

## The Thibault by Roger Martin Du Gard, A Historical Novel

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**Abstract:** *The political awareness of Roger Martin du Gard has actual direct and important consequences on the fabrication and the conception of his fictional characters. It must make them evolve to give them consistency, not only in terms of ideas, but also in terms of their action. They already remain individuals with their inner truth and well established in previous volumes and in the minds of readers, but on the other side of the coin, they take on a completely new dimension. Unlike diplomatic facts, which he always introduces indirectly through the discussions of his characters, Martin du Gard reports directly on socialist actions. Our interest in the conflict between history and romantic fiction in Summer 1914 should not, however, distort our appreciation of the artistic value of Roger Martin du Gard's novel. No critic mostly disputes the impression of deep unity, which emerges after reading the story lived by the Thibault characters.*

**Key Words:** *Thibault, Roger Martin du Gard, War, Summer 1914.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

A Roger Martin du Gard was a French novelist. He trained as a paleographer and archivist, he brought to his works a spirit of objectivity and a scrupulous regard for detail, and because of his concern with documentation and the relationship of social reality to individual development, his fiction has been linked with the realist and naturalist traditions of the 19th century. His sympathy for the humanist socialism and pacifism of Jean Jaurès is evident in his work.

When in 1954 a critic asked Roger Martin du Gard, why in the last part of his great romantic cycle of Thibaults, the

First World War took such a big place? He answered with these words:

"The intrusion of the 1914 war in European society brutally shocked all values, created a new, dramatic climate, where political events have thrown individual destinies into the shadows. Insofar as the Thibaults family have a documentary interest and constitute the history of a given period, the last volumes very faithfully express the upheaval caused by the war" (Martin du Gard, Summer 1914:179).

Summer 1914. written between 1932 and 1936, indeed testifies to a profound transformation of the novel, at the time when the characters are confronted with the First World War. This then becomes of capital importance, it transforms their life, it makes them react, and it breaks, as in tragedy, their will or their revolt. Through fiction, the author's questions about the responsibilities of war and the socialist movement are pierced.

The most obvious and important innovation of the new plan for the end of his cycle (which he established in the early thirties) consists in placing the continuation of his novel in a period framed by two precise, fundamental vintages for which then examines the causes of the conflict, 1914 and 1918. Jacques Thibault, who has become a socialist rebel against the war and in parallel with the death of Jean Jaurès, a historical figure, he fell a martyr for his socialist convictions and his pacifist action. Before 1914 bourgeoisie, which lived in the reassuring certainty of an immutable and well-ordered universe, seems to disappear with Antoine who dies after becoming aware of the underlying reasons for his failure.

It is not difficult to relate this change to the deep crisis of the turning years, a crisis of consciousness, which follows that of the social system. Martin du Gard is quite explicit on this point. On February 5, 1932, he noted in his Journal (Martin du Gard, Lettre à Mauris Ray, 1980:23). new ending that he had found for the novel:

The Thibault disappeared and wiped out in the war. It is a whole society; a whole form of the bourgeoisie that war destroys with them. As a result, my work, the Thibault, takes on a deep meaning. The painting of a decaying world and the end of this world in the bloody catastrophe (Martin du Gard, Lettre à Mauris Ray, 1980:136).

## 2. Discussion:

The political awareness of Roger Martin du Gard has very direct and important consequences on the fabrication and the conception he has of his fictional characters. It must make them evolve to give them consistency not only in terms of ideas, but also in terms of their action. They remain individuals with their inner truth already well established in previous volumes and therefore in the minds of readers, but they take on a completely new dimension.

We want to show by a brief analysis; the summer 1914 is precisely structured by a war-peace antithesis. However, before looking at this part of the Thibault, it is interesting to know, how the novelist himself experienced the First World War? Mobilized from August 20, 1914, he waged the whole war and was not demobilized until February 1919. He joined very early on the rare intellectuals of Europe who like Romain Rolland and tried to stand above the mixed (Martin du Gard, Summer 1914:159). He did not give in to the blindness of propaganda, which glorified war. On the contrary, he says:

I spent ten days in the mud of Mont St-Eloi. I saw the fireworks at night, the gray convoys of prisoners, the stretchers, and the blood on the clay. What horror, what madness! In addition, I have the atrocious impression of remaining one of the last to see this. For others, it is a common sight, which has become normal (Martin du Gard, Lettre à Mauris Ray, 1980:34).

He also claims:

How does all remain alive and sensitive in Europe not arise, at the end of courage and resignation, to cry. Enough, enough! What universal insanity, what ignoble contagion of madness! (Bardel, 1992:84).

We could multiply the citations dating from the war, which confirm the fundamentally anti-militarist, and pacifist positions of Martin du Gard. The volume N of the General Correspondence edited by Maurice Rieuneau, as well as the corresponding part of the Journal published by Claude Sicard, contain very numerous testimonies which illustrate this attitude in detail. Irena Filipowska published in the Proceedings of the Saarbrücken Symposium on Martin du Gard a penetrating study on the novelist's reactions to the First World War. For our purpose, let us simply remember that the experience of war, deeply rooted in his memory despite the decline of twenty years, represented for the novelist a source of information, feelings, reactions and opinions and his positions pacifists of the thirties were only updating an attitude which was already his in 1914.

Through which channels did Martin du Gard learn about the history of the First World War that the objective history that went beyond his subjective experience lived directly? We know that he consulted a large quantity of books, journals and various testimonies, sources that are, still preserved at the Château du Tertre, which he lived in when he wrote summer 1914. In the purer naturalist tradition, the novelist wanted, like Zola to root his fiction in the objective reality of society and more particularly of history with regard to summer 1914. Having acquired at the Ecole des Chartes des working methods and a professional conscience worthy of the great university historians, he was able to make critical use of his sources and the numerous studies published in the 1930s.

His great romantic work during the First World War was built on a solid basis: lived experience, historical documentation and research. Nevertheless, romantic fiction cannot be determined exclusively either by experience or by documented history. To reach the level of an artistic and literary representation, Roger Martin du Gard structures all these materials in a strict composition, a kind of solid architecture (Martin du Gard, Lettre à Mauris Ray, 1980:243). In which he brings his fictional characters to life.

It is clear, if a structure underpins this great historical fresco, it is in the antithesis between the war forces and the peace forces that it must be sought. The war forces are not only the nationalist right, represented by French Action and a large part of the press, it is also and above all the European governments which, through "their weakness, their hesitations, their imprudence, their hidden appetites" (Martin du Gard, Lettre à Thomas, 1980:134), must assume to a greater or lesser degree, heavy responsibilities. The thorny question of the immediate resilience of the war is developed in detail before the reader.

The choice of the date on summer 1914, June 28, is already significant: the novelist can thus describe the reactions of his characters after the assassination of Sarajevo, which would precipitate events. When the action of the novel resumes, two weeks later, the political situation has changed considerably. Unlike the contemporaries of 1914, the characters of Martin du Gard were then informed down to the smallest detail of the diplomatic exchanges that took place at the beginning of July between Germany and Austria. The novelist first gives, through the voice of Austrian socialists, a brief summary of the Balkan problems and the economic rivalries between the great powers (Martin du Gard, Summer 1914:129). He alludes to the Wiesner report, the conclusions of which the Socialists know from July 12. It also approaches, although more cautiously, the possible complicity of the Serbian government and, later, of certain Austrian leaders. (Malavie, 1981:24).

What he wants to show is, the Austrian government is trying to use the attack as a pretext for settling scores with Serbia. German approval would have serious consequences. When Jacques Thibault announces, "that Germany has

already given his support to Austria", Meynestrel, the most aware character in the novel, understands: "Meynestrel started. He did not take his eyes off Jacques" (Boak, 1984:46). All the dramatic tension of the dialogue focuses on this German responsibility.

Like its historical importance in the outbreak of the First World War, the Austrian ultimatum plays a crucial role in the novel by Martin du Gard. On the morning of July 24, the newspapers announced the delivery of an Austrian note to Serbia, without measuring the consequences (Daspre, 1976:43). It was in the evening of the same day that the danger became evident to the public. The novelist then devotes an entire chapter, chapter 33, to the political situation and the diplomatic consequences of the ultimatum. Martin du Gard. Underlines the deliberately aggressive nature of the note and Austria's secret hope that Serbia will reject the conditions imposed. Contrary to official declarations by the German government, the characters in the novel assume that Germany became aware of the text of the ultimatum from July 22.

By this presentation of the facts, Martin du Gard shows that, in this first stage of political tension, it is Austria and Germany, the latter by its unconditional support for that one who bear the heaviest responsibility.

However, this is not the only conclusion of the novelist, who also releases the responsibility of the French government. Martin du Gard not within the scope of this study to show in detail the positions clearly displays it in the violent controversy, which divided French historians of the time over the possible responsibilities of France. Let us briefly summarize by saying that Martin du Gard attempts a fair distribution of responsibilities of the war on the whole of great powers of time.

From this intention of the novelist, it follows that the work is full of historical, diplomatic and military details. We will return to the aesthetic consequences of this intrusion of history into the novel. Let us remember now that, on this crucial question which preoccupies him greatly (Gorilovics, 1984:132), he sums up his opinion by an image. In addition, to avoid the improbability, which would consist in making express this judgment by a single character, which would make it a quasi-prophecy, he presents his conclusions in the form of a conversation between several characters of the novel, which is gathered on July 31, 1914. An artistic solution that does not deceive anyone: it suffices to leave aside the introductory formulas, which precede the interventions of each interlocutor to find in all points the judgment of Martin du Gard in the thirties. Assimilating war to fire, he writes:

On June 14, a summer day, suddenly a fire broke out in the centre of Europe. The focus was in Austria. The small bundles had been carefully prepared in Vienna. However, the spark was from Serbia! Driven by a violent one, by a treacherous Northeast wind, which came straight from Petersburg! Moreover, the Russians immediately blew the fire with the incomprehensible consent of France. Moreover, in concert, they threw a number of small bundles they had been keeping dry for a long time! Germany, meanwhile, watched coldly the flames rise, and the sparks foolishness. Out of foolishness, and out of pride! Because she prided herself insanely on being able, in due time, to circumscribe the brazier, to make the share of the fire and to remove chestnuts from it. Who would have spoken enough to put out the fire and aggravating circumstance? She had clearly seen the fire start and spread. However, she contented herself with shouting: Help! In addition, she was careful not to open her valves! Which, despite the peaceful air, she will have given herself, is very likely to make her appear to the judgment of posterity as a sneaky accomplice of the arsonists (Martin du Gard, Summer 1914:19).

All European governments, therefore, have a greater or lesser share of responsibility. In 1914, the only political force that could hinder them that could ensure peace was international socialism. It has been wrote in 1935:

"My book is partly built on the fact that the revolutionary friends of Jacques are pacifist internationalists, who fight to the point of despair against the threat of war. Which is also historically true: The Socialist International, if not to the extreme of the far left, was pacifist, fought fanatically for the general strike and the refusal of war" (Martin du Gard, Summer 1914:101).

The restriction on the "extreme of left" is reflected in the transformation of the character of Meynestrel, whom Martin du Gard had first wanted to pacifist and which he ended up making, in 1936, a cynic and a warmonger. (He no doubt thinks of Lenin). However, the international socialist movement is nevertheless presented as a whole as the great pacifist force, as the real alternative to the danger of war.

The revolutionary group in Geneva represents the entire European socialist movement on the romantic level, like an International in miniature. Through the various members of this circle, who each embody a nationality and an ideological current of socialism of 1914, the novelist skillfully introduces the actions and reactions of the great socialist parties of Europe. It describes in detail the attitude of German Social Democracy, of the Italian and Russian socialist parties; it mentions the positions of the Socialists of England and Serbia. Nevertheless, the most complete picture is obviously of the French workers' movement. This is not only because the romantic cycle of Martin du Gard mainly

depicts French society, but is also explained by the novelist's sympathy for the particularly clear and energetic pacifism that French socialism seemed to him to have adopted in 1914.

Unlike diplomatic facts, which he always introduces indirectly through the discussions of his characters, Martin du Gard reports directly on socialist actions. The story is played here on an affordable level to all characters. Each socialist activist was able to participate in the boulevards demonstrations, and the positions taken by Jaurès, far from being kept secret, were on the contrary addressed to the public of the time. If, therefore, the integration of socialist activities in the novel is relatively easy from the point of view of romantic technique, it does, however, require a very thorough knowledge of historical details. Because in wanting to describe a pacifist manifestation more directly, the novelist is more likely to distort historical reality by giving free rein to his imagination. This temptation is all the greater for Martin du Gard since he did not know these socialist struggles himself in 1914, having remained in the countryside until August 1: he therefore did not experience any of the events that he intends to describe. The historical accuracy of summer 1914, noted by all the critics and confined by the examination of sources, is therefore the fruit of scrupulous documentation.

We have compared in detail, in a thesis on this subject, the different sources used by Martin du Gard, newspapers, memoirs of historical figures, history books, with the aesthetic result obtained in the novel (Martin du Gard, *Lettre à Mauris Ray* 1980:16). It emerged from this study first the extraordinary accuracy and precision of the documentation work provided by Martin du Gard, his desire for objectivity, but at the same time his obvious sympathy for the pacifism of the French socialist party of before the first war, and especially for Jean Jaurès, who by his policy and by his death, he was assassinated on July 31, 1914, is for him very embodiment of the peace forces.

After this brief analysis of the structure provided to the historical novel by the antithesis of war and peace, one naturally comes to wonder how the novelist was able to make coincide the enormous mass of his documentation and this rigorous desire for antithetical composition in his fictional world. Because we must not forget that, the Thibault characters have their own existence in this romantic cycle before summer 1914 (which is only the seventh volume) and therefore before being confronted with the history of 1914. For each event, their psychology dictates to the novelist a certain range of reactions which he cannot ignore, under pain of improbability. Thus, Jacques Thibault can become a sympathizer of socialism in 1914, but by no means a typical socialist. He remains undecided, he hesitates, he does not think, he does not act like the average socialist of the time. We could criticize this uncertainty and a certain inconsistency of the heroes of Martin du Gard. It was wrong, because these traits are precisely those which allow the novelist to avoid the danger to which his historical documentation exposed him, and which would have been to schematize his characters too much, to conceive their psychology according to a preconceived representative idea that they would embody classic pitfall, which has come up against so many other theses on an artistic level. Here, the presence of the central heroes, in all their complexity after the first six volumes, is already so strong that they can become one with the historical documents, which Martin du Gard wants to account for in summer 1914.

This subordination of purely documentary elements to the fictional universe is facilitated by the dramatic technique of the novelist, an aesthetic principle that he has tried to use in almost all his novels;

The novelist, must step aside, disappear behind his characters, abandon their place to them and endow them with a life powerful enough for them to impose themselves on the reader by a kind of presence, as they impose themselves to the spectator the beings of flesh that he sees moving, that he hears conversing, on the other side of the ramp (Martin du Gard, *Lettre à Mauris Ray*, 1980:136.).

This desire to erase the narrator preserved Martin du Gard from the danger of giving history lessons himself in the context of historical research of his time. Each piece of information, each appraisal of the political situation must, for him, be plausible when his characters' experience it. At the same time, as we have shown, we want to give a critical overview of historical problems. He intends to suggest to the reader his own opinion on the question of responsibilities. We want to make known facts, which were perfectly secret in 1914. Knowledge and understanding of the events is only possible with the hindsight of the historian of 1930, who has a host of diplomatic documents and who can rely on historical studies.

There is therefore a fundamental contradiction between the point of view of the historian Martin du Gard, who needs historical perspective, and that of the novelist Martin du Gard, who wants to present his action without the intervention of the narrator. Martin du Gard endeavors by various methods to attenuate this contradiction. The most effective way is to bring the angle of view of your central hero closer to your own views of 1930. Jacques Thibault is a very conscious character. He follows political events with a remarkable critical sense; he is never fooled by false rumors, newspaper propaganda or nationalist blindness. He travels across Europe, looks, compares and reflects. This political awareness of the central character that the reader follows throughout the summer of 1914 is as close as possible to the retreat of the novelist. Jacques does not himself declare:

From Geneva, I mean from the international environment where I live the nuances are fading: we see, with a kind of hindsight, the general lines of European policy (Martin du Gard, Summer 1914:23).

The retreat of the narrator is therefore compensated by the distance in space of the fictional character. If all these characteristics of Jacques agree fairly well with his character, an abuse in this sense would however risk contradicting his complex psychology. François Porché points out an exaggerated overload of the chronology of Jacques:

Jacques does not have a minute to breathe; he must run from one capital to another, charged with mission by his party, no doubt, but above all by the author, who needs him to know at a certain precise date, this or that fact, which will enter the system of the work, in this sort of pre-established synopsis ( Martin du Gard, Summer 1914:23).

It is likely that many readers will not realize that historical events may have influenced this extraordinary activity of Jacques. Already, even before history plays a role in *Les Thibault*, Jacques is worried. The fever in which he experiences the days of July and August 1914 is a perfectly plausible reaction, consistent with his character. The reader is not struck by its evolution and hardly notices the technical advantages that the novelist derives from it.

Martin du Gard also attributes to Doctor Philip an exceptional political conscience and almost prophetic judgments on the historical events, where one easily recognizes the views of the novelist. Philip believes L. A very long war, where all the nations will be exhausted at the same time, without any wish, or being able, to stop on the slope (Martin du Gard, Summer 1914:179).. TI recognized that in July 1914, something ends, which we were, and something begins, including us, we will not be old (Martin du Gard, *Lettre à Mauris Ray*, 1980:106).. In addition, draws attention to his role himself by saying: we speak, we prophesy. There is nothing improbable, however, in the fact that Philip expressed such opinions in 1914. His philosophical skepticism and the rejection of all prejudice are in perfect harmony with this role of prophet that the novelist attributes to him. It is one of the technical skills of Martin du Gard to thus suggest by the mouth of different characters his own point of view without one can ever discern the artifice.

For the secondary characters specially designed for the historical picture of 1914, the question of the agreement between the discretion of the narrator and the conceptions of the historian arises differently (Garguilo,1973:97). For their invention depends intimately on certain historical considerations. Characters like Meynestrel, Roy, Mourlan or Studler each embody a position on the war. The documentation of the novelist thus fits directly into their dialogue. It is through the choice of these types. By their positive or negative presence, by their exact place in the novel that historian Martin du Gard can express, but he has no need of technical devices to hide it.

Given the mass of diplomatic documents that Martin du Gard intended to use, the integration of historical facts into the chronology of the novel posed a particularly delicate problem. The majority of diplomatic facts of some importance were unknown to the public in 1914. On the exact course of events, full light should only be made after publication of the official collections of European governments. How to make these documents known without the intervention of the narrator? The simplest solution was obviously to introduce a character familiar with the most secret negotiations in 1914. Thus the diplomat Rumelles, who often has the function of making known to readers of facts that public opinion was unaware of during the trying days of July 1914, Antoine Thibault, his doctor, had to give him a daily bite. The novelist is entirely free to describe Rumelles, when the information he can provide and his opinions seem to be useful. The friendly relations between the two men allow Rumelles to speak freely: "I should not divulge these things, but you a doctor, you know how to keep a secret, don't you?"

In the field of French politics, Rumelles is the main means of information. However, Martin du Gard does not want to make him the only commentator, necessarily apologetic of French decisions. To suggest his own opinions, he prefers to publicize and judge events through opponents of official policy, by the Socialists of Humanity and the Geneva group (Filipowska , 1968:67). It is no coincidence that the novelist chose the editorial offices of Humanity for a large part of his descriptions. In Paris, the socialists were relatively well informed by the government on political developments, the news flowed to the editorial staff and the editors immediately took stock of the situation. Martin du Gard mentions eleven editors of *L'Humanité* in 1914. None of them is a historical figure, as confirmed by Georges Weill. Three editors, Berthet, Chardent and Odelle, are only very briefly appointed. Following the example of Jumelin and Rabbe, the novelist shows the passage of anti-militarists to the theses of the National Union. However, the other six editors have the sole function of providing information on the political situation. It is still limited, moreover, to the same area each. Marc Levoir, for example, always returns from the Quai d'Orsay (Martin du Gard, *Lettre à Mauris Ray* 1980:243). Pagès seems to be the specialist in contacts with the Ministry of War. TI has addictions to the Ministry of War he is linked to a military scribe, employed in the secretariat of General Joffre and he reports on Russian military preparations the opinions of Messimy and the declaration of war by Germany against Russia. Martin du Gard therefore endeavors to give a certain individuality to these editors, but he hardly succeeds, it must be said, more characterized by

the information they provide than by psychological or human criteria, they form in the reader's mind a block which has the common function of informing.

Many facts could not be known either by Rumelles or by the editors of *Humanity*: the contacts between Austria and Germany, at the beginning of July. Martin du Gard is forced to resort to another process here, the artifice of which is easily revealed. TI invents a certain number of socialists whose only role is to obtain secret information by more or less obscure ways. By Hosmer, a Viennese socialist, Martin du Gard reports ultra-secret facts ten times. Since Hosmer could not have had this information through normal channels, he is essentially defined as a spy: "Besides, Hosmer, this is a wonderful information service in Vienna: Hosmer always ends up knowing everything!". The reader accepts such an improbability when it is not repeated. But when Trauttenbach, a German socialist, is defined by an almost identical process "by personal vocation, he specialized in the occult direction of a kind of revolutionary and international spy service". The novelist's artifice becomes all the more, it is obvious that such socialist activities are not supported by any historical source. This role of informant is found in other socialists. Bühlmann is aware of the secrets of the Viennese chancellery; Kir chenblatt is "well informed on the state of mind of the high officials of the Empire" m.; Paterson receives information from London by mail m, 238). To get the stories of all these characters into the plot of his novel, Martin du Gard often had to paint the socialists while traveling. Germans are in Paris, Austrians in Geneva, the Geneva group in Brussels, a Russian in Antwerp, Jacques in Berlin, and Italians in Switzerland: the reader comes to the impression, obviously false, that the socialists of 1914 never stopped to walk around Europe.

Martin du Gard accepts these improbabilities in order to be able to introduce into summer 1914, the many historical elements at his disposal, and in particular his rich documentation on the responsibilities of war. It arrives there by the various processes, which we have just enumerated, but at the price of a rather heavy price: the number of the characters of its novel is considerably increased, without addition for the artistic unit of the work. The historian here takes precedence over the artist.

Our interest in the conflict between history and romantic fiction in summer 1914 should not, however, distort our appreciation of the artistic value of Roger Martin du Gard's novel. No critic disputes the impression of deep unity that emerges when reading the story lived by the Thibault characters. It comes in large part from the admirable parallelism between historical events and the fabric of fiction: the dramatic evolution of the love of Jenny and Jacques, the threat of collective death but which always remains that of an individual concrete.

When summer 1914 was published in 1936, critics with rare exceptions who refused the defeatism of the work, such as Robert Brasillach in *L'Action Française* welcomed the historical picture of the time presented by Roger Martin du Gard, and its accuracy. In addition, these judgments of 1936 should be appreciated even more since the vast majority of these critics had experienced the war. For them as for the novelist himself, Summer 1914 was not conceived as a historical novel in the sense of the nineteenth century, that is to say as a return to a distant past; on the contrary, the experience of the period described in the novel and its multiple extensions into the present gave the work a burning topicality.

Summer 1914, as we know, is not the last book in the Thibault series. It is the Epilogue, written in 1937 and 38, which is the synthesis of which we can try to draw a kind of conclusion and message. The action takes place four years later, at the end of the war. In addition, the narrative perspective through which the reader contemplates the fictional world of Thibault and the historical events is limited, in a very significant way, to the vision of Antoine Thibault. Mortally gassed and therefore a victim of the war, he nevertheless lulled himself into illusions about the advent of a peaceful world (about the League of Nations creation projects). However, Martin du Gard, by publishing the Epilogue, and the reader by reading it, already knew that these hopes had to be totally dashed by the explosion of another world war.

Should we conclude from this in the struggle between war and peace, between evil and good, the prospect of progress for humanity and its destruction, the novelist wants to convey to us the pessimistic message of a kind of fate of history? Some exegetes of the work think that the Thibault characters, Jacques in particular, but also Antoine, relive the drama of "dipe ... dipe" was warned, too (Martin du Gard, *Lettre à Thomas* 1980:76). In summer 1914, history would replace the popular myths of the ancient tragedy. TI would emerge from it a historical pessimism, which would respond to his biological vision of man, according to which he carries the tragic in him. Thus, the loss of faith in the future of history would also translate the tragic disappointment of rationalist humanism of the nineteenth century and the first. If it is necessary to rally to such an interpretation for the tragic of the heroes of the novel and the relationship of the characters to the story, the same is not true of the effect of this tragedy on the reader. Would Martin du Gard have wanted or accepted that at the end of the cycle, his readers take away the feeling of the helplessness of humanity, even a pessimistic vision of history? We do not think so. Because the failure of Jacques and later that of Antoine Thibault is located at a precise moment in history and thus mitigates the effect of the tragic, which is not fatal, because we learn the deep reasons for the war nor above all unchangeable and eternal as in the ancient myth. The tragic death of Jacques and Antoine reflects the total failure of their individuality. However, the significance of their actions, their sufferings, even their ideas is rightly relativized by this integration in a historical context. Antoine's pessimistic philosophy is that of a

man who, in 1918, knew he was going to die. Nevertheless, she is consciously counterbalanced by her faith in the future, which is also that of Roger Martin du Gard and of the reader, faith that symbolizes Jean-Paul, the child of Jacques. This end can therefore also be an optimistic message, without any specific political or social content, but which does not exclude the historical future and which remains open to the meaning that future generations will give it.

Such an interpretation of the conclusion of the cycle finds its confinement in the reactions of contemporaries and of Roger Martin du Gard himself. Faced with the historic event of the Second World War, they wonder what would be, not their own reactions, but those of Jean-Paul. Martin du Gard is no longer free to answer this question himself. The historical novel has its own laws, and the open conclusion of the cycle allows the reader to invest it with the sense of history that he himself lives. The hopes placed in Jean-Paul were already dashed when the novel was published in 1940, because the new war had already broken out. The virtually optimistic end of the cycle then led critics and Martin du Gard to wonder what Jean-Paul would do in this new war. It would then be a fighter against Hitler, thinks the novelist, who tells us, responding to a criticism of Gabriel Marcel:

However, yes, my dear G. Marcel, I almost want to write the life of Paul when I read an article like yours. Moreover, I would perhaps surprise you by showing you a Jean-Paul, perfectly son of Jacques and Antoine's nephew, aviator on the Saarbrücken front and accepting with somber and ardent resignation this war in 1940, so different from all the others, this war for everything he cares about, against all that he hates the most in the world! Hitler is the war against barbarism (Fainas-Wehrmann, 1984:64).

But the roots of the characters in concrete history, in a temporarily closed past, allows Martin du Gard to refuse abusive analogies, and at the same time reflects the double historicity of the historical novel, that of the novelist who writes a work and that of the reader who reads the novel at another precise moment in history. The Thibault's open ending solution, conceived long before the outbreak of the new war, might not have been possible afterwards. This is what André Malraux saw right after the publication of the Epilogue in 1940, which is for him:

The room that assembles and arranges, at least from the inside, the dispersed elements of all of the above. The stake was considerable, and you won it: as it is, with their living parties and their dead parties, the Thibault's will be one of the few witnesses of the time. It was time (Martin du Gard, *Lettre à Thomas*, 1980:143).

The appreciation of Malraux seems confirmed by the current reception of the work of Martin du Gard. The open conclusion that carries no thesis, assures Thibault their value for the reader of today, while so many novels bearers of a precise ideology are often condemned to oblivion. Martin du Gard's historical novel reflects a conception of the world and of history devoid of those certainties, which mark historical novels of the nineteenth century, which often served a national cause or an ideology. In the Thibault family, the only message expressed by the novelist is, as we have seen, a negation of everything that generates war and that deprives men of their humanity.

### 3. CONCLUSION:

The political awareness of Roger Martin du Gard has very direct and important consequences on the fabrication and the conception he has of his fictional characters. It must make them evolve to give them consistency not only in terms of ideas, but also in terms of their action. They remain individuals with their inner truth already well established in previous volumes and therefore in the minds of readers, but they take on a completely new dimension.

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Unlike diplomatic facts, which he always introduces indirectly through the discussions of his characters, Martin du Gard reports directly on socialist actions. The story is played here on an affordable level to all characters. Because in wanting to describe a pacifist manifestation more directly, the novelist is more likely to distort historical reality by giving free rein to his imagination. This temptation is all the greater for Martin du Gard since he did not know these socialist struggles himself in 1914, having remained in the countryside until August 1: he therefore did not experience any of the events that he intends to describe.

Our interest in the conflict between history and romantic fiction in summer 1914 should not, however, distort our appreciation of the artistic value of Roger Martin du Gard's novel. No critic disputes the impression of deep unity that emerges when reading the story lived by the Thibault characters. It comes in large part from the admirable parallelism between historical events and the fabric of fiction: the dramatic evolution of the love of Jenny and Jacques, the threat of collective death but which always remains that of an individual concrete.

With *Les Thibault*, Roger Martin du Gard was confronted with the fundamental problem of the novel, which aims to be realistic or historical in our time. In the absence of ideological certainties and an optimistic philosophy of history, narrative certainties have been lost (modern forms of the novel largely reflect the lack of conception or philosophy in the history of novelists). Martin du Gard is one of those, and perhaps one of the last, who try to give, in the form of a long cyclical novel (Part of the Balzac and Zola tradition), a broad panorama of their society of the thought and ideologies of their time, presented by an omniscient narrator. This undertaking was accompanied by very great difficulties, which Martin du Gard often admitted himself. We will only quote one sentence that is quite revealing: "no one will know the harm that I have done to screen all these sons, French political life, European political life, and the personal life of my characters," he wrote in 1936. Furthermore, during the 20 years of the genesis of the cycle, the novelist himself evolved considerably, and changes of plan and orientation were the consequence. However, his skeptical and unbiased conception of history and the open conclusion to the future found in the Epilogue helped the novelist to give a fairly faithful picture of the historical reality of his time. As Malraux has noticed, Martin du Gard nevertheless succeeds, in the *Thibault*, in finding an artistic synthesis which "assembles and orders" the romantic sum. Its reader of today and tomorrow, and no doubt that of Korea as well as Germany or France, reads in this complex and open end of the Epilogue a message that also applies to its own future.

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