity remains to be discussed, and may usefully be regarded as an appendix to the foregoing discussion of the eternal Mediterranean. Here, in fact, we shall be considering the appeal made by the settlers' literary spokesmen to a *pied-noir* brand of picaresque; a tradition which, as so often, can be traced back to the work of Louis Bertrand (Gourdon *et al* 1974, pp.135-137; see also Calmes, pp.67-85). Conesa is among the most obvious sources for this type of material, but it may be found in more unexpected places. Take, for instance, Jean Lartéguy's account of Bab-El-Oued's reaction to the news of Raspéguy's amorous involvement with one of its daughters:

Bab-El-Oued s'intéressa avec l'indiscrétion, le sans-gêne et la bonne humeur qui sont le propre de ce quartier aux amours de Concha Martinez et de son colonel de parachutistes. Il fallut le match R.U.A. contre Saint-Eugène pour faire passer cet événement au second plan; mais Bab-El-Oued porta dès lors au colonel un grand attachement, il en fit son héros en même temps que son fils adoptif et imposa son nom à Alger-la-prude des beaux quartiers. (Lartéguy 1960, p.419)

Raspéguy may be the likeable rogue at the centre of Lartéguy's excursion into the picaresque genre, but the milieu itself undoubtedly contributes to the mood of a passage like this. If *le peuple neuf* is characterised by a brash vitality, then Bab-El-Oued epitomizes that pioneering virtue; indeed, the entire *quartier* seems to have a touch of Gil Blas's Spain about it. Compare the account of Raspéguy's departure for Suez:

Le colonel Raspéguy, en uniforme, les galons sur l'épaule, ses deux gardes du corps en armes derrière lui, vint dans sa jeep faire ses adieux à Concha.

Tout Bab-El-Oued était aux fenêtres. Des linges claquaient au généreux soleil de la Méditerranée.

Il embrassa la jeune fille, lui tapota les fesses et partit prendre Le Caire aux applaudissements frénétiques de toute une foule où les Espagnols, les Maltais, les Arabes et les Mahonnais côtoyaient quelques <<Français de souche>>. (ibid., p.428)

The remarkable parallels with Conesa's treatment of his neighbourhood will require no further elucidation. In contrast, Conesa's celebration of the adventures of Cagayous, the *locus classicus* of French Algerian picaresque, does need to be examined.

The opening lines of the relevant section of *Bab-El-Oued* encapsulate its Mediterranean message:

L'âme de Bab-El-Oued, c'est Cagayous.

Il en est le roi en étant d'abord le roi de ses voyous, mais au sens méditerranéen du mot, c'est-à-dire un voyou sympathique. (Conesa 1970, p.109)

The picaresque reference is made even more explicit when Conesa turns his attention to the character's creator, Auguste Robinet or "Musette", and his project "de faire raconter la vie d'Alger par un Bab-El-Ouédien, dans la tradition picaresque de *Lazarillo de Tormes*" (ibid., p.110). As for the hero's strange name, we learn that it is rooted in the *pataouète* so central to the settlers' Mediterranean self-image:

Son nom est un composé de *lagagnous*, *chassieux* en patois méridional, *legañoso* en espagnol, et *cagar*, *caguer* en espagnol qui s'étend en *cagaioun*, petit homme, petit étron. Si bien que Cagayous serait à la fois un condensé et un jeu de mots signifiant *chassieux-chiasseux*! (ibid., pp.109-110)

The thorny problem of *pied-noir* antisemitism - accurately reflected in the prejudices of Cagayous and his associates - will be acknowledged by Conesa, but then explained away as a mere "mode" (ibid., pp.111 & 114); whilst the hero's regular victories over assorted Muslim malefactors are illustrated with neither comment nor hesitation (ibid., p.116). However, it is only with Conesa's concluding remarks that the real ideological importance of his extended reference to Cagayous becomes apparent:

J'ai longtemps pensé que nous autres enfants de Bab-El-Oued étions les fils du fougueux Cagayous...

Et puis, j'ai compris que nous n'étions pas leurs fils, car *Lazarillo de Tormes* et tous les *picaros* qui font les quatre cents coups d'un bout à l'autre de la Méditerranée ne procréent pas, n'ont pas de descendants et n'en ont pas besoin puisqu'ils sont éternels et ne meurent jamais... Non, nous ne sommes pas les enfants de Cagayous. Tous, nous portons en nous une étincelle de son génie, de son don d'émerveillement devant un univers qui, chaque nuit, rassemble tout son talent en un effort prodigieux pour nous préparer les étonnantes nouveautés du lendemain, d'un monde qui appartient à ceux qui brandissent leur orgueil de mâle comme un drapeau. (ibid., p.121)

The European settlers of Algeria may not be the sons of this archetypal Mediterranean *picaro*, but they are undoubtedly to be regarded as the heirs to the character's legacy of vitality and robust moral health; they share in his genius, and thereby prove themselves to be the genuine incarnation of the eternal Mediterranean



man. Their legitimate ownership of "un monde" - which is both *la patrie méditerranéenne* and *l'Algérie française* - is thus established beyond all possible doubt.

Perhaps the single most important figure in the discourse of French colonialism is the myth of the *mission civilisatrice*, which permits the magical transformation of profit, privilege and usurpation into a national duty: a Gallic variation of Kipling's theme of the white man's burden (see Hargreaves 1981, pp.8-17; cf. Ageron 1978, pp.62-71). Such a version of events in Algeria (and elsewhere) was far more acceptable to the various backers of the colonial enterprise - the settlers themselves, their metropolitan supporters, and even a number of Muslim *évolués* - than the historical reality of French domination. It was altogether more comfortable to believe in the notion of a civilizing mission than in a form of mastery founded on invasion and expropriation, reinforced through systematic exploitation, and ultimately maintained by the constant threat of military force. The theme's wide acceptability is testified to by Raoul Girardet, in his attempt to explain the historical success of *Algérie française* in uniting behind its banner such diverse shades of colonial opinion as traditional PCF-voters, socialists, reform-minded liberals, die-hard conservatives and neo-fascists:

Il ne s'agit pas seulement en l'occurrence d'un héritage commun de représentations collectives, de thèmes, d'images et de références. Il s'agit aussi, et plus profondément, d'une conscience identique d'une vocation privilégiée attribuée, à travers les siècles, au destin de la nation française. Jamais en fait, et même chez les plus étroits doctrinaires d'un certain type de nationalisme, l'idée de la France ne s'est trouvée séparée d'une <<certaine idée de la France>>, c'est-à-dire d'une certaine conception de la patrie considérée comme un instrument décisif de civilisation et de progrès. L'hétérogénéité des origines politiques de ceux qui se montrèrent les plus ardents et les plus tenaces militants de la cause de l'<<Algérie française>> ne doit donc pas surprendre. (Girardet 1972, p.265)

It is thus no coincidence that the metropolitan anticolonialist lobby should, in similar fashion, have rallied to the theme of "les impératifs moraux liés à la mission libératrice traditionnellement assignée à la France" (ibid., pp.265-266). For both sides in the debate, in fact, it was France which always appeared centre-stage, and never Algeria. So, for the defenders of *Algérie française*, the European population's vocation was not only to develop the territory, but also to civilize it. By the latter stages of the

war, this second theme could hardly be voiced in quite the overt and uncomplicated fashion that it once had been; the challenge of militant Algerian nationalism to the colony's political and cultural assumptions precluded that possibility. Indeed, by 1961, even Cécil Saint-Laurent is ready to admit an element of irony as regards the settlers' civilizing mission. Take, for instance, his description of Kléber Desaix as "...un bel enfant, un vaillant pied-noir qui poursuivra, dans le cadre des traditions familiales, l'oeuvre civilisatrice du capitalisme français au Sersou" (Saint-Laurent 1961, I, p.310).

This said, there was nothing to prevent the continued appeal to the myth of the civilizing mission by more indirect methods. In particular, the literary commentators' insistence on the barbarism of the FLN and its supporters testifies to its persistence (as we shall show in Chapter 7). Similarly suggestive of the French nation's vocation are the regular references to the European population's "good works": i.e. the paternalistic provision of food, accommodation, medical care and education, and all other such acts of generosity and compassion. A case in point is Isabelle Pélissier's description of her grandfather's relationship with his Arab servants:

- Ils l'adorent, dit Isabelle; lui les insulte, leur ordonne d'aller retrouver les fellagha, de le laisser seul, mais tous savent combien il les aime. Il a construit pour eux des maisons, une infirmerie, distribué des lopins de terre... (Lartéguy 1960, p.414)

A particularly rich source of ideological profit is the question of the education and emancipation of Muslim women. Here, the French nation's civilizing mission is able to shine out against a background of Islamic sexism and obscurantism. Consider, for example, the following remarks by an old Arab encountered by Bachir, Kléber Desaix's foreman, at the local market:

- Il se passe des choses surprenantes, prononce-t-il sans cesser de chiquer. Sais-tu que ma plus jeune fille a comploté contre moi avec l'instituteur? Elle veut continuer à apprendre. Il croyait que je la laisserais partir pour le collège. Autant qu'elle se prostitue chez Mme Kaïr, à Vialar. (Saint-Laurent 1960, II, p.538)

In the event, it is Kléber Desaix's wife Bernadette - a metropolitan tourist who falls in love with both the settler and the country (ibid., p.388) - who will become the motive force behind the local implementation of this particular aspect of France's

civilizing project in Algeria. She will thus encounter scepticism from some members of the European community, including notably her husband. However, her spirited defence of her work amongst the female refugees at the Sidi-Omar relocation camp is the vehicle for a striking reiteration of the theme of the French enlightenment of a benighted Algeria:

- Kléber, pourquoi dites-vous que ma présence est inutile? J'ai plus de déceptions que de succès. Bon. Il m'arrive même d'en pleurer. Ça, c'est mon affaire. Mais j'ai un bilan positif! Deux femmes qui s'étaient brûlées, qui suppuraient depuis un mois, sont en train de guérir. Vous avez entendu le lieutenant-médecin, il y a cinq minutes, me dire que si cette femme avait continué à se soigner au crottin d'âne, elle aurait perdu le bras, elle serait peut-être morte. J'ai presque sauvé la vie de quelqu'un depuis que je suis ici! Je n'ai que vingt filles dans mon école. Sur les vingt il y en a douze qui arrivent une demi-heure en avance et qui m'attendent comme le Messie. Hier, quand j'ai ajourné la classe, plusieurs ont pleuré. Je vous garantis qu'à Reuilly-sur-Marne on n'aurait pas pleuré! (ibid., pp.387-388)

Bernadette has become a settler herself and has, in the process, come to love the land and to experience a typically paternalistic concern for its indigenous inhabitants. This concern finds expression in a way which emphasizes the need for a continued French presence in Algeria, "for the Muslims' own good". Without France, we are led to believe, the *indigènes* would continue to languish in their mediaeval ignorance and fear. The troublesome fact that the colonial power had manifestly failed to better that native lot in over a century and a quarter of occupation is, not surprisingly, avoided here.

In the event, the myth of the *mission civilisatrice* would, like the rest of the themes described above, be overtaken by historical developments. When this happened, the *pieds-noirs'* literary defenders would try to produce new variations on old mythical themes in a last-ditch attempt to rationalize the European community's loss of its long-established privilege. The demonization of de Gaulle was one such response. Consider Martinez's account of the innocent settlers' betrayal at the hands of the duplicitous French leader:

Mais le peuple pied-noir n'a que cent vingt ans, c'est un peuple enfant, il aime encore ses hochets bleu, blanc, rouge. [...] Poussé par ses tontons, il choisit - peut-on en vouloir à un enfant? - d'appeler son papa pour l'aider à comprendre. Et le papa arrive; il le comprend, ce garnement de peuple, ça comprend tout, un papa. Il jure de

tout arranger. Il nous fait promettre de lui obéir toujours. C'est normal, pour un papa; tous les papas aiment ça; et il s'en va.

Et l'enfant ne s'est pas rendu compte que son papa ne l'aime pas, ne l'a jamais aimé. Peut-être même qu'il n'est pas son vrai papa. Alors, pour sa punition, il va se retrouver tout seul sans y croire... (Martinez 1982, pp.33-34)

As previously suggested, the precise significance of de Gaulle's celebrated declaration to the huge crowds assembled on the Algiers *Forum* on 6 June 1958 - "Je vous ai compris!" - has often been debated (see Courrière 1970, pp.371-373; cf. Horne 1977, pp.299-303). In retrospect, it would seem that a basically vacuous statement was filled with whatever meaning best corresponded to the aspirations of the individual listener or group of listeners. For the *pieds-noirs*, this meant that the words of the new head of state were taken to indicate unconditional support for the cause of *Algérie française*; a term which de Gaulle himself would, with a single exception, very significantly refuse to employ (see Droz & Lever 1982, pp.188-189). When the old man's determination to be rid of the Algerian problem became clear, that is to say after his epoch-making *autodétermination* speech of 16 September 1959, the *pieds-noirs* knew that their communal demise was only a matter of time. It was the theme of *l'abandon* - the mother country's desertion of its colonial sons and daughters - which best captured the settlers' feelings at this time and subsequently. Compounded of fear, frustration, and, above all, righteous indignation, it was this which enabled the European population of Algeria to cling onto the belief that they were in no way responsible for their eventual fate. A final version of the foundation myth of *piéd-noir* dispossession, it readily articulates such sub-themes as that of the patriotic settlers' *naïveté* in dealing with duplicitous metropolitan Frenchmen; while the final insistence on the community's patently unjust "punishment" ties in straightforwardly with the already noted idea of the *peuple neuf* as a *peuple maudit*.

*L'abandon* was followed by *l'exode*, as the hasty "repatriation" of the European population in the spring and summer of 1962 is invariably characterized (see, for instance, Bacri 1971, pp.193-212). Not surprisingly, this transfer *en catastrophe* of the

better part of a million *pieds-noirs* to a "mother country" which the vast majority of them had never come from in the first place has its own mythology. This strand is, perhaps, most intriguingly represented by the work of Daniel Saint-Hamont, whose hilarious *Le Coup de Sirocco* (1978) is a fascinating blend of myth and demystification.

Take, for instance, his opening scene of *pied-noir* exile:

Quand le bateau a démarré, beaucoup de gens sont restés à l'arrière. Ils écrasaient une larme en voyant disparaître la belle Algérie. Nous non, parce que ce jour-là, avec le brouillard on pouvait à peine voir à trois mètres: alors on a rien vu. Juste un peu sur le grand mur dans le port d'Oran les lettres: ICI LA FRANCE, et déjà tout était gris autour de nous. Ma mère pleurait. D'abord qu'elle était triste, et aussi qu'on avait perdu deux valises. C'était pas grave parce que dans ces deux valises, on avait que les choses qui servaient à décorer le salon: les bibelots, les chandeliers de mon père (il était le seul à croire que c'était de l'argent massif: on les soulevait, jusqu'au plafond ils envolaient...) et les peintures. C'est pas que je connais beaucoup en peinture, mais nos tableaux j'étais sûr que ceux qui les avaient faits n'étaient pas des génies inconnus, ou alors ils risquaient de le rester jusqu'à la mort. (Saint-Hamont 1978, p.7)

At first glance, the young narrator's disabused commentary on events would seem to provide a counter to more conventionally lachrymose versions of the settler diaspora. However, its bathetic approach to the community's suffering may, on closer inspection, be seen to utter a number of previously identified mythical themes. So, the clichés of European exile may be gently mocked - note the tears as "la belle Algérie" disappears forever over the stern rail - but the despair of this archetypal *mère de famille pied-noir* is clearly genuine (cf. Dessaigne 1962). In short, the family are not the colonizers of history, but rather the hapless victims of *pied-noir* mythology. They are typical *petits blancs*, who have in no way profited from Algeria and the Algerians, as the references to their pathetically humble baggage make clear. Their *naïveté* may be comically evoked as regards the father's attachment to his worthless candlesticks, but it is revealed to have a serious edge when the official fiction of a "French" Algeria is referred to; these people's only real sin is to have believed the declarations of generations of politicians, it seems. With the introduction of the lost suitcases, meanwhile, we not only have an image of personal loss, but a stock symbol of the *pieds-noirs'* dilemma: exile or death, *la valise ou le cercueil* (as exemplified by Loesch

1963). Torn between the forces of French imperialism and colonial nationalism, the settlers of *Le Coup de Sirocco* are sacrificed to history, their lives blown apart by the North African "winds of change" suggested by the novel's title.

As for the European terrorist organization which made inevitable this mass movement of population, the work of Henri Martinez is an obvious reference. Himself a member of an OAS commando in Oran, Martinez understandably presents an extended apology for the organization and its acts of often horrific violence. His account derives the major part of its interest from the author's patent inability to pierce the attendant mythology of the OAS; and this, twenty years after the demise of *Algérie française*. So, for Martinez, the OAS was truly military in its structures and aims; its violence was a necessary response to that of the FLN; it was itself a nationalist movement, fighting for a *pied-noir* "Israel"; it was the victim, not the aggressor, in its terminal conflict with the French military; and so forth (Martinez 1982 & 1984, *passim*).

Yet, the most enduring of these "tactical" myths is, without doubt, that of the *occasions manquées*: the notion that *Algérie française* could have been preserved, if only appropriate measures had been taken at the right time. A particularly frequent focus for thinking of this kind is the European-Muslim "fraternization" which occurred on the Algiers *Forum* in the days which followed the *événements* of 13 May 1958 (see Horne 1977, p.291; cf. de Gaulle 1970a, pp.47-48). A single illustration of the treatment accorded to this much-debated phenomenon will suffice to demonstrate both the character of the new myth and its thematic reliance on an old one. Having described the scenes in Algiers and evoked the new colonial relationship to which they supposedly point, Cécil Saint-Laurent refers to the authorities' release of a number of Muslim internees as a gesture of reconciliation. One of the freed prisoners describes the reaction of the others:

- On ne peut pas faire une révolution cohérente avec des Méditerranéens. Cet après-midi, j'ai rallié Alger avec une quinzaine de mes camarades du camp. Toute la journée d'hier on nous avait traînés de cérémonie en cérémonie. Moi, je comprenais

très bien que pour recouvrer leur liberté ils sachent être patients. Mais ce soir, quand nous sommes arrivés ici, alors que personne ne leur demandait rien, ils ont voulu à toute force que notre camion les dépose au Forum, et se sont mis à brailler en chœur avec les autres. (Saint-Laurent 1961, II, pp.309-310)

With this appeal to the old myth of *l'éternelle Méditerranée*, those who advocate a new and just version of *Algérie française* only succeed in revealing their enduring attachment to the ideology of the old one. As for the key notion of a colonial *fraternité* capable of transcending racial barriers, this will be considered in its own right in Chapter 7. For the time being, we might simply underline the depoliticizing nature of any such inter-ethnic brotherhood: the Algerian revolution ceases at the point where *fraternisation* commences. Once again, the "artificial" politics of nationalism are mythically overcome by the "spontaneous" Mediterraneanism of French Algeria. "If only this natural goodwill could have been built on..." laments the myth of wasted opportunities.

It is with this particular myth, so often voiced by the metropolitan liberals (see Chapter 5), that we shall turn to two remarkable *pied-noir* commentators, Jean Pélégri and Jules Roy. Born, interestingly, in the same small village - Rovigo, in the Algérois - these two contemporaries put forward strikingly similar critiques of colonial society. As the latter notes in *La Guerre d'Algérie* (1960): "Deux <<intellectuels>> sortis du même coin de terre, cela finit, à la longue, par donner à penser, surtout quand il s'agit de deux fils ou petit-fils de colons qui, sans s'être jamais rencontrés, en arrivent à la même conclusion" (Roy 1960, pp.58-59). The strengths and weaknesses of that common conclusion will be considered in due course. What we should point out here, meanwhile, is that both writers were plainly conscious of the need for a major reconsideration of their community's position in the new Algerian reality. The most obvious candidate for this task was the world-renowned voice of the liberal conscience, Albert Camus. He, however, had ruled out further public comment on the Algerian question in April 1958, following the failure two years earlier of his idealistic plan for "une trêve civile" in the colony (see Camus 1958, pp.167-184; cf. Droz & Lever 1982,

pp.147-148). Whilst Roy consciously presents his book as an attempt to fill the void left by Camus's "silence", and subsequent death in 1960, Pélégri refers only to his personal motives for writing. Nevertheless, both address themselves directly to their fellow *pieds-noirs*, and there can be little doubt that they both see themselves as solitary and, in all probability, reviled prophets in the intellectual wilderness of *Algérie française*. We shall consider their respective accounts in chronological order, beginning with Pélégri's *Les Oliviers de la justice* (1959).

In his own text, Jules Roy notes the important contribution recently made to the Algerian debate by Pélégri's narrative, calling it "un noble livre ... dans lequel l'auteur explique à son père mourant comment l'Algérie en est arrivée là, en péchant par l'omission" (Roy 1960, p.58). Our view of the text would be that it makes an important statement about the social roots of Algerian nationalism, without ever being able to use its genuine insights to draw properly political conclusions about either the present strife or the future status of Algeria. In other words, as the author-narrator struggles to cope with the trauma of his father's death, he will come to a partial understanding of the changes occurring in his native land; what he cannot achieve is a full appreciation of the demise of the colonial order and its replacement by a nationalist one. As a result, Pélégri is unable to escape from a liberal problematic that comprehends Muslim suffering in terms of a failure of *fraternité*, rather than as an inevitable product of the colonial system. This way of reading the socio-political situation reflects an abiding belief in the reformability of *Algérie française*, in spite of the fact that earlier opportunities to achieve this end had consistently been squandered. The text's insistence on the need for "justice" in Algeria appears in this light to be little more than the author's preferred alternative to what the nationalists were actually demanding in 1959: the full independence of an FLN-led Algeria.

Set in 1955, Pélégri's narrative turns precisely on the notion of a fraternity capable of transcending racial barriers in Algeria. This is exemplified, it would seem,



by the atmosphere prevailing on the little farm where the author-narrator grew up. Throughout the work, this period and place are nostalgically evoked as a golden age; one which, somewhat paradoxically, might point the way forward to a new Algeria. The pastoral evocation of "le bonheur du crépuscule" is typical of this aspect of the work. Having presented a series of standard images of bucolic peace and tranquillity, Pélégri comments on the lasting significance of what is a necessarily fleeting moment:

Oh! Je le sais, ces grandes familles qui s'endormaient dans la paix n'étaient, ne pouvaient être qu'un commencement: l'homme ne peut rester toujours dans sa famille, si juste soit-elle. Mais elles auraient pu ... être le commencement de tout.

Elles auraient pu faire oublier l'injustice première. (Pélégri 1959, p.124)

Here, Pélégri manages to combine a genuine insight into the nature of colonialism - its foundation on injustice, characterized as "la faute originelle" (ibid., p.123) - with a good deal of liberal wishful thinking. For, the image of "one big happy family" is, as we have already established, a profoundly misleading one in the colonial context, characterized as it was by a radical separation of colonizer and colonized. Moreover, colonialism's expropriation of the *indigène* is not in the nature of a single, properly punctual, injustice; it is rather a process, a continual denial of his natural rights. It is, in consequence, not liable to be either forgotten or forgiven; it exists or it does not, it cannot be rendered more humane.

The Algeria of *Les Oliviers de la justice* is deemed to possess a dual cultural heritage, and therefore to be half European and half Muslim. These strands are perceived to be complementary rather than competing - still less mutually exclusive - and are variously symbolized. The most extended and also the most important metaphor used by Pélégri is that of the vine and the palm-tree, a dichotomy which is mirrored in the social domain by his father and Embarek, the local *marabout*. After a stormy first encounter, the two men arrive at a tacit agreement about their respective rights and duties, and are thus able to become friends. For the author-narrator, the relationship of this European and this Arab is symbolic of a broader division of responsibilities in colonial Algeria:

Maintenant qu'ils sont morts tous les deux, à la même heure matinale, je ne peux les séparer dans ma mémoire, de même que je ne peux, dans le paysage, séparer la vigne du palmier.

Tous les deux, chacun à sa manière, avaient donné un sens à ce paysage.

Toi, mon père, tu avais défriché, assaini. Dans les caniveaux douteux et peuplés de moustiques, toi, c'était du soufre que tu faisais brûler - comme pour le diable. Quand tu grelottais, hagard, dans ton lit, au moment de tes accès de paludisme, ne me semblais-tu d'ailleurs comme possédé?

[...]

Et peu à peu le paysage était devenu fertile. (ibid., pp.141-142)

Et toi, Embarek ... que dirai-je de toi?... Toi, à ce paysage, tu avais donné une âme - ce qui est aussi important que le reste. En effet, je le sais maintenant, il n'y a point d'amour sans cela. [...] Toi, dans ce paysage de vignes, tu étais le palmier. (ibid., p.145)

The two men's "concordat tacite" (ibid., p.141), dividing the world into the secular and the spiritual, is a convenient one for the *pied-noir*, in that it posits a notional equality whilst upholding existing property relations. The ownership of the land - the real Algerian problem - is not here in question. Indeed, Pélégri's father is the familiar pioneer, the creator of Algeria *ex nihilo*. He is one of those who have made the malarial swamps of the Mitidja into the richest farming land in Algeria; the land he cultivates is therefore his by right. As the writer puts it elsewhere:

Mon père était de la génération de l'aurore. Celle de quatre heures du matin sur les chantiers, celle de l'initiative et du travail. On n'ose plus le dire aujourd'hui, mais si la plaine était un peu devenue son royaume, c'était parce qu'il avait défriché, labouré, planté - sans violences. (ibid., p.122)

Taken by itself, this extract might well give a misleading impression of Pélégri's stance on the colonization and subsequent European exploitation of Algeria. For, elsewhere in his narrative, he is at pains to stress the violence inherent in the colonial system. Indeed, his account of the death of a starving Muslim in a European vineyard is amongst the most striking images of that endemic brutality:

Entre deux rangs de vigne, un Arabe d'une vingtaine d'années était étendu sur les mottes, immobile, enroulé sur lui-même comme un lièvre touché en pleine fuite. Le gardien l'avait surpris en train de voler du raisin et l'avait tué, au lieu de tirer en l'air. Sur les mottes fraîchement retournées, luisantes, s'épalaient des taches de sang déjà sombres, et autour de sa main, qui serrait encore ce qu'il restait de la grappe, des grains s'étaient éparpillés, des raisins verts. Il avait été tué pour une grappe de raisins verts!

[...]

Depuis ce jour-là, la vigne a perdu pour moi son innocence. (ibid., pp.126-127)

The fact that the Arab's executioner is a fellow Muslim serves to add a bitter irony to what is already a powerfully demystifying treatment of a major mythical theme. However, at the end of the day, Pélégri remains emotionally attached to the vine and its symbolism; as his observations on the occasion of his father's funeral make clear:

Nous avons rejoint l'autre route nationale. Celle-ci, des peupliers la bordaient encore. Et de part et d'autre, pendant des kilomètres, jusqu'aux portes de Maison-Carrée, s'étendaient des vignes, encore des vignes, sur lesquelles de loin en loin veillaient des militaires. On reconnaissait, sous les arbres et dans la cour des fermes, leurs uniformes... <<Un temps viendra, disait Embarek, où les hommes presseront les raisins et se corrompent.>> Il disait aussi: <<Une seule étincelle quand le bois est sec peut allumer un grand feu.>>

Et pourtant, malgré Embarek, j'avais toujours aimé les vignes...  
Et je les aime encore. (ibid., p.191)

There can, on the basis of this passage, be little doubting Pélégri's personal integrity. Indeed, he admits that his ethnic affiliations - as symbolized by the settlers' cultivation of the vine - must inevitably prevail over both his friendship with Embarek and his appreciation of the military coercion on which the rural charm of *Algérie française* is ultimately based. A similar honesty is revealed when the author-narrator considers exile and his relations with his fellow *pieds-noirs*:

Je me rendais compte qu'avant de partir, il me fallait d'abord chercher ici mon salut. Et que, pour cela, j'avais à me réconcilier avec quelque chose, avec quelqu'un... Qu'il serait doux, ensuite, l'exil!

Comment ne pas avoir compris que ce salut, jamais, je ne pourrais le trouver seul? Que j'étais solidaire des autres, de leur générosité comme de leurs fautes ou de leurs crimes. Quand je me sentais bien, c'est que j'étais leur complice. (ibid., p.232)

The idea of a "complicity" with the rest of the European community is a very fruitful one, which serves to draw attention to the leading role of ethnicity in the Algerian contest. Unfortunately, however, Pélégri is unable to take this remarkable psychological and sociological insight to its logical, and inevitably political, conclusion. For, if the only real "salvation" for the individual settler is to be found in the community, then communal values and the collective self-image are almost certain to

prevail over that individual's worthy attempts to place himself outside its self-preserving ethos. To take the side of the colonized is necessarily to place oneself beyond the colonialist pale; it is an act of ethnic apostasy which denies one's community and thus oneself. Regarded in this light, it is a virtual impossibility, and so all attempts to "put oneself in the colonized's shoes" must result in either compromises or confusions or both: i.e. "...la danse tourmentée du colonisateur qui se refuse, et continue à vivre en colonie" (Memmi 1957, p.70). This is very much the case in Pélégri's *Les Oliviers de la justice*. For, what we are faced with here, in fact, is a particularly intense version of the liberal dilemma (as defined in Chapter 5).

Much as the metropolitan liberals had objected to the methods used by the French army in Algeria, but not to the ultimate ends of its efforts, urging rather a more humane form of *pacification*, the more liberal-minded members of the European community sought not to put an end to the colonial system, but to render it more "just". With the benefit of both hindsight and distance, we may readily appreciate that such a project was both a theoretical nonsense and a practical impossibility. However, it is within this perspective - one where "injustice" is the preferred euphemism for an increasingly negatively perceived colonialism - that their contribution to the Algerian debate must be situated. This view of colonial reality did not prevent some very scathing criticism of the liberals' fellow settlers, and, indeed, of themselves, but it did preclude serious consideration of the only real alternative to *Algérie française*: i.e. *une Algérie algérienne*. To state this is not, however, to deny the importance of this literary attempt at communal self-criticism, but simply to indicate its general limitations. Some examples drawn from Pélégri's narrative will help to make those limitations more apparent.

Throughout *Les Oliviers de la justice*, Jean Pélégri levels criticisms at various aspects of the contemporary society of *Algérie française*. He draws attention, for example, to the European's habitual indifference to the Muslim Algerian and his culture

(Pélégri 1959, p.21). More significantly, he stresses the settlers' blindness to the suffering of a people that seems to have been made for service and to be predisposed to poverty (ibid., pp.39-45). It is precisely this way of seeing, or failing to see, the *indigène* that is finally being challenged by the FLN's militant brand of Algerian nationalism:

Ici, on avait toujours accordé trop d'importance au paysage. On l'avait décrit, admiré; on l'avait fertilisé, embelli. Mais qui s'était intéressé aux hommes? On jugeait qu'ils faisaient partie du décor, comme les cactus, comme les palmiers. (Ne les appelait-on pas souvent, d'ailleurs, avec un aveugle et dégradant mépris, des *troncs de figuier*?) Pourtant ces mêmes hommes étaient en train de nous apprendre qu'il ne faut jamais prendre le monde tel qu'il est. (ibid., pp.229-230)

Pélégri's emphasis on the Algerian war's ideological dimension - its challenge to the settlers' vision of the world - is of undoubted value; as is his drawing of attention to the colonizer's objectification of the colonized. Less convincing, however, is his explanation of this acutely observed colonial reality in terms of a failure of paternalism. This view of events is frequently echoed by his father:

- Ça ne m'étonne pas qu'ils se révoltent... Qui est-ce qui s'occupe d'eux aujourd'hui? Qui est-ce qui leur parle?... (ibid., p.27)

The thematic association of paternalism and the notion of *occasions manquées* will be clear enough on the basis of this and similar remarks; their logical connection will also be readily appreciated. As far as the author's reliance on such thinking is concerned, the basic problem from our point of view is that criticism based on it must always be of abuses of the colonial system, rather than of colonialism itself. So, while the author may rightly identify "cette injustice quotidienne que l'on respirait comme un siroco" as the root cause of the Algerian revolt (ibid., p.33), he will be unable to recognize that this daily abuse of the colonized is the very essence of French Algeria, and not some remediable failure on its part. By the same token, Pélégri will fail to appreciate the inevitability of European racism in the colonial context: the *indigène* must be perceived as the lazy and cowardly representative of "Cette sale race qui veut nous chasser d'ici et prendre nos terres" (ibid., p.26). This, for the simple reason that,

by 1955, an end to the colonial system of property relations was precisely what the Muslims sought, not the *bulletin de vote* refused to earlier generations of nationalists and now offered belatedly in an attempt to defuse the colony's crisis.

Staying with this theme, we might usefully point out that the author displays considerable insight when blaming the historical repression of political nationalism for the emergence of the FLN and its commitment to the use of force to overthrow continued French rule. What is more, this analysis of the origins of the nationalist insurrection includes a major denunciation of the use of torture in Algeria *before* 1954 as a means of humiliating and terrorizing those members of the Muslim community brave enough to demand a better deal (*ibid.*, pp.257-259). However, Pélégri is unable to appreciate that, once triggered, this popular rising can only end in the demise of *Algérie française*. So, he will express his faith in the settlers' future prospects in Algeria; this, on the basis of the *tendresse* which, on a deeper level, underpins the relationship between the territory's European and Muslim communities. Indeed, he will suggest that the real humanity of the former may even now be able to make up for the humiliations inflicted over the years upon the latter:

Ces humiliations ont laissé dans les chairs et, plus encore, dans l'âme de vieilles cicatrices: quel baume, quel parfum, pourra jamais les effacer? Ces cicatrices-là ne se soignent pas - même dans le plus moderne hôpital de notre civilisation occidentale.

Il n'y a, pour les guérir, que les parfums d'Arabie... Ou alors - ou alors, la tendresse: *notre* tendresse. [...]

Car elle existe, cette tendresse. Nous la frôlons tous les jours. Elle est même, je crois, plus forte, plus profonde, que toutes les haines. (*ibid.*, pp.259-260)

With the introduction of this theme of *tendresse*, our attention is drawn to the liberal problematic itself. Put simply, inter-ethnic relations are to be understood in terms of the primary opposition of love and hate, with the liberal "solution" to the present hostilities consisting in an extension of that *fraternité* often experienced at the level of the individual to Algerian society as a whole (*ibid.*, pp.249-254). The fact that the historical indifference of the *pied-noir* to the Muslim masses which surrounded him should be thought of in terms of love and hate is clearly a matter for some concern.

For, as every student of French Classicism knows, love and hate are not really contraries, but rather two sides of the same emotional attachment; it is precisely that absence of interest, such as characterized the Algerian colonizer's view of the colonized up to 1954, which is its true opposite. Interestingly, this image of the Franco-Algerian relationship appealed right across the political spectrum. So, the communist writer André Stil is just as happy to state that *Nous nous aimerons demain* (1957), as the *pied-noir* activist Jean Brune is to evoke *Cette haine qui ressemble à l'amour* (1961). However, it was colonial liberals like Pélégri and Roy who were most influenced by the myth of inter-ethnic fraternity. Consider the former's developed statement of his hopes for Algeria's future. His point of departure is their common experience of service in the Second World War, and its legacy of *occasions manquées*:

Ah! si nous l'avions eu, ce courage, au retour des nos victoires, à ce moment unique où tout était possible, puisque cette Algérie juste et fraternelle dont nous rêvions, nous l'avions connue et vécue à notre tour sur les champs de bataille. Quel exemple, nous aurions donné, nous les Africains!

[...]

Pour la première fois, des hommes de races et de religions différentes, triomphant de la haine et de l'injustice, se seraient unis librement, donnant ainsi au monde l'exemple de la fraternité future... Voilà ce que nos enfants, plus tard, auraient pu lire dans leur livre d'histoire. Et nous, les vieux, avant de nous endormir tranquilles, nous aurions dit, comme dans les belles légendes: <<Nous étions de ce pays et de ce peuple!>>

Comme toutes les autres révolutions, en comparaison, même les plus justes et les plus nécessaires, auraient paru cruelles - dérisoires!

[...]

Mais il n'est pas dit que nous ne la vivrons pas, un jour, cette histoire. Cela dépend de notre courage. (Pélégri 1959, pp.244-245)

Pélégri's typically liberal combination of diagnostic acuity and prognostic wishful thinking is nowhere more clearly underlined than here. So, the Second World War may be rightly identified as a watershed in the history of French Algeria - i.e. the moment when the urgent need for a new social justice became properly apparent (as it did throughout Europe's colonies) - but the only "solution" urged is an idealistic one based on the replacement of inter-racial *haine* by *fraternité*. It is this undefined Algerian harmony, to be achieved by unstated means, at some unspecified date in the future, which is preferred to the realistic political option: that is to say, support for the

FLN's fight for national independence. Its brand of revolutionary violence is rejected, no matter how just and how necessary it may be, in consequence. At the root of this muddled thinking is, as always, an elementary confusion as regards the nature of colonial injustice. So, mistaking the cultural superstructure of colonial Algeria for its politico-economic base, Pélégri is able to suggest that a greater European awareness of Muslim traditions could have brought about a radical change in relations between the two communities:

Nous étions, malgré les injustices, malgré les coups de feu qui crépitaient depuis plusieurs mois déjà dans les campagnes, nous étions si près de la réussite, de la communauté, de la victoire, de la victoire de l'homme sur l'homme - oui, malgré tout! Si près de ce bonheur qui, si nous ne l'avions pas laissé passer, nous aurait conduits vers le pays le plus beau.

Il aurait fallu encore si peu de chose!

Peut-être aurait-il fallu, tout simplement, que les petits Européens apprennent eux aussi, sur les bancs de l'école, des chansons arabes et kabyles... Il y en a de si belles - qui chantent la plaine, la montagne, l'amour. (ibid., pp.262-263)

Love and a few native songs are all that is required, then, to right colonial wrongs, and to bridge the gulf between colonizer and colonized. Jean Pélégri's good will is beyond question here; but so, unfortunately, is his liberal self-delusion as regards both the reformability of colonial Algeria and the extent of the changes that would be necessary to bring about such a transformation. In short, he reveals himself to be precisely that "colonisateur de bonne volonté" or "colonisateur qui se refuse" described by Memmi. For, what the author fails to grasp is the total nature of his community's reliance on colonial exploitation of the Muslim Algerian. Such a situation could never be made more just, any more than the French army's pacification effort could ever be rendered more humane. It was thus not a question of missed opportunities, still less of chances yet to come. The only real choice was between *Algérie française*, complete with its inherent injustice, or an FLN-led *Algérie algérienne*. When pushed, Camus was to opt in 1957 for the former, preferring his "mother" to "justice" (Camus 1965, pp.1881-1882). For his part, Pélégri attempts to evade the issue, languishing instead in the nostalgic evocation of a childhood golden age dominated by his now dead father.



It would thus fall to Jules Roy to argue for the latter option. Such *pied-noir* support for the cause of Algerian nationalism is not without its problems, inevitably, but it does show just how far the liberal conscience was prepared to go in the pursuit of "justice".

As Roy explains in an apostrophe to his dead friend:

Pour moi, j'ignore, Camus, si je suis comme toi capable de placer ma mère au-dessus de la justice. Comment oserais-je parler de cela? Ta mère vit encore tandis que la mienne... Il ne s'agit pas de préférer sa mère à la justice. Il s'agit d'aimer la justice autant que sa propre mère. (Roy 1960, p.215)

Before going on to look in detail at Jules Roy's *La Guerre d'Algérie*, it is perhaps as well to consider the relevance of this celebrated piece of non-fiction to the present study. Several factors militate in favour of the text's inclusion. To begin with, the blurring of accepted generic distinctions in the literature of the Algerian war was noted in our introduction, as was our belief in the primacy of ideology over literary self-referentiality. So, the liberal *témoignage* which Pélégri presents to the reader as a *roman* may very properly be compared with the liberal *témoignage* communicated by Roy's more obviously essay-like *récit*. In addition, the text possesses considerable artistic merit, as will become apparent, and thus may reasonably be included amongst other notable examples of prose literature. The work's systematic reference to other literary texts - including particularly the one just considered, as well as Camus's *oeuvre* - is a further indication of its pertinence in the present context. More important than any of these considerations, however, is the fact that *La Guerre d'Algérie* may justly be considered, with Alleg's *La Question* and Servan-Schreiber's *Lieutenant en Algérie*, to have exerted a major influence over French public opinion. As Talbott explains:

In mid-October [1960], when excitement over the Manifesto [of the 121] and the Jeanson network still ran high, a curious thing happened, or failed to happen. The novelist and playwright Jules Roy - veteran of Indochina, retired air force colonel, son of *pieds-noirs*, close friend of Albert Camus - published a short book called *La Guerre d'Algérie*. Roy's was not the sort of book a *pied-noir* soldier might have been expected to write. [...]

*La Guerre d'Algérie* would have been a prime candidate for seizure under the Fourth Republic - or in the early days of the Fifth, for that matter. But in the same weeks that the police were laying hold of *France observateur*, *Les Temps modernes*, and *Vérité-Liberté*, Roy's book became a best seller. The government's failure to remove it from circulation may have been an oversight. The police may have left *La Guerre d'Algérie* alone, though, because Roy wrote what de Gaulle thought. To

announce that France had nothing to gain from continuing the struggle in Algeria was to state views de Gaulle had already offered. Perhaps a best seller accustomed opinion to ideas unthinkable six years earlier. Perhaps its success showed that these ideas were already popular. (Talbot 1980, pp.175-176)

The previously "unthinkable" ideas voiced in *La Guerre d'Algérie* went a good deal further than the general conclusion that France had nothing to gain and everything to lose in the Algerian war. For, in this little book, Jules Roy addressed himself to the big political questions, taking to task both his former comrades-in-arms and his fellow *pieds-noirs*. His unique personal and professional qualifications for this task will require no further underlining. What should be pointed out, however, is the extent to which Roy's text is a reply to the dead Camus. Indeed, the author goes so far as to suggest that had his great friend still been alive, he would never have produced his own work at all (Roy 1960, pp.13-14 & 205). Yet, for all Roy's devotion to the late Nobel prize winner - who, he maintains, would have spoken out too had he lived (*ibid.*, pp.205-206) - his study of the conflict in his native land is very much his own, and forms the basis of a political stand which had already proved to be beyond his illustrious contemporary. This said, Roy is no more able to break free of the love/hate problematic than was Pélégri. However, he does push the liberal perspective to its limits and thus produces a more persuasive account of the Algerian war and the colonial reality that gave rise to it than any previous literary commentator. It is this fact, we would suggest, that explains that remarkable contemporary impact noted by John Talbot.

Like Pélégri, Roy is preoccupied with the injustice of *Algérie française*, which he too identifies as the root cause of the current hostilities. A particularly dramatic illustration of this causal relationship is provided early on, when Roy describes the conditions prevailing in a typical enough relocation camp:

Un de mes amis qui servait dans l'armée a vu les habitants d'un camp de regroupement accroupis pour boire dans une rigole où l'on vidait l'eau d'une citerne. S'ils avaient été des bêtes, on aurait aménagé un abreuvoir. Pour d'autres humiliations de ce genre, les gens du F.L.N. égorgent et mutilent. (*ibid.*, p.12)

Muslim suffering of this kind is nothing new, we learn; nor is the *pieds-noirs'* studied indifference to it. Indeed, if Roy returns to his own childhood, it is not to revel nostalgically in happier days gone by, but rather to focus attention on the European child's indoctrination into the communal myths of Arab inferiority and animal-like "otherness". These must be maintained if the colonizers are to continue to be able to live comfortably with the daily spectacle of native misery (*ibid.*, pp.20-23 & 179-180). (These myths will be considered in their own right in Chapter 7.) By the same token, the Bab-El-Oued described in *La Guerre d'Algérie* has little in common with the harmonious Mediterranean *creuset* evoked by Gabriel Conesa. On the contrary, the famous *quartier* is seen to be split down the middle according to race:

On cherche en vain à y reconnaître les indices de l'intégration. Chaque communauté se côtoie sans se mêler; on ne se marie pas, en Algérie, sauf rares exceptions, entre Européens et Musulmans. A Bab-El-Oued, les jeunes Musulmans ne fréquentent pas les jeunes Européens. Dans les petits restaurants où ils mangent, assis parfois à la même table, ils expédient leur repas en évitant de se regarder. (*ibid.*, p.54)

As for the inter-ethnic *fraternité* so often vaunted by both Pélégri and Conesa, Roy displays a keen insight into the artificial and selfish basis of at least one such display in a village close to the fortified Tunisian frontier:

Quand la situation était sérieuse, il y a trois ans, les colons prenaient les ratons dans leurs voitures. La fraternité régna tout à coup. On les plaçait à l'avant, bien en évidence. Il fallait les aimer puisqu'ils semblaient avoir gagné. Et puis, le barrage mis en place, les fellagha se firent plus rares et les choses redevinrent ce qu'elles étaient auparavant. La fraternité s'estompa puis disparut. (*ibid.*, p.118)

On a more general plane, Roy will bear witness to the vision, courage and determination of his colonizing forbears (*ibid.*, pp.20-21). However, he will also raise important questions not normally considered by the descendants of the territory's *défricheurs*. Consider, for example, the following indictment of France's colonial *oeuvre*:

Je n'ai pas dit pourquoi cela me touchait tant, que nous fussions injustes pour les Musulmans. Pas seulement parce qu'ils nous ont aidés à transformer la terre que nous avons occupée; pas seulement parce qu'ils ont travaillé à nous enrichir. Mais encore parce que nous les avons enrôlés dans notre armée, qu'ils s'y sont bien conduits et sont morts pour la France pendant quatre guerres... On me dira une fois de plus qu'ils acquittaient une dette à son égard pour les routes, les écoles et les hôpitaux que nous avons bâtis. Demandons-nous si nous faisons des routes pour eux et si, pour leur

part, ils en éprouvaient un tel besoin. A l'époque, ils pensaient que les routes ont de la valeur pour ceux qui s'en servent, que c'est Dieu qui guérit et que la mort est l'égalité suprême. En vérité, nous les avons aidés à mourir plus vieux sans nous occuper de les faire mieux vivre. (ibid., pp.112-113)

As the author was to put it even more bluntly in a subsequent press article addressed "Aux Français d'Algérie":

Je n'ignore pas ce que nos pères et vous avez bâti en Algérie. On l'a dit et redit. Souffrez que je n'insiste pas. Avec quoi avez-vous construit des villes, des fermes, des routes, des barrages, des usines et des chemins de fer, des écoles et des hôpitaux? (Roy 1961, pp.130-131)

Here Roy makes his attitude to his compatriots' "creation" of Algeria abundantly clear. They have, indeed, made the colony what it is, but with metropolitan finance and technical expertise on the one hand, and inadequately rewarded Muslim manpower on the other; and, above all, if the settlers have committed themselves to the *mise en valeur* of the territory, then it has been for their benefit alone. It is this honesty as regards colonial motivation which puts Roy in an unusually strong position to consider French Algeria's present troubles. For him, there is no question but that "l'Algérie sera un jour indépendante" (Roy 1960, p.137). What is more, he appreciates that, given the woeful conditions of existence of the mass of Muslim Algerians, joining the FLN is the only logical and, indeed, morally defensible option for the young *indigène* (ibid., pp.168-169). This is a major departure for a liberal thinker, and one which is made all the more remarkable by Roy's decision to align himself with the nationalist revolutionaries, and against his natural allies, in the struggle for Algeria. Addressing himself to a French army captain whom he met in the course of his researches, the author suggests that he, at least, has come to understand the total nature of a colonial war in which one must, sooner or later, and in one way or another, choose between the two sides:

Il n'y a plus rien de commun entre vous et moi, capitaine. Je ne serai jamais de votre côté en Algérie et si un jour, dans le collimateur de vos chars ou de vos avions, vous distinguez parmi les rats en guenilles un grand bâtard de votre race aux cheveux blancs, ce sera moi. N'hésitez pas. Appuyez sur les boutons de feu de vos mitrailleuses. Ce jour-là, vous aurez bien servi la cause de l'Occident. (ibid., pp.169-170)

This striking image of trans-ethnic solidarity is probably as near as any *pied-noir* writer can reasonably be expected to get to a position of identification with the killers of his fellow countrymen. Some might be inclined to argue that such a literary show of support for the nationalist cause costs Roy nothing, particularly as he had already chosen, like Camus, the voluntary exile of the Parisian intellectual establishment. However, to do this would be to underestimate the author's feelings for his native land, former comrades, family and friends. He makes a point, in fact, of stressing the communal ties which must be put behind him if he is to have a clear conscience in this matter:

On m'accusera de trahison, je le sais. On me menacera comme on l'a déjà fait. Anonymement. Et puis? Je serai un salaud parce que j'aurai, après tant d'autres, dénoncé les abus et les erreurs d'une classe qui aura fait porter ses propres péchés et sa propre imbécillité à la nation tout entière? Acceptons loyalement d'être un salaud. [...] Ce que je cherche alors? Le moyen de ne pas avoir honte de moi. (ibid., pp.175-176)

Yet, for all this, Roy is unable to appreciate the full implications of his developed critique of the Algerian war and the colonial reality which gave rise to it. Like Pélégri, he continues to express faith in the reformability of French Algeria, explaining its injustice in terms of abuses and errors, rather than as the very foundation of the colonial system. For him, the daily humiliation and chronic poverty of the Muslim population of the territory is an accidental rather than a substantial feature of the *présence française*; something, in short, that might have been avoided. This is the familiar liberal account of the conflict as a failure of paternalism, as a tale of missed opportunities for the creation of a better *Algérie française*. Such thinking is implicit in several of the foregoing quotations, and is made explicit in passages like the following one, in which Roy explains his personal mission to - who else? - his mother:

<<Me voilà, maman. Je suis venu voir notre pays pour essayer de comprendre ce que les autres en ont fait. Nous avons bâti des églises, des banques et des écoles, des routes et des hôpitaux, mais nous avons négligé de nous occuper des Arabes comme il aurait fallu.>> (ibid., p.26)

Had the colonizers of Algeria paid more attention to the welfare of the colonized population, then, "none of this need ever have happened". The *pieds-noirs'* economic and political ascendancy could have remained unchallenged, "if only" the European minority had seen fit to treat the Muslim majority in a more equitable fashion. The historical *naïveté* of a belief in the possibility of installing a colonial regime "with a human face" will be readily apparent. Less obvious, perhaps, is the basis upon which Roy constructs his Franco-centric vision of an "Algerian" Algeria. Consider the following, truly remarkable, observation:

On appelle l'archevêque d'Alger Mohammed Duval, ce qui me paraît un grand honneur pour lui. Quand on appellera M. Abbas Fernand au lieu de Ferhat, l'Algérie algérienne sera un fait. (ibid., p.107)

The Algerian specificity of the future state is to be defined, it now seems, in terms of its assimilation of French cultural values; this, on the basis of a common Franco-Algerian destiny (ibid., pp.151-152). What we are really taking about here, in fact, is the future status of the *pieds-noirs*. For, if Roy is prepared to argue for greater social justice in an "Algerian" Algeria, he is not ready to countenance the massive reduction in settler privilege that would be necessary to turn any such dream into political reality. Indeed, he goes so far as to make the following, very revealing, statement of the Algerian nationalists' demands:

Le F.L.N. ne demande pas que nous quittions l'Algérie, mais que nous accordions aux Arabes ce que nous leur avons toujours refusé jusqu'à ce qu'ils prennent les armes contre nous: une certaine idée de l'homme ... la reconnaissance de leurs droits physiques, civiques et moraux, avec tout ce que cela comporte. Ceux qui ne voudront pas s'entendre avec eux sont ceux qui n'ont jamais voulu admettre que les Arabes pouvaient être leurs égaux. Ils préfèrent partager leur terre et leur pain avec nous qu'avec les Chinois. (ibid., p.138)

To be quite fair to Roy, we should note that the FLN did, indeed, see a role for the *pieds-noirs* in an independent Algeria; or rather it professed to do so. The activities of the European terrorists in the closing stages of the war would, however, render the French government's efforts to protect the settlers' stake in the country wholly futile. No Algerian future could be envisaged for the colonists once the OAS

had started the frenzied blood-letting which marked the end of *Algérie française*. What is more, there is no real reason to suppose that the *pieds-noirs* would, or could, ever have remained in the newly sovereign state in any case:

Respect for the settlers' civil rights depended on the capacity for tolerance of a society in the ascendancy after decades of settler rule. Even in the absence of the OAS, the prospects of a minority cast down from its position of supremacy may not have been very good. One-party states elsewhere have established poor records in looking out for minority rights; there is little reason to think that the new Algeria would have behaved differently. In the event, its respect for the guarantees of Evian was never put to the test; the settlers removed the problem by removing themselves from Algeria. (Talbot 1980, p.244)

There was, in short, no safe place in the new Algeria for colonizers; for the European population to have remained would have meant giving up their French status, and, of course, the privileges that went with it. The option of sharing in the nation's independence was open to them, but they would have had to forego their communal "superiority" in order to avail themselves of it. The fact that Jules Roy should have clung to his belief in the *pieds-noirs*' future Algerian role is a function of his misunderstanding of the nature of Muslim aspirations at this time. For, what the rebels were seeking in 1960 was not limited, as he suggests, to "leurs droits physiques, civiques et moraux", otherwise termed *justice* or *dignité* (Roy 1960, pp.43 & 103 respectively). What they now demanded, rather, was that Algerian nation which Roy is able neither to deny, nor yet fully to accept. Such an entity is consequently deemed to have come about only as a result of French mistakes and to remain in an embryonic form:

Il n'y en avait pas ... de patrie algérienne! Les Italiens descendants des Romains, les Juifs, les Turcs, les Grecs ou les Berbères auraient pu autant que les Arabes, derniers occupants de cette terre avant nous, revendiquer des droits de gouvernement! Et nous avons fait, ou sommes en train de faire la patrie algérienne contre nous, de souder contre nous cette mosaïque de peuples qui se détestaient, se jalousaient et s'égorgeaient les uns les autres. [...] La <<patrie algérienne>> n'existe peut-être pas encore dans le sens où le F.L.N. l'emploie, mais elle est en train de se cimenter. (ibid., pp.181-182)

Two ideological features stand out quite clearly here: the essential colonizability of Algeria; and the artificiality of the FLN's *patrie*. Such an approach to nationalist

demands brings Roy rather closer to that adopted by the die-hard partisans of *Algérie française* than he might have realized or intended. Indeed, the only conclusion to be drawn from such thinking is that France has every right to assert its sovereignty over the territory and people of Algeria. What is more, it is still not too late for the real integration of the latter into the French national community: "Tout est possible encore, oui, si nous nous décidons enfin à aimer" (ibid., p.201).

The love/hate problematic, previously identified as the root cause of Pélégri's liberal illusions, is appealed to overtly here. It was this way of framing Algeria's problems that effectively prevented Roy from coming to terms with the imminent demise of his community. So, while he may present a most damning indictment of both Algeria's colonial reality and France's colonial war, he is still able to suggest that *fraternité* is a practical alternative to independence:

N'arrive-t-il pas qu'on se hâisse et s'entre-tue entre frères, puis qu'on se réconcilie? En les accueillant [les émissaires du F.L.N.], il s'agit certes de les traiter en rebelles, mais il s'agit aussi, puisque le bachaga Boualam est, comme tous les Algériens musulmans, notre frère, de ne pas enlever aux autres une dignité qu'ils réclament. Ils sont nos ennemis? Sûrement. Pour le moment. Mais aussi nos frères. Pour toujours. (ibid., pp.197-198; cf. pp.151-152)

Even with the benefit of hindsight, Roy would continue to look on the conflictual relations between colonizer and colonized in Algeria as "une brouille amoureuse entre la France et l'Algérie" (ibid., p.190). So, in *Le Tonnerre et les anges* (1975), the final volume of his epic treatment of the French *présence* in Algeria, he will describe the work done for the Arabs by Dr Paris as "l'amour" (Roy 1975, p.69), while the attitude adopted to Camus by the *pied-noir* critics of his planned "trêve civile" is put forward as a product of "la haine" (ibid., p.65). This emotional account of political developments extends to the FLN bomber who tries to murder the doctor. Passing himself off as just another patient, the young man will almost give his deadly game away:

Le docteur appliqua le stéthoscope sur ses épaules, écouta le murmure des bronches comme des vagues mourant sur la plage, puis un battement précipité du coeur qui l'étonna: un vrai tambour nègre, avec le redoublement brutal des extrasystoles



interrompant pour un temps le rythme forcené, l'affolement du coeur après un effort violent ou le spasme amoureux. (ibid., p.71)

So, the emotional agitation of the Muslim terrorist may be likened to the, presumably perverted, consummation of a love affair. By the same sort of logic, a failed personal relationship may be taken to explain a female settler's life-long antipathy towards the colonized: "l'histoire de Marguerite et de Hassane... De la haine pour les Arabes à cause d'une trahison amoureuse..." (ibid., p.65). Such images of inter-ethnic conflict are to be understood as part of Roy's all-embracing vision of the colonial enterprise in Algeria as "un mirage épique vers quoi des millions d'hommes et de femmes ont marché en portant les douleurs et les enchantements de l'amour" (ibid., p.429). This mystification of historical reality may have helped Roy and his fellow *pied-noir* liberals to rationalize the, no doubt personally traumatic, events which occurred in their native land, but it must also be seen to have detracted from Roy's own contribution to the debate surrounding those events. As we shall see in the following chapter, considerations of inter-racial sexuality are very much to the fore in the French literary depiction of the Muslim Algerian and his role in the 1954-1962 hostilities.

## CHAPTER 7

### *LE MEME ET L'AUTRE*

In his study of "the war without a name", John Talbott argues that the society of French Algeria was characterized by a radical "dualism" (Talbott 1980, pp.12-14). He summarizes this phenomenon as follows:

In colonial Algeria, linguistic, religious, and racial differences ran parallel along either side of one vast cultural fault, Algerians on one side, Europeans on the other. No institution served, at any point in the society, to join the two sides of the fault together... (ibid., p.14)

This phenomenon is readily explainable in terms of the economics of the colonial relationship. Its implications for the various colonial discourses, including particularly those uttered in the prose fiction of or about the colony, are similarly straightforward. Indeed, their thrust may be said to consist in the ideological manipulation of the linguistic categories of the Self and the Other (see Gourdon *et al* 1974, pp.100-114). In the present chapter, we shall seek to demonstrate the validity of this analysis by considering the depiction of the *indigène* in a range of texts drawn from the French literature of the Algerian war. Beginning with Jules Roy's indictment of the settler community's insistence on the inferior "otherness" of the colony's indigenous inhabitants, we shall discuss the variety of conflicting images resorted to by metropolitan and *pied-noir* authors in an attempt to come to terms with militant Algerian nationalism's challenge to the existing economic, political, and, above all, ideological order.

In the colonial context, primary linguistic categories are invested with ideological values of the first importance. The fact that the Other is the object of the colonizer's discourse, rather than a partner in it, is consequently a crucial one. Indeed, this relationship is at the very heart of the colonialist mode of speaking (about) the native, and reveals both the psychological motivation and the internal contradictions of the relevant discourse. Put simply, the colonizer is permanently tempted by the idea of physically exterminating the Other, but cannot bring himself to transform this fervent

wish into reality (Memmi 1957, pp.78 & 160-161). He must therefore seek an alternative means of deflecting the challenge posed to his self-image by the mere existence of the colonized. This, for the simple reason that the colonizer makes a doubly uncomfortable discovery whenever he becomes aware of the Other: "...il découvre l'existence du colonisé et du même coup son propre *privilège*" (ibid., p.36). The historical response of the European settlers of Algeria to this ideological dilemma is summed up by Memmi as follows:

Comment? Comment l'usurpation peut-elle essayer de passer pour légitimité? Deux démarches semblent possibles: démontrer les mérites éminents de l'usurpateur, si éminents qu'ils appellent une telle récompense; ou insister sur les démérites de l'usurpé, si profonds qu'ils ne peuvent que susciter une telle disgrâce. Et ces deux efforts sont en fait inséparables. Son inquiétude, sa soif de justification exigent de l'usurpateur, à la fois, qu'il se porte lui-même aux nues, et qu'il enfonce l'usurpé plus bas que terre. (ibid., p.77)

In view of Memmi's accurate observation that the elevation of the colonizer and the denigration of the colonized are but two halves of a single ideological strategy, it will be readily appreciated that any consideration of the depiction of the Other must, inevitably, also take into account the representation of the Self. It will therefore come as no great surprise that Jules Roy, the most perceptive inside commentator on the *pieds-noirs*, should be to the fore in exposing his community's self-serving view of the Muslim Algerian. Central to this preferred image of the native is the notion, inherited from the *Algérienistes*, of his inferior otherness. As Roy puts it, looking back on his childhood socialization:

Ce que je savais parce qu'on me le répétait, c'était qu'ils [les Arabes] étaient d'une autre race que moi, inférieure à la mienne. Nous étions venus défricher leurs terres et leur apporter la civilisation. (Roy 1960, p.20)

It is obviously no coincidence that the determinants of Arab otherness should also be those of the settler legitimacy discussed in the previous chapter. On the contrary, the *indolence* and *indigence* so easily connoted by the term *indigène* are the logical corollaries of the settler myths of pioneering creation and civilizing mission. The colonized may therefore be regarded as the mythical antithesis of the colonizer;

that is to say an essentially negative value, systematically contrasted with the positively evoked *pied-noir*. The concept of Muslim otherness may, in consequence, be alluded to in a variety of spheres, but will always form part of a broader vindication of the French colonial enterprise. Roy is only too well aware of the ease with which such thinking may be used to deny the reality of Arab suffering under the colonial regime:

<<Ce sont des gens qui ne vivent pas comme nous... >> Cette phrase jetait un voile pudique sur leur pauvreté. Ce qui pouvait apparaître comme une grande et profonde misère n'était qu'un refus de coucher dans des lits, de manger aussi bien que nous, ou d'habiter des maisons bâties en dur, sous des toits. Leur bonheur, oui, était ailleurs, un peu semblable, qu'on me pardonne, à celui des bêtes de la ferme, et je crois que je les ai toujours vus considérés, chez nous, comme des boeufs, qu'on traitait bien, mais qui pouvaient inspirer aucune compassion. <<Ils n'ont pas les mêmes besoins que nous... >>, me disait-on. Je le croyais volontiers, et, du coup, leur état ne pouvait m'émouvoir. (ibid., pp.21-22; cf. Pélégri 1959, pp.39-45)

Roy's personal amazement at discovering that "les troncs de figuiers étaient des hommes semblables à nous" (Roy 1960, p.23) is as nothing, however, compared with the communal shock and outrage occasioned by the FLN's use of arms against the settler community. As the author puts it to his fellow *pieds-noirs*: "Nous avons pris les ratons pour des imbéciles et nous avons usé à notre égard des trésors d'indulgence et d'admiration, au point que la rébellion nous a moins étonnés que scandalisés" (ibid., p.180). It was this scandalized reaction to the nationalists' armed threat to the European ascendancy that explained the emergence of a new myth of the Other, or, more accurately, of a new variation on old colonialist themes. As the initially isolated acts of terrorist violence spread and intensified, a new and specifically Algerian image of militant otherness came to replace the common colonial emphasis on the laziness, dirtiness, dishonesty and general incompetence of the colonized population. So, the partisans of *Algérie française* might still insist upon the Muslims' disqualifying failure to cultivate the land (Châtelet 1981, p.223), but they would also seek to make sense of their increasingly frequent attacks on the property and persons of European farmers. It was the unmistakable signs of a hitherto unsuspected, or denied, Muslim dynamism, in other words, that the colony now sought to rationalize.

One literary response was to blame the burning, stabbing, shooting, and, above all, throatcutting (see Chapter 1), not on the political development of the Other, but rather on his cultural retardation. This belief in Muslim backwardness is the essential foundation of the colonizer's faith in his own *mission civilisatrice*, of course. When properly combined with a favourable account of paternalistic colonial advance, it can be used to explain away the nationalist revolt in a particularly plausible fashion. Take, for instance, this seemingly authoritative statement by Saint-Laurent's Colonel Jasson:

- La crise actuelle, je crois qu'elle tient à ce que nous avons porté des hommes comme Ferhat Abbas au même siècle que nous. Mais des millions d'Algériens étant encore en 1750, les premiers ont trouvé dans l'état des seconds à la fois la justification et le personnel d'une révolte. Voilà pourquoi il faut multiplier les écoles et brûler les étapes. (Saint-Laurent 1958, p.130)

This type of thinking is by no means confined to the right wing of French politics. Compare the remarks made by a colonial nationalist militant in Pierre-Henri Simon's *Portrait d'un officier*:

L'erreur de la France, voyez-vous (et ici je n'ose pas dire sa faute), ce fut de se montrer avec nous en même temps trop généreuse et trop dure; permettez-moi d'ajouter même: trop intelligente et trop bête. Si elle voulait nous garder à perpétuité sous tutelle, il fallait nous laisser toujours en l'état de mineurs, nous interdire la connaissance de ses lois et de ses livres, nous obliger à nous replier sur nous-mêmes, sur notre conscience de race inégale en génie et en moyens. Cela, elle ne l'a pas voulu... (Simon 1958, p.77)

Here, then, the *mission civilisatrice* is vindicated by one of the very nationalists who have risen up against the colonial system: a representative of France's opponents himself acknowledges the pre-colonial backwardness of his countrymen, the "état de mineurs" of a "race inégale en génie et en moyens". The fact that the speaker himself is an *évolué* - "Français d'esprit et de langue, pris les armes à la main dans un combat contre la France" (ibid., p.75) - adds further weight to Simon's and Saint-Laurent's common argument. Moreover it suggests the importance of tactical flexibility in the colonizer's mystification of his relationship with the colonized. If an insistence on the otherness of the colony's native inhabitants is the colonialists' principal strategic ploy, then a periodic appeal to their supposed "Frenchness" remains a useful tactical option.

The Other is liable to be transformed into the Double, in other words, whenever mythical capital may be made from such a move. As is the case here, in fact, where nationalist revolt is reduced to the status of a by-product of colonial assimilation: the colonized is only rebelling against France because the civilizing colonizer has made him so "French". France has brought its colonial subjects this far, and, so the argument runs, only France can lead them properly into the future. As Saint-Laurent's Kabyle mayor puts it: "...je serais fou si j'étais pour les rebelles. Leur victoire, ce serait la régression pour nous" (Saint-Laurent 1958, p.60).

However, the notion of native backwardness was not, by itself, enough to deflect the threat posed to European ideological hegemony by Muslim political violence; other methods of depoliticization would therefore be applied. Jean Brune, for instance, laid great stress on the religious fanaticism of the rebels, portraying Algerian nationalism as a new brand of Mahdism (Brune 1961, p.54 & passim). As for the ordinary Muslims who follow Brune's pretender to the Mahdi's throne, they are swayed only by force, as every self-respecting *pied-noir* knows. One of the *petits colons* described in *Cette haine qui ressemble à l'amour* is a case in point:

Il savait que les uns et les autres donnaient des gages aux rebelles pour ne pas compromettre un avenir éventuel et parce qu'ils leur étaient confusément reconnaissants de hâter par leur sacrifice une évolution dont ils profiteraient. Mais presque tous souhaitaient secrètement la victoire de la France. Ils attendaient au bord du chemin que le sort des armes décide entre les combattants affrontés dans l'arène... Ils restaient disponibles... (ibid., pp.205-206)

The mystification effected by this passage will be familiar in view of our discussion of Lartéguy's account of the aftermath of the massacre at Rahlem (see Chapter 1). It is this way of imaging the Other which Jean Pélégri draws attention to when describing the racism of an elderly female relative:

Avec elle, la solution du problème algérien était simple, ultra-simple.

- Il n'y a qu'à lire le Coran. Il est dit dans le Coran: <<La force, c'est la loi de Dieu.>> C'est pour cela que les Arabes ne respectent que la force... Il faut comprendre leur religion, à ces gens-là!

Et voilà. Voilà à quoi servait la religion des autres. (Pélégri 1959, p.105)

As Pélégri clearly appreciated, it was the historical refusal of the European

authorities to countenance even limited nationalist opposition to the colonial order that led directly to the outbreak of politically inspired violence in Algeria (see Kahler 1984, pp.335-336). It was the *pieds-noirs'* cult of force, in other words, not that of the indigenous population, that made revolution inevitable in the colony: "Si bien qu'un jour les petits-fils du sergent Traradj Akli s'étaient mis à croire eux aussi, à notre exemple, que la force c'est la loi de Dieu" (Pélégri 1959, p.116; cf. p.130).

The FLN atrocities also discussed in Chapter 1, and subsequently, are quite straightforwardly tied in with this belief in the subordination of Muslim political consciousness to displays of force; indeed, our remarks about the locals' response to the paras' brutal riposte to one such display will have served to prepare the ground for the present discussion. For, if the FLN's acts of violence are so horrific, runs the argument, it can only be because its leaders are seeking to coerce an otherwise uncommitted, if not actually unsympathetic, body of native opinion. The murders, mutilations, arson attacks and so forth are, moreover, to be regarded as manifestations of essentially atavistic behaviour: i.e. as a throwback to that pre-colonial barbarism which supposedly characterized the social organization of North Africa from the end of the Roman period to 1830. This is very much the reading of historical events encouraged by Brune's novel, which regularly presents graphic descriptions of horrific acts of violence. These are most often directed against the perpetrators' own kind, in order to enforce compliance with nationalist demands, but may also be directed at the settler community. In both cases, however, such behaviour is rationalized as a return to primitive savagery. So, the text's account of the torturing to death of a recalcitrant *marabout* - and of the subsequent mass murder of his fellow villagers - serves to make precisely the same point as the description of an innocent *colon's* "Christ-like" suffering at the hands of the FLN (Brune 1961, pp.544-547 & 172-173). Whatever the specific circumstances of such acts of terror, the mythical message is unchanged: the Other is now, and always has been, a *barbare*.

The *barbare* is perhaps the most enduring image of the FLN combatant to have been presented for both domestic and international consumption. The broad appeal of this figure is not difficult to understand. To begin with, it ties in with a clearly defined and time honoured European conception of the Maghreb, and, for that matter, of the Arab world as a whole: the myth of *Barbarie*, complete with pirates and slave-traders, sultans and their harems, heathen religious beliefs and unspeakable sexual practices, and a variety of other, equally frightening and fascinating, oriental or exotic characteristics (see Saïd 1978 & Kabbani 1986). Against this backdrop, the French presence in Algeria is readily comprehended in terms of the European *mission civilisatrice*: i.e. as the bringing of light to the benighted masses of North Africa. So, it is not only this broad mythical canvas, but also the generalized contemporary outrage at the alleged barbarism of the FLN guerrillas that we must bear in mind as we turn now to Claude Bonjean's remarkable novel, *Lucien chez les barbares* (1977).

Bonjean's use of the *barbare* theme is to be distinguished from those discussed hitherto in two crucial respects: its insistence on the original, properly linguistic, sense of the word and its derivatives; and its resistance to the familiar abusive connotations of the term as habitually applied to the Other. For Bonjean, in fact, *barbare* serves primarily as a synonym for "Algerian": his novel never refers to the French colony, nor to the war there, by name, and the term is employed to make the reader aware that the action is, indeed, set in North Africa - the Barbary Coast of maritime history and lore. So, Algeria becomes *la Barbarie*, an established geographical entity. The term *barbare* may, in consequence, be properly applied to the inhabitants of the land and, above all, their language. Bonjean's narrator duly refers to the "mots barbares" picked up by French soldiers in the course of their period of service in France's "unidentified" colony (Bonjean 1977, p.27). His account of the entertainments devised by the native *ralliés* - of whom more will be said shortly - describes their "chants barbares" (*ibid.*, p.67);



whilst the European victims of an urban bombing campaign wake to discover that "des graffiti barbares couvraient les murs" (ibid., p.162).

Of particular interest in this regard is the attention given to place names, which the inexperienced Lucien perceives as "des noms de lieux qu'on ne savait imaginer" (ibid., p.27), but which will become the backdrop to his own experiences of combat. Consider the following, typically spare, passage:

Lucien fut décoré. Les lieux où il avait accompli son exploit portaient des noms barbares. Leur mention rehaussait la citation. (ibid., p.130)

Like the military *habitués* who exchange "des propos inouïs" in order to impress the *bleus* (ibid., p.27), the rhetoric of the medal citation relies for its effect on the "exotic" quality of Arabo-Berber place names. Throughout his novel, Bonjean seeks to undermine any such exotic or oriental perceptions of Algeria and the Algerian war. His awareness of the importance of language in the colonial context is, as the foregoing quotation would suggest, central to this demystifying project.

Bonjean, in fact, is one of the few French authors to have paid any real attention to what Memmi calls "un drame linguistique" (Memmi 1957, p.127), that is to say the clash of his own mother tongue with that of the Other, be it Arabic or Berber. As Memmi explains, the ubiquity of the colonizer's language, its dominance of every sphere of social interaction in the colonial situation, means that bilingualism becomes an absolute necessity for the colonized: "Il est condition de toute communication, de toute culture et de tout progrès" (ibid., p.126). However, the colonized's eventual acquisition of the colonizer's language proves to be a decidedly mixed blessing:

...le bilingue colonial n'est sauvé de l'emurement que pour subir une catastrophe culturelle, jamais complètement surmontée.

La non-coïncidence entre la langue maternelle et la langue culturelle n'est pas propre au colonisé. Mais le bilinguisme colonial ne peut être assimilé à n'importe quel dualisme linguistique. La possession de deux langues n'est pas seulement celle de deux outils, c'est la participation à deux royaumes psychiques et culturels. Or, ici, *les deux univers symbolisés, portés par les deux langues, sont en conflit*: ce sont ceux du colonisateur et du colonisé. (ibid., p.126)

Although Bonjean's treatment of the theme of language does not undertake the kind of sophisticated analysis of the colonial relationship just quoted, it does at least draw the reader's attention to the role of linguistic conflict within the broader pattern of the Algerian war. So, for instance, Lucien's witnessing of a revolt by native troops, largely provoked by an NCO's attempt to turn them out of their accommodation, testifies to an unusual preoccupation with the details of language on the part of the author:

Cette révolte couvait. Elle éclata en apostrophes barbares lorsque Terneuse pénétra sous les tentes avec l'intention d'en évacuer les occupants. Le son de la langue barbare évoque le fracas des lames entrechoquées. Le ferrailleur le plus bruyant portait un chiffon en huit sur la tête et une moustache noire. Le noir de sa moustache accentuait le gris mauvais du teint. Ce scélérat s'appelait Rohour, se prétendait le fils d'un chef de tribu, était fâché qu'on ne l'eût pas embarqué avec ses camarades, éparpillait furieusement de la pointe du pied le fumier qui servait de lit; en un mot, il en avait assez. (Bonjean 1977, pp.206-207)

This account successfully draws attention to the linguistic predicaments of both the French soldier and the native auxiliary: the NCO's invasion of the *ralliés'* tents gives rise to an outburst, not in the language of the country whose cause they have been recruited to serve, but rather in that of their colonized homeland; the very sound of their speech, meanwhile, emphasizes its alien quality to French ears. The ironic description of the angry recruits' ringleader is similarly interesting. For, if anyone is to be regarded as a *scélérat*, then it should be Terneuse, whose attempt to extort money from the unfortunate recruit will lead to his being shot by Rohour's father. As for this relative, Rohour is quite justified in "claiming" that he is the head of his tribe: he might have added that the noble old man also served under the French colours at Verdun (*ibid.*, p.219). So, it is the son of an Algerian *poilu* that Bonjean's unscrupulous sergeant attempts to swindle. This type of attitude to locally recruited troops is by no means untypical of that displayed by the French military in *Lucien chez les barbares*.

If Rohour's complexion is remarkable for its "gris mauvais", then the explanation is almost certainly to be found in native poverty and ill-health. Unlike the

positively motivated *harkis* to be found in the work of Saint-Laurent and Volkoff, Bonjean's *supplétifs locaux* join the French forces in the most unromantic of circumstances: "Onze indigènes misérables avaient demandé à s'engager, pour de l'argent" (ibid., p.125).

The eventual fate of these eleven recruits can be predicted, to a certain extent, in view of an earlier account of the murder of a native sentry by French troops. The victim, Mekoub, is himself responsible for the death - which he claims to be accidental - of a young second lieutenant. This situation is further complicated by the fact that the officer, in spite of his timid appearance, was the unit's torturer, and had just killed a native "suspect" who would not, or could not, talk. Bonjean's description of the interrogation and summary execution of Mekoub is typically terse:

La sentinelle, remise sur ses pieds, geignait, bredouillait des excuses... Un passe-montagne étouffait ses lamentations. Le capitaine le lui arracha. Un briquet éclaira les pommettes aiguës d'un indigène. <<Mekoub>>, intervint Terneuse, <<un rallié. Il est chez nous depuis trois mois>>... Une voix accusa: <<Il a voulu tuer Perna>>, une autre: <<Que fait-on de lui?>> Le capitaine haussa les épaules.

Le lendemain soir, Mekoub fut ramené mort, le crâne pulvérisé, d'une corvée de bois. (ibid., p.38)

The eleven recruits will be treated with contempt, brutality, and, above all, suspicion. Regarded as *vauriens* from the outset, it is scarcely surprising that Bonjean's *mercenaires* should quickly discourage their instructors "par leur indiscipline et leur incroyable inaptitude au maniement des armes" (ibid., pp.125-126). Two of the recruits never return from their first leave. Of the remaining nine *harkis*, one is shortly to desert, killing a soldier and wounding two others in the process. The military's response to this, not unexpected, *trahison* (ibid., p.127) is swift and merciless. This time, the task of dealing with the Algerian "traitor" falls to Lucien and his unit. So it is that the central figure comes to corner the deserter near an abandoned village:

Il y eut ce bruit de carton ondulé qu'on déchire, une rafale. Touché, un soldat garrotta son biceps. Lucien rampa jusqu'au ravin et dégoupilla une grenade. Il jeta la grenade et la terre entra dans son estomac. Une fumée blanche s'élevait du trou. Puis ce brouillard se dissipa; Lucien vit le déserteur crucifié, une mitrailleuse à ses pieds. Il abaissa son arme. L'indigène gémissait, balbutiait dans son dialecte rogommeux. Il

tenta de détacher un bras... De toute façon, Lucien ne comprenait pas cette langue.  
Le capitaine fit transporter le corps dans le hameau... (ibid., p.128)

It is this "exploit", no less, which will earn Lucien his decoration, as previously discussed. The incident does not merely undermine official versions of the war - those images of the conflict represented by the medal citation - it also throws new light on the Self's relationship with the Other. Once again, note the text's insistence on the linguistic drama created by the colonial distribution of forces: in a moment of great stress, the colonized deserts the colonizer's language, just as he has deserted his army. Lucien cannot understand Arabic, or Berber, and the Other dies as a result: his demise is as much a product of this failure of communication as it is of any perceived threat to the French soldier. Also worthy of interest here is the rhetorical association of the native's suffering with the Passion: i.e. "le déserteur crucifié". This is a figure to which we shall return when we come to consider the depiction of the Other as victim.

The body of the dead deserter will be used by the army as a means to *mouiller*, or compromise, the remaining eight recruits. Ordered to shoot the corpse, their terrified acquiescence will be interpreted, not as an indication of their good faith, but rather as a sign of their cowardice, and thus of their essential colonizability:

Le capitaine discourait. Il disait:  
- Vous êtes des lâches. Vous avez, sans protester, souillé l'un des vôtres.  
Cette lâcheté vous condamne à la servilité. (ibid., p.129)

There is no pretence at asserting the homogeneity of the French military's European and Muslim elements here, with the officer's description of the dead man as "l'un des vôtres" being particularly eloquent. In fact, the *ralliés* are in a classic "no-win" situation. If they go along with the military's brutality, then they are cowards and doomed to servility; if they resist, then they are the objects of even more intense suspicion. So, following his failure to execute Terneuse's order to "finish off" a wounded native woman (ibid., pp.136-140), Moumoud is regarded as both a coward and a potential traitor:

Terneuse confia, plus tard, en aparté:

- Gardons-nous de Moumoud. Pour réparer sa lâcheté, il est prêt, j'en suis sûr, à nous massacrer tous. (ibid., p.140)

Yet, in spite of the appalling treatment to which they are subjected by their French "comrades", the natives continue to come forward in response to army appeals for recruits. Lucien joins Terneuse, a driver named Guichard, and "un interprète du nom de Tovar, rallié des premières heures" (ibid., p.193), in a mobile recruiting team. Despite his long service, Tovar reveals, albeit in his sleep, that he remains fundamentally "other":

...Tovar somnole. A quoi rêve un supplétif? Il rêve sauvagement comme si sa race l'avait récupéré, le temps d'un songe. (ibid.)

Nevertheless, it is Tovar who puts the recruiting team's message over, very effectively, to his fellow *indigènes*:

Ils seront deux cents rameutés par porte-voix à accepter de rejoindre Tovar dans son chien et loup. Pourtant il ne leur promettait pas la lune, ni reconnaissance de la Patrie, ni évacuation en cas de désastre, mais, traduisant toujours Terneuse <<une bonne solde, du tabac, et la fraternité des combats>>. (ibid.)

The predicament of the Other as *rallié* is nicely summed up by the image of "son chien et loup": the characteristic and characterizing alienation of the native recruit, from both French "friend" and Algerian "foe", from military dog and FLN wolf, is clearly to the fore here. As, indeed, is the scandalous indifference of the French nation to the eventual fate of its Muslim defenders: the list of things not promised by Tovar is pure Volkoff, in fact. As for the supposed benefits of service in the French colonial cause - pay, tobacco, fraternity - the evident irony with which the narrator presents Tovar's words is enough to undermine them completely. Money and cigarettes are sufficiently venal to require no critical demystification, whilst the "fraternité des combats" appealed to by Terneuse is belied by such incidents as the murder of the native sentry, the bloody desertion of his fellow countryman, and, above all, the sergeant's own attempt to swindle Rohour and his father. It therefore comes as no surprise to learn that the "brotherhood of arms" should - like its obvious civilian counterpart, the much vaunted *fraternisation* of Europeans and Muslims - be destined to

end in the violent deaths of those natives unable to resist the temptations of the colonizer:

La guerre avait pris un tour si singulier que les gradés occupaient tout leur temps en séances de réflexion ou à compulser les manuels d'école. Le capitaine, exténué, ne dormait plus...

Cela avait débuté par un massacre dans un des villages où le président du Conseil s'était fait applaudir. Les scènes de fraternisation auxquelles sa visite avait donné lieu, ici comme ailleurs, menaçaient le crédit des maquisards...

Présageant le pire, le capitaine licencia ses nouvelles recrues, éléments de désordres prévisibles. Ils partirent l'un derrière l'autre, adressant à la sentinelle le salut réglementaire qu'ils avaient appris, puis ils s'éloignèrent, bras ballants, dans leurs anciennes défroques. Aucun ne parvint jusqu'à chez lui. En cours de route, ils furent tous hachés par le menu. (ibid., pp.227-228)

As seems so often to be the case, it is the Other who must pay with his life for the delusions of the colonizing power.

To conclude this section of the discussion, let us return to our earlier claim that Bonjean's use of the *barbare* theme is remarkable for its resistance to the familiar abusive connotations of the term as applied to the Other. Only twice in *Lucien chez les barbares* does the author equate violent acts with barbarism, and in neither of these cases is the colonized straightforwardly identified as the *barbare* in question. Thus, in the following account of rebel reprisals against a gang of military rapists, it is by no means obvious that the Other is to be regarded as barbarous or the Self as civilized. The narrator begins by describing the problems posed by the sexual frustration of a newly posted tank unit:

Trois kilos de bromure additionnés au vin des bidons ne parvinrent pas à réduire la bosse de leur braguette. Pire, cette alchimie rendit fou. Quelques-uns, toute prudence abolie, descendirent dans les quartiers indigènes et violèrent deux filles sur des sacs de grain, dans un hangar. Le lendemain, quatre des criminels étaient portés disparus.

Une patrouille les retrouva, alignés sur le bitume, à poil, assassinés, émasculés. Les badauds montraient le trou qui béait à l'endroit du sexe. Une Citroën à cocarde tricolore fendit la foule à coups de trompe furieuse. Il en sortit le gouverneur et sa femme. Elle, se soulageant dans un mouchoir brodé, lui, raclant sa gorge et déclarant: <<Des détraqués? Parfait. Je connais une thérapeutique.>> Le spectacle de cette barbarie l'avait converti. (ibid., pp.163-164)

The seemingly authorial comment in the final sentence of this passage should not be allowed to mislead us. For, whilst we, as readers, are encouraged systematically

to align ourselves with the position of the subject of the *énonciation* - the narrator or "implied" author - we must not overlook the ironic juxtaposition of scenes which precedes this remark. By the time the notion of barbarism is introduced, the reader has already been effectively insulated against its mythical power to persuade. It is the governor, the civil representative of the colonial power, who first rationalizes the Other's violence in terms of mythical stereotypes; it is through his eyes that the murderers and mutilators of the French troops are perceived as *détraqués*. The reader, meanwhile, remains conscious throughout of the fact that the rebels' victims were themselves the perpetrators of a brutal act of violence. As *criminels*, they merit their fate, and the FLN's action is thus seen for what it actually is: the understandable, if extreme, response of the colonized to the very real aggression of the colonizer. The governor's *barbarie* thus becomes our *représailles*. In the process, Bonjean questions the legitimacy of all such spectacular conversions to the cause of *Algérie française* in the wake of rebel atrocities, as epitomized by that of Jacques Soustelle following the Philippeville massacres of 1955 (see Talbott 1980, pp.49-50).

If anyone is presented as a *barbare* in Bonjean's novel, in fact, it is the French soldier in Algeria. Just like Lartéguy's *Esclavier* - "<<Peut-être pourrions-nous empêcher l'empire de s'écrouler en nous transformant nous-mêmes en barbares...?>>" (Lartéguy 1960, p.378) - Bonjean's captain will seek to explain and excuse military brutality in terms of the nature of the conflict and the barbarism of the enemy. Consider the following address to his men:

- Vous êtes la meilleure unité de l'armée française. Du nord au sud, de l'est à l'ouest, vous êtes craints. Vous avez acquis une réputation de dureté. Cette renommée vous oblige, et je ne tolérerai pas qu'on manque à cette obligation.

<<Ne vous demandez pas où est le bien et le mal. Faites la guerre selon les lois qu'elle s'est données. J'en sais qui ont reculé; ils parlent de barbarie. Moi, j'affirme: le courage est du côté des barbares, parce que la facilité est de l'autre.>> (Bonjean 1987, pp.87-88)

The officer's words must be set against a backdrop of military exactions, including the Nazi-style public execution of hostages taken at random among the

civilian population, carried out in the wake of an FLN ambush on Lucien's regiment.

The following is a typical example of the unit's response:

La fureur l'avait pris, et il ne faisait pas bon croiser son chemin. Les poings émiettaient les dents; les poignards se plaisaient à trancher les oreilles. Abandonnait-on une maison, qu'un indigène, suspendu à une poutre par les pieds et les poignets, tournoyait encore au bout de ses cordes, vertèbres brisées: on appelait ce supplice le tourniquet. (ibid., pp.86-87)

It is small wonder that, as the regiment's reputation for ferocity spreads, the terrified Muslim population should hasten to tell all they know to the occupying forces.

Not that it does them much good:

Les prisonniers se jetaient à genoux et baisaient les bottes. Ils dégorgeaient leurs renseignements; on les tuait. (ibid., p.87)

Thanks to Bonjean's detailing of the Other's suffering at the hands of the French military, appeals to the myth of the *barbare*, such as that made by the captain, fall on deaf ears. The reader of *Lucien chez les barbares*, in short, is presented with a demystified version of the barbarian theme which serves not to validate the gloss given to historical events by the myth-producers of *Algérie française*, but rather to draw critical attention to one of the key figures of their rhetoric.

If the rebellious *indigène* is not to be depicted as a barbarian, then how else may his challenge to the colonizer's ideological hegemony be deflected? One possible solution is, paradoxically, to depict the FLN guerrilla as the worthy adversary of the French combatant. Consider the following remarks drawn from the literature of an earlier conflict:

...I can't say I had ever hated him [the Boche] very wildly. You find hate more among journalists and politicians at home than among fighting men. (Buchan 1930, p.681)

The idea of a community of enemy equals, mystically united by the very combat which sets them at one another's throats, is not a new one, as Richard Hannay's appeal to the theme demonstrates with regard to the 1914-1918 war. It is therefore hardly surprising that the myth-makers of the Fourth and Fifth Republics should have sought to make similar capital out of the relationship supposed to exist



between the French military and their Algerian opponents. Their task was facilitated by the fact that many of the rebellion's key military figures had served themselves in the French army. Ahmed Ben Bella, the focus of the external FLN leadership and destined to be the first president of an independent Algeria, was only the most visible of the nationalists' *anciens combattants*. Personally decorated for valour by General de Gaulle, the future head of state had served with distinction in the armed forces of the very country whose rule in Algeria he now sought to overthrow; an experience common to many of the FLN's fighters and one which was found at all levels of the rebels' political hierarchy.

Lartéguy's guerrilla leader, Si Lahcen, is a typical figure in this respect. From the outset, in fact, the rebel commander is represented as the enemy double of Raspéguy and his paratroopers. This, in so far as Si Lahcen, who is a former warrant officer and a veteran of the Indochinese conflict (Lartéguy 1960, p.341), remains a soldier above all. Moreover, the ex-NCO served in the unit commanded by Mahmoudi, the native Algerian member of Raspéguy's band of radically disillusioned paratroop officers (*ibid.*, p.342). It is thus highly ironic that Raspéguy should, with his men, be charged with the destruction of Si Lahcen's group of guerrillas.

A number of points need to be made about Lartéguy's depiction of the rebel chief and his fatal confrontation with his former comrades in arms. To begin with, the author's insistence on the individual FLN combatant, his background and aspirations, is to be understood as part of a wider tendency to "personalize" the Algerian conflict, both in this novel and in the French literature of the Algerian war as a whole. This is not to suggest - Barthes's previously quoted remarks notwithstanding - that there is anything inherently wrong in deciding to focus the attention of the reader on an individual rather than on a group; nor, by the same token, is it to imply that writing about collectivities is, of itself, less mystifying than dealing with personalities. Rather, what we have in mind here is the ease with which the general post-war trend towards

decolonization and the specific historical thrust of militant Algerian nationalism are both regularly explained away in terms of the essentially unconnected experiences of specific colonized individuals. So, whilst Si Lahcen's reasons for joining the rebellion may themselves be political - he joins the FLN when his coach business is ruined by a corrupt colonial official (*ibid.*, p.341) - his role in the struggle will be used, paradoxically, to make mythical capital out of his "natural" or apolitical reluctance to fight his former comrades.

A second feature of this tendency to personalization which bears discussion is the way in which it favours the discredited treatment of history as a series of one-to-one confrontations between "great men", with the broad mass of humanity reduced to the role of essentially passive followers or observers (*cf.* Chapter 4). The history of Muslim Algeria's struggle against the French colonial authorities and their military defenders for the right to self-determination thus becomes the story of Si Lahcen versus "l'administrateur de P..." and Colonel Raspéguy. Reductionism of this kind is clearly at work throughout the novel's description of the rebels' battle against the paratroopers, and is particularly convenient from Lartéguy's point of view in so far as it removes the need to discuss the troublesome problem of military intelligence-gathering methods. For, coming from a soldier, the guerrillas' tactics can safely be predicted by Lartéguy's heroes. So, Boisfeuras manages to deduce that the rebel chief has moved his unit down from the *djebel* and into the town, while Raspéguy is able to predict his opponent's moves with confidence in the eventual battle (*ibid.*, pp.343 & 369 respectively). In both cases, the aristocrat Glatigny is asked to put himself in the rebel commander's shoes:

- Glatigny, que ferais-tu à la place de Si Lahcen? (*ibid.*, p.343)
- Glatigny!
- Oui, mon colonel.
- Vous êtes Si Lahcen, vous êtes encerclé avec une centaine d'hommes sur un piton, avec très peu de vivres, d'eau et de munitions. Que feriez-vous? (*ibid.*, p.369)

The suggestions of a shared military identity, transcending the bounds of racial,

religious, and political affiliations, is surely clear enough in this marked repetition of a convenient formula. Also noticeable is the fact that the final showdown between the two sides should take place back up in the mountains, that is to say above the world of civilian society, in the rarefied atmosphere of an idealized military existence; the messy reality of a war in which civilians were all too regularly embroiled is replaced by "...a kind of purity ... the suggestion of a contest between equals, in the absence of civilians able to blunder into harm's way" (Talbot 1980, p.69).

That the paratroopers' adversary is indeed their equal as regards military prowess is never in doubt in the case of Si Lahcen. His own understanding of the thinking of his opponents mirrors that of Boisfeuras and Raspéguy, in marked contrast to the flawed thinking of his political counterpart in the local FLN hierarchy (Lartéguy 1960, p.345). Indeed, the *para* officers are only able to predict the guerrilla chief's moves because they correspond so closely to their own precepts. The site chosen by Si Lahcen for his last stand is testimony to his insight (ibid., p.363), while his final instructions to his men both demonstrate his military acumen and remind the reader once again of the source of his expertise:

Si Lahcen fit venir ses cinq chefs de groupe et leur exposa son plan: - Nous tiendrons jusqu'à la nuit, puis nous tenterons une sortie sur le point le plus faible du <<dispositif ennemi>>, afin de gagner l'oued. - Pour toutes les expressions, tous les mots techniques, Lahcen employait le français et il éprouvait un certain plaisir à étaler ses connaissances militaires devant ses subordonnés. (ibid., p.366)

Lartéguy twice overtly underlines his covert mythical claim that his paratrooper heroes, in spite of the might of the military machine which backs them up, are fighting Si Lahcen and his men "à égalité" (ibid., pp.343 & 370). This is not altogether implausible in view of the historical division of French military labour in Algeria (see Talbot 1980, pp.63-64). However, it demands some interesting juggling with terms on the part of the author of *Les Centurions*. So, whilst we may read initially that Si Lahcen is in charge of "Une bande de cent trente hommes", as his *para* identity is developed his group of guerrillas ceases to be referred to dismissively as a *bande* and

becomes instead "sa troupe": that is to say an altogether more fitting adversary for Raspéguy and his men (Lartéguy 1960, pp.343 & 363 respectively; cf. Barthes 1957, p.138).

Si Lahcen's standing as a worthy opponent for Lartéguy's *paras* also requires that he be portrayed as altogether less savage than the vast majority of the rebels referred to in the novel. To this end, Lartéguy regularly seeks to demonstrate the relative humanity of this particular guerrilla commander. The criticism levelled at him and his style of warfare by Ahmed, the FLN's local political commissar and the man responsible for the treacherous and bloody murder of Merle and Bistenave, is typical of this trend:

Ahmed haussa les épaules. Il n'avait que peu de sympathie pour le Kabyle Si Lahcen, ses manières de vieux sous-officier, sa lenteur d'esprit, sa prudence. La bande qu'il commandait ressemblait de plus en plus à une compagnie régulière et, si on le laissait faire, il affublerait tout le monde de galons et d'insignes, interdirait le pillage et le viol, tout ce qui donnait à cette guerre son attrait puissant sur les êtres primitifs qu'il avait à commander. (Lartéguy 1960, p.345; cf. pp.361-366)

Lartéguy is really having his cake and eating it here. Not only are the opponents of continued French rule in Algeria divided by both ethnic conflict and, much as in Lartéguy's France, differences between (good) soldiers and (bad) politicians; they are also threatened by arguments between those few leaders committed to a properly "military" campaign and the mass of bloodthirsty "primitives" under their command. Si Lahcen may thus be established as a worthy adversary for the novel's *para* heroes, without the bulk of the French army's opponents becoming any less despicable as a result. This particular representative of the Other remains a soldier, and may consequently be regarded as the adversary double of the military Self; the rest of the FLN's troops remain what they always were: *barbares*.

In fact, the wholly exceptional nature of Raspéguy's guerrilla adversary is underlined by the character himself. After reflecting on his experiences in Indochina, and particularly on the friendships which developed there between himself and his French comrades in arms, Si Lahcen makes a major statement of his personal alienation

from the rebels and their cause:

Il prit soudain conscience que tous ses amis étaient dans cette armée contre laquelle il se battait et que tous les siens, au contraire, étaient pour lui des étrangers, et certains, comme Ahmed, lui faisaient horreur. (ibid., p.362)

What we have arrived at here is one of the central sources of mystification in the literature of the Algerian war: the notion that the war is, in some essential way, an unnatural one, setting brothers, lovers and friends against one another, and characterized as a result by a tragic *déchirement* (see Barthes 1957, p.138). As such, this theme is naturally one to which we shall be giving more detailed attention a little later. In the present connection, the myth is regularly uttered by means of references to the *médaille militaire* awarded to Si Lahcen for gallantry in the Indochinese war. The most dramatic of these references is also the most overtly mythical; it occurs as Si Lahcen dies, at the hands of Lieutenant Pinières:

Si Lahcen tomba sur les genoux en lâchant sa mitraillette, puis il roula quelques mètres sur la pente et ses poings, d'abord serrés, s'ouvrirent. Pinières le fouilla et sortit de sa poche la médaille militaire. Dans son portefeuille se trouvait aussi sa carte de pension et le texte de sa dernière citation en Indochine.

- Il y a quelque chose qui cloche dans cette guerre, dit Pinières à Esclavier. (Lartéguy 1960, p.373)

The likely reaction of the historically distanced reader of *Les Centurions* would be to consider the obduracy of French resistance to demands for change in the status of the nation's Algerian colony to be the single most important cause of the *malaise* experienced by Pinières and officers like him. However, the integrated contemporary consumer of the text can reasonably be supposed to have interpreted the above passage as intended, that it to say as further evidence of the "fratricidal" nature of the armed conflict between the Self and the Other.

Much like Bistenave (the transformed leader of the "mutins de Versailles") before him, Si Lahcen is most effectively recuperated by Lartéguy's military community in death. Raspéguy's report to the local army commander - a conceited and wholly useless traditionalist - on the successful outcome of his operation against the rebel *bande* provides the opportunity to put Si Lahcen's military standing beyond doubt and,

furthermore, to reiterate the novel's preferred view of the Algerian conflict as a tale of missed opportunities:

Raspéguy se mit au garde-à-vous, comme s'il citait une nouvelle fois le rebelle à l'ordre de l'armée:

- <<Sergent-chef Si Lahcen, du Troisième Régiment de Tirailleurs Algériens: magnifique entraîneur d'hommes, combattant splendide, assiégé à l'intérieur d'un poste par des forces infiniment supérieures, son officier étant tué, a pris le commandement et, bien que grièvement blessé, a refusé de se rendre, résistant six heures jusqu'à l'arrivée des renforts.>>

- C'est ce même Si Lahcen, mon colonel, que le lieutenant Pinières a tué, alors qu'il essayait d'enrayer la débâcle de ses hommes. Il aurait été plus facile de le garder avec nous. (ibid., p.374)

Lartéguy is by no means alone in displaying a predilection for depicting the Other *qua* rebel, i.e. in his most obviously adversary manifestation, as the double of the military Self. It is not the open supporter of *Algérie française* after all, but an outspoken critic of the war, Gilbert Cesbron, who came up with the following statement of the fundamental identity of the French soldier and his FLN opponents:

...l'ennemi véritable se terre à l'arrière, dans les villes: races de larves envieuses, esclaves sournois, hommes de bureau, de parapluie et de condoléances. Mais l'adversaire qui sait souffrir aussi longtemps, se battre aussi durement et enfin viser mieux que vous, l'adversaire qui vous tue n'est pas votre ennemi. (Cesbron 1962, pp.348-349)

The French military's campaign against its supposed enemy in the rear will be very familiar territory by now. Indeed, the interest of the foregoing passage derives less from any contribution made to the army's cause in its extended war of words with the metropolitan liberal intelligentsia (in spite of the not insignificant detail that the author of this particular example of military romanticism is himself a prominent member of that much pilloried group), but rather from its profoundly representative quality. For, what we must recognize here is precisely that appeal to the myth of a transcendent warrior identity voiced in turn by Buchan's Hannay and Lartéguy's paratrooper heroes.

That Cesbron's reference to this particular Algerian war myth is, as suggested, typical of the relevant literature can be demonstrated, quite straightforwardly, by briefly considering a range of metropolitan treatments of the relationship between the French

soldier and his Algerian adversary. Such different texts as Jean-Jacques Rochard's *Max Skoda* (1965), Guy Croussy's *Ne pleure pas, la guerre est bonne* (1975), Claude Bonjean's *Lucien chez les barbares* (1977), and Vladimir Volkoff's *La Leçon d'anatomie* (1980) all share the preoccupation of Lartéguy and Cesbron with enemy equals. More specifically, they are similarly inclined to image the war as a series of examples of one-to-one combat. So, for instance, Cesbron may write about his hero's repeated failure to encounter the enemy as "la chaîne infinie des rendez-vous manqués" (Cesbron 1962, p.345), thereby suggesting both the role of destiny and a conflict between equally competent individuals. Rochard, for his part, prefers to present the struggle between the army and the FLN as an extended duel involving only volunteers and fought high in the mountains, as in Lartéguy's novel. The image of combat which emerges from Bonjean's account of the struggle between "la section de Lucien sur le piton 222" and "la terrible bande qui régnait sur un immense massif, à l'est du pays" (Bonjean 1977, p.164) contributes to the propagation of this noble vision of the conflict. For Croussy, meanwhile, the single military operation which so dominates the whole of his narrative is summed up in a most revealing fashion by the narrator: "il me semble qu'elle n'a été qu'un effort pour chasser un homme" (Croussy 1975, p.13); and again, a little later: "Nous étions quatre hommes réunis pour capturer Amirouche mort ou vif" (ibid., p.47).

In each of these examples, the Algerian conflict is reduced to a very personal battle for supremacy: if not always a one-to-one contest, at least something very like it. This is similarly true of Volkoff's depiction of the relationship between the French military and its rebel adversaries. In *La Leçon d'anatomie*, with its insistence on the role of the *seigneur* in the making of history, it is only logical that the struggle for the present and future control of Algeria should be presented as a trial of strength between Colonel Beaujeux and his rebel counterpart, Si Hamou Aslam. Nor is it surprising that the FLN leader should resemble his French opposite number more closely than many of

his supposed comrades. We read, for instance, that "Si Hamou Aslam était un homme raisonnable, cruel, non pas sanguinaire" (Volkoff 1980, p.389); or later "C'était un type réglo" (ibid., p.447). The reason for the rebel's good standing is not hard to find. Rabah Oumokrane, Beaujeux's friend and, note, former fellow officer, takes up the point:

Aslam est correct. C'est un tigre, mais il est correct. (ibid., p.208)

This combination of ferocity and decency has an obvious name in the fictive Algeria of Volkoff and those like him. If Si Hamou Aslam is an honourable opponent, the obvious explanation is that, first and foremost - and in common with both his lieutenant, Moussa Mokrane, and, most importantly, with Beaujeux himself - "C'est un militaire" (ibid., p.209). And, of course, being a soldier is, for military romantics such as Rochard at least, altogether better than being a civilian: his "Ennemis bien-aimés" (Rochard 1965, pp.14-15) are united by their common superiority to the non-military world. Thus it is that Max Skoda is able to consider his armed opponents as part of his *clan*:

Il méprisait, ou du moins ignorait, tout ce qui n'appartenait pas à sa confrérie. Le monde était simple. Il y avait le clan d'une part, dans lequel il incluait confusément l'adversaire, et de l'autre, le reste du monde.

Ce monde était représenté, dans son esprit, par les marchands, ceux qui vivent de compromis, de combines et d'or, et règnent sur un troupeau d'esclaves satisfaits ou endormis. [...] A l'opposé, sa propre caste était celle du sang et de la force. (ibid., p.28; cf. Perrault 1961, pp.98-106)

Although Guy Croussy starts from very different ideological premises, he comes to some remarkably similar mythical conclusions in his account of the troubled reaction of French soldiers to their Algerian opponents; here, the troops finally come face to face with them, as prisoners:

Décidément, ils ne s'habitueraient jamais à ces hommes que l'on force à descendre des montagnes avant de mourir. Ils semblaient se dire: <<Deux hommes sont arrivés, l'un est sauvé, l'autre est condamné, comme une grâce est accordée ou refusée, deux larrons sont crucifiés, l'un est sauvé, l'autre est damné. Comment comprendre ce partage?>> (Croussy 1975, pp.24-25)



Clearly, Croussy's troops are just as much victims of the Algerian war as the native prisoners for whom they feel such easily understandable pity. Indeed, the French soldier and his FLN opponent are readily assimilable to the "deux larrons" of the quotation, with the second-level reading being that both combatants are crucified on the tree of French civilian indifference, or something of the kind. An overt critic of the war thus comes to represent the men who actually fought it as, in some special way, identical, and thereby contributes to the propagation of the right-wing military romantics' myth of a common military essence.

This notion is reiterated a little later in the novel, when Croussy's hero-narrator makes the observation (reminiscent of the Maupassant short story "Amour") that "A la longue, chasseur et gibier avaient fini par se ressembler" (ibid., p.35; cf. pp.95 & 106). Indeed, Croussy repeatedly portrays the two sets of combatants as being indistinguishable in the Algerian mountains, deserts and forests where their lethal confrontation occurs. So, for instance, when a number of corpses are discovered, it proves to be impossible to determine whether they are those of one's own side or of the enemy (ibid., pp.135-136; cf. p.176). The leaders of the two sides are united, meanwhile, in being "des hommes forts"; while their men find it hard to tell friend from foe as they join battle in the depths of the forest (ibid., pp.161-162). As for the hero-narrator, he finds it ever more difficult to identify the participants in the conflict, going so far as to hide from his fellow troops on two occasions (ibid., pp.152-153 & 177). Having felt sympathy for the lot of the Other in life (ibid., p.139), the French soldier, as depicted by Croussy, is destined to mirror his FLN opponent even in death. Note the clear parallel between the demise of the protagonist and that of Amirouche as described in two, quite separate but juxtaposed, official communiqués:

Commandement militaire

30 mars 1959

[...] Amirouche a été abattu alors qu'il se défendait dos au ravin. (ibid., pp.188-189)

Commandement militaire

30 mars 1959

[...] Trois hommes, dont la mort remontait à plusieurs jours, gisaient au fond d'un ravin, en contrebas d'un pont où l'ennemi avait commencé à les enterrer après les avoir enveloppés dans leurs toiles de bivouac. Le quatrième gisait, seul, à côté d'une mule, dos au ravin. (ibid., p.189)

The format chosen for the description of these deaths, that of two official press releases from the French military, inevitably leads to an automatic linking of the relevant events in the mind of the reader: just as the novel opens with the association of the two combatants by means of its constant reference to the theme of the "traque" (ibid., pp.11-56), it closes with their mystical union in death. The parallelism of the identical dates and of the two men's positions at the time of their respective deaths serves to underline this formal linkage, whilst the care afforded to their enemies' corpses by the Algerian guerrillas plainly makes its own potently mythical contribution to the novel's treatment of the theme of the enemy equal.

If a single characteristic could be said to epitomize the French military's historical, as opposed to fictional, opponent in North Africa, it would surely be the FLN's failure to conform to the traditional view of what constitutes an armed force. In contrast to its classically organized adversary, the rebel army was made up of small units scattered across, and hidden in, the countryside. While the European army which it opposed was clearly identifiable as such, being readily distinguishable from the civilian population which it sought to defend, the ALN was, in contrast, difficult to isolate from the Muslim community, which not only provided it with all of its recruits and the bulk of its intelligence, but also continued to feed it and frequently to house it. Moreover, this indigenous population kept silent about the activities of the rebel fighters and the politico-military network which supported them in their struggle, thus depriving the French army of its single most valuable source of information about the personnel and the organization of the nationalist rebellion.

With the ALN's "irregulars" being virtually indistinguishable from what we may regard as the more properly civilian portion of the native population, and with its "regular" component in any case avoiding large-scale confrontations with the military,

pursuing instead the altogether more appropriate hit-and-run tactics of a highly mobile guerrilla force, it proved to be extremely difficult for the *forces de l'ordre* to get to grips with their Algerian opponents. The systematic use of torture and other such atrocities followed logically from these historical premises: once a military rather than a political solution to the nationalist insurrection had been decided upon, *la sale guerre* was the inevitable response to the terrorist campaign of an adversary which, in line with Mao's dictum, lived in the population "like a fish in water".

It is this reality which writers like Cesbron, Bonjean and Croussy are trying to communicate when they refer to the FLN guerrillas as being *invisibles* or *insaisissables*. As the eponymous hero of *Lucien chez les barbares* puts it in a letter to the mother of a dead comrade:

<<Les balades n'en finissent pas; l'ennemi est insaisissable, je le soupçonne d'avancer sur un chemin parallèle: cette guerre sera éternelle.>> (Bonjean 1977, p. 49 & passim; cf. Cesbron 1962, pp.342-345 & Croussy 1975, pp. 78 & 91-93)

It is precisely the extreme difficulty involved in attempting to "seize" the FLN guerrilla, both militarily and from a psychological point of view, that accounts for the tendency of French writers of every stripe to depict the Other, *qua* combatant, as the double of the military Self. The unknown, and perhaps even unknowable, reality of the nationalist *moudjahidine* is replaced by something which is comfortably familiar, namely the military romanticism of Western tradition. Thus, even critics of the war like Bonjean - and Lucien's ironic assessment of the conflict's likely duration makes his creator's own political position clear enough - look to the nationalist fighter as to something "knowable" in terms of the French military mentality. This is a serious error of historical analysis in our view, and one which is implicitly recognized by the very writers whose work furthers the myth of a transcendent military identity. So, despite his cited portrayal of the rebel *fellagha* as the enemy equals of his representatives of the French army, the liberal Cesbron is in duty bound to take note of the absolutely fundamental difference between the soldier and his guerrilla opponent: the FLN is at

home in Algeria, the French army, for all its claims to the contrary, is not. Thus we read that France's North African territory is itself radically hostile to the French combatant in a way that it is not to his indigenous counterpart:

...un pays qui, tout entier, vous guette; où rochers, hommes et arbres sont de connivence. Un pays truqué de fond en comble; et chaque olivier, chaque chêne-liège de ce bois-ci recelait des armes luisantes de graisse; et lorsqu'on écartait une broussaille à ras de terre, dans cette plaine-là, deux yeux d'homme et le regard étroit de son fusil brillaient au fond d'un trou.

[...]

Pays truqué, hanté, où les fusées éclairantes révélaiient des fantômes à l'arme luisante, des détalades de burnous. Rochers en forme d'hommes, tueurs en posture de rocher... Peuple au double visage et, sur le douar le plus déserté, flotte un immense étendard vert et blanc... Djellabas qui s'entrouvrent sur une arme, le temps d'une rafale; mais déjà il n'y a plus là qu'un innocent berger, qu'un vieillard respectable... (Cesbron 1962, pp.342-344)

Cesbron is getting much closer here to what we might, on the basis of the foregoing summary of the French soldier's historical experience of his Algerian adversary, regard as a demystified vision of the Other. This is argued not because we believe the Algerian countryside to have been "in league" with the FLN in some mystical way, but rather to the extent that Cesbron's treatment of the French military's enemy is suggestive of the basic gulf existing between the colonizer and the colonized, on the one hand, and of the total nature of the Algerian war, on the other.

Similar points are made in a directly comparable fashion by both Bonjean and Croussy. The former describes the military's destruction of the natural environment along with the rebels which it shelters (Bonjean 1977, pp.95-97 & 172-173), while the latter talks of the guerrillas' special relationship with their native land in the following terms:

Le rmel - les sables de terres légères -, les sra - les terres à blé protégées de l'érosion -, les tins - les argiles lourdes - avaient reçu la visite des partisans, les avaient nourris, les avaient soignés, aujourd'hui ils paraissent dormir.

Avec l'apparition du désert s'était achevé le bled el makhzen - le pays soumis aux souverains des villes - et avait commencé le bled es siba - le pays de la dissidence et de l'indépendance. (Croussy 1975, p.142)

In contrast to many French novelists, Croussy used his knowledge of Arabic not to render Algeria more easily *saisissable*, and thus liable to colonialist circumscription,

but rather, as here, to emphasize the profoundly alien nature of both its geography and its culture. The point is very clearly made that the reign of the French rulers of Algeria is destined to come to an end sooner or later, just like that of the Ottoman "souverains des villes" who preceded them (cf. Ageron 1964, p.114). For, not only is the continued rule of the colonial power threatened by the nationalist guerrillas, it is also challenged by both the land itself and its civilian inhabitants. As Bonjean's hero explains to his lover (who also happens to be the mother of the dead comrade referred to earlier), the war is everywhere and everyone:

- Où est la guerre? questionnait-elle.

Il la conduisait alors au sommet de la colline et montrait les noires montagnes qui fortifiaient l'horizon.

- La guerre est là, expliquait-il.

Puis son doigt dessinait la plaine jaune et orange.

- Et là également.

Il désignait les enfants indigènes dégringolant la rue devant eux, sur des planches munies de roulettes.

- Là encore, poursuivait-il.

Et d'une pauvre et d'un vieillard sur le trottoir:

- La guerre, aussi, c'est eux... Tous, ennemis. (Bonjean 1977, p.106)

Lucien's brutally lucid reply to Paule Jonin's question is, perhaps, the single most convincing literary evocation of the total nature of *la sale guerre*. In a "revolutionary war", such as that fought by the FLN guerrillas against the French, only two positions are possible: *pro* and *contra*, with no intermediate stance being recognized by either the forces of colonial order or their insurrectionary challengers. There are thus only friends and foes in the Manichaean universe of the Algerian conflict - who is not with us is, of necessity, against us - with no credence being given by either side to French liberal appeals to spare the innocents. Indeed, the doctrine of *guerre révolutionnaire*, whether as applied by the FLN or by its French military opponents, denies the very existence of innocence: the original sin of racial belonging, of European and Muslim ethnicity, determines each individual's role in the colonial drama, each individual's status as Self or Other, once and for all. As Croussy's hero-narrator realizes, any perceived similarities between enemy combatants are outweighed

by their objective differences:

Ce soir il faut bien y penser: qui est l'homme que nous nous apprêtons à abattre et que nous n'avons jamais vu? [...] Un homme comme tous les hommes qui vivent ces années de folie dans les montagnes des Aurès? Le frère des autres fauves: Massu le tigre, Salan le lion, Bigeard le léopard, qui n'ignorent rien de ses oeuvres et qui répondent par les mêmes crimes? Amirouche ignore notre solitude, notre dieu, notre race. Nous ne possédons rien en commun avec lui, ni les morts, ni les enfants, ni la terre. (Croussy 1975, p.125)

One final aspect of the French literary depiction of the Other as rebel which we must briefly consider is the suggestion that French troops were occasionally tempted to desert their comrades and join the rebels instead in their struggle against France. In spite of the above quotation, Croussy's central figure hints that he personally is open to the temptations of the Other:

L'aumônier s'est avancé à l'entrée de l'ifrane. [...] D'ici on apercevait une lumière pâle qui appelait.

- C'est l'hélico? a demandé l'aumônier.

- Non, a dit Grenier, ce sont les partisans qui appellent pour un coup de main.

Comme si mon coeur battait dans l'espace, j'ai eu envie de plonger dans le ravin et de rejoindre l'appel mais la voix de l'aumônier m'a retenu... (ibid., p.74)

While Rose is only tempted to join the rebel cause, and thus to "become" the Other, the eponymous hero of Rochard's *Max Skoda* actually does betray his fellow Foreign Legionnaires and take to the hills with the FLN. This is a truly remarkable development in a novel which is, for the most part, a standard enough celebration of France's élite foreign defenders, and one which is only achieved at the expense of a good deal of mystification. It also makes for a certain amount of elementary confusion as regards plot and characterization.

At a key point in the narrative, Skoda, traumatized by his experiences on the losing side in Indochina, establishes contact with local Muslim leaders and thus discovers that salvation lies in a total immersion of Self in this land and its people: "...il ne lui restait plus qu'une chance: s'incruster ici jusqu'à n'être plus étranger" (Rochard 1965, p.122). But the hope generated by this discovery is destined to be short-lived. The legionnaire realizes almost immediately that any such total assimilation is precluded by the reality of racial appurtenance: "...après cet élan d'espoir, il sait son

adoption impossible: la couleur de sa peau masque celle de son âme" (ibid., pp.122-123). However, this clear-sightedness as regards the ultimate nature of his relations with the Other does not prevent Skoda from multiplying his contacts with the local population. His pro-Muslim sympathies extend to his armed adversaries in the hills, with whom he occasionally comes face to face for one-to-one discussions (ibid., pp.124-130). Indeed, the Lieutenant is even able to achieve a local, and inevitably highly unofficial, truce between the two sides in the war (ibid.). The explanation offered for this historically unlikely turn of events - mythically presented in terms of a "Trêve chevaleresque des temps jadis" (ibid., p.129) - is that Skoda is above all concerned for the well-being of the local population, who are not Arabs but Chaouias, and that this concern happens to further the French cause in Algeria:

Si Skoda avait eu des remords, ceux-ci auraient été dissipés puisque, travaillant au départ pour l'intégrité des Chaouias, il entravait l'essor de la rébellion en favorisant la dissidence des Berbères. C'est probablement pour l'avoir pressenti qu'il s'était résolu à conclure avec eux. (ibid., p.131)

The underlying rationale of Skoda's collaboration with the rebels is, once again, the notion of a transcendent military identity. It is this, in fact, which enables the leaders of the two sides to come together so successfully at a local and personal level. However, the sympathy felt for their opposite numbers by each of the combatants is, as they both realize, potentially disastrous:

Chacun, devinant sa ressemblance dans l'autre, évitait toute discussion qui eût amené un semblant d'amitié. Aucun ne tenait à aggraver cet accord. Ils ne désiraient pas voir une certaine fraternité remplacer la politesse qui régissait leurs rapports. (ibid., p.130)

It is precisely into this "piège" (ibid., p.129) that Skoda himself is destined to fall. As the days go by, he will become ever more like the indigenous population of the region and thus further and further estranged from his own kind: "Il appartenait chaque jour davantage à cette race, à ce mode de vie, et c'est ailleurs qu'il se sentait étranger" (ibid., p.132). More particularly, he will grow ever closer to Mâdi, the local FLN leader, and will end up joining his guerrilla *bande*.

Skoda's implausible conversion to the rebels' cause comes about as a result of his commanding officer's plan for him to infiltrate Mâdi's group posing as a deserter. The plan backfires as Skoda's *retournement* becomes genuine, as a result of a strange, and highly improbable, combination of a post-Indochina disillusionment with the French army, a nascent awareness of some of the Algerian conflict's contradictions, and an instinctive fraternity between himself and the guerrilla leader. The French soldier's own account of the reasons for his desertion is, not altogether surprisingly, a fine example of Orwellian "doublethink":

<<[...] Si la nation se désagrège, ce qui revient à dire que la nation n'est déjà plus, l'individu n'a plus de devoirs envers elle. On ne peut avoir de lien avec rien. Je me suis donc rassemblé: épervier et nuage. Je reviens au clan.

<<Mon armée, veuve de ses conquistadores, divorcée de ses explorateurs et de ses bâtisseurs, perd son sens. [...] En conséquence, la justice déserte tous les partis de cette guerre. On peut ne pas le faire ou y participer dans n'importe quel camp sans cas de conscience. On la mène dans celui qui réunit le plus d'affinités.

<<Ma nation n'est plus puisqu'elle commande le désagrègement de mon armée. [...]

<<Or, toi et les tiens, vous représentez ce clan, ce dialogue, ce symbole que je cherchais, au-delà des nationalismes. [...]

<<Or, te servir, c'est aussi, contre les apparences, servir la bonne part de la France. C'est quand même être là. Tu comprends? (ibid., pp.162-163)

Quite how the justice of the Algerian nationalist cause is undermined by the trials and tribulations of the military remains unclear. No more obvious is the reasoning which enables Skoda to describe the armed resistance of Mâdi's guerrillas to French colonial rule as being "above nationalisms". Still less apparent is the way in which the active participation of a French officer in such a group is deemed to contribute to the further glory of "the real France", whatever that may be. Mâdi may follow Skoda's thinking, but the discerning reader is unlikely to.

In any event, the Legion deserter is accepted by the FLN chief, who instructs his men to obey Skoda "comme à lui-même" (ibid., p.164). His new Algerian identity is thus forged: "Skoda connut bientôt les quatre saisons du hors-la-loi..." (ibid., p.176). As an "outlaw", Skoda knows that his days are numbered, and the rebels' most unlikely recruit is, in due course, captured and summarily executed - like any other "outlaw" -



on the familiar *corvée de bois* (ibid., pp.183 & 186-188).

The ideological significance of this odd tale is, we would suggest, altogether more straightforward than its plot. By depicting Skoda as a soldier who becomes a rebel, Rochard effectively seeks to deny the real importance of the radical dualism which characterized every aspect of social relationships in colonial Algeria. By joining the rebellion, Skoda "becomes" the Other: Algeria's unknown Muslim majority is thus rendered comprehensible as far as the European imagination is concerned. In the process, the threat posed, implicitly but continuously, by the very "otherness" of the indigenous Algerian community is magically removed.

A similar example of the Western, and especially the French liberal, tradition's misplaced faith in the universality of human nature (Memmi 1957, pp.52-54) is to be found in Clavel's *Le Silence des armes* (1974). Our earlier discussion of this account of the psychological wounds inflicted on one soldier by his participation in the Algerian war will have served to establish its general relevance to the present discussion. What must now be considered is Jacques Fortier's final violent confrontation with the military authorities, and more particularly the conceit that this last stand brings about the veteran's magical transformation into his erstwhile enemy: "Il n'était plus un soldat français, mais un fellagha traqué par toute l'armée..." (Clavel 1974, p.174).

With Clavel, we are getting very near to an heroic presentation of the FLN guerrilla. The emphasis which the author places on the, historically overwhelming, numerical superiority of the rebel's military opponents is, in fact, a direct contradiction of the official image of the rebellion as merely the work of *une poignée de terroristes*. Memmi explains why the small numbers of the nationalist combatants should properly be regarded as a source of pride rather than as an indication of weakness:

...lorsque éclatèrent les premiers troubles dans les colonies, ceux qui n'en comprirent pas le sens se rassuraient en faisant le compte des combattants actifs, en ironisant sur leur petit nombre. Le colonisé hésite, en effet, avant de reprendre son destin entre ses mains. Mais le sens de l'événement dépassait tellement son poids arithmétique! Quelques colonisés ne tremblaient plus devant l'uniforme du colonisateur! (Memmi 1957, p.115)

Like Cesbron, Bonjean, and Croussy, Clavel uses the image of a union between the FLN guerrilla and the natural environment to suggest both the alien nature of the French presence and the total character of the colonial conflict (Clavel 1974, pp.260-261). Such a depiction might reasonably be considered romantic, but cannot be said to amount to a wholeheartedly heroic treatment of the nationalist combatant. For that, we have to turn to Georges Mattei's novel, *La Guerre des gusses* (1982). As we noted in our initial discussion of this novel, the action focusses on a single French conscript, nicknamed "Nonosse", who deserts his fellow troops in disgust at the war being waged in Algeria. His decision to join the FLN - which is altogether more credible than that of Rochard's eponymous legionnaire - brings him into contact with such heroes of the Algerian revolution as Si Ahmed, who asks him to become a bomb-maker:

Il m'a appris qu'il y avait un seul spécialiste pour la fabrication des explosifs et il m'a dit: <<La guérilla a besoin de bombes pour compenser son manque d'armes lourdes, je ne fais pas la guerre aux femmes, aux enfants, aux vieillards, moi. Pars tranquille, tes bombes seront utilisées seulement contre des objectifs militaires.>> (Mattei 1982, p.111)

Mattei's sanitized image of the FLN's use of bombs is typical enough of the French left's historically troubled response to the Algerian nationalists' way of waging war. The author's leftist treatment of the Other as rebel also displays the tendency, common to liberals as well as to writers on the left, to portray the Algerian insurrection in terms of the wartime Resistance to the German occupation. (See Chapter 3; cf. Clavel in Chapter 5.)

While we might not wish to criticise this type of imaging of the FLN combatant too severely, in that it undoubtedly functions as an antidote to the prevailing literary depiction of the guerrilla as a villain of various kinds, it certainly constitutes a further mystification of the Muslim fighter and his historical role. Although the Other is, for once, shown in a favourable light, it is, nevertheless, as yet another pale reflection of the colonial Self. Lacking the breadth of historical vision required to appreciate and to communicate the specificity of the FLN's challenge to French hegemony in North

Africa, guilt-ridden commentators like Mattei and Clavel do the best they can with the images available to them from their own country's recent past. The Other remains an object of French intellectual discourse, in other words, rather than a partner in it, but does at least benefit from the pangs of conscience afflicting leftists and liberals alike.

It is as the victim of French colonial aggression, in fact, that the Other is most convincingly imaged by metropolitan novelists like Mattei and Clavel. The latter's extended treatment of this theme in terms of *la mort des autres* has already been described (see Chapter 5). For the nationalist guerrillas portrayed by Mattei, it is the communal memory of atrocities which lies behind their own violent opposition to continued French rule. In this regard, particular importance is attached, quite rightly, to the bloody events which occurred in Sétif, in the Constantinois, on or about 8 May 1945 (Mattei 1982, pp.50 & 87-89). In particular, Mehdi's account of the circumstances of his personal rebellion against the French presence in Algeria is borne out by history:

...je n'ai jamais oublié cette boucherie. C'est là que mon nationalisme est né. C'était la première bataille de notre guerre. Pour toi, le jour de la libération était un jour de fête. Pour moi, c'était un jour de deuil et mon premier combat. (ibid., p.89; cf. Talbott 1980, pp.21-23)

This account of the roots of nationalist rebellion may fruitfully be juxtaposed with the intriguing image of the Other communicated by Albert Camus's short story, "L'Hôte": i.e. the sole literary, as opposed to journalistic, contribution made by the great *pied-noir* liberal to the intellectual debate which the Algerian conflict provoked both in Algeria itself and in metropolitan France. The refusal of the Nobel prize-winning author to participate in the political discussion of his homeland after 1958, following the predictable failure of his attempt to institute *une trêve civile* in the colony, has frequently been discussed in terms of "le silence de Camus" (see, for instance, Thody 1961 & Revel 1979). More interesting from our point of view, however, is the single text in which this most famous son of *Algérie française* did directly address some of the central problems raised by the FLN's armed challenge to

continued French rule in North Africa.

In his respected critical essay on Camus, Conor Cruise O'Brien sets out to demystify the writer and his work. This goal is very successfully achieved, thanks to the critic's decision to concentrate on the often neglected Algerian aspect of Camus's *oeuvre*. Having placed Camus's writing back in the social context from which it originated, he is able to cut through the myth of the "universal" novelist and philosopher - the popular perception of Camus as Tarrou's "saint sans Dieu" (Camus 1947, p.230) - and thus to reveal the properly colonial foundations of so much of that writing.

For O'Brien, Camus is the archetype of Memmi's "colonisateur de bonne volonté" or "le colonisateur qui se refuse" (Memmi 1957, pp.47-69). This, it will be recalled, is the untenable position which may be equated, in the specific context of the 1954-1962 hostilities, with the classic liberal dilemma: i.e. opposition to the methods of colonial repression in Algeria, whilst condoning its ultimate ends (see Chapter 5). It was precisely this contradiction which characterized Camus's principal non-literary contribution to the Algerian debate, *Actuelles III: Chroniques algériennes* (1958), which O'Brien rightly describes as "a depressing volume" and a highly unsatisfactory one (O'Brien 1970, p.72).

At the heart of O'Brien's "desanctification" of Camus is an extended critique of the writer's literary depiction of the indigenous population of Algeria. The European-Arab relationship in *L'Etranger* thus becomes the object of careful scrutiny, as do the "disconcerting omissions" from the Oran of *La Peste* (ibid., p.45): is it really only Europeans who die as a result of the plague which afflicts Algeria's second city? Criticism is likewise levelled at "Camus's most lamentable Mediterranean-solar myth" as revealed in *L'Homme révolté* (ibid., p.56), as well as at the writer's general failure to come to terms with either French violence in Algeria or his personal analytical inadequacies as regards the dispute over the colony and its future status (ibid., p.65

particularly). Also shrewdly analysed is *L'Exil et le royaume*, the 1957 collection of short stories which includes "L'Hôte", whilst *La Chute*, "the only one of Camus's novels which is not set in Algeria", is most convincingly argued to be "the one in which Algeria is most painfully present" (ibid., p.82).

O'Brien's reading of Camus is one which is endorsed by Albert Memmi, as the above reference to the latter's *Portrait du colonisé* will have suggested. In another essay - "Une littérature de la séparation" (1969) - Memmi concentrates on the colonizer's literary depiction of his relationship with the colonized, "cette complémentarité contradictoire" as he terms it (Memmi 1969, p.14). For Memmi, a thoroughgoing awareness of the Other is precluded by the violence inherent in the colonial system, as he explains:

...dans une situation de force, cette intimité confiante entre Dominants and Dominés était condamnée à rester illusoire. [...] Le résultat ... est que l'Indigène est resté une ombre, un stéréotype, comme disent les spécialistes, un étranger. (ibid., p.15)

This gulf between the European and Muslim populations is not the only thing revealed by Memmi's informed scrutiny of the literary artefacts of *Algérie française*. For, if Camus and the other *pied-noir* authors proved incapable of dealing satisfactorily with the Other, they were able to communicate, albeit unwittingly, the terminal *malaise* of the settler community:

Cette littérature nous montre que si l'indigène est une ombre, le Colonisateur est d'une certaine manière un homme séparé. Et qu'il n'est pas naturel et sain, sans dommages et sans troubles, de vivre séparé de l'immense majorité des hommes d'un pays, de sentir autour de soi la méfiance, sinon la haine, même si l'on possède la certitude d'être les plus forts ou même si l'on fait de son mieux pour fissurer ce mur par la bienveillance ou le dévouement. C'est la littérature d'une société en crise, crise peut-être insurmontable: ce que ces écrivains flairent avec désespoir. (ibid., pp.16-17)

Memmi points to the work of Albert Camus as being of particular significance in this regard:

J'ai suggéré que *L'étranger* de Camus, c'était probablement d'abord Camus lui-même étranger dans son pays natal, et pas seulement, comme on le prétend, l'expérience d'une étrangeté métaphysique, ou psychologique, née de l'absurde condition humaine. (Et cela aussi, bien sûr.) Toute l'oeuvre de Camus pourrait être reprise dans cette perspective, depuis le *Malentendu*, au titre alors si évident, jusqu'à *L'exil et le royaume*, qui devient alors si concrètement évocateur, et qui fut son dernier livre; comme si le destin avait ainsi voulu cerner définitivement la physionomie du plus grand

écrivain maghrébin actuel. (ibid., p.17)

In the discussion which follows, we shall argue that Daru, the European schoolteacher at the centre of events in "L'Hôte", is just such "un homme séparé" and is very much an "étranger dans son pays natal". Moreover, we shall suggest that both he and the unnamed Arab prisoner with whom he finds himself entrusted, despite his opposition, are created, as it were, in the ideological image of Camus himself, and may consequently be regarded as personifications of the *pied-noir* author's fundamental alienation from Muslim Algerian society. In short, the narrative's depiction of the relationship obtaining between the Self and the Other in the colonial situation will be put forward as evidence of its creator's inescapable *étrangeté* in his homeland, a condition which must ultimately be understood in terms of that *étrangeté* imposed on the indigenous population of Algeria by a culturally aggressive colonialism which deemed the Arabs and Berbers to be French subjects but not French citizens. As O'Brien puts it: "Camus is a stranger on the African shore, and surrounded by people who are strangers in that France of which they are legally supposed to be a part" (O'Brien 1970, p.14).

In our discussion of the literary response of the French liberals to the Algerian conflict, we drew attention to that group's "historical dilemma"; by which we meant their opposition to the means used to maintain French rule in Algeria, whilst at the same time continuing to uphold the notion of France's "civilizing mission" in North Africa. Daru's "deliberate refusal to influence others" (Yvonne Guers-Villate 1980, pp.143-151) may be read, we would suggest, as an allegory of that intellectual predicament: a favourable representation of the unwillingness of Camus, and many of his fellow liberals, to take up a clear stance on the Algerian question. The text's rhetorical imposition of a tragic evaluation of Daru's experience may consequently be understood in terms of the author's preferred interpretation of his own "refusal to intervene" (ibid., p.147).

In the present context, we shall seek to identify points of tension between the text proper of Camus's short story and its diegesis - i.e. the sequence of actions and events that the reader construes from the narrative (see Scholes 1982, pp.110-114) - in order to illuminate the work's representation of the Other. More specifically, we shall suggest that the tale of Daru's confrontation with the unnamed Arab prisoner is properly regarded as inadequate from a diegetic point of view. This inadequacy, we shall argue, stems from the text's effective concealment of the native's existence as Aristotle's "political animal". This line of enquiry is most easily followed with the help of a brief summary of Camus's story.

On an abstract level, the plot of "L'Hôte" is something of a literary commonplace, as Showalter explains:

One character aids or shelters another who would normally be the former's enemy. This literary topos ... can be found in many versions, from folklore and legend to modern popular culture. It was especially popular with the romantics, in works like *Hernani* and *The Lady of the Lake*, and with other writers preoccupied with heroism, like Corneille and Saint-Exupéry. (Showalter 1984, p.73)

Camus's distinctly modern variation on this traditional theme retains much of the apparent simplicity of plot of these earlier works:

A schoolteacher in an isolated area is ordered by a policeman to keep a prisoner overnight and conduct him to jail. The teacher treats the prisoner kindly, offers him several opportunities to escape, and in the end gives him food and money and shows him the road to freedom. The prisoner, however, takes the road toward the jail. (ibid.)

It is the signal failure of Camus's narrative satisfactorily to account for the prisoner's actions that lays it open to the charge of diegetic inadequacy. For, if it is a characteristic of the classic realist literary text to generate enigma, it is also a characteristic of that text to resolve any such enigma as the text moves towards its point of closure (Belsey 1980, p.70). In fact, the answer to the riddle of the Arab's failure to escape is to be found, not so much in the words of the text, as in its silences. In particular, it is the text's failure to say certain things about the Other that offers the real key to the diegetic mystery of "L'Hôte". These textual silences are most usefully revealed by replacing the text's artificially abstracted plot in the appropriate

historical context.

Showalter's analysis of this aspect of the short story is worthy of particular note:

Set in Algeria in the mid-1950s, it is the only story [in *L'Exil et le royaume*, or elsewhere come to that] that alludes to the political crisis of the time. The prisoner is an Arab; Daru and the gendarme, Balducci, are both *pieds-noirs*... Balducci refers vaguely to the rebellious violence that led ultimately to the end of French rule in Algeria, and both he and Daru wonder whether the Arab might be a revolutionary terrorist, although they think not. (Showalter 1984, p.75)

In spite of the unique position of "L'Hôte" within Camus's *oeuvre*, Showalter specifically rejects political interpretations of the short story as mistaken, arguing instead that : "*The Guest* has nothing to teach about the Algerian conflict, except insofar as its problems were those of all conflicts, in all ages and in all places, between all sorts of people and for all sorts of reasons" (ibid., p.76). Such a reading of the text is wholly at odds with our own interpretation, for reasons which we shall now make clear.

As ever, the text's depiction of the colonial Self must be considered before we can turn our attention to its treatment of the Other. The first thing which must be noted in this regard is the fact that Daru shares in the point of view of the narration in a way that his Arab "guest" most certainly does not. The narrative may be written in the third-person, in fact, but there can be little doubt whose perception of events we are being presented with: we see the world through Daru's eyes, and it is with him, and his experiences, that the reader naturally identifies in consequence. Indeed, Camus's story could very straightforwardly be rewritten in the first person, thus suggesting that the European protagonist is to be regarded as a partner, as it were, in the discourse of the text. In contrast, the unnamed Arab handed over to Daru should properly be thought of as the familiar object of the colonizer's speech. Support for this view of the basic mechanics of the narrative is to be found in a number of areas.

The most basic and obvious of these is the fact that the single Muslim character in "L'Hôte" is never named. Camus's *instituteur* is very quickly identified as Daru,



just as his *gendarme* is readily recognized as Balducci (Camus 1957a, pp.84-85). The two are thus rendered present to the reader, and made comprehensible for him, in a way that the prisoner, referred to throughout as "l'Arabe", is not (*ibid.*, p.86 & *passim*). The prisoner is talked about, in other words, not as a concrete individual, complete with a personal identity, like those of the story's European figures, but rather as a type, or, more accurately, an archetype. For, if the Arab prisoner retains the initial anonymity which the *pied-noir* characters are allowed to shed, it is in order that his lack of individual specificity should not detract from his value as symbol: Camus's unnamed Arab represents his race as a whole - as, perhaps, does Meursault's anonymous Muslim victim in *L'Etranger*. Daru, in contrast to his Muslim "guest", but in common with the *pied-noir* anti-hero just mentioned, is depicted as a highly individual member of his own racial community, if not actually an "outsider" in his own right.

Gourdon *et al* have argued persuasively for a view of the ideological stance adopted by Camus and his fellow writers in the *Ecole d'Alger* as being founded on a rejection of the fundamental colonial distinction between colonizer and colonized:

Le pôle ... qui pose la non-disjonction des contraires - position très délicate dans l'idéologie coloniale - est par excellence celui de l'Ecole d'Alger, tournée vers la pensée d'une <<Algérie nouvelle>> oeuvre de tous les <<hommes de bonne volonté>>, dans la négation de l'opposition des contraires initiaux (colonisateur/colonisé). Par refus de la problématique raciale, les auteurs de l'Ecole d'Alger centrent leurs narrations sur des thèmes d'ordre social (organisation d'une grève dans *L'Action* de Roblès) ou moral (revendication de la dignité humaine dans *Les hauteurs de la ville*, de Roblès; difficulté d'être en société dans *L'Etranger*, de Camus). (Gourdon *et al* 1974, p.118)

Daru's predicament is, like that of Meursault before him, presented as being essentially moral, and even ontological, in nature, rather than as the necessary product of the conflictual politics of the colonial situation. This avoidance of the political as regards characterization is a symptom of a more thoroughgoing failure on the part of Camus and his colleagues to confront the political reality of *Algérie française*. For Gourdon *et al*, the roots of this historical inadequacy are to be found in the problematic

position within the European community of the authors themselves:

Aussi bien Roblès que Camus appartiennent au milieu des petits blancs, d'origines diverses, vivant pauvrement dans et de la colonisation. Après les colons et les métropolitains, ils accèdent à la parole romanesque. Et c'est pour dire leur difficulté de vivre et de prendre parti. Meursault, comme l'instituteur de la nouvelle L'Hôte (in *L'exil et le royaume*) n'appartiennent ni au Même ni à l'Autre. Issus du Même, ils s'en sont éloignés (dans l'espace ou moralement), et le refusent, comme ils refusent <<l'Arabe>>. Leur condamnation à mort les surprend dans ce refus double, et figure son impossibilité dans la colonie. (ibid., p.119)

This assessment of Camus and his fictive representatives can be more easily appreciated if we now consider the character of Daru in a little more detail. The opening lines of the narrative are indicative of the way in which the text as a whole images the central figure:

L'instituteur regardait les deux hommes monter vers lui. L'un était à cheval, l'autre à pied. (Camus 1957a, p.83)

As a teacher, Daru is at the forefront of the colonizer's attempt to fulfil his nation's *mission civilisatrice*. His personal contribution to the enlightenment of the benighted Algerian masses is one which takes for granted the validity of the official myth of the *trois départements* (i.e. the contention that Algeria was an integral part of France, rather than her colony), as the map on his blackboard reveals (ibid.). The gift of French education is not the only thing provided by Daru the schoolmaster; he is also responsible for the distribution of the grain supplied by the colonial authorities to alleviate the effects of the eight months of drought which have directly preceded the present snows (ibid., pp.83-85). Thus, the European educator provides not only intellectual sustenance for the Muslim population of Algeria's *hauts-plateaux*, but also its material equivalent.

It comes as no surprise to learn that the author of "Misère de la Kabylie" (1939) should be aware of the suffering of a large section of the Muslim population of Algeria. Less predictable, perhaps, is the failure of the great *pied-noir* liberal to consider the very need for supplementary feeding of this kind as an indictment of the colonial relegation of the indigenous inhabitants of the territory to the most marginal of

its constituent lands. However, we are not primarily interested here in such specific political questions as the need for agrarian reforms in the Algeria of the 1950s, rather our chief area of concern is the broader ideological implications of Camus's treatment of the Self and the Other. Additional light is shed on this question by the lines just quoted.

From the outset of the narrative, Daru is presented as an individual living in splendid isolation from both sides of Algerian society: he is above the common run of humanity, both physically, and, by association, spiritually. This spiritual superiority is underlined by the "monastic" quality of the schoolmaster's existence: "[Daru] vivait presque en moine dans cette école perdue, content d'ailleurs du peu qu'il avait, et de cette vie rude..." (ibid., p.85). Asking for so little, and giving so much - the food and knowledge referred to above - Daru is not only a contented man, but also, we are naturally inclined to feel, a genuinely decent one: it is "only right" that he should be left in peace to enjoy the spartan pleasures of his hilltop existence. However, the seclusion and tranquillity of the teacher's world are, in fact, soon to be shattered by the arrival of Balducci and the Arab. Hence the appeal of the image for Camus, the troubled liberal. Daru/Camus is required by each side in the developing colonial conflict to take a positive stand for or against it, with no middle ground being recognized. He attempts, nevertheless, to live in what is a political no-man's-land, and is rejected by both sides in consequence. The two men climbing up the mountain towards him are the twin harbingers of his personal fate, as it were: "Ni Même ni Autre", as Gourdon *et al* put it, Daru is "condemned", above all, for his failure to obey the rules of the colonial game. Unfortunately, this "tragic" interpretation of Camus's tale is not easy to uphold in view of the ample evidence provided by the narrative of the liberal mystification of the historical relationship obtaining between the colonizer and the colonized in the Algeria of the 1950s.

The fact of the matter, we would maintain, is that Daru, like Camus himself, can never in reality be anything other than the colonial *Même*: willingly or unwillingly, he is condemned by his race to be the *colonisateur*. The very existence of the Other will therefore be a permanent reminder of precisely that colonial privilege challenged by the militant nationalism of the FLN and recognized by the European witness to Muslim suffering: "Devant cette misère, [Daru] ... s'était senti un seigneur, avec ses murs crépis, son divan étroit, ses étagères de bois blanc, son puits, et son ravitaillement hebdomadaire en eau et en nourriture" (*ibid.*).

At his post high on his mountain *piton*, Camus's *seigneur* bears an uncanny resemblance to the fictive heroes of defenders of *Algérie française* less troubled than the author of "L'Hôte". The teacher's affinity with the land around him is similarly evocative of more self-confident mystifications of the settler's quest for place. So, for instance, the chief characteristic of Daru's *hauts-plateaux* is the absence not so much of men as a whole, as of its indigenous Algerian inhabitants. The strategy here is the familiar one of insisting upon the emptiness of the land which the French teacher - the archetypal cultural colonizer - has effectively "settled". We consequently read such descriptions of the place as the following:

...l'immense étendue du haut plateau désert. (*ibid.*, p.83)

Quand toute la neige serait fondue, le soleil régnerait de nouveau et brûlerait une fois de plus les champs de pierre. Pendant des jours, encore, le ciel inaltérable déverserait sa lumière sèche sur l'étendu solitaire où rien ne rappelait l'homme. (*ibid.*, pp.88-89)

On l'avait nommé à un poste plus au nord, sur le plateau même. Au début, la solitude et le silence lui avaient été durs sur ces terres ingrates, habitées seulement par des pierres. (*ibid.*, p.92)

Daru inspectait les deux directions. Il n'y avait que le ciel à l'horizon, pas un homme ne se montrait. (*ibid.*, p.100)

Dans ce vaste pays qu'il avait tant aimé, il [Daru] était seul. (*ibid.*, p.101)

In these and other examples, Camus regularly seeks to draw the attention of the reader to the supposed emptiness of the land. However, he cannot avoid making it

clear on a number of occasions that the land, for all its appearance of desolation, is, indeed, inhabited by someone other than Daru. However, even here, the presence of the Muslim population of the *hauts-plateaux* is magically transformed into an absence. Consider, for instance, the proposition that "Le pays était ainsi, cruel à vivre, même sans les hommes, qui, pourtant, n'arrangeaient rien" (ibid., p.85). Leaving aside the suggestion that the native inhabitants of this area are difficult to live with - they are, perhaps, "cruel" like the harsh land on and from which they barely manage to scratch a living - the most striking feature of this description is the fact that when the Other eventually appears in "L'Hôte", it is as an absent part of the Algerian landscape. The grammatical negation of the Muslim population of the region - "sans les hommes" - is symptomatic of a more sinister denial of the Other's troublesome presence. Where, after all, are the schoolmaster's Arab pupils? Is it really just a coincidence that they, the ostensible reason for his being in the mountains at all, are kept away from the school by heavy snows at the very moment singled out by Camus for our consideration (ibid., pp.83-84)? And why do the starving parents and grandparents of his pupils never come looking for food, as Daru himself expects (ibid., p.85)?

In order to deny the existence of the indigenous population of the region more effectively, moreover, it is helpful to demonstrate that Daru himself is an *indigène* in some sense. This is duly done, but not without some very revealing textual tension. Indeed, Camus's description of Daru's own relationship with the land reveals a major diegetic discrepancy as regards the schoolteacher's origins. Or, to put it even more directly, "L'Hôte" contains a genuine factual contradiction, which we would suggest is indicative of the ideological quandary of both its *pied-noir* protagonist and his creator. Compare the following extracts from the text:

Le pays était ainsi, cruel à vivre, même sans les hommes, qui pourtant, n'arrangeaient rien. Mais Daru y était né. Partout ailleurs il se sentait exilé. (ibid., p.85)

Longtemps, il [Daru] resta étendu sur son divan à regarder le ciel se fermer peu à peu, à écouter le silence. C'était ce silence qui lui avait paru pénible les premiers jours de son arrivée, après la guerre. (ibid., p.92)

Was Daru born in the region or was he not? Is he a native of the *hauts-plateaux* or did he move to it after the war? Camus's wish to establish the character's "indigenous" credentials is underlined by a subsequent remark made by Balducci to Daru: "Tu es d'ici..." (ibid., p.91); which only serves to make the contradiction all the more remarkable. Indeed, we would go so far as to suggest that this example of tension between the narrative text and its fictive diegesis is indicative of a profound uncertainty in the *pied-noir* psyche as regards the nature of the settlers' own relationship with the land. Whether born in Algeria or not, in fact, the European population was never of the land in the way that its indigenous Muslim inhabitants all too plainly were. They are only there as the result of the use of force, a fact which precludes a normal relationship with either the colonized population or the colonized land.

It is this historical truth which must be suppressed at all costs. Hence the retreat of the French liberal intelligentsia from practical politics; hence Camus's post-1958 *silence*; hence the silence at the heart of "L'Hôte". Throughout the narrative, in fact, we are in a silent zone, with Daru himself established from the outset as an essentially silent figure. So, not only Camus's snow-covered *hauts-plateaux*, but also their principal, if not sole, inhabitant, are presented as being "naturally" silent. Reference to the narrative's direct evocation of the silence of the place itself has already been made, but Daru's reluctance to speak requires some discussion.

The short story opens with the schoolmaster watching Balducci and the Arab climb towards him. Although he can see the two men, he cannot identify them at this stage, on account of their distance from him. Moreover, he cannot hear them, or Balducci's horse, until they are very much closer to him (ibid., p.83). When one of the men waves to him, Daru does not respond, and even when the distant figures come within earshot, Daru avoids communicating with them:

A portée de voix, Balducci cria: <<Une heure pour faire les trois kilomètres d'El Aneur ici!>> Daru ne répondit pas. (ibid., p.86)

A pattern of non-communication is thus established which will be developed as the narrative unfolds: at key moments, Daru will regularly choose either to refrain from speaking himself or to refuse to listen - and this, not so much to others in general, as to the Other in particular. Which leads us to consider the image of the Algerian colonized as it appears in Camus's short story, and to draw particular attention to a number of its principal features.

In sharp contrast to Balducci, who is presented as being both amiable and competent, the Arab is depicted in wholly negative terms. Where the gendarme waves and shouts as the men climb the mountainside towards the school, he does not even raise his head a single time (*ibid.*). Where the European is familiar, friendly, and capable, he is both ill-looking and manifestly alien:

[Balducci] sourit à l'instituteur sous ses moustaches hérissées. Ses petits yeux sombres, très enfoncés sous le front basané, et sa bouche entourée de rides, lui donnaient un air attentif et appliqué. (*ibid.*)

Daru ne vit d'abord que ses énormes lèvres, pleines, lisses, presque négroïdes; le nez cependant était droit, les yeux sombres, pleins de fièvre. Le chèche découvrait un front buté et, sous la peau recuite mais un peu décolorée par le froid, tout le visage avait un air à la fois inquiet et rebelle qui frappa Daru quand l'Arabe, tournant son visage vers lui, le regarda droit dans les yeux. (*ibid.*, pp.86-87)

The phrase "à la fois inquiet et rebelle" is clearly a pivotal one, suggesting, as it does, that the Other lacks the faith in himself which is required for a thoroughgoing rebellion, no matter whom or what it may be directed against. Moreover, Camus is at great pains to make clear that the prisoner's crime is neither political nor directed against France:

- Enfin, dit-il [Daru] en se retournant vers Balducci, qu'est-ce qu'il a fait? Et il demanda, avant que le gendarme ait ouvert la bouche:
- Il parle français?
- Non, pas un mot. On le recherchait depuis un mois, mais ils le cachaient. Il a tué son cousin.
- Il est contre nous?
- Je ne crois pas. Mais on ne peut jamais savoir.
- Pourquoi a-t-il tué?
- Des affaires de famille, je crois. L'un devait du grain à l'autre, paraît-il. Ça n'est pas clair. Enfin, bref, il a tué le cousin d'un coup de serpe. Tu sais, comme au mouton, zic!...

Balducci fit le geste de passer une lame sur sa gorge et l'Arabe, son attention attirée, le regardait avec une sorte d'inquiétude. Une colère subite vint à Daru contre

cet homme, contre tous les hommes et leur sale méchanceté, leurs haines inlassables, leur folie du sang. (ibid., p.89)

This passage is an extremely dense one, from a mythological point of view, and tells us a great deal about its *pied-noir* author's troubled perception of the Algerian colonized. To begin with, what stands out here is precisely the "otherness" of the Arab sitting in front of Daru: the schoolmaster may quickly transform his disgust at this man and his crime into a generalized diatribe against human wickedness, but the integrated reader will not mistake the primary object of his anger: what sort of man, after all, could kill his cousin with a billhook in a dispute over a few grains of wheat? Who else but the Other: the fanatical and bloodthirsty throat-cutter, the *sale* and *méchant* Arab of French popular myth. It is this profoundly alien figure which Daru is faced with, and will attempt to treat with properly liberal humanity.

Similarly worthy of particular note is the *ils/nous* opposition introduced by Balducci and immediately picked up and put into use by Daru himself: for all his subsequent attempts to place himself in the no-man's-land between colonizer and colonized, he clearly aligns himself with both the settler community and the French colonial cause. As the gendarme makes clear, this binary opposition is of central importance at a time when open hostilities between the colonizer and the colonized are daily more likely: "S'ils se soulèvent, personne n'est à l'abri, nous sommes tous dans le même sac" (ibid., p.90; cf. pp.88 & 91). The old Corsican's analysis is borne out by the threat made against Daru at the close of the narrative by the Arab's *frères*, despite his effort to help his unwanted prisoner to escape (ibid., p.101).

The gendarme's reply to Daru's enquiry effectively denies the possibility of a political motive for the murder, whilst also managing to suggest the existence of a permanent gulf between "us" and "them" as regards motivations and affiliations: "you never can tell" (with them). In Memmi's terms, the stigmatizing "marque du pluriel" (Memmi 1957, p.106) is applied without question by both the representative of the coercive forces of the colonial state and Camus's liberal hero. This characteristically



"plural" denial of the Other as political agent will be referred to again, when we come to analyse the diegetic "hole" in Camus's depiction of the Other.

Also to be underlined is the Other's total inability to speak French: not only is the Other deprived of the single most important requirement for "integration" into colonial society as a whole, he is also put at a major disadvantage in his dealings with any individual European, such as Daru. The schoolmaster, like the gendarme, is able to speak Arabic, and is thus in a position to take charge in all exchanges with the Other: excluded from the French-speaking community, the colonized must accept the dominance of the colonizer even in the use of his native language.

Finally, we must draw particular attention to the central figure's judgement of the Other. This is of considerable importance given the generally accepted reluctance of both Camus himself and his literary spokesmen either to judge or to be judged (the characters of Meursault and Tarrou come to mind immediately in this connection). Here, for once, Camus does judge, and, moreover, he goes so far as to reiterate his judgement of the Arab and his act on two different occasions. In the first of these, the schoolmaster attempts to explain to the gendarme his refusal to turn the Arab, whose guilt is never in doubt, over to the colonial authorities:

- Ecoute, Balducci, dit Daru soudainement, tout ça me dégoûte, et ton gars le premier. Mais je ne le livrerai pas. Me battre, oui, s'il le faut. Mais pas ça. (ibid., p.90)

In the second, the attempt at self-justification is for the teacher's own benefit:

Le crime imbécile de cet homme le révoltait, mais le livrer était contraire à l'honneur: d'y penser seulement le rendait fou d'humiliation. Et il maudissait à la fois les siens qui lui envoyaient cet Arabe et celui-ci qui avait osé tuer et n'avait pas su s'enfuir. (ibid., p.98)

The all-inclusive quality of that "tout ça" is significant. Indeed, the phrase may reasonably be taken to refer to the whole pressure of the situation on Daru, who seems already to be aware of the ethical conflict that is made explicit in the second quotation. Yet, at no stage are we encouraged to believe that Daru, the "colonisateur qui se refuse", will be able to come to terms with his unavoidably profound alienation, *qua*

colonizer, from the Muslim inhabitants of Algeria. His liberal moralism may make him aware of their suffering, and may even lead to a reluctance to commit himself overtly to support for the repressive apparatus of the colonial state, but it can never be enough to enable him to bridge the huge gap which exists between himself and the Algerian colonized. Such a bridging of the colonial divide could only be the result of the most radical transformation of the colonizer himself: namely, that he take his revolt against the injustice of the colony to its logical conclusion by refusing the community of his fellow settlers - "les siens" - and becoming himself a member of the Other's community. However, as Memmi rightly points out:

En vérité, si peu nombreux sont les colonisateurs, même de très bonne volonté, qui songent à emprunter sérieusement cette voie, que le problème est plutôt théorique; mais il est capital pour l'intelligence du fait colonial. Refuser la colonisation est une chose, adopter le colonisé et s'en faire adopter en semblent d'autres, qui sont loins d'être liées. (Memmi 1957, p.50)

In fact, Daru is so far from considering aligning himself with the Other that he declares himself ready to fight against the Muslims in the event of an uprising. This expression of his willingness to combat the Arab and his kind, should the need arise, is, we shall demonstrate, part of his wider refusal of fraternity with the colonized. Like Memmi's "colonisateur de bonne volonté", Daru "*n'est pas des leurs et n'a nulle envie d'en être*" (ibid., p.51). This rejection of the colonized can only stem ultimately from an unfavourable, if unwilling, judgement of the Other and his world:

...il faut bien qu'il [le colonisateur de bonne volonté] se l'avoue - même s'il refuse d'en convenir avec les colonialistes - , il ne peut s'empêcher de juger cette civilisation et ces gens. Comment nier que leur technique est gravement retardataire, leurs moeurs bizarrement figées, leur culture périmée? [...] Certes, ... il a toute confiance dans le génie des peuples, de tous les peuples. Il reste cependant qu'il admet une différence fondamentale entre le colonisé et lui. Le fait colonial est un fait historique spécifique, la situation et l'état du colonisé, actuels bien entendu, sont tout de même particuliers. Il admet aussi que ce n'est ni son fait, ni sa situation, ni son état actuel à lui.

[...] Beaucoup de traits du colonisé le choquent ou l'irritent; il a des répulsions qu'il n'arrive pas à cacher et qui rappellent curieusement celles du colonialiste. En vérité, il est loin ce moment où il était sûr, *a priori*, de l'identité de la nature humaine sous toutes les latitudes. Il y croit encore, certes, mais plutôt comme à une universalité abstraite ou un idéal situé dans l'avenir de l'histoire... (ibid., pp.52-53)

A case could be made for seeing a similar critique of liberal *pied-noir*

universalism in Camus's short story. The reference to the map of France is, on this reading, to be regarded as a quite deliberate piece of self-criticism on the part of the author, intended to show the extent of the liberal schoolmaster's failure to appreciate his own role in maintaining the myths of French Algeria. Daru is thus presented as a man tragically blind to a situation that he *almost* understands. So, left on his own with the Arab, Daru will experience a real fraternity with his "guest", but will seek to deny the fact because he is trapped within a scheme of masculine values which does not permit such feelings. Consider Camus's description of the intimacy imposed on the schoolmaster as a result of his having to sleep in the same room as the Arab:

Dans la chambre où, depuis un an, il dormait seul, cette présence le gênait. Mais elle le gênait aussi parce qu'elle lui imposait une sorte de fraternité qu'il refusait dans les circonstances présentes et qu'il connaissait bien: les hommes, qui partagent les mêmes chambres, soldats ou prisonniers, contractent un lien étrange comme si, leurs armures quittées avec les vêtements, ils se rejoignaient chaque soir, par-dessus leurs différences, dans la vieille communauté du songe et de la fatigue. Mais Daru se secouait, il n'aimait pas ces bêtises, il fallait dormir. (Camus 1957a, p.96)

In fact, what we are faced with here is a familiar liberal mystification: the historical reality of colonial strife is replaced by a myth of a supra-ethnic *fraternité*. The fact that Daru chooses to close his eyes, both literally and metaphorically, to the implications of this new relationship with the Other is, in consequence, less important than the fact that it is deemed possible at all. Indeed, the passing up of the opportunity fits readily into the liberal perspective of *occasions manquées* (see Chapter 5). What really counts, in short, is the author's appeal to the familiar notion of the brotherhood of man, rather than the protagonist's attempted denial of that ethnicity-transcending humanity. Compare the following passage, in which Daru once again finds himself forced, involuntarily, into an awareness of the Other's existence:

A ce moment, de l'autre côté de l'école, le prisonnier toussa. Daru l'écouta, presque malgré lui, puis, furieux, jeta un caillou qui siffla dans l'air avant de s'enfoncer dans la neige. (ibid., p.98)

Daru's violent reaction to the Arab's intrusion on his hilltop isolation - he wishes for nothing so much as to be left alone once again (ibid., p.93) - is

symptomatic of his desire to avoid contact with the Other. When the Arab mysteriously asks the schoolmaster to accompany him and the gendarme the following day, Daru fails to respond either positively or negatively (ibid., p.95). The Muslim's entreaty is itself unexplained - "Pourquoi?... Pourquoi?..." asks Daru in vain (ibid.) - and is rendered all the more enigmatic by being left hanging unanswered in the air as the action jumps, without a break, to the middle of the night. The prisoner's appeal " - Viens avec nous..." (ibid.) - thus becomes heavy with implied meanings, the most obvious of which is an invitation to the schoolmaster to abandon the side of the colonizers and to throw in his lot with the colonized. The liberal, caught in the contradictions of his revolt against colonial means, whilst not at the same time condemning colonial ends, seeks solace in silence. Later, he will be led to impose silence on the Other:

L'Arabe s'était retourné maintenant vers Daru et une sorte de panique se levait sur son visage: <<Ecoute>>, dit-il. Daru secoua la tête: <<Non, tais-toi. Maintenant, je te laisse.>> (ibid., p.100)

Daru's refusal to listen to the Arab at this critical time - the schoolmaster has just told the prisoner to judge for himself between freedom and prison (ibid.) - is, we would argue, indicative of a general refusal on Daru's part to face up to his own need to choose between two, mutually exclusive, political paths. He longs to be rid of his uninvited guest, after all, in order precisely that he may "se retrouver seul sans avoir rien à décider" (ibid., p.93). The panic and indecision of the Muslim when forced to choose (ibid., pp.100-101) is thus just one aspect of a broader reluctance to take sides in Camus's narrative. And this, in spite of the author's obvious appreciation of the ultimate impossibility of avoiding such a choice in the colonial context. The presence of this fundamental tension makes for a text that is remarkably rich in meanings. However, it is very much open to question how far such a characteristically liberal approach may serve to demystify the role of ethnicity in the Algerian conflict.

In the event, both the Arab and Daru "vote with their feet" for the colonial *status quo*. The former prefers European-guided imprisonment to an independent Algerian liberty, symbolized by the desert and its nomadic tribesmen, whilst the latter returns to his blackboard and its map of France's principal rivers (*ibid.*, pp.100-101). He may have made an anticolonialist gesture by providing the Arab with food and money, and by pointing out the direction to freedom, but he has not been able to *lâcher* his own kind in the total way suggested by Memmi (*ibid.*, p.91). His earlier reflections on his rather brusque treatment of the old Corsican gendarme, Balducci, underline the strength of his ties with his own community - "les siens" - and thus prepare us for this final outcome:

Il pensait à Balducci. Il lui avait fait de la peine, il l'avait renvoyé, d'une certaine manière, comme s'il ne voulait pas être dans le même sac. Il entendait encore l'adieu du gendarme et, sans savoir pourquoi, il se sentait étrangement vide et vulnérable. (*ibid.*, p.98)

What more appropriate adverb could be applied to Daru's feelings than this "étrangement", with all its typically Camusian resonances? The schoolmaster, like the great *pied-noir* liberal he represents, is most certainly an *étranger* in the land of his birth. It is consequently not in the least surprising that Daru, in the face of the threatened Muslim reprisals against him, should look to the north, and thus towards the Mediterranean and France, as the narrative closes:

Daru regardait le ciel, le plateau et, au-delà, les terres invisibles qui s'étendaient jusqu'à la mer. Dans ce vaste pays qu'il avait tant aimé, il était seul. (*ibid.*, p.101)

Where Daru renounces his beloved Algeria at the end of the story, his Muslim *hôte* gives up his freedom. Why? No wholly convincing answer is possible, as Showalter explains:

The prisoner's last gesture ... is highly ironic, a black parody of Hernani's vow to reconstitute himself prisoner of Don Ruy. It remains, moreover, unexplainable ... many suggestions have been advanced to justify the prisoner's decision; but with the story narrated rigorously from Daru's perspective, there can be no fully persuasive explanation. (Showalter 1984, p.74)

Even more revealingly, the critic notes that "we cannot hope to solve the problem through understanding the Arab because Camus does not tell us enough about him" (ibid., p.79).

The real answer to the enigma of the Arab's choice of prison over liberty is to be found, then, in Camus's failure to describe the figure in sufficient depth and detail. The anonymous victim of a European's gratuitous violence in the Algiers of *L'Etranger*, ignored in the Oran of *La Peste*, the Other is mysterious and unconvincing in the *hauts-plateaux* of "L'Hôte". As depicted by Albert Camus, the Muslim Algerian is essentially unknowable: a permanent puzzle for author, narrator, protagonist and reader alike. Deprived of a political dimension from the moment he and his crime are introduced (Camus 1957a, p.89), in this, the only one of Camus's literary texts to refer directly to the violent challenge of the Algerian nationalists to continued French rule in the territory, the Other finds himself denied what is perhaps the most fundamental constituent of his, and our, humanity. In the process, the specifically political violence which rocked Algeria in the 1950s gives way to the "sale méchanceté" of "tous les hommes" in "L'Hôte" (ibid.). The history of France's principal North African colony is thus replaced by an altogether less troublesome universalism, common to Camus and his fellow liberals in the *Ecole d'Alger*. If the author's imaging of the Other suffers in consequence, and it most assuredly does, then at least this failing serves to draw attention, albeit in a rather negative fashion, to the very real heights attained by the same writer in his depiction of the terminal psychic *malaise* of *Algérie française*.

We have already drawn attention in this chapter to the literary mystification of the Other's sexuality. Elsewhere, we have shown how sexual relations between Europeans and Muslims are regularly portrayed in terms which favour the colonizer to the detriment of the colonized. So, for instance, in Lartéguy's *Les Centurions*, "natural" lust between a French soldier and an FLN activist triumphs over "unnatural" nationalist politics (see Chapter 1). In an altogether different vein, our consideration of the settler

myth of the *peuple neuf* noted the emphasis put by Audisio, and other members of the *Ecole d'Alger*, on the need for a *métissage* of the two Algerian communities, in spite of the historical absence of sexual relations between Europeans and Muslims (see Chapter 6). Having laid the ground in this way for a discussion of the Other as lover, we shall now attempt to flesh out the sexual image of the Muslim by referring to a limited number of particularly striking examples of French literary myth-making.

The first of the relevant passages is taken from Saint-Laurent's *Les Passagers pour Alger*. The author of this novel has rightly been characterized by Pierre Vidal-Naquet as "un spécialiste de l'érotisme à bon marché" (Vidal-Naquet 1972, pp.164-165), and in the following extract it is not difficult to see why. The participants are Saïd Youcef, an FLN *cadre* operating in Switzerland, and Paule, a metropolitan French recruit to the Algerian nationalist cause:

...en traversent la salle où Paule travaillait derrière sa ronéo, [Youcef] éclata de rire. Il saisit la jeune fille par la nuque et l'entraîna dans son bureau.

[...]

Avec une adresse où entrait de l'habitude, il avait renversé Paule sur le bureau.

[...]

Il avait troussé jusqu'aux hanches l'étroite jupe Prince de Galles de Paule sous laquelle elle ne portait aucun vêtement et contemplait le ventre de la jeune fille, soigneusement rasé comme il l'exigeait pour mêler aux impressions qu'elle lui donnait le souvenir des premières musulmanes de sa jeunesse. Après un moment de réflexion pendant lequel il ne cessa de rire, il retourna Paule comme une crêpe, faisant voler les papiers autour d'elle. Il redevint contemplatif devant la croupe étroite, serrée, qui s'offrait à son regard, sertie par les lanières blanches et festonnée des jarretelles. Il écarta les cuisses de la jeune fille avec une espèce de majesté. Elle cria:

- Non, pas comme ça!

Il rit encore et plongea en elle. (Saint-Laurent 1960, I, pp.60-61)

This is cheap titillation if ever there was, but it is also a clear statement of the myth of all-consuming Arab sexuality. The brutal Youcef is plainly an incarnation of the North African equivalent of the "black peril" so feared by European wives and daughters in colonies further to the south. His mocking laughter, his unheeding violence, and, above all, his turning of the French woman into the unwilling object of

his selfish - and, it is suggested, doubly perverted - gratification, make him the very image of the Arab rapist.

Compare Bonjean's description of the (Algiers?) Casbah, one of the historic strongholds of the FLN:

Faute de place, les maisons de torchis se chevauchaient; des sapes secrètes les reliaient entre elles, les occupants les empruntaient, disait-on, pour se mélanger dans de sordides accouplements. Le beau-père forniquait avec sa bru, et le frère engrossait sa soeur. Un enfant naissait toutes les cent quatre-vingts minutes. On mettait sécher dehors les linges des accouplements pour qu'ils resservent. (Bonjean 1977, p.166)

This is obviously an altogether more intriguing image of Arab sexuality. Here, Bonjean draws attention to the central historical issue of the Muslim Algerian birthrate, which far outstripped that of the European community and thus constituted a very real basis for the settlers' fear of demographic swamping. In its turn, this fear can be plausibly presented as the psychological root of the French obsession with the Other's sexual behaviour. Considered from this point of view, Bonjean's treatment of the theme may reasonably be described as broadly demystifying, with particular importance being attached to the phrase "disait-on", which clearly establishes a critical distance between the narrator and the views expressed. However, the notion that the Arabs are unable to control their animal instincts, even as regards their own daughters and sisters, is not itself dismissed as false. Indeed, it gains some general credibility through the description of the Muslim quarter and its *mores* which both precedes and follows it. This is plainly a very far cry from the classically exotic Casbah of a writer like Conesa, complete with its "prostitution bon enfant et qui osait dire son nom" (Conesa 1970, pp.63-65). Nevertheless, it does suggest a preoccupation with the sexual life of the Other which arguably tells us at least as much about the European colonizer as it does about the Muslim colonized. We are consequently none too surprised to discover the following passage towards the end of Bonjean's novel, as the French hold over the local population is increasingly challenged by the nationalist rebels:

Les autorités furent bientôt submergées par les révoltes qui éclataient en chaîne à travers le pays. Les populations versatiles se donnaient à d'autres maîtres.

Sur les murs des casernes, on placarda des affiches aux couleurs ennemies. Et



les militaires étaient hués; lorsqu'ils défilait, s'efforçant à un maintien martial, on les accablait de gestes ridiculisant leur virilité. Des bandits descendirent même de la montagne pour sodomiser une patrouille de chasseurs alpins sur la place publique afin que chacun sût de quel côté était la force mâle.

Alors, la grande ville s'offrit, femelle, aux rebelles. (Bonjean 1977, pp.299-230)

The single most striking feature of this extract is its remarkable association of politico-military power and sexual dominance. In effect, Bonjean takes the standard theme of Muslim power-worship, and links it to the equally frequently voiced myth of all-consuming Arab sexuality. The product is a particularly potent combination of the relevant mythical themes, in which each is given a new weight by the presence of the other. A similar effect is produced by the graphic account found in Gilles Perrault's *Le Dossier 51* (1969) of the homosexual rape of French prisoners by the rebels. This view of the other is to be contrasted with both the grisly account of homosexual relations between French and native youths in *Lucien chez les barbares* (Bonjean 1977, pp.177-185) and the same text's (previously discussed) account of the military's rape of Algerian women (ibid., pp.163-164).

Rape, prostitution, homosexuality: three themes which, in their different ways, serve to draw the attention of the critical reader to the fundamentally unsatisfactory nature of sexual relations between the races in colonial Algeria. As Talbott reminds us:

This lack of social contact [between Europeans and Muslims in Algeria] manifested itself in countless ways. One of the most telling was the absence of intermarriage between Europeans and Algerians. Such liaisons took place at the rate of fewer than 100 per year. If marriages were rare, illicit relationships were unheard of. Half-castes were remarkably scarce. Sexual encounters between Europeans and Algerians were limited to the furtive meetings of homosexuals and the commercial transactions of prostitutes. (Talbott 1980, p.14)

Given this general background, what are we to make of the *ménage à trois* which is the dominant theme of Jean-Pierre Millecam's novel, *Sous dix couches de ténèbres* (1968)? It is to this highly unusual version of the familiar theme of the eternal triangle that we must now turn our attention.

On one level, Millecam may properly be regarded as the high priest of *fratricide* and *déchirement*. However, this author's contribution to the French literature

of the Algerian war would be worthy of particular note were it only for his quite exceptional first-hand experience of the conflict:

En 1956, Jean-Pierre Millecam, jeune professeur dans un petit village algérien, était exécuté sommairement par un groupe d'extrémistes en raison de sa sympathie pour les Arabes et de ses opinions anticolonialistes. Laissé pour mort, il devait, miraculeusement, être sauvé. (Chaillet 1980, p.25)

In *Sous dix couches de ténèbres*, this murderous attack is mentioned only in passing, and does not occupy the central ground that it would later do in Millecam's *Une Légion d'anges* (1980). Instead, it is the troubled relationship between a Frenchwoman and her two suitors, one a *pied-noir*, the other an Arab, which is to the fore. The treatment accorded to this basic theme is an intriguing one, for a variety of reasons. Foremost amongst these is the relatively inaccessible nature of the narrative, as Paul Morelle points out:

...Millecam est d'une lecture difficile. C'est indéniable. On n'entre pas dans Millecam comme dans Jean d'Ormesson. Il faut, pour le lire, presque autant de souffle qu'il en manifeste dans l'écriture. Il y faut une disposition à l'envoûtement. (Morelle 1985, p.13)

The difficulty of Millecam's writing can be explained in terms of both its form and its content. On the one hand, the narrative is characterized by the *cassure du récit* so typical of contemporary French literature, whilst on the other, the bare bones of the plot give little indication of the real weight of the story told. In this latter regard, Bernard Alliot's comments are instructive:

Résumer l'histoire d'un livre de Jean-Pierre Millecam se révèle une entreprise vaine et conduit à une trahison. Car l'anecdote n'est qu'un prétexte, dans tous les sens du mot. Il s'agit, chaque fois, d'une quête ... la quête d'un absolu évidemment inaccessible. (Alliot 1980, p.15)

There is a remarkable lyricism and a genuine mysticism to Millecam's writing which, in combination, account for much of its difficulty, and not a little of the "timeless quality" which critics like Alliot are inclined to attribute to it (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, *Sous dix couches de ténèbres* can, like Millecam's other Algerian novels, be both summarized and historically situated with no real difficulty. The setting for the story of Isabelle's relations with Laurent and Rachid is clearly the colonial Algeria of

the late 1950s, whilst the basic plot is straightforward enough. Laurent, a young *pied-noir*, falls in love with Isabelle, but cannot bring himself to talk to the young French woman herself about his increasingly obsessive affections; instead, he tells his secret to Rachid, his best friend since the days of their shared childhood. The Arab, having participated in his friend's love by proxy, now falls in love with Isabelle in his own right, and it is he who will eventually capture her heart. Isabelle and Rachid thus become lovers, whilst Laurent, who finds himself rejected by Isabelle when he does finally declare his love for her, becomes ever more obsessive and isolated. Whether the *pied-noir* ever finds out about the couple's necessarily secret affair is not clear, but what is certain is that his personality undergoes a radical change as a result of his experiences. As tensions mount in response to the FLN's armed challenge to French colonial rule, Laurent becomes a strident racist and rejects his former friend. Moreover, he joins the police and thus becomes an agent of the repressive apparatus of the colonial state. It is in this capacity that he will come into direct conflict with Rachid, who has himself entered the conflict on the nationalist side. Accused of organizing a strike at the *lycée* where he and Laurent were once fellow pupils, Rachid is arrested and taken for questioning. His interrogator is none other than Laurent, and his boyhood friend thus becomes his torturer. In spite of the brutal treatment to which he is subjected, Rachid does not crack, and is eventually released from police custody in a predictably pitiful condition. He is taken off to the mountains to recover, whilst Isabelle, obsessed with the suffering inflicted on her beloved, invites Laurent to her home and kills him.

In fact, the foregoing summary of the plot of *Sous dix couches de ténèbres* gives no real indication of the complexity of the narrative. To begin with, the story of this peculiarly Algerian *ménage à trois* is not told in classic realist fashion, and lacks such features of conventional literary texts as an obvious hierarchy of discourses and a straightforwardly linear chronology. The novel opens with Isabelle's final preparations

for Laurent's murder and follows her through the day to its bloody conclusion. Everything else is recounted in flashback, however, much as in a *nouveau roman*, with the constituent elements of the three young people's lives together being juxtaposed and intertwined in what is, superficially at least, a most bewildering fashion. Like the work of Butor, and, even more obviously, that of Robbe-Grillet, the text is obsessional in character, and as such does not behave in a fashion which makes for either easy reading or straightforward criticism. Events are typically presented out of sequence, with no situating framework, and from multiple perspectives; physical details are dwelt on with just as much insistence as mental states; questions are put by characters who are not always clearly identified, and frequently remain unanswered.

Yet, for all its patent inadequacy as regards the question of form, our reconstruction of the narrative's essential content is, in itself, enough to suggest that preoccupation with *fratricide* and *déchirement* of which we spoke earlier. This characteristically liberal view of the Algerian conflict is, without doubt, the ideological hinge on which Millecam's literary treatment of the war turns. Consider, for instance, the description provided by Laurent's mother, for Isabelle's benefit, of her son's denial of his childhood relationship with Rachid:

<< ...son seul ami a été ce jeune Arabe: il était à la maison lorsque vous nous avez fait cette visite avec votre mère. Croyez-moi, ne me croyez pas: c'étaient, ce sont des frères pour moi. Ce seront toujours des frères, quoi qu'il arrive... Quand je pense à ça, je me dis que c'est une injure du sort, qu'un mauvais génie est en train de nous jouer un sale tour: nous ne méritons pas ça, je vous jure... >> (Millecam 1968, pp.139-140)

The reference to a cruel fate is typical enough of the *fratricide* school, and frequent mention is made of the three young people's tragic *destin* (e.g. *ibid.*, pp.73 & 82). *Déchirement* is similarly to the fore from the outset of the novel (e.g. *ibid.*, pp.22 & 25). The central theme of *fratricide* is itself clearly present in the above portrayal of Laurent and Rachid as brothers, and will be developed as the action progresses. Its apogee is reached, predictably, with the European's torture of his Muslim *frère* (*ibid.*,

pp.251-262). The following extract from Rachid's account of his horrifying experiences is typical:

Il disait: <<Au bout de quelques instants à peine, je me suis rendu compte que c'était bien lui - non cette abstraction figée qui m'était d'abord apparue lorsqu'on m'avait poussé dans cette pièce: je me suis rendu compte que celui qui allait être mon bourreau était bien l'être auquel j'avais été uni pendant dix-huit années sur les vingt-deux que j'ai vécues - uni par un lien inexplicable et comme surnaturel: celui qui allait me frapper, me noyer, me brûler, me mutiler était bien le garçon brillant et généreux que j'avais connu, non le monstre qu'il s'efforçait de devenir.>> (ibid., p.258)

However, it is not Rachid's vision of the war which carries the most weight in *Sous dix couches de ténèbres*, but that of Lancelot, the liberal schoolmaster who is nearly killed for his anticolonialist beliefs and his friendship with the Arabs. As the obvious fictive incarnation of the author himself, it is to his analysis of the conflict that we inevitably pay the most heed:

Lancelot disait: <<J'ai fait ce que j'ai pu, mais la guerre a été plus forte... Vous [Rachid] ne savez pas, vous ne savez plus - quand on devient adulte on oublie comme elle était blanche et brillante, la neige de l'enfance... Tout ça maintenant souillé de sang, les amis meurtriers des amis - Dieu sait pourtant si ces enfants étaient proches les uns des autres, sur les bancs du collège, à l'époque où je chassais la peste et les ténèbres... Je n'écrivais plus parce qu'il est plus beau de vivre un roman d'amour que d'en écrire un... Moi Lancelot j'ai créé de l'amour: cela me sera compté... Pourquoi Dieu s'est-il retiré de moi? Pourquoi, partout où je porte les yeux, ne vois-je plus aujourd'hui que des campagnes souillées, des amis meurtriers des amis, des frères meurtriers des frères?... >> (ibid., pp.212-213)

Lancelot's liberal *cri du coeur* is, we would suggest, the single most striking example to be found in the imaginative literature of the Algerian war of that particular mystification which Barthes identified as consisting in "une lamentation impuissante, qui reconnaît le malheur pour mieux s'installer" (Barthes 1957, p.138). For Lancelot, and for his creator, the conflict in North Africa is, it would seem, to be understood in terms of "le Mal, et non un mal (remédiable)" (ibid.). This passage, in other words, epitomizes the mystification effected by the novel as a whole, and which has as its ideological foundation a misleadingly "tragic" reading of the 1954-1962 Franco-Algerian conflict. It is interesting to note that Alliot praises Millecam's fictive Algeria in words which would seem to validate the premises, if not the conclusions, of our own analysis:

"L'Histoire aux oripeaux sanglants bégaie et perd sa prétention à la crédibilité au profit d'une tragédie shakespearienne (Alliot 1980, p.15)

Where Alliot sees Shakespeare - Racine might be more appropriate, given the classical density of the *topos* and the concentration on a single, climactic day - we would point to liberal mystification. Paradoxically, but not surprisingly, it is precisely the contribution made by Millecam's fiction to the furtherance of the myth of colonial *fratricide* which critics have singled out for praise (see, for instance, Chaillet 1980 & Morelle 1985). We would wish to draw attention to an altogether more perceptive aspect of Millecam's Algerian *oeuvre*, and one on which we see eye to eye with Alliot:

Ce que dévoile Jean-Pierre Millecam ... c'est l'univers fantasmatique de la communauté algérienne d'alors, avec ses rapports tissés de rejets et d'attrance, ses ambiguïtés sexuelles, l'obscurantisme religieux. (Alliot 1980, p.15)

By choosing to focus the reader's attention on what is, to all intents and purposes, an artificial and historically inaccurate image of French Algeria - that of an interracial *ménage à trois* - Millecam has, somewhat surprisingly, but quite undeniably, brought into the light a number of areas of the colonial psyche which were previously "sous dix couches de ténèbres". Thus regarded, the historically unrepresentative character of Millecam's actors and plots - Alliot talks of "invraisemblance" and "personnages ... hors du commun" (ibid.) - ceases to be of any real significance. In other words, improbable individuals and situations assume a new importance when considered not as history, but rather as symbol:

[Les romans de Millecam] prennent tous appui, même s'ils le transcendent, sur un thème qui n'a pas fini d'inquiéter les consciences françaises: la guerre d'Algérie. Et ils le traitent d'une manière qui ne peut qu'accentuer cette gêne. Il n'y a pas, chez Millecam, les bons d'un côté, les méchants de l'autre. Il y a, sur une culpabilité originelle, qui est la spoliation d'un peuple, l'histoire d'un couple, le couple franco-arabe, qui s'unit et se déchire, se pénètre et se répudie et que le sexe rassemble. (Morelle 1985, p.17)

If we ignore the appeals uttered by the critic to the myth of Franco-Algerian *fratricide*, we are left with two perceptive observations: that the binary opposition attraction-repulsion is of fundamental importance in the colonial context; and that

sexuality - in spite of, or perhaps precisely because of the general historical absence of interracial sexual relations - is a privileged area of study for anyone seeking to understand what Memmi has described as "cette complémentarité contradictoire" of the colonizer and the colonized (Memmi 1969, p.14). One or two examples from the text will be sufficient to demonstrate Millecam's grasp of these psychological truths.

The first passage for consideration concerns Isabelle's love for Rachid, whilst the second focusses equally on this relationship and on Laurent's change of heart as regards his childhood friend; Rachid is the speaker in the former extract, Lancelot is addressing Isabelle in the latter:

<<Nous sommes ennemis, c'est pour ça que nous nous aimons, l'Algérie indépendante en réalité ça te fait horreur, ça te raye d'un coup, toi, ta mère, tes chiennes, vos propriétés, ne me dis pas le contraire, ne me dis pas que les titres, le passé de ta race tu t'en fous, tu dis que tu t'en fous parce que tu as tout ça à ta disposition, mais le jour où il faudra renoncer à tout ça, le jour où tu seras une femme comme des millions d'autres... Note bien que je ne te fais pas de reproche, j'aime que tu sois comme ça, fidèle à toi, mon ennemie, ma meilleure ennemie, la seule sur qui je puisse compter... >> (Millecam 1968, p.22)

<<En vérité, ils se mouvaient l'un et l'autre sous le ciel de la fascination: dès la prime enfance ils étaient fascinés l'un par l'autre, de même que vous êtes fascinée par Rachid ou que Rachid et Laurent étaient fascinés par moi. Parce que nous sommes les uns pour les autres des planètes inconnues, que lorsqu'une planète vient à s'aventurer dans le ciel d'une autre planète il se produit d'infinis bouleversements de l'écorce, des nuées et du coeur, et que chaque planète est tentée d'abandonner son orbite pour se perdre sur l'orbite de l'autre. Mais la fascination peut déboucher sur l'impossible et la violence: nous ne sommes que des solitudes, il nous faut bien l'admettre si nous voulons peupler ces solitudes. Lorsque l'écart qui sépare les planètes devient celui qui sépare les races, les choses deviennent mille fois plus violentes, la fascination mille fois plus grande. Vous aimez Rachid: cet amour aurait pu tout aussi bien être de la haine, car l'amour et la haine sont le recto et le verso de la même fascination. L'amitié de Laurent a laissé la place à une haine qui s'est étendue aussitôt à l'ensemble d'une race: cette haine n'est qu'un amour inverse. Bref, si vous aimez Rachid, Isabelle, c'est par racisme>>... (ibid., pp.226-227)

Whilst we might wish both to dispute the notion that the permanent enmity of colonizer and colonized in Algeria gave rise to a "love" of some strange kind, and to challenge Millecam's "planetary" theory of social interaction, there can be little disputing the justice of his emphasis on race in the colonial context, together with the economic, political and social advantages, and disadvantages, which it brings. Indeed, the picture which the author paints of a society where race is everything is deeply

persuasive. What we are presented with in Millecam's symbolic fiction, in fact, is something very like the psychic confusions and contradictions identified by no less an analyst of the colonial situation than Albert Memmi. There can be little doubt, after all, that Millecam's fictive Algeria is, like the historical society examined by Memmi, a place where no one ever really stands a chance:

Personne, en somme, n'a eu de véritable chance en colonie. Vaincus ou vainqueurs, tout le monde fut isolé et finalement aliéné, les uns par leurs défaites, les autres par leurs victoires. (Memmi 1969, p.20)

In truth, the abiding interest of Jean-Pierre Millecam's *oeuvre* is beyond the narrowly defined scope of the present ideological survey. Millecam's writing does indeed transcend the specific conflictual situation in which it is rooted, just as Morelle suggests. Pierre Enckell goes further, maintaining that "Il serait parfaitement abusif de vouloir à tout prix insérer Millecam dans une case portant l'étiquette <<littérature des Français sur le Maghreb>>, qui n'est manifestement pas faite pour lui" (Enckell 1984, p.191). Nevertheless, by focussing on the one novel which best encapsulates the author's treatment of the Algerian war, we have been able to draw attention both to those aspects of Millecam's work which illuminate and to those which mystify.

It is no coincidence that *Sous dix couches de ténèbres* should stand out so clearly from the rest of Millecam's output when considered from a chronological point of view. The fact that it only appeared seventeen years after his first novel, *Hector et le monstre* (1951), and some ten years before what we might regard as his mature Algerian tetralogy - *Et je vis un cheval pâle* (1978), *Un vol de chimères* (1979), *Une légion d'anges* (1980) and *Choral* (1982) - serves to underline its testamentary status. For, *Sous dix couches de ténèbres* is the Millecam novel which may most reasonably be considered primarily in terms of its *valeur de témoignage*, rather than of its properly literary merits.

The fact that the literary treatment of interracial sexuality acts as a touchstone for judging attitudes to the colonial relationship as a whole leads us now to consider a



number of alternative approaches to the imaging of the Other as a lover. The most remarkable of these is Xavier Grall's *Africa blues* (1962), a novel which displays a more developed insight into both the psychology and the politics of colonial Algeria than the writing of most of the liberal Catholic *appelés* to have spoken out on the war. In addition, Grall's text possesses not only an impressive formal symmetry, but also a genuine thematic density, with its concentration on the devastating impact on the very strong central figure of the conflictual relations between colonizer and colonized being as original as it is intense.

From its powerful opening scene, which describes the *pied-noir* hero's hanging of a would-be Muslim arsonist, to its close, with his own death on the same tree, *Africa blues* sharply focusses the reader's mind on the contradictions of the colonizer's rhetoric. These are personified by the diehard settler, José Montfort, who is revealed to be the offspring of a scandalous union between his mother and one of the Muslims employed on the family farm. Introduced as the proud upholder of the colonial tradition - "le dernier des Montfort" (Grall 1962b, p.10) - José will thus be transformed into the ultimate colonial aberration. As his own unfaithful wife will put it in her diary: "<<José Montfort, fils de Driss>>, me disais-je, prenant soudain conscience de sa tare originelle, de ce qu'il avait de monstrueux, dans le sang, la chair et l'âme" (ibid., p.160). The Self will become the Other, in short, as the details of José's "original sin" are revealed.

Throughout his narrative, Grall displays the ability to imagine the Other and his world in a most convincing fashion. In particular, he is one of the very few French writers to appreciate the "redemptive" and genuinely revolutionary character of nationalist violence, including especially rebel atrocities (ibid., pp.19-20). He also provides a number of refreshing counter-images of *Algérie française*, such as the following view of the jewel in the crown of French colonial creation:

Le cri [nationaliste] avait jailli dans les Aurès, dans l'Ouarsenis et jusque dans la luxuriante, la verte, la plate, la riche Mitidja, la Mitidja impure, celle qui avait le plus forniqué avec les Français, celle qui sentait le plus fortement la prostitution, le

luxe, la graisse de lard, celle qui sentait le vin et l'alcool, celle qui avait courtoisé les conquérants le plus effrontément, celle qui avait Blida pour centre, celle qui était au plus bas, sous les montagnes comme un ventre, celle qui était un ventre de femme bariolé et peint, celle qui était la courtisane, celle qui était labourée, cultivée, abreuvée de séguias, celle qui était luxueuse et grasse, la Mitidja elle-même avait clamé ce premier jour du mois de novembre: <<Tahya el Djazair, tahya, tahya... >> (ibid., p.21)

This powerfully sensual adversary image of the Mitidja, generally seen as the greatest triumph of settler creation *ex nihilo*, serves not only to draw attention to the ethnocentricity of all such conventional views of the colonial *mise en valeur*, but also to emphasize both the breadth and the depth of the Muslim rebellion. Indeed, for the author of *Africa blues*, the Muslim Algerians' revolt against the established order is as total as its success is inevitable (ibid., pp.130 & 19-20 respectively). Yet, it is in his depiction of the colonizer's attitude to the colonized that Grall displays his real originality. Interestingly, the Algeria veteran recognizes that his fellow troops - caught up in "cette guerre étrange et silencieuse à laquelle ils n'avaient jamais été préparés" (ibid., pp.78-79) - must inevitably respond to the Other in a way which bears a striking similarity to that of the *pieds-noirs*. For both the soldier and the settler, in fact, fears and resentments readily manifest themselves in a fierce loathing of the colonized:

Leur drame n'avait qu'un seul nom: le raton, le fel, le bounioul, et c'était un nom qu'ils ne supportaient pas, le poivre dans leur sang, le sel dans l'iris, le poison au ventre. (ibid., p.82)

In colonial Algeria, then, the single really important distinction is between the colonizer and the colonized, the privileged Self and the impoverished Other. For the military representatives of the *Français de France*, just as for the *Français d'Algérie*, in fact, the Algerian is, and must be, perceived as a permanent affront to the Self's individual and communal identity. As far as the latter group is concerned, the Arab is a constant threat to the peace and tranquillity of French Algeria, an unavoidable reminder of the settlers' tenuous grip on their earthly paradise. In particular, the *pieds-noirs'* justified fear of demographic swamping is convincingly presented as the basis of the barely suppressed desire to physically exterminate the Other: "Et tout serait bien

dans cet éden méditerranéen, n'était la présence lancinante, toujours multipliée, des Arabes, des petits d'Arabes" (ibid., p.137).

This typical way of perceiving the *indigène* is most forcefully voiced by Moreno, a *pied-noir* serving in the French army. Though a native of Bab-El-Oued, the private does not share Gabriel Conesa's "Mediterranean" illusions about the relationship obtaining between the colonizer and the colonized. His attitude to the Other is revealed most clearly when his unit captures Salah, a local guerrilla leader:

Moreno tient sa victime par le coude. Ce chancre, cette crasse, cette saleté, l'Arabe! Cette obsession légendaire, transmise de père en fils! Avec, pour toile de fond, cette crainte latente de leur ressembler, à eux, ces bounioul. Tout doux, tout bons, quand ils ne bougent pas et qu'ils baissent la tête. Insupportables, littéralement insupportables comme une vermine, dès qu'ils se mettent à remuer, à montrer qu'ils existent. (ibid.)

Grall's insistence on the neurotic character of this primary colonial relationship will be seen to bear out that of Jean-Pierre Millemam. What is more, the author of *Africa blues* makes it plain from the outset that an historically justified fear is the basis of all such European visions of the Other (ibid., p.10). His suggestion that the *pieds-noirs* are unconsciously afraid of resembling the indigenous inhabitants of Algeria is to be regarded as a demystifying inversion of the supposed Mediterranean fraternity so loudly trumpeted by the literary defenders of *Algérie française*. Not surprisingly, this novel variation on the theme of the settler's fear of the Other comes across most powerfully, and most ironically, in the person of José Montfort. Consider the character's account of his adolescent attempt to deny the truth of his mixed race:

<<Je me regardais tous les jours dans la glace. Je craignais que mon visage ait ce teint olivâtre des bâtards arabes, et qu'il trahisse mon horrible secret. Je me défiais des femmes. Je luttai contre l'amour qui malgré tout me portait vers ma mère. J'étais obsédé. <<T'es le fils d'un raton, t'es le fils d'un raton.>> Dès mes vingt ans, je fréquentais les bouzbirs et là je choisissais la putain la plus typiquement arabe et me vengeais sur elle. Le complexe du colonisé quoi! Du reste, les bordels en Afrique du Nord sont faits pour ce défoulement-là. Les bounioul recherchent les Européennes pour se venger de l'Europe. L'émancipation commence toujours dans les bouges! J'étais guetté par la démence. Pour oublier ma condition je me donnais comme un forcené au travail de la terre. Mon corps lui-même haïssait l'Arabe. Il le sentait. Il le flairait. Il en avait des répulsions.>> (ibid., pp.114-115)

Once again, Grall's foregrounding of the sexual *fantasmes* generated in and by

the colonial situation, and experienced on both sides of the racial divide, is deeply persuasive (cf. Kabbani 1986, *passim*). For the mature José, the revelation of the scandalous circumstances of his conception will mark the onset of a terminal decline. Led to confide in his wife after years of secrecy - and in the wake of her own infidelity with a French officer on the one hand and a walk-out by his Muslim staff on the other - the settler will only now come to terms with the full implications of his parentage. When the narrative opens, the protagonist is only too ready to kill the Other in order to preserve his property and privilege; when it closes, he has come to terms with the contradictions of his life as a "European" and is only too ready to die. As his wife Véronique puts it in her diary:

<<José se fait de plus en plus lointain. Il a rendu ses armes à son passé, à ses fantômes, au vieux Driss.>> (ibid., p.183)

The end will finally come for the protagonist as he sits drinking one night on his veranda. Shot in the leg by an unseen assailant, he does not cry out for help, attempting instead to staunch the flow of blood by applying more and more earth to the wound. The resulting mess functions as a grotesque symbol of the Europeans' attachment to their native land, and also serves to explain the character's terminal delirium. These last muddled thoughts are predictably dominated by religion and details of the protagonist's sordid origin, as he asks himself "Qui peut rendre pur celui qui a été conçu dans l'impureté?" (ibid., p.192). Of particular interest is his consideration of the symbolism of the colonial farmstead (see Chapter 6), and, above all, his recognition that his mother's act has not only ruined his own life, but also undermined the colonial order itself:

Le sirocco ne faiblissait pas. Face à José, près de l'agonie maintenant, il s'engouffrait dans la vieille, la vénérable, l'austère, l'intrépide maison coloniale dressée sur le haut plateau comme une maison forte, quelque donjon arc-bouté contre la fatalité du ciel, maison d'un siècle où tant de joies humaines, où tant de bonheurs ruraux, prodigieusement simples et bons, avaient régné, sous les murs crépis au blanc, cerclés par la bague lumineuse de la véranda, bercés par l'immémoriale chanson des récoltes de septembre quand l'Algérie livrait dans la paix faillible mais si désirable de l'automne, les ouvriers à leur travail sous l'oeil noir des Montfort, tout allant pour le mieux jusqu'à ce que cette femme, Eve infidèle et pantelante, eût fait signe au vieux Driss dont le membre impatient dans la culotte de coutil attendait ce jour pour

bousculer l'ordre établi et heureux, pour rompre irrémédiablement le bail et la féodalité. (ibid., pp.196-197)

This climactic passage exposes to view the underlying fallacy of that myth of Franco-Algerian *métissage* once uttered by Gabriel Audisio and other *pied-noir* liberals (see Chapter 6). Such a blending of the races did not occur in *Algérie française*, precisely because it would have brought to an end the radical dualism upon which the economics of colonial exploitation relied. To have encouraged the emergence of a population of mixed racial origin would have been to risk the dissolution of the European stock in the Muslim Algerian masses. No North African equivalent of the formalized "separateness" of the Cape Dutch was needed to protect French interests against the subversive potential of their own sexuality; the *pieds-noirs'* own sense of racial "apartness" provided adequate insurance against such a revolution from within.

One final aspect of Grall's treatment of the Other is worth noting at this point, namely his depiction of the condition of the Algerian worker in France itself. Consider the following extract from *Africa blues*, in which the previously mentioned FLN guerrilla reflects upon his experience as an immigrant:

Toute sa vie, Salah la voyait défiler: il y avait cinq ans il travaillait en France, à Paris, chez Citroën. Il y avait appris que la misère d'un manoeuvre nor'af n'a pas la même valeur que la misère d'un manoeuvre français, que le Parti communiste français ne lui demandait que sa gueule sans se soucier de sa misère. Du reste, le contremaître l'appelait <<Bicot>> avec un aussi grand mépris que le bourgeois. Il sut alors que la fraternité ouvrière était un leurre et que la haine des classes n'était qu'une galéjade comparée à la lutte des races, et qu'il lui fallait d'abord conquérir son titre d'homme, oui conquérir son beau nom d'homme avant de conquérir celui de prolétaire. Un ouvrier de Kabylie était plus proche de son coeur qu'un ouvrier de Pantin ou d'Aubervilliers. (ibid., pp.29-30)

This passage introduces what we may conveniently term the theme of *l'Autre parmi nous* (cf. Leriche 1959). Grall's depiction of Algerian suffering in metropolitan France could almost be a summary of the demystifying message put forward by what is perhaps the best known of those texts devoted to the idea of the Other as lover, Claire Etcherelli's *Elise ou la vraie vie* (1967). Before we turn to that novel, however, it is useful to consider an example of the sort of French communist mystification against

which both Grall and Etcherelli take so determined a stand. André Stil's *Le Dernier quart d'heure* (1962) provides just such an example. The final volume of an Algerian trilogy begun in 1957 (and republished as a single "novel" in 1978), this tale of the friendship between a northern French proletarian and his immigrant workmate is also the most intriguing aspect of Stil's contribution to the contemporary debate on the colony.

Set in the *Nord*, just a few months before the end of the hostilities in North Africa, Stil's novel focusses the reader's attention on the grim conditions of existence experienced by those Algerians employed in the region's mines and foundries. These men are separated from their wives and families, housed in squalor, and subject to the constant persecution of the police. What is more, they are shamelessly exploited by their employers, with their French workmates unable to see beyond the official myth of inferior "otherness". As one French worker typically remarks: "Il faut tout de même reconnaître, il y a un trou, un sacré trou, quelquefois, entre eux et nous!..." (Stil 1978, p.330).

Nevertheless, a small minority of properly informed individuals, and specifically the members of the local branch of the *Parti communiste français*, are determined to bridge this ethnic divide, perceived as "le vide entre deux peuples" (ibid., p.470). Foremost amongst this group is Stil's hero, the ageing ironworker Charlemagne. A wartime deportee to Buchenwald, the protagonist is anxious to avoid the sort of complicity which he believes the German nation as a whole to have been guilty of regarding the Nazis' treatment of the Jews (ibid., p.371 & passim). Consider his statement of communist faith in the face of Algerian suffering:

L'ignorance, la méfiance, c'est notre faute.

Il faut dire ainsi: notre faute. Même si ce n'est pas nous, moi, Charlemagne, nous, les communistes... La France, c'est quelque chose. Nous en sommes. Et nous aurons à réparer, pour l'honneur. Et qui même réparera, surtout, la faute des autres? Nous. Déjà maintenant, qui répare? C'est compliqué, c'est un peu injuste, mais on ne se sent pas pleinement un homme si on ne sait pas dire ce *nous-là*. Je ne t'ai rien fait de mal, frère, mais j'ai cette envie plein le coeur, de racheter, au moins par le coeur,

pour commencer, et dans ton coeur, petit à petit, tout le mal que t'a fait ma maison. (ibid., p.400)

The quasi-religious terminology used here should alert us to the pro-PCF mystification being effected by the novel as a whole. What we are presented with by Stil's narrative, in fact, is an image of an almost Christ-like Party, which, though wholly blameless itself, is prepared to atone for the sins of lesser mortals. This runs directly counter to the historical confusion of the PCF, which, in common with much of the traditional left (i.e. the major parties and their supporters), proved to be incapable of coming to terms with the radical political challenge of colonial nationalism. This, for reasons which Albert Memmi has made clear: "En bref, l'homme de gauche ne retrouve dans la lutte du colonisé, qu'il soutient *a priori*, ni les moyens traditionnels ni les buts derniers de cette gauche dont il fait partie" (Memmi 1957, p.57).

The primary cause of the French leftists' inability to comprehend the specificity of the Algerian revolution was the tendency, which they shared, revealingly, with the right-wing theorists of *guerre révolutionnaire*, to see the FLN's struggle as socialist first and nationalist second (see Girardet 1972, p.241; cf. Crouzet 1963). However, the fact of the matter was that the Algerian war could not be properly understood as just one front in a global conflict between the classes, any more than it could be reduced to a struggle between the superpowers; it had to be considered in its own right. So, when Stil's protagonist comments that "là-bas, ici, ça se voit trop qu'il y a des gens qui passent sur eux, les Algériens, ce qu'ils n'osent pas, ce qu'ils n'ont jamais osé faire sur nous, mais dont l'envie ne leur manque ni ne leur a jamais manqué" (Stil 1978, p.472), he is failing to appreciate the fundamental difference in kind between the suffering of the proletariat and that of the colonized. This underlying confusion may itself be explained in terms of a humanist universalism of the kind previously noted in the writing of liberal commentators on the Algerian war. Take, for instance, the following expression of Charlemagne's faith in the common lot of workers all over the world:

Au fond de l'homme, tu retrouves toujours un fil et une trame ... en lin ou en jute, en soie ou en coton, grossier ou fin de travail, et sous toutes les épaisseurs et tous les dessins, toutes les couleurs, mais à Calcutta ou à Roubaix, au bord du Sahara et à Paris, un fil et une trame, non?... (ibid., p.470)

It is leftist mystification of this kind that Claire Etcherelli looks to expose in her novel, together with all such convenient distortions of the complex reality of the Other. Produced just five years after the Algerian conflict ended, *Elise ou la vraie vie* remains as pertinent in the France of the 1990s as it was in the 1960s. The foundation of that abiding relevance is to be found in the novel's thematic orientation, with the narrative addressing itself less to the 1954-1962 conflict as such, and more to the enduring tensions and contradictions of the Franco-Algerian relationship. After all, the plight of the North African immigrant worker in contemporary France differs little in substance from that of his counterpart in the Paris of the war years, with any such difference being a matter of intensity rather than of kind.

This said, Etcherelli does offer a particularly penetrating insight into the harsh facts of life for the Algerian worker in the metropolitan France of the late 1950s, or, to put it another way, of the Other *parmi nous*. Judged according to our adopted criterion of textual worth - the encouragement or discouragement of ideological mystification - her work is to be rated highly. A readily accessible narrative, *Elise* (as we shall refer to the text henceforth) nevertheless possesses a genuinely classical concentration of emotional effect, which, much as in Millecam's novel, may be attributed to the fact that the novel's action is recounted in flashback over a single night, as the central figure spends her final hours in Paris. More importantly, from our point of view, it regularly manages to defamiliarize, and thereby to demystify, metropolitan French perceptions of the Other.

A tale of unremitting depression, *Elise* is a love story stripped bare of romantic frills; the traditional happy ending is ruled out from the very first sentence: "Surtout ne pas penser" (Etcherelli 1967, p.11). In stark prose, the text details the oppression of the weak by the strong, and that of those even weaker in turn, and is at least as



inclined to explode the myth of proletarian solidarity as it is that of, let us say, Arab sexuality. Concentrating on a very restricted segment of French society, it tells us infinitely more about metropolitan attitudes as a whole than many other wider-ranging novels. In the same way, the novel avoids the temptations of a Cesbron-style literary jaunt to Algeria (see Chapter 5), and is all the better for it. Yet, the text's resolutely "metro-centric" approach paradoxically reveals many of the Algerian war's unavowed, and elsewhere unavowable, truths. It thereby brings the reader closer to an appreciation of the conflict's historicity, forearming him or her, into the bargain, against contemporary mystification of Algerian immigration and settlement. Several factors contribute to the fulfilment of the text's demystifying project, of which the most noteworthy are the specifically metropolitan perspective just mentioned, the love theme, and the self-conscious limitations of both the narrator and the narration. Whilst these three elements may be formally isolated for the purpose of critical analysis, any such consideration of them is, of course, inherently artificial. Our discussion will reflect this fact, tending as it does to overlap in places.

Elise, the first-person narrator, is the text's exclusive point of focus. In consequence, the Algerian war, like everything else, is only real for the reader to the extent that it is lived and recounted by the protagonist. Though seemingly limiting, this mediation is, in reality, extremely productive. Orphaned just before the outbreak of the Second World War, Elise and her brother are brought up by their grandmother in a small provincial town. The family's world is characterized by genteel poverty on the one hand, and psychological debilitation on the other. The young woman's awakening is initially political, and is sparked by her profound attachment to her brother, the *complexe et complexé* Lucien. A self-contradictory and self-destructive individual, he becomes involved in left-wing agitation, first against the war in Indochina and later against the Algerian conflict; this, as a result of the impetus provided by Henri, a revolutionary dilettante whose comfortable background contrasts sharply with their own

circumstances. With Henri's departure for Paris, Elise is brought into Lucien's political world; her genuine interest in the politics of Algeria is thus combined inextricably with an overweening desire for the affection of her intelligent, but chronically unstable, brother. When he too leaves for Paris, she will follow him, in quest of the *vraie vie* sought by Rimbaud, and countless others since him. In the event, she will find it, albeit fleetingly and very traumatically, and will thereby achieve an emotional awakening to complement her new political consciousness.

The Parisian heart of *Elise* is the car plant where brother and sister go to work on the production line. With extensive use being made of immigrant labour, race dominates relations at all levels: between the management and the shop floor, foreman and factory hand, worker and fellow worker. Into this bleak vision of an industrialized mankind comes Elise, timid, well-intentioned, and caring. With the inhuman and dehumanizing demands of machines and production targets constantly exacerbating racial tensions, she is soon obliged to come to terms with the harsh conditions of her new existence. One of the foremen gives her a "friendly" word of advice:

- Bonjour, la demoiselle... Un conseil. Vous êtes gentille tout plein et sérieuse, bien comme il faut. N'allez pas vous mettre dans les pattes d'un syndicat. Et ne parlez pas trop avec les Algériens. Bonne journée! (ibid., p.118)

In spite of this warning, Elise will become involved not only with the union, but also, and more importantly, with the immigrants who work alongside her. Like her brother before her, she will ignore the counsel of her "superiors":

- Moi, j'ai voulu lui expliquer. C'est un jeune, il ne connaît pas la vie. Je lui ai dit, laisse tomber les *crouillats*, te mêle pas de leurs histoires, fais ton travail, discute pas avec les chefs, pas de politique ici. Il ne m'a pas écouté, il s'est fâché avec tout le monde, même avec le délégué. Ils ont eu une engueulade ici même, avant votre arrivée. Il provoque, il provoque. Les gens en ont eu marre et les chefs aussi. Pour eux, il n'est pas un élément intéressant, il discute trop. (ibid., p.151)

She too will refuse to ignore the *crouillats* and their problems; she will argue, will politicize, and will not spare the sacred cows of the left any more than she will those of the right. Her *naïveté* is precisely what underpins her provocation, and, as such, is the principal cause of her alienation both by and from her French co-workers

and managers. Like its central figure, the text does *faire de la politique*; indeed, its abiding interest resides in the fact that it insists on discussing, rather than settling for the reassuring *constatation* of myth. *Elise*, like the eponymous heroine, like her brother, wears its political heart on its sleeve.

So, following her brother's lead, *Elise* becomes involved in the metropolitan anticolonialist and antiwar movement. Yet, paradoxically, it is not this overtly political side of her general awakening that will take her - and us - nearer to an understanding of the whole Franco-Algerian relationship, but rather its emotional aspect. *Elise's* love for a fellow car-worker, *Arezki*, brings her both to the fringes of involvement with the FLN and to a radically new understanding of Self. In addition, it offers the reader of the tale a demystified and demystifying insight into the Algerian war. The novel's approach *might* be regarded as "narrow": a single character's limited experience of the impact of events in North Africa on the least privileged sections of mainland French society is relied upon to communicate its broad vision of those same events. That it is so successful is a function of the narrative density gained by eschewing an illusory comprehensiveness: for what *Elise* lacks in coverage is more than made up for in communicative intensity. To justify this claim, it is enough to examine the text's depiction of the Algerian conflict, as seen in the defamiliarizing perspective of *Elise's* love for *Arezki*.

The principal demystifying strategy identifiable in *Etcherelli's* novel is the regular contrasting of the confident generalities of both right and left with the modest details of the protagonist's halting love affair. The specious certainties of the two apparent adversaries thus give way to a necessarily messy world - both emotionally and politically - of personal tensions, complexities, and contradictions: *la vraie vie* as lived rather than dreamed. There is absolutely no place for illusion in *Elise's* scheme of things: what little progress the largely unhappy couple do make is consistently undermined by events, and is ultimately demolished by them. All that the central

figure is able to cling to is hope, though of a wholly disabused kind. In a demystifying inversion of the Pandora figure - woman perceived as the origin of mankind's ills - this particular woman is revealed to be the helpless victim of a wider social *malaise*. Elise's faith in the future is, like that of the inhabitants of the Nanterre *bidonville* which she visits with Arezki, real enough, but crucially conditioned by the concrete hardships of the present:

Un seul mot était inconnu ici, celui du désespoir. Tous disait ... <<un jour... >> et aucun ne doutait. Le présent, c'était la lutte pour la survie. (ibid., p.210)

La douleur me guette, tapie dans mon futur, camouflée dans les souvenirs; elle m'attend pour me frapper mais je la contournerai et me défendrai hardiment. Je chasserai de moi jusqu'à la moindre image. Mais sous les cendres, l'inévitable espérance tiendra bon. Je ne sais d'où viendra le souffle qui l'attisera. Je ne sais vers quoi elle me poussera. Je la sens. Dans mon ensevelissement je la sens. Indistincte, informe, impalpable mais présente. Je me retire en moi mais je n'y mourrai pas. (ibid., p.277)

As Elise's parting shot makes clear, her story is not to be regarded as "tragic" in so far as that term implies resignation to an unavoidable fate. Rather, her show of defiance in the face of virtually overwhelming adversity is to be read as an illustration of Romain Rolland's genuinely revolutionary appeal to the pessimism of the intellect and the optimism of the will. The world of *Elise* is a very hard place, but it *can* be changed: i.e. a political dynamic exists which is the antithesis of mythical stasis.

The key to an appreciation of the novel's force is to be found in an awareness of its central figure's severely restricted psychological capabilities; the last thing that her emotionally deprived home life has prepared her for is the transgression of one of metropolitan French society's most rigorously observed taboos. The depiction of her relationship with Arezki through her own, desperately honest, eyes immediately puts the text, and the reader, at a distance from the vast majority of male-written and male-centred French treatments of the Algerian war. With *Elise*, we cut through the multiple layers of sexually-focussed military romanticism which mediates so much discussion of the conflict. Here, we are in the rarely considered world of metropolitan women; a world which, via Elise's love for Arezki, impinges on an even less frequently visited

domain: the universe of the Other. Uniquely regarded as the loved one, the Algerian is inescapably present in Etherelli's *métropole*; as is the war itself.

The protagonist's love for an Algerian worker - the most unspeakable crime for so many of her contemporaries, writers included - permits the articulation and simultaneous exposure of a variety of immigrant-related myths. Central among these is the durable myth of all-consuming Arab sexuality, a belief which not only has its historical roots in the *pied-noir* fear of demographic swamping, but also has a more general psychological basis in the nature of the colonial relationship itself. This theme is voiced and demystified in a variety of ways, of which the most overt centres on the French women who work alongside Elise. Their cloak-room conversation evokes the prevailing atmosphere in all its banal hostility; as in the following extract, where a more experienced worker is discussing conditions in the car plant:

- Là où j'étais avant, conclut-elle, c'était encore plus dur.

[...]

- Mais au moins, ajouta-t-elle, il n'y avait pas d'Arabes.

Je [Elise] rougis, mais personne ne me regardait.

La fille qui me rappelait Marie-Louise venait d'entrer. [...] Elle demanda une cigarette et répondit à celle qui l'interrogeait que le grand brun de la peinture lui avait payé un café.

- Ils sont tous bruns à la peinture, s'esclaffa une des femmes.

Les autres éclatèrent de rire. Là-haut, presque tous les hommes étaient des Africains noirs. La fille haussa les épaules.

- Vous croyez que je vais marcher avec un nègre?

- Tu as bien soulevé un Algérien.

- Ah celui-là, dit-elle, je vais finir par lui envoyer une gifle. Il se plante devant moi, il me regarde, il me fixe. Ce matin, il n'a pas arrêté de me sourire.

- Ils sont collants avec les femmes. (ibid., pp.151-152)

Crucially, Etcherelli does not shy away from the limited sociological insights contained in such remarks; on the contrary, the wolf-whistles, cat-calls, and similar manifestations of shop-floor sexual harassment are dutifully recorded. Rather, these overt expressions of Algerian sexuality are placed in the context necessary for a demystified understanding of them. First Lucien then Arezki explain such phenomena:

- A travailler comme ça, on retourne à l'état animal. Des bestiaux qui voient la femelle. On crie. C'est l'expression animale de leur plaisir. Ils ne sont pas méchants. Un peu collants avec les femmes parce qu'ils en manquent. (ibid., p.85)

Il [Arezki] excusait Mustapha et m'expliquait, par sa propre expérience, le

comportement de son camarade envers les filles à l'usine.

- Quand j'ai commencé à travailler à Paris, disait-il, j'en étais ébloui, la tête m'en tournait. Les filles ici ont des corps qui font envie. Elles sont plus désirables que les femmes de chez nous pour des raisons ... qui n'ont rien à voir avec la beauté. J'étais fou de les sentir autour de moi. Je baissais la tête pour ne pas les voir bouger ou se baisser. Les femmes, là-bas, nous les voyons si peu, et ici, presque à portée de la main. Tu imagines pour Mustapha qui vient du fond des montagnes...

- Et vous avez aimé beaucoup de ces belles femmes?

Quand je reprenais le vous, il me savait contractée.

Quelquefois, il disait en se moquant:

- Lequel des deux est le sous-développé? (ibid., pp.185-186)

Whether Lucien's proletarian psychology is preferred, or Arezki's inter-cultural explanation, the result is much the same: demystification. Moreover, Arezki's gentle mocking of Elise's emotional limitations takes us a crucial stage further. His playfully expressed, but perfectly legitimate, awareness of *her* under-development undermines the central colonialist thesis of the chronic backwardness of the Other. This inversion of the standard European perspective is thus of some importance: it should lead the reasonably aware reader to question the state of his or her own development. That such is, indeed, the text's ideological project would appear to be confirmed by Arezki's later refinement of his socio-sexual thesis; Elise has spoken to him about the contemptuous mockery to which she is subjected by her female workmates:

- Que veux-tu, pour les Français, nous sommes des déchaînés sexuels, et pour les nôtres, les Françaises sont les championnes du... raffinement. Quelques-uns s'accouplent pour ces raisons-là. Je préfère te dire qu'il y'a souvent déception, de part et d'autre. Les légendes... (ibid., p.239)

Of prime importance in this regard is Elise's own ambivalence as a consumer of myth. It would be all too easy for her to appear blameless in the midst of institutionalized French racism - easy, and attractive in an undemanding way, but seriously misleading. Etcherelli's fictive reality is, in fact, altogether more complex, and Elise is as prone to suspect Arezki's intentions as anyone. Real demystification comes not so much from attacks on obvious targets - ignorant workmates, loud-mouthed drinkers, the police, *Monsieur et Madame tout un chacun* - as from the systematic undermining of her own, well-intentioned and avowedly anti-racist, attitudes. So, for instance, the common sense notion of Arab sexuality is, in the following

extract, exploded all the more effectively for Elise's unattractive susceptibility to it; she learns from experience, and we learn with her:

Imprégnée d'idées reçues, j'avais pensé, le soir où nous nous promenions dans les jardins du Trocadéro et où, choisissant un trou d'ombre, Arezki m'avait violemment embrassée: ça y est, maintenant, il va m'emmener dans sa chambre. Mais rien ne s'était produit. (ibid., p.184)

Similarly, whilst the reader might, like Lucien, wish Elise to be stronger and admit openly to her relationship with Arezki - her brother almost certainly betrays their clandestine affair to this end (ibid., pp.189-190) - the central figure's own attitude is both more convincing and more constructive. So, Arezki's accusation that Elise is embarrassed to be seen in public with him might be denied by her, in all good faith and to his apparent satisfaction, but a serious doubt remains (ibid., p.181). Indeed, the protagonist's own inability to fool herself for long soon reveals a harsher truth:

Chaque fois que nous nous séparions, Arezki me recommandait le secret, et cela m'agaçait un peu. A la vérité, cela me convenait tout à fait. (ibid., p.184)

What is more, even a distinctly Barthesian capacity for understanding the mechanics of mystification does not guarantee the protagonist immunity from its pernicious influence:

Irène sortit. Il y eut des murmures dans le groupe des femmes. Je saisis cette phrase:

- ...elle marche avec les Algériens.

C'était l'expression d'usage: marcher avec, toujours suivi du pluriel. Et c'était l'injure suprême: marcher avec les Algériens, marcher avec les Nègres...

[...]

Demain elles diraient de moi <<elle marche avec les Algériens>>. Ces mots évoquaient des bouges tristes où la même femme passe successivement dans les bras de beaucoup d'hommes. (ibid.)

For all her demystifying insight into the linguistic workings of her colleagues' prejudices, Elise cannot wholly resist them. In the same breath, she wishes she could confide in these women, could share their secrets along with their bench; fearing their condemnation, she longs to be one of them. Indeed, her desire to keep on the right-side of her racist workmates has just led, or at least encouraged, her to reject Arezki's invitation to see him that evening; as she herself is perfectly well aware:

J'ai eu quelques minutes de satisfaction vaniteuse quand j'ai dit non à Arezki.

Si je le pouvais, je rattraperais ce refus. Vous êtes pour quelque chose dans ce non. J'ai peur de vous toutes. (ibid., p.175)

This flawed awareness of myth's power is deeply persuasive. The same approach is used, with considerable success, to expose a complex of immigrant-centred myths. One by one, the notions of Arab homogeneity, *susceptibilité*, unfitness for serious work, inhumanity, and the like, are held up for critical appraisal; and not by a self-assured individual, confident in the rightness of her words and deeds, but by Elise (ibid., pp.77-88). Her hesitant insights into the mystification of the Franco-Algerian relationship virtually oblige the reader to reconsider his or her own stance on the questions raised. Whether aligned with the "left", the "right" or the "centre", it is thus extremely difficult to arrive at anything other than a personally troubling interpretation of the events recounted by the narrative. *Elise* leaves no comfortable position intact for the reader, and this is the real basis of its abiding importance and appeal: the text demands that the issues presented be considered not according to personal or social preconceptions, but on something very like their own, historically specific, terms.

The inability of Elise wholly to break free of her condition and conditioning is symbolized most forcefully, perhaps, by her persistent unwillingness to write to her grandmother informing her about Arezki: "Un Arabe... L'épouvantail de la grand-mère" (ibid., p.224). This has its mythological corollary in the Algerian militant's patent lack of revolutionary *grandeur*. He is not the glamorous figure dreamed of by the French left, any more than he is the bogeyman of the right wing's declarations or of the government's propaganda. In particular, the leftist tendency to equate the Algerian underground and the wartime Resistance is singled out for criticism; as is the taste for "l'exotisme, le mystère" of activists like Lucien (ibid., pp.160-161). All that remains when the layers of metropolitan mystification have been stripped away is that most demanding of rhetorical figures, that ultimately unassimilable but irresistibly challenging reality: a fellow human being, with his or her full quota of frailties and contradictions. Depicted as such, Arezki is entirely representative of the Algerian revolutionaries as a



group. His heartfelt recognition of this historically accurate and genuinely anti-romantic state of affairs bears quotation at some length:

Je suis comme les autres. Moi aussi, j'ai envie de casser la figure à quelques types, moi aussi j'ai envie de me saouler quand j'ai le cafard ou pour oublier, moi aussi j'ai bu en cachette. J'ai eu aussi envie de tricher avec le trésorier, et je ne vais pas aux réunions sans peur. Je voudrais passer mon dimanche au lit et non pas me lever à six heures pour courir le quartier, ne plus rendre des comptes, ne plus être commandé; et il y a des frères que je ne peux pas souffrir. [...] ...parfois le but s'éloigne, ou tu penses que personne ne vaut la peine que tu souffres. Nous sommes loin d'être des saints. Nous avons nos défauts propres, et, en plus, ceux que provoquent la lutte clandestine et la vie en commun. Nous nous disputons, nous nous en voulons, nous nous aidons comme des hommes nageant dans le même bocal sans pouvoir nous isoler, dormant côte à côte, nous lavant les uns devant les autres. Il y a des gais, des vaniteux, des sournois, des naïfs, des durs, des salauds, des timides. Des hommes. Et le miracle, c'est qu'on ait réussi à empêcher l'explosion de cent ou de mille caractères condamnés à se supporter, à se brimer. (ibid., pp.211-212)

Interestingly, Arezki's most disturbing shortcoming concerns not his revolutionary faith but rather his love for Elise. The Algerian's inability to accept, still less to understand, the sister's devotion to the brother is dramatically revealed when he asks Elise to choose between spending one Sunday with him and visiting Lucien in hospital:

Tout le dimanche, j'attendais Arezki. Il ne vint pas.  
 [...]
 Je lui en voulais, j'étais assurée qu'il m'avait menti.  
 Il ne chercha pas à dissimuler.  
 - Oui, je l'a fait exprès.  
 - Cela t'a donc fait plaisir?  
 - Oui. (ibid., p.256)

Is this the product of some perverse jealousy? Does Arezki want to test Elise's love? Or does his apparently motiveless act of sadistic cruelty spring from other motives? Various diegeses are possible on the strength of the given *récit*, but none of the available options is ever overtly validated. An element of enigma remains disturbingly present: the reader, like Elise, will never know why Arezki acted as he did; just as the Algerian's disappearance at the end of the narrative can never be satisfactorily explained either by Elise or by us. The text's movement towards closure - the classically satisfying dissipation of the mystery which it has itself created - is, in consequence, neither as consistent nor as final as that exhibited by the

bulk of Algerian war fiction. In his terminal absence just as in his transient presence, Arezki retains an important measure of unseizability, of openness. Moreover, the metropolitan France in which he lives, and perhaps dies, and the Algerian revolution which he modestly furthers are likewise possessed of this ideologically challenging brand of diegetic openness. We, the readers, are patently not provided with all the facts about the Algerians' clandestine struggle, no more than we are able to see clearly into the state's overt and covert responses: how could we be? Rather, history is played out in the shadows of metropolitan France by aesthetically unsatisfactory figures, and we only hear the echoes of their bitter clash: "les murmures de la guerre", as Roger Ikor put it.

Fought by essentially messy characters, the Algerian war of *Elise* is very much *la sale guerre* of historical record. Just as she foregrounds Arezki's contradictions, so Etcherelli faces up to the less palatable aspects of the nationalist revolt. The FLN's use of coercion as often as conversion among its own people is not shied away from, any more than Arezki's failings are ignored. So, for instance, the summary execution of suspected informers and the like, while it might be justified on the grounds of revolutionary expediency, is still perceived in all its horror (*ibid.*, p.116). The revolutionaries' often violent collection of financial contributions to the nationalist cause is similarly recorded (*ibid.*, p.92). Arezki's hypocritical refusal to protect his old alcoholic uncle from the anti-drink crusading of his fellow militants also falls into this category of demystifying truths (*ibid.*, pp.204-206). In the fictive universe of *Elise*, the Algerian struggle for national liberation is the antithesis of romance; as Arezki sums it up for his uncle: " - La révolution ... est un bulldozer" (*ibid.*, p.205).

At the heart of the metropolitan leftists' misreading of the Algerian war is their own myth of working-class solidarity. This notion is regularly undermined, and thus gives way to a less attractive but considerably more constructive vision of chronic economism aggravated by a particularly acute form of racist nationalism. *Elise* sees

through the French left's institutionalized appeals to the nobler sentiments of the proletariat very early on (ibid., p.166). It is but a short step for her from this discovery to what is, in effect, a *tiers-mondiste* critique of the totality of colonialist power-structures, including the oppression of the colonized worker by his counterpart in the *métropole*. Arezki has been telling her about the harsh realities of his childhood and adolescence in colonial Algeria:

Je restai muette...

Arezki me regarda en riant comme s'il se moquait de moi.

- Si nous commençons à raconter nos misères...

- Les nôtres, dis-je, n'ont rien de comparable aux vôtres.

- Oui, je le pense. (ibid., p.197)

The logical result of this inherent tension in the Franco-Algerian relationship as lived at the industrial workplace is that participation in the French left's anti-war agitation, however well-intentioned, can only ever be a negation of the very solidarity that it is designed to incarnate. This paradox is most clearly illustrated by Elise's unwished but definitive estrangement from Arezki as a result of her idealistic enthusiasm, in the wake of the *événements* of 13 May 1958, for a leftist march against the Algiers' insurrection and in support of the Fourth Republic (ibid., pp.259-260). It is the Algerian militant's hard-headed perception of political realities - " - Ça sert à rien, c'est trop tard" (ibid.) - that is borne out by historical developments. Misled by her emotional reaction to political events, Elise neglects Arezki, and is very shortly to regret it. Sacked from the plant following an altercation with a foreman, Arezki is deprived of the all-important *fiche de paye*, and is consequently in grave danger of arrest and detention, or worse. In an interesting reversal of her earlier choice, Elise turns down his offer to meet her in order to attend the demonstration, and never sees him again. She subsequently discovers that Arezki was arrested after his final telephone call to her, on the eve of the march. In a final devastating irony, this loss is combined with that of her beloved brother: desperate to be *dans le coup* in his own right, Lucien steals a moped from the hospital where he is a patient and dies in a road

accident on his way to the demonstration. Belatedly, Elise, like Henri, comes to share Arezki's conclusions:

<<Quelle folie, avait dit Henri. Pour une manifestation inutile... >> [...]

Là, dans ce plat paysage, avait fini l'aventure de sa vie. Vie manquée, mort dérisoire. (ibid., p.268)

The related myth of the workers' ability to counter the physical threat of the military and the other repressive apparatuses of the state was frequently voiced during the Algerian war. Notable occasions were the April 1961 *putsch* and, before that, the May 1958 revolt. Etcherelli is thus justified in having Elise recount the following exchange, which occurs in the course of the demonstration of 28 May:

Des hélicoptères survolaient la foule. Quelqu'un, derrière moi, dit:

- Et si les paras débarquaient?

- Qu'ils y viennent...!

Nous sauvions la République, nous étions le nombre, invincible et uni. (ibid., p.262)

However, as Elise's experience of the reality of state-sanctioned force makes clear, the author has even more reason for undermining the periodic bravado of the left-wingers; the central figure is reflecting on the traumatic conclusion of her first ever visit to Arezki's lodgings:

J'ai eu peur, et quand j'en parle, j'ai peur encore. Lucien, tu disais: <<La police... peuh...!>> Mais moi je dis, j'ai eu peur. Jamais je n'avais concrétisé le mot force. Il est maintenant habillé de sombre, guêtré, casqué, ceinturonné. Ils ont de larges épaules, des mains puissantes, de grosses armes. Ils luisent, du casque à la mitraillette. Ils sont les plus forts. (ibid., p.223)

With this one, painfully concrete, image, the text cuts through the rhetoric of the French left, revealing its inability to face up to the dismal implications of the experiences of Arezki and Elise, and of those like them; the coercive apparatus of the state is thus presented for appraisal in all its frightening solidity.

The left's susceptibility to more subtle modes of repression is exposed when Elise, in the wake of Lucien's hospitalization, is tempted to take the communist Gilles - easily the most sympathetic of the factory foremen - into her confidence. She holds back at the last moment, for reasons which make it plain that the, previously noted,

tendency of metropolitan commentators to "feminize" French support for the FLN is by no means the prerogative of the right:

Les bruits mêlés, la bière, la liberté de nos propos me poussaient à m'ouvrir à lui. Et puis, je me retins à l'ultime seconde. Quand j'eus dit: <<Ecoutez...>>, je pressentis que, s'il savait, son optique changerait. Inévitablement, il penserait: voilà, elle aussi, c'est une histoire de lit. (ibid., p.243)

The inability of metropolitan observers to appreciate the predicament of one of their own is as nothing compared with their lack of awareness of the condition of the Other. This gulf extends even to Elise; her privileged position allows her to sympathize with the lot of the inhabitants of the Nanterre *bidonville*, but not to live it. Her deep inability to empathize is not only noted by the text, but also, crucially integrated into its narrative structure. In the following extract, the limits of the narrator and of the narration are admitted in a self-conscious rejection of earlier literary treatments of the *bidonville* theme (e.g. Lanzmann 1958). The result is precisely the defamiliarization lacking in those earlier accounts:

Tant de journaux, de témoins, de récits ont décrit, depuis, ces lieux où, parqués, agglutinés, survivaient des centaines d'êtres; le faire, ce serait dire et répéter les mêmes mots, accumuler les mêmes adjectifs, tourner en rond autour des mêmes verbes: entassement misérable, souffrance physique, maladie, pauvreté, froid, pluie, vent qui secoue les planches, flaques qui se coulent sous la porte, peur de la police, obscurité, parcage inhumain, douleur, douleur partout. (ibid., pp.209-210)

This self-conscious admission of the narrative's limitations is of considerable strategic significance. The text does not merely recount Elise's failed attempt, as protagonist-narrator, to turn Life into Literature, it makes that failure a principle of its narration. The process of aesthetic estrangement thus encouraged by *Elise* is very much in evidence in the following passage, where the central figure's tendency to indulge in *la romanesquerie* is self-critically evoked. Contemplating the foggy city through the window of the bus carrying her to work, Elise recalls the romantic treatments of fog which she studied as a girl:

J'avais cinquante minutes d'irréalité. Je m'en fermais pour cinquante minutes avec des phrases, des mots, des images. Un lambeau de brume, une déchirure du ciel les exhumaient de ma mémoire. Pendant cinquante minutes, je me dérobaï. La vraie vie, mon frère, je te retiens! Cinquante minutes de douceur qui n'est que rêve. Mortel réveil, porte de Choisy. Une odeur d'usine avant même d'y pénétrer. Trois minutes

de vestiaire et des heures de chaîne. La chaîne, ô le mot juste... Attachés à nos places. Sans comprendre et sans voir. Et dépendant les uns des autres. Mais la fraternité, ce sera pour tout à l'heure. (ibid., p.100)

Here, Etcherelli is doing rather more than reiterating her formulation of Ralph Grillo's accurate observations that "the adverse meaning of *étrangeté* is not always, or only, a property of the right" and that immigrant workers in France are not "integrated with the working class, except at the level of grand theory" (Grillo 1985, pp.79 & 239). More fundamentally, she explodes the myth of literature as an escape-route from everyday existence; what Foulkes describes as "a general tendency to 'shut it away from sight'; to seek shelter from reality in a world of abstractions and eternal truths" (Foulkes 1983, pp.78-79). Poetry can provide no durable recourse for the central figure, any more than it can for the reader. It is, rather, the novel's relentless concentration on the prosaic that constitutes its strength. Etcherelli's portrayal of the humdrum horror of metropolitan France draws on both the naturalism of Zola and the monstrous logic of Kafka; hers is a universe in which abnormality is the norm - at least as far as Algerians are concerned: "La disparition d'Arezki était naturelle, elle s'inscrivait dans une fatale logique dont j'étais la seule à m'émouvoir" (Etcherelli 1967, p.274).

The concluding section of the narrative, in which Elise is driven home by Henri, is a climactic indictment of metropolitan inhumanity to (Algerian) man. Shocked into mute receptivity, the central figure penetrates the ugly truths behind her companion's "Voici Paris" (ibid., pp.269-272). Above all, she realizes that her efforts to discover the whereabouts of Arezki are doomed to failure:

...la vie d'un Arabe est de quel prix ici? Le goût de l'ordre sue de ces maisons. On l'a refoulé, renvoyé là-bas, dans la guerre. Je pourrai bien crier, qui m'écouterà? S'il vit, où est-il? S'il est mort, où est son corps? Qui me le dira? Vous avez pris sa vie oui, mais son corps qu'en avez-vous fait? [...] Qui se souciera d'Arezki? [...] Je pressens que je ne verrai plus jamais Arezki. (ibid., pp.271-272)

An immense success, both as a novel and in Michel Drach's temporarily banned film version, Claire Etcherelli's *Elise ou la vraie vie* was very properly awarded the

1967 Prix Fémina. It is to be hoped that this distinction will not result in the mythical recuperation as Great Literature of what is a profoundly disturbing text. Indeed, the work's firmly established position in the new literary canon should not be allowed to blind us to its genuine power to subvert. As Alain Calmes has argued: "Le désir de coloniser, allié à la nostalgie d'un monde révolu, hante encore certaines consciences malheureuses: le point de vue colonocentriste, persistance anachronique des idées de l'ancien état de choses, demeure un élément indissociable de l'idéologie française contemporaine" (Calmes 1984, p.245). A properly informed reading of Etcherelli's account of relations between the Self and the Other is, we would suggest, the best possible insurance against the resurgence of any such colonialist mystification.

## CONCLUSION

<<La guerre d'Algérie>>, de prime abord, ce n'est pas comme un sujet d'histoire que s'imposent à tous ceux de ma génération ces mots-là: ils agissent sur moi comme un déclic de la mémoire affective, les images s'ensuivent à foison. [...]

Comment faire de l'histoire avec ça, avec ces associations d'images croisées, la chair encore meurtrie des uns, la rancune tenace, les réminiscences douloureuses des autres? Une mémoire qui tourne à l'hypermnésie ne trouble-t-elle pas la sérénité de l'historien? (Winock 1984, pp.22-23)

It is in these terms that Michel Winock opens his mock *baccalauréat* essay on the Algerian war, a subject set by the Amiens-Rouen *académie* in 1984. For the real candidates' elders, the very choice of such a topic remains a source of amazement, as the historian goes on to explain:

...il fut un temps où appeler un chat un chat, et la guerre d'Algérie la guerre d'Algérie, c'était subvertir la vérité officielle, que dans les départements français d'Algérie on ne pouvait faire une <<guerre>>, qu'on ne s'y livrait qu'à des actions de <<pacification>>, aux fins de protéger la communauté franco-musulmane, contre une poignée-de-rebelles-manipulés-par-l'Etranger. Là-dessus, tout le monde entre-temps s'est mis d'accord: c'était bien la guerre... (ibid., p.23)

Affective memory *versus* academic history, personal images *versus* public truths; it is very much against this background of conflicting and conflictual interpretations of the Algerian war that we have sought throughout to situate the present study. Taking as our point of departure the foreign observer's astonishment at the continued French preoccupation with a period of their history "[qui] n'était, à tout prendre, qu'un épisode parmi d'autres du processus normal de la décolonisation" (Droz & Lever 1982, p.344), we have looked to the prose fiction produced in response to the conflict to cast some critical light on the mechanisms responsible for the unique intensity of the Algerian experience.

An approach of this kind necessarily implies both a concentration on the sociological and political aspects of literary texts, and a systematic selection of materials which are primarily, and sometimes exclusively, of interest from this point of view (cf. Enckell 1985, p.191). This extra-literary method of reading has been characterized as ideological, with our principal criterion of textual worth consisting in



each work's contribution to the mystification or demystification of the Algerian war. With this in mind, we have considered a range of texts produced by French soldiers, settlers, and metropolitan commentators, concentrating throughout on the images thus communicated both of the writers' respective communities and of the other parties to the conflict. It is this approach which has led us to posit the existence of a group of discursively communicated ideological myths: namely, the *para*, the *appelé*, the *seigneur*, the *libéral*, the *pied-noir*, and the *autre*. The literary manifestations of these archetypal figures have each been discussed in turn, and their ideological foundations identified and at least partially explicated. We are therefore now in a position to draw a number of more general conclusions about the specific role played by literary texts in the French public's perception of the Algerian war.

It is surely the case, as Alain Calmes argues, that "l'histoire de la présence coloniale est aussi celle de la tentation qu'eut l'idéologie française de devenir la tête de pont du monde occidental dans sa tentative de pénétration et d'asservissement du monde islamique" (Calmes 1984, p.245). However, it is also beyond doubt that what Winock terms "la bonne conscience coloniale" had definitively collapsed by 1960 (Winock 1984, p.24). To put such a precise date on this revolution in the French nation's collective perception of its role in the world - i.e. the replacement of *la plus grande France* by *l'hexagone national* as the focus of French ambitions (ibid., p.23) - is not intended to encourage the Gaullist myth of the Algerian war, according to which the General was solely responsible for ridding France of her ruinous colonial obsessions and thus permitting her to take up her rightful place as the leading force in a newly prosperous Europe. Rather, it is to acknowledge the importance of de Gaulle's *autodétermination* speech of 16 September 1959. For, this spelling out of the inevitability of Algerian independence is properly regarded as a watershed in public attitudes to the hitherto officially sanctioned myths of the *mission civilisatrice*, *Algérie française*, and *le maintien de l'ordre*. From September 1959 onwards, and whatever

one's political affiliations, it was clear that French Algeria was a dead letter.

It follows from this that there is a primary distinction to be made between texts produced prior to de Gaulle's properly epoch-making speech, and those published after it. Indeed, it is above all in these terms that we are able to state that such politically and thematically diverse narratives as Albert Camus's "L'Hôte" and Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber's *Lieutenant en Algérie* (both 1957), Cécil Saint-Laurent's *L'Algérie quand on y est* and Pierre-Henri Simon's *Portrait d'un officier* (both 1958), together with Jean Pélégri's *Les Oliviers de la justice* (1959), all share a common ideological perspective: what is at stake in each of these texts is only ever the maintenance and possibly the reform of *l'Algérie française*, never the establishment of *une Algérie algérienne*. What is more, it is the preservation of this colonialist problematic which necessitates the systematic mystification of Algeria's status, both present and future, irrespective of the respective merits of each work. So, Servan-Schreiber might successfully expose the myth of *pacification*, but he is unable to see beyond it to the inevitable demise of the colonial system which makes all such violence necessary. In the same way, Simon laments the military's use of torture in Algeria without recognizing that the struggle for the territory could never be made humane; whilst Pélégri's undoubted good will is not enough to allow him to break free of what Jules Roy has called "le mythe d'une Algérie heureuse" (Roy 1982, p.19).

It is thus highly significant that Roy's own essay, *La Guerre d'Algérie* (1960) should have been published when it was. Indeed, it represented a major turning-point in the literary depiction of the Algerian war, not only reflecting, but actively encouraging the development of a post-colonial French consciousness. Not that this nascent awareness of the new parameters of the Franco-Algerian relationship was by any means shared by all. On the contrary, the literary defenders of *Algérie française* would continue to plead the colony's case right up to the Evian agreements and beyond. Their increasingly frantic attempts to shore up the colonial edifice are

accurately represented by the mystifying writing of Jean Lartéguy (1960), Jean Brune (1961), and Cécil Saint-Laurent (1960 & 1961). In contrast, both open-minded career soldiers like George Buis and metropolitan liberals like Roger Ikor (both 1961) were able, for all their stated limitations, to make a positive contribution to the demystification of the colonial enterprise. However, it would fall to the ex-conscript, Xavier Grall (1962b) to produce what is perhaps the outstanding fictional exposure of the mythical foundations of the *présence française* in North Africa.

The close of hostilities in Algeria did not, as might have been expected, signal the end of the literary preoccupation with recent events there. Rather, the Algerian conflict continued to generate a regular flow of texts, with the literature of the conscript experience being particularly rich in the latter part of the 1960s as writers like Perec (1966), Labro, Croussy, and Guyotat (all 1967) endeavoured to shed light on this durably problematic aspect of the Algerian experience. The process of self-examination continued throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, as our discussion of the very different approaches of Bonjean (1977), Liscia (1980), Klotz (1981), Pépin (1981), Mattei (1982), and Bourgeade (1983) has shown. Both leftist and right-wing mystifications of conscript service have been identified, whilst the unsurprising tendency of writers in recent years to use the Algeria of the *appelé* as a *décor* for the treatment of more universal themes has also been noted. (This last development is perhaps best exemplified by a number of conscript-centred *polars* and *bandes dessinées* which have now appeared: e.g. Delteil 1985 and Vidal & Bignon 1982; cf. Daeninckx 1984).

With the demise of *Algérie française* and the repatriation of the better part of a million European settlers, the floodgates were opened on a tidal wave of *pied-noir* recrimination and nostalgia. Conesa (1970), Martinez (1982 & 1984), and Saint-Hamont (1974 & 1981) are typical examples of this still unabated flow of European *plaidoyers* and *larmoyers*. That these and all such examples of *la nostalgie française* should continue to maintain the myth of an Algerian golden age is hardly surprising,

perhaps. Less to be expected, however, is Vladimir Volkoff's formally imaginative but politically reactionary paean to the colonial *seigneur* and the wasted opportunities for preserving *Algérie française* (1980). The wholly anachronistic vision which this text puts forward of the paternal colonizer and the childlike colonized ignores the challenge made to this most traditional image of the colonial situation by such powerful, and sexually-focussed, critiques of colonialism as are uttered by Grall (1962b), Millecam (1968), and, *a fortiori*, Etcherelli (1967). These historically "misrepresentative" but ideologically pioneering treatments of the Franco-Algerian relationship are effectively leap-frogged by Volkoff, whose work may be seen as part of a broader *revanchisme* that yearns for the lost glories of empire; a tendency epitomized by Pascal Bruckner's pamphlet *Le Sanglot de l'homme blanc* (1983) and properly condemned by Sami Naïr (1983), amongst others.

The combination in Volkoff's work of formal novelty and ideological conservatism leads us to ask some fundamental questions about the relationship obtaining between form and content in the literature of the Algerian war. In particular, we must decide whether, in fact, formal innovation really is a necessary condition of socio-political defamiliarization as argued by commentators like Frye and Vonnegut. This case has been persuasively argued by Alec Hargreaves with regard to the French colonial literature of the expansionist period:

...the colonial spirit ... may have been fundamentally inimical to [artistic] innovations. [...] Colonisation is characterised by the subjugation of new areas to pre-established purposes, as opposed to the redefinition of aims in the light of new conditions and experiences. Writers who were in sympathy with the colonial spirit ... approached the overseas territories with inflexibility. [...] ...the main artistic evidence of the colonial spirit ... lies in the very rigidity of their fictional technique, which is too narrow to successfully handle truly reciprocal inter-personal relationships." (Hargreaves 1981, pp.160-161)

While this type of analysis is undoubtedly valid with regard to the earlier period of colonial literature examined by Hargreaves, it appears somewhat simplistic if applied to the literature of the Algerian war. This is precisely what Angelo Rinaldi does when

bemoaning the conflict's failure to produce a "great novel" to compare with *War and Peace*, *L'Espoir* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*:

Dans ce canton de la littérature, continue de régner le silence d'une mecha après le passage d'un commando de parachutistes. Un silence de loin en loin troublé par le cri d'une mémoire blessée. Un cri qui ne parvient pas à troubler notre indifférence - si déplaisant que soit le mot, il faut bien le prononcer. Seul, sans doute, un chef d'oeuvre réussirait à nous réveiller, à dégager du brouillard les événements qui déchirèrent deux nations il y a vingt-cinq ans, en les fixant dans la provisoire éternité de l'écriture. (Rinaldi 1979, p.86)

Rinaldi's hackneyed imagery is as revealing as his fulsome praise of Pierre Guyotat's *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats* (1967), which is characterized as "[un] monument de belles proportions qui appartient incontestablement à la meilleure littérature" (ibid., p.87). In fact, little could be more contestable than this formally pretentious, and, in consequence, well nigh unreadable, text's claims to greatness. On the contrary, it is to a modest and resolutely realistic treatment of the very same conscript theme, Philippe Labro's *Des feux mal éteints* - published the same year but ignored by Rinaldi - that we would look for an example of genuinely awakening literature. This is one of a select band of readily accessible but undeniably demystifying texts which may not have the universal appeal of Tolstoy, Malraux or Hemingway, but certainly contribute to a properly informed awareness of the historical specificity of the Algerian conflict. Others would include particularly Servan-Schreiber's *Lieutenant en Algérie* (1957), Roy's *La Guerre d'Algérie* (1960), Buis's *La Grotte* (1961), and Grall's *Africa blues* (1962b): i.e. a fictionalized autobiography, a deeply personal essay, and two highly autobiographical novels; a range of texts which serves to underline the blurring of generic distinctions in this body of literature and usefully reminds us of the basic primacy of ideology over self-referentiality as far as the goal of demystification is concerned. This is a collection of writing, moreover, which leads us to believe that, whatever the properly artistic merits of formal innovators like Millecam - and notwithstanding the masterly contributions made on the Algerian side proper by highly innovative writers like Kateb Yacine (1956) and

Mohammed Dib (1962) - in this particular historical context, a readily accessible realism offered the most effective route to Winock's affective memory.

However, these texts are very much the exception to the general mystifying rule. For the bulk of the literary commentators considered here, there can be little doubt that "Algeria constituted a sort of historic inkblot where Frenchmen, in purporting to account for events there, instead revealed much more of the political lessons, hopes, and fears they had acquired from other experiences and had projected onto Algeria in disregard of the objective circumstances there" (Smith 1978, p.29). This is particularly true of those writers who inclined towards military romanticism, whether it be openly and wholeheartedly like Lartéguy and Brune, or in spite of themselves like Cesbron (1962) and Clavel (1974). In view of this fact, the final word should, perhaps, be left to Roger Ikor, whose own work *Les Murmures de la guerre*, has strong claims for inclusion in our list of actively demystifying treatments of the Algerian war:

Fenns avait lu *le Feu*, il avait lu *Civilisation et Vie des Martyrs*, il avait lu *les Croix de Bois*, et *A l'Ouest rien de nouveau*, et *les Nus et les Morts*, et même *le Brave Soldat Schweik*; il avait lu *Stalingrad* et *Sur le Don paisible*, et bien d'autres romans de guerre encore, sans parler de *Guerre et Paix*. Il avait cru jadis qu'ils illustraient l'horreur, la monstruosité et l'absurdité de la guerre. Il se rendait compte à présent que tous, et même ceux qui prétendaient au pacifisme, vibraient d'une subtile jubilation au rappel des plus épouvantables souvenirs. Le capitaine Conan n'était pas seul à proclamer la joie du guerrier: elle palpitait partout, inconsciente, mais vivace, chez les Russes comme chez les Américains ou les Français, et...

Parbleu oui: c'est elle que le lecteur recherchait, allait chercher dans ces livres. Le lecteur ancien combattant par nostalgie, le lecteur non-combattant par envie. (Ikor 1961, p.106)

The Algerian war, in short, may have been a particularly traumatic experience for the French nation, but this fact by no means precludes its literary recuperation by our most shadowy psychological processes. We have attempted in this thesis to cast some light on the ideological mechanisms at work in the literary imaging of the Algerian war; a similar study along psychocritical, and even psychohistorical, lines is very much to be encouraged.

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