

In the Days of the Last Vespasians

by Louis Allen

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Yes, even the last ones are threatened, and it becomes a matter for congratulation, let alone relief, to catch sight of the one opposite the Palais de Justice, or the few they have left in the Latin Quarter, outside the Ecole de Médecine or opposite the Place de la Sorbonne. Other visual clichés of Parisian life are disappearing, too, for ever. A few weeks ago, unthinkable red and grey buses began to appear on a few Paris routes, heralding the disappearance of the familiar ugly green monsters with their capacious platforms, still the best, if somewhat unstable, way of seeing the city. By 1966 at least one Métro line will be running without drivers and dispensing tickets from machines (it's always been supposed that if they allowed people to travel free on the Métro and dispensed with drivers and clippies the loss of revenue would be less than the wage-bill . . .). And an old landmark is about to disappear from the skyline at the end of the long perspective of the rue de Rennes, where the Gare Montparnasse is making way for a vast new office-block and modernised station. The present station is inadequate to deal with the vast increase of traffic, but some memories will go with it: the ghosts of Modigliani and Soutine haunt it and it was here von Choltitz surrendered to Leclerc when the city was liberated in 1944.

No doubt in a few years time the gradual changes will have the cumulative effect that Baron Haussmann's long broad avenues did under the Second Empire. Yet the changes are slower than many in Western Europe, and it's mainly public buildings that are involved. The Arc de Triomphe is under sheets and scaffolding, ready to emerge into the light of day like the gleaming new Panthéon, but many (far too many) Frenchmen are still villainously housed, and likely to remain so. The real scruffiness of a great deal of French territory is certainly one factor in that political apathy of the electorate, particularly the young electorate, which is a constant theme of newspapers and reviews. In a way, I suppose, apathy is almost a relief after the upheavals of the past two decades. All the old questions which were tearing France apart only a few years ago have been thrown into the waste-paper basket of history as if they'd never happened: the war in Indo-China, and the rebellion in Algeria, with their aftermath of torture and military dissidence, are as remote as 1870. The moral problems involved in conscription into a war of savage repression have given way to the more domestic problems of acquiring consumer goods.

As far as a dampening of political enthusiasm is concerned it has been supposed that the political emancipation of women in France, which only dates from 1944, has produced a more conservative electorate, less interested in radical answers to political questions. That this vastly over-simplified view, held by many male professors of political theory, is based on a number of clichés which will not stand up to analysis, is the theme of a recent study of electoral sociology, 'Les Françaises et la politique' in *Les Temps Modernes* (July, 1965) by Andrée Michel. Most previous studies, she affirms, have been falsified from the start since (like Maurice Duverger's *Le comportement politique des femmes*, published ten years ago) they tackle the problem solely from the point of view of women's participation in the various political parties, whereas women find a more suitable outlet in the activities of pressure groups, which are often at least as significant politically.

The reason is that – whatever the juridical status of women in modern France – the parties themselves tend to restrict the role played by women in them. Women rarely hold top jobs, are not often chosen as candidates for elections, party committees on women's questions are often used as channels for diverting their interest from major issues, and if women are to succeed within a party framework, they must accept a masculine verdict on the priority of this or that issue. All this is as true of the supposedly more progressive parties of the left, which have shown themselves every bit as paternalistic in this respect as the traditional parties. All party structures are over-bureaucratic and unable to adapt themselves to the newer mentalities; they deal in convenient tactical lies whereas women prefer an aim to be clearly stated and unambiguously striven for and are above all interested in peace, a goal none of the parties seems to pursue effectively.

Other familiar prejudices are taken to task: that women are more sentimental and vote for a personality rather than a programme; that they are more passive than men and vote the way their husbands want them to; that they are antifeminist and don't really want to see other women in public life. Mlle Michel adduces an interesting point against the first: it was possible in pre-Nazi Germany to assess male and female votes because they were counted separately, and less women than men voted for Hitler and the Nazis. Though it is true that 10% more women than men voted for de Gaulle in 1962, this can be explained quite simply not in terms of personality, but because de Gaulle promised a definite policy of ending the war in Algeria, and seemed most likely to carry it out, and would attract women's votes on this ground alone. Again, it is said that women vote like their husbands, but why should it not be simply that husbands vote like their wives? In fact, when there is a visible identity of voting patterns, the most likely cause is the still persistent homogamy in France: Alain Girard has shown in a recent study

(*Le choix du conjoint*, Paris, P.U.F, 1964) that husbands and wives are still selected within fairly narrow geographical, educational, religious and socio-economic limits. It is the identical background rather than marital persuasion which is probably effective here. As far as women's antifeminism goes, a recent survey has shown that among voters for equal access to political and professional status, 76% women voted in favour, as opposed to 56% men.

Another cliché is the 'essentially conservative' nature of the female vote. Here Mlle Michel admits the statistics show that more women than men vote for the moderate centre or Christian parties. But the figures don't show a very wide discrepancy: in the Belfort elections in 1946, 47.6% of women voted communist as against 52.4% men, 46.5% women voted socialist as opposed to 53.5% men, and 57.6% women voted MRP as against 42.4% men.

Certain factors of differentiation have to be taken into account. The female electoral body is older than the male: as a result of two world wars there were in 1946 more than three times the number of single or widowed women over 50 than men of similar status. This difference is less acute today, but it is still present, and older people on the whole tend to cast a more conservative, traditionalist vote. A second factor is that a larger number of men are active in workers' and professional associations, whereas, of course, only 36% of women over 15 have employment, and women's work tends not to be in the same sector as that of men: of 100 politically active women interviewed in 1954 for another survey, only 30 were working class women; of 100 men, 52 were from the working class.

Education is perhaps the most important factor. And what happens here interests the Church in France very much. It is usually supposed there are more Catholic women voters than men. Why? Because even among the free-thinking middle-class circles, there is a tendency to ensure that the daughters of the family are brought up by nuns, and in the technical sector of education a recent report (1962) on the employment of women showed that in state technical schools there was an average of 61 boys to 39 girls, and in religious schools 34 boys to 66 girls. Another enquiry into the tenants of furnished accommodation in the Paris area showed how common it was for poor workers to send their sons off to Communist youth meetings while their daughters went to catechism class to prepare for their first communion, on the assumption that whatever the parents believed a religious education was 'the right thing' for girls. If then, says Mlle Michel, there is some basis for the belief that women tend to vote for the party which seems currently to represent Catholic interests, this has nothing to do with a supposedly inherent sentimental religiosity on the part of women; their thinking has simply been moulded by the type of education they have received.

Mlle Michel concludes that the real forces in France remain the 'pressure groups', such as the Church, the employers, the legal and

banking professions, all of which act outside the interplay of political parties. Women too have found their sphere in activities (movements for peace, for family planning, League for the Rights of Man, etc.) which aren't run along the antiquated lines of the party system. The parties of the Left have had most to lose from not achieving a massive following among French women since their emancipation in 1944 (under de Gaulle incidentally, not as a result of a democratic parliamentary intervention), and if they do not realize their sclerotic inability to criticise and reform themselves and show themselves capable of granting women a full and proper role in policy and direction, then they will continue to fail to attract the ardour and enthusiasm of women, which will inevitably manifest itself in extra-party political activities.

As far as French youth is concerned, the cudgels have been taken up by a young graduate, Yves Livian ('Changer d'air', *Le Monde*, 16 Sept., 1965). No one seems to have pointed out, he says, that since young French people have no proper means of education or information about political issues and since there is no attempt to give them a political interest in what is happening inside France, the 'dépolitisation' is hardly surprising. Yet French youth travels abroad, reads and compares the results with what it sees in France. What does it see? Political parties quite incapable of transcending ancient disputes, trade-unions divided amongst themselves and unable to forgo preoccupations which belong to the nineteenth century, and the whole of political life 'crushed by a myth which is both re-assuring and a little ridiculous, the myth of the Saviour, of the Great-Man-who-at-least-has-the-merit-of-being-there'. Young people not only notice this, they see also the chasm which divides this reality from the ideals which are piously repeated to it every day: France as the country of democracy ('the freedom foreigners come to seek', 'life is good in France'), the country of culture ('the most intelligent people on earth', the superiority of French universities) and so on. Now young Frenchman can quite easily see that France is anything but the country of democracy, because public opinion there is simply not concerned with the really great questions (atomic energy, unity of Europe, etc.) and because for the past seven years it has been satisfied with an omnipotent sovereign who has decided everything for the people, and because no objective information is accessible in a country submerged by propaganda and televised degradation. 'A country does not deserve democracy' M. Livian concludes 'when reasoned choice gives way to abdication'. Culture fares no better, and here he takes up a theme which has appeared here and there in the French press for some time. 'France is not a cultured country because one Frenchman in two doesn't even read a book a year, because the government applies to an adult population a literary censorship intended for children, because expenditure on education is restricted to provide public money for motorways and everyone is

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busy admiring the infant squallings of an urban reconstruction which has been going on for 20 years almost everywhere else, and because singers are more esteemed than scientists. The atmosphere of France weighs heavily on the young, ossifies their minds, and asphyxiates intellectual and social life with its conformity, its opposition to progress and its false notions of national greatness. "One supreme Being breathes too deep", but many stifle.'

Inviting young Frenchmen to take a change of air, M. Livian does not say that they are *not* apolitical; he gives reasons why they are. In a brilliant, if rather abstract, pamphlet entitled simply *En France* (Paris, Julliard, 1965) the philosopher Jean-François Revel confirms in not dissimilar terms the irritation, verging on disgust, with the daily apparatus of French living which he is obviously not alone in feeling. The French people as a whole have no share in the culture which has been elaborated for many centuries by French civilisation. Bad taste, ignorance and ugly surroundings prevail, in a country which has traditionally prided itself on the very opposite. The real vocation of the French lies not in the intellectual but in the military life, because the military ideal is a prototype in France for any human ideal. This has political repercussions: the notion the French have of political power is rooted in the military principle, and it is a historical misunderstanding that there has arisen an image of the French as a people of freedom and revolution. In reality their whole way of thinking and feeling lies in the opposite direction. The French have an enduring contempt for democratic régimes and democratic politicians and the way they spontaneously accept authority once it is imposed is sufficient explanation for the recent rapid implanting on French soil of personal power. No need to take away their freedom of expression, because they are the creators of a new form of dictatorship adapted to an under-informed society devoted to consumer goods.

This is the major failure of the Left in France today. It acknowledges defeat within itself and has as good as given in to the authoritarian régime which its young intellectuals secretly admire. Hence the deplorable fact that the only really harmful opposition to de Gaulle in the last few years has not come from the Left at all but from the extreme Right. The Left is prepared to concede the virtues of personal power because it is afraid of being accused of wanting to return to the feebleness, string-pulling and corruption of the Fourth Republic. Those who were marxists in 1948 are now cautious careerists in the wake of the 'great man'. The increasing complexity of industrial civilisation, far from creating the depoliticalisation which is endemic in France today, and which is as much a symbol of the success of the authoritarian régime as the police repression of student demonstrations, would normally require an increase in political awareness, and does so elsewhere. France is behind the rest of the industrial world in this. And happy in being so, concludes

Revel, 'because France only realises herself fully when she remains unaware of what those who govern her do or intend to do'.

Revel's forthright and acid scourging of French conformity and listless acquiescence in the gaullist régime has been noted on all sides as a brilliant analysis of the *malaise* felt in certain areas of French opinion. It doesn't of course, go far enough, because the political and cultural apathy, which both he and Livian comment on, has its roots in a deeper lack of strong feelings towards life itself. A book published some time ago, and hardly noticed here because it was probably assumed that *Generation X* had said all there was to be said about contemporary adolescence, gives a kind of 'mass-observation' view which shows a much profounder discontent than any which might be solved by a change of government. The book is Bertrand Blier's scenario of interviews with a cross-section of young Parisians who have grown up since the war: *Hitler? Connais pas* (Hitler? Who's he?) published in the series 'Voici – Témoignages' in 1963.

One example will be enough to show the kind of reaction he obtained. Nicole is a 19-year old typist who works in the centre of Paris. Not bad-looking, but with a certain hardness and aggressiveness in the expression. In spite of this she has the charm of her age, a little spoiled by overdoing her make-up and the evident signs of fatigue from too many late nights. 'My parents made a great mistake last year, leaving me alone in Paris, with money and the use of the flat, for a whole month. The expected occurred, I took up with a boy (I think a girl should have one or two experiences before she gets married) – I'd decided that at 18, for reasons of . . . of hygiene, I would take a lover. His name was Philippe, and I took up with him, I suppose, partly out of gratitude, there was always a whole crowd of us having lunch or dinner at his house . . . and anyway, it had to happen – Philippe or someone else, it didn't matter much.

I was fairly middle-class in my ideas, at bottom – I hadn't been around much, and I was impressed by the fact he was a publicity photographer and a painter – I modelled for him – yes, that already! I don't think I was in love with him, no – we understood each other quite well, physically we got on well together – and he took me to see plays and films it wouldn't have occurred to me to go to before I knew him.

When he left me – I think it was his fault, really, he pushed things a bit far. At the end I was keeping him, more or less, and he took advantage of this to go out with other girls. I wasn't worried about *them* but I was pretty mad about him doing it with my money, almost under my eyes – and everybody knew about it. I got fed up one day, threw a plate at him and left. Three days feeling dreadful – he filled so much of my life! It was the time we spent together so much – lunch, dinner, theatre – otherwise I couldn't care less about the 'chagrin d'amour'.

What do I think about him now? I never think about him at all. He did me a service, that's all. He has no importance for me at all, any more – I don't think he ever did, really. I never think about him, never at all – what's the point?

Oh, yes, there was an awful row when my parents got back and my mother found the list of my 'conquests' in my handbag. But they gave up in the end, I was quite determined to do what I wanted and finally they decided not to bother about what I did outside the domestic circle. At any rate if it does bother them, they don't show it. . . .

What do I think about my parents? Difficult to say . . . We don't really know each other. We see each other at meal times (about the only habit I've left) and afterwards my father watches television so you can't talk. It's better that way. My mother brings me coffee to bed in the mornings. That's all. You can see our family life doesn't amount to much.

Oh, I like them all right, but I don't have any real feelings for them, or any exchange of ideas with them, or anything like that, it's just that they're decent, they're useful – and I've got used to them. If they weren't there it would be a nuisance, it would change so many things.

Love? It's something physical, mostly. The rest, for me, is a sort of friendship – love – real but not very deep. In relationships like that it's the friendship not the love which counts. Love is something external, something that doesn't really go with me at all. I like physical love, of course. Otherwise I wouldn't do it. What do I think about it? Difficult to say, off hand, just like that. It depends who it happens with, and how. It has an important place in my life, but . . . It's rarely a complete success, in fact it's usual for it not to be, because I can't always do it with people I like . . . well, obviously it's often a flop.

I'm not afraid of death, no, really not. Don't know why. Perhaps because life doesn't interest me much, really. I like it for the people I meet, that's all life is; but I don't think death's so serious, so important. It's got to come, hasn't it?

After death? Problem's a bit beyond me. I think there's nothing left – nothing – like life. What I would like, is something like reincarnation. That would be smashing! But you wouldn't remember what you were before, so it wouldn't matter much.

I don't want to be buried, can't bear the thought of it. I think that's the worst thing about death, and there's the hypocrisy of people crying for you when they didn't really like you. And it's atrocious, fearful, to know you're going to decay, that your body's going to drop to bits and be eaten by insects and things. No, I can't bear the thought of it. No, I don't want people to come and visit my grave. Once you're dead, you're dead, it's over, best forget. I want to be cremated. I don't much care what's done with the

ashes. But what I don't like are those tombs! They make you feel so sad. . . .'

You feel at once, reading Blier's interviews, that the emptiness they often show is a very deep-seated one, and a merely political change isn't going to alter the quality of life enough to make it matter at that level. Beside this deep disquiet, the enthusiasm the press is currently whipping up for the December presidential election seems to be scratching the surface. The newspapers put the obvious questions: What kind of a showing will François Mitterand make, with his romantic resistance past and his cautious alliance with the Communists? What is the status of the dark horse Antoine Pinay (out of Vichy by Fourth Republic) who will probably cash in on the perennial middle class need for security and continuity with a rather unlovely past? None of the contenders stands a chance against de Gaulle, and they clearly know this themselves, as does everybody else. But their showing will provide an indication of the line-up when the shadow of the great man no longer obumbrates everything and everyone. The manoeuvres are interesting for what will be happening in four or five years, not for what they will produce in December. It will be interesting to see, later, if someone like the journalist Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber (who wrote a very good book about his service in Algeria at a time when it took courage to do so) will use his platform *Express* to put across a Kennedy formula, in his own image, to appeal to a generation which apparently isn't interested. In an article 'Préface à la campagne' (6 Sept., 1965) he declares that two things alone count: first, does France really see the necessity for forming part not simply of a kind of Europe Zollverein, which can easily be dominated by Chrysler, General Electric *et al.*, but of a politically united Europe with a single political decision-making body, the only thing which will make any kind of counter-balance to the U.S.A. and Soviet Russia? Second, the crucial factor for any candidate opposing de Gaulle is the will – or otherwise – to treat with the Communists. The first of these considerations implies breaking openly with the recent tacit tradition of criticising de Gaulle on domestic issues while preserving a conspiracy of silence over French foreign policy. The official view distilled daily by all forms of propaganda is a kind of nationalist poison. Paradoxically the Communists fall into this trap as much as anyone else. They seem to accept de Gaulle's nationalism in Europe without any difficulty. This is little different from the history of the Fourth Republic which was basically a convergence of Gaullists and Communists to prevent national renovation through the electoral system and to frustrate any kind of governmental stability. Now, by tacitly approving de Gaulle's nationalist foreign policy, the Communists buttress the most essential part of his programme. Any politician who seriously wants to break away from this sterile *de facto* collusion must openly oppose the 'poujadist' direction of the Communist Party and the 'maurassien'

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direction of the Gaullists. Many Frenchmen are Communist or Gaullist, very naturally, not because they have anything in common with the conservative direction of either party, but because they hope through them to achieve the modernisation of France. Anyone who can show a way to use this stock of good will and subtract it from where it now lies, useless, in the hands of the extremists of either side, would point the way to a really fruitful future for French politics.

Since Servan-Schreiber wrote this – and he admits it is fairly banal – François Mitterand has put himself forward as the candidate of the Left, prepared – as Gaston Defferre was not – to receive the co-operation of the Communists. This has naturally caused some misgivings among those socialists who, with good reason, fear even gift-bearing Greeks; but Mitterand is able enough to steer his own course and seems to be aiming at what Servan-Schreiber outlines as the essential opposition policy. The text of M. Mitterand's candidature is quite specific on a number of these points: 'The essential question for me, he writes, is to oppose the arbitrary nature of personal power, chauvinistic nationalism, and conservatism in the social sphere, to respect scrupulously freedom and the law, to seize every chance of creating Europe, with a dynamic expansion controlled by democratic planning'. Mm . . . Anyway, let's wait and see.

Françoise Sagan

The countless negotiations that no doubt are necessary to lead to this or that candidature, and which are promptly reported in detail make one sympathise to a certain extent with the lack of desire for non-personal goals that Blier's young men and women showed. Until, that is, one sees its logical conclusions, which are drawn with devastating accuracy and lucidity – and a certain complacency, too – by the torch-bearer of the last generation but one: Françoise Sagan. The graduation of Mme Sagan from sports-cars to parentage hasn't dimmed her perceptions of that type of life which is perpetually standing on the edge of pointless risk to give spice to what would otherwise be a terrifying vacuity. Her new novel, *La Chamade* (Julliard, 1965) traces the same old story, with the same old players.

'Battre la chamade' is a military phrase meaning to beat the drum for a parley with the enemy. The lovers' hearts beat like this drum when they are together in their brief episode of passion; but the phrase has another meaning too, 'to surrender', 'to give in', which is precisely what the heroine Lucile does – not to love, not to passion, but to the need for money and comfort. Sagan's world, as all her critics never fail to point out, is a very limited one, a section of the moneyed middle-class which flickers rapidly between Paris café society and the Mediterranean, fighting boredom with brief episodes of passion or driving fast cars. Against this constant Sagan background, the unattractive quartet of *La Chamade* unfolds its sad drama. Lucile Saint-Léger, a woman of 30, who has sworn to try and keep her youth alive within her (by irresponsibility and selfishness) is

kept by Charles, a tolerant, generous man of about 50. He provides the money, the atmosphere of mink and Rolls Royces, which means she doesn't even have to think about acquiring it. Lucile is lazy and won't even exert herself for things she very much desires. She meets Antoine, a parallel case – he is of the same age as herself, works for a publisher, and is kept by Diane, a wealthy handsome woman of 50. They decide to break away from their 'keepers' and spend a spring and summer together in a brief episode of passion, which begins to decay when Lucile realizes how much she depends on having the money Charles provided.

Her lazy cupidity sends her back to him: passion may be splendid, but too much Métro in place of the Rolls brings disenchantment. She is with child by Antoine and Charles pays for an expensive abortion. The child would have been an irritation: 'The sun, the beaches, laziness, freedom, it's our due! We can't help it, Antoine, it's in our heads, in our skin. Oh, no doubt we're rotten. But I never feel I *am* rotten except when I pretend to think I am'. Charles takes her back, of course, because he has learned to accept her lack of responsibility and views with patience her vow, made fifteen years before, never to let her youth leave her. 'A well-fed, well-dressed animal, agile only in avoiding complications' – this is Lucile; but, however wretched, an authentic twentieth-century heroine. One sees in her the completion of the girls evoked in Blier's interviews.

Talking to Georges Belmont (*Arts*, 15 Sept., 1965), Françoise Sagan is quite lucid about the self that creates (or re-creates) this kind of women and this kind of world. After a broken marriage, an almost fatal accident and a child (her son Denis), she knows now that she is no longer invulnerable. 'When I was a child I was completely absorbed in my family, but they were all adults and I feel I've either always been a kind of "fake adult" before my time or that the older I grow the more I cling to childhood. There are still certain "grown-up" virtues I don't understand. I think, for instance, since I'm the one who commits my acts, I'm the one who should judge them. Whereas the adult view is that they imply a whole complex of moral and social relationships.' Denis is the exception: 'Only Denis has the right to judge me and this is the first time I've ever felt that about anybody. And it's very odd to feel suddenly someone in your life who judges you, an eye which looks at you as you've always wanted to be looked at.'

Asked by Michele Cotta (*Express*, 13 Sept., 1965) how she would envisage the death of her heroine, Mme Sagan's reply was characteristically predictable: 'The best thing for her would be to be killed in a car smash when she's thirty-five. Yes, that's it, she'll kill herself when she's very happy, one evening after drinking too much and driving too fast.' When asked how she thought of growing old herself, 'I never think about it' she answered – which hardly tallies with the manifest obsession of her heroines. She thought she would simply

grow old like everyone else, '... or perhaps I'll be killed in a thermo-nuclear war. Or I'll be in Brazil with a gigolo. Or I'll become a model wife and mother'. The order of priorities is not without a certain interest.

One wonders whether the life Françoise Sagan proposes – or evokes – is the kind of life a country without great goals will inevitably offer to its people. And yet the laziness of Lucile, which is her most outstanding characteristic, is not really typical of the French attitude to life even among those who are most accused of being apathetic on the political level. 'Let my lusts be my ruin' wrote Hart Crane in one of his letters 'since all else is fake and misery'. It might seem that this is the gospel of the Sagan world; and yet its principal actors are not as *energetic* as such a positive pursuit of pleasure would imply. Their aim is ease, rather than delight.

Education of examinations

The indifference to issues is held, it should be said, to extend beyond the political: cultural apathy is also supposed to be the natural condition of the average Frenchman who, according to the angry book trade's statistics, reads half a book a year, or less. A rather grandiosely titled 'Crusade for the Book' intends to remedy this by encouraging not simply the use of bookshops but of libraries as well. French libraries are by and large more unprepossessing than ours so this may not be an easy task; but the flood of pocket-books seems to give the lie to the pessimists. France caught on to the pocket-book market late in comparison with Britain and America but has now a number of very flourishing series, *Le Livre de Poche*, *Le Monde en 10/18*, *Idées, J'ai Lu*, which can rival Penguins in width of range and initiative in publishing out-of-the-way or original texts. Publishers clearly do not lack courage when they are prepared to market not merely Jules Romains' *Les Hommes de Bonne Volonté* but also a complete pocket Proust in four or five volumes. And there is something else: the very different reactions to the recent reform of the *baccalauréat* show that education, if not culture as such, can still be a burning topic.

The old *baccalauréat*, the cornerstone of the French educational system, had two stages and passing it entitled the holder to go on to university education. The examination now has one stage only, the first stage being replaced by teachers' reports. Good marks in the new examination (the pass mark is 50%) will lead to the University, less good marks will lead either to a competitive examination in which the candidate tries again for university or goes to a technical institute. Those who do not get 50%, and do not want to go to a technical institute, will be awarded a *certificat de fin d'études* which will merely indicate the completion of secondary studies. The examination introduces a stricter specialisation, grouping subjects into categories. It is intended, for example to ensure that the *bachelier* in arts will enter the *Faculté des Lettres* and one in sciences will enter the *Faculté des Sciences* – which is a trend very much opposed to what the

new universities in Britain hope to achieve. The reform of the 'bachot' has occupied a lot of space in newspapers and reviews but it is by no means as far-reaching as this fact might lead one to believe and it is certainly not as radical as many French educators would like.

It affects in no way the entry to the 'grandes écoles' (*Polytechnique* and so on) which provide the top bureaucratic and industrial framework of French society – rather like reforming English education without mentioning the public schools. As in this country, technical education is clearly a poor relation and likely to remain so, since those who cannot enter universities because of low marks in the *baccalauréat* will be sent to 'instituts techniques' – which by definition will not get the best pupils. No mention is made of new teaching methods to cope with the vast increase in numbers demanding secondary education – 70,000 in 1900, but two and a half million now. Writing in *Réalités* (July 1965), Jean Capelle, a professor at Nancy who is also a member of the *Conseil supérieur de l'Éducation nationale*, questions the whole nature of the *baccalauréat*, and shows that its double function – as a terminal examination at the end of a period of study, and a check to see which candidates are fit to continue their studies – introduces an element of ambivalence exactly like that in our own G.C.E. 'A' level examination. The averaging of results is futile – a candidate average in everything will get through, so will one brilliant in some things but poor in others, and the examination won't distinguish. And the use of a single test or group of tests at one time means that the candidate is tested at only one point of the curve of his development. Content is faulty too, relying on memory rather than on intelligence, erudition and not method being rewarded. The case of the examination leakages showed this. In the Toulon and Marseilles areas, a number of scripts were considered 'contaminated' since the candidates knew the topics they were to be asked. But a comparison of work-books with scripts showed that the bad candidates were still bad candidates since they had relied on an uncoordinated amassing of information and their inability to cope with it showed through. There was thus, concludes M. Capelle, only a moral necessity to make the candidates re-sit the exam – practically speaking, the leakages hadn't affected the issue. He even suggests providing the candidates with documentation – as they would usually have it in real life to solve historical or technical questions. With everyone having equal documentation, the examiner could then concentrate on discovering real ability, which would be shown by the way the documentation was used.

In addition, the system of collating teachers' reports to give a joint verdict on a pupil would be difficult in France, says M. Capelle, because it would imply giving an official value to the opinions of those teachers who belong to the 'enseignement libre', i.e. to Catholic schools, and the Falloux law (back into the middle of the nineteenth century!) removes these schools from the control which

would render possible the acceptance of their verdicts. M. Capelle merely indicates that church schools exist in other countries which have solved this problem, but he doesn't propose a solution for France: the problem is still too hot to hold. Oddly enough, the nearest he comes to a solution as far as recognising Catholic school 'verdicts' for entry to university is concerned, is to suggest an adaptation of the British system, whereby a candidate would take a compulsory paper in French composition and then another three out of a possible twelve or so, of his own choice – in a national examination. It is vital for France that the Universities become more selective and that a variety of other possibilities be made available for those who at the moment try to enter a University at all costs, since the *grandes écoles* are closed to them (they are hyper-selective), and there are not enough technical institutes to go round.

M. Capelle's last point: the school year has three elements, teaching, examinations, holidays – the last two are on the increase, the first is diminishing. If the French do not reverse this trend and make a better use of their school year, they are going to find themselves qualitatively and quantitatively behind the other nations of the modern world.

The approving glance cast by M. Capelle at our 'A' Level system will astonish the English reader struggling (if he has a family) in the morass of a totally inadequate examination system for his children; but the philosopher Georges Gusdorf says much the same sort of thing about the *lacunae* of French education (*L'Ecole ou l'on s'ennuie*, *Nouvelles littéraires* (23 Sept., 1965). Criticising the *baccalauréat* and the *certificat d'études* not as instruments for education but as obsessional neuroses, he attacks the purely cerebral approach to education in France, the incompleteness of what the schools do from the point of view of character formation and physical perfecting of the child. Apart from the harmony of the kindergarten, ignored by the administrators as unimportant, there is a fearful rat-race throughout the system which makes for a system of cramming and boredom, resulting in an exclusively intellectual and theoretical education. M. Gusdorf begins at the top – reform the system, he proclaims, throw out the pedagogues who administer it and put an end to the idiotic experimental researches into education carried out by the apostles of programming. Get rid of the technicians and look for people who are concerned with the full education of mind and body. In view of this radical need, the recent reforms are absurdly inadequate. Don't tinker with exams like the *baccalauréat*, suppress it and all exams like it: they are a running sore in French life. If people say you can't have an education without sanctions, because it would lead to catastrophe, he answers that the catastrophe is there already.

Le nouveau roman

Current controversy is by no means confined to the *dépolitisation* of French youth or the iniquities of the French educational system.

The novelist Romain Gary has recently revived the whole business of the *nouveau roman* in a slashing piece of pamphleteering entitled *Pour Sganarelle* (Gallimard). As anyone must, M. Gary admits the technical virtuosity of the new school (not so new, perhaps, since they already dominate the ranks of Plon's 10/18 pocket series). But the whole direction of their novels is wrong. Most novelists are produced by their society; *these* are positively *defaecated* by it, immersed in it, and their art is a kind of metaphysical neurosis of which the forerunner is undoubtedly Kafka. The great novels of the past were victories over their time as well as products of it, and the multiplicity of their creators (Cervantes, Balzac, Tolstoy) has been replaced by the totalitarian novel with one identity and one situation. There is no transcendence of the writer's condition. In fact he becomes so absorbed by that condition that he writes about writing about it (like Philippe Sollers in *Drame*) and tries to ignore the pressures of Power upon his world. The novel should be a liberation, first of the novelist and then of his reader, a conquest of liberty over the limits imposed on them both by external Power of whatever kind.

The master of the *nouveau roman*, Robbe-Grillet, is taken to task for his assertion that the novel must not any longer claim a god's-eye view for its characters (Tolstoy overseeing the whole of Napoleon's campaigns), because this claim offends against *authenticity*. Against this, M. Gary says the novelist in having this god's-eye view is rightly enjoying the unbridled freedom of the imagination without which he would not be a novelist at all.

Technique itself can be a snare and a delusion. The novelist of the nuclear age seems no longer concerned with describing the relations between himself and the world, he is merely looking for whatever has not been done in the past of his art. This may be occasionally a fascinating pursuit, but it disregards the world in favour of the white margin on the page, the space between the lines of what's been written already. Verdict on the 'new novel': the cultural stagnation of an exhausted élite which wants to create art from art and not from life.

This ostrich-like refuge in technique is, of course, based on the fallacy of progress in art, a field, according to M. Gary, in which the word makes no sense: Cézanne is not in advance of Velazquez. All great novels may be revolutions in themselves, but against an *absence* in the past, not against other novels.

The pamphlet makes short work of other received ideas which seem to support the researches of the 'new novel'. The cinema is supposed to have killed the older forms – yet the cinema feeds on the novel, old or new, and in fact it is only a competitor for the popular novel – and even this has never been more popular, precisely, than it is today.

It is also said that the impact of present reality is too strong to make fiction worthwhile. But this simply means there is more reality

for the novelist to draw from. Strength like this would only kill an art which was drawing inspiration from art. Those people who think History is crushing the life out of the novel are just another generation of 'précieux' in retreat from the manifold strength of raw reality into the arms of language. They are looking for a desert island. And critics help them by insisting too much on creating themselves, by wanting their art to be autonomous, which it can only be at the expense of original writing. Hence the vogue for works which *demand* explication, for a hermetic type of literature which permits the critic to be the ventriloquist of the novel.

There is much more in the same vein, with some good old-fashioned rhetorical pamphleteering which makes one realize how deplorably desiccated literary controversy has become in England. Any sensible critic, of course, is chary of unconsidered assaults on experimental art – the profession has had its fingers burned too often in the past. And yet those of us who feel that Bergson's *fonction fabulatrice* is an essential part of the artist in prose fiction, as it is of man himself, are bound to feel uneasy when the narrative thread is contemptuously cast aside, whether it be for the sake of psychological analysis, poetic vision, or tropistic observation of reality. The flight into fantasy and/or technique may arise, of course, quite straightforwardly from the writer's experiential inadequacy. Raymond Queneau has commented on this as it affects French writers in an entry in his recently reprinted diary (*Batons, chiffres et lettres*, Gallimard, 'Idées', 1965):

'In France we are accustomed to writers who have a career (teaching say, or the civil service) parallel to their literary career, and both develop without conflict. The American writer is quite different. Usually he's had all kinds of jobs and his human experience is infinitely wider than that of writers whose life has been lived always in the same circle – a very small circle at that — and who as a result look for their creative wealth in an out-dated solipsist psychology or a second-hand sociology. Young novelists often find themselves short of ideas when they've described their bourgeois childhood and their adolescent student anguish. They want to 'renew' themselves. But how can they? They've seen nothing, done nothing. After a brief crisis of despair, they start again, novel two, novel three, novel four – but on what foundations? They've seen nothing of life at all.'

Can one envisage the future of the novel as lying in other directions from that taken by the people (Robbe-Grillet, Butor, Sarraute, Duras, Simon) of whom Romain Gary so expressively disapproves? Yes, I think so, and at the risk of raising a horse-laugh I would suggest it lies where both English and French popular taste have found it: in the spy story, the *roman d'espionnage*. If one looks beyond its use as a compensation or nostalgia for real action, it becomes clear that in the hands of its best practitioners the *genre* may gradually

acquire the universal usefulness as a vehicle for something beyond itself which the traditional love story has always had. Flaubert started *Madame Bovary* with the explicit recognition that no datum could be more banal than provincial adultery. Yet it was possible to create a work of art, using that datum, which should both express its times fully and say universal truths. The *roman d'espionnage* might, in this way, replace the *roman d'adultère* and become the privileged mode of expressing our contemporary disquiet. We have surely at long last stopped being terrified by Valéry's dismissal of pure narrative ('How could anyone bear to write "La Marquise sortit à cinq heures" ?') and can demand it again not just in the sequence-of-shattering-events formula of Ian Fleming, but in the ironically detached view of this sequence one finds in Len Deighton and John Le Carré, both of whom have recently caught the imagination of the French. The formula of the early Graham Greene entertainments is echoed in both, with their seedy unhappy agents and doomladen heroes.

It is fitting that the spy story, which is one of the prime examples of narrative in the raw, should offer a solution to the problems of the novel. John Le Carré was over in Paris in September signing copies of *Miroir aux Espions* for enthusiastic admirers – many critics among them – and his replies to interviewers showed he thought the spy story, however humble its aesthetic origins, could become the vehicle for great art. 'Are you likely to attempt some other *genre* to express what you have to say?' asked Guy Le Clec'h (*Figaro Littéraire*, 23 Sept., 1965). 'I don't think the spy story is a *genre*', answered Le Carré. 'It's a way of exposing one aspect of the social situation in the world today, a useful vehicle in which you can put important things. I feel perfectly free to write a book without corpses or revolvers. But I do think a good thriller, with its bias towards violence, can express an inner action just as well as the classical novel.' 'I must have chosen the world of spies as my starting point,' he said to Véra Volmane (*Nouvelles littéraires*, 23 Sept., 1965) 'because it illustrates what I'm trying to say: the solitude of the designated victim.' 'But in the sense in which you understand the word' she asked, 'isn't a victim always solitary?' 'I shouldn't like to think so' he replied, 'A spy is like a writer, he lives on the edge of the crowd, sketching his experiences in bits and pieces and making up a whole out of them. Just like the spy, the writer is a conjurer. He constructs images he finds in himself.' And to Sonia Lescaut he re-asserted the universal validity of the spy story (*Arts*, 22 Sept., 1965): 'The spy story allows you to say whatever you want to say, just as the love story did in the past. Who cares about adultery today? It isn't a cause for scandal any more. Whereas spying is everywhere, and so it is spying which best reflects the society of our day.'

Well, like some other things, perhaps it sounds a more attractive proposition in French. . . .