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Pacifism and the European Idea: War and Inner Conflict in the Work of Léon Werth

Manet van Montfrans

Since the mid-1980s, interest in the First World War – in historiography, literature and film – has grown considerably in Western Europe. It has been sparked by a number of factors, including on the one hand German unification, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the final demise of communism, and on the other the striking symmetry between the violent events that marked the beginning and end of the twentieth century. Sarajevo 1914 – Kosovo 1999: the circle would seem to be complete. In France the international developments caused by the changes in the Eastern bloc coincided with a crisis of an entirely different nature. Over the 1970s and 1980s the French saw the cultural and social edifice that had been built up during the Third Republic collapse like a house of cards. The agricultural reforms of the 1950s and 1960s and the migration of rural youth to the cities led to further depopulation of the countryside. Concepts such as *la France profonde, la douce France* and *la France éternelle* suddenly seemed robbed of their content. Concerned, the French began to look back with nostalgia and anxiety on a past that most adults could remember from their childhood, but that was now rapidly disappearing.

In the field of literature this past is examined by postwar authors such as Pierre Bergounioux (b. 1949) and Jean Rouaud (b. 1952, Prix Goncourt 1990). In their novels they look at their families' history, and in doing so chart the breakdown of the rural and provincial society of *la France profonde*. Both see this breakdown as having begun with the First World War.[1] Their work ties in with a thematic tendency in the historiography of the First World War, which was reinforced by the establishment of the *Centre de recherche de l'historial de la Grande Guerre de*

Péronne in 1989. The centre unites historians studying the cultural aspects of the armed conflict during and after the 1914–18 period. Their approach focuses on the experience of violence on a mass scale, the arguments used to justify this violence and the consequences of the mourning into which the European countries were plunged by the First World War.[2]

Other indications of the 'topicality' of *la Grande Guerre* are films such as *La Vie et rien d'autre* (1988) and *Capitaine Conan* (1995) by Bertrand Tavernier,[3] the publication of war diaries and other ego-documents and the rediscovery of forgotten authors. In 1997, a carefully annotated edition of the notes and letters written during the First World War by one of the founders of the *Annales*, Marc Bloch, was published under the title *Ecrits de guerre*. The anniversary year of 1998 saw the publication of *Paroles de Poilus. Lettres et carnets du front (1914–1918)*, a collection of letters and diaries (Guéno and Laplume 1998). The edition of 300,000 copies equalled the success booked by Henri Barbusse with *Le Feu, journal d'une escouade* (Prix Goncourt 1916). In the 1990s, the obscure work of the writer and journalist Léon Werth (1878–1955) was largely republished by Viviane Hamy, a small Parisian publishing firm. It received enthusiastic reviews in the dailies and weeklies.[4]

In his overview of the intellectual and literary response to the catastrophe of the First World War, John Cruickshank typified the autobiographical *Clavel soldat* (1919), based on Werth's experiences in the trenches, as 'the most unswervingly pacifist novel written under the immediate pressure of the events' (Cruickshank 1982, 104). Cruickshank regarded the anti-war message of this novel as much more uncompromising than that of Barbusse's *Le Feu*, widely regarded as the bible of pacifist authors between the wars, or also, less kindly, as 'the breviary of defeatism' (Rieuneau 1974, 77).

If we define pacifism very generally as the belief that all wars are wrong and that conflicts should be solved by negotiation, then this belief may be considered as one of the enduring, albeit frail, legacies of the First World War and as a cornerstone of the European idea ever since. In this chapter, the writings of Léon Werth are considered in terms of a window on his time and are drawn upon to illustrate some of the intricacies of pacifism during and after the First World War.

Clavel soldat: novel or eyewitness account?

In 1929, under the title *Témoins*, the critic Jean-Norton Cru published an overview of French prose published by combatants or ex-combatants

in the form of diaries, memoirs, observations, letters and novels between 1915 and 1928.[5] For his study Cru selected over 300 works, each of which he summarized, adding a brief description of the author's life and military career. The aim of this sizeable compilation was to enable those who had fought at the front to make their voices heard and, on the basis of their experiences, to sketch a picture of the war that would be useful to historians. As a result of his own war experiences Cru was aware of the gulf between the terrible reality of the trenches and how the home front, safely distant from the hostilities, saw the conflict. He feared that the history of the war would be dominated by a one-sided and distorted view. The accounts from the front were intended to provide a counterbalance:

> The field of vision of a soldier at the front is limited, but precisely because it is limited he is able to observe very precisely; the soldier at the front does not see much, but what he sees, he sees very clearly. Because he sees things through his own eyes and not through those of another, he sees what is there.[6]

It is therefore scarcely surprising that the most important criterion used by Cru when assessing the texts he had selected was the degree of veracity. Though he did select novels to include in his compilation, these were without exception texts in which, through the thin veil of fiction, the figure of the author and his experiences at the front were clearly discernible. Besides Barbusse and Werth, the authors covered by Cru include René Benjamin, *Les Soldats de la guerre: Gaspard* (Prix Goncourt 1915), Georges Duhamel, *La Vie des martyrs – 1914–1916* (1917) and *Civilisation* (Prix Goncourt 1918) and Roland Dorgelès, whose *Les Croix de bois* (1919) vied with the success of Barbusse's *Le Feu*. With the exception of Benjamin, who published his novel early on, in 1915, and whose popular, articulate and irrepressibly optimistic main character met the expectations of the home front, all these authors expose war as barbarous mass slaughter. Barbusse and Werth are the most political, while Duhamel and Dorgelès condemn the war largely on humanitarian grounds. After the war, the many thousand *anciens combattants* constituted a critical but hungry public that was highly receptive to the message of this kind of eyewitness literature.

Cru extracted the verifiable facts from the writings he studied, and examined whether the author had bent the truth. He abhorred poetic licence, and at the very least felt uneasy in the no man's land between fact and fiction. He castigated Barbusse, for instance, on the grounds that

Le Feu not only contained a great many inaccuracies but also evinced a 'morbid' preference for barbaric and apocalyptic scenes. Cru claimed that Barbusse's success as the 'Zola of the trenches' was due to the fact that his macabre vision of the war conflicted with the absurdly optimistic reporting in the press (Cru 1929, 565). He did not advance the possibility that the book's success may have had something to do with the time of its publication (1916–17) and with the hope expressed by the leftist Barbusse that a new society would arise in which equality and brotherhood would triumph.

Cru was much milder in his judgement of Werth, although the introduction to his commentary causes one to fear the worst:

> It is an ugly, unpleasant book, and because the blatancy of the paradoxes is so irritating, one is inclined to rank it right at the bottom in the hierarchy of war novels.
>
> (Cru 1929, 654)

But, Cru goes on to write, as far as the historian is concerned, this work is more useful than all the other trench novels put together (654). He lauds the precise indications of place and time, the variety of characters, the true-to-life dialogues and, of course, the author's restraint in fictionalizing his experiences. What he condemns is the novel's pessimism, Werth's entirely black view of the world around him, not just of his fellow soldiers, but 'even' the landscape and the sky. This censure was echoed 45 years later by Maurice Rieuneau in his study *Guerre et révolution dans le roman français* (1972, 187).

Léon Werth

When in 1914, in spite of pacifist and socialist convictions, Léon Werth responded to Poincaré's call to a *Union sacrée* and took up arms as a volunteer, he was 36 years old.[7] Werth was born to a family of assimilated Jews in the Vosges (Remiremont), had studied literature at the Sorbonne and worked as a journalist for different journals and periodicals such as *La Phalange, Les Cahiers d'aujourd'hui, Le Matin* and *Paris-Journal*. He had become a member of the Socialist Party in 1912.[8]

Werth had done his military service in 1899. He wrote a very anti-militaristic account of his year in the barracks, based on the notes that he had made at the time, which he published in 1950 under the title *Caserne 1900*. This account belongs to the tradition of anti-militaristic novels written in France at the turn of the century and criticizes the

Figure 10.1 Léon Werth, conscript, 1899
Source: Les editions Viviane Hamy.

brutal behaviour of the NCOs and the dehumanizing effect of barrack life.[9] It shows how suspicious the young Werth already was of authority based not on understanding and intelligence but solely on hierarchy.

Werth's first novel, *La Maison blanche*, was nominated for the Prix Goncourt 1913 together with Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*. Neither won the prize. Alain-Fournier was killed in action in September 1914; his poetic novel was to win him literary immortality. Werth, a private of the 64th Division, survived the Battle of Flirey, also in September 1914. In February 1915 he was transferred to the Signals Corps as a telephonist, and in November 1915 he was declared unfit for further service. He wrote about his experiences in 1916 and 1917 in *Clavel soldat*. It is clear from Werth's decision to postpone its publication until after the war that he realized that the work would never have got past the censor.

Werth's pessimism and anti-militarism did not go down well in France in 1919 and his *Clavel soldat* caused a major scandal. The recalcitrant Werth, however, refused to be cowed, and re-offended with an anti-colonial pamphlet, *Cochinchine*. This appeared in 1926, at a time when France was glorying in its colonial empire. Werth survived the Second World War, which he described as 'a Dreyfus Affair on a global scale', in a village in the Jura, where he kept a diary of events: *Déposition. Journal 1940–1944*. He covered the Pétain trial in July–August 1945 for *Résistance*. After his death in 1955 his work lapsed into obscurity; the only reason that his name was still vaguely known was because Antoine de Saint-Exupéry had dedicated his book *Le Petit Prince* (1943) to him.

The good soldier Clavel: pacifism, socialism and patriotism

In the 23 chapters of *Clavel soldat*, Werth describes the experiences of his hero and alter ego André Clavel, from the moment that he is mobilized in July 1914 until he goes on leave in August 1915. Clavel volunteers for the front, believing that he is thus treading in the footsteps of 'les guerriers de l'an II', the people's army of 1793 that defended the achievements of the Revolution against the European coalition armies that had invaded France.[10]

Right from the first chapter, Werth makes it clear that Clavel's decision may be based on untested abstractions, but that these abstractions are certainly not inspired by the kind of exalted nationalism propagated by Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras.[11] In 1914 Barrès became president of the *Ligue des patriotes*, a nationalist Republican movement, and Maurras was president of the powerful, conservative, Catholic and highly anti-Semitic *Action française*.[12] The Republican Barrès and the monarchist Maurras joined forces in efforts to save France and the established order from socialism and to wreak revenge for the defeat suffered in 1870. Werth sees this nationalism as an abominable mist of incense and gunsmoke hovering around the ideology of 'Blut und Boden', and sighs in a frank authorial comment, 'How these relics of Taine, dug out of the dustbin, stink of stuffy classrooms and the sacristy' (Werth 1993, 10–11).

Just like his creator, on the eve of the First World War, Clavel is a convinced pacifist and socialist. Yet he decides that he must not shirk his duty. He bases this decision on three arguments. First, the international socialist front has been breached, because the German socialists have sided with their own government: the ideal of a united international

popular resistance to the war would not yet seem feasible, given the weight of nationalist forces ranked against it.[13] Second, Germany is attacking the ideal in which he strongly believes. In order to defend the peace it is sometimes necessary to wage war: 'faire la guerre à la guerre, ou faire la dernière guerre à la guerre' (26). And, finally, he, like every French child in the fledgling Third Republic, has been taught from his earliest years that it is a sacred duty to defend one's country at times of peril. In other words, Clavel is also a patriot. This combination of pacifism, socialism and defensive patriotism is typical of the official policy of the French Socialist Party, whose leader Jaurès was murdered on 31 July 1914, on the eve of the First World War, by a fanatical nationalist. In July 1914, Clavel, like so many of his compatriots, believes that the war in which he is to fight is the war to end all wars.

Having been equipped by the author with these high-minded ideals in the first chapter, Clavel is ready for a baptism by fire and a thorough disillusionment. Werth's book shows a pattern common to many war novels – it begins with mobilization and preparation for an encounter with the enemy, continues with an account of experiences during the conflict and ends with a return to normal life. Werth does not of course escape the *topoi* of the war novel: the lies that hide often fatal errors (97), the deadly boredom (126), the episodes of fraternization with the enemy (174), the idea that officers are very much a privileged group (186), the summary execution of deserters (299, 305). His originality lies in the way in which he relentlessly shows how very much the reality of the front differs from the expectations of his main character and from the picture envisaged by people at home. He does so with an unerring eye for situational irony, using short dialogues, small, revealing, often bitter anecdotes, and quotations from army communiqués or from the right-wing nationalist press (*Le Temps* and *L'Echo de Paris*). Patriotism, solidarity and valour are virtues that play a huge role in the imagination, but in Clavel's experience prove to be exceptions to the rule.

At the front, love of the fatherland is reduced to a few slogans that have been drummed into the soldiers at school. And it may be, thinks Clavel, that love of the fatherland does not actually exist. For how patriotic are soldiers who profit from the chaos of war by abandoning all standards of decency and looting and plundering the villages of their fellow countrymen (61, 127)? What does solidarity amount to if the wounded are left lying between the lines, or if the men resent officers so much that they make them advance first into enemy fire (131)? When morale sinks to such a pitch, heroism is likely to be thin on the ground. The concept of 'honour' plays a fairly minor role as far as the ordinary

troops are concerned – many of them peasants who have left their *pays* for the first time in their lives. Nor are the military authorities very effective in instilling such feelings in the men. Soldiers are supposed to regard it as an honour to be allowed to fight for France, but if they commit an offence they are given three extra days in the trenches. So is it an honour or a punishment to fight for France (139)?

All that most men can manage is blind obedience. Werth's novel opens with the description of a herd of cows lumbering slowly towards a drinking trough under some trees in the languid heat of a summer's evening. It is a seemingly peaceful image, whose true significance only becomes apparent in the course of the narrative. In a metaphor that was, incidentally, fairly common at the time, Werth compares the soldiers to a herd of animals that apathetically allow themselves to be led to the slaughter. Life at the front is degrading. The irony of fate dictates that the soldiers literally become one with the earth – the same earth with which nationalists like Barrès claim they have mystic ties.[14] Mud is the natural element of the troops in the trenches. And in Werth's novel, not only the earth, but also the people, the houses, the trees, the fields and even the sky are often pale grey – the colour of mud: 'Two soldiers, shapeless and colourless, as if they have been roughly shaped from mud' (113).

When it comes to exploding stereotypical notions, Werth vies with Flaubert's *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*. His novel also contains a long series of incongruous and occasionally hilarious scenes. A lot of firing is done, but it is by no means always on target. A surgeon tells Clavel that up to now he has removed more French than German bullets from wounded men. Werth has an acute ear for military rhetoric and sends it up mercilessly, as in the scene where a commander welcomes his newly arrived troops with the following speech:

> Welcome . . . The comrades whom you replace bore themselves like true heroes. They are dead. . . . Try to follow their example.(61)

Blind obedience can have disastrous and distressing effects. The commander who gives orders to shoot at anything that moves causes the death of an officer, shot by his own obedient men, as he walks through no man's land at night. The deserter facing the firing squad seems to be preoccupied by the burning question of how he should stand. When the firing squad is ordered to make a quarter-turn to the right, the condemned man also obeys the last order he hears in his life: 'right turn!' (300).

What distresses Clavel most is the discovery that soldiers distort their own dreadful experiences by dressing them up in the martial lyricism of the jingoistic press:

> The soldiers are disheartened and sometimes desperate. And yet it is their bodies, rather than their morale, that suffer. For everything in them, all they have learnt at school, the reports in the papers, and public opinion supports them in their resignation – which they will later translate into heroism, just as civilians are already doing.(354)

This discovery shatters all hope of collective resistance to the war. The soldiers are afraid of the civilian population, afraid of being despised by those who stayed at home and afraid of the militancy of armchair warriors. They dare not reveal the distressing reality of the trenches to civilians who would not understand, and who would mistake sincerity for cowardice. This puts an end to Clavel's belief – a belief he had at first held dear – that the war could lead to a radical transformation of international society and that this transformation could be entrusted to the 'masses'.

Clavel soldat is a *Bildungsroman*. Werth shows how Clavel's ideas evolve from political, collectivist and revolutionary pacifism to a more personal, anarchistic pacifism. He evolves from the assumption that war is sometimes necessary, though always an irrational and inhumane way to solve dispute, to the belief that war is always wrong and should never be resorted to. Clavel volunteers for the front in order to defend his ideal of peace and to help achieve it as soon as possible, at the risk of his own life. He is however rapidly brought down to earth by the horrors of the war's first winter. It is hardly surprising that the idea of deserting becomes more and more attractive to Clavel. Once all the notions that enabled him to reconcile his pacifism with the violence of war – *Patrie, Civilisation, Guerrier de l'an* II, *la dernière des dernières guerres* – have proved hollow reeds, desertion becomes the only logical course of action. Clavel does not desert, but instead volunteers for the most dangerous missions, as if he alone could embody the values and norms that his comrades and superiors so sorely lack.

Ultimately Clavel comes to the conclusion that this war will not end war, but that every day that it is prolonged will cause people to become more used to it (352). And the novel that opens with the image of the herd ends with the comment of a simple woman whose son has been killed. The remark that she would give all Germany and all France to have her son back again saves Clavel briefly from the despair and rage

inspired in him by the civilian population's gratuitous patriotism and misguided nationalism. In this final passage, Werth is completely at odds with Barbusse who, in the final, prophetically charged chapter of *Le Feu*, calls for a continuation of the battle, for 'the people' to rise against those he holds responsible for the mass slaughter, the 'imperialist' rulers of the Western states. In doing so, Barbusse gives rise to the suspicion that he seeks to exploit the suffering of the soldiers – which he has described with such empathy – for propaganda purposes. As Cruickshank (1982, 82) remarks, the comment on the final page of *Le Feu*, 'if the present war has contributed in any way to progress, then the misery and slaughter will weigh less heavy', casts a strange light on the protests against war in the preceding 348 pages.[15]

Werth's Clavel is confronted with all the negative aspects of warfare, and loses faith in humankind and its ability ever to create a world of social justice and international concord. The iron logic with which Werth, in an effective montage of situations, dialogues, quotations and musings, shows how hollow the ideas are for which men fight, how frivolously politicians and army leaders set to work, how passively soldiers resign themselves to their fate, is hard to refute. And although, for instance, his descriptions of men returning beaten from the trenches (115) and of young helpless soldiers (144) are sympathetic, the dominant tone in the book is one of cold fury. Despite the fact that Werth portrays a great many characters from various backgrounds, very few capture the sympathy of his hero and of the reader. Is Werth's account of his experiences a true one, or is his embittered view attributable to other factors? Does the anger about his own naivety bias his judgement of the others? It is striking that Werth almost never shows Clavel through the eyes of other characters, and that he never wastes any words on the anti-Semitism that was admittedly suppressed, but which certainly existed in the army. If one compares *Clavel soldat* with the above-mentioned anti-war novels by Barbusse, Dorgelès and Duhamel, Werth stands out mainly for his distant and analytical attitude. The fellowship between the narrator and his fellow combatants, so characteristic of the other novels, is almost entirely absent in Werth's writing. A comparison of the ideas set out by Marc Bloch in his *Ecrits de guerre* also shows that Bloch, although he expresses the same kind of criticism of the army leaders as Werth and is similarly condescending towards the not always heroic troops, he is much less negative than Werth, and can show appreciation of courage and patriotism.

After 1918, the myths of heroism, patriotism and brotherhood were preferred to a pessimistic rendering of the disillusioning reality. In the

1920s, the people of France were supposed to look back with pride on the huge sacrifice that had been made. Not only had nearly 1.5 million soldiers been killed – 25 per cent of the male population between 18 and 40 years of age – and over three million wounded (of whom more than a million were to become lifelong invalids), but the country was also left a legacy of hundreds of thousands of widows and orphans. The Great War generated a culture of commemoration centring on the cult of those who fell on the field of honour, as Annette Becker explains in her chapter in this volume. The gigantic chain of battlefields that wound its way from the North Sea to the Franco-Swiss border has left in its wake hundreds of *lieux de mémoire* in the shape of military cemeteries. It will be clear that in such a context a novel like *Clavel soldat* could not be well received. Werth's refusal to pull the wool over his readers' eyes and provide a 'hopeful' alternative as Barbusse had done in *Le Feu*, coupled with his merciless judgement of his fellow soldiers, was completely at odds with the understandable need to regard those who had given their lives as heroes.

Werth, pacifism and the European idea after 1918

Werth leaves his soldier Clavel in an ideological impasse. But what happened to him after 1918? What was the outcome of his aversion to what he refers to so tellingly, in *Clavel soldat*, as 'l'amour fatal du grand fait divers'? Which place should he be allotted in the complex history of pacifism and Europeanism in France between the wars?[16] Between the wars, pacifism in France took some very different forms. In 1932 there were about 50 pacifist organizations in France, by 1936 nearly 100. The desire for peace was widespread – among ex-combatants and their families, among politicians and among intellectuals – but their motives differed, as did views on how sustainable peace should be achieved. The pacifism of the intellectuals was inspired by a bad conscience; many felt guilty because they had taken part in the war, and cherished a deep suspicion of the political elite who had brought them to this pass and who, with the Treaty of Versailles, had sown the seeds for future conflict. A number of them, including Barbusse, broke with the Social Democrats and joined the Communist Party, which was set up in 1920.

While socialists were in general fully committed to peaceful politics and tried, up to 1938, to curb militant tendencies wherever possible, communists used pacifism as a means of preparing for the revolution and for the struggle against fascism. Barbusse, for instance, was a member of numerous anti-fascist committees and was involved in the organization

of international peace conferences. The rise of the left-wing parties and the victory of the *Front populaire* in 1936 also led to right-wing pacifism, based on fear of Bolshevism.[17] Briand's plan to prevent war by establishing a European confederation not only received a lukewarm welcome in international circles, as described in Chapter 3 of this book, but also provoked mixed feelings in France in 1929–30. The right was afraid of German nationalism, while the socialists and communists had not forgotten the past of the former socialist and strike-breaker Briand, and feared that his project for a United States of Europe masked preparation by the capitalist states of Europe for a war of aggression against the Soviet Union.[18]

From 1919, Werth was part of the anti-Stalinist, leftist, pacifist movement headed by Romain Rolland.[19] In the controversy of 1919 between Rolland and Barbusse in the *Clarté* group about whether or not to legitimize the use of violence and to accept the shape taken by the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia, Werth sided with Rolland. The group of writers that Romain Rolland gathered around him looked for ways of giving shape to the reconstruction of Europe and achieving Franco-German reconciliation. The periodical *Europe*, set up in 1923, charts the attempts of this internationally-minded group of intellectuals to find a third way, to steer a course between universalism and nationalism, between Barbusse and Barrès, but also shows how vague and generalized their notions of Europeanism still were.[20]

The first issue of *Europe* (15 February 1923, 103–13) opened with an article tellingly (and for some almost blasphemously) entitled 'La Patrie européenne' by the poet and *ancien combattant* René Arcos (1880–1959). The title implicitly criticizes the concept of Fatherland, the navel-gazing tendencies of nations and the artificial division of Europe into states whose genesis and demise are dictated by the fortunes of war. So as to prevent calamities like the First World War, Heinrich Mann, who contributed to the periodical until 1939, advocated a union between France and Germany as the foundation of 'l'Etat au-dessus des Etats, L'Etat suprême' (Mann 1923, 124).

As fascism emerged, however, faith in Franco-German cooperation and a united Europe began to evaporate. In 1932, for instance, Raymond Aron published a series of dejected articles about the German situation in *Europe*. Inspired by his idol Ghandi, Rolland had gradually evolved a philosophy of passive resistance during the 1920s, but the pressure of rising fascism and the new-found pacifism of the right ultimately compelled him to become a fellow-traveller. In 1936 he was followed by most of *Europe*'s staff.

Werth's most substantial contribution to *Europe* consisted of a series of articles about a journey to Indo-China, published collectively in 1926 under the title *Cochinchine*. His pacifism expressed itself in an fiery protest against the way narrow-minded and smug French colonials – including the French army – subdued the 'natives', often in the name of 'European civilization'. *Cochinchine* was directed not only against French colonialism, but also against 'Eurocentrism', which Werth perceived as nationalism and warmongering on a global scale. The events in the colonies made him aware once again that little progress had been made since *la Grande Guerre*. *Cochinchine* sparked off a smear campaign against its author in the right-wing press, which accused him of complicity with the Bolsheviks.

Between 1928 and 1933 Werth openly changed sides and began to contribute to Barbusse's *Monde, hebdomadaire international*, which was founded in 1927 and financed by Moscow. Unlike Barbusse, Werth was not a member of the Communist Party, but from 1928 he was certainly a sympathizer. As Barbusse's editor-in-chief Werth demonstrated his ontinuing preoccupation with the First World War, his deeply-rooted distrust of 'drawing-room philosophers' and his sympathy with the political signature of *Monde* in a number of articles attacking the pan-European ideas of Drieu La Rochelle and the European visions of Valéry and Spengler, whom he accuses of exploiting ad nauseam the clichéd theme of European decadence (Werth 1931). Though direct evidence is lacking, it seems likely that Werth, too, was impelled by rising fascism to modify his ideals and to support, albeit temporarily and implicitly, the idea of violent revolution. The conservative views of Jean Guéhenno, who edited *Europe* between 1929 and 1936, might also have induced him to side with Barbusse. In 1933, however, he discontinued his cooperation with *Monde* because he could no longer endure Barbusse's Stalinist top-down approach. Werth subsequently became involved in the pacifist leftist weekly *Marianne*, but on the eve of the Second World War he once again revoked the ideal of non-violence. He opposed the Munich agreement, which aimed to appease Nazi Germany, and became a staunch supporter of General de Gaulle after the latter's famous 'Appel du 18 juin 1940'. Writing in his diary on 1 May 1943 Werth states: 'those who in 1914 wanted a peace that was less foolish than war, are now accepting a war that is less foolish than peace' (Werth 1992, 467).

Léon Werth was a non-conformist, a rebel who set his own course, did not allow himself to adopt simplistic stances and did not entrench himself after taking up a position. The fact that fate often brought him into contact with the 'common' Frenchman – in the barracks and in the trenches – seems to have preserved him from the barren abstractions that, as he himself noted in *Clavel soldat*, often lead to mistakes (12). Unlike Julien Benda, who in the 1920s warned intellectuals to avoid direct political involvement (Benda 1927), Werth never wanted to be shut up in an ivory tower, nor did he wish to have anything to do with ponderous notions such as 'the decline of the West'. However, in the pacifism which he professed after the First World War, Werth was caught between two emotions: a deep suspicion of the then political elite – inspired by his war experiences – and his sympathy for Marxism (though he had reservations about the idea of world revolution). This prevented him from welcoming a concrete plan like Briand's which, had it been realized, might possibly have sustained peace in Europe. The increasing pressure of fascism made it difficult, indeed ultimately impossible, for Werth and many like him to continue to adhere to pacifist principles.

Notes

1 Twenty-five per cent of the male population between the ages of 18 and 40 were killed, and of this 25 per cent, over half belonged to the peasantry. See Bergounioux 1987, 1992, 1995; Rouaud 1990, 1992.

2 The research by Jean-Jacques Becker *et al.* was thus an extension of the increasing interest shown by historians during the 1970s in the terrors visited on the civilian population under the Vichy regime and, most particularly, in the fate of Jews and political prisoners deported by the Nazis. This project brought forth the following publications: Becker *et al.* 1994; Winter 1995; Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 1997, 251–71; Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 2000.

3 Tavernier set his *La Vie et rien d'autre* in the shell-flattened landscape of north-east France. His main character's task is to identify soldiers who were buried anonymously – an all-too-common occurrence – and to inform families of the final resting place of their missing sons and brothers. *Capitaine Conan* is based on the eponymous novel by Roger Vercel (Prix Goncourt 1934) and concerns the vicissitudes of the French army in Romania in the months after the armistice of 11 November 1918.

4 As witness the reviews in: *Le Monde des livres*, 29 October 1993; *Le Canard enchaîné*, 27 October 1993; *La Vie*, 2 December 1993; *La Liberté*, 6/7 November 1993; *La Croix*, 14 November 1993.

5 Cru lists 324 books that were directly inspired by the war and were written between 1915 and 1930. Of these, only about twenty fall in the category of novels. The remainder are purely eye-witness accounts – diaries, memoirs, correspondence. The French literature inspired by the First World War is of course not confined to the realistic trench novels, including *Clavel soldat*, selected by Cru. Modernist writers such as Apollinaire, Cendrars, Cocteau, Raymond Radiguet and Proust also dealt with the theme of war, but on an incidental basis, and with much greater literary freedom; their work falls

outside the genre of eye-witness literature. In the 1930s, as the dividing line between fact and fiction became blurred by the passage of time, various anti-war novels were published that have since become classics. They include *Le Troupeau* (1931) by Jean Giono, *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1932) by Céline and *Le Sang noir* (1935) by Louis Guilloux.

6 René-Georges Kimpflin, war veteran and author of a series of war memoirs, *Le Premier Souffle* (1920), cited by Cru 1929, 17. This and all subsequent translations are my own.

7 Only a few could withstand the appeal of Poincaré's *Union sacrée*. Poincaré reached out to both Catholics and socialists, calling upon them to forget their differences and to defend their country against the German aggressor, France's arch enemy. Fewer than 1.5 per cent of the soldiers who were mobilized defaulted, and 3000 men who had been conscientious objectors in peacetime could be found full of warlike spirit at the front in September 1914.

8 For biographical information on Werth I am indebted to Jean Maitron and Claude Pennetier (1993, 367–9). For a description of the prewar intellectual climate in France, see Christophe Prochasson and Anne Rasmussen 1996, 11–123.

9 *Caserne 1900* belongs to the tradition of anti-militaristic novels written at the turn of the century by authors like Lucien Descaves (*Sous offs, roman militaire*, 1889), and Abel Hermant (*Le Cavalier miserey, 21e Chasseurs, Moeurs militaires contemporaines*, 1887). The main criticism made by these authors was of the brutal behaviour of the NCOs and the dehumanizing effect of barrack life. The anti-militarism was also a reaction against an army that threatened the existence of the fledgling Third Republic, particularly at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. At the beginning of the twentieth century its character changed; the army was deployed by radical Republicans such as Clemenceau and Socialists such as Aristide Briand to break the mass strikes organized by the CGT trade union, set up in 1895. The CGT was, not surprisingly, extremely anti-militaristic.

10 The expression 'guerrier de l'an II' is a commonplace encountered in many French war novels; the German equivalent would be a reference to the soldiers of the 1813 war of liberation.

11 In the literary field ultra-nationalism was represented by authors like Charles Péguy and Ernest Pschari. They, however, are more concerned with aristocratic notions such as renown and honour than with a desire for revenge. Both were killed in action in September 1914.

12 After the first difficult winter of the war, the *Action française* broke with the *Union sacrée*. In the first instance it accused the new Jewish immigrants, 'les Germains de l'intérieur', of making common cause with the enemy, and then turned its gunsights on 'les juifs de souche', the assimilated Jews, many of whom had lived in France for decades. For anti-Semitism in France immediately before and during the First World War, see Philippe-E. Landau 1999, 67–77.

13 After the death of its influential leader, August Bebel (13 August 1913), the German Socialist Party became very much divided. See for the development of anti-militarism and pacifism among various sections of French society on the eve of the First World War the very detailed study by Jean-François Becker (1977, 84–119).

14 'How beautiful they are, our defenders in their dugouts . . . as they embrace the soil of their birth' (Rieuneau 1974, 86).

15 See also Jay Winter (1998, 178–85) on the apocalyptic tone of *Le Feu*.

16 Whereas a number of studies on pacifism have been published since 1980 in Great Britain, the United States and Germany, France has until recently shown little interest in the subject. Not only was French pacifism between the wars a very divided movement that could not be compared to large-scale movements such as the British Peace Pledge and the Deutsche Friedenskartell, but the defeat of 1940 and occupation by Nazi Germany meant that the French associated pacifism with defeatism, Vichy and collaboration. Moreover, after the Second World War pacifism became linked in the public mind with the politics of the Parti communiste français, which played an important role in Le mouvement de la paix (founded in 1948). See Ingram 1993, 17–50.

17 The manifesto 'Pour la défense de l'Occident' (*Le Temps*, 4 October 1935), drawn up by the ultra-nationalist Henri Massis and signed by hundreds of intellectuals on the right and extreme right, is one of the symptoms of the emergence of this right-wing pacifism.

18 The highly negative article that appeared in the left-of-centre *Monde* when Briand died is instructive in this respect: 'If Briand is regarded as a pacifist, we must ask ourselves what kind of peace Briand wanted . . . Briand's case proves that the struggle to prevent war will fail if it is not taken up by the masses, and if it does not become the struggle of the people against the establishment whose privileges, power and politics lead us right to the brink of war' (*Monde*, 2 May 1932, 3).

19 Rolland was in Switzerland when the war broke out, and wrote a series of critical essays in the *Journal de Genève* (August–December 1914), which, collectively published in 1915 under the title *Au-dessus de la mêlée*, won their author considerable renown as a champion of pacifism.

20 For an analysis of the stances taken by *Europe* (against the occupation of the Ruhrgebied, against the 1927 Paul Boncour Act, in the 1928 Demartial Affair), see Racine 1993, 51–69. The Boncour Act, one of the aims of which was to engage intellectuals in a new international conflict, provoked a passionate manifesto, 'Déclaration d'indépendance de l'esprit', which was published in *Europe* in 1927. Werth was one of the signatories. On this subject see also Sirinelli 1990, 79–82.

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11

Engineering Europe: The European Idea in Interbellum Literature, The Case of *Panropa*

Menno Spiering

Figure 11.1 Sunrise over Europe after the First World War. Emblem of Panropa
Source: Sörgel 1932, 75.

After the First World War Europe was awash with individuals, committees, associations, movements and government officials that propagated close cooperation – if not union – between the various European states. In his 1983 study of this phenomenon Carl Pegg gives an authoritative overview of the many schemes that sought to promote, in his words,