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HUGUES REBELL AND CHARLES MAURRAS BEFORE *L'ACTION FRANÇAISE*

Little is known about the relation of Hugues Rebell and Charles Maurras. Their correspondence has not come to light, and the extent and duration of Rebell's collaboration with Maurras and the group of *Action Française* have never been established with certainty. In *L'Enquête sur la monarchie* (1900), Maurras mentioned that their friendship dated from their early days in Paris: "Que de fois," wrote the founder of the *Action française*, "nous avons gémi ensemble sur les faiblesses ou les paresces d'un 'parti' ignorant de ses magnifiques ressources [*i.e.*, the royalist camp before being organized into a political party]. Quelles démarches nous avons faites tous deux! Quelles lamentables conversations nous avons tenues et souffertes, sur des gens qu'un bruit public nous assignait comme chef!" (149–50). These remarks suggest that Rebell played a significant role in the formation of the future royalist party—if not in the work of organization and propaganda, at least in the ideological formation of its doctrine. Victor Nguyen, the historian of the *Action Française*, once suggested that the young Maurras assimilated the theories of Nietzsche almost entirely through Rebell, ideas that were of capital importance in the development of Maurras' thought, and which later, as we shall see, he went to considerable length to deny (696). These ideas were gradually shaped as he came to articulate his literary and aesthetic views in the 1880s and early 90s. It was in the debates around the *École Romane* and against the Symbolist movement that they were molded. Rebell was one of the adherents to this short-lived movement and defended it on several occasions. However, as I will attempt to show, a number of differences and tensions came to increasingly separate the two men. From the beginning, Rebell's literary practice did not correspond in any way to the precepts of the *École Romane*, and the development of his writing in the course of the 1890s led him in a very different direction. Furthermore, he was reluctant to see aesthetic and literary ideas applied directly to politics and in particular to the creation of organized, political parties, a task that increasingly occupied Maurras in the latter half of the 1890s and after the Dreyfus Affair. In the later years of his short life (he died in 1905), Rebell did not engage in a debate with Maurras, but a few signs point to his suspicion of the direction taken by the *Action Française* and his estrangement from the movement (though he continued writing for

the royalist paper *Le Soleil*). In what follows, I will examine the relationship of the two men through the literary and political currents and debates of the early 90s and seek to determine the extent of the influence that Rebell exerted on the young Maurras.

Hugues Rebell was the pseudonym of Georges Grassal, who was born in Nantes on October 28th, 1867 into a bourgeois family of ship owners and captains.¹ Barely eighteen years old, he began a review entitled *Le Gai Sçavoir* in 1885, enamored as he already was with Nietzsche who was at this time completely unknown in France (the young Grassal could read German). *Les Méprisants*, published in the following year, bears the traces of his Nietzschean aristocratism and his contempt for the masses: “Et ces hommes,—les poètes—vivant et mourant parmi le mépris des utilitaires, rudes pédants qui usurpaient un titre dont les méprisés seuls étaient dignes [...]” (8). Many of the themes of Rebell’s later work are already present in this adolescent book: the idea (derived from Renan and Nietzsche) that art and culture have no place in democratic societies that are driven by utilitarian values, and secondly, and more importantly, that art is first and foremost the celebration of life in its physical and sensual dimensions, and that the puritanical ethics of modern societies do not permit such an affirmation of the life of the instincts. In this aspect of his art, Rebell was deeply influenced by the libertine literature of the eighteenth century, which increasingly surfaced in his work in the course of the next decade and, coupled with his interpretation of Nietzsche, pushed him towards a “literature of transgression.” At this early date, however, his writing was couched in the language and imagery of Symbolism; the tales and poems of *Les Méprisants* are dedicated to Mallarmé, Huysmans, Verlaine and even Maurice Rollinat, among other Symbolist writers. Yet there was also a Nietzschean affirmation of life, sensuality and Dionysian intoxication present in his work that was in powerful contradiction to the Symbolist aesthetic.

In this regard, the early date of this book is noteworthy, for Nietzsche was completely unknown at the time in France. The first two articles by Jean Bourdeau and Eugène de Roberty dedicated to the author of *Zarathustra* date from 1888 and 1890, but it was not until 1891 that Teodor de Wyzewa’s study, “Le Dernier Métaphysicien,” in the *Revue Bleue*, brought some attention to the work of the German philosopher. Shortly thereafter, Jean de Néthy’s article was published in *La Revue Blanche*, after which a veritable cult of Nietzsche arose in France.² Rebell was one of the few writers of the period who spoke German well, and we can surmise that as an adolescent in Nantes he was already familiar with Nietzsche’s work, as the title of his journal *Le Gai Sçavoir* clearly reveals. Furthermore, his interpretation of Nietzsche was

1. The account of Rebell’s life is from his biography by Rodange.

2. Jean de Néthy, “Nietzsche-Zarathoustra,” *La Revue Blanche* (1892): 206–212.

very much in accord with the one we find a few years later in the work of Maurras and his disciples. For him, Nietzsche was “un des adversaires les plus redoutables de ce bas socialisme qui menace de ruiner tout ce que nous chérissons” (“Sur une Traduction” 98). Nietzsche’s hatred for democracies and *le peuple*, his affirmation of the life of the instincts, his aristocratism and his cult of the hero and conquest provided Rebell with ammunition for his own campaign against what he called “primitive” Christianity, democracy, socialism, and anarchism—all, in his view, enemies of art and beauty. This interpretation was very close to the writers of the *Action Française*’s reading of Nietzsche in the later 1890s. For them, Nietzsche served to illustrate all the historical, cultural and racial differences that separated France from Germany: the opposition of French Classicism and German Romanticism, of the Latin sense of plastic forms and the Germanic tendency towards the *informe* and the infinite, and of French rationalism and German spiritualism.

It is perhaps necessary to elucidate, in a short digression, the reception of Nietzsche’s work among the writers of the Right in France in the early 1890s. The response to the work of Nietzsche in France was diverse, but two dominant tendencies stand out nonetheless: on the one hand, the hostility of Wagnerians and on the other, the enthusiasm of the enemies of the symbolist movement. The latter did not belong to any one grouping, but were united in their concern with the “problem” of decadence. Contrary to Russia or Austria, where the public was first introduced to the works of the German philosopher through his earlier writings and had thus known him, at least for a certain period, as a Wagnerian, Nietzsche’s work arrived in France long after his break with the composer of *Lohengrin* (Forth 101). Furthermore, the first translation of Nietzsche to have a significant impact in France was the *Case of Wagner*, where the prophet of Bayreuth was virulently criticized as one of the key sources of contemporary European decadence. It could only meet with the antagonism of the French Wagnerians, who were quick to respond. Edouard Schuré and Téodor de Wyzewa were among the first to launch the attack. Schuré had met Nietzsche in Bayreuth in 1876; in an article in *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, he recounted his conversation with the young German and described him as a proud spirit who had been humiliated and crushed by the success of his friend Wagner, the superiority of whom he could never accept, which finally led to their break. For Téodor de Wyzewa, one of the founders of the *Revue Wagnérienne*, Nietzsche was plagued with an abnormal and poisonous intelligence that drove him to destroy everything that he had once loved and which was to lead him eventually to nihilism and ultimately madness: “La tournure générale de sa pensée nous fait voir en lui un frère de Tchérine et des Bakounine, de ces nihilistes slaves si prompts à l’illusion, mais plus prompts encore au désenchantement, victimes d’un idéal trop haut et d’une clairvoyance trop aiguë” (99).

The affinities that united the symbolists and the Wagnerians are well known. Wyzewa translated the works of Wagner for Mallarmé, and for Edouard Dujardin, another editor of the *Revue Wagnérienne*, Wagner's conception of the soul was "exactly that which Mallarmé and the symbolists had made of poetry" (qtd. in Forth 100). Mallarmé, Verlaine and a number of symbolist poets hailed the "god Wagner" in an article entitled "Hommage à Wagner" in the *Revue Wagnérienne*. On the other hand, Nietzsche's approbation of French classicism, his distinction of German and Latin cultures at the expense of the former, and his critique of decadence appealed to a number of the critics of Symbolism. Nietzsche's rhetoric of regeneration provided the adversaries of Symbolism with a powerful weapon against what they considered to be the movement's "northern" aesthetic of sickness, pessimism and death. According to Geneviève Bianqui, the first disciples of Nietzsche in France were patriotic and interpreted his voice as "un rappel vers les rives méridionales de la pensée. Ils y ont goûté l'antidote des religions tristes venues du nord: tolstoïsme, ibsénisme, culte de la pitié et de la mort, pessimisme schopenhauérien et wagnérien" (12). Nietzsche had himself on several occasions countered the health and vigor of Mediterranean sensibility against the sickness of Nordic culture. "Il faut méditerraniser la musique": such had been his answer (offered in *French*) to the problem of the decadence and decline of European civilization (*Birth* 159). His distinction was welcomed by a number of writers in France for whom Symbolism represented a "foreign," northern phenomenon transplanted on French soil. Not only, they charged, were its sources of inspiration northern (Wagner, Schopenhauer, Ibsen), but most of its actual adherents were of foreign origin: Francis Vielé-Griffin and Stuart Merrill were Americans; Gustave Kahn, Ephraïm Mikhaël and Bernard Lazare were Jewish; Téodor de Wyzewa and Marie Krysinska were of Polish origin; and a large contingent of the writers of the movement were Belgian: Verhaeren, Maeterlinck, Fontainas, Mockel and Rodenback, among others. Huysmans's attack on Jeanne d'Arc in *Là-Bas* could only exacerbate the antagonism. He accused her of annexing the South—a foreign territory according to his character des Hermies—to the rest of France and thus depleting the essentially northern character of French culture.

Le sacre du Valois à Reims a fait une France sans cohésion, une France absurde. Il a dispersé les éléments semblables, cousu les nationalités les plus réfractaires, les races les plus hostiles. Il nous a dotés, et pour longtemps, hélas! de ces êtres au brou de noix et aux yeux vernis, de ces broyeurs de chocolat et mâcheurs d'ail, qui ne sont pas du tout des Français, mais bien des Espagnols ou des Italiens. En un mot, sans Jeanne d'Arc, La France n'appartenait plus à cette lignée de gens fanfarons et bruyants, éventés et perfides, à cette sacrée race latine que le diable emporte! (46–7)

Meanwhile, Symbolism had provoked a violent reaction in the provinces that, particularly in the south of France, stimulated regionalist movements whose primary points of reference were the concepts of “Latin genius,” Mediterranean sun and culture. From Toulouse to Marseilles, dozens of journals and reviews—*L'Effort*, *L'Âme Latine*, *L'Aube Méridionale*, *La France d'Oc* and many others—celebrated the joyful culture of the South and its life. Against the supremacy of Paris and Symbolism, which they considered “sad” and of northern influence, they dreamt of a *littérature du terroir*. The initial impetus had come from Mistral and the *Félibrige*, neither of which was originally motivated by political questions. In the 1890s, however, a number of Mistral's disciples took a different direction. The case of Joachim Gasquet is significant in this regard. One of the founders of the *École d'Aix* and editor of the journal *Les Mois dorés*, he initially united, according to Michel Décaudin, all the poetic tendencies of the fin de siècle in his person (36). His poetry, “tousjours aux confins d'une éloquence au flux torrentiel,” partook of a pantheistic aesthetic that recalled the great Romantics (Raymond 93–4). His introduction to the work of Nietzsche further crystallized the “Mediterranean” aspects of his poetry. His *Dionysos* unites the Nietzschean cult of Dionysos to the sensuality of Provençal landscape and Mediterranean sun. He extolled life, joy and sensuality. His regionalism soon took nationalist accents, however, and it was not long before he joined Maurras and his group. In an article published in the *Action française* entitled “De l'anarchisme dreyfusien au nationalisme intégral,” he described his intellectual trajectory and the development of his ideas on art and poetry. Nourished on the Nietzschean cult of the hero and of conquest and on Mediterranean culture, explained Gasquet, it was only logical to embrace nationalism and *maurrasisme* after the experience of the Dreyfus Affair. Nietzsche provided one of the primary influences for the manifold movements in the 1890—the various *régionalismes*, naturisme and others—in their attacks against Symbolism and Decadence and their affirmation of life, joy, action and energy, which could easily assume nationalist and patriotic dimensions.

The name of Nietzsche is often encountered in the annals of the *Action française*. From his earliest works, Maurras found that he had to account for the role Nietzsche had played in his development, a “Germanic” influence he was reluctant to admit and had to deny periodically through the years. His knowledge of Nietzsche was very likely acquired from secondary sources, namely from his contact with Hugues Rebelle. His surprise at hearing that his short story *Les Serviteurs* was inspired by Nietzsche may be authentic, for he would have incorporated Nietzschean ideas without ever having heard of the author of *The Gay Science*. His contemporaries were indeed struck by the Nietzschean aspects of this short story. “The most Maurrassian” of his early works according to Ivan Barko, *Les Serviteurs* was written in 1891 and published

in the *Revue Bleue* the following April (66). It tells the story of the Athenian Criteon, who, once descended to the kingdom of the dead, finds that his wisdom and power are of no consequence without his servants. In turn, his slaves, still in Athens, find life impossible without their master. Some years later, they in turn join him and inform him that Athens has fallen to the Barbarians, its temples demolished, its poets dead. A "Hebrew Christ" has arrived and has ennobled the slaves and promised to set them on the throne of the strong. He has awakened a desire which, "au lieu d'exalter vers les types de la Beauté, incline aux choses laides, mutilées et humiliées . . . Les sots, les faibles, les infirmes ont reçu sa rosée" (*Chemin* 193). The new doctrine has spread rapidly and is gaining new adherents every day. The master and his slaves, however, can take comfort in the fact that they have once again found one another and applaud the union that gives their existence meaning and coherence.

The essential themes of Maurras's thought are already present in *Les Serviteurs*. Society is composed of the strong and the weak, of masters and slaves, and the salvation of the masses resides in their recognition of the superiority of their rulers. Judaism and Christianity have introduced the nefarious notion of the individual's liberty and right to happiness, which can only lead to social anarchy and, paradoxically, to the individual's spiritual misery. By contrast, Greek art integrated the anarchic elements of the human psyche and of society into a harmonious beauty, but what Maurras called "primitive Christianity," which was the expression of the resentment of the slaves, rose in revolt and demolished all that Greek culture had accomplished. Instead, Maurras advocated a paganism that he sought in Hellenic or rather "Greco-Latin" culture, the most perfect realization of the reconciliation of Man with the dark forces that inhabit his innermost being. It is not hard to recognize the ideas of Nietzsche here, or rather the "French myth" of Nietzsche, an influence that the contemporaries of Maurras did not fail to recognize. When, in 1895, he inserted *Les Serviteurs* into his book *Le Chemin de paradis*, Maurras felt it necessary to defend himself against any taint of "nordic" thought. In a note added to the end of the volume, he recounted being questioned about the obvious Nietzschean elements in his story. "Est-il possible que vous ne connaissiez pas Nietzsche?" he reported being asked (213). "Mais c'était la première fois que j'entendais ce nom!" Yet in the same paragraph, he added this curious passage that contradicts his other statement:

Mais voici, me dit-on, qu'elle [the thesis of *Les Serviteurs*] est professée en Allemagne par un étrange écrivain de race slave appelé Nietzsche. C'est à peine si j'ai feuilleté ce qu'on nous a donné de Nietzsche. Il me souvient cependant d'avoir noté dans son *Cas Wagner*, publié en 1888, mais traduit chez nous seulement en 1893, de curieuses rencontres sur la philosophie de l'art avec les

thèses esthétiques qu'il m'est arrivé à moi-même à soutenir en 1891 au moment de la fondation de l'École romane. (213)

In 1903, responding to Pierre Lasserre's *La Morale de Nietzsche*, Maurras once again recalled the circumstances of the publication of *Les Serviteurs* and concluded: "Sans sympathiser avec Nietzsche, nous pûmes entrevoir que ce Barbare avait du bon . . . Ce Germain demi-slave sera le bienvenu dans l'enceinte sacré de l'antique École française, mais si l'on veut le faire apparaître en docteur, il convient de rappeler ses porte-parole au juste sentiment du Tien et du Mien" (*Quand les Français* 114).

Maurras's disciples and sympathizers of the *Action Française* have always denied any relation between Nietzsche and the author of *Le Chemin de paradis* (Roudiez 127, Barko 27). Writers on the left, on the other hand, have persistently stressed the Nietzschean aspects of Maurras's thought without being able to explain their source, other than the "Nietzscheism" that was said to be in the air during the 1890s (Gide 86). The date of Rebell and Maurras's first meeting has never been established accurately. We can assume that they met around 1890, probably through the intermediary of Henri Mazel. Maurras could have read Rebell's *Les Méprisants* (1886), which contains the Nietzschean themes later encountered in his *Chemin de paradis*. In "Idéale Résurrection," for example, Rebell celebrates the joys and beauty of pagan life and the Greek world as remedies to the decadence of contemporary culture. "Coucher du soleil" recounts the story of the advent of the masses, utterly indifferent to beauty and only concerned with liberty and material gain. The book has as its epigraph this sentence from Edgar Allan Poe's *The Colloquy of Monos and Una*: "Et ces hommes,—les poètes,—vivant et mourant parmi le mépris des utilitaires, rudes pédants qui usurpaient un titre dont les méprisés seuls étaient dignes." In his note to *Les Serviteurs* for the edition of 1895, Maurras quotes the same story as a proof of his fidelity to Greek and Latin sources.

The anti-Christian and pagan elements of Maurras's tale can also be traced to Rebell and further to Nietzsche. They both saw a continuity between Judaism, primitive Christianity, the Reformation and the French Revolution. Taine was wrong, claimed Maurras, to trace the origins of the revolution to the seventeenth century and classicism: "Les pères de la révolution sont à Genève, à Wittenberg, plus anciennement à Jérusalem; ils dérivent de l'esprit juif et des variétés de christianisme qui sévirent dans les déserts orientaux et la forêt germanique, aux divers ronds-points de la barbarie" (*Œuvres*, v.2, 33). Because of its strong roots and its solid traditions, continued Maurras, the South was protected against the dubious influences from the Orient, whereas the weaker Germanic world could not defend itself: "L'hébraïsme le pénétra sans difficulté." In the Latin world, by contrast, the deep-rooted pagan currents in

society tempered primitive Christianity by integrating it into the culture of antiquity. The Reformation was another attempt by the forces of sedition to re-introduce the primacy of the individual over society and of the private over the public. Luther gave free rein to the “tumulte intérieur” and made it the measure of all values. For Maurras, the German and the Jewish principles are one and the same: he often spoke of “l’esprit judéo-germanique”—revolutionary, individualist and barbarian. “Idées libérales, idées humanitaires, idées révolutionnaires, idées juives, idées suisses,” all different facets of the same principle: anarchy (*Quand les Français* 126). They represent “une sédition systématique de l’individu contre l’espèce,” a formula borrowed from Comte that Maurras never tired of quoting. By contrast, “[l]es traditions helléno-latines en sont tout aussi innocentes que le génie catholique romain médiéval” (*Œuvres*, v.2, 33). For Maurras, Catholicism was the response of the Latin world to the “Oriental invasion.” It was in Renaissance Italy that the insurrectionary substance of primitive Christianity was transformed into a hierarchical institution, reflecting the Latin conceptions of order and clarity. The Catholic Church purged the revolutionary and anarchic drives of Christianity and converted them into respect for power and hierarchy. This conception is, once again, in accord with Nietzsche and Rebell’s ideas on Christianity. For Rebell, Christian virtues were “l’apanage des esclaves que groupa le christianisme à ses origines: la paresse, la haine de la beauté, de la pensée, des énergies humaines” (*Chants de la pluie* 196). They were “humanized” and refined by the Church, and turned into the great works of art of the Renaissance. Elsewhere he wrote:

Nous sommes en effet de l’avis des contemporains de Tacite, qui regardaient les chrétiens comme des fous et des malfaiteurs: c’était non seulement l’empire, mais toute l’humanité qu’ils mettaient en péril. Détruire ce faisceau de passions qu’est l’homme, cette activité, cette création incessante de désirs qui sont les conditions de la vie morale, étouffer cet orgueil qui est l’affirmation de son être, tel est le but du primitif christianisme. Qu’on ne confonde point avec le catholicisme que nous aimons ainsi que toutes les formes de la sensibilité cette monstrueuse religion d’eunuques et de vieilles femmes. Si les peuples et les siècles ne l’avaient transformée, si elle n’avait volé aux religions de l’antiquité leur splendides mystères, elle nous causerait la même horreur qu’aux anciens Romains. (“Littérature d’actualité” 70–71)

The forces of anarchy make their appearance once again with the French Revolution and Romanticism. For Maurras, the key villain in this constellation is Rousseau, “le misérable Rousseau.” Rebell could have read this fragment from Nietzsche, written in 1884: “The French Revolution as the continuation

of Christianity. Rousseau is the seducer: he again unfetters woman who is henceforth represented . . . as suffering . . . Then the poor and the workers. Then the vice-addicts and the sick—all this is moved into the foreground” (*Will* 58). Rebell attacked Rousseau on several occasions, but it was Maurras who turned him into his *bête noire*, responsible for all the evils of the modern world. Rousseau is the prototype of “l’insurgé contre toutes les hiérarchies, le cas essentiel de l’individualisme anarchique.” He rose against the society and culture of the *ancien régime* just as the Jewish prophets had revolted against aristocratic Rome (*Poésie* 15). Worse, he was the cause of the ruin of the rigorous, masculine culture of classicism and at the origin of “feminine” romanticism. For Maurras, classical culture was distinguished by its capacity to master the dark and unruly forces and integrate them into order and harmony. Rousseau, by contrast, placed the anarchy of passions at the center of his universe and made them the standard of all values. In *Le Romantisme féminin*, Maurras traced the origins of Rousseau’s revolution to pre-history and equated it with the timeless principle of femininity:

La femme a découvert, dès les origines, l’esthétique du Caractère à laquelle fut opposée plus tard cette esthétique de l’Harmonie, que les Grecs inventèrent et portèrent à la perfection, parce que l’intelligence mâle dominait parmi eux. Les Grecs firent du sens général et national du beau le principe de toute leur civilisation que Rome et Paris prolongèrent. Les autres peuples, d’Orient ou d’Occident, c’est-à-dire tous les barbares, se sont tenus au principe du Caractère, tel que le sentiment féminin l’avait révélé. (*Romantisme* 65)

Maurras’s essentially Manichaeian vision of the world is nowhere more clearly expressed: on the one hand, a masculine culture of intelligence, order, beauty and clarity; on the other, the reign of feminine sensibility and individualist anarchy. This division has its geographic corollary: a direct line connects Athens, Rome and Paris, the axis of civilization; chaos reigns outside, be it in the dark German forests or the Oriental desert.

Nietzsche was the first thinker in the nineteenth century who forcefully opposed the Nordic and Latin civilizations.³ After his break with Wagner and increasingly after 1884, the author of *The Gay Science* immersed himself in French literature, advised his friends to read only in French, and praised the refinement of French culture against the militarism and vulgarity of the German bourgeoisie. The Austrian Ernst Bertram underlined Nietzsche’s identification

3. Madame de Staël had confusedly distinguished between the two in *De la littérature*, but her idea did not find an echo before Nietzsche.

with the South. His attacks on German culture and music, according to Bertram, were the consequence of his realization that he could not fully strip himself of the northern elements of his own character: "Il la déchire, en la niant, la persiflant, la condamnant, diabolisant une moitié d'elle comme il a fait d'une moitié de soi—tandis qu'il poétise et divinise [le Sud] avec d'autant plus de passion" (176). In turn, many of his first readers in France considered him a Frenchman despite himself. According to his first French translator, Henri Albert, Nietzsche wrote for France because "ses attaches avec l'Allemagne étaient toutes rompues" (14). The philosopher Jules de Gaultier, author of *Le Bovarysme*, observed similarly: "Il faut constater que la pensée de Nietzsche est d'inspiration nettement française" (580). The debates around "Nietzsche romanisé" and "French Nietzsche" continued until the 1930s, with writers on each side of the Rhine attempting to assimilate or reject Nietzsche from the pantheon of Latin or Germanic writers (Le Rider 25–41).

It was in the doctrine of the *École romane*, of which Maurras was the most outspoken theorist, that the ideas enumerated above crystallized and were made concrete. On the 14th of September, 1891, Jean Moréas published the manifesto of the school in *Le Figaro*:

L'École romane française revendique le principe gréco-Latin, principe fondamental des lettres françaises qui florit aux XI^e, XII^e, XIII^e siècles avec nos trouvères, au XV^e siècle avec Ronsard et son école, au XVII^e avec Racine et La Fontaine . . . Ce fut le romantisme qui altéra ce principe dans la conception comme dans le style, frustrant ainsi les Muses françaises de leur héritage légistique. L'École romane française renoue la chaîne gauloise, rompue par le romantisme et sa descendance parnassienne, naturaliste et symboliste (qtd. in Georjgin, 93–4).

It has never been established with certainty whether the theoretical foundations of the school were the work of Maurras or Moréas. The latter's *Le Pèlerin passionné*, published a few months before the manifesto of the *École Romane*, bears certain imprints of *romanité*, but these elements remain vague and are subordinated to its overall symbolist aesthetic. As the reviews of Anatole France and Maurice Barrès attest, his contemporaries had no doubt on the question.⁴ To them, *Le Pèlerin passionné* represented the apotheosis of Symbolism. *La Plume*'s banquet celebrating its success on 2 February 1891 was

4. Anatole France's "La poésie nouvelle: Jean Moréas" appeared in *Le Temps*, 21 déc. 1890 and Maurice Barrès's "Jean Moréas symboliste" in *Le Figaro*, 25 déc. 1890. Both were reprinted in *La Plume*, 1 jan. 1891, in a special issue on "Le Symbolisme de Jean Moréas."

the consecration and triumph of the symbolist movement. A few months later, however, Moréas turned against the movement that he had himself ushered in a few years before (he was the author of the manifesto of Symbolism in 1886). His *École romane* indeed broke with all the literature of the nineteenth century in favor of a purely “Greco-Latin” canon of letters—from Homer to Dante and Racine. The real culprit was once again Romanticism, with its later offsprings the Parnassian school, Naturalism, and Symbolism, what Léon Daudet would later call “*le stupide XIXe siècle*.” Henri Clouard attributes the origins of the movement to the author of *Le Romantisme féminin*: “[C]’est Maurras qui détacha Moréas du Symbolisme” (203). Jean Carrère also maintained that Maurras served as an intermediary between the *Félibrige* and Moréas, confirming a latent tendency in the author of *Le Pèlerin passionné* which only surfaced after the foundation of the *École Romane*. Ernest Raynaud agreed with this view; Moréas needed an impetus in order to recognize himself, “et sa rencontre avec Charles Maurras et les ‘félibres’ le [réintégra] dans sa nature et le [ramena] à sa véritable destinée” (“L’École romane” 68). What he ultimately retained from Maurras, claimed Raynaud, was his cult of “l’esprit latin et sa haine des lettres septentrionales.” In this manner, the Nietzschean influence, which, as we have seen, had its origins in Maurras’s encounter with Rebell, found its way into the doctrine of the *École romane*.

Maurras was quick to draw political conclusions from the literary doctrine of the *École romane*. Despite the patriotic tone and vocabulary of the manifesto, its author Jean Moréas had no interest in politics. From his symbolist beginnings he had retained the cult of pure art and an absolute indifference toward social and political questions. In his memoirs, Henri Mazel recalled that Moréas was exclusively interested in poetry and was never heard speaking of any other subject: “Je crois bien qu’il a traversé toute la crise dreyfusienne sans dire un mot de l’Affaire” (64–5). For Moréas, the aim of the *romane* doctrine was the renewal of French language and prosody. Maurras, however, was forging his political theories from the literary lessons of the school. In July 1891, two months before the publication of Moréas’s manifesto, *La Plume* dedicated a special issue to the *Félibrige*. It was edited by Maurras and had as its “conclusion” his famous article “Barbares et Romains,” in which he practically appropriated the *Félibrige* into the program of the *École romane*. “Ce mystérieux rythme, qui s’étend du midi en ondulations de lumière, on peut le consacrer de mille vocables. Latin, félibréen, italien, hellène, il est le même. Jean Moréas . . . l’a voulu appeler ‘Roman’” (229). And what defines the *roman* is its rupture with Romanticism and the Romantic poets’s attempt “de s’assimiler les procédés puérils . . . des Hyperboréens.” For Maurras, Romanticism increasingly replaced and signified everything outside of *romanité*, classicism and Hellenism. “Toutes les catégories vaines sont renversées et le mot juste est prononcé: il n’y a plus de symbolistes, il n’y a plus de parnassiens,

il n'y a plus de réalistes ni de naturalistes, ni d'idéalistes non plus; il ne reste plus que des romantiques" ("Trois romantiques" 216). Moreover, the correlation of Romanticism and the North makes them enemies of the Latin spirit. The *roman* poet Ernest Raynaud hailed the arrival of the *École romane* and stressed its pagan spirit as a remedy against the new wave of mysticism, synonymous with Romanticism and Symbolism. Moréas's new school, by contrast, represents "l'affranchissement, pour les consciences, du joug chrétien" ("Poètes romans" 165).

The continuity between Romanticism and revolution was, furthermore, one of the earliest convictions of Maurras, once again derived from Nietzsche and Rebell. "La critique du Romantisme," he wrote, "[tend] à la critique de la Révolution" (*Œuvres*, vol.2, 40). By toppling the harmonious social order of the *ancien régime*, the revolution produced an irrational, anarchic society, just as Romanticism introduced disorder and chaos in classical verse. The decadence of literature recalls the decadence of *la patrie*. Instead of subordinating the word to the sentence and the sentence to the paragraph, for the Romantics "le mot, en tant que mot ou assemblage de lettres . . . est tout à fait souverain" ("Trois romantiques" 218). "Liberté divine du Mot, liberté souveraine du Citoyen, égalité des thèmes verbaux ou des éléments sociaux, vague fraternité créant le 'droit' de tous et leur droit à tout" (*Œuvres*, vol.2, 41). Instead, classicism and monarchy are characterized by the subordination of part to whole, of disorder to harmony. Barrès described how Maurras, on a visit to Pau, had the vision that consolidated his theories on politics and aesthetics:

C'est sur cette terrasse, je le sais, devant ce Château d'Henri IV, qu'en 1890 il advint à notre ami de sentir la nécessité naturelle de la soumission pour l'ordre et la beauté du monde. Un paysage agréable où toutes les parties se soumettent les unes aux autres . . . amenèrent Charles Maurras à constater allègrement que, malheur ou bonheur, tous les états qu'il y a dans l'humanité sont des conditions nécessaires à la qualité de chacun. (255)

Maurras's theory of decadence is directly based on Nietzsche's passage on the subject in *The Case of Wagner*: "What is the sign of every *literary decadence*? That life no longer dwells in the whole. The word becomes sovereign and leaps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and obscures the meaning of the page, the page gains life at the expense of the whole" (170). These lines were in turn borrowed from Paul Bourget's analysis of decadence in his *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*. According to Jacques Le Rider, Maurras's conception of decadence can be traced to Nietzsche's, who in turn had found it in Bourget's *Les Essais*. Was Rebell responsible for introducing Maurras to Nietzsche's *The Case of Wagner*, or at least to the ideas contained

in it? As delineated above, Maurras retained from Nietzsche his critique of democracies and his approbation of classicism. Rebell shared Maurras's view, but his reading of Nietzsche was more theoretical and less practical. Along with a number of writers of the extreme right, he saw Nietzsche as a weapon against the increasing subjugation of the individual to the rationalized economic, social and political system of modernity. The universalizing discourse of modernity represents for Rebell a tyranny far more oppressive than pre-modern societies. The solution he increasingly opted for was the irrational and the Dionysian, which led him to the idea of *transgression* that he sought in erotic literature and experience.⁵ What is more, his theories had consequences for his writing that led him in a very different direction than the precepts of the *École romane*, of which he was purportedly one of the representatives.⁶

Rebell, however, did profess the principles of *romanité* for a short time. His *Union des trois aristocraties* (1894) bears the emblem of the *École romane*—Minerva wearing a helmet—on its cover. In at least one article, published in September 1893 in *L'Ermitage*, he defended the school of Maurras and Moréas. He stressed the importance of a national literature represented by the *École romane*: “[La] nécessité de conserver à notre poésie son caractère national, nul ne l’a mieux compris que M. Moréas” (“La poésie française” 157). Symbolism, by contrast, is of foreign inspiration and tends towards the infinite, the vague and the spiritual, all qualities of the Nordic imagination: “Le rêve du Nord vaste, mais confus, brutal plutôt que puissant, grossier et sublime tour à tour, ne peut sans préparation s’accommoder de notre littérature analytique et précise, élégante et fine, d’une vision bornée si l’on veut, mais très nette.” Moréas, concluded Rebell, has returned to this tradition by reviving the simplicity and clarity of the poets of the Pléïade, of Ronsard, Malherbe, Racine and La Fontaine.

Elsewhere in Rebell's work, however, we encounter a very different notion of tradition. In the epilogue of *Les Chants de la pluie et du soleil*, he wrote:

Contraint de mêler aux pensées de la solitude celles qui naissent
durant la lutte, j’ai choisi comme moyen d’expression, une prose

5. In this sense, he could be considered a predecessor of Georges Bataille. Bataille was, as Denis Hollier has recently noted, a careful reader of the literature of *fin de siècle*, with its aesthetics of eroticism and death. Hollier mentions Huysmans' *Là-Bas* as one of the sources of Bataille (XVII–XX). But, as we shall see, Rebell's writing and his interpretation of Nietzsche are much closer to Bataille's.

6. “Les six” who, according to Maurras, comprised the school were, besides Maurras and Moréas, Maurice du Plessys, Raymond de la Tailhède, Ernest Raynaud, and Hugues Rebell.

d'un rythme spécial, plus lyrique que ne l'est la prose ordinaire et n'ayant pourtant pas la forme précise et musicale de notre poésie. Le vers classique, qui exige la simplification et la synthèse, se fût mal accommodé de la plupart des sujets que j'avais à traiter et, alors qu'il pouvait me convenir, j'ai dû également le délaissier pour conserver à mon livre une certaine unité rythmique. (198–99)

Classical form, superior as it is, cannot convey the ideas that pertain to contemporary exigencies. What are these exigencies? The writer cannot, as he did in the era of Racine and Molière, rely upon a clearly delimited public with whom he shares a set of aesthetic values. In modern societies, he resembles an actor who is playing on the stage of an empty theater. This sentiment was of course shared by a number of writers in the 1890s. Rémy de Gourmont proposed that the writer work secretly and descend into the catacombs (*Chemin* 218). For Vielé-Griffin and a number of symbolist writers, the solution was to abstain altogether from writing and take refuge in silence or hermetic forms (314). Rebell, on the contrary, calls for a *littérature engagée*:

Je n'approuve point, certes, un tel dédain de la célébrité, ni ce manque d'ambition qui tendrait à faire de chaque poète comme une sorte de monomane en cellule, ne s'occupant que de lui et se moquant du reste du monde. On n'atteint au grand art que si l'on sent des âmes avec soi. Le public est le collaborateur nécessaire de l'artiste: la fièvre d'enthousiasme qui l'anime dans la recherche de la beauté, il la doit à cette multitude de désirs exaspérés mais vagues, à cette aspiration immense d'un peuple à un idéal encore confus, qu'il est chargé, lui créateur, de préciser et de définir. (*Union* 8)

The artist needs a public but cannot accept the one he finds in modern democracies: “[I]l désire l'approbation des esprits, et non l'applaudissement des foules” (*Union* 8). Rebell thus pleads the three aristocracies—of spirit, money and birth—to unite and recreate this lost public. He wants to create this public with the force of his writing. Could it appreciate great works of art? “S'il [lui] est impossible à présent de faire de leurs livres des œuvres, que ces livres soient au moins des actions” (*Union* 10).

His notion of commitment thus entails an idea of literature as *action*. Art must not be concerned with ideas, but rather embody the immediate forms of experience in a way that bypasses what psychoanalysis would term sublimation. In an essay on dilettantes, by which he meant “un homme en route d'être dieu,” he defined the most important quality of the great work of art as its “intensity of expression” (279). He attacked the school of art for art's sake for the “ridiculous idea” of advocating “un art chaste ayant pour but de nous délivrer de la vie physique” (“L'érotisme” 257). Its proponents claim that their

works “ne s’adressent pas au sens, mais à l’esprit.” Rebell, on the contrary, refused such an art and rejected the distinction between pornography and literature, between “les livres érotiques proprement dits et les livres ‘artistiques’ qui traitent de l’amour, entre ceux qui ont pour but d’exciter en nous le sens génésique et ceux qui n’intéressent que notre intelligence” (258). The distinction, he claimed, is at bottom a literary hypocrisy, for we find the same degree of sensuality in the work of an artist and a pornographer, though they may differ in their “quality of sentiment.” Without sensuality, art cannot reach its goal and cannot even exist. What is this goal? “L’art a pour but d’augmenter notre vie vitale” and its primary source and object should thus be eroticism. Sentimentalism, “ce travestissement ridicule de l’amour” and a product of modern puritanism, only depletes and impoverishes art. “L’Érotisme est la forme la plus accessible de l’art . . . [Il] convie l’homme tout entier à la fête de la vie: c’est pourquoi il ne méprise pas les sens, il ne dédaigne pas le corps, ignorant s’il y a des parties nobles ou honteuses, des idées basses ou élevées” (259). This “joyful art” has as its effect “la jouissance passionnée,” an intensification of the senses, of experience, of *life*. Rebell praised the work of Félicien Rops for its frank depiction of the body and all the violent forms of desire. Rops was horrified by “la peinture intellectuelle” but truthfully painted the passions, “sans autre prétention que d’évoquer la vie extérieure, d’être allé plus loin que les sens, justement pour les avoir d’abord rassasiés” (“Félicien Rops” 652).

Elsewhere he claimed: “Il n’y a pas de jouissance lorsque l’âme n’est pas en action” (“La Morale” 5). Against both the naturalist and the symbolist novel, he affirmed instead a novel of adventure, where the plot engages and seduces the reader and draws him into action. Why are “serious” writers turning away from plot, from a literature of adventure? “Le mépris d’aventure indique la fatigue de vivre; il correspond bien à ce goût du repos, à ce rêve d’une existence fixée irrévocablement qui ont inspiré le socialisme” (*Chants de la patrie* 172). Following Nietzsche’s ideas on the antinomy of art and democracy, Rebell was led to affirm an art that shatters moral and ethical boundaries and affirms “the life of the instincts.” In his novels, he thus sought the experience of limits through delirious forms of violence, the paroxysm of the senses and of language, eroticism, extreme psychological states—jealousy, pain, suffering, hatred. In *La Câlinese* he wrote, “Il n’y a guère que l’amour où civilisation et barbarie s’unissent et concourent si intimement à nos jouissances, où une sensibilité affinée puisse aider, prolonger, embellir nos violences” (281). Defending the practice of bullfighting which fulfills “un besoin bien vif de notre sensibilité,” he reflected, “Il est certain que l’on goûte mieux l’existence lorsqu’on s’est vu sur le point de la perdre et que l’idée de la mort, dégagée des images lugubres dont l’entoure le christianisme, est un puissant aiguillon pour nous presser à jouir” (“Sur les tauromachies” 41). Reflecting on Shakespeare and his time, the narrator of his first novel, *Baisers d’ennemis*, goes as far as to equate love and murder: “Oui! L’amour, c’était [à l’époque de Shakespeare]

cette gesticulation féroce, cet égoïsme passionné qui allait quelquefois jusqu'au meurtre, toujours jusqu'à l'hostilité!" (VI).

We begin to recognize the differences that separated Rebell and Maurras. For the author of *Le Romantisme féminin*, Hellenic culture is unparalleled in its ability to domesticate and harmonize the violent and anarchic drives of society and human psyche alike. His attacks on Rousseau hinged on Romanticism's exaltation of sentiment and passion. Modernity, democracy, socialism, revolution all signify "cet insensé désir d'élever toute vie humaine au paroxysme, le fond de l'erreur moderne, qui ôte la paix de tout coeur" (*Le Chemin XXIII*). He only recognized the Apollonian dimensions of Hellenic culture, which he saw as an antidote of the chaos of modern life. Albert Thibaudet once remarked on Maurras's one-dimensional understanding of Greece: "Le Voyage d'Athènes marque le plus absolu dédain pour l'archaïsme mycénien et pour la sculpture du VI^e siècle. Pareillement, aux propos qu'il tient sur toute la culture hellénisante et alexandrine, j'imagine qu'il lui apparaît comme le mal romantique de la Grèce" (20).

Rebell's rebellion against the modern world, on the contrary, was through a Nietzschean exaltation of the Dionysian and the irrational, by the exacerbation of violent and erotic desires that would shatter the limits of the personality.

For Pierre-André Taguieff, however, the distinction is merely superficial. The dominant influence of Nietzsche's thought on the *Action Française*, he claims, was not doctrinal but rather *stylistic*. What they retained from the author of *Zarathustra* was the radicality of their negation, the absoluteness of their affirmations, the contemptuous tone, the heroic "jusqu'au boutisme" and the calls to force and violence (261):

Le discours antinietzschéen public de l'Action française se révèle ainsi contesté par un contre-discours 'nietzschéen', voire nietzschéophile, discours réservé, d'usage interne, exaltant une source d'inspiration presque honteuse, et comme mise au secret. Du Nietzsche légal de l'Action française, un Nietzsche à peine lu et avec malveillance, objet d'attaques convenues, se distingue dès lors le Nietzsche réellement et admirativement lu, le Nietzsche inspirateur—avec Péguy, Drumont et quelques autres—de la révolte totale contre le monde moderne, contre toutes ses orientations politiques (démocratie égalitaire, pluralisme libéral, socialismes), révolte qui constitue la dimension proprement traditionaliste du "nationaliste intégral" (263).

In this perspective, the disagreements on the question of Nietzsche within the different factions of the *Action Française* masked a more general and fundamental methodological concurrence. Maurras's rejection of Nietzsche as an anarchist was complemented by Rebell's interpretation calling for a tyrant to

come and redeem the world through blood and violence (*Chants de la pluie* 197). On closer scrutiny, however, we can discern that the disagreements run deeper. During his last years, I believe, Rebell began to revise his relationship to both Maurras and Nietzsche. In his interview with Le Cardonnell and Vellay, he declared, “Nietzsche a été pour moi un auxiliaire de circonstance . . . je ne l’ai jamais pris pour maître” (109). In an essay written in 1899, which he never published, he questioned the French disciples of Nietzsche and wondered whether the German philosopher had not been abused and misused. “Comme les plus belles barques traînent parfois des herbes immondes, Nietzsche traîne après lui le nietzschisme” (*Culte* 81). Without naming these pupils, he ridiculed what had become of Nietzsche since his theories were applied to the development of a political party: “L’égotisme et l’orgueil ne sont ni bons ni mauvais. Ils dépendent des êtres qui les emploient. Imaginez l’égotisme et l’orgueil de certains niais; et voyez comment le nietzschisme, compris par un parti politique, devient ridicule” (*Culte* 90). There is little doubt that by “political party” Rebell meant the *Action Française*. This charge, contrary to what Reino Virtanen once claimed, is not one more instance of the campaign waged by the writers of the *Action Française* against “Nietzsche the barbarian,” but rather an attack on the party of Maurras itself (196).

Finally, Antoine Compagnon’s recent distinction between anti-moderns and reactionaries (or traditionalists) can serve to further illuminate the differences between Maurras and Rebell. The two groups indeed do share much in their vision; they are counter-revolutionaries and against the tradition of the Enlightenment; they are elitist and reclaim an aristocratic heritage—if only in spirit; their writing is characterized by its violence, by “vitupération ou l’imprécation” (17). There is one thing, however, that separates them: the fundamental pessimism of anti-moderns. In “Le Voyage,” Baudelaire announces the credo of the anti-modern: “Contre le traditionaliste avec ses racines, l’anti-moderne n’a ni lieu, ni table, ni lit” (Compagnon 22).

Rebell’s fortune—he had inherited more than half a million francs, a considerable sum, upon the death of his father in 1888—was quickly depleted, as much in lavish spending as in his refusal to engage himself in its management. Forced to earn a living by the late 90s, he began writing pornographic novels under the pseudonym of Jean de Villiot for the dubious publisher Charles Carrington. His association with this shady figure estranged his literary connections, and the reviews and journals terminated his contributions. Alfred Vallette, the editor of *Mercur de France*, who had until then published Rebell’s novels, refused the subsequent ones. Worse, he was framed in a suspicious affair in Naples with a child prostitute and became the object of blackmail and terror by a gang of Italian outlaws in Paris. He was forced to sell his art collection and library, and, fleeing his creditors, he had to move from one apartment to another, sometimes twice within the same week. After 1900, he disappeared from the literary scene and gave no more news of himself to any

of his friends. Paul Léautaud saw him in the street in 1904 and was shocked to see the former dandy who used to glow with health now reduced to the figure of an old man (he was barely 37 years old):

Le Rebell d'autrefois, assez corpulent, avec son visage d'abbé du XVIIIe siècle, était devenu un homme maigre, courbé, avec le masque, tout à fait, du Voltaire de Houdon, la démarche vacillante, s'appuyant sur une canne, sénile et ravagé à la fois. Il avait bien mis cinq minutes pour traverser la chaussée de la Rue Corneille. (qtd. in Rodange IV)

A few years before, he had written these cruel lines: "Le droit à la vie, c'est la force, c'est l'intelligence, c'est la beauté. Si je ne possède aucune de ces qualités: c'est bien, je me résigne à mourir" (*Chants de la pluie* 3). Now it was his turn. When he died in poverty at the Hôtel Dieu in Paris in 1905, he was a forgotten figure.

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