Forms of Temporality and Environmental Context: The Interweave of Literature and History in the *Labyrinthe du monde* of Marguerite Yourcenar

being a submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Oxford

by

Rodney Mearns

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge with deep thanks and appreciation the following:

the perspicacity and unflagging, kind good-humour of my supervisor, Professor Simon Kemp;

the suggestions and recommendations of the examiners at the Confirmation of Status;

the staff of the Taylorian Library for their constant help and support;

the ever-present warmth and cheerful detachment of my family as I have been immersed in this work.

Rodney Mearns
St. Cross College
Oxford
Submission for the Degree of D. Phil.

Abstract I

In her text, *Le Labyrinthe du monde,* Marguerite Yourcenar creates a double triptych, firstly a three-volume work, but also one on a lesser scale which sits at the beginning of the second volume, *Archives du Nord.* This design enables her to open the whole up to consideration as a fourfold division of time: geological, deep time, historical conjuncture and the personal or individual time of her parents. Other than drawing on it to provide the setting, the first is discarded by the writer. Taking a deep time perspective enables the writer to engage with a *longue durée* approach to the larger regional destruction of the animal and vegetable worlds which since man's arrival have been and continue to be constantly and unremittingly under duress. The argument is that the fate of the way of life of her predecessors is inextricably bound up with this dilemma, thereby constituting a serious warning to man and contemporary society. There is hope; it is to be found in a sensitizing child education and a consequential responsiveness among young people as they awaken to the centrality in their lives of a non-hierarchical biosphere. This thesis believes it is innovative in its putting forward of these matters of structure, theme, content and extended Yourcenarian argument in the *Mémoires*. Critical commentary of the *Labyrinthe du monde,* authorial title of Marguerite Yourcenar's *Mémoires*, generally takes the form of individual essays on an aspect or point raised in the course of the work. There does not appear to have been a single full-length study which looks at the work in the manner in which it is examined here as a whole. Not doing so amounts to a limitation. Commentary notes, for instance, the triptych character of the work, but does not follow through the implications.

Rodney Mearns
St. Cross College
Oxford
Submission for the degree of D. Phil.

Abstract II

The *Labyrinthe du monde*, the three-volume work which sits framed in Marguerite Yourcenar's *Mémoires*, displays a deeply imaginative engagement with history. Early in the opening chapter the author gives the reader the date of her birth. Unlike usual autobiographical sequences this birth marks not a beginning, but a terminus. Much of what matters in the work comes prior to this event. Meanwhile, the death of the mother which occurred as a consequence of that birth is placed before the reader as an irremediable rupture in the triangulated set of relationships, father, mother, child. A pivotal point in the narrative, the significance of the death is marked by a conscious effort by the writer to monumentalize it. Drawing on Blanchot's *L'Espace littéraire* helps us to see and understand that.

In recent decades much academic work has gone into understanding the relationships between fictional and historical narrative. Exploration of this constitutes the methodology of this study. Yourcenarian scholarship is examined in order to explore a variety of assessments of this aspect of her work, including essays in the collection of Maurice Delcroix, *Roman, histoire et mythe dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*. A discussion of the insights afforded by the writings of the historian R.G. Collingwood follows, as a consequence of which the significance of the role of the imagination in the composition of historical writing emerges clearly. Yourcenar is

seen as an imaginative writer working within the constraints of a self-imposed strait-jacket of personal genealogical history, one in which insight into the personalities in question is more important than dates. The chapter now turns to Yourcenar's exploration of history and finds the emphasis to be on deep time, the Holocene Epoch, and man's role and character as he emerges onto the North-Western European landscape envisaged over a period of many millennia. Yourcenar finds man's attitude to his environment inclined to be negative, predisposed to the destructive. Man is instinctively an aggressor characterized by free will. Understanding of this set of views is assisted by the insights of Braudel and the *longue durée*. These conclusions set the tone and the scene for the chapters that follow.

Transitioning from the analysis of deep time, the discussion now examines how Marguerite Yourcenar engages with the Anthropocene as this is reflected in damage to flora (Ch. II) and fauna (Ch. III) on a variety of fronts. Walter Wagner sees Yourcenar as the leading writer in French on the environment and this assessment is explored. Trees are central and are taken to be representative of flora more generally. Yourcenar views the damage in the course of WWI to the pine-trees which were a feature of her family home and which gave the property its name as a 'holocaust'. This perspective is a microcosm of what has befallen and continues to befall the range of pines which originally adorned the North-Western European limina in ancient days from Portugal to Russia. The discussion then links with the experience she and Frick had when they returned to Mount Desert after an absence to find a swathe of trees cut from their immediate neighbourhood and their responses to that. The kinds of

reading, French as well as English, which helped form Yourcenar's thinking on this topic is reviewed. Of the six châteaux which formed part of the wider family holdings Flémalle and Acoz are especially relevant to the environmental debate. Taking the early eighteenth century, viewed here as the beginning of the Anthropocene, as the pivotal point it is noted how Flémalle moves inexorably to its demise. The account of the fate of Flémalle renders possible the description of the human-induced anthropocenic set of changes leading to modern thermo-industrial pollution and its legacies. In its heyday the château was a fine example of the apparently timeless way of life established in the region with links to deep time. It is an exemplary case and lies at the heart of Yourcenar's amplification of the serious state the world has got itself into. Even as the account moves into its period of triumph in the eighteenth century, by drawing on the coal seams which lay under it, Flémalle not only played a key part in the creation of the modern world which now surrounds its geographical location, that move led inexorably to its decline and demise to the point where the name now designates a post-industrial suburb of Liège while the château and its remnants have disappeared. Ironically, the writer remarks on the fact that trees, indicative of all vegetation, are being pollutingly destroyed by the age-old legacy of compacted trees now turned to coal, a process being iterated in the burning of oil, the outcome of the multi-million-year compacted legacy of microflora and microfauna as the world eats itself up.

Moving to Octave Pirmez, 'the solitary of Acoz', Yourcenar shows trees in a positive light. For Octave they are a context for learning and reflection, for mental succour and consolation, including as he contemplates his brother's suicide, a context where he can find peace and reconciliation with a world which he found difficulty

accommodating to, an environment where he can hear and play music, even till the evening of his death. Technological developments precipitated the onset of the Anthropocene; as the nineteenth century gathered pace certain technological developments which arose, medical intervention, rail and firearms, are referred to, one in each volume, each with a capacity for dealing death, feature, but the advent of the aeroplane and the motorcar, the latter in particular, are singled out for discussion. As hunting took place largely in the woods and it brings together flora and fauna as well as technology in the form of firearms, the discussion of that topic concludes the second chapter and acts as a link with the third.

Chapter III opens with a consideration of the major social transposition away from the institution of the wet nurse to bottle feeding, the consequence of which is that cow's milk has become indispensible to human survival. This leads to Yourcenar's account of how the creature is treated – by exploitation leading to its complete expropriation at the hands of man. The three essays Yourcenar wrote on the environment in the seventies when composing the first two volumes of the *Mémoires* are now examined as is her response to the UNESCO Declaration of the Rights of Animals of 1978. The centrality of the equivalence of human and animal life in Yourcenar and other writing, creative and philosophical, is clarified.

In line with the thinking of Bentham, picked up on by Derrida, Yourcenar places a key emphasis on the animals of close domestic association, the dog and the horse. The dog is seen as a creature of affection and companionship and so in its interactions

with its owner expressive of inner states of mind. Approaching matters in this way admits the analyses of the contemporary thinker, Corine Pelluchon, for whom the notions of *vulnérabilité* and *fragilité* are fundamental, into the examination. These ideas, central to the argument, open the way to a new understanding of man's relation to the biosphere, his relation with his fellows and to all forms of life, animal and vegetal; all are strikingly aligned to Yourcenar's insights. Important sides to Yourcenar's character and personal history are adduced from her attachment to dogs. It is through her interest in horses that she reveals much to us of her father, both his wives, and their world. Understanding of the privileged world in which her father grew up is increased by seeing it through his eyes when travelling on horseback along with his father. Then, starting with Octave, three events highlight the catastrophic demise of the horse culminating at the time of the Great War, one in each volume.

The challenge now has become one to see if the human, animal and vegetal can be constructively conjoined in a biospheric totality in any way in Yourcenar's world view and this is what, basing its findings largely on the third volume of the trilogy, Chapter IV, the final chapter of the thesis, seeks to examine. An understanding of the nature of the event is central to this. The outcomes for Yourcenar's mother's family are not encouraging; isolation, etiolation and the loss of the family name are what are observed and this is what Yourcenar contemplates when she stands by the family vault at Suarlée in 1956 for the first time wondering what she can possibly do in the face of what seems a sepulchral impasse. As for her father, meanwhile, he lost both his sisters to accidents and also both his wives. His attempt to woo Jeanne de Reval

ended in failure. The provocative tattoo, *Ananké*, which he bears seems sadly appropriate. If there is to be success, two essentials emerge. Firstly, the sensibilities of the growing child are to be awoken by a caring adult, whether parent or teacher; in her case it was resoundingly the former. Secondly, when a couple tutored in this way come together their responsiveness to nature and to one another must somehow be of a piece. Yourcenar does not seek to be declamatory on this, yet her couple, Jeanne and Egon, exhibit universal qualities and insights all readers can relate to. Meanwhile, Yourcenar's mother's self-devised reading programme foreshadowed the one Yourcenar was to develop so extensively. We see, too, how she provided for her daughter beyond her own death by the pact she struck with Jeanne and, crucially, in fidelity how it was honoured. Outcomes include a reconciliation between Jeanne and Egon following their trials and finally a seeking out of the mother for Egon. This and a successful return after great danger generate a credible sense of an ending to the entire work. Biospheric wholeness of the human, animal and vegetal finds confirmation in the writings of leading authorities such as Pelt and Uexküll.

CONTENTS

Introduction

The title of Marguerite Yourcenar's most substantial work invites reflection. Writing in a collection of essays dated 1988 André Maindron states:

> Faut-il rappeler qu'aucun sous-titre ne vient préciser les intentions de l'auteur? – C'est l'éditeur qui classe le livre dans une rubrique baptisée "essais et autobiographies".[1]

The Pléiade edition appeared in 1991, in fact titled *Essais et Mémoires*; the choice, presumably, was Gallimard's. In a further statement Maindron says:

> Faut-il redire aussi que le titre collectif, *le Labyrinthe du monde*, n'est utilisé par Yourcenar qu'à partir de la publication d'*Archives du Nord*, en 1977, trois ans après celle de *Souvenirs pieux*? et que précisément le troisième volume de sa trilogie, *Quoi? L'éternité*, qui traiterait de sa propre vie, n'est toujours qu'annoncé?[2]

Quoi? L'Éternité had not been published at this point. Meanwhile, until *Archives du Nord* was on the verge of publication, that is in 1977, it seems that Yourcenar was content to allow the term *souvenirs* suffice to embrace the notion of 'memories'. In the *Dictionnaire Marguerite Yourcenar* Bruno Blanckeman reports that *Quoi? L'Éternité* was 'Publié en 1988 quelques mois après la mort de Marguerite Yourcenar.'[3] In the same *Dictionnaire*, under the entry for the *Labyrinthe du monde*, Aurélie Adler writes of:

> [L]e régime factuel, annoncé par l'étiquetage générique de l'édition de la Pléiade ("mémoires"), est sans cesse démenti par le régime fictionnel qui gouverne bien souvent la narration.[4]

---

[1] André Maindron, '"L'être que j'appelle moi"…' in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Biographie, autobiographie*, ed. by Elena Real (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 1988), 169 – 76 (p. 169).
[2] Maindron, p. 169.
[3] *Dictionnaire Marguerite Yourcenar*, dirigé et préfacé par Bruno Blanckeman (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2017), p. 502.
[4] *Dictionnaire*, p. 316.

This remark points up the seeming conflict between history and fiction which is a feature of this work and which is discussed below. Meanwhile under the entry for *Mémoires* she states:

> Si les trois volumes du *Labyrinthe du monde* regroupés dans la section "mémoires" du volume de la Pléiade mettent en évidence une posture mémoriale, ils manifestent également de nombreuses résistances au genre.[5]

In this way she further stresses the hybrid character of the narrative and its resistance to conventional classification. *Le Labyrinthe du monde* emerges, meanwhile, as Yourcenar's title of choice for the work.

The editorial title, *Mémoires*, prompts in the mind of the reader such questions as, 'What are the memories/memoirs of?' and, perhaps more particularly, 'Whose memories are they?' In raising questions of subject-matter and ownership the reader brings to bear a set of expectations triggered by the relatively conventional term, *mémoires*. Yet if the term *mémoires* has an element of the generic in it, the Yourcenarian title, *Le Labyrinthe du monde*, suggests something more metaphorical, intriguing, possibly even enigmatic. The suggestion that to embark on a reading of the *Mémoires* is to lead oneself or allow oneself to be led into a labyrinth raises the questions of what kind is this work, where is it heading, what is it telling that is more or less than the personal memories of the narrator? There seems to be an implicit call for clarity or definition. The opening chapter of this discussion shows that at the time of composition there was a general cultural move towards forms of narrative hybridity in French writing; Yourcenar's *Labyrinthe* conforms to this development. Clarity or definition turn out to be elusive.

---

[5] *Dictionnaire*, p. 356.

It is the issue of narrative hybridity and the consequent difficulties of classification which help us understand the unusual degree of complexity in the relationship between fiction and history in this work, something many critics have wrestled with. Starting with the issue of hybridity the opening chapter moves quickly to review a range of discussions by critics of the manner in which fiction and history interweave in Yourcenar's text. The review leads to a measure of resolution in the reflections of the thinker and historian R.G. Collingwood on this matter. The deeper understanding which ensues as a result permits the re-entry of the discussion of the genre and so to an evaluation of the work as a biography or autobiography and the difficulties these sorts of more rigorous classification give rise to, if we are to understand the *Labyrinthe du monde* correctly.

It is now argued that the central feature of the entire work is the death of Yourcenar's mother, Fernande, that it constituted a very specific rupture which lies at the heart of the entire work. Room is given for discussion of the aspect of contemplation Yourcenar invites us to share on this passing. Structural considerations emerge at this juncture and reflection on those open the text up to the immense range of space and time embraced by the Yourcenar text, a form of narrative envisioning which shows that along with a desire to embrace the North-West European landmass as the stage for her action, that she is less interested in history than in time. Yourcenar's sense of time is fourfold, what may be termed the geophysical, the Holocene Epoch, the Anthropocene and the modern. By this last is meant the world of the *Belle époque* as it was experienced by her parents. The first of these gives the setting of the whole. While there are certain differences, the views of Braudel prove helpful in clarifying Yourcenar's viewpoints on the remaining three.

Chapters Two and Three move to a consideration of flora and fauna, respectively, largely as seen from the standpoint of the Anthropocene. As substantial landowners sitting on rich coal seams, the writer's forebears benefited greatly from the thermo-industrial wealth-generation of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This was the time when the manners and lifestyle of these people were laid down in a modern idiom and became entrenched. Following Yourcenar's steady preoccupation with their description and use of them as metonymic of flora in general, Chapter Two focuses on the feature of pine trees. First, the matter of where Yourcenar sits in contemporary thinking on the environment, both with reference to her own works and more generally, is examined. As society moved increasingly to family and the private in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the dominant domestic residential focus of Yourcenar's forebears became the family château. There are six in the narrative and among these Flémalle in particular serves to exemplify the character and quality of life of the world of the people Yourcenar is describing. The paradox of wood being consumed by compacted wood, as happened at Flémalle, of the whole being used to generate industrialization and also weapons manufacturing, is highlighted. The chapter then moves contrastively to a consideration of trees in various beneficial aspects. This is followed by an examination of certain technological advances and their often equivocal relation to human need; the chapter ends with an assessment of the character and role of the social practice of hunting, *la chasse*.

Not only does Chapter Two confine its reference to flora to only such as would have been encountered by her predecessors, but she largely limits them to trees. This is not a horticultural inventory. Similarly, Yourcenar's review of creatures and the animal world is carefully confined to only such types as her relations would have

encountered on an everyday basis. The discussion in Chapter Three is almost exclusively confined to the domestic companions, the dog and the horse, along with the farm animal, the cow. Notwithstanding these self-imposed constraints, Yourcenar is able to say a remarkable amount. In a single sharp focus through her discussion of the domestic ungulate Yourcenar pinpoints key topics raised by our treatment of cows and animals more generally. Essays she wrote are explored to clarify and expand her thinking on this matter as it is laid out in the *Labyrinthe*. Yourcenar universalises care for and relationship to animals by linking them with deep time and her arguments are reviewed in conjunction with similar perspectives by thinkers such as Bentham and Derrida. There are three instances of dogs as creatures of companionship, consolation and suffering in the work. From the many available, three sets of relationship to horses are chosen to exemplify the manner in which they were integrated into the patterns of living in the *Belle Époque* and her parents' world. The chapter ends with indications of how horses suffered in the smash-up which was the First World War. The sufferings of soldiers are equally implied.

The fourth and final chapter opens with a discussion of the event as the term is understood by Braudel and analysed by Ricœur. This leads to a discussion of certain concatenations of events in the narrative, events which reveal an underlying attempt at forms of intimate union and perpetuation. The text argues that through the experiences of the family on Yourcenar's mother's side what is observable is a form of family etiolation while her father's life seemed destined never to achieve that kind of fulfillment and harmony in the long term. It is suggested that consideration of these factors raise a question of the short-comings of the forms of patriarchy which characterized haut-bourgeois society in the *Belle Époque*. In a move which shifts the

notion of parenthood from the experienced to the idealized Yourcenar substitutes Jeanne and Egon as figures who fulfill that role. Following an emphasis on the necessity of appropriate education of the senses in childhood, the writer goes on to focus on the wooing of Jeanne by Egon and this is described in a natural context which enables her to argue for a blending and a harmonization between the human and the natural worlds. Achieving this constitutes a riposte to the inherently belligerent and destructive tendencies of man, features which have been noted and tracked from deep time throughout the discussion and which have lain at the heart of the indifference to the damage being wrought upon the environment and creaturely life. Part of the reward for this perspective, crucial to human survival, comes in Egon's visit to his dying mother. Once this encounter with the mother is successfully negotiated the narrative draws to its conclusion.

1. INTERWEAVE, RUPTURE AND THE CONFIGURATION OF TIME

1.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at three main issues. Firstly, having established the hybrid character of the narrative, the discussion explores the matter of interweave, that is to say the degree and nature of the relationship between fiction and history in the *Labyrinthe*. On a general front this relationship has become a topic for critical study in recent decades. In the case of Yourcenar it receives a special emphasis. This is because in her account of herself as a practitioner of writing Yourcenar refers to herself as an 'historien-poète', that is one whose practices consciously work to combine both forms of narrative representation. The text seeks to explore this matter and in doing so examines leading critical assessments of her practice, the extent of its success and what it reveals to us. From consideration of this feature of style the study moves to an exploration of structural matters. The centrality of the death of Yourcenar's mother as an organizing principle in the *Labyrinthe* is evaluated and assessed. The manner in which the statements relevant to this issue are configured leads to a consideration of the over-arching shape of the *Labyrinthe* as a whole and this in turn leads to an analysis of the sense of a distinctive timespan which reaches beyond the normal temporal constraints of history to what is termed 'deep time'. Discussion of this feature lends itself to important comparisons with the schemas of Braudelian history and these are explored. While a number of features are illuminated by this perspective, it transpires there are also significant differences. Assessing these lays the ground for the remainder of the thesis.

1.2 Aspects of the relationship between history and literature in the *Labyrinthe*

In his discussion of the 'investigations and explorations of the everyday' since 1980 Michael Sheringham notes a common pattern in the decline of the novel in the 1980s and 1990s and a movement:

> '… in favour of hybrid works exploiting the documentary impulse in such modes as autobiography, biography, the journal, historical writing, travel writing, and the essay.'[1]

He goes on to state:

> In a climate that saw the end of the structuralist embargo on subjectivity and reference, and favoured new ways of looking at the concrete human subject at grips with experience, these modes, often involving fusions between different media, including film, photography, theatre and reportage, tended to incorporate a self-reflexive awareness of their methods and status. The referential and the fictional, for example, tended no longer to be viewed as polar opposites but as interactive elements.

Possibly bearing in mind writers such as Thomas Kuhn, he concludes: 'Hard-nosed objectivity in the human sciences came to seem illusory, as did art's severance from experiential reality.'[2] For all that she was physically far removed from Paris, Marguerite Yourcenar was not out of touch with literary and intellectual trends in France even as she felt free to plough her own furrow. That literature and history are deeply imbricated in one another in her *Labyrinthe du monde* in a multi-genre, hybrid and individualistic manner is now commonly acknowledged and the topic continues to exercise contemporary critics. To quote María José Vázquez de Parga:

> Inconsciemment le récit va de soi-même, et les intrusions de l'écrivain sont inévitables dans une narration où l'auteur veut reproduire la vie et les scènes de ces personnes qu'elle a connues mais surtout de celles qu'elle n'a pas

---

[1] Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 2010), p. 3.

[2] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962, 2012).

> connues, et qu'elle doit imaginer. Et c'est bien de l'imagination ce que nous trouvons dans ce *Labyrinthe* en forme de roman.[3]

These words affirm what is increasingly acknowledged more generally, that history and fiction are deeply interwoven with one another in narrative writing. This point was made by Barthes in his essay, 'Le discours de l'histoire', first published in 1967, where he states:

> [L]a narration des événements passés, soumise communément, dans notre culture, depuis les Grecs, à la sanction de la "science" historique, placée sous la caution impérieuse du "réel", justifiée par des principes d'exposition "rationnelle", cette narration diffère-t-elle vraiment, par quelque trait spécifique, par une pertinence indubitable, de la narration imaginaire, telle qu'on peut la trouver dans l'épopée, le roman, le drame?[4]

Similarly, in her discussion where she reviews the role of the reader in relation to the *Labyrinthe*, Sun Ah Park says:

> [L]a fonction du lecteur au sein du texte nous a guidés vers des aspects d'ordre littéraire, culturel, social et historique.[5]

Park's suggested solution to this issue is to proffer a new term, 'Histobiographie'. At the end of her study she recommends:

> Notre étude a fini par révéler un nouveau genre, l'Histobiographie, où il n'y aurait pas d'opposition entre les genres littéraire et historique.[6]

Meanwhile, along with the role of myth, the interweave of history and fiction in Yourcenar's writing was discussed in a series of essays in the *hors série* number published by the SIEY in 1995. In his essay in this collection in which he discusses aspects of the relationship between fiction and history in Yourcenar's writings

---

[3] María José Vázquez de Parga, 'Rapports du couple et relations familiales dans *Le Labyinthe du monde'*, in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Écrivain du XIXe siècle?*, ed. by Georges Fréris et Rémy Poignault, (Clermont-Ferrand: SIEY, 2004), pp. 413 – 421, p. 414.

[4] Roland Barthes, 'Le discours de l'histoire', in *Le bruissement de la langue: Essais critiques IV* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984), p. 163.

[5] Sun Ah Park, *La Fonction du lecteur dans* Le Labyrinthe du monde *de Marguerite Yourcenar* (Paris: Harmattan, 2003), p. 318.

[6] Park, *La Fonction*, p. 320.

Antoine Wyss questions how from the moment that the text which is thought to be historical becomes susceptible of more than one interpretation, from the stage once it has been made – *fait* – and where the presentation of a period gets caught up in the complexities of intrigue thereby taking on novelistic qualities, it becomes open to question how the veridictional qualities of history can be simply juxtaposed with flights of imaginary fantasy and it can be simply stated that we are in one genre rather than another.[7] It remains nevertheless true, Wyss insists, that the distinction between fiction and history continues to exist in contemporary culture. The non-specialist reader, he states, wants to know whether it is one or the other he is holding in his or her hands and the publishers of historical fiction allocate those works to the category of fiction. That said, in the case of a work such as the *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, such is the degree of historically attested information that Wyss wonders whether it raises the question that the old categories of classification are outmoded. All that granted, however, we need to guard against over-reaction. That history borrows from the techniques of fiction is generally agreed, but not all the techniques of fiction are equally available to it. In illustration of this he cites the following. *Mémoires d'Hadrien* carries the hallmark of an autobiography, one in which Hadrien relates his own life. A historian would not be permitted to proceed in this fashion. S/he would be within her/his rights to attempt to recreate the emperor's mental universe, to seek to outline the likely structure of his decision making, to hazard at an outline of his thoughts and sensibility. What s/he would not be allowed to do would be to attribute to Hadrien a sequence of words or thoughts for which s/he had no evidence or authority. In view of the fact that Hadrien himself did not compose memoirs, those

[7] Antoine Wyss, 'Auteur, narrateur, personnage: quelle historiographie pour *Mémoires d'Hadrien*', in *Roman, histoire et mythe dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by Simone et Maurice Delcroix (Tours: SIEY, 1995), pp. 483 – 491 (p. 483).

which are tendered in his name as in *Mémoires d'Hadrien* can only have the character of fiction and are not the works of history. It is for this reason that a historian like Anthony Birley can state that while *Mémoires d'Hadrien* is an exceptionally fine work, it must not be read as history, 'For all her intuition and literary genius, the Hadrian whose *Mémoires* Yourcenar composed is a different person from the historical emperor.'[8] This statement neatly makes clear the point that Yourcenar's Hadrien is in fact not a person at all – he is a literary construct.

Literature and history have much in common in the extended prose writings of Marguerite Yourcenar, in particular those which engage with events set in an otherwise recorded past as is the case with her main novels, *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, *L'Œuvre au Noir* and *Un Homme obscur* as well as works from the pre-war period, *Denier du rêve* and *Le Coup de grâce*. Commentators have spent much time teasing out the interrelationships between the two categories in her narratives. The issue becomes even more pertinent in *Le Labyrinthe du Monde*. In this instance the writer begins with what appears to all intents and purposes to be the terms of reference of an autobiography, 'L'être que j'appelle moi,' and this is followed immediately by stating the date of her birth, 'un certain lundi 8 juin 1903.'[9] The concrete, incontrovertibly historical character of this cannot be gainsaid. Shortly after the writer attests to the curious sense of vertigo or unreality this statement occasions in her:

> Néanmois, pour triompher en partie du sentiment d'irréalité que me donne cette identification, je suis forcée, tout comme je le serais pour un personnage historique que j'aurais tenté de recréer…'[10]

---

[8] Anthony R. Birley, *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor* (London and New York, 1997), p. xiii.
[9] Marguerite Yourcenar, *Souvenirs pieux* in *Essais et mémoires* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1991), pp. 707 – 949 (p. 707).
[10] *Souvenirs*, pp. 707 – 708.

The urge to 'recreate her historical personage' as stated here is notable, and, as commentators have often and sometimes ruefully remarked, she then goes on not to do so. Almost immediately any 'pacte autobiographique' is ruptured and it is not until the seventh chapter of the final volume, *Quoi? L'Éternité*, that the figure of a young Yourcenar makes any kind of an extended appearance in the *Mémoires*. Prior to that the work has quickly become what she describes at the beginning of *Archives du Nord*, 'Dans un volume destiné à former avec celui-ci les deux panneaux d'un diptyque, j'ai essayé d'évoquer un couple de la Belle Époque, mon père et ma mère.'[11] In this statement we see that the bulk of the focus of the *Mémoires* is not on her but on the world of her parents.

In his opening words to the Introduction to the collection of essays, *Roman, histoire et mythe dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*, Delcroix says:

> En 1968, quelques mois après la publication de *L'Œuvre au Noir*, une étudiante des Faculté d'Anvers entreprenait la première étude académique consacrée à cette œuvre: *de l'histoire au roman*.[12]

In an essay in the same collection the mixture of forms which has gone into the making of *Le Labyrinthe du Monde* is indicated by Colette Gaudin:

> Ce n'est pas la constitution et l'inventaire de l'archive yourcenarienne que j'examine ici, mais plutôt la question de la position critique de l'auteur dans une œuvre où érudition, fiction et autobiographie sont imbriquées avec beaucoup de contrôle.[13]

Elsewhere Gaudin had earlier stated:

---

[11] Marguerite Yourcenar, *Archives du Nord* in *Essais et mémoires* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1991), pp. 953 – 1184 (p. 953).
[12] Delcroix, *Roman*, p. 3.
[13] Colette Gaudin, 'Le roman de l'histoire: l'archive yourcenarienne entre relique et ruine', in Delcroix, *Roman*, pp. 207 – 18 (p. 210).

> [C]'est au niveau de l'écriture qu'est le véritable labyrinthe, le véritable parcours qui entrelace l'ordre de l'histoire et l'ordre du récit.[14]

In an attempt to address this issue of hybridity, what category of literary classification the *Mémoires* might be said to fall into, in a further essay Nadia Harris offers a sort of definition by negative:

> Ni autobiographie, ni mémoires, ni essai, ni historiographie, ni roman, *Le Labyrinthe du Monde* est un récit hybride réunissant les caractéristiques d'un sous-genre.[15]

In a quest for a terminology she draws on Albert W. Halsall who proposes the term 'roman historico-didactique', and this is defined as follows: 'un texte narratif qui affirme la coexistence, dans un même univers diégétique et d'événements et de personnages inventés.' The categorisations are useful and the emphasis on the fictional character welcome, yet, perhaps because there is so little writing which is immediately comparable to the *Labyrinthe*, and also while it is not fully contained by any one of the categories she discusses, autobiography, memoirs, and so forth, but may reasonably be said to include them all, it is perhaps not greatly valuable to spend much time on what may be thought to be a somewhat nominalistic exercise. As with Antoine Wyss, Harris sees much merit in bringing the criteria of literature to bear on this work and she draws on the work of Genette in order to do so.[16]

Yvette Went-Daoust is surely correct when she points to an observation made by Yourcenar when she was reflecting on what might be entailed for her were she to be

---

[14] Colette Gaudin, *Marguerite Yourcenar à la surface du temps* (Amsterdam – Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1994), p. 119.
[15] Nadia Harris, '*Le Labyrinthe du Monde*: roman historico-didactique', in *Roman, histoire et mythe dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by Simone et Maurice Delcroix (Tours: SIEY, 1995), pp. 229 – 38 (p. 229).
[16] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982), pp. 298 – 315.

writing about herself.[17] The remark can be found in the *Carnets de notes* to *Mémoires d'Hadrien*:

> Ma propre existence, si j'avais à l'écrire, serait reconstituée par moi du dehors, péniblement, comme celle d'un autre; j'aurais à m'adresser à des lettres, aux souvenirs d'autrui, pour fixer ces flottantes mémoires.[18]

The conclusion is that in Yourcenar's view when it comes to people, historicizing writing entails the creation of a persona. In her discussion of a number of exchanges which Yourcenar reports as having taken place in the course of the *Labyrinthe* Went-Daoust notes the extreme unlikelihood of the authoress ever being in a position in reality to hear such things while also noting the writer's own comments on the matter:

> Je glisse ici une note de la narratrice. Ces propos, ou d'autres semblables, tenus à Egon par Michel à Scheveningue, ne lui acquirent sans doute pas plus de sympathie de la part de son jeune interlocuteur.[19]

What matters here, Went-Daoust points out, is not the truth that what she heard is what she reports, but how it fits into the structure of the narrative, that is the conversation between Michel and Egon on the beach at Scheveningen. This is a literary criterion. As in fiction, we are allowed to see their respective points of view and to observe the processes of their thinking and this is followed by their interior monologues. Documentary material is not cited for its own sake, but for its potential to be dramatised and organized into a consequential narrative. The author takes the liberty of expanding or contracting the length of certain events. There are frequent conversational exchanges and the author allows a point of view to the characters and not just to herself as narrator: 'Non seulement le lecteur les entend parler, mais il les

---

[17] Yvette Went-Daoust, 'Les registres d'une autobiographie. La part du roman et de l'histoire dans *Quoi? L'Éternité*', in *Roman, histoire et mythe dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by Simone et Maurice Delcroix (Tours: SIEY, 1995), pp. 465 – 474 (p. 467).

[18] Marguerite Yourcenar, *Œuvres romanesques* (Paris: Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1982), p. 527.

[19] *Quoi?*, p. 1284.

voit penser.'[20] It is at this point that the critic points to a key feature of Yourcenar's approach to this matter:

> [O]n sait qu'elle recrée ses personnages historiques en s'associant à eux dans une espèce de symbiose, par magie sympathique'. Elle a exposé cette démarche dans les 'Carnets de notes' de *Mémoires d'Hadrien* et l'a amplement illustrée.[21]

Went-Daoust notes, too, the reiteration of this line of approach made by Yourcenar in her exchanges with Matthieu Galey:

> [M]on effort est d'incliner ma propre personnalité et de l'effacer pour entendre, pour m'abandonner au personnage, ce qui a, je l'admets, quelque chose de médiumnique.[22]

In a further essay in this collection Evert van der Starre opens his commentary on the relationship between fiction and history in this writer's work with words uttered by Marguerite Yourcenar in the course of her interview with Patrick de Rosbo.[23] In her view the study of history does not oblige the writer to enter into any kind of relationship with the inner life of the individual, if indeed it is even its task to do so:

> [Il] n'est pas obligé, je dirai même que les règles du jeu lui interdisent, d'entrer à l'intérieur de l'homme en question pour le recréer, littéralement, pour le faire *revivre*.[24]

If we are to take this statement at face value, these grounds alone are sufficient to place the *Labyrinthe* firmly in the category of fiction; they will find further confirmation below. In seeking to clarify this point Yourcenar cites the practice of Stendhal. The historian has, 'le droit de donner, par exemple, l'image de la bataille de

---

[20] Went-Daoust, p. 467.
[21] *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 526; Went-Daoust, p. 468.
[22] Marguerite Yourcenar, *Les yeux ouverts: Entretiens avec Matthieu Galey* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1980), p. 107.
[23] Evert van der Starre, 'Entre roman et histoire', in *Roman, histoire et mythe dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by Simone et Maurice Delcroix (Tours: SIEY, 1995), pp. 419 – 429.
[24] Patrick de Rosbo, *Entretiens radiophoniques avec Marguerite Yourcenar* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1972), p. 51. Her italicizing.

Waterloo en se plaçant dans les perspectives de 1971; c'est parfois son devoir et son mérite de le faire.'[25] The novelist, on the other hand, makes every attempt to identify with the historical personage and to eliminate those things he might not have known. In this way Stendhal plunges us into a daily round, 'où l'on ne savait pas encore ce que seraient les résultats de la bataille.'[26]

Van der Starre argues that what is noteworthy about Yourcenar's novels is precisely the predominance of the backward look, 'la prédominance du regard rétrospectif.'[27] This is as characteristic of the historian as it is of the author, he points out, and goes on to indicate how Hadrien becomes, 'son propre historien.' The phrase is in fact Yourcenar's own made in the course of her discussion with Rosbo.[28] In the opening chapter of *L'Œuvre au Noir* we are told that Zénon who apparently is setting out on an ecclesiastical career will not in fact follow one. The early stages of *Un Homme obscur* relate that as he leaves Amsterdam Nathanaël is being condemned to death, a fact about which he knows nothing. Each novel demonstrates the manner of writing history the author attributes to that discipline. From this it has to be concluded that the opposition between fiction and history cannot be stated in this form. At this point in a footnote van der Starre observes that the situation is rendered complex by the fact that the interviews in which she opposes fiction and history come late in the course of Yourcenar's life and this means that in part her comments are self-reflexive. This fact will inevitably colour her interpretation of her own works.[29]

---

[25] Rosbo, p. 51.
[26] Rosbo, p. 52.
[27] Van der Starre, p. 419.
[28] Rosbo, p. 52.
[29] Van der Starre, p. 420, n. 1.

Turning to what he terms the genealogical novels, that is the *Mémoires*, van der Starre offers a further difference from *Mémoires d'Hadrien*. He states that rather than locating the references in the *Carnets de notes* which do not constitute part of the work properly understood – what is now generally known as the paratexts – Yourcenar lays, he says, her cards on the table, 'Bien loin de reléguer ses références dans des "Notes" qui ne font pas partie de l'œuvre proprement dit, Yourcenar y joue cartes sur table.'[30] In this way something of the work which has gone into the task of reconstruction may be seen in the text itself and this shows in the rich array of hypotheses, 'peut-être', 'sans doute', 'j'aime à croire', 'je puis donc m'imaginer', and so forth, which are a feature of the work. In van der Starre's view the idea which sees the light of day in this metadiscourse is one of extreme historicism, the postulates of which are known from Yourcenar's own writings. In the first place the witnesses of an epoch of history ought to be understood from the spirit of the age in question while the historian ought to able to absorb him or herself completely in what s/he studies and eradicate his or her own individuality. Historicism, 'l'historisme', emerges then, as not just the concern of certain nineteenth-century German theorists. Van der Starre finds that the idea also emerges in the writings of R.G. Collingwood in 1946, a writer he suggests was read by Yourcenar.[31]

---

[30] Van der Starre, p. 421.

[31] R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, ed. with Introduction, T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946).

1.3 Collingwood, a significant presence?

R.G. Collingwood's essay, 'The Historical Imagination' is second in the sequence of Epilogomena to the main text of his *Idea of History*. In the course of this essay Collingwood points out that over the previous century and a half of historical thinking, that is thinking about history, the study of the subject has gradually worked out its own technique.[32] Collingwood points out that unlike, for example, physics, the things historians reason about, 'are not abstract, but concrete, not universal but individual.' Nor are they, 'indifferent to space and time but have a where and a when of their own, though the where need not be here and the when cannot be known.'[33] He goes on to state that the old-fashioned view, what he terms the commonsense view, has often been that the essentials of history are memory and authority. Following this through to its logical conclusion enables him to state that, 'the consequences of the common-sense theory have only to be stated to be repudiated.'[34] Key, in fact, are, 'selection, construction and criticism', and the realization that this is the case amounts to, 'a Copernican revolution' for history.[35] It will be shown that this is the role of the imagination in the writing of history.

Following the line of thought of the earlier philosopher, A.C. Bradley, Collingwood now seeks to establish the criterion of historical truth, for without a criterion there can be no criticism. In Bradley's discussion the criterion emerges as not what did happen but what could have happened. What this amounts to is Aristotle's criterion of what is admissible in poetry and so the shortcoming at this juncture is that it does not 'serve

[32] Collingwood, p. 232.
[33] Collingwood, p. 234.
[34] Collingwood, p. 235.
[35] Collingwood, p. 236.

to discriminate history from fiction.'[36] What emerges nevertheless from Bradley's analysis is the important realisation that there are two ways in which the historian must go beyond what the sources tell him/her. The first of these is the critical way and this is the one which has been identified by Bradley; the second is the constructive way. By constructive history Collingwood means a form of interpolation between the statements taken from the authorities and other statements implied by them. These 'interpolations' have two characteristics. On the one hand they are in no way arbitrary or merely fanciful; 'it is a necessary, or in Kantian language, *a priori.*'[37] The process of construction contains nothing which is not necessitated by the evidence and, furthermore, it is a legitimate activity without which there would be no history at all. Secondly, and this is key to the understanding of Yourcenar, 'what is in this way inferred is essentially something imagined.'[38] The whole amounts to an activity with a double character and Collingwood terms it the *a priori* imagination. To clarify the matter further Collingwood here quotes the nineteenth-century historian, Macaulay, 'a perfect historian must possess an imagination sufficiently powerful to make his narrative affecting and picturesque.' For Collingwood this is insufficient, however, for the fact is that 'the part played by the historical imagination is properly not ornamental but structural.'[39] It is at this point that Collingwood comes to his key statement, and here he must be quoted in full:

> The imagination, that 'blind but indispensible faculty' without which, as Kant has shown, we could never perceive the world around us, is indispensible in the same way to history: it is this which, operating not capriciously as fancy but in its *a priori* form, does the entire work of historical reconstruction.[40]

---

[36] Collingwood, p. 239.
[37] Collingwood, p. 240.
[38] Collingwood, p. 241.
[39] Collingwood, p. 241.
[40] Collingwood, p. 241.

In contrast to this the imagination of the artist is free, though not capricious.

What remains now to be appreciated is that the discussion so far overlooks the importance of the part played by criticism. It needs to be appreciated that for historical thought, 'there are no fixed points, … properly speaking no data.'[41] The fact is that the 'web of imaginative construction is something far more solid and powerful than we have hitherto realized. … it actually serves as the touchstone by which we decide whether alleged facts are genuine.'[42] Collingwood now proceeds to draw the two strands together:

> The resemblance between the historian and the novelist, … here reaches its culmination. Each of them makes it his business to construct a picture which is partly a narrative of events, partly a description of situations, exhibition of motives, analysis of characters. … The novel and the history must both of them make sense. … As works of the imagination, the historian's work and the novelist's do not differ. Where they do differ is that the historian's picture is meant to be true.[43]

Collingwood's analysis is treated in some detail by Ricœur who comments on the 'striking fashion' of its conception of history as a 'reenactment' of the past.[44] He summarises Collingwood's analysis of historical thought into three phases, the documentary aspect, the work of the imagination in interpretation of 'what is given through documents', and the 'ambition that the constructions of the imagination bring about the reenactment of the past.'[45] Ricœur finds Collingwood's treatment of the 'historical imagination' surprising for its 'audacity'. He notes that in this view the

---

[41] Collingwood, p. 243.
[42] Collingwood, p. 244.
[43] Collingwood, pp. 245 – 46.
[44] Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit*, 3 vols (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983), trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988, 1990), III, p. 144.
[45] Ricœur, III, p. 144.

historian becomes his own authority, audacious in his historical constructions, and that he does not even hesitate to speak of '*a priori* imagination' which enables him to indicate that the historian is judge of his own sources and not vice versa. The criterion for his judgement is the coherence of his construction, Ricœur states.[46] In a note to the main text Ricœur draws attention to the idealist character of Collingwood's analysis.[47] For Ricœur the relationship being argued for between historical evidence and the imagination situates historical research wholly within the logic of questions and answers, a logic he states which can be further seen in Collingwood's *Autobiography* and which was a step acknowledged in turn by Gadamer.[48]

At this point Ricœur introduces an unexpected aspect, that reenactment is numerically equal with the initial thought. It is not immediately apparent that Collingwood uses the term 'numerical' or the notion of number, but shortly after Ricœur seems to clarify when he says that, 'For it (the imaginary picture of the past) to be the same, it has to be numerically identical with the past.' What seems to be in question is an exact equivalence or overlay of past with present, the result of which is an annulment of temporal distance. In any event, Ricœur here begins to move on to a consideration of what he terms a 'maximal interpretation' of Collingwood's thesis of identity. It seems unnecessary to follow him at this juncture for two reasons. In the first place he is primarily concerned at this point to probe further the issue of time and its relation to narrative at a philosophical level. Secondly, and for these purposes arguably more

---

[46] Ricœur, III, p. 145.

[47] Ricœur, III, p. 307, n. 13.

[48] Ricœur, III, p. 307, n.12. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007), trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, *Truth and Method* rev., 2nd edn (London: Bloomberg, 2013).

significantly, Yourcenar's own work finds a deep resonance in the insights of Collingwood, and these Ricœur has acknowledged.

Collingwood's writings were known to Yourcenar. The inventory of her library compiled by Yvon Bernier lists two works by him, both studies of the wall of Hadrian, which increases the likelihood that she may have also read his philosophical essay; at the least she was familiar with his method.[49] As described by van der Starre the argument in Collingwood is that in order to understand the past in a fashion appropriate to its manner of enquiry, the historian needs to relive the experience which made it or think through its thoughts. If the historian's work often begins with the external discovery of an event, one cannot just stop there. S/he always needs to remind her or himself that the event was an action and so in her or his capacity as a historian the principle task is to insert oneself mentally into that action in order to discern the thought of the agent. This seems consistent with what has been described above. As van der Starre points out, many phrases in the *Carnets de notes* to the *Mémoires d'Hadrien* can be identified which show a striking similarity to those of Collingwood, in particular those which refer to the metaphor of interior and exterior. The writer exhorts herself to, 'Refaire de dedans ce que les archéologues de XIX^{e} siècle ont fait du dehors.' The 'magie sympathique dont on sait l'importance consiste à se transporter en pensée à l'intérieur de quelqu'un.' This quotation in full comes from the *Carnets*:

> Un pied dans l'érudition, l'autre dans la magie, ou plus exactement, et sans métaphore, dans cette magie sympathique qui consiste à se transporter en pensée à l'intérieur de quelqu'un.[50]

---

[49] Yvon Bernier, *Inventaire de la bibliothèque de Marguerite Yourcenar: Petite Plaisance* (Clermont-Ferrand: SIEY, 2004).
[50] *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 526.

The historical novel is, according to van der Starre, 'prise de possession d'un monde intérieur.' [51]

It is notable that the concurrence of the phrase, 'magie sympathique' brings the observations made by many of the critics cited above together. In addition, van der Starre notes Yourcenar's own comment to Matthieu Galey that for her 'magie sympathique' and 'imagination' operate as synonyms. It is clear that this focus is immensely helpful in developing our understanding of Yourcenar's creative method. A number of the key phrases of this character will be commented on as the analysis of the *Labyrinthe* proceeds. However, it seems necessary to also remark that in stating that in doing this within the text rather than confining such practice to the paratextual Yourcenar is 'laying her cards on the table', is possibly to overlook an important issue. On the one hand the practice might seem almost off-hand, constituting a post-modern feature, inviting the reader to enter into a compact of knowingness as she observes how the work is put together. On a more weighty level it suggests that Yourcenar is flagging up that in this work she is not writing the same sort of text as a *Mémoires d'Hadrien*. She was well aware that the Hadrien figure she wrote was an artefact, a creature of the creative imagination, that to invoke an opening for such a personage with the words 'Cher Marc' was an act of literary daring which, as she herself acknowledges, could only be possible when one is an experienced writer and probably over forty:

> En tout cas, j'étais trop jeune. Il est des livres qu'on ne doit pas oser avant d'avoir dépassé quarante ans.[52]

---

[51] van der Starre, p. 422.
[52] *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 521.

The crucially different fact which characterizes the *Mémoires*, 'Les romans généalogiques', is that unlike her Hadrien, the characters existed. This means that when, for instance, she intrudes the figure of Zénon onto the beach at Scheveningue along with Octave Pirmez she is pointing to something which in an act of sharing she is inviting the reader to grasp. While it is true Octave really existed and Zénon did not, the question is, and it is one she is inviting us to reflect on, how does the process of recall operate in a way which brings either of them back into play again and how does this differ in their respective cases, if in fact it does? From a mentalistic point of view, as phenomena of the mind, Octave and Rémo, whom she never met and in that sense has never known any more than she 'knew' Zénon, are temporally summoned by her back from Hades to give their messages before being released to return once more:

> Avant de laisser repasser à ces deux ombres le fleuve infernal, j'ai quelques questions à leur poser sur moi-même.[53]

In terms of recall, evocation and rendering them somehow into words, where do the differences lie between the historically attested character and one who is deeply imagined by the writer? In working to answer this van der Starre suggests the phrase 'réaccomplissement de l'expérience du passé' as a way of rendering Collingwoood's 're-enactment of the past' and refers to Gadamer to support this rendering.[54] It seems important to note here that the issue was of great importance for Yourcenar, and perhaps most especially in this work, for the character who is central and who lies at the heart of it is Fernande, the woman whom in a unique way she had experienced, but whom she had never met and whom she now seeks to know.

---

[53] *Souvenirs*, p. 871.

[54] Hans Georg Gadamer, *L'Art de comprendre: Herméneutique et tradition philosophique* (Paris: Aubier, 1982), p. 57.

Viewed in this light, it becomes especially interesting to observe Yourcenar's practice when she reviews the sources she draws upon in order to enable her to construct the *Mémoires*. Both *Souvenirs pieux* and *Archives du Nord* carry paratexts, *Notes*, in which she acknowledges her sources. The references here are to sources, archives and helpful individuals, often trained historians. Included in the former she itemizes Octave's correspondence deposited in the Bibliothèque nationale de Bruxelles. To this she adds communication with the Director of the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique and also a learned essay contributed by a M. Paul Champagne to the catalogue of the Académie royale de langue et de littérature françaises de Belgique. Various scholars and Directors of museums are also cited. The *Note* to the *Archives du Nord* is briefer and this time refers more exclusively to the contribution made by various family members who answered queries, but who also had written up a deal of relevant information themselves. These include her half-brother and also his son.

On the other hand, and in many ways in marked contrast to these documentary sources of a formal and historical character, when referring to the material she drew upon to construct her narrative within the text, that is early in the text of *Souvenirs pieux* itself, Yourcenar points to a number of sources of a different character. These she terms, 'bribes de souvenirs', and notes immediately that they are 'reçus de seconde ou de dixième main.'[55] There are many pieces of information, 'tirées de bouts de lettres', there are 'feuillets de calepins' which failed to be consigned to the waste bin, there are official documents lodged in, 'mairies ou chez les notaires', and of these she says, 'des pièces authentiques dont le jargon administratif et légal élimine

[55] *Souvenirs*, p. 708.

tout contenu humain.'[56] These last are positioned as being the least use of all. In many ways Yourcenar's approach here echoes the sentiment of Collingwood: 'These sources are sources, that is to say, credence is given to them only because they are in this way justified.'[57] And again:

> The historian's autonomy is here manifested in its extremest form, because it is here evident that somehow, in virtue of his activity as an historian, he has it in his power to reject something explicitly told him and to substitute something else.[58]

Yourcenar's capacities to select, construct and criticize are clearly in evidence here. And yet there would seem to be a further point to notice. The point she appears to wish to make concerning the evidence she cites in the work as distinct from that which comes after it in the *Notes* is its increasing uncertainty, the need to 'read into it', to extend the imaginative faculty when seeking to get it to yield its secret. And this matter comes, in a sense, to a head in the final paragraph of the *Note* to *Archives du Nord* when she says:

> Ce que je sais de l'histoire de mon père avant son second mariage sort presque entièrement de ses propres souvenirs, égrenés au cours de conversations avec moi durant les dernières années de sa vie.[59]

In sum, working within the text Yourcenar goes to considerable lengths to underscore from the outset the substantial aporia which will emerge from the investigation of any documentary evidence on which she seeks to base her study. A striking addition to this catalogue of possible sources is oral evidence. There are many occasions, including the one just cited, when she will say that she has only her father's word to go on for what she is attesting; early in *Souvenirs pieux* that takes the rather more

---

[56] *Souvenirs*, p. 708.
[57] Collingwood, p. 245.
[58] Collingwood, p. 237.
[59] *Archives*, p. 1184.

generalized form of, 'Je n'ignore pas que tout cela est faux ou vague comme tout ce qui a été réinterprété par la mémoire de trop d'individus différents.'[60]

Because of its association with juridical matters, Ricœur renders Collingwood's 'evidence' by the phrase 'documentary proof' thereby avoiding confusion with the French 'évidence'. Oral evidence is testimony and as such is not acceptable as a sole basis on which to erect history; it cannot have the status of documentary proof. Unlike the sources cited in the *Notes*, the sources adduced by Yourcenar within the *Souvenirs pieux* are on a sliding scale of dubiety as material on which to base history, and, as seen, she goes to considerable pains to make this plain to the reader. In effect, right from the outset within the narrative of the *Mémoires* Marguerite Yourcenar is making a shift from the role of being a writer of history paying due deference to the requirements of the web of imaginative construction to one of fiction, the interest and success of which is bound up with the web of the world of history imagined which she constructs. The work, then, is one of imaginative fiction, but almost paradoxically it operates with a self-imposed strait-jacket of a certain kind of commitment to history, her personal genealogical history. That said, how she will tell it will be a matter of her choosing. Yourcenar makes this clear to us when she terms herself, 'L'historien-poète et le romancier que j'ai essayé d'être', a sentence in which she draws together the two types of narrating.[61] Meanwhile, something of the process of imaginative investment is characteristically evoked in a striking extended metaphor drawn from nature:

---

[60] *Souvenirs*, p. 708.
[61] *Souvenirs*, p. 877.

> La vie passée est une feuille sèche, craquelée, sans sève ni chlorophylle, criblée de trous, éraillée de déchirures, qui, mise à contre-jour, offre tout au plus le réseau squelettique de ses nervures minces et cassantes.[62]

In *Les yeux ouverts* Matthieu Galey puts to Marguerite Yourcenar the question:

> Vous avez écrit quelque part qu'à notre époque on retombe toujours dans "l'ornière du roman", et qu'on ne peut pas y échapper. Pourquoi? Pourquoi écrire un roman, et non un traité ou un livre d'histoire?[63]

Yourenar offers a two-paragraph reply to this question.[64] Her opening sentence is notable for its twofold repetition of the word 'certain(e)':

> Parce que je voulais offrir un certain angle de vue, une certaine image du monde, une certaine peinture de la condition humaine qui ne peut passer qu'à travers un homme, ou des hommes.

The use of the word 'certain(e)' with its meaning of 'particular' is also suggestive of something which is evident, incontestable, sure, but also that which is real, true, something which cannot be gainsaid. Perspective also plays a part. The statement in its early phase mentions the point of view, moves to the notion of an image and then to that of a painting. Looking from a particular angle, seeing and interpreting a coherent, gathered whole lies at the heart of the artistic as distinct from the historicizing objective. The subject-matter is the humanistic one of that which can only be experienced through either a man or men.

Yourcenar now moves to a commendation of history, praising it for the manner in which it offers to its readers the liberation, 'la grande liberté', by means of which, courtesy of the historian, it makes available to contemporaries an understanding of the rhythms of the human situation and of the solutions it proposes, advises against, or

---

[62] *Souvenirs*, p. 790.
[63] *Les yeux ouverts*, pp. 61 – 62.
[64] The writer's response takes up the remainder of p. 62.

offers us from another set of social relations. Because it is history this experience will be unique.

In the second paragraph Yourcenar introduces a reservation. She distrusts the fact that history is prone to systematization. By this she seems to mean that it is in the very nature of the discipline that it does this, presumably because it chooses what it wishes to portray and so the selections made are driven by the perspective the historian wishes to put across. The consequence is that the historian is imposing a personal interpretation on the material. This is frequently not admitted or, if it is, it is done in an affirmative spirit, driven often by what is viewed as a form of truth which itself is in fact only transitory:

> Mais en même temps je me méfie du fait que l'Histoire systématise, qu'elle est une interprétation personnelle qui ne s'avoue pas telle, ou au contraire qu'elle met agressivement en avant une théorie prise pour une vérité, qui est elle-même passagère.[65]

She now goes on to state that the historian does not show his assumptions, be they personal or ideological, and that the one is prone to concealing the other. It is there all the same, – 'Il en a, pourtant.' This can manifest itself in various ways. For example the viewpoint may be that of a nineteenth-century bourgeois, or it may be that the history of Imperial Rome is being written up by a militaristically minded German. The historian may be a Marxist who sees Marxism everywhere or finds it nowhere in the past. The historian is dominated by various theories, often without even being aware of it him or herself, 'Il est dominé par des théories, quelquefois sans même s'en apercevoir.'[66] It is at this point that Yourcenar now spells out the contrast established by literature. If, on the other hand, one makes the character speak in his

---

[65] *Les yeux ouverts*, p. 62.
[66] *Les yeux ouverts*, p. 62.

own name, as in the case of Hadrien, or, as in the case of Zénon, in a style which is more or less that of the period in which he is set, in an indirect style which in reality is a monologue couched in the third person singular, the result is that one puts oneself in the place of the character being evoked. In this account by Yourcenar we see art as constituting the imaginative transference into the personage of the imagined Other. It entails a loss of self even while it arises from the self. It is this way that one – the writer – finds oneself in the presence of a unique reality, which is that of that particular man at that specific time in that specific place:

> [O]n se trouve alors devant une réalité unique, celle de cet homme-là, à ce moment-là, dans ce lieu-là.[67]

Yourcenar concludes by stating that it is by means of this roundabout approach that both the human and the universal are best attained, 'Et c'est par ce détour qu'on atteint le mieux l'humain et l'universel.'[68] At the beginning of *Archives du Nord* Marguerite Yourcenar tells us:

> [J]'ai essayé d'évoquer un couple de la Belle Époque, mon père et ma mère.[69]

While the period of the *Belle Époque* is the context, it is the characters of Fernande and Michel and their evocation which are the central concern. The truth the writer seeks is not the truth of the historical facts for their own sake, but the truth of the insights into personality and character arising within that context enabled by the techniques of artistic exploration. In conclusion, it may be said that Collingwood shows that in the reconstructions of history the imagination is as important and as central as it is in works of fiction. This view finds confirmation in the analyses of Paul Ricœur.

---

[67] *Les yeux ouverts*, p. 62.
[68] *Les yeux ouverts*, p. 62.
[69] *Archives*, p. 953.

1.4 Biography, autobiography, universality

With just a few dates associated with it, the emphasis on the presentation of death in the *Labyrinthe du monde* is cultural rather than historical. Death as discussed in various manifestations in the text is real, is true, and really happened to the characters under discussion, but the manner and interpretation of its significance is presented in terms associated with literary modes. The first of these to be considered will be biography.

Writing of biography, 'récit qui module l'histoire d'une vie', Elena Real points out the genre has a fundamental place in the work of Marguerite Yourcenar.[70] In the course of her twenties Yourcenar compiled the enormous *Remous* which contained an outline of the life of Hadrien as well as the notion of a genealogical history giving a clear indication of her interest in this kind of writing. Before she was thirty she had composed the study, *Pindare*. The main works to be held in mind in this perception, Real suggests, are *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, L'*Œuvre au Noir* and *Un Homme obscur*. These are all post-war texts; to them can be added the earlier *Alexis*, *Le Coup de Grâce* and a range of the lives described in *Denier du Rêve*. What distinguishes these texts, Real says, is not a critical moment in each life, but how the portrait of the personage is built up from its past through retrospective narrative. It is by this means that the reader is led to a childhood or a moment of birth. This sequence is then followed up to a crucial moment of conflict. An approach of this kind often entails flashbacks. In brief, Yourcenar's characters come carrying baggage; they have a history behind them and indeed it is this history which frequently defines them. For

[70] Elena Real, 'Biographie, autobiographie et quête de soi', in *Marguerite Yourcenar. Biographie et autobiographie*, ed. by Elena Real (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 1988), pp. 243 – 51 (p. 243).

example, in his letter to Monique Alexis says, 'Je crois que ces années d'enfance ont déterminé ma vie'. Presenting a character in this fashion presupposes a certain view of man and of time, Real argues. It suggests that it is impossible to grasp the entirety of a person in a single moment. The individual cannot be seen and traced unless one knows the different periods in the course of which he has made his life. In this stance Real suggests we can see the influence of Heraclitus, a favourite thinker of the writer, on Yourcenar. This viewpoint enables the contemplation of constant movement and with it change. The present moment cannot be seized, for man and the universe itself are in a state of constant flux. The only possible way in which one can attempt to define man is by gazing at him persistently and reflecting upon him – 'de le cerner, est donc de l'envisager et de le dévisager à travers toute son histoire' – in the entirety of his history throughout the succession of the moments which go to make up his life.[71]

Yourcenar may be seen refining this approach in the course of her development as a writer. A quotation taken from her interview with Matthieu Galey states:

> J'avais choisi Pindare comme sujet sans songer qu'il m'aurait fallu vingt ans de réflexion et d'étude pour comprendre ce que signifie l'image du monde que pouvait se faire un Pindare.[72]

This comment on Pindar enables us to understand the function the novelist grants to history. It illustrates the sense of the biographies of the mature post-war period which, despite fundamental differences, present a series of common features which give a character and a hallmark to Yourcenar's work. While in the novels of the early

---

[71] Real, p. 244.

[72] *Les yeux ouverts*, p. 64. The passage Real cites is: 'À cette époque-là j'étais trop jeune pour savoir quelle idée du monde pouvait avoir une homme tel que Pindare.' It is attributed to *Les yeux*, p. 62, but is not in fact to be found there and may come from an earlier edition. The quotation cited in the text is sufficiently close for there to be no adverse effect on Real's argument.

period the narrative focuses on a critical moment of the history of the character, Real states, ending often in their discovery of themselves and assuming their own individuality, in the biographies of the later period what is of interest is not only the history of an individual but also the history of a time reflected across the consciousness of a character:

> [C]'est non seulement l'histoire d'un individu mais aussi l'histoire d'un temps réfléchi à travers la conscience du personnage. C'est non seulement d'un homme qu'il s'agit, mais de sa vision du monde.[73]

The important consequence of this is that we become the beneficiaries of a double biography, that of a man and that of a world which sustains him. A further outcome is the following. In contrast to the intrinsic individuality of the early period, the Yourcenarian character of the second period is interesting not only for the grounds of their distinctive singularity, but for extending the narrow limits of the self and of the subjective; it acquires a universal dimension. Real insists that without ceasing to be itself, it appears as a paradigm of a certain attitude to man in the world and in the universe. The character carries within himself, as Montaigne says: '[L]a forme entière de l'humaine condition.' As a result, the biography acquires a didactic and exemplary function, as Yourcenar herself underscores:

> En un sens, toute vie racontée est exemplaire; on écrit pour attaquer ou pour défendre un système du monde, pour définir une méthode qui nous est propre.[74]

The process is one whereby the generalizing capacity of the character who progressively sheds his specific individual features becomes to that extent a symbol of every individual life. The *Labyrinthe du monde* constitutes a thorough exemplification of these distinctive features.

---

[73] Real, p. 244.

[74] Marguerite Yourcenar, *Mémoires d'Hadrien, Carnets de notes* in *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 536. Real, p. 244.

Turning to autobiography Elena Real observes that those Yourcenarian biographies which are inclined to ignore or suppress marginal details or details relating to the individual show a movement towards general or universal qualities of character. As a result they present all the problems of the discovery of the self, 'la découverte de soi', and so, as a consequence, they bestow on this question a range of responses to the challenge of the possibility of a Yourcenarian autobiography. In his mnemonic recreation Hadrien seeks not only to instruct Marcus Aurelius, he also comes to know himself and thereby to define himself by giving a shape to a life, the sense of which escapes him. In some way he fixes an existence which appears to him in the form of constant mutations and changes. It can be asserted that in the matter of biography that Marguerite Yourcenar pushes the genre to the limits in the case of Hadrien. She stretches internal focalization and effects a change of voice of the narration in the first person so creating a form of pseudo-autobiography. On the theoretical level what *Mémoires d'Hadrien* shows is a coherent reconstruction of a life, the capacity of the personal memory to recall all that which makes the 'me' which followed in time. As a consequence it implies the possibility of the writing of the self.

In a discussion of Georg Lukács and Marguerite Yourcenar Damien Zanone finds:

> Ces deux exemples montrent les auteurs pour qui le travail d'historialisation de la personnalité par l'autobiographie se révèle insupportable: ils ne parviennent pas à fondre dans une identité globalisante ('moi') des incarnations successives qui ne sont pas réconciliées entre elles.[75]

He concludes:

> Marguerite Yourcenar pratique l'autobiographie sans finalement écrire la sienne: elle donne celle d'un autre – *Mémoires d'Hadrien* – et ce qui semblait

[75] Damien Zanone, *L'autobiographie* (Paris: Ellipses, 1996), p. 14.

> s'annoncer comme la sienne – *Souvenirs pieux* et *Archives du Nord* – est en fait la contribution en immense tableau du cadre généalogique dans lequel elle est née.[76]

This judgement finds support in the argument of Real. She points out that in the case of Zénon matters are different from how they are with Hadrien. Aporias are deliberately generated. Despite Zénon the past appears without reference to the subordination of the human laws of cause and effect, of time and space, and even of importance. Biography in *L'Œuvre au Noir* is a biography across the abyss, 'La biographie dans *L'Œuvre au Noir* est une biographie à travers l'abime.'[77] Real cites the text:

> Il revivait maintenant trop souvent des moments révolus de son propre passé, non par regret ou par nostalgie, mais parce que les cloisons du temps semblaient avoir éclaté.[78]

Matters in Zénon's life do not happen that way, but outside the laws of causality and the spatio-temporal. From the theoretical perspective and the mnemonic capacity of the individual to recompense their life all the evidence shows the impossibility of this attempt to reconstruct the 'moi'. There is perpetual discontinuity and involuntary interruption. These cross over with and interfere with the present. What emerges is the sheer impossibility of reconstituting in full a single day and the dangers of even trying. Nathanaël, on the other hand, fully accepts the hand of chance. Biography is impossible in this case because the self is inexorably dissolved in the flow of time and nothing is able to fix it. *L'Œuvre au Noir* attempts to introduce coherence into the account of one's past; *L'Homme obscur* says this is impossible. Nothing enables us to

---

[76] Zanone, p. 14.
[77] Real, p. 246.
[78] Marguerite Yourcenar, *L'Œuvre au noir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 339.

seize the self which is in flight in every human being. This trajectory across the main novels has important implications for the *Mémoires*.

Real's insight finds further support in Valeria Sperti's discussion, 'Le pacte autobiographique impossible'.[79] Sperti points to the opening of Rousseau's *Confessions* in which he lays down the obligatory opening of a work of this sort, 'Je suis né à Genève en 1717.' She then remarks:

> A cette première suit la date de la rédaction: les deux situent les limites chronologiques de la remémoration sur laquelle s'axe l'acte littéraire.[80]

Yourcenar's opening bears a superficial similarity to Rousseau's procedure, 'L'être que j'appelle moi vint au monde un certain lundi 8 juin 1903.' This opening is to be seen, however, not as a beginning, but as an ending. *Souvenirs pieux* and *Archives du Nord* have as their objective the tracing of the events which made this birth possible, as Yourcenar says, '[de] distinguer le jeu compliqué des causes dont nous ressentons encore les effets.' As Sperti states, while Rousseau and Yourcenar cite dates to mark a birth, the latter opens up a remarkable dimension, the intentional distanciation between the 'je' and the 'moi', subject and object respectively of the same phrase. This, Sperti asserts, poses a problem of identity. Autobiography presupposes identity between the author, the narrator and the character.[81] How can this relationship be said to appertain, Sperti asks, if the 'je' does not assimilate to the 'moi'? For Yourcenar the identity of the 'je' of the narrator and the 'moi' of the character is a psychological impossibility.

---

[79] Valeri Sperti, 'Le pacte autobiographique impossible', in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Biographie, autobiographie*, ed. by Elena Real (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 1988), pp, 177 – 81.
[80] Sperti, p. 177.
[81] Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975, 1996).

In furthering her discussion of this issue Elena Real notes Jean Blot's comment on Yourcenar:

> Tout paraît intéresser Marguerite Yourcenar, sauf Marguerite Yourcenar, toute vie sauf la sienne, toutes les conditions à l'exception de celle qui lui fut réservée.[82]

This observation is borne out in her exchange with Matthieu Galey when she says:

> Cette obsession française du "culte de la personnalité" (la sienne) chez la personne qui écrit ou qui parle me stupéfie toujours. Oserais-je dire que je la trouve affreusement petite-bourgeoise? Je, moi, me, mon, ma, mes…[83]

In short, the autobiographical pact is disappointed. In this instance the author-narrator does not relate to us her autobiography; the 'je' declines to relate its 'moi.' The sole 'moi' the author presents us with – and one which is otherwise difficult to identify – is that of a new-born baby without conscience or awareness of itself, without history, almost without identity, that is to say, almost, 'non-biographiable.'[84] The child, one hour old, opens *Souvenirs pieux* and closes *Archives du Nord*. The child of the final pages of these two volumes leads us directly to the little girl at the beginning of the narrative in order to make us cross what Real terms 'obscures galeries généalogiques', which now abut onto the life of this child.[85]

Real suggests that what this amounts to, then, is a quest for the self, 'une quête de soi.'[86] The author-narrator renounces the appearance of becoming an object of discourse, of relating her ultimate self to us, that is of relating herself to us in her individuality. Possibly, Real suggests, she assumes that not doing so is her best and arguably only way of revealing her self to us. In order to seize the self Marguerite

---

[82] Jean Blot, *Marguerite Yourcenar* (Paris: Seghers, 1980), p. 13.
[83] *Les yeux ouverts*, p. 218.
[84] Real, p. 250.
[85] Real, p. 250.
[86] Real, p. 248.

Yourcenar undertakes not a quest of the personal, but a transpersonal one, one in which the being loses itself, then finds itself among men, families, people and the worlds in which it has journeyed. It is not the personal recollection or the individual memory which is capable of finding or revealing being, but the universal transpersonal memory, a memory which runs through historic human time to arrive at *La nuit des temps*. The construction of the self is brought about by means of a network of biographies in large part referential, in the course of which the author seeks the identification of parallel pathways, points of common ground which often otherwise she does not find or cannot accept. Across what Real terms this genealogical gallery Yourcenar saves from oblivion and death those who have existed and in doing so she saves herself:

> Elle devient la mère qui nourrit de sa substance toute la lignée dont elle procède.[87]

Before and after are thereby annihilated. The point of confluence of the whole network, Marguerite Yourcenar, is at one and the same time in and for the writing the point of origin.

Reviewing the *Mémoires*, including along lines as suggested by Real, highlights the Yourcenarian preoccupation with the universal. This may be seen in the perception of many commentators. For example, following a detailed review of the contribution of Rémo and Octave Pirmez Françoise Bonali Fiquet concludes:

> Marguerite Yourcenar ne se penche sur son propre moi que pour l'élargir à, 'l'immense foule anonyme dont nous sommes faits', atteignant cette dimension cosmique.[88] […] En s'efforçant de découvrir ce qui la relie à la mémoire collective, l'autobiographe retrouve ainsi que Nathanaël au terme de son parcours existentiel, 'le fond commun de toute l'aventure humaine […],

[87] Real, p. 251.
[88] *Les yeux ouverts*, p. 203.

> l'uniformité sous la variété des apparences', ce qui nous fait dire avec Philippe Lejeune que, 'si *Je* est un autre, ce n'est pas seulement parce que son énonciation cache des instances multiples, c'est que tout récit de vie n'est qu'une reprise ou une transformation de formes de vie préexistantes.'[89], [90], [91]

While Marguerite Yourcenar sees constant change and variation in art, broadly understood, and how this reflects a changing world, she frequently asserts the essentially unchanging character of human nature. An instance of this may be seen in the manner in which in the following passage she presented her case when addressing an assembly of Rectors, Deans and Heads of Higher Education Institutions in Paris entitled *L'Écrivain devant l'histoire* in 1954:

> Shakespeare qui avait lu tous ces auteurs a même éliminé certains détails pourtant intéressants parce qu'ils étaient trop particuliers. De même que Brutus il a simplifié l'action, il lui a enlevé certains éléments de politique trop complexe ou d'incidents réalistes ou il n'a gardé que ceux-là que ceux qui lui servaient à présenter le grand drame moral, le grand drame intellectuel qu'il voulait présenter: le drame de l'homme en proie à l'hésitation entre son respect pour un ami qui est aussi un grand homme et son souci de défendre son parti politique, son idée de droit, conflit qui mène Brutus à assassiner César. C'est là ce qui importe à Shakespeare et non le Brutus proprement dit qui s'est promené dans les rues de Rome un certain jour de l'histoire romaine. C'est au point que Shakespeare donne très volontiers à son Brutus certains aspects du gentilhomme, de l'honnête homme de la Renaissance anglaise. Il n'hésite pas à le faire si cela lui permet de nous présenter un Brutus plus vraisemblablement et plus accessible à ses spectateurs.[92]

The differentiation made here in the handling of the facts of history is susceptible to a number of different artistic approaches, including the psychology of a well meaning,

---

[89] Marguerite Yourcenar, 'Voyages dans l'espace et voyages dans le temps', Conférence faite à l'Institut français de Tókyô, le 26 octobre 1982, *Le Tour de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), *Essais et Mémoires*, p. 694.

[90] Philippe Lejeune, *Je est un autre: L'autobiographie, de la littérature aux médias* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980), p. 9.

[91] Françoise Bonali Fiquet, 'Du "je" à "l'autre" dans *Le Labyrinthe du monde*', in *L'Universalité dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by María José Vázquez de Parga et Rémy Poignault, 2 vols (Tours: SIEY, 1995), II, 93 – 106 (p. 106).

[92] Marguerite Yourcenar, 'L'Écrivain devant l'histoire', Conférence faite devant Messieurs les Recteurs, les Inspecteurs d'Académie et les Directrices et Directeurs d'Écoles Normales (Paris: CNDP, le vendredi 26 février 1954), p. 6. Also available at: https://www.cidmy.be/index.php/oeuvre/discours/128-conference-l-ecrivain-devant-l-histoire.

if politically naïve Shakespearean protagonist. Yourcenar makes a formal distinction between the Brutus, 'proprement dit', that is the Brutus insofar as he can be recuperated from the historical record, and the Brutus we see before us in the drama. As Yourcenar remarks elsewhere in the same text, for Dante, on the other hand, far from being an *honnête homme*, as he was a regicide, Brutus deserved to be consigned to the bottommost pit of the *Inferno*. Interpretations, artistic ones in particular, can be widely divergent; human nature remains constant nevertheless throughout.

In his discussion of the relationship between antiquity and the presentation of the self in *Souvenirs pieux* Rémy Poignault points to the following:

> [I]l y a dans ce jugement sur la culture de ses devanciers et de l'usage qu'ils en ont fait, une forme d'expression indirecte du moi.[93]

Following a detailed examination of the interrelationships between primarily Octave and Rémo, but also Fernande, Poignault establishes that:

> Comparée à Octave et Fernande, il apparaît que l'auteur est allée plus au fond dans des voies où ils ont manqué de volonté, qu'il s'agisse de la sympathie universelle ou de la culture.[94]

He concludes:

> En exposant la vie de ses ancêtres, Yourcenar est donc loin de s'effacer totalement: c'est elle-même qu'elle cherche, même si sa personne se trouve comme disséminée.[95]

This perception finds a ready agreement with the transpersonal described by Elena Real while integrating the concept of the universal. What emerges from this discussion, in particular of Real's, is that such is the nature of Yourcenar's approach

---

[93] Rémy Poignault, 'L'Antiquité et l'expression du moi dans *Souvenirs pieux*', in *L'Écriture du moi dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by Rémy Poignault, Vincente Torres, Jean-Pierre Castellani, Maria-Rosa Chiapparo (Clermont-Ferrand: SIEY, 2004), pp. 9 – 24 (p. 10).
[94] Poignault, p. 24.
[95] Poignault, P. 24.

to the writing of history that we get a double biography, that of the person in question and also of the world they inhabit. This in turn leads to a sharpened sense of universals.

In discussions of narrative generally the close interrelationship between history and literature has increasingly been seen as an issue of importance and has been discussed by Ricœur in relation to the writings of Louis Mink and Hayden White.[96] Of the former he points out that in his *Time and Narrative* he 'summarised the theses of the narrative school.'[97] He goes on to praise Mink for his rigour and honesty stating:

> The problem is posed that will be the torment of any literary philosophy of history: what difference separates history from fiction, if both narrate?[98]

He shows that Mink continued to wrestle with this issue, clinging all the while to 'the commonsense belief that history is distinguished from fiction by its truth claim', and that he continued to explore the matter without resolving it to his satisfaction even in his final essay, 'Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument'.[99] In the discussion above, as Real points out, Yourcenar finds a resolution to this dilemma in the transpersonal by means of which she is the pivotal point through which the narrativising of the personal and to a degree of the genealogical pass through her and coordinate.

---

[96] Louis O. Mink, 'History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension', *New Literary History* 1 (1970), 541 – 58. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973).

[97] Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, I, 155 – 74.

[98] Paul Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), trans. by Kathleen Blamey & David Pellauer, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 2004, 2006), p. 241.

[99] Louis O. Mink, *Historical Understanding*, ed. by Brian Fay, Eugene O. Golob and Richard T. Vann (Ithaca: Cornell University Pres, 1987), pp. 182 – 203.

1.5 Structural matters: the death of the mother

Because the first two volumes of the *Labyrinthe* are retrospective, the third prospective from the occurrence of Fernande's death that event emerges as the axial experience which unites and coordinates the events of the trilogy. This makes it the primary organizing element in the work. Looking to these larger structural considerations raised by the *Labyrinthe du monde* it may be seen that the account of Fernande de Crayencour's death occurs early in the course of *Souvenirs pieux.* Yourcenar states, 'Fernande mourut dans la soirée du 18, d'une fièvre puerpérale accompagnée de péritonite.'[100] The account conforms closely to the description of puerperal pyrexia which was responsible for a typically high incidence of maternal mortality and which as a figure was largely consistent between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1930s before falling quickly to modern patterns.[101] Not only were the well-to-do not immune, they were more likely to contract the condition because of surgical interference. This aspect is discussed under the sub-heading, 'High maternal mortality due to unnecessary interference' by Irvine Loudon.[102] Following that event in its narrative course *Souvenirs pieux* goes full circle back from the death to the earliest records of any familial predecessor, the earliest of whom were found to have lived in Liège in the fourteenth century. Changing direction the narrative now moves forward, concluding at the time when Fernande is sitting at rest awaiting the birth of her child. This final scene of the volume leaves the reader poised shortly before the birth and ensuing death with which the volume opened. Anne-Yvonne Julien notes

---

[100] *Souvenirs*, p. 728.

[101] Geoffrey Chamberlain, 'British maternal mortality in the 19th and early 20th centuries', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 99 (11) (Nov., 2006), 559 – 63 (p. 559 and Figure 1).

[102] Irvine Loudon, 'Maternal mortality in the past and its relevance to developing countries today', *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 72, Issue 1 (July 2000), 241S – 246S. Loudon points out that while his figures relate to the UK, the figures for France and Belgium are similar.

that Yourcenar comments on the structural feature in a letter to Jean Chalon dated 29 March 1974:

> [À] la fin de *Souvenirs pieux*, […] [elle a], si l'on peut s'exprimer ainsi, *moins sept mois*. […] Ce livre, dont, ainsi que l'a très bien remarqué Jacquelin Piatier, la construction est circulaire, nous ramène dans sa dernière page à son point de départ.[103]

Archives du Nord relates the extended history of her father's family up to the immediate aftermath of Fernande's death, in view of which he removed himself and the infant child from Brussels and the property he had purchased there for his family back to Mont Noir in France, his parental home. The final volume, *Quoi? L'Éternité*, begins with the father trying to get to grips with life following his bereavement. The family dislocations and the consequences for the survivors constitute the thematics of rupture which characterise the text. On one level the entire text is a multi-faceted coming to grips with the consequences of that event, the inextricable conjunctions of on the one hand the birth of the narrator and on the other the death of the mother consequent upon it.

The title of the opening volume invokes the little memorial card which is presented by the writer as a kind of *souvenir pieux*, a commemorative feature of Catholic funerals, and in the course of this volume Yourcenar gives us instances of a number of these, including Fernande's. In a note, however, Maurice Delcroix observes that the precise collocation of the two words does not quite occur. He remarks:

> Ni Littré, ni le *Grand Larousse* du début de ce siècle, a fortiori ni le *Robert* ne connaissent l'expression. Elle était pourtant presque aussi répandue que la

[103] Anne-Yvonne Julien, *Marguerite Yourcenar ou la signature de l'arbre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), p. 216. The italics are Julien's. The letter appears in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Lettres à ses amis et à quelques autres*, présentation et notes de M. Sarde et J. Brami, E. Dezon-Jones (Paris: Gallimard, 1997 (1995)), p. 543.

> mort dans nos campagnes, peu concurrencée par des formules comme: "Affectueux souvenir", "A la pieuse mémoire de…", "Souvenez-vous dans vos prières de…" etc., qui parfois s'y substituaient ou s'y ajoutaient.[104]

Delcroix sees in Yourcenar's expression an element of irony, '[P]our écrire *Souvenirs pieux* – titre ambigu s'il en est, dont l'ironie virtuelle n'exclut certes pas tout respect pour les morts.'[105] At the same time, and in addition, it can be readily appreciated that the title can also be taken in a larger sense. In this volume Yourcenar is commemorating her mother, the woman she never knew, an act of *pietas*. In this Virgilean echo she honours the memory of Fernande, showing a pious regard for her memory, tendering her extensive writing skills in order to bring the life of that rather shy and retiring figure out of the oblivion of the past. It cannot be said that Fernande died in childbirth on account of poverty or lack of such medical care as was available at the time. Fernande was the last of ten children of the wealthy landowner, Arthur de Marchienne. Her mother died fourteen months later, it is thought carrying her eleventh. Yourcenar notes that Fernande's grandmother in turn had died in childbirth at twenty years of age. On this issue Yourcenar's details which stand without comment make it abundantly clear that in the nineteenth century in the process of carrying and bearing children women ran a life-risking gauntlet whatever their status. To that extent Fernande is exemplary of an age and a set of social conditions which come increasingly under scrutiny as the work progresses.

In relating the mother's deathbed scene two quotations from Blanchot's *Espace littéraire* help clarify the process of monumentalising Yourcenar is pursuing in the course of this description:

---

[104] Maurice Delcroix, '*Archives du Nord* au passage du XIXe siècle', in *Marguerite Yourcenar écrivain du XIXe siècle?*, ed. by Georges Fréris et Rémy Poignault (Clermont-Ferrand: SIEY, 2004), p. 138, n. 6.
[105] Delcroix, '*Archives du Nord*', p. 138.

> Ce qui est là, dans le calme absolu de ce qui a trouvé son lieu, ne réalise pourtant pas la vérité d'être pleinement ici. La mort suspend la relation avec le lieu, bien que le mort s'y appuie pesamment comme la seule base qui lui reste. Justement, cette base manque, le lieu est en défaut, le cadavre n'est pas à sa place. Où est-il? Il n'est pas ici et pourtant il n'est pas ailleurs, nulle part? mais c'est qu'alors nulle part est ici. La présence cadavérique établit un rapport entre ici et nulle part.[106]

The sense of being there while at the same time of not being there finds an echo in Yourcenar's account of the laid out body of her mother on its deathbed. She writes:

> Elle est devenue ce qu'on voit des morts: un bloc inerte et clos, insensible à la lumière, à la chaleur, au contact, n'aspirant ni n'exhalant plus l'air et ne s'en servant plus pour former des mots.[107]

As Gregg notes in his discussion of Blanchot, the mortal remains the deceased has left behind are present to us in the world, but the essential truth of the cadaver is that it is *not* of this world.[108] He then goes on to state that once the mourners come to terms with the fact that there can be no human relationship with the corpse any longer, the other-worldly inaccessibility of the cadaver makes it begin to resemble itself. Yourcenar says:

> Elle donne surtout l'impression d'être exquisement propre: les coulées de sueurs, le suintement des lochies ont été lavés et séchés; une sorte d'arrêt temporaire semble se produire entre les dissolutions de la vie et celles de la mort.[109]

In this way, as in Blanchot, in an ironical move ontological priority is given to the corpse over the living person. The concern of the period, the *Belle Époque*, to ensure that everything is done in a certain way has ensured the following appearance:

---

[106] Maurice Blanchot, *L'espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 348.
[107] *Souvenirs*, p. 733.
[108] John Gregg, *Maurice Blanchot and the Literature of Transgression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 24. His italics.
[109] *Souvenirs*, p. 732.

> Ses mains, entrelacées d'un chapelet, sont jointes sur le haut du ventre ballonné par la péritonite, qui bombe le drap comme si elle attendait encore son enfant.[110]

Blanchot goes on to note a further feature. Not only does he hold it insufficient to speak only of the likeness of the corpse to the formerly living person, there is, he asserts, something more at work:

> Oui, c'est bien lui, le cher vivant, mais c'est tout de même plus que lui, il est plus beau, plus imposant, déjà monumental et si absolument lui-même qu'il est comme doublé par soi, uni à la solonnelle impersonalité de soi par la ressemblance et par l'image. Cet être de grand format, important et superbe, qui impressionne les vivants, comme l'apparition de l'original, jusque-là ignoré… peut-être rappelle-t-il, par son apparence de souveraineté, les grandes images de l'art classique.[111]

The emphases on monumentality and on art in a classical idiom in the passage are particularly noteworthy. Taken together the two terms seem to illuminate what Marguerite Yourcenar is doing in her description. First Blanchot's words are vividly borne out in the following passage:

> Tandis que, dans ses portraits de jeune fille et de jeune femme, Madame de C*** n'offre au regard qu'un visage agréable et fin, sans plus, certaines au moins de ses photographies mortuaires donnent l'impression de la beauté. L'émaciation de la maladie, le calme de la mort, l'absence désormais totale du désir de plaire ou de créer bonne impression, et peut-être aussi l'habile éclairage du photographe, mettent en valeur le modelé de cette face humaine, soulignant les pommettes un peu hautes, les profondes arcades sourcilières, le nez délicatement arqué aux étroites narines, lui conférent une dignité et une fermeté qu'on ne soupçonnait pas. Les grandes paupières fermées, donnant l'illusion du sommeil, lui dispensent une douceur qui autrement lui manquerait. La bouche sinueuse est amère, avec ce pli fier qu'ont souvent les bouches des morts, comme s'ils avaient à leur acquis une victoire chèrement remportée.[112]

---

[110] *Souvenirs*, p. 733.
[111] Blanchot, *L'espace*, pp. 350 – 351.
[112] *Souvenirs*, p. 733.

Furthermore, Blanchot's remarks on the association with an image taken from classical art resonates in especial depth with Yourcenar's final sentence in this section:

> On voit que les trois femmes ont disposé avec soin le drap fraîchement repassé en grands plissements parallèles, presque sculpturaux, étalés sur toute la largeur du lit, et fait bouffer l'oreiller de Madame.[113]

This last loyal service rendered to their mistress elevates the picture to a study of a monumental order which belongs to a commemorative gesture in the early days of photography and which can now be held for posterity. The ambivalence, life-in-death, death-in-life, merges into artistic commemoration, a defining trace of a monumentalising kind. Such is the stylization of the description that it leads Anne Yvonne Julien-Dubosclard to suggest further an affinity between the actions of the servants and the Three Fates:

> Qui, par exemple, n'apercevrait, derrière les trois domestiques présidant à l'accouchement et à la toilette mortuaire de Fernande, les trois Moires de l'Antiquité?[114]

In an added perspective the description of the recently deceased seems to be in a line with the notion handed down from a medieval inheritance, that of the *Ars bene moriendi*, one in which the sufferer has struggled to find peace[115]. Analysing this scene Simone Proust is inclined to see in the focus on the *sueurs* and the *suintement* evidence of a Freudian sub-text, a tremulous haunting, an inability by the writer to reconcile herself to the lost mother.[116] This reading, interesting as it is, appears,

---

[113] *Souvenirs*, p. 733.

[114] Anne-Yvonne Julien-Dubosclard, '*Souvenirs pieux* de Marguerite Yourcenar', in *Marguerite Yourcenar et l'art: L'Art de Maguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by J. P. Castellani et R. Poignault (Tours: SIEY, 1990), p. 301, n. 5.

[115] Philippe Ariès, *L'Homme devant la mort* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977).

[116] Simone Proust, *L'autobiographie dans* Le Labyrinthe du Monde *de Marguerite Yourcenar: L'écriture vécue comme exercice spirituel* (Paris, Montréal: L'Harmattan, 1997).

nevertheless, to overlook Yourcenar's capacity and determination to gaze at the less palatable and the less comfortable with *les yeux ouverts*. Doing so was a central precept in her philosophy. Auerbach's comment on Saint-Simon's description of the death of Monseigneur assists our understanding here: '[T]he dignity of death and the grotesque details which contrast with it, are brought together to produce an impression which is, on the whole, completely unified.'[117] Furthermore, Simone Proust's observation seems, too, not to pay due attention to the framing technique. The writer refers not only to the increasingly monumental character of the corpse but also to *ses photographies mortuaires* and again to *l'habile éclairage du photographe*. Barthes comments:

> Au fond la Photographie est subversive, non lorsqu'elle effraie, révulse ou même stigmatise, mais lorsqu'elle est *pensive*.[118]

An exceptionally informed student of the art of the seventeenth century, Yourcenar was familiar with the framing of Death in the art of the period.[119] In a characteristic move she seems to have transposed the representation from the earlier art form of the framed painting to the modern one of photography. Viewing the account in this fashion would seem to lead to a substantial gain. Arresting the movement of Time, freeze-framing the moment, allows for a period of contemplation followed by reflection. The eye is caught first by the repellent associations with dying, then by the immediate detachment from the body lying in its own state as the description

---

[117] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard D. Trask (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968)*, p. 417.
[118] Roland Barthes, *La Chambre Claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 1980), p. 65. His emphasis.
[119] Examinations of the feature include the two studies by Dirk Van der Cruysse, *Le portrait dans les "Mémoires" de Saint-Simon: Fonctions, techniques et anthropologies: Etude statistique et analytique* (Paris: Nizet, 1971); *La mort dans les "Mémoires" de Saint-Simon: Clio dans le jardin de Thanatos* (Paris: Nizet, 1981).

progresses from immediate shock and revulsion to one of dignity and abstraction. Here again Barthes seems relevant:

> La photographie donne un peu de vérité, à condition de morceler le corps. Mais cette vérité n'est pas celle de l'individu, qui reste irréductible; c'est celle du lignage.[120]

Freed of immediate pain and suffering the being just departed, has become an entity for contemplation even in its deepest intimacies and also for one to reflect on, including one's own relationship to it. This is the mother Yourcenar has had no experiential memory of, the person who, in some sense or other, she is responsible for the death of, if one chooses to look at matters in that way, whose presence she is recreating through imaginative empathy assisted by photographic records. In this way the account becomes not only personal, but is also summative and representational of an age and a set of circumstances and practices characteristic of that age.

[120] Barthes, *La Chambre Claire*, p. 161.

1.6 Aspects of temporality in the structure of the *Labyrinthe du monde*

Yourcenar describes the beginning of *Archives du Nord* in the following terms:

> Dans un volume destiné à former avec celui-ci les deux panneaux d'un diptyque, …[121]

The image has already occurred early on in the Chapter, *La Tournée des châteaux* in *Souvenirs pieux* where she remarked:

> C'est là l'un des panneaux du diptyque.[122]

While a diptych is frequently understood as an artefact in a religious context, it has an earlier significant history as well. Often used for writing, in classical, mainly Roman times, it occasionally served this purpose among the Greeks as well. The Liddell and Scott Dictionary cites the meaning as of two leaves folded with writing on.[123] A triptych, which is a conscious development of the earlier form and more frequently found in the medieval period, is more exclusively religious in character and tends to pictorial representation. As Élène Cliche notes, in a letter, referring to *Quoi? L'Éternité*, Yourcenar remarks on, 'le troisème et dernier panneau de mon triptyque.'[124] There was a measure of fluidity in the text on this matter until it was eventually settled with the publication of the final volume. One consequence which emerges from this structuring is that *La Nuit des temps*, opening chapter of the *Archives du Nord*, has a somewhat free-standing character and a centrality in the work as a whole. Whether the work is viewed as a diptych in its initial stages or as a triptych in its final form, this Chapter lies at the centre of it. In this locational choice

---

[121] *Archives*, p. 953.
[122] *Souvenirs*, p. 751.
[123] Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, with a revised supplement, 1993), p. 1549.
[124] *Lettre à ses amis*, p. 597.

the theme of deep time is being emphasized and it emerges as being of fundamental importance.

La Nuit des temps, which falls into three distinct sections is not to be confused with the three-volume triptych, that is to say the complete work, though it may be not inappropriate to think of it as one on a considerably smaller scale topping the larger one, the *Labyrinthe* in its entirety. Unlike by far the majority of other sections in the first two volumes of the *Labyrinthe,* these do not break down further into sub-divisions. Each of the three is roughly similar in length, approximately two thousand words apiece. In a fashion reminiscent of a camera winding increasingly rapidly in reverse through time Yourcenar skates first through the centuries, then through the millennia:

> Décollons, pour ainsi dire, de ce coin du département du Nord qui fut précédemment une parcelle des Pays-Bas espagnols, puis, en remontant plus haut, un lopin du duché de Bourgogne, du comté de Flandre, du royaume de Neustrie et de la Gaule belgique. Survolons-le à une époque où il était encore sans habitants et sans nom.[125]

Lest she be taken too seriously or perhaps be accused of pomposity Yourcenar here pokes fun at herself by citing the mock-seriousness of Racine's Intimé in *Les Plaideurs*:

> "Avant la naissance du monde", déclame pompeusement dans sa plaidorie comique l'Intimé de Racine.[126]

This approach leads to a repudiation of the mythic or the folkloristic, but rather to a consideration of the geologically attested submersions and recedings of seas aeons before, the consequence of which has been to reveal the seacoast with which we are

---

[125] *Archives,* p. 954.
[126] *Archives,* p. 954.

familiar, reaching from Cap Gris-Nez to Zeeland in Holland. What is being outlined here is a landscape which predates the arrival of man, 'Les plus vieux de ces empiétements datent de bien avant l'homme.'[127] The geographical focus then narrows, moving a little inland to the area lying between Arras and Ypres on the one hand and Gand (Ghent) and Bruges on the other, focusing finally on Mont-Noir, well known to Yourcenar, for it is where she was brought up, thereby enabling the writer to see linkages between the earliest possible time and that of her own childhood.

In the second section of *La Nuit des temps* Yourcenar urges us to consider the region in a timescale roughly coextensive with the arrival of man in North-West Europe at the end of the last ice-age. This deep time perspective is primal, for it is with the arrival of man upon the scene that history may be said to begin. This is that point in time, approximately twelve thousand years ago, which constitutes the starting point for all Yourcenar's serious considerations of man in his natural environment insofar as it impacts on or serves to help understand the dynamics underlying the efforts of 'trois cents générations' to live and work in the region.[128] This rough timescale receives further support in another phrase when she says, 'ce fatras qui dans dix mille ans ne se distinguera plus des débris organiques et inorganiques que la mer a lentement pulvérisés en sable.'[129] In geological terms this period is known as the Holocene, the current geological epoch. On its webpage the International Commission on Stratigraphy states in an article dated 19 June 2018 that the Holocene Epoch is to be dated 11,700 years before the year 2000 CE.[130] The Holocene Epoch, the more recent of the two which make up the Quaternary Period, is the time when,

---

[127] *Archives*, p. 954.
[128] *Archives*, p. 959.
[129] *Archives*, p. 955.
[130] www.stratigraphy.org. *Formal subdivision of the Holocene Series/Epoch*. Accessed 21.v.'19.

following the receding of the ice mass, agriculture is first recorded on the European landmass under discussion. Yourcenar marks this by referring to the fact that at this time Britain was still adjoined to the Continental mainland by an area then above sea-level and known to science as Doggerland. In this way she seeks to incorporate Britain from the earliest days into her overall view and the full extent of her vision. Referring to the low hills of which Mont-Noir is one she says:

> [L]eurs crêtes modestes sont des témoins. Ils datent d'un temps où le bassin de la Tamise se prolongeait vers la Hollande, où le cordon ombilical n'était pas encore coupé entre le continent et ce qui allait devenir l'Angleterre.[131]

In an observable sequence the first of the three Sections of this opening Chapter of *Archives du Nord* focuses on the physical and temporal aspects as they emerge from the dark abyss of time, the second looks at the characteristic environment as the region was beginning to be slowly populated while the third considers something of the identity, character and behaviour of the earliest inhabitants as they emerge into recorded history. In essence this last takes the form of an account of the struggles of the native inhabitants against the expanding Roman empire, primarily when under the command of Julius Caesar; the key text is the *De Bello Gallico*. Marguerite Yourcenar looks in outline at how these people gradually meshed with and integrated into a social complex which was to become the groundbase of the peoples of the region as it and they evolved gradually into modern times. As may be concluded from this account, in considering the roots of her family on her father's side, then, Yourcenar is willing to embrace perspectives which allow for an exceptionally broad ambiance in terms of space and time, a remarkable *longue durée*. In this way she is able to give an immensely wide-ranging context, both geographical and historical,

---

[131] *Archives*, p. 955.

which can accommodate shifts and changes while also allowing for influences and linkages, both political and cultural, all of which go into the make-up of the experience of what constituted living in the heart of it, here to be understood as French and Belgian Flanders along with Wallonia and the accompanying lowlands. This area may be considered the epicenter of the narrative. This set of choices reflects a development in her writing in which the focus moves from the Mediterranean in *Mémoires d'Hadrien* to Flanders in *L'Œuvre au noir* and with the *Labyrinthe du monde* is now resolutely located in the latter area.

It is at this point that it may be seen that Yourcenar is inviting the reader to regard the evolution of the region in a perspective of deep time. What this term can be held to mean will be further explained below. A number of strands and apperceptions come together at this point and serve to enrich the reading. Firstly, in view of its exceptional scope, locational and temporal, and using it to underscore the range and extent of what she considers to be relevant to the totality of her inheritance, Marguerite Yourcenar is here endowing her *Mémoires* with a form of cosmogony. The notion is even referred to by her in the course of the chapter. Commenting on the practice of the Continental Celts to repair to Britain for druidic training she says:

> Ils ont appris par cœur les vastes poèmes cosmogoniques et généalogiques, réservoirs des sciences de la race.[132]

There is considerable affinity between this account and what she herself has in hand in relation to her own family history in the course of the *Labyrinthe* where as well as documentary evidence she relies heavily on oral testimony, not least that of her father.

---

[132] *Archives,* pp. 964 – 65.

Referring to a rosary suspended from her infant cradle the point at issue is that Yourcenar cites the technical term 'pléistocène' when speaking of the elephant whose ivory was given to the making of this 'bibelot'.[133] In a further emphasis when speaking of her great-uncle Octave Pirmez she raises an issue of his adherence to biblical literalism, the purpose seems to be to establish a bridgehead to take on board developments signalled by scientists such as Darwin and Lamarck:

> Cet Octave ému par la grandiose mécanique céleste, à qui il arrivait de se rappeler que, pendant les quelques pas faits par lui de sa fenêtre à sa table de travail, la terre avait avancé sur son orbite de plus d'un millier de lieues, ne se rendait pas compte qu'au xvi^{e} siècle il eût été contre Copernic, comme au xix^{e} siècle il était contre Lamarck et Darwin.[134]

Yourcenar points to Teilhard de Chardin by way of contrast:

> Octave Pirmez n'a pu prévoir Teilhard de Chardin, ni le moment où les esprits les plus avancés à l'intérieur de l'Église se rallieraient à la thèse évolutionniste au moment où celle-ci cesserait d'être pour la science un dogme monolithique.[135]

In sum, then, Marguerite Yourcenar is fully aware of geological, Paleolithic time as well as of the Pleistocene era, yet she is at pains to clarify that while she is going back and to a very early time, she is drawing the line at the beginning of the Holocene Epoch, that time when men began to inhabit North-Western Europe and turn it to farming as the ice receded. It is this period facing to modernity which is meant by 'deep time'. Marguerite Yourcenar is well aware of geological time, but declines to explore it for her present purposes. The perspective, then, is one of beginnings rather than of origins, of history rather than of myth.

---

[133] *Souvenirs*, p. 723.
[134] *Souvenirs*, p. 852.
[135] *Souvenirs*, p. 851.

The relationship between man and nature as she portrays it bears little relationship to the biblical story:

> [N]ous sommes loin de la légende judéo-chrétienne pour laquelle l'homme originel erre en paix sous les ombrages d'un beau jardin, et plus loin encore, s'il se peut, de l'Adam de Michel-Ange s'éveillant dans sa perfection au contact du doigt de Dieu.[136]

Marguerite Yourcenar's disenchantment with the Renaissance vision of the human in contact with the sublime as seen here is forceful and striking, and all the more so when it is considered that as early as 1931 she had written an essay, *Sixtine*, an exploration of male beauty, inspired by this very work of art.[137] An altogether more credible picture, she states, is given by the comic strips and the manuals of popular science, 'Les bandes dessinées et les manuels de science populaires', when they show a hairy, club-bearing brute, '… nous montrent cet Adam sans gloire sous l'aspect d'une brute poilue brandissant un casse-tête.'[138] The account of human behaviour offered here in the *Labyrinthe* leads her to offer a forceful, succinct account of a human figure much more akin to a stereotypical caveman, possessed of fire, moving gradually through the phases of the Neolithic period in a line of slow progress to the nineteenth century. In addition to the instance above, Yourcenar uses the word 'brute' twice more. First is when she refers to the creature's gradual acquisition of skills at developing primitive tools:

> Brute certes, l'homme de la pierre éclaté et de la pierre polie.[139]

Slowly the creature learns to identify the qualities of its vegetable diet and to recognise the repetitions of the movement of the stars it observes, identifying the

---

[136] *Archives,* p. 958.
[137] *Essais et mémoires,* pp. 281 – 88.
[138] *Archives,* p. 958.
[139] *Archives,* p. 958.

seasons and the lunar movements from which it learns to navigate and plan its journeyings. At this juncture the writer states:

> Ces brutes ont sans doute inventé le chant.[140]

This crucial step, a talent all too often lost in contemporary man, she asserts, leads gradually to the recognition of a certain religious sentiment becoming recognizable in the urge, essentially artistic, to attend carefully to the manner of the burial of the dead. At this point Yourcenar finds affinity between the shamanistic rituals and the experiences of the Underworld evoked in Odysseus's journey into that region as described in Book XI of the Odyssey or even more clearly in Dante's writing.[141] The direction of drift of this account which has been slowly building is now about to reach the climax the writer has been working towards. This emerges here as a two-part assertion. Firstly, the seriousness with which we should treat shamanism is something which has only emerged with anything like a proper understanding in recent times:

> Depuis un siècle à peine que travaillent nos ethnologues, nous commençons à savoir qu'il existe une mystique, une sagesse primitives, et que les chamans s'aventurent sur des routes analogues à celles que prirent l'Ulysse d'Homère ou Dante à travers la nuit.[142]

Secondly, Yourcenar vigorously remonstrates against a dismissive attitude to this activity on the grounds of its early occurrence in human experience. She states that it is all too typical of contemporary man's arrogance to decline to see in the activities of these early people behaviour comparable to our own. When we look at cave paintings we should, making allowances for changes in character, see them as being equivalent to cathedrals in their own time and capable of being understood as such. Equally, it is

---

[140] *Archives,* p. 958.

[141] Yourcenar's interest in shamanism was likely in part stimulated by Eliade's writings, Mircea Eliade, *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaiques de l'extase* (Paris: Payot, 1951). Eliade's text was for long a leading treatment of this topic.

[142] *Archives,* p. 958.

important not to be duped into seeing the Lascaux cave paintings on the one hand as the expression of a utilitarian magic designed to produce favourable outcomes, 'une magie utilitaire,' or on the other as the dutiful execution of a series of representations to entrench a rapacious priesthood, 'comme une corvée imposée par une tyrannique et rapace prêtraille.'[143] Such notions, she holds, are to be left to the foreshortened perspectives of the Homais's of this world, 'Laissons à Homais ces simplifications.'[144] Marguerite Yourcenar asserts here that we should see a direct equivalence between the religious ecstasy implicit in a cave painting's representation of an animal slaughtered and the Christian image of the sacrificed Lamb:

> C'est par l'effet de notre arrogance, qui sans cesse refuse aux hommes du passé des perceptions pareilles aux nôtres, que nous dédaignons de voir dans les fresques des cavernes autre chose que les produits d'une magie utilitaire: les rapports entre l'homme et la bête, d'une part, entre l'homme et son art, de l'autre, sont plus complexes et vont plus loin. […] Rien n'empêche de supposer que le sorcier de la préhistoire, devant l'image d'un bison percé de flèches, a ressenti à de certains moments la même angoisse et la même ferveur que tel chrétien devant l'Agneau sacrifié.[145]

This clear statement of a deeply embedded human urge for religion in some form brings home that Marguerite Yourcenar seeks here to operate at a level more explicit than that of metaphor: equivalence is asserted, human nature is constant in its capacity for worship and in its potential for an interanimate relationship between man and the world of living creatures. In the light of this the thread of quiet emphasis on creatures, dogs, horses, cattle, porpoises and so forth, which will be noted in the course of this discussion and which will be examined below takes on a deeper significance.

---

[143] *Archives,* p. 959.
[144] *Archives,* p. 959.
[145] *Archives,* pp. 958 -59.

It has been seen how Marguerite Yourcenar renders the biblical Paradise supererogatory to her narrative, asserting that Man is in reality far removed from the divinely created pre-lapsarian figure of the biblical text; on the contrary he is a brute emerging from the abysm of time. There is arguably, however, a form of Paradise and that is nature itself, particularly when untrammelled and uncompromised by the presence of Man. That said, rather than the textual Garden of Eden, in this work it takes the form of the geographical location of the North-West European landmass, already referred to. This is a region where the oceans are not immobile or merely picture-pretty, 'mais bougeant et changeant au cours des heures'. In this landscape the trees redden in Autumn while in Spring the needles of the pines display, 'une mince capsule brune.'[146] An important element is the silence; in this world no sound is heard of men or of human tools. On the other hand there is birdsong, including their alarm signals when they sight the approach of weasels or squirrels. This apprises us that we are not in a land of myth or make-believe, but the natural one with which we are familiar, at least in northern latitudes, one in which nature is a round of birth, death, predatory feeding and killing as part of the natural cycle. It is not a world of escapism. Here the sound of insects prevails and they are both predators and prey while bears root out beehives in search of honey and lynxes take down deer:

> Baignons dans ce silence presque vierge de bruits de voix et d'outils humains, où s'entendent seuls les chants des oiseaux ou leur appel avertisseur quand un ennemi, belette ou écureuil, s'approche, le bourdonnement par myriades des moustiques, à la fois prédateurs et proies, le grondement d'un ours cherchant dans la fente d'un tronc un rayon de miel que défendent en vrombissant les abeilles, ou encore le râle d'un cerf mis en pièces par un loup-cervier.[147]

The aural component continues to be emphasized. It is in this world of physical nature that we hear the dive of a duck, the sound of a swan as it takes to the air, the

---

[146] *Archives,* p. 956.
[147] *Archives,* p. 956.

glide of a snake, the roll of porpoises. What is decidedly absent is the pollution occasioned by, 'la fumée d'aucune chaudière.'[148] The appeal to us is as follows, '[T]ournons avec la terre qui roule comme toujours inconsciente d'elle-même, belle planète au ciel.'[149] By the time of writing pictures of the earth from space had commonly been witnessed.[150] The praise here for the earth is unequivocal and this is followed by arguably the most telling detail of all, 'Le soleil chauffe la mince croûte vivante.'[151] From the central role played by the sun in its life-giving relation to the thin crust on which all are dependent, we move to the contribution of the rain, the snow and then to a consideration of the heavenly bodies, the moon and finally the stars, evoked as follows:

> Et, quand la lumière de la lune ne les occulte pas, les étoiles luisent, à peu près placées comme elles le sont aujourd'hui, mais non encore reliées entre elles par nous en carrés, en polygones, en triangles imaginaires, et n'ayant pas encore reçu des noms de dieux et de monstres qui ne les concernent pas.[152]

Yourcenar's Paradise is the world we inhabit; perhaps the point is that what we have been given is in fact a Paradise, if only we could allow ourselves to see it. However, Yourcenar's view of it is far from being a Romanticised one. Furthermore, man is a most dubious addition to this plenitude of natural wonder and a source of great threat to it. Man is in an uneasy symbiosis with the world in which he resides. His relationship to the externalized Other is restless, problematic and constantly tending to the negative.

---

148 *Archives*, p. 956.
149 *Archives*, p. 956.
150 For the first photo from the moon, 23 August, 1966, see, for example, Ben P. Stein, '45 Years Ago: How the 1st Photo of Earth From the Moon Happened', *Science & Astronomy* (August 23, 2011), https://www.space.com/12707-earth-photo-moon-nasa-lunar-orbiter-1-anniversary.html Accessed, 8.vi.'19.
151 *Archives*, p. 956.
152 *Archives*, p. 957.

Central to the Yourcenar thesis is the assertion that from the very moment he enters his world at the beginning of the Holocene Epoch Man is at odds with it; he is, 'Le prédateur-roi, le bûcheron des bêtes et l'assassin des arbres.'[153] The cluster, 'l'homme-loup, l'homme-renard, l'homme-castor' indicates a particular equivalence between man and nature; perhaps too it suggests a totemic relationship on man's part as he learns from that nature and adopts qualities which enable him to master it to his own immediate advantage. The list which follows this, of Man's perpetrations against the world in which he finds himself, is considerable. To quite an extent Yourcenar sees the problematic of this lying in the distinctive quality man displays, his ability to choose:

> L'homme avec ses pouvoirs qui, de quelque manière qu'on les évalue, constituent une anomalie dans l'ensemble des choses, avec son don redoutable d'aller plus avant dans le bien et dans le mal que le reste des espèces vivantes connnues de nous, avec son horrible et sublime faculté de choix.[154]

The determination here to be quite explicit with its emphasis on choice as a defining human quality makes it clear that Yourcenar does not accept a deterministic categorization for the human being. The issue is in the tension between the 'horrible' and the 'sublime' – which will win out? Importantly, in the message of the *Mémoires* overall, the answer to this allows less and less for a margin of error as the capacity for self-destruction continues to grow.

From this point on through the evolution of society during the Holocene Epoch Yourcenar sees man as gradually coming to terms with his environment, developing social order, building villages, learning skills, crucially drawing from the natural world in which he finds himself. It is in character, nonetheless, that the first emerging

---

[153] *Archives,* p. 957.
[154] *Archives,* pp. 957 – 58.

group to whom she gives a name is Tollund Man, the social cluster in Denmark of the Iron Age and one which practiced human sacrifice.[155] At the very first emergence into history in this region Man is seen as slaughtering not only nature, but his own. She raises the question as to what the grounds might have been for this death – a victim seen rightly or wrongly as being a traitor, a deserter, a sexual misfit? While we do not know the deity to whom the victim was sacrificed, whichever of these, if it was one of these, the surviving face is strikingly intelligent:

> L'homme de Tollund, contemporain de l'âge du fer danois, momifié la corde au cou dans un marais où les citoyens bien-pensants de l'époque jetaient, paraît-il, leurs traîtres vrais ou faux, leurs déserteurs, leurs efféminés, en offrande à on ne sait quelle déesse, à l'un des visages les plus intelligents qui puissant être.[156]

It seems not inappropriate to point out that Yourcenar's argument expressed here has had strong confirmation from subsequent discoveries. Four years after her death the body of Ötzi the Iceman was recovered in South Tyrol. Dated in the period between 3,400 and 3,100 BCE, in their discussion Shadbolt and Hampson state:

> Ötzi the Iceman is perhaps the best known [example of natural mummification], discovered in an Austrian glacier complete with his hunting kit, and arrow and bludgeon wounds from fatal adversaries. He seems, from third and fourth party blood on his weapons, to have wounded his enemies, or worse, before they finally killed him.[157]

Just as Yourcenar asserts of Tollund Man, that at his first appearance man is seen to be belligerent, murderous even, it now turns out to have also been the case so much earlier, an assertion supported by evidence dating two and half thousand years before the discovery in Tollund.

---

[155] P.V. Glob, *The Bog People: Iron-Age Man Preserved* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969, 2010). This text does not appear among those listed in Yourcenar's library. The text listed is Christian Fischer, *The Tollund Man and the Elling Woman* (Silkeborg: Silkeborg Bogtrykkeri A/S, s.d., s.p.).
[156] *Archives*, pp. 959 – 60.
[157] Nigel Shadbolt and Roger Hampson, *The Digital Ape: How to Live (in Peace) with Smart Machines* (Melbourne, London: Scribe, 2018), p. 81.

Shadbolt's and Hampson's statement occurs as part of a larger discussion in which they point out that:

> We were born with axes in our hands. Everyone reading this book is perfectly fashioned by evolution to make and use one. The brain bred into us by handaxe culture is what enables us to read this sentence. We were tool-using, higher apes, coexisting with tool-using hominins, long before we became *Homo sapiens*. We became handaxe makers and deployers, and expert teachers of our children about handaxes. That was a precursor to, and a necessary condition for, the development of language and the complex self-ideation which goes with it.[158]

This is the inheritance Yourcenar is working both with and against; with, in that for her the handaxe has been replaced by the pen or the typewriter, against in that in our modern world the tools for self-destruction have now become so extensive and have such capacity for human annihilation that every sinew must be bent to try to preclude their use in any circumstances. This is the moral and ethical purport of her writing. Yourcenar's concern with nature, a profound respect for it and her concern to preserve it in every way possible is not just a modish commitment to 'ecology'; it is a passionate concern, a deep anxiety that a failure on our part to understand how we relate to our planet may well lead to our extinction. For Yourcenar this outcome is possible precisely because of our human capacity to choose our fate, coupled with the fact that time and again we have made the mistake before we have learned the lesson and begun to try to put things right. In a modern world there is no longer the latitude to learn the hard way. Death, and in particular inadvertent death even when intentions are for the best as in the case of Fernande, but also of others who will be discussed, is a central concern of the work.

---

[158] *The Digital Ape*, p. 76.

The issue of the beliefs of the people of the region and particularly how it came to pass that they surrendered their belief systems for those of their conquerors is raised in the final section. Yourcenar says, 'On ne connaît bien un peuple qu'à travers ses dieux.'[159] The point is an important one for her; she will be querying the rigidities of the belief systems of her parents' world. We know nothing of the deities worshipped by Tollund Man, 'en offrande à on ne sait quelle déesse,'[160] As for the Celts, while we know of their druids, we know little of their beliefs. These in turn gave way to the gods of the Romans, in turn replaced by Christianity. It would be agreeable, Yourcenar asserts, to know when and precisely how this came about:

> On voudrait savoir à quelle date précise cette race troqua ses dieux primordiaux contre un Sauveur venu de Palestine, à quel moment la ménagère qui précéda de loin les Valentine, les Reine, les Joséphine et les Adrienne dont je suis sortie, (…)[161]

The dominant point Yourcenar seems, nevertheless, to want to make is that no matter what system of belief people had none of it was sufficiently efficacious to protect them from invasion, war and destruction:

> Le nouveau dieu n'a sauvé personne; les dieux anciens ne l'auraient pas fait non plus. Ni la déesse Rome, affaissée sur sa chaise curule.[162]

All the time the shadow of the violence of the twentieth century wars stands behind these evocations. It seems that 'Rome' in the passage can refer either to the Rome of classical times or to the church. In any event the stage is set for repeated invasions, collapse and the task to rebuilding and reconstructing, 'Ce ne serait pas la dernière fois.'[163] In this way time becomes the reiteration of the patterns of time itself.

---

[159] *Archives,* p. 963.
[160] *Archives,* p. 960
[161] *Archives,* p. 965.
[162] *Archives,* p. 967.
[163] *Archives,* p. 967.

1.7 Time past, emplotment and the status of the event

From the preceding it can be stated that time as it is outlined by Yourcenar falls into four divisions, geological time, deep time, historical time and the history of contemporary events. To rephrase these divisions in other terms they may be termed geological time (again), the Holocene Epoch, the Anthropocene and the modern or to put the matter otherwise, 'l'histoire événementielle'.[164] As has been seen, the first of these, while clearly understood and appreciated by Yourcenar cannot be considered as history, for man does not come within it; it is devoid of a *mentalité*. It is the last three which are applicable. In the manner in which she organizes the relation of time past Yourcenar shows certain affinities to the approach adopted by Fernand Braudel, sufficient to warrant comparison.[165] Braudel's work on the Mediterranean was first published in 1949. This work and its new approach to history was much remarked on in intellectual French circles throughout the 1960s; in 1973 Labrousse termed it 'an epoch in world historiography.'[166] In his Introduction to the first edition Braudel states:

> The final effect then is to dissect history into various planes, or, to put it another way, to divide historical time into geographical time, social time, and individual time.[167]

Of these three sections the one which has become best known in this approach is the first, what he terms the 'longue durée'. Braudel argues that in historical study the

---

[164] Informally, the Holocene Epoch may also be conveniently termed 'la longue durée' see: Fernand Braudel, 'Histoire et sciences sociales, la longue durée', *Annales, E.S.C.*, Oct – Dec. 1958, 725 – 53.
[165] Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II*, rvd. 2nd. ed. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966), trans. by Siân Reynolds, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1972), p. 20.
[166] For the quotation see: Peregrine Hordern and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000), p. 36.
[167] Braudel, p. 21.

event hardly counts, what really matters is the slow march of time and how over a very long period it gradually shapes the world and society into the forms with which we have become familiar, '… a history whose passage is almost imperceptible, that of a man in relation to the environment, a history in which all change is slow, a history of constant repetition, ever-recurring cycles.'[168] His major work ostensibly is about Philip II of Spain and the gradual demise of his empire. The study culminates in this event, but in fact it can be argued that in reality it is about the Mediterranean and the role it played in bringing about the set of circumstances in which Philip lived and with which he worked. Much as his empire was eclipsed, in and around the same time the central inner sea, the Mediterranean, declined in importance and the centre of power and wealth shifted across the Alps to Northern Europe.

Geography and the environment, by which here is meant the physical environment of seas, coasts, plains, hills, mountains, all that grows and thrives within them, play a large part in Braudel's understanding of how the forces of history work. He states:

> Geography in this context is no longer an end in itself but a means to an end. It helps us to rediscover the slow unfolding of structural realities, to see things in the perspective of the very long term. Geography, like history, can answer many questions. Here it helps us to discover the almost imperceptible movements of history.

The first part of Braudel's three-part work is given over to 'geohistory' and it is this which suggests an affinity between the approaches of the two writers. In discussing his work Hordern and Purcell point to the fact that there is a long tradition of a tendency, if not more, in this perspective to geographical determinism stretching from Herodotus to Montesquieu and beyond.[169] That Braudel himself was not unaware of

[168] Braudel, p. 20.
[169] Hordern and Purcell, p. 38.

this is shown by his comment, which they note, '… even one undertaken in the doubtful pursuit of a determinist explanation.'[170] The point finds further confirmation in a remark by Braudel, on this occasion picked up on by Ricoeur, 'It is worth repeating that history is not made by geographical features, but by the men who control or discover them.'[171] A further important consideration is that Braudel was greatly influenced in his thinking by Vidal de la Blache. Initially a historian, Vidal became a geographer and he influenced a whole generation of students. Hordern and Purcell state, 'The section on the Mediterranean in Vidal's *Principles of Human Geography* (1926) prefigures Part I of Braudel's work (the one which treats of the geographical context and which is the least contested part of his argument) in most of its ahistorical essentials.' In this connection Hordern and Purcell also remark that it is part of a long-established tradition in French higher education to teach geography and history together, '… regional histories begin with a chapter on the flora and fauna, functioning as the backdrop to the historical discussion that follows.' This suggests that in reaching back into a remarkably early period of time and in setting her discussion in a strikingly wide-ranging physical geographical span Yourcenar may not only be following a lead established by Braudel, but also be conforming to a long-established French pedagogical tradition.

In view of this it becomes important to explore the extent to which Yourcenar's time divisions are of a piece with Braudel's. As with him, her geographically defined area is immensely extensive, reaching across the area in any sense to be understood as Europe viewed physically and extending into Russia and the Middle East, while stopping at the northern limits of the Mediterranean itself. In temporal terms while,

---

[170] Braudel, p. 23.
[171] Braudel, p. 225. In Ricoeur, I, p. 210.

as has been seen, she is aware of geological time, her historical interest begins with the advent of man on the North-Western European landmass. The 'longue durée' is more general and more loosely applied. Meanwhile, in a Braudelian perspective where Marguerite Yourcenar makes an audacious move is in transferring the centre of activities of her narrative from the Mediterranean to the centre of Flanders, a much smaller setting but one with its own intensity of focus and inherited richness. In a separate additional notable departure where he treats of an imperial majesty, Philip II, she gives her energies to recreating the world of a well-to-do couple with no special claim to fame, a kind of post-Revolutionary Everyman duo of the period of the *Belle Époque* who happen to be her parents. There are other major differences too between her and Braudel. Significantly, where in the course of his discussion of the 'longue durée' Braudel's method has a leaning towards a measure of determinism, as has been remarked, Marguerite Yourcenar repudiates any such perspective when she comments on the differentiating quality of man, which she lays out in a passage which has already been noted – his ability to choose, 'L'homme […] avec son horrible et sublime faculté de choix.'[172] It is the ability to exercise free will which is paramount here. She argues that in human affairs it will be decisive. As Yourcenar negotiates the passage of time from the earliest occurrence of man within the area under scrutiny until the finding of the early remains of Tollund Man, she makes brief reference to practices of a social and ethnological kind. Nevertheless, there is no attempt to place these on a scientific, empirical footing as a fieldworker might. In Yourcenar's case the narrative is designed to underscore the individual and collective tendency on Man's part to damage fellow humans and also the natural environment, all at a clear cost to society. In this way the objective of the passage is to show that there is a

[172] *Archives*, pp. 957 – 58

precedent for the subsequent catastrophe which was to befall the Belgian region in the course of the two World Wars. In the hands of this writer death plays a different role from that of the demise of Philip II and his empire in Braudel. Death and the potential for it and of this world of her forebears lies at the heart of Yourcenar's exploration in the *Labyrinthe*. It is man's incorrigible capacity for dealing out death and destruction to his fellows and to the world he lives in which is in question. Emphatically, every time this happens it is the outcome of choices he makes. Things could be otherwise.

The second temporal category put forward by Braudel is what he terms 'conjonctures' or 'social time'. 'Conjonctures' amount to a clustering of a series of 'events' which taken together give a single coherent review of a particular person, a set of circumstances or a historical development. It can relate to any such 'cluster' and is not required to be specific to any one period. Hordern and Purcell note that the notion is derived from an economic model which at the time of its use was already becoming obsolete. In Yourcenar's scheme of things there is also a second phase or 'plane', to use Braudel's term, in her presentation of the sequence of time past. A significant temporal phase, it is here argued, is being launched in the second section of *Souvenirs pieux, La Tournée des châteaux,* a moment when the writer reviews a number of the several residences associated with the extended family on her mother's side. In this text that is what is understood as the Anthropocene; this will be discussed in the next chapter.

Braudel's third category is 'l'histoire événementielle' or individual history, a category he almost scorns:

> I am by temperament a 'structuralist', little tempted by the event, or even by the short-term conjuncture which is after all merely a grouping of events in the same area.[173]

In Yourcenar's case, on the other hand, the event takes on an altogether greater significance. She treats extensively of the day-to-day events of Fernande's and Michel's lives. Central, though, is an understanding and appreciation of the natural environment, including, it will emerge, as this is understood by a growing child. Here too flora and fauna are crucial to an understanding and appreciation of what Yourcenar is arguing for. The conclusion is that if the geological era is set aside, Yourcenar shows a measure of similarity to the threefold temporal structure of Braudel, whether through design or not dissimilar perspectives, but, that said, she puts them to characteristically distinctive uses expressive of her own views and literary intentions.

In his discussion of 'conjonctures' Braudel produces what Ricoeur terms 'a space-in-motion made of roads, markets and trade.'[174] This, Ricoeur tells us, accounts for why it is necessary for Braudel to speak of banks and of industrialization and trading families, but especially of cities whose appearance changes the face of the land. Yourcenar has already addressed much of this world in *L'Œuvre au noir*; here in the *Labyrinthe* it gives way to a different dynamic, the question of the environment, more as this is understood in a contemporary idiom and represented in all their temporal manifestations by flora and fauna. This is to be distinguished from a Braudelian ecogeography. It is also to be distinguished from ecology. The word 'écologie' seems to occur only once throughout the *Mémoires*. This seems to say no more than

---

[173] Braudel, p. 1244.
[174] Ricœur, *Time*, I, p. 210.

that Marguerite Yourcenar was fully conversant with the term and its implications as she was of much else.[175] Horden and Purcell, for example, state:

> Ecology is the scientific study of the relationship between living organisms and their animate and inanimate environment. There is as little space in it for, on the one hand, simple environmental determinism (now, fortunately, both theoretically and empirically discredited) as for vague popular concerns with pollution on the other. An ecologist is customarily involved in the detailed – and usually quantified – study of niches, systems, food chains, transfers of energy, the size and distribution of animal or human populations, and so on.[176]

Clearly Yourcenar's writing does not come within this classification and it is important to appreciate this. At the same time her deep meditation on man's dangerously flawed nature and how it manifests itself is equally clearly removed from any mere 'vague popular concern' on the issue of the environment.

Writing at the beginning of the 1980s and commenting on Braudel Ricoeur states that 'the history of long time-spans has now carried the day and tends to occupy the entire field of historical studies.'[177] Writing in 2000 Holdern and Purcell point out that this has in fact turned out not to be the case.[178] (Their opus will be an important exception.) By that time Braudel's work can be seen to have brought about a summation and to a close an entire epoch in Mediterranean scholarship. Hordern and Purcell also comment on the manner in which Braudel deploys his evidence and question 'whether he has entirely succeeded in translating that vision into historiography.'[179] They point out that *The Mediterranean* can be approached as a

---

[175] For a discussion of the ecological in Yourcenar see: Lucille Desblache, 'Marguerite Yourcenar, les animaux et l'écologie', *Alizés, Revue angliciste de La Réunion, Faculté des Lettres et Sciences humaines* (Réunion: Université de La Réunion, 2009), 173 – 83.
[176] Hordern and Purcell, p. 45.
[177] Ricœur, *Time*, I, p. 207.
[178] Hordern and Purcell, p. 39.
[179] Hordern and Purcell, p. 42.

series of discrete essays, that 'the ecologising and interactionist perspectives cannot be satisfactorily integrated.' They feel forced to conclude that *The Mediterranean* 'is thus best seen as a historical panorama, a massive specific picture full of engaging detail. Its author's achievement is less to have advanced specific hypotheses … than to have enriched our imaginary tableau of the period.'[180] They conclude that *The Mediterranean* 'is, then, widely held to be a major yet flawed achievement.'[181]

Coming to this matter by quite a different route Ricoeur's conclusions are remarkably similar. For Ricoeur, 'that historical events do not differ radically from the events framed by a plot' is an important thesis. Ricoeur sees Braudel's 'dissecting of history into various planes' (p. 21) as constituting a major contribution to the theory of narrative time. The question for him is what is it which enables us to make the distinction between a 'history whose passage is imperceptible" and a "history on the scale … of individual men". This is to state in philosophical terms the reservation expressed by Hordern and Purcell. Ricoeur states:

> It seems to me that the answer is to be sought in the principle of unity which, despite the separation into different spans of time, holds the three parts of Braudel's work together.[182]

For Ricoeur the problem resides in the approach Braudel takes to the event, the third category of historical time. As noted, on p. 901 Braudel states, 'I am by no means the sworn enemy of the event', yet he has long asserted that what really matters in history is the 'longue durée', that he is little tempted by the event, or even by the short-term 'conjoncture', ' which is after all merely a grouping of events in the same area.'[183] Braudel's art structures his history of events in which there is a great deal in the way

[180] Hordern and Purcell, p. 42.
[181] Hordern and Purcell, p. 43.
[182] Ricœur, *Time*, I, p. 208.
[183] Braudel, p. 1244.

of dates, battles and treaties, 'not by dividing them into periods, as all historians do, but by reanchoring them in structures and conjunctions.' The culmination of this approach is, 'Spain leaving the Mediterranean. At the same time the Mediterranean steps outside the spotlight of global history.'[184]

This being the case the question arises, why then was it necessary to devote pages to the death of Philip II, for, as Ricœur states, from the viewpoint of the total history the Mediterranean lies at the heart of the work; this death was not a great event. That death reveals an individual destiny which does not fit exactly within the framework of an explanation which itself is not scaled to the measurement of mortal time. Yet not to have included it risked the issue of knowing history as human history and this makes it an indispensible component. This fact also gives us an important insight to the central significance of the death of Fernande which otherwise might seem almost marginal to the Yourcenarian narrative or at least much less consequential.

The conclusion is that taking the three levels of Braudel's work together, they constitute a 'quasi-plot'. In answer to the question, 'What frames the plot?', the answer is the decline of the Mediterranean as a collective here on the stage of world history. It is not the death of Philip II, but the end of the conflict between the two 'political leviathans (Spain and Turkey) and the shift of history towards the Atlantic and Northern Europe.' In view of this the overall Braudelian plot must be said in Ricoeur's words to remain 'a virtual plot'.[185] Didactic reasons require that the 'three different conceptions of time' (p. 1238) remain disconnected. As Hordern and Purcell

[184] Braudel, p. 1184.
[185] Ricœur, *Time*, I, p. 214.

point out and Braudel explicitly admits (p. 21), the division of history into three layers or time-scales is really merely a heuristic device.[186]

What Ricoeur is able to assert beyond Hordern and Purcell is that Braudel has invented a new type of plot. His virtual plot 'teaches us to unite heterogeneous structures, cycles and events by joining together heterogeneous temporalities and contradictory chronicles.'[187] A consequence is that depending on the emphasis the reading can stress either the Mediterranean or the imperial death. Either way 'the history of events lacks the principle of necessity and probability that Aristotle attributed to the well constructed plot.'[188] It is through the quasi-plot that Ricoeur is enabled to question Braudel's diminution of the event. Ricoeur finds the event neither necessarily 'brief' nor 'nervous', terms Braudel used to describe it, but a variable on the plot, for the truth is the event is what distinguishes the historian's concept of structure from that of the sociologist or the economist. Thus we come by a full circle to Ricoeur's opening thesis that, 'historical events do not differ radically from the events framed by a plot'; in short, what is the case for history is the case for literature as well.[189]

Ricœur remarks that all three temporal levels contribute to the overall plot. Furthermore, and he gives the example of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, a novelist, he says, would have combined all three in a single narrative. This is what Yourcenar does. In struggling to conceptualise a total history Braudel cites possible writers for comparison – Gabriel Ardisio, Jean Giono, Carlo Levi, Lawrence Durrell, André

---

[186] Hordern and Purcell, p. 38.
[187] Ricœur, *Time*, I, p. 216.
[188] Ricœur, *Time*, I, p. 216.
[189] Ricœur, *Time*, I, p. 208.

Chamson.[190] It is noteworthy that without exception these are littérateurs, not historians. This very fact prompts the reflection that in his *Méditerrannée* Braudel himself is at bottom evincing a novelistic turn. Hordern and Purcell's estimation of the imaginative character of his sweep has already been noted while Ricoeur comments, '… the major contribution of this work, is to open it up a new career for the very notion of a plot, and, in this, for that of the event.' The conclusion is that whether by part imitation of Braudel or, without wishing to insist on that in any way, independently through creative instinct and practice Marguerite Yourcenar has evolved a threefold temporal character in her narrative, one which while in significant ways is in line with Braudel's, is more deeply emplotted than his and which, paradoxically, as a consequence in a key regard is more truly historical.

[190] Braudel, p. 1234.

1.8 Conclusion

It has now been seen that in choosing to write about the world of her parents, the world of the *Belle Époque*, Marguerite Yourcenar finds it fruitful to construct what in many ways is a hybrid work, one which enables her to access insights and levels of understanding which reach beyond those conventionally explored by genres such as biography or autobiography. In doing this she reflects a contemporary interest in narrative hybridity. Central to this is a particular characteristic interweave between fiction and history. In the process of writing this she opens up a universalizing perspective on human activity in the region of her forebears, conceived in the widest possible geographical and historical timespans. In doing so she draws on notions of deep primordial time as known and recorded in the North-West European landmass dating from the end of the ice-age. This is the Holocene Epoch. In taking this approach she is of a piece with leading post-war French historical thinkers, of whom Braudel is the best known. Examination reveals that she does not follow slavishly in this, but works out her own lines of approach. For her what is central is the death of her mother and it turns out to be the primary organizing feature of the work. What also emerges in the course of the discussion is a picture of man. The picture she creates here is of a being who, while he has freewill, is instinctively belligerent, often negative, frequently destructive. That is not the sole or the whole story, but the predisposition has become increasingly concerning in view of the modern capacity man has for destroying his environment and his fellow beings with it. Giving clear evidence of that from the text is the concern of the next two chapters which respectively address matters of the human impact on fauna and flora in a context of temporality.

2. HISTORICAL TIME AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

2.1 Introduction

The second category of time is historical time, what Braudel terms 'conjonctures', a record of things past focused round documented evidence. While this can treat of history of an ancient period, and even of prehistory, merging into archaeology, such studies tend to be of more recent times, yet still of periods not generally in recent memory and largely document based. This tends to be different too from the kind of personal history of the sort seen in the recall of personal memories and associations, matters which tend to belong rather to autobiography or recent biography as much of the information being related there is at least coextensive with the writer's own memories. Marguerite Yourcenar's *Mémoires* also contain much that may be said to fall within this category of historical time or conjuncture. Discussion of it does not preclude reference to deep time. Viewed externally, this material has been surveyed and discussed by Mireille Blanchet-Douspis with careful reviews of the conditions and circumstances of the nineteenth century in which much of the action being described took place.[1] Somewhat differently, the present discussion works outwards from the inner structures of the narrative and follows the prerogatives of the narrator as she makes her moves and choices. As with deep time it becomes evident that much of this material is also thematically associated with nature and the environment; these elements may be said in Ricœurian terms to constitute its emplotment. In order to manage the discussion it will be discussed under two considerations, that of flora and that of fauna; put more simply, growing and living things, with the primary emphasis in the first on trees and secondly animals, essentially domesticated, living with man.

[1] Mireille Blanchet-Douspis, *L'influence de l'histoire contemporaine dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008).

2.2 Where deep time and historical time meet

Introducing concerns about the environment in a framework of deep time Yourcenar's perspectives find further confirmation in the remark she makes in the first Section of *La Nuit des temps* where she talks about the substratum which underlies her native region:

> Vers Lille, Anzin et Lens, sous l'humus raclé par l'exploitation minière, se tassent les forêts fossiles, le résidu géologique d'un autre cycle, plus immémorial encore, de climats et de saisons.[2]

It is this enlargement of view which enables her to evoke the scene of imaginative action and origins which go to make up her narrative as being circumscribed in place by the dunes and pinelands which reach from Portugal to Scandinavia and as far as the steppes of Russia where things are open-ended and there is no clearly defined border or end:

> Contemplons plutôt ce monde que nous n'encombrons pas encore, ces quelques lieues de la forêt coupée de landes qui s'étale presque ininterrompue du Portugal à la Norvège, des dunes aux futures steppes russes.[3]

In this way the writer embraces the Mediterranean and the world of Rome to the south and to the south-east at the height of its powers, so reaching to ancient Persia as well as into the land of the Rus beyond Kiev. It is important, too, to note that Yourcenar makes no attempt to represent this in the terminology of scientific biological or technical environmental language. The pine forests she invokes stand for and represent the world of flora, fully understood.

---

[2] *Archives*, p. 954.
[3] *Archives*, pp. 955 – 56.

When Marguerite Yourcenar describes the destruction of the pine trees round Mont-Noir early in the First World War she chooses a strong image of comparison:

> Le Mont-Noir en particulier doit son nom aux sombres sapins dont il était couvert avant les futiles holocaustes de 1914.[4]

The employment of the term 'holocauste' here is clearly intentional. That a casual indifference to the destruction of nature in any of its forms predisposes man to an equally indifferent approach to the destructive devastation of his fellows is a point regularly insisted upon in Yourcenr's writings. In the account immediately following these words the confrontation is pictured as being directly between the trees and the weapons of war:

> Les obus ont changé son aspect de façon plus radicale qu'en détruisant le château construit en 1824 par mon trisaïeul.[5]

This strong statement is then followed by a sombre reflection on the difficulties of a simple reconstructing to produce an identical landscape:

> Les arbres peu à peu sont revenus, mais, comme toujours en pareil cas, d'autres essences ont pris la relève: les noirs sapins pareils à ceux qu'on voit à l'arrière-plan des paysages de peintres allemands de la Renaissance ne prédominent plus. Il est vain d'imaginer les déboisements, et, s'il en est, les reboisements de l'avenir.[6]

Here Yourcenar forestalls any simplistic solution or dismissive remarks which might suggest that the trees will restore themselves quickly enough, no real harm has been done. Characteristically, to enforce her point she has recourse to the illustration from the evidence of art, citing the fidelity of the German artists of the Renaissance to what they observed. Germany was capable of producing art too, in this case painters who had responded to the aesthetic qualities of her native region. Each of the three time-

---

[4] *Archives*, p. 955.
[5] *Archives*, p. 955.
[6] *Archives*, p. 955.

spans of her *Mémoires* has embedded in it the theme of destruction in the face of war. The consequence of this is a tightening of the plot in Aristotelian terms, an effect which makes the whole more sombre.

Under the entry 'Écologie' in the *Dictionnaire Marguerite Yourcenar* Walter Wagner states, '[E]lle [i.e. Yourcenar] est sans doute la première et plus importante écrivain écologiste de la littérature française au XXe siècle.'[7] Drawing attention to Yourcenar's evocation of the entire North-East European landmass as an extended reach of pines in prehistoric times Wagner terms this approach a form of ecological fundamentalism (*fundamentalökologischem Diskurs*).[8] He then points out that thinking on the topic of the environment in general dates from the 1980s among critics in the Anglo-American sphere.[9] In particular he draws attention to the work done by Cheryll Glotfelty, citing her sentence, 'Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.'[10] Here too he refers to the observation of Anna Bramwell who in her study of the history of ecology remarks, '[D]isaffection with the extant has been of such an order as seriously to impair their [the ecologists'] sense of reality.'[11] In slipping into a position which is old-fashioned (*basalen weltanschaulich*) and out of touch (*Realitätsverlust*) with reality Wagner argues that Yourcenar aligns herself with one of the two main schools

---

[7] *Dictionnaire Marguerite Yourcenar*, p. 173.
[8] Walter Wagner, 'Ökologische Utopie und ökozentriches Paradigma: Marguerite Yourcenars *Le Labyrinthe du monde*' in *Reflexe eines Umwelt- und Klima- bewusstseins in fiktionalen Texten der Romania*, ed. by Cornelia Klettke / Georg Maag (Berlin: 2010), pp. 207 – 225.
[9] Wagner, p. 208.
[10] *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, (Athens, London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), p. XVIII.
[11] Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 246.

of ecophilosophy known as Deep Ecology.[12] Wagner cites in particular in this connection the thinker Arne Naess, founder of this school of thought.[13] The second school, known as Shallow Ecology, finds place for the possibility of positive human intervention in the processes of Nature, a viewpoint which accepts the need for mankind on the planet and is more associated with thinkers such as Hans Jonas and René Dubos.[14] The danger with a commitment to the principle of Deep Ecology is that it can lead to or signal a form of misanthropy, what Luc Ferry termed, 'haine de l'humain comme tel.'[15] In a note to this statement Wagner cites a further quotation in keeping with Ferry's sentiment, this time drawn from Dominique Simonnet, 'Les intransigeances écologistes ne reflètent en fait que l'inverse des excès de la société qu'ils [les écologistes] combattent.'[16] In Wagner's opinion Yourcenar falls into this category: *Yourcenars Umweltdiskurs wurzelt zweifellos* (without doubt rooted) *in dieser Dialektik.*[17] In the same essay Wagner surveys a number of points in the course of which the tenacity of a narrative expressing nostalgia for a lost Paradise is seen as playing a key part.[18] In support of this thesis Wagner quotes the historian Carolyn Merchant who suggests, 'The Recovery of Eden story is the mainstream narrative of Western culture.'[19] Here Wagner finds a strong desire for a wilderness

---

[12] Wagner, p. 217.

[13] Arne Næss, 'The Basics of the Deep Ecology Movement', in *The Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Næss*, trans. and ed. by Alan Drengson and Bill Devall (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2008), pp. 105 – 119.

[14] Wagner notes that Jonas states, 'eine *unbedingte Pflicht* (the absolute necessity) der Menschen zum Dasein.' Hans Jonas, *Der Prinzip Verantwortung: Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), p. 80, trans. by J. Greisch, *Le Principe responsabilité; Une éthique pour la civilization technologique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990, 2008). The Dubos statement, 'La terre a besoin des hommes.' may be found in René Dubos, *Courtisons la terre* (Paris: Stock, 1980), p. 129.

[15] Luc Ferry, *Le Nouvel Ordre écologique: L'arbre, l'animal et l'homme* (Paris: Grasset, 1992), p. 33.

[16] Dominique Simonnet, *L'écologisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France (Que sais-je? 1784), 1994), p. 117.

[17] Wagner, p. 218, n. 40.

[18] Wagner, pp. 207 – 225.

[19] Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (New York, London: Routledge, 2003), p. 2.

prior to the time of human habitation and he goes on to assert that it is possible to see in Yourcenar's writing of a history of Mankind since the Fall a pained lamentation for the loss of an original symbiosis between Man and Nature (*Verlust der ursprünglichen Symbiose von Mensch und Natur*).[20]

The point is an important one. It presupposes, however, that Yourcenar is indeed wedded to the notion of a possible Arcadia and his first suggestion is that she has a sympathy with the powerful notion of the myth of the Golden Age (*wirkungsmächtigen Mythos vom Goldenen Zeitalter*).[21] It has to be said, though, that Yourcenar does not subscribe to such a notion. It seems clear, on the contrary, that Yourcenar's argument centres in fact on the absence of any such rapport between man and nature, but rather that in his very nature and primary instincts Man is from the outset predisposed to a relationship of antagonism in his approach to Nature. Her argument is that it is precisely this fact which lies at the heart of many of the problems which beset the planet. Furthermore, in her portrayal not only is Nature governed by processes of birth, feeding and death, it is fully predatory according to its own laws. The beauty inherent in Nature is not something Nature itself has any appreciation or awareness of; it is Man who registers that. There is a further significant consideration. As noted in the extensive geographical sweep described above, Yourcenar is careful not to define the limits of the reach of the great forests, in effect, to totalize her picture of that world; it remains open-ended and fluid with almost limitless potential. The non-totalising character is significant and finds affinity in the debate between Derrida and Gadamer where the latter was able to assure his

[20] Wagner, p. 214.
[21] Wagner, p. 220.

interlocutor his perspectives were not blighted by limiting closure.[22] This aspect at issue here is crucial for Yourcenar is not to be boxed into the constraints of a perception of being a deep ecologist, pejoratively understood. She is pointing, rather, to areas of major concern which have a forward-looking perspective, not to be confused with a regressive lament for an irrecoverable time past.

[22] *Dialogue and Deconstruction: the Gadamer – Derrida Encounter*, ed. by Diane P. Michelfelder & Richard E. Palmer (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 124 – 25.

2.3 Felled trees; experience, reading, reflections

In her appointment book Grace Frick relates how, returning to Mount Desert in the summer of 1955 she and Yourcenar found 'that hundreds of trees had been "ruthlessly" cut to the stumps in the wooded lot behind their house.' Howard goes on to say:

> They mourned not only the destruction of habitat for birds and other wildlife but also the loss of a sight and a sound buffer between Petite Plaisance and houses north of their property.[23]

The tenor of the response does not suggest one of a committed extremist perspective and does not seem unreasonable in the circumstances. Characteristically, the two women set about addressing the situation and their resolution was driven by more than mere aestheticism or gardening enthusiasm:

> From the "desolation" of the woodlot, she [Frick] transplanted blueberries and cranberries to the grounds of Petite Plaisance. She oversaw the planting of apple trees on the west lawn and amended the soil around the Montmorency cherries to the east. She […] struggles with a kiwi vine that would eventually grow into a leafy pergola, unique for the region, over the kitchen porch. As Yourcenar once advised the homesick young Frenchman John Lambert, to feel at home in America one must create, "as Grace and I have done, a domain, however small it may be, governed by fantasy or one's personal wishes."[24]

The sequence is instructive in a number of ways. There is a clear determination to turn the loss of a natural amenity to an effect which will make a reclamation and reconfiguration possible and within a manageable timeframe. In addition, on a day-to-day basis Yourcenar was here directly encountering a casualness to woodland and its benefits which meshed disturbingly with the constant erosion of Europe's woodlands she chronicles as being set in train from deep time and then reaching a

---

[23] Joan E. Howard, *We met in Paris: Grace Frick and her life with Marguerite Yourcenar* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2018), p. 223.
[24] Howard, *We met in Paris*, pp. 223 – 24. For the Yourcenar quotation, *Lettres à ses amis*, p. 125.

significant personal climax in the destruction of the pine trees of Mont Noir early in the Great War. Important too is the knowledge enabling the development of 'un domaine'. Yourcenar was informed on many aspects of trees, bushes and plants and here the point is that, as with her knowledge of animals, it far exceeds anything she refers to in the course of the *Mémoires*. Flowers do feature in the work at various points, but as it is hoped to be shown, to particular artistic effect; the *Mémoires* is not concerned to constitute a repository of lists of flora in a horticultural or biological inventorying fashion. Yourcenar fixes primarily on the feature of pine trees and finds in them a sufficiency to speak her message.

In the matter of flora Marguerite Yourcenar's primary focus is on trees. As well as being metonymic of flora generally in the narrative, they define the landscape and so belong to the contemporary, they lie at the heart of the Anthropocenic developments which will be discussed below, they are co-extensive with the geographical delineations of the Holocene Epoch and they constitute the residual underlay of geological time. Time in all its manifestations and the ecological come together in this one growth form and in ways which will have major consequences in the narrative. They are a central component in her thinking on nature, on flora and on ecology. That Yourcenar's thinking on these matters was directed in part by her reading may be seen from the fact that as well as a copy of the biologist Rachel Carson's landmark text, *Silent Spring*, which she had in her library in a 1962 edition, she had three copies of that author's *The Sea Around Us* – apposite for one living on an island – in addition to a copy of the less well known *The Sense of Wonder* .[25] This

[25] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* ((Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962); *The Sea Around Us* (New York: The New American Library [s.d.]); (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961); *The Sense of Wonder* (New York & Evanston: Harper & Row, 1965).

inclusiveness suggests a strong interest in the concerns of that writer. As Bérengère Deprez reports, Yourcenar had a number of writings of the American Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau's works in her library. As well as *Walden* and *The Maine Woods*, there were also two collections of his texts, *The Succession of Forest Trees, Wild Apples and Sounds* and finally *In Wilderness Is the Preservation of the World*.[26] These books focus largely on woodlands and the hills and natural terrain adjacent to where she and Frick lived. It was natural for them to be interested in these accounts; they described part of their world. That Thoreau was an influence on Yourcenar is not to be contested; indeed he was perceived as such an iconic writer – the adjective used by Deprez – that it is hardly to be believed that she was not made aware of him by Frick, if he was not already known to her. Deprez also notes the visit by Frick and Yourcenar to Baxter State Park. The place is significant for it was to here that Thoreau came on his return following his ascent of Mount Katahdin and it was here too that the women chanced across the bear in their path which was to feature subsequently in *Un homme obscur*. Deprez quotes Thoreau as he records coming back down into a wilderness. His text includes the words, 'This was the Earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old Night.'[27] Thoreau's quotation from Milton's *Paradise Lost* encourages us to pause and consider Yourcenar's practice, questioning whether she puts nature to the same set of uses in her writings as Thoreau does in his.

---

[26] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004); *The Maine Woods* (ed. Jeffrey C. Cramer (New Have Conn., London: Yale University Press, 2009); *Excursions* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1975); *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971).

[27] Bérengère Deprez, *Marguerite Yourcenar and the USA: From Prophecy to Protest* (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2009), p. 63.

It is a commonplace of Yourcenar studies that the writer was deeply versed in the Classics.[28] The classical authors whose influences appear in her works are predominantly the poets and dramatists along with a number of philosophers, including Plato. Progress in this area did not always come readily. Such was her slow progress with the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius that her father was moved to throw the bilingual edition out the window:

> [I]l jeta un jour par la fenêtre un Marc-Aurèle bilingue de la collection Loew (*sic*), que je ne savais encore ni traduire correctement du grec, ni prononcer convenablement en anglais.[29]

Michel's behaviour here was arguably one of the most inspired acts of teaching strategy in literary history.

The precocity of Yourcenar's reading in both French and English emerges clearly from what we learn of her reading during the Great War. For example, recounting the reading she did along with her father when in London in the course of the first fifteen months of the war Yourcenar states that they read together:

> [T]out Shakespeare, les poètes métaphysiques du xvii^{e} siècle, les lourds historiens de l'Angleterre victorienne et ses brûlants romantiques.[30]

Given this ambitious reading programme, supplemented as it was by Hugo, Balzac and the comedies of Musset, references to Saint-Simon which also occur appear seem neither implausible nor unlikely, notwithstanding her young age. In short, there was a rich strain of writing and a ferment of general ideas in French as well as in English available to Yourcenar and she gives indications of having drawn upon both.

---

[28] Rémy Poignault, *L'Antiquité dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar: littérature, mythe et histoire*, 2 vols (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1995).
[29] Marguerite Yourcenar, *Quoi? L'Éternité* in *Essais et mémoires* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1991), pp. 1187 – 1433 (p. 1379). *Loew* is a slip for the Loeb edition.
[30] *Quoi?*, p. 1379.

Françoise Bonali Fiquet cites the report by Jean Montalbetti on Yourcenar's reading during the war following the arrival of her and her father in Paris:

> Entre 1915 et 1918, l'adolescente se passionne pour l'histoire, lissant *l'Histoire d'Angleterre* de Thomas Macaulay, les *Mémoires* de Saint-Simon et de Cardinal de Retz, *La Révolution française* de Mignet, les *Mémoires* de Mme Roland et "nombre d'ouvrages historiques sur la Renaissance, la Révolution, le XVII^{e}siècle", qui ont dû avoir "une certaine influence sur [son] orientation future" (*YO*, p. 44).[31]

Yourcenar refers to Saint-Simon, that is Louis de Rouvroy, the writer of memoirs and courtier to Louis XIV, also elsewhere. In her interviews with Matthieu Galey in *Les Yeux ouverts* in answer to a question on her early reading of Dostoyevsky she remarks:

> Il y avait aussi des auteurs français, Saint-Simon, par exemple. Mon père aimait surtout les écrivains du xvii^{e} siècle. J'ai lu à peu près tout Saint-Simon avec lui. J'avais le sentiment d'y rencontrer les foules humaines, j'y ai vu le grand observateur de ce qui se passe, de ce qui passe… Quant à son style, il est si grand qu'à moins d'être vraiment du métier on ne s'aperçoit pas qu'il en a un. Sa langue est admirable, mais je me demande si ce n'est pas maintenant, surtout, qu'elle m'impressionne.[32]

The inventory of Yourcenar's library in Mount Desert lists not only the writings of Saint-Simon, but also the works of Bassompierre in addition to those of de Retz. The reference to these historians finds a further, if more reserved, mention in the *Archives du Nord* where she states, 'Je suppose que Michel a lu Retz ou Saint-Simon pendant que les femmes lisaient du Willy.' Of this reading Claude Benoît Morinière remarks that it will result in the outcome of 'laissant entendre que son père préférait la

---

[31] Françoise Bonali Fiquet, 'Les lectures de Marguerite Yourcenar enfant et adolescent', in *Marguerite Yourcenar et l'enfance*, ed. by Maryla Laurent et Rémy Poignault avec la collaboration de Lydie Waleryszak (Tours: SIEY, 2003), pp. 153 – 70 (p. 163). The internal quotation is taken from Jean Montalbetti, 'Marguerite Yourcenar dans son île de Mont-Désert: "Je me suis éloignée de la politique: l'essentiel est ailleurs"', *Portrait d'une voix: Vingt-trois entretiens (1952 – 1987)*, ed. by Maurice Delcroix (Paris: Gallimard, "Les Cahiers de la NRF", 2002), p. 191.

[32] Yourcenar, *Les yeux ouverts*, p. 49. On the reading Yourcenar was doing at the end of the war and shortly after see Josyane Savigneau, *Marguerite Yourcenar: L'Invention d'une vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), trans. by Joan Howard, *Marguerite Yourcenar: Inventing a Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 50.

compagnie de ces illustres mémorialistes à celle du romancier humoriste et superficiel, plus indiqué pour le sexe féminin.'[33] The comment does not compromise the interest stated above which she and her father found together in the great memorialist.

Yourcenar, then, read a number of the well known nineteenth-century English historians. While she does not name him, Carlyle can be considered as an important possibility for two of his books are to be found in Yourcenar's library, his essay on the *Niebelungenlied* and also his work, *Heroes and Hero Worship*.[34] Transcendentalism was a Unitarian response to the writings of W.F.G. Schlegel, but was also influenced by Carlyle who railed against industrialization.

An important influence, too, in the line of Transcendentalist thinking was Charles Fourier. While apart from the experiment with the Brook Farm Association for Industry and Education between 1841 and 1847 Fourier's phalansterian initiatives had mixed success in the US, his ideas struck a deep root in American thinkers and among the Transcendentalists in particular. In his survey of the extensive influence of Fourier Serge Audier writes:

> On pourrait ajouter à ce propos, concernant l'influence américaine, que le fouriérisme avait profondement marqué, dès la première moitié du xix^{e} siècle, le movement 'transcendantaliste' américain, réuni à Concord avec ses penseurs majeurs que furent Emerson et Thoreau, sur lesquels on reviendra tant leur rôle fut considérable dans la naissance d'une conscience écologique aux États-Unis.[35]

---

[33] Claude Benoit Morinière, 'Entre L'Histoire et l'histoire', in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Écrivain du XIXe siècle*, ed. by George Fréris et Rémy Poignault (Clermont-Ferrand: SIEY, 2004), pp. 21 – 32 (p. 30).
[34] Thomas Carlyle, *The Niebelungen Lied – An Essay* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, [n.d.]); *Heroes and Hero Worship* (Philadelphia, Henry Altemus Company, 1899).
[35] Serge Audier, *La société écologique et ses ennemis; Pour une histoire alternative de l'émancipation* (Paris: La Découverte, 2017), p. 106.

Notwithstanding the fact that Fourier's ideas came to be considerably overridden by interest in Marx, they had a vitality and surfaced at distinct times. Audier notes that Isaiah Berlin established that Fourier influenced Roosevelt's thinking when devising the New Deal. Roosevelt was a politician whose ideas Frick and Yourcenar were sympathetic to. Audier quotes Berlin as follows, 'Le *New Deal* de Roosevelt, en 1932, était plein d'idées saint-simoniennes et fouriéristes.'[36] In 1947 André Breton published his *Ode à Charles Fourier* and the thinker's ideas experienced a revival in the course of the events of May 1968, a date interestingly close to the composition of the first volume of Yourcenar's *Mémoires*. It is possible, furthermore, that the ideas came directly to her in this way and not just by being mediated through the line of the Transcendentalists. When citing Fourier his eager interpreter Ferdinand Guillon refers repeatedly to woodlands, forests and the stripped off crowns of mountains as indicative of the damage being done, including on a broader scale. In his text, *Théorie sociétaire de Charles Fourier*, Guillon refers to '[L]'île de l'Harmonie, une haute montagne si belle et attrayante pour l'homme. Une forêt séculaire domine son front, et l'on dirait une couronne déposé sur sa tête.' He contrasts this with:

> [L]'île de la Subversion, ou encore l'île du Malheur. Là aussi existe la haute montagne; mais son front est chauve et décharné, ses flancs sont couverts de ronces, d'épines et de plantes vénéneuses; ses arbres, dévorés par une foule innombrable de chenilles et d'insectes nuisibles, ne portent que des fruits amers que toujours une foule affaméee dispute avant le temps.[37]

In Guillon's words we see a conjunction between trees, harmony and deep time. Meanwhile, Audier sees in Fourier an anticipation of the present-day notion of global

---

[36] Isaiah Berlin, *The sense of reality: studies in ideas and their history*, ed. Henry Hardy; with an introduction by Patrick Gardiner (London: Pimlico, 1997), trans. by G. Delannoi et A. Butin, *Le Sens des réalités* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2011), p. 128. Audier, pp. 105 – 106.

[37] Ferdinand Guillon, *Théorie sociétaire de Charles Fourier: Accord des prophéties de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament avec la théorie sociétaire de Charles Fourier par un prêtre catholique-romain* (Cluny-Lyon: Au Centre de l'Union phalanstérienne, 1841), pp. 24 – 25. Audier, pp. 112 – 13.

ecological peril and draws attention to the title of Fourier's paper, 'Détérioration matérielle de la planète' which appeared in *La Phalange* in 1847.[38] In Fourier's writing the destruction of trees is a consistent symbol of damage to the social order as well as to the planet's well being.

The tantalizing question of who Yourcenar might and might not have read must remain open on many fronts, but a strong candidate has to be Tocqueville. Tocqueville, who exhibited a Romantic responsiveness to nature characteristic of his age, realized that the days of an American wilderness were numbered and in his best known work he records this solemn reflection:

> Les merveilles de la nature inanimée les trouvent (les Américains) insensible et ils n'aperçoivent pour ainsi dire les admirables forêts qui les environnent qu'au moment où elles tombent sous leurs coups. Leur œil est rempli d'un autre spectacle.[39]

It seems likely that the best known text of this key writer on relations between France and America is one Yourcenar would have been acquainted with.

On a somewhat different front, George Sand is a writer whose works are also represented in Yourcenar's library where she had a copy not only of *Mauprat* in an edition of 1930, but also a collection of letters Sand and Flaubert wrote to one another.[40] Writing of her experience of the Forest of Fontainebleau in 1837 George Sand says:

> Nous nous arrangeons pour ne rencontrer personne, en suivant les chemins les moins battus, et en découvrant nous-mêmes les sites les moins fréquentés. Ce

---

[38] Charles Fourier, 'Détérioration matérielle de la planète', *La Phalange*, 16e année, tome 5, premier semestre (Paris: Au Bureau de la Phalange, 1847), p. 402.
[39] Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, tome 1, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), p. 70.
[40] George Sand, *Mauprat* (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1930); *Dialogue des Deux Troubadours.* Correspondence entre George Sand et Gustave Flaubert de 1863 à 1876. Choix établi par George Lubin qui en a écrit la préface (Paris: Les Cent Une, 1978).

> ne sont pas les moins beaux. Tout est beau ici. D'abord les futaies sont toujours belles dans tous les pays du monde, et, ici, elles sont jetées sur des accidents de terrain toujours décoratifs et toujours praticables. Ce n'est pas un mince agrément que de pouvoir grimper partout, même à cheval, et d'aller chercher les fleurs et les papillons là où ils vous tentent.[41]

The sentiment in this passage as of the piece as a whole is summed up by Audier, 'Un certain degré de solitude, condition d'une communion avec la nature aussi bien minérale que végétale et animale, lui apparaît alors comme une exigence fondamentale.'[42] It is noteworthy how closely this statement conforms to the manner in which Octave is said by Yourcenar to comport himself in his woodlands.

In fact this piece by Sand was just one in a long line of articles by many people which arose from the struggle which ran from 1830 – 70 to try to ensure the survival of the Fontainebleau Forest. In 1853 the painters of the Barbizon School and Théodore Rousseau in particular managed to secure an undertaking from Napoléon III that sections of the forest would be preserved on grounds of, 'leur grande valeur esthétique' and in 1861, following an imperial decree of 13 August, a natural reserve of 1,600 hectares was created at Fontainebleau under the category of 'série artistique.'[43] When the occasion arose again in 1872 Sand was prepared to take up the pen on this account once more. In her *Impressions et souvenirs*, referring to the issue she frequently mentions not only many aspects of nature, but specifically trees:

> [S]i […] vous voyez de temps en temps un massif de beaux arbres, soyez certain qu'il est entouré de murs et que c'est là une propriété particulière où vous n'avez pas le droit de faire entrer votre enfant pour qu'il sache comment est fait un tilleul ou un chêne.'[44]

---

[41] George Sand, 'Fragment d'une lettre écrite de Fontainebleau', *Les Sept cordes de la lyre* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, août 1837), pp. 299 – 300.
[42] Audier, p. 450.
[43] Audier, p. 444.
[44] George Sand, *Impressions et souvenirs* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1873), p. 326

Furthermore, she states that when it comes to commercial supplies for building there is no point in looking to sourcing wood from America for there too the virgin forest is regressing, to such an extent that, 'l'arbre disparaîtra et la fin de la planète viendra par dessèchement sans cataclysme nécessaire, par la faute de l'homme.'[45] Concern for forests and knowledge of the effort that had been made to secure the one in Fontainebleau would have been part of the common knowledge of people of Yourcenar's social background when modelling their estates. Perhaps what can be seen in this fertilization from sources both French and English is less a superposition of an American idiom upon a French one, as Deprez suggests, but rather an amplification which finds sanction and example in both cultural strands, strands which themselves have already crossed and mingled at many points – one need only think of Emerson's trip to Europe in the course of which he met Wordsworth, as well as Coleridge and Carlyle, an encounter which was to lead to a conscious awareness-raising of the world of hills and lakes in and around Concord. Emerson is well represented in Yourcenar's library. As well as two copies of his *Essays* there is also a copy of his *Essays and English Traits* in addition to his *Literary Ethics*, and it was he who wrote the Introduction to Thoreau's *Succession of Forest Trees, Wild Apples and Sounds*.[46]

What this section shows is that the regret felt by Yourcenar and her companion for the trees cut down behind their property was no mere vague emotion of exasperation or disappointment. Yourcenar's knowledge and understanding of the enlightened efforts to preserve such forms of cultivation was based on her reading of an extensive legacy

---

[45] Sand, *Impressions*, p. 328.

[46] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus, 1982) and (Washington: National Home Library Foundation, 1932); *Essays and English Traits* (New York: Collier & Son, 1909); *Literary Ethics* (New York: Y. Crowell & Co., [n.d.].

of writing, writing which it had been thought was largely confined to an American Transcendalist tradition deriving from forms of German Romanticism, but which can now be seen to have had parallel and to a considerable degree mutually influencing roots in French culture as well.

2.4 Flémalle, the exemplary case: flora, pollution and demise

The discussion now seeks to foreground the issues of environmental destruction, pollution and demise. The estates which feature in the *Labyrinthe* number six in all: Flémalle, La Pasture, Marchienne, Boverie, Acoz and, finally, Mont Noir. Mont Noir, the sole one of the six to be located in France, was sold by Michel on the death of his mother, Noémi, in 1911. Much, though by no means all, of Yourcenar's discussion of the flora and fauna, so central to the *Labyrinthe*, is associated mainly with the two properties, Flémalle and Acoz, while many of the comments on Marchienne underscore those made on Flémalle. The message Yourcenar will seek to convey in her discussion of the fortunes of Flémalle are laid out in brief in what she says of Marchienne:

> Je ne me propose pas de reprendre ici le thème orchestré à Flémalle, celui de l'air sali, de l'eau souillée et de la terre corrodée par ce que nos ancêtres crurent honnêtement être le progrès, excuse que nous n'avons plus. Mais le destin de Flémalle-Grande menaçait Marchienne.[47]

The statement is clear and unreserved and its very brevity carries its own forcefulness. The inherent irony of the situation is brought out in the following sentence:

> De l'autre coté de l'étang, par-delà les perspectives déjà diminuées du parc, des cheminées d'usines vomissaient leur offrande aux puissances industrielles, dont les parts de fondateur garnissaient probablement de portefeuille d'Émile et d'Arnold.[48]

Emile and Arnold were Louise de Marchienne's sons. The factory is consuming the very land which is the source of their wealth and ruining their estate, arguably a case of appetite being a form of will which finally eats up itself. All this is summed up in

---

[47] *Souvenirs*, p. 776.
[48] *Souvenirs*, p. 776.

a final delicate image which serves to underscore that its days are, if not numbered, then seriously threatened:

> Discrètement, avant de verser le thé, la tante Louise essuyait, d'un coin de sa serviette brodée, la tasse de Sèvres où venaient de se poser quelques molécules noires.[49]

While the possible fate of Marchienne is thereby implied, two of the estates, Flémalle and Acoz, stand out as foci for discussion of the issue of environmental degradation.

There are two aspects to Yourcenar's choice of Flémalle. From the chronicler's perspective Flémalle has the attraction that it passed out of the family line some considerable time before the period of narration and so there can be much less chance of giving offence to living members of the family in anything that might be written; it can serve as an exemplary case. Secondly, the pivotal point in the discussion is the second decade of the eighteenth century, following which the property has a glorious climax for a century or so. Tell-tale signs of pollution and degradation gradually become evident, then increasingly ineluctable, and are finally definitive. The argument in this discussion is that this pivotal moment, the second decade of the eighteenth century, may reasonably be termed the onset of the Anthropocene period, in Braudelian terms a key moment of conjuncture. The notion is discussed further below. The introduction of the château of Flémalle by the writer constitutes a Janus-like gesture, on the one hand looking back into deep time, while on the other stepping forward into what turns out to be its decline and final demise in the modern.

An important aspect in our understanding is the survival of a lithograph of the estate dating from the second decade of the eighteenth century. Cut in what Yourcenar

---

[49] *Souvenirs*, p. 776.

terms an act of vandalism, 'coupée par un vandale', from a volume entitled *Délices du pays de Liège,* it is dated 1718.[50] Yourcenar inherited the lithograph from her mother. The scene is described as 'Une vue', a technical term for a composition, usually of a rural scene. The view has been reproduced in editions and discussions of the *Mémoires,* though not in the Pléiade. In his work, *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama observes, 'Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind.'[51] Comparison with the lithograph shows how Yourcenar bears out this fact, the careful analysis which constitutes her account and the swift effectiveness with which she conjures it up. She notes the turrets on the château, work a century behind the French style. Such is the elaborateness of Yourcenar's description that historically it may owe something to the outlines of a late Roman villa. Since the scene notes a relationship with nature and also observation towers, there may be a suggestion in outline or a survival of such a structure, possibly one designed for *otium*.[52] Given Yourcenar's classical interests such a structure may have suggested itself to Yourcenar and indeed the existence of watchtowers, 'échauguettes', suggests at least the earlier character of the building. The gardens, meanwhile, indicate influence from Versailles in keeping with the idiom of the times. In addition, the eye leads off to the hill at the rear with its rural complement of orchards, farmlands and vines – 'des vergers, des champs et des vignes'.[53] The fertility of the whole is clearly implied in the enormous barn which is visible, as is the settled character of the region in the medieval church close to the château, while a dozen or so tiled houses with sloping roofs indicate the village of Flémalle-Grand, 'Une grange massive, une

---

[50] *Souvenirs,* p. 756.
[51] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), pp. 6 – 7.
[52] 'Villa' in: *Brill's New Pauly. Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World,* ed. by Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, Antiquity vol 15, Tuc–Zyt (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2010), cols. 416 – 18.
[53] *Souvenirs,* p. 756.

chapelle restée médiévale flanquent le château ou s'y accotent.'[54] The whole is suffused with something of 'the mystique associated with great riches.'[55] A highway leads to the river at the edge of which two or three skiffs offer a means of transport either to the island in the middle or to cross the river to the abbey of Val-Saint-Lambert on the other side. At this point Yourcenar drops in the fact that this has long since given way to a factory complex. Opening then to a larger context, Yourcenar points out that what lies beyond the wooded hills lining the top of the portrait is Tongres, capital of Belgian Gaul and also of Limbourg, border of the estates of that Prince-Bishop. In this way the periods of pre-Christian Classical times and of the pre-Revolutionary eighteenth century are explicitly brought together and a sense of deep time integrated and interlinked in the narrative with the later period finds further confirmation.

It is at this point, in an act of historical bi-focalism, that Yourcenar appears to allow herself to engage in a measure of creative reminiscence. She relates the historical fact that it was in the eighteenth century that an engraved metal retirement piece, property of a Roman legionary dating from the second century of the Christian era, was found in the Meuse. The writer's focus centres on the retired legionary to whom the medallion belonged, a man, she suggests, who, following service, including in Britain, retired to his native region. 'J'aime à croire,' she continues in an imaginative flight of fancy, that he served in the time of Trajan and had heard a confused something about the coming into authority subsequently of Hadrian. In this way she invests the remarks with a link to her own *Mémoires d'Hadrien*; as a writer she establishes here

---

[54] *Souvenirs*, pp. 756 – 57.

[55] Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350 – 550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 186.

in the mind of the reader that she has a personal vested interest in the region and its history. She also has the sanction of her acclaimed work to assure us that she knows what she is talking about. At this juncture Yourcenar goes on to construct a life of retirement for her legionary, a man of modest pretensions, which includes a visit to Rome. At this point she asserts that, 'Je digresse moins qu'on ne pourrait le croire.'[56] Here she refers to those members of the family, owners of the Flémalle estate in the eighteenth century, who found the medallion and thanks to whom the object was seen as constituting something of historical significance as a result of which it eventually found its way into the local museum. That this came about is attributable to their education in the classics; they had a respect for their finding and appreciated its cultural worth:

> [A]ntiquaires à leurs heures, comme le bel air l'était de leur temps, Louis-Joseph et ses héritiers ont dû scruter avec intérêt les chiches vestiges qu'avait fait sauter du sol la pioche de leurs jardiniers. Ils ont manié révérencieusement ces monnaies rouillées et ces tessons de poterie rouge, aux reliefs stéréotypés, mais exquis, dans laquelle les pauvres du monde gallo-romain mangeait leurs fèves et leur bouillie d'orge; ils ont cité à leur propos des vers latins appris au collège, légèrement estropiés par manque de mémoire, en exhalant ça et là un lieu commun sur le passage du temps, la fin des empires, et même celle des principautés.[57]

Through their education and the slow accretions of time leading to the period in which Louis-Joseph and Marguerite Pétronille now occupy it Flémalle has come to merit the attribution of a period of neo-classicism. This links it successfully and meaningfully with the period of the second century of the modern era, a period which for Yourcenar constituted a cultural high-water mark. The second decade of the eighteenth century marks, then, a moment of cultural significance and the function of what appears to be a digression amounts in fact to the components of a strategy to

---

[56] *Souvenirs*, p. 758.
[57] *Souvenirs*, p. 758.

emphasise this and to suggest further connections, similarities and forms of indebtedness. Two points suggest themselves to be considered here. Firstly, judged in temporal terms through the evocation of her legionary Marguerite Yourcenar is linking this phase of her narrative with the deep time of the opening Chapter of *Archives du Nord*. Secondly, by the time of the legionary Roman rule had been firmly established and the day of the Belgae and related tribes had definitively passed. Yourcenar's choice of an 'ordinary' man is striking; rather than anyone imperial it was this man and many of his rank and kind who were responsible for laying down the patterns of living which would slowly evolve and mature through the time of Charlemagne and the Middle Ages to reach the rich climax here being described in Flémalle in the early eighteenth century. The whole as conjured up in the lithograph manifests a rich flourishing of centuries. It may be wondered whether in the figure of the centurion the writer envisages him as a kind of putative forebear of the Crayencour line, one possibly even directly, if marginally, in touch with Hadrien. The mild neo-classicism which understands something of the significance of the medallion marks a new moment of temporal beginning; it is a period of conjuncture.

In view of this it is to be noted how Louis-Joseph and his wife, Marguerite-Pétronille, moved into their new home with all the ease of an animal moving into the abandoned lair of a somewhat different species:

> Il est intéressant de les voir s'installer ainsi, comme des animaux dans la tanière déserte d'autres animaux d'une espèce apparentée de loin à la leur.[58]

For Yourcenar such a comparison with the behaviour of animal creatures is pointed and far from condemnatory – even if the persons being referred to might have felt it to constitute some kind of a criticism. Of itself and in Yourcenar's sense of things it is

[58] *Souvenirs*, p. 756.

far from being a denigration of the human behaviour in question; it shows the affinity between man and his fellow creatures in the Yourcenarian perspective. In this way having asserted first an affinity but more importantly a distinctiveness, Marguerite Yourcenar draws attention to the fact that the premises her predecessors moved into were, 'les antiques vestiges d'une commanderie de l'ordre de Saint-Jean-de-Jérusalem à Flémalle.'[59] Yourcenar is able to cite the names of no less than three distinguished predecessors of the building as well as the Order of St. John and the Chapter of Saint-Denys. All of this would have been lost on the new incumbents, she states:

> Il est douteux que Louis-Joseph et Marguerite-Pétronille aient jamais été dérangés dans leur sommeil par les spectres de chevaliers à croix rouge.[60]

The force of this brisk dismissal is to confirm the new proprietors as proponents of the new Enlightenment way of thinking and at the same time as constituting a rupture with the faith period preceding it. If the property itself constitutes a kind of agrarian ripening over a very long period of time, the attitudes in vogue by this time are an important marker of the outlook of the new incumbents. What was formerly medieval, even Renaissance, is now consigned to the past and is forgotten, if it was ever learned by the new owners in the first place.

There is a deliberate intention to mark a new beginning here. The property of Flémalle, 'l'abbey du Val-Saint-Lambert,' has become, 'bien entendu, l'immense complexe usinier d'aujourd'hui'.[61] The paragraph portraying Flémalle conjures up something which is generalized and altogether more representational of a way of living and it is designed to contrast with what follows. The picture is of an opulent and successful estate of the time rather than merely a single specific property, that is

[59] *Souvenirs*, p. 756.
[60] *Souvenirs*, p. 756.
[61] *Souvenirs*, p. 757.

to say of just Flémalle. It offers an image of fullness and of plenty, one where festivals were a period when each and everyone had their place, 'On suit ensemble la procession de la Fête-Dieu, chacun à son rang et à sa place.' Tables were laden, 'verdure et fruit abondent en bas comme en haut', wine was plentiful, 'vient la vendange et la confection d'une piquette à laquelle Monsieur préfère le bourgogne.'. Deer hunts were discussed, 'La venaison, produit d'exploits cynégétiques qui alimentent la conversation', and food was served on silver platters, 'plats d'argent'. Successful poaching adventures, 'braconnage', were celebrated in the village while in order to eat well and properly M. and Mme employed a French chef: 'Le bel air oblige Monsieur et Madame à faire apprêter leur mangeaille par un cuisinier français ferré sur les sauces.'[62] All is a distillation of a large estate style of living and in this Flémalle is representative of a characteristic residence and of a way of life. On more than one occasion they were joined in their repasts by the local bishop. This focalization on foison and rural, landowning plenty facilitates the next Yourcenar move, to allude to the bishop's seat in Seraing which less than a century later was to give way to the Cockerill factories. She points to the fact that the first locomotive to be manufactured on the Continent will be made there.

With the rise of Liège, and Flémalle as exemplary of that socio-economic development, Yourcenar points out that the château and the region drew many important people. In the same year as the lithograph of the view in the *Délices du pays de Liège* was designed, that is 1718, Peter the Great of Russia visited. The purpose of his visit was to learn of the new kinds of industrialization which were by then under way. Subsequent distinguished visitors were Joseph II, Count Falkenstein,

[62] All quotations from *Souvenirs*, p. 759.

the Hapsburg monarch and Count Haga, King Gustav III of Sweden, as well as Casanova. The political background was the various wars of succession. Whatever the fate of the local people, crucially, the well-to-do belonged to what Yourcenar terms, 'l'époque de la guerre en dentelles', the outcome of which was to leave the social order fundamentally unchanged.[63] The comparisons and contrasts with the total war of 1914 which were to engulf the region are clear; both are predicated on the development of heavy regional industrialization.

The transition from the elegant slaughter of the eighteenth century to the mass killings of a century and a half later was determined by the industrialization the rulers were so interested in. The point is central to Yourcenar's narrative. In the eighteenth century the prince-bishops of Seraing visited their counsellors at their residence in Flémalle. Speaking of the summer residence Yourcenar says:

> Ni Monseigneur, ni ses arbres, ni ses oiseaux de son parc, où les hauts fourneaux flamberont bientôt jour et nuit, ne s'en doutent, pas plus qu'ils ne se doutent que les bêtes géantes de la préhistoire ont erré à cette place laissant leurs empreintes et leurs os dans la boue du fleuve, et à peine plus fossiles de nos jours que cette locomotive de 1835.[64]

She speaks, too, of the Cockerill factory at Seraing, 'Seraing, aujourd'hui siége des usines Cockerill.'[65] The Englishman John Cockerill settled in the Liège region where he initially began to develop machinery to make textile production more efficient in the 1820s, from there moving to steam locomotives for transport.[66] Weapons manufacturing to the benefit of both sides was already well entrenched in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:

---

[63] *Souvenirs*, p. 761.
[64] *Souvenirs*, p. 760.
[65] *Souvenirs*, p. 760.
[66] On Cockerill see *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by Leslie Stephen (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1887), XI, p. 200.

> Les picques des Gardes wallonnes furent peut-être forgées à Liége, et conversement celles des soldats de Guillaume d'Orange, la contrebande étant de tout temps une activité quasi officielle des fabricants d'armes.[67]

In sum, it was in the early eighteenth century at the time when Louis-Joseph and Marguerite-Pétronille moved into their new abode matters really began to get going and the modern world was launched.

One of the earliest references in this connection occurs once again in this second Section of *La Tournée des châteaux* when Yourcenar is discussing the source of wealth of the family ancestors of the period shortly before the eighteenth century. She mentions feudal rights, 'droits féodaux', and points out that the estate-owners' income was drawn from farming, '[L]'opulence des propriétaires dépend de baux consentis aux fermiers autant de plus due de redevances déjà d'un autre âge.'[68] As time wore on people invested increasingly in commerce and industry, but the major transformation came with the discovery of the desiccated legacy of million-year old trees, coal. She states:

> C'est l'emploi de la houille, de plus en plus commun à partir du xviii^{e} siècle, qui a transformé peu à peu les fabriques encore à demi artisanales en grande industrie.[69]

Here time immemorial and the world of the present day are fatefully conjoined. An immediate outcome and what was to become before long a major problem was the inability to resist the ensuing acquisitiveness:

> Soyons sûrs que les premiers des gens de lignage qui découvrirent sous leurs idylliques, mais peu productifs, champs et pâturages la richesse houillère en

---

[67] *Souvenirs*, p. 753.
[68] *Souvenirs*, p. 755.
[69] *Souvenirs*, p. 755.

> éprouvèrent le même plaisir que le fermier du Texas ou le prince arabe qui s'avèrent de nos jours possesseurs d'un puits de pétrole.[70]

Marguerite Yourcenar juxtaposes these two states, the before and after of the discovery of coal. Contemporary thinking is inclined to give this new epoch a name, The Anthropocene. This word is meant to indicate the significant impact of human behaviour on the earth's geology and ecosystems. The term has not yet been approved as a recognized subdivision of geological time, though it is being vigorously considered by the relevant bodies. In their article which popularized the notion Crutzen and Stroemer suggested the following:

> To assign a more specific date to the onset of the "anthropocene" seems somewhat arbitrary, but we propose the latter part of the 18th century, although we are aware that alternative proposals can be made (some may even want to include the entire holocene). However, we choose this date because, during the past two centuries, the global effects of human activities have become clearly noticeable. This is the period when data retrieved from glacial ice cores show the beginning of a growth in the atmospheric concentrations of several "greenhouse gases", in particular CO_2 and CH_4. Such a starting date also coincides with James Watt's invention of the steam engine in 1784.[71]

Although Crutzen and Stoermer suggest the date of the invention of the Watt steam engine as one possible starting date for the notion of the Anthropocene, as the matter is not finalised yet, given the emphasis in this text on 1712 and on 1718, as well as on the whole of the second decade of the eighteenth century more generally, this text suggests instead as a starting date for the Anthropecene the date of the invention of the Newcomen engine which occurred in 1712. This date all but coincides with the lithograph of the *Délices du pays de Liège* and the fact-finding mission of Peter the Great. Certainly the second decade of this century is key and common to all three in the text of Marguerite Yourcenar's *Mémoires*. The core feature of the Newcomen

---

[70] *Souvenirs*, p. 755.

[71] Paul Crutzen & Eugene F. Stoermer, "Have we entered the 'Anthropocene'?", *IGBP Global Change Newsletter* 41, accessed from IGBP.net 24.xii.'16 and 5.v.'18.

was a steam engine, the principal use of which was to pump water out of mines, something which was crucial for gaining access to mineshafts and their seams of coal. The utility was quickly appreciated and developed in France, Belgium and Germany as well as Britain. In her discussion of Peter the Great Yourcenar comments on, 'ses timides héritiers qui périront dans une cave d'Ékatérinenbourg.'[72] This reference to Tsar Nicholas and his family does not overtly state that Ekaterinburg was also the mining capital and that as a consequence it became the third city of the Russian Empire, but it is a relevant concern here all the same. The city was launched on the path of industrial development early in the eighteenth century following Peter's visit. There is, furthermore, a gruesome entropic circularity in this sequence, for the remains of the royal family were initially hidden in a disused mineshaft there almost exactly two hundred years later.[73]

As she still had the lithograph in her possession, Marguerite Yourcenar decided to visit Flémalle in the course of her visit to Belgium in 1956. A scene every bit as bad as the heaviest polluted of Germany's Ruhrgebiet of the time is evoked. The transformation from the eighteenth-century estate was by now fully complete. In his discussion of chemically-induced erosion in the *Labyrinthe* Walter Wagner quotes the Yourcenar passage which shows the degradation of such cultural icons as the Parthenon, Strasbourg Cathedral, La Giralda of Seville and, again, Venice:[74]

> La vitesse annulant les distances annulera aussi les différences entre les lieux, traînant partout les pèlerins du plaisir vers les mêmes sons et lumières factices, les mêmes monuments aussi menacés de nos jours que les éléphants et les baleines, un Parthénon qui s'effrite et qu'on se propose de mettre sous verre,

---

[72] *Souvenirs*, p. 760.
[73] Helen Rappaport, *Ekaterinburg: The Last Days of the Romanovs* (London: Windmill Books, 2009), pp. 197 – 206.
[74] Wagner, p. 212.

> une cathédrale de Strasbourg corrodée, une Giralda sous un ciel qui n'est plus si bleu, une Venise pourrie par les résidus chimiques.[75]

In this way the phenomena of pollution and erosion, in step with damage to creatures in the wild, while local to Flémalle are also generalised to an international range. Wagner sees in this a broader condemnation of the threefold blight of Capitalism, Consumerism and Technology (*Kapitalismus, Konsumerismus und Technizismus*) and notes that this condemnation of the damage to this selection of cultural icons arose from her grandfather's grand tour a century earlier.[76]

Meanwhile, the environs leading to the main property had been replaced entirely by an interminable line of working-class houses of the sort, Yourcenar says, which our indifference considers acceptable for those other than ourselves and, apart from their façades, identical to those she has seen in a couple of dozen other countries. The generalising of the Flémalle witness on a global basis is intentional and has been extended explicitly as in the quotation above. Under a thick sky, 'l'industrie lourde mettait entre le fleuve et l'agglomération ouvrière sa topographie d'enfer.'[77] The quotation refers to what Corine Pelluchon terms, 'la révolution thermo-industrielle', and she acknowledges her indebtedness to Jacques Grinevald for the phrase. In a footnote Pelluchon states:

> Pour reprendre l'expression de Jacques Grinevald, qui souligne le rôle joué par le feu et la chaleur dans cette révolution liée à la sidérurgie et au charbon puis, à partir de la deuxième moitiée du xix^{e} siècle, par la chimie.[78]

---

[75] *Archives*, p. 1180.
[76] Wagner, p. 212.
[77] *Souvenirs*, p. 763.
[78] Corine Pelluchon, *Éléments pour une éthique de la vulnérabilité: Les hommes, les animaux, la nature* (Paris: Les Éditions du cerf, 2011), p. 22, n. 1. For the Grinevald reference see, Jacques Grinevald, *La Biosphère de l'Anthropocène: Climat et pétrole, la double menace* ((Paris: Broché, 2008).

Collingwood may be cited here. Of the historian he states, 'his pictures must be localised in space and time. The artist's need not; essentially, the things he imagines are imagined as happening at no place and at no date.' He then goes on by way of illustration to remark, 'Of *Wuthering Heights* it has been well said that the scene is laid in Hell, though the place-names are English.'[79] In the case of Yourcenar's Flémalle of the 1950s the scene as envisaged by Yourcenar has become a kind of Hell and a median point between history and fiction has been achieved. It is from this type of industrialised horror that she will generalise to embrace a wider applicability, one in which the list of places is not simply successional, but extended analogously based on Flémalle which serves in its own right and in a representational capacity.

When finally she ran the property to ground Marguerite Yourcenar found it was in the last stages of demolition. One surprising fragment remained:

> Posé sur un bout de plancher lui-même en porte à faux sur un croulant mur de soutènement, un gracieux escalier s'élançait vers un premier étage disparu. Des marches manquaient, mais la rampe avec ses ferroneries du xviii^{e} siècle était intacte.[80]

Anything of value had already been taken away by the purchaser apart from this one random piece pointing skywards, in effect to nowhere. Yourcenar is reminded of the lithographs of Piranesi:

> [C]e qui m'attendait était ce décor de Piranèse, cet escalier discontinu montant allègrement vers le ciel.[81]

The artist Piranesi is significantly referenced by Yourcenar in the course of her work. She relates how she purchased some lithographs of his in 1940, moved, it would seem, by the artist's evocative recreations of a once great civilisation, now passed

---

[79] Collingwood, p. 246.
[80] *Souvenirs*, pp. 763 – 64.
[81] *Souvenirs*, p. 764.

away, centred on the city. This must have had a special resonance with her given the situation in Europe at that dark time. On the one hand, the image in question is briefly suggestive of Piranesi's *Antiquities*, yet the figure of the ladderless staircase also evokes a period, poignantly elegant, from which it has turned out there is no possibility of escape into modernity as the steps have disappeared. This aspect of the scene captures the spirit of the *Carceri* well. The château, Flémalle, has otherwise been reduced to a heap of rubble. In this it is much less enchanting than the ruins of Rome evoked by Piranesi. In his discussion of Yourcenar's essay, 'Le Cerveau noir de Piranèse', Nigel Saint comments on how, 'In paradoxically enlisting the movements of the eye to try to fix the figures of the ruins, Yourcenar sees Piranesi trying to dig into the ruins.'[82] Yourcenar's words in the essay are illustrative of this point:

> Il est facile de se représenter, sous l'insupportable éclat de midi ou dans la nuit presque claire, cet obsevateur à l'affût de l'insaisissable, dans ce qui paraît immobile cherchant ce qui bouge et change fouillant du regard la ruine pour y découvrir le secret d'un rehaut, la place d'une contre-hachure, comme d'autres l'ont fait pour y repérer des trésors ou pour y faire lever des fantômes.[83]

The process of rediscovery Yourcenar here attributes to Piranesi, of the hunter lying in wait for the ungraspable, seems a not unreasonable description of what she herself is doing here in evoking the demise of Flémalle. She achieves it through the image of the juxtaposition of the remains of the spiral staircase, remnant of an age of elegance, and the rubble it is temporarily resting in. Piranesi's etchings delivered the possibility of a resuscitation of Rome in a new spirit of neo-classicism tinged with an incipient Romanticism. The rubble of Flémalle offers no such prospect; the entropy is final,

---

[82] Nigel Saint, *Marguerite Yourcenar: Reading the Visual* (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), p. 92. The essay, 'Le Cerveau nnoir de Piranèse', which appears in the collection *Sous bénéfice d'inventaire*, dated 1959 – 61, was printed in the collection (Paris: Gallimard, 1962, 1978), *Essais et Mémoires*, pp. 75 – 108.
[83] *Essais et mémoires*, p. 79.

the dynamic irremediably gone.[84] This constitutes a disturbing comment on the landed class centred on the culture of the rural châteaux. Reflecting further, Yourcenar is moved to comment that if the Canon whose land it had originally been had a spiritual side to him, he would have seen in this a symbol, 'y aurait assurément vu un symbole.'[85] The reader is being invited to think in such terms. The attempt at elegant permanence and elevated aspiration, symbolised by the staircase, has crumbled, come to nothing and is now on the verge of disappearing into the dark abyss of time. There is a sheer finality to this and it becomes the dominant tone of the remainder of the section.

Part of the significance of the second and third sub-sections of this second section of *La Tournée des châteaux* is that in them Marguerite Yourcenar lays out clearly a number of her views on the interrelationships between the natural and human worlds. Her views draw on the two visits to Flémalle, the first in 1956, the second in 1971. The purpose of the first, she tells us, was to discover for herself what there might be by way of a vestige or remnant of the château which at one stage had been in the family. Now that she has established this, the purpose of the second trip was to look at the Roman veteran's medallion and also to look about. Among the themes which emerge from this second survey is the level of pollution-generating fumes and smoke emanating from the chimneys of the factories in the neighbourhood and which gives no sign of having abated in the intervening fifteen years. On this second visit she is assured that a scheme for deindustrialisation is under way, but she can see little sign of it. The word 'écologie' occurs here, the first if not the only occasion in the entire

---

[84] David Baguley, *Naturalist Fiction: the Entropic Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[85] *Souvenirs*, p. 764.

Mémoires, and Yourcenar makes it clear that part of what is at play is commercial consolidation. Rather in the manner of medieval feudal barons, the stronger force has won out over the weaker:

> Les dragons crachant le feu sur l'autre rive avaient dévoré ceux, plus faibles, en face.[86]

The reference to mythical beasts suggests something of a titanic struggle, dwarfing the puny efforts of mankind. As the decade and a half has seen little or no improvement, both visits can serve to underpin her views. Given the important role horses play elsewhere in the work the comparison she chooses to describe the decline and fall of Flémalle at this juncture is notable:

> La plupart des domaines meurent mal. Privée de ses parterres et de son parc, il en était de celui-ci comme de ces pur-sang qu'on réduit à l'état de haridelles avant de les envoyer à l'équarrisseur.[87]

Much as in the case of Mont Noir when following its destruction in the First World War Yourcenar tells us what she really felt the loss of was the pine trees which gave the property its name, on this occasion she says that it is less the house and the quincunxes of trees on its estates than the damage to and present condition of the very land itself:

> [C]elle de la terre, tuée par l'industrie comme par les effets d'une guerre d'attrition, la mort de l'eau et de l'air aussi pollués à Flémalle qu'à Pittsburg, Sydney ou Tokyo.[88]

Couched characteristically in the metaphor of war, these comparisons have the effect of internationalising and also clarifying a much greater and more broad-based global problem. What that problem is is summed up in the predicament of the property

---

[86] *Souvenirs*, p. 765.
[87] *Souvenirs*, p. 764.
[88] *Souvenirs*, p. 764.

itself. It has been shown how in Yourcenar's perception the attack on Mont Noir was nothing short of an attack on its trees, its natural life. The point to note here is that the land is the direct and immediate recipient of the attack upon it. This is noted by Wagner who points out that by this time Yourcenar argues that the soil has not only been rendered sterile, it has been killed, 'tuée', while the water is 'mort[e]'.[89] When Wagner was writing this the statement with its deliberate choice of military metaphors seemed to constitute a measure of excess, yet that the comment is neither fanciful nor merely rhetorical the following may serve to show. The series of seven articles entitled *Contaminations* run by *Le Monde* between 2nd and 10th September 2018 each reported on areas in a range across four continents which have become completely polluted by chemicals to such an extent that life is no longer tenable there.[90] In a contemporary perspective this calls in question the reservations expressed by critics and commentators such as Merchant, Bramwell and Ferry seen in Wagner's article above in relation to this discussion. While their comments may be in many ways appropriate to other circumstances and a somewhat earlier time, the situation embraced in Yourcenar's 'tuer la terre' is now a pragmatic description of a material, physical reality and neither a rhetorical flourish nor an escapist flight into a form of deep ecology. In this may be seen Yourcenar's prescience. Meanwhile, in a counter-balancing gesture Yourccenar reflects on the malpractices of the villagers in the region in earlier times, for there were many, but the scale was such that the outcome could not be entirely ruinous. They too abused their soil and water, but in their ignorance they lacked the means to be really effective in destroying their natural context:

---

[89] *Souvenirs*, p. 764.

[90] Sophie Landrin et Marie Sumalle associé au photographe Samuel Bollendorff, *Contaminations*: *Sept voyages en terres sacrifiées*, *Le Monde*, 2 – 10 Septembre, 2018.

> Ils avaient jeté à la rivière le contenu de leurs pots de chambre, les carcasses du bétail qu'ils assommaient eux-mêmes et les saletés du corroyeur.[91]

What has happened since then is a succinct summary of what has befallen within the period of the Anthropocene:

> [I]ls n'y déversaient pas des tonnes de sous-produits nocifs ou même mortels; ils avaient à l'excès tué des bêtes sauvages et abattu des arbres; ces déprédations n'étaient rien auprès des nôtres, qui avons créé un monde où les animaux et les arbres ne pourront plus vivre.[92]

Whatever the efforts which might have been made to alleviate some of the worst aspects of this industrialised legacy in the period between her visit of 1956 and subsequently, the now abandoned premises of Vieille-Montagne are most evocative of the ruined château of the dark sorcerer of Wagner's *Parsifal*. Essentially, 'les traces à peu près indélébiles de l'attrition industrielle subsistaient.'[93] What lies at the heart of this malady is the discovery of coal and then more generally in a reiterating way, oil. In a terrible irony it is the firing of the compacted residue of trees over million of years old which is leading to the annihilation of the present day tree-covering and all forms of growth with it:

> C'est le charbon des forêts mortes des millions de siècles avant que l'homme ait commencé à penser, le pétrole né de la décomposition des roches asphaltiques ou lentement produit par des microflores et des microfaunes multimillénaires qui ont transformé notre lente aventure en course effrénée de cavaliers de l'Apocalypse.[94]

---

[91] *Souvenirs*, p. 764.
[92] *Souvenirs*, p. 764.
[93] *Souvenirs*, p. 765.
[94] *Souvenirs*, p. 766.

It is the image of the apocalypse in Yourcenar's writing in general Walter Wagner has in mind in a recent article.[95] In illustration he quotes from the address she gave at the constitutional law conference in Montreal shortly before her death:

> Durant des années déjà, nous avons vu dans chaque pays, ou presque, la crainte de la guerre, la crainte des révolutions, ou quelques fois le souhait des révolutions, nous avons souffert du drame des classes et des races. Ces diverses craintes sont pour ainsi dire suspendues à une autre crainte, infiniment plus vaste, qui va grandissant: celle de la destruction de la Terre elle-même, exploitée et polluée par nous…[96]

This passage finds further confirmation from another in the same speech, this time cited by Achmy Halley:

> La formule *Terre des hommes* est extrêmement dangereuse. La terre appartient à tous les vivants et nous dépendons en somme de tous les vivants. Nous nous sauverons ou nous périrons avec eux et avec elle.[97]

As with the Anthropocene, Marguerite Yourcenar sees this development as irreversible, 'irréversible'; the root causes are, 'avidité et sa violence' in the quest for energy. This insistence on irreversibility is further confirmation that Yourcenar does not hold with the notion of a lost Golden Age; following the rupture the question is what, if anything, can be done? What she can testify to is the dramatic consequences for the estates of her forebears:

> De ces deux dangereux adjuvants, la houille a triomphé la première. Le hasard fait que mon pays paternel, la région lilloise, et les deux sites liés au souvenir de ma famille maternelle, Flémalle-Grande et Marchienne, ont été de bonne heure défigurés par elle.[98]

---

[95] Walter Wagner, '"Notre monde de fin de monde": Sur la rhétorique apocalyptique de Marguerite Yourcenar', *Bulletin de la SIEY*, 38 (Clermont-Ferrand: déc. 2017), 73 – 89.

[96] Marguerite Yourcenar, '… Si nous voulons encore essayer de sauver la terre', Nicole Duplé éd. , *Le droit à la qualité de l'environnement: un droit en devenir, un droit à définir. Ve conférence internationale de droit constitutionnel. Fifth International Conference on Constitutional Law* (Montréal: Éditions Québec / Amérique, 1988), p. 26. Wagner, '"Notre monde"', p. 77.

[97] Achmy Halley, *Marguerite Yourcenar*: *Portrait intime* (Paris: Flammarion, 2018), p. 179.

[98] *Souvenirs*, p. 766.

The choice of the term, 'adjuvants' in the context of 'dangereux' and also 'houille' with its normal connotations of being positive and medically supportive seems notable here; great risks are to be associated with this discovery. Yourcenar closes off this deeply troubled Section with a reflection:

> Flémalle, jadis un des "délices du pays de Liège", m'offrait ce jour-là un échantillon de nos erreurs d'apprentis sorcier.[99]

The emphasis here once again is on the fact that Flémalle-Grand of Liège is representative of a great and much wider malaise. Furthermore, the reference to the sorcerer's apprentice is precise; the allusion to the poem by Goethe, *Der Zauberlehrling*, suggests a disaster well-meaningly or perhaps somewhat mischievously triggered which it is then difficult if not impossible to halt.

What we are led to see in the account of Flémalle in particular is the exploitation of the compacted residue of millennia being turned to an energy source – with disastrous consequences. It is the consequences of this behaviour which are termed the Anthropocene, that is the period in time since which such has been the invasive action of man that his activities were having an increasing and otherwise avoidable negative effect on the environment. This is a contemporary outcome of a practice which began early in the eighteenth century. The link is between historical time and the contemporary. It may seem as though Yourcenar is using geological time as a component in her discussion, but this is not so for the initiative and the dynamic comes from the second of her threefold time divisions, the period of history. The fact that the source of this energy is the compacted residue of countless millennia is at the same time both incidental and ironic. As Yourcenar states, it has taken a measurable

[99] *Souvenirs*, p. 766.

number of generations to bring about the disastrous levels of pollution which are in danger of stifling us all. Such is her message in this section.

2.5 Trees and memory, trees as a source of consolation, trees and harmony

In Yourcenar's perceptions trees are not merely passive; once they are allowed to play their natural part and are not exploited, they can emerge in the narrative in many positive lights. Octave Pirmez, Yourcenar's great-uncle, plays a significant part in the discussion of this point. It will be shown how when riding home through forests the play of memory enables him to reflect deeply on his brother's death, to order his thoughts and to try to work to a better understanding. Part of that process will be the consolation he finds and it is the context of trees which makes that possible. Trees too play a part in giving us striking insights into his sensibilities, including as he nears his death.

It has been noted already that Walter Wagner argues that Yourcenar is wedded to the notion of a form of Arcadia. Of Octave he observes that Yourcenar records many points of similarity between how he went about his reading and learning, much as she herself was to do herself some decades later. In making this important point Wagner asserts that Octave, whose education was strongly based on the reading of classical texts, was essentially of a Romantic disposition and he quotes him from a letter Yourcenar cites to his friend and neighbour, José, where he writes, 'Que faut-il pour goûter des heures de joie profonde? La vue d'une tête candide, le seul spectacle d'un paysage pastoral.'[100] The second Arcadian aspect Wagner notes at this juncture is that of Yourcenar's childhood and he cites a number of quotations from *Les miettes de l'enfance* to establish this, noting in particular the writer's comments on the flora and fauna she can recall with affection from that time. He finds in this a reminiscence

[100] *Souvenirs*, p. 836.

in the mind of the writer of the influence of artists as Lorraine and Poussin, essentially an idealizing tendency, *Die von Yourcenar Szenen ähneln dabei den idealisierten Landschaften von Lorraine und Poussin.*[101]

The qualities of Octave's writings noted by Wagner are helpfully stated. At the same time to assert that he sublimates his weariness with life in pathetic effusive outpourings (*pathetischen literarischen Ergüssen*) seems too sweeping. In addition, it does not accord with Yourcenar's more nuanced reading. She acknowledges his stylistic shortcomings and also the fact that much of what he wrote would benefit from careful pruning. If that were done, however, a work of significance would emerge, she asserts, and it could take its place among some distinguished writers who have left a narrow but important corpus. She states:

> Un anthologiste d'un brutal courage, qui traiterait Octave Pirmez comme en pratique nous traitons Virgile […] détachant une phrase ici, une ligne là, plus loin un fragment de chapitre, ou au contraire quelques mots isolés brillant du fait même de leur cassure, obtiendrait un mince cahier qui, comme l'auteur l'espérait lui-même, pourrait se glisser dans quelque coin de bibliothèque entre Guérin et Sénancour. Une âme parfois admirable s'y trouverait lavée de tout ce qui n'est pas l'essentiel.[102]

In making the comparison with Maurice de Guérin and Sénancour Yourenar is pointing to writers who like Octave had difficulty in ever getting recognized and who in any event scarcely profited from their efforts, if at all. Nevertheless, they have left an important legacy. It is characteristic, too, that she should associate Octave with a sensibility which by the time he was writing was already looking back increasingly to a bygone age. This too is a reflection on a society which was culturally behindhand. In making the effort to write at all Octave was, Yourcenar makes clear, establishing a

---

[101] Wagner, p. 222.
[102] *Souvenirs*, p. 848

basis on which Belgian letters could build; he was also a forerunner. It is important to recognise too that it is not Yourcenar's way to formally analyse schools of thought or of letters. That said, in the discussion of the character of her two great-uncles she seizes the opportunity to explore the implications of two of the main lines of nineteenth-century thought, Romanticism and Positivism, not as notions to be analysed in themselves, but as these are encountered and as lived in the work and experiences of these two characters. In this way she becomes a notable analyst on three counts of nineteenth-century trends and preoccupations as indicated by Bruno Blanckeman:

> Ces trois empreintes du dix-neuvième siècle, philosophique (le positivisme et ses implications), artistique (le romantisme en ses emphases), sociologique (le conformisme bourgeois et ses valeurs), constituent une identité idéologique qui habite l'écrivain, mais sur un mode négatif.[103]

After an initial engagement with Rémo she becomes notably critical:

> L'ardent Rémo a lui aussi ses tics et ses préjugés d'époque. Son positivisme, auquel il est parvenu par la plus épuisante des ascèses mentales, a toute la roideur d'un dogme.[104]

And shortly after a social comment made by him she states:

> Cette rhétorique démagogique ne vaut pas mieux que l'éloquence doctrinaire d'Octave.[105]

Reviewing Octave's peregrinations in the light of this, the manner in which she relates the opening of the fifth section of chapter three of *Souvenirs pieux* emerges as notably forthright. She acknowledges that the account she has given to this point of

---

[103] Bruno Blanckeman, 'Marguerite Yourcenar, passeur du siècle', in: *Marguerite Yourcenar: Écrivain du XIXe siècle*, ed. by Georges Fréris et Rémy Poignault (Clermont-Ferrand: SIEY, 2004), p. 15.
[104] *Souvenirs*, p. 852.
[105] *Souvenirs*, p. 853.

Octave's visit to his dying uncle, Louis Troye, is, 'un montage.'[106] The point is significant for she then adds that in it one detail is a straightforward invention. The surviving evidence gives no indication that he made the journey to La Pasture to see his uncle on horseback. There is no indication either way whether he did or made the journey in his coach or on horseback;

> Un seul détail est décidément inventé: rien n'indique que le poète, ce 23 octobre 1875, fit à cheval la route d'Acoz à La Pasture. Mais il a à son crédit d'autres chevauchées plus longues. S'il fit ce jour-là ce trajet dans sa voiture, comme ce fut le cas dans les deux occasion suivantes, ses méditations en cours de route n'en ont pas été changées.[107]

This statement, somewhat startling at first, comes, it will be noted, after the account of Octave's journey. This means that while we are reading it we assume that what we are being told in fact took place in the manner of a factual relating of history. This is a clear case where on the author's admission we are being presented with an imaginatively contrived account. Yet it is rooted in what occurred and it can be asserted that in approaching matters in this way it gets to the bottom of what in reality moved and motivated Octave. Central to this is having him journey by horse so that he is unequivocally alone with his ideas. A marked symbiosis is thereby effected between the human and the natural in this sequence. In isolating him like this as an individual caught in anxious reverie and through his heightened sensibilities Marguerite Yourcenar is able to fuse elements of fragility and vulnerability, human and natural. Both are registering degradation and loss.

Following his visit to his dying uncle, Louis Troye, Octave's yearning for a sharing of his ideas is foiled and he is thrust back upon himself. As he makes his way

---

[106] *Souvenirs*, p. 840.
[107] *Souvenirs*, pp. 840 – 41.

homewards the gradual approach of the flames from steelworks are visible through trees and seem to be threatening Acoz; its demise could well be imminent. The relationship of Octave to the woodlands on his estate is distinctive. Octave can see:

> Une trouée dans la masse forestière laisse passer une lueur rougeâtre, celles des hauts fourneaux qui peut-être un jour dévoreront ces arbres.[108]

In the case of Flémalle Yourcenar could say:

> Vu de loin, ce lieu rongé par la cupidité et l'imprévoyance de quatre ou cinq générations d'hommes d'affaires des xix^{e} et xx^{e} siècles, restait dans l'ensemble, ce qu'il avait été du temps de la vieille gravure des *Délices du pays de Liége*.[109]

Following the passage which points to the glimpse of furnaces through the trees of Acoz Yourcenar now writes:

> Quand ce faible passant qu'Octave se sent être ne sera plus là pour le défendre, ce sol tapissé de milliards de créatures que nous appelons l'herbe et la mousse sera peut-être corrodé, couvert de scories. Les dieux verts puissamment enracinés dans l'humus dont ils tirent leur force n'ont pas comme les animaux ou l'homme la ressource de combattre ou de fuir; ils sont sans défense contre la hache ou la scie.[110]

The vulnerability of the vegetative covering is being emphasised here and Octave is neither oblivious nor indifferent to it nor to the threat to it.

The mood on his return is sombre and this strand is echoed and picked up in a pathetic fallacy as he sets off on his return journey which is now much changed in character:

> La route est la même que celle du matin, mais la froide et venteuse fin de journée semble avoir changé le paysage. Les arbres, tantôt si beaux sous leur parure d'or, ne sont plus que des mendiants à qui la bise qui souffle maintenant par saccades arrache leur derniers haillons. L'ombre des nuages assombrit les champs.[111]

---

[108] *Souvenirs*, p. 830.
[109] *Souvenirs*, p. 765.
[110] *Souvenirs*, p. 830.
[111] *Souvenirs*, p. 818.

The tearing away of the last protective leaves is prefatory to the gradual affirmation of Octave's inner realisation that Rémo's demise was not an accident which the family had always been anxious to assert, but that in reality he had died by his own hand. It is the action of the trees agitated by the winds which enable Octave to arrive at this admission and to see through the skeins of social appearances. Now liberated, the next sequence leads on to close examination and memory recall of time spent together with his brother and what he and thereby we the readers can come to know of him. For the writer's strategy throughout much of this whole portion of the narrative is to reveal to us by a process of intimate observation many of the thoughts and reflections which pass through Octave's mind, the creation of an inner state of thought and reflections of a subtle and complex kind. Rémo's education included time spent in Jena and Weimar where he came in contact with developing scientific thought including in matters of ideas and also politics. He committed vigorously to the philosophies of his day, a process which would result in incomprehension, alienation and distancing from his family, perspectives which in turn eventually led to his suicide.

In a conjunction of flora and fauna Octave's progress through the woods on horseback loosens his memories and associations and what as a consequence can be revealed to him of his brother. On this 'rêverie du promeneur solitaire', as Octave approaches his demesnes he becomes almost like the spirit of those estates:

> La nuit est tombée et la fatigue venue, mais le fait de se retrouver maintenant sur ses terres, dans ses bois, apaise cet homme-dryade pour qui rien ne compte autant que l'épaisse douceur des mousses et la rampante beauté des racines.[112]

[112] *Souvenirs*, p. 828.

At this point the mood becomes more demanding and problematic, while the memory of Rémo becomes more immediate, more intense. Rendered poignant by 'le beau moutonnement des collines,' we witness the internalization of a process. Nature is here used by the author to evoke memory and recall, and the pain that goes with that process. The outer environment mirrors and intertwines with the convolutions of Octave's mind and associative reflections. Marguerite Yourcenar wishes to reconstruct and examine the inner workings of a subjective state of being through its interactiveness with its environment, one which she is reconstructing from such evidence as she has to hand – primarily Octave's own writings – which she suffuses with her own imaginative reach. Much of the outcome has to do with coming to terms with Octave's own sense of his place in the world and his ardent desire to rescue the memory of his loved brother from oblivion, an echo in a minor key of what she herself is doing as she probes the memory of her mother and her world. Partly stimulated by the sight of his uncle Louis nearing his end, Octave's mind has been predisposed to melancholy matters while the context of the woodlands facilitates the organization of his thoughts, many almost subliminal, to cohere as in the manner of a dream. Yourcenar is double-layering time here; we witness the artist's reconstruction of Octave in turn reconstructing a deeply experienced personal memory. Making his way home from Louis, his mind turns to Rémo as he thinks back over the first report of the tragedy three years earlier:

> Plus tard, il y a trois ans et un mois à peine, par un temps venteux qui faisait pleuvoir autour d'Octave "la pâle multitude des feuilles", c'est ici qu'un enfant du village lui a remis la dépêche foudroyante: *Arrivez vite. Grand malheur*.[113]

[113] *Souvenirs*, p. 829.

Octave recalls how in the course of his agonised three-hour long wait he feared the worst. In an imaginary proleptic moment he hoped Rémo has not been disfigured. Some days later the cortège was carried along this line of trees, again a key feature, lit by resinous torches:

> Quelques jours de plus, c'est le long de ces allées qu'un cortège funèbre a passé aux lueurs mouvantes de torches de résine.[114]

The manner of return of Rémo's body through the woodlands to his ancestral home is referred to again in this chapter, this time in the first sub-section of the eighth section:

> Le pèlerinage de Rémo avait vite abouti au retour du jeune Siegfried ramené à la lueur des torches le long des allées forestières; le sien s'achevait plus lentement en une symphonie pathétique.[115]

In tribute to his commitment to German ideas and art, Yourcenar here associates Rémo with a character from German myth with its Wagnerian echoes; it is a tribute, too, that in the same sentence she honours Octave, lover and practitioner of music, with a reference to no less a master than Beethoven.[116] The reference suggests the manner in which Octave attempts to live out his life, giving it an aesthetic shape. In this sequence the environment and specifically trees make possible for Octave a reconciliation with time, loss and pain.

Contextualised in rich vegetative surroundings, Octave fails to arrive at any final conclusions on the issues relating to his brother in the course of his slow, horse-borne peregrination home. Yet as a reliable mode of transport it is his mount which facilitates his processes of reflection and in the meantime we sense movement as the

---

[114] *Souvenirs*, p. 830.
[115] *Souvenirs*, p. 868.
[116] It is assumed that Beethoven's Sonata 8 is what is being referenced here, not Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony.

rider continues to progress through the woods. In the final stages of his approach to the house Octave gives his horse its head:

> Il laisse son cheval, qui lui aussi connaît la route, trotter vers la bonne écurie chaude.[117]

The animal has brought him successfully through the labyrinth of his thoughts, the woods and his own inner misgivings to the safety and security of home. Throughout this sequence Yourcenar is intrigued to track how Octave made his peace with a world deeply indifferent if not hostile to his temperamental concerns while at the same time trying to hold the ring in the family and in a society that he felt himself to be at the heart of and also obligated to. We are brought to understand that he deserves his tribute and Yourcenar would have the reader feel that the flowers placed in his empty seat following his death by his fellow writers were well earned. In conjunction with this is a determination to do Rémo justice in properly chronicling the manner of his passing away even while at the same time pinpointing the limitations and short-comings of the system of values to which he subscribed.

Yourcenar is far from being oblivious to the fact that Octave found the inner life he sought to examine and chronicle, testing. In a perceptive insight she says:

> Sa vie, qui à première vue nous paraît presque scandaleusement facile, lui avait sans doute coûté d'épuisants efforts.[118]

As an, 'homme-dryade', trees were not only a context in which he could tease out his thoughts, they also offered a context in which he could develop his learning.[119] This was especially the case in his early years. He and Rémo would sit underneath a tree

---

[117] *Souvenirs*, p. 831.
[118] *Souvenirs*, p. 866.
[119] *Souvenirs*, p. 828.

with their notes and books about them, sharing the playful nicknames they had concocted for one another, delving at times quite deeply in their reading:

> [Ils] se sont assis sous les branches entrelacées de deux tilleuls centenaires, avec autour d'eux leurs carnets, leurs livres, sur l'herbe courte de leur verte salle d'étude.[120]

Though there is no hint in the text of the Bodhi tree of the East, here the tree is handmaid to enlightenment, learning, insight.[121] Later Yourcenar will remark that she too did much the same, 'Comme les deux frères, j'ai lu sous les arbres Hésiode et Théocrite.'[122] It is appropriate that the writers cited treat of the countryside, whether the subject-matter is practical or idyllic. Here the very trees themselves constitute a pastoral context and a support in the acquisition of knowledge; they are timeless, eternally relevant and precious. In the light of this it is not inappropriate too that having gathered pine cones Octave then gradually feeds them into the fire:

> Octave s'assied devant la cheminée, y jette une à une des pommes des pin qu'il a ramassées lui-même dans un grand panier, le long d'une allée, au cours d'une de ses promenades solitaire, regarde jaillir et danser la flamme.[123]

This is a view of fire and its relationship to the woods in quite a different aspect from the one of industrial destruction. Here in contrast as well as succouring intellectual effort in the manner seen above, the woods offer warmth, life and vitality to human living. Yourcenar notes that Octave knew the text of Bonaventure's study of the Life of St Francis which relates the saint declining to separate logs on a burning fire so as not to disturb the flame:

---

[120] *Souvenirs*, p. 834.

[121] Buddhist elements in Yourcenar's thinking are discussed by Simone Proust, *L'Autobiographie dans* Le labyrinthe du monde *de Marguerite Yourcenar: l'écriture vécue comme exercice spirituel* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997).

[122] *Souvenirs*, p. 874.

[123] *Souvenirs*, p. 833. This and the next quotation are from the same page.

> Octave, grand lecteur du *Miroir de la perfection*, songe à saint François qui, par tendre respect pour les flammes, empêchait qu'on séparât les bûches brûlant encore.[124]

Through contemplation and reflection Octave is open to the implications of the natural and the world of nature which is beneficent and with which one can work constructively. Yourcenar regrets that his enthusiasm for St Francis was not picked up when it came to compiling his *souvenir pieux* at the time of his interment: 'François d'Assise, son saint préféré, ne fut pas non plus mis à contribution.'[125] This blind spot on the part of those near and dear to him, surprising too in view of his empathy with animals, would seem to be a clear indication of their failure to understand either his stance or the deep inner life going on within him and its attendant struggles.

A strikingly individualistic aspect of the importance of his trees and woodlands to Octave is indicated by the fact that shortly before his death he took to playing his violin in the woods at night. The sensitive Octave was deeply unhappy at school and he found great consolation in music:

> Depuis l'époque où elle le consolait des tristesses du collège, la musique était restée l'une de ses passions, comme elle l'avait été pour son frère, et il aimait la mêler aux bruits et aux odeurs sylvestres. Une de ses lettres mentionne une sonate de Mendelssohn jouée par lui chaque soir en plein bois sur son précieux guarnérius.[126]

That he did in fact play his violin in this fashion in the night time is also attested to by his mother:

---

[124] *Souvenirs*, p. 833. Bonaventure, Intro. Hugh McKay, *The little flowers of St. Francis: The mirror of perfection: St. Bonaventure's Life of St. Francis* (London: Dent; New York, Dutton, 1966).
[125] *Souvenirs*, p. 870.
[126] *Souvenirs*, pp. 864 – 65.

> Mme Irénée, toutefois, note qu'elle s'inquiéta, quelques jours avant la mort de son fils, de le voir s'attarder dehors avec son violon par un humide soir d'avril.[127]

For the Pan-like Octave his woods constituted a sacred place, a context of elevated reflection and an environment of harmony. His relationship to them may be summed up in Yourcenar's words as follows:

> [C]es bois qui étaient pour lui un lieu saint, et où il avait ça et là gravé sur les troncs d'arbres ces mots qui étaient évidemment le leitmotiv de ses réveries forestières: NOX – LUX – PAX – AMOR.[128]

The appellation 'homme-dryade', already noted, which Yourcenar gives to Octave is suggestive and has further interest in this context.[129] In his discussion of the god Pan Philippe Borgeaud notes how Euripides in the *Ion*, a text certainly known to Yourcenar, speaks of, 'the sanctuary on the Acropolis evoking the music of this god who plays his syrinx deep in shade.'[130] Music-playing, isolation and shade are here combined and are all features of Octave's world. It is to be observed too that in a note based on the study by Burkert Borgeaud refers to the analogy between hunting and sex, a matter of 'recognised importance in many cultures'.[131] Firstly, Octave's uncertainties over whether to carry a gun on hunting expeditions or if he does to equivocate by keeping it unloaded seems relevant here, even while Yourcenar would prefer him simply not to hunt at all. At the end of the present chapter she criticises Octave, contrasting him with Zénon; unlike the vigorous and forthright Zénon, Octave

---

[127] *Souvenirs*, p. 865.
[128] *Souvenirs*, p. 865.
[129] *Souvenirs*, p. 828.
[130] Philippe Borgeaud, *Recherche sur le dieu Pan* (Genève: Imprimerie du 'Journal de Genève', 1979), trans. by Kathleen Atlas and James Redfield, *The cult of Pan in Ancient Greece* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 48.
[131] Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: Interpretationen altgriechischer Opferriten und Mythen* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2nd edn, 1997), trans. by Peter Bing, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1983), p. 101, n. 21.

is constantly hesitant and holds back. Secondly, in keeping with this is the question of any possible relationship Octave may have had with women. His mother Irénée wishes he would marry, but, 'Elle l'espéra en vain.' Even mentioning the matter can be socially explosive:

> Le rigorisme du temps compliquait sur ce point les choses: quand Octave avoue, sans plus, à un ancien camarade bien-pensant sa liaison "avec une blonde", le brave garçon jette feu et flamme et le supplie de rompre ou d'épouser sur-le-champ, dilemme qui peut-être ne se posait pas. Rien des complexités du cœur et des sens n'avait droit de cité dans ce milieu comme il faut.[132]

There is the set of exchanges, too, between Félicien Rops and Octave in which the former suggests that in this domain Octave may have had something of a hidden life. Whatever the truth of Octave's involvement with a woman on any footing whatsoever, somewhat as above, there is a measure of affinity between his situation and that which characterises the figure of Pan. Borgeaud remarks:

> Passion surely draws Pan to the nymphs and animates the dance, but detachment is preserved. This god, who has so much in common with Aphrodite, succeeds only at musical performance.

and he concludes, 'Pseudo-Heraclitus has it exactly right: this is a sphere of frustration.'[133] Finally, he remarks on the fact that the syrinx is not only a vehicle for rendering love-songs; there is something disturbing, funereal about the sound.[134] Much that is similar could be said of the manner of Octave's playing of his violin while wandering his woods at night when in his terminal illness with its suggestion of pathos and melancholy. While the whole description relating to Octave is couched in terms evocative of the bourgeois world he lived in, nevertheless there is also something yet more primal underlying the demands and tensions which characterised

---

[132] *Souvenirs*, p. 867.
[133] Borgeaud, p. 77.
[134] Borgeaud, p. 82.

it. Borgeaud sums up much of his response to his study of the divine figure of classical Greece he has examined in the following words:

> A solitary vagabond, a wanderer through snowy wastes, in foreign territories off the beaten track, […] Pan seems gripped by a constant and eccentric restlessness.[135]

To a notable degree Octave conforms to this description.

In brief, trees are not viewed by Yourcenar in a utilitarian light. They are put forward as constituting an organic context, a framework in which the human mind can find amplitude, an opportunity and a context for thought and reflection; they offer potential for succour. All this is apart from and in addition to their general usefulness. Furthermore, what is said of them in the work is being said of flora and vegetation in general.

[135] *Souvenirs*, p. 83.

2.6 Fateful developments: the machine in the garden

Marguerite Yourcenar's *Labyrinthe du Monde* chronicles technical developments which nevertheless could have tragic outcomes – examples, one in each volume, are her mother's reliance on medical expertise, her grandfather's terrible experience on the Versailles railway, the death by a firearm of her father's sister, Marie. In this section, however, the discussion will be confined to the momentous shift in society's arrangements as it transferred from horse-drawn power to the mechanical engine and the aeroplane.[136] In what seems a necessary preamble the discussion opens with Yourcenar's account of her father and his contemporary, Proust, responding to these radical changes in their society in the period shortly before the outbreak of the First World War.

Towards the end of the first chapter in the third volume of the *Mémoires*, *Quoi? L'Éternité*, that is to say *Le Traintain des jours*, Marguerite Yourcenar draws attention to the fact that Proust was so moved when he saw his first plane leave the ground that he wept with excitement:

> Nous ne somme qu'à sept ou huit ans de l'époque où le jeune Proust pleurait des larmes d'enthousiasme en voyant son premier avion s'élever dans le ciel de Balbec.[137]

Her focus on the aeroplane, which she will shortly expand on briefly but tellingly, is part of a lengthier discussion which, notwithstanding the emphasis here on aviation, focuses primarily on the motorcar, invented at much the same time. Part of the writer's purpose in citing Proust is to show how not only grown men, but also rare

---

[136] For the notion of the introduction of the machine into the bucolic see Leo Marx, *The machine in the garden: technology and the pastoral ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[137] *Quoi?*, p. 1202. Proust's feelings for Albertine and Agostinelli are compounded in this incident, but with the word 'enthousiasme' Yourcenar focuses attention on the aeroplane itself here.

individuals of exceptional insight and sensitivity could respond to and endorse a technological invention. In the previous sentence she has said:

> Nous avons oublié à quelle point la découverte de l'automobile fut un miracle pour l'homme du tournant du siècle.[138]

This sentence amounts to a preamble, a two-page discussion on her father's enthusiasm for his motorcar which he purchased at this time and which absorbed much of his interest and enthusiasm, at least for a period. Citing Proust at the same time demonstrates that in being enthusiastic Michel was not only in good company, his excitement was of a piece with discriminating and informed people of the day.

Marguerite Yourcenar will shortly comment on some of the ensuing disadvantages arising from both aircraft and motor vehicles, but in a brief manœuvre she removes herself and subsequently her father from any charge of ludditism. She relates how her father was having a mechanical difficulty with his new purchase at the garage in Bailleul. As she dismisses this, a touch haughtily, perhaps, Marguerite Yourcenar wants us to reflect deeply on the forms of social change being generated by the developments of technology, the effects they have on our lives and, most particularly, the responsibilities they bring with them. It would be simplistic and indeed incorrect to assert that Yourcenar is opposed to either motorcars or to aeroplanes. It is a gung-ho endorsement that she is working to warn against. In a further transposition Yourcenar moves from Proust to Marcel, remarking that:

> Marcel n'avait pas prévu la mort tombant du ciel, Coventry, Dresde, Hiroshima, et les anéantissements placés plus loin dans ce qui est encore notre avenir, pas plus que l'attrition produite en périodes de prétendue paix par les haines et les rivalités des nations artificellement rapprochées.[139]

---

[138] *Quoi?*, p. 1202.
[139] *Quoi?*, p. 1202

If the focus associated with Proust is on the aeroplane, in Michel's case it is the motorcar. In his case she points out he could have no foresight of the following:

> Michel ne prévoyait pas l'embouteillage des rues, les routes annuellement jonchées d'autant de blessées et de morts que par les effets d'une guerre civile, les gaz lâchés par les moteurs polluant les poumons, délitant la pierre et tuant les arbres, l'asservissement du monde aux puissances du pétrole, l'Océan souillé par les forages et les mortelles marées noires.[140]

In a single stroke Yourcenar here draws together a number of large themes: thanks to the motorcar, deaths and tortious damage in civil society on a scale every bit as large as that arising from civil conflict, pollution with grave health consequences, environmental damage not only to forests and woodlands, but even to rock faces and structures, enslavement to the tyranny of the oil-based economy – she is writing not long after the oil crisis of the early seventies – the pollution of the oceans arising from drilling and exploration. In sum, living things, including men, are suffering on a grand scale arising from the handiwork and inventions of man's creative talents when these are directed to technological inventions.[141] Just as Proust could not have foreseen the severe militaristic consequences of the development of the aeroplane, her father could not have realistically been expected to foresee the consequences of the invention of the motorcar. In this account both Proust and her father become exemplary of the individual, unwitting in the face of major technological development. Both of them were equally welcoming of the introduction of the machine into the garden.

There is a brief moment at the beginning of this cycle of involvement with the motorcar when Michel thinks he will be able to drive for as far as the roads extend:

---

[140] *Quoi?*, pp. 1202 – 3.

[141] Polarization between nature and technology is discussed in Victor Ferkiss, *Nature, Technology and Society: Cultural Roots of the Current Environmental Crisis* (New York and London: 1992), while David Rothenburg, *Hand's End: Technology and the Limits of Nature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1993), explores the opposition between science and nature.

> Pour le moment Michel à l'impression de se déplacer librement dans un monde qui s'étend de tous côtés aussi loin qu'il y a des routes.[142]

In her expansion on this theme Yourcenar draws in the analogy of the earlier development of the railway. The passage is lengthy, but is key to an understanding of a major theme which informs the *Mémoires* as a whole:

> Plus de chemin de fer roulant sur des rails inflexibles, plus de gares bruyantes et enfumées, plus de fumées noires vomies sur les paysages. Ni Marcel se promenant en Normandie avec Albertine, ni Michel faisant de la vitesse sur les pavés du Nord, ne devinent que, plus dévastateurs encore que deux guerres, les "progrès de la circulation" jetteront bas les beaux peupliers et les beaux ormes de ces routes de France qu'ils ont tant aimées, pour laisser aux chauffards une chance de plus de se dépasser.[143]

'Progress', which in this account takes the form of causing environmental waste and damage by felling the poplars and elms which line the roadways, lies at the heart of this criticism. Every act in the name of progress which has this kind of outcome is a writing of history; change and comparisons are enacted between that which has now come to be and that which was before the change was wrought. This development is not gainful, it is entropic. Such developments are not to be commended without challenge. At this point Michel is again equated in his perceptions with Proust's Marcel rather than with the writer (Proust) viewed historically as a person. This in turn transposes us into a way of seeing Michel not as a fictional character, but as a character, attested in history, but to be understood and judged in fictional terms. There is a perspective according to which we are to see him as exemplary, representative, one of us, all too likely to be helpless and uncomprehending. The condemnation of the lack of vision, foresight or understanding becomes a kind of literary sententiousness, a plangent statement of sage reflection, exemplified in the

---

[142] *Quoi?*, p. 1203.
[143] *Quoi?*, p. 1203.

text in the personas of Michel and also Marcel, but really to be applied to all. The individual is not to be judged in terms of the locally, personally moral. Yourcenar wants her readers to stand back and reflect so that fundamental changes in attitude can be generated.

The passage entails, then, a degree of generalizing. Michel becomes representational of a point of view, susceptible of comment and evaluation, limited, but understandably so, inasmuch as he is a child of his time. Of both Michel and Marcel, then, it can be said, 'Ils étaient alors l'état normal d'un homme ouvert aux réalisations nouvelles.'[144] This point is made more emphatically shortly after:

> Ils ne savent pas non plus que cette délicieuse liberté de s'arrêter où la fantaisie vous en vient et d'atteindre par des routes peu fréquentées des sites qu'on n'imaginait pas si proches sera supplantée sous peu par la claustrophobique rigueur de l'autoroute dont on ne sort qu'aux endroits autorisés, annoncés longtemps d'avance par des panonceaux, et que gouvernent des feux verts et rouges comme autrefois les rails. L'étrange facilité qu'ont les objets créés par l'homme pour finir par se ressembler ne s'est pas encore révélée à eux.[145]

Here the author pinpoints the curious pattern of reiteration of a system which, for all that it was once characterized by rail and now by road, is essentially in the process of repeating itself. In these iterations we see something of the 'atrophy of experience' occasioned by mechanization described by Walter Benjamin.[146] While this seems to say that human ingenuity does not at bottom change very much, the dynamics of Positivism are still very much in evidence. In many ways it is the unquestioning, unreflecting assumptions of Positivism Marguerite Yourcenar is questioning here.

---

[144] *Quoi?*, p. 1202.
[145] *Quoi?*, p. 1203.
[146] Walter Benjamin, 'On some Motifs in Baudelaire', *Illuminations*, trans. by H. Zohn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), pp. 157 – 202.

What emerges from this comparison between the concerns of both her father and Proust, interests they came to quite independently, is the speed of technological change, the extraordinarily short period of time between the development of new technologies and the catastrophic climax of the dropping of the first atomic bomb, that is between the opening decade of the new century and the crucial moment less than half a century later. With this comes the disturbing realisation of man's capacity as a consequence to destroy himself and much of the planet along with him. It is this realisation which gives Yourcenar's writing its immense urgency, relevance, contemporaneity. It also explains why she fastens so unremittingly on the prime importance of alerting her readership to the vulnerability of the environment both vegetative and creaturely. By 'environment' here she means the material, physical, growing and living universe; in modern terms the biosphere or ecosphere we all inhabit. As a living, biological entity man is included in that and so his fate is inescapably bound up with it.

La chasse

In a manner which brings trees, woodlands, creatures and technology in the form of firearms together, the topic of La Chasse enables the negotiation between flora and fauna, central to this discussion, to be examined here. In the next chapter it will be shown how Yourcenar demonstrates how our lives have been historically interwoven with the creatures of human companionship, primarily the domesticated ones, the dog and the horse. At various points the narrative also moves to embrace creatures of the wild insofar as these impact upon and are impacted upon in turn by regular living patterns. Discussion of this topic is not a general question of creatures in the wild, but those which are incorporated into the annual cycle of social living represented in the ritual of *La Chasse*.

As an event the hunt brings the hunter in close conjunction with the prey and the memories and associations the activity gives rise to are immediate and intense. The greater part of the references to hunting in the *Mémoires* are to be found in *Souvenirs pieux*. This is because most of the scenes in which hunting takes place are on the large estates, the châteaux, the accounts of which are largely confined to a significant part of this volume. By hunting here is meant not foxes and hounds, but shooting; the picture of hunting in the work is exclusively one of shooting parties on large estates. The practice is included in a list of activities characteristic of the closed circle of the privileged land-owning class inventoried by Charle:

> [L]e château et la vaste propriété en province, l'hôtel particulier à Paris ou l'appartement spacieux, exclusivement dans un quartier peuplé de gens de même appartenance sociale, la domesticité nombreuse, la fréquentation d'un

> cercle où ne se rencontrent que des gens du même monde, l'accumulation d'objets dont des œuvres d'art, la pratique d'un sport comme la chasse.[147]

Marguerite Yourcenar was aware that the practice was confined to certain times in the year and that it was in many ways a social activity among this favoured class. The situation may be usefully contrasted with that in other societies. Næss, for example, writes:

> The Indians in California, with their animistic mythology, were an example of equality in principle, combined with realistic admissions of their own vital needs. When hunger arrives, brother rabbit ends up in the pot. 'A brother *is* a citizen, but oh, so temptingly nutritious!' – This exclamation is too easy; the complicated rituals which surround the hunt in many cultures illustrate how closely people feel bound to other beings, and how natural it is to feel that *when we harm others, we also harm ourselves.* Non-instrumental acts develop into instrumental.[148]

It is notable that the pheasant shooting being described is not empathetic. If there is a ritual, it is that it takes place in a socially-determined season and in a manner designed to confirm the landowner's entitlement to fire a weapon on his own land.

Following the sale of Mont Noir and the outbreak of the war when Yourcenar was around eleven years of age her father left the area and she did not return until her mid-twenties. It was on the occasion of this visit that she was invited to take part in a pigeon shoot, 'un tir aux pigeons.'[149]. 'J'assistai,' she tells us, 'pour la seule fois de ma vie, à cette cérémonie sportive.'[150] Her memory, she tells us, is a little hazy, but her impressions of the prince whose shoot she attended was that he was short and

---

[147] Blanchet-Douspis, p. 85, following Christophe Charle, *Histoire de la France du XIXème siècle* (Paris: Seuil, Points Histoire, 1991), p. 248.
[148] Arne Næss, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy, t*rans. by David Rothenberg (Cambridge: Cambridg University Press, 1989), p. 174. His italics.
[149] *Souvenirs*, p. 842.
[150] *Souvenirs*, p. 842.

broad with a rustic charm characteristic of such people. It was the birds which were beautiful:

> Les beaux oiseaux aux tons de soie moirée et d'ardoise, sortis un à un d'un panier, était insérés par un garde dans une boite de bois blanc; l'invité armait son fusil; l'oiseau, se croyant libre, prenait son vol dans un grand battement de joie; le coup de feu le rabattait immédiatement, mort, pesant comme une pierre, ou au contraire palpitant, se débattant un long instant sur le sol jusqu'à ce que le garde l'achevât dextrement pendant qu'on recommençait.[151]

The units of the sentence hold the sensibilities the description arouses in us in an even suspension. With the opening of the sentence the admiration of the reader for the creature of nature is evoked as a straight fact of observation and also as a subject for admiration, if not of wonder. The *sacré* is being invoked here. This then gives way to the ominous juxtaposition with the impersonal taking up of the weapon. Central to the piece is the complete certainty with which the creature can be trusted to take to the air in pursuit of its freedom, celebrating its nature. The striking down by the shot immediately after this is devastating, final. Or at least it would seem to be so until it is realized that with everything so highly contrived it would appear to be impossible to miss and at least there might be a complete unawareness and absence of suffering on the part of the creature at the crucial moment. Nevertheless, quite often the job is imperfectly done and the *coup de grâce* has to be delivered by the man in attendance. In some ways it is the phrase, 'ou au contraire', which gives the passage its real bite and incisiveness. Syntactically, the piece seems to be reasonable and mannered in tenor. With opening phrasing suggestive of a light airiness we suddenly realise we are actually witnesses to a massacre at close quarters, one which seems to be essentially meaningless or which achieves nothing beyond a paltry, momentary self-

[151] *Souvenirs*, pp. 842 – 43.

aggrandisement. It may be that the prince in question was not even an unpleasant person. In any event, it is the insensitivity, sanctioned by custom, which Yourcenar is calling in question. The deep concern is the desensitizing effect slaughtering animals has, which, unless carefully directed and managed, leads inevitably, she insists, to a similar indifference to the slaughter of humans. This will happen all the more readily when the actions entailed are committed in a tight area of physical proximity, precisely when the anxieties and pain are registered and ignored. In a similar spirit Marguerite Yourcenar notes it as an irony that the patron saint of hunting is St. Hubert. Of this she writes:

> Nous sommes au pays de saint Hubert, mais le tueur qui se convertit pour avoir vu s'avancer vers lui le cerf en larmes, portant entre ses bois Jésus crucifié, est devenu, par un renversement dont nul ne sent l'ironie, le patron des chasseurs et de leurs équipages, un peu comme le crucifix prit place au prétoire du côté des juges.[152]

Yourcenar here castigates the sad lack of thought that has given rise to ironies of misunderstanding in social pactice. Once again Næss's comments seem relevant:

> Immanuel Kant's maxim "You shall never use another person only as a means' is expanded in Ecosophy T to 'You shall never use any living being only as a means.' The lack of identification leads to indifference.[153]

It is commonly held that the present interest in the issue of the environment began to arise in the 1970's, a date suggested by Corine Pelluchon in an aside. Indeed, Walter Wagner points out that thinking on the topic of the environment in general dates from the 1980s among critics in the Anglo-American sphere.[154] It was in 1955, however, that Marguerite Yourcenar first published her study of Oppian's text on hunting in her

---

[152] *Souvenirs*, p. 759.
[153] Næss, p. 174.
[154] Wagner, p. 208.

essay, 'Oppien ou *les Chasses*'.[155] This text looks at the development of the concept of the chase over more than two millennia. Yourcenar points to the presence of beasts of Africa and Asia in the text of the classical period. By the time Oppien comes to be rediscovered and re-edited in the sixteenth century by Florent Chrestien, 'curateur de bibliothèques royales, bon humaniste qui fut professeur d'Henri IV,' it becomes known as *Quatre livres de la Vénerie d'Oppien*.[156] Thinking on the presentation of hunting had by this date been heavily influenced by medieval traditions of the hunt, essentially a matter of European animals, deer, boar, fox and also bear. Yourcenar notes in contrast the sheer plenitude of the world of post-classical Greece where the possibility of exhausting the animal supply seemed inconceivable. On this Yourcenar writes:

> Voici ce monde plus ancien et plus jeune que nous, neuf à chaque aurore, que l'homme a décimé et persécuté depuis le temps des chasseurs en chlamyde ou en justaucorps, qui du moins avaient l'excuse de croire en l'abondance inépuisable de la nature, cette excuse que nous n'avons plus, nous qui continuons non seulement à détruire les bêtes, mais travaillons à anéantir la nature elle-même.[157]

What this passage shows is that the problem of the potential for the negation of nature and the attitudes she held in relation to that were clearly well developed even at that earlier stage in her writing career. By the time she gets to the account of the society of Northern France and Francophone Belgium among the well-to-do in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Marguerite Yourcenar makes it clear that in perpetuating hunting these people were enshrining practices which, if largely medieval in origin, had little or no place in a contemporary world where the level of

---

[155] An earlier form of this essay was published as an introduction to the translation by Florent Chrestien of the *Cynégétique d'Oppian* (Paris: Les Cent-Une, 1955), pp. I – VI. The work was gathered together with other pieces into *Le Temps, ce grand sculpteur*, published in 1983.

[156] Florent Chrestien, *Les quatre liures de la Venerie d'Oppian poete Grec D'Anarzarbe* (A Paris, : De l'imprimerie de Robert Estienne, Par Mamert Patisson, 1575).

[157] *Essais et mémoires*, p. 395.

slaughter and damage to nature was no longer sustainable. Yourcenar's father, Michel's, own attitude to hunting, meanwhile, is clear:

> Cet homme qui forme instinctivement un lien avec tout animal qu'il rencontre déteste la chasse, et aime trop les chevaux pour aimer les courses.[158]

[158] *Souvenirs*, p. 936.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has brought into prominence the fact that Yourcenar is a key writer on the environment as is argued by the critic Walter Wagner. The discussion explored the relationship emphasized by the text between trees and their geological forebears, that which is now experienced as coal. So specific was this development in the area in question that it is possible to pinpoint a precise decade as constituting a date for the genesis of the Anthropocene. The discussion leads on to explore the impact this development had on the lives and material conditions of the owners of the large estates which contained seams under them and how the ensuing thermo-industrial activities generated not only huge family wealth, but also major anthropocenic consequences. Yourcenar goes on to show how the associated discoveries and methodologies were rapidly adopted by visiting European monarchs, launching a steady process of transition to a globalized set of practices ushering in the modern world. Problems and concerns consequent upon these activities which Yourcenar highlights are now considered. The discussion next considers some of the beneficial aspects of flora as seen, for example, in the restorative, educational and therapeutic potential of trees, to name just some. This is followed by an examination of the uneasy relationship between bioforms and technology seen in the rapid development of aircraft and cars, a tension discussed in the section on the machine in the garden. The chapter ends with a discussion of hunting as this was understood in the château society of the world Yourcenar is evoking. The topic combines nature, woodlands, creatures and firearms, thereby bringing together in one collective social practice features of the present chapter and leading to the discussion of fauna in the next.

3. FAUNA: ANIMALS AND TIME

3.1 Introduction

The essentially agrarian world of the nineteenth century, the prime subject of Marguerite Yourcenar's narrative, included the owners of substantial lands who, as much as their tenants, were close to the animals they depended on for their sustenance, their wealth and companionship. In the passages on the situation of the treatment of the cow and of animal slaughter which follow we see examples of Yourcenar in her role as what Deprez terms a 'protest' writer. The occurrences of mentions of dogs and horses, on the other hand, are more in the idiom of a narrative and they are made to appear as part of a background and a contextualizing. The argument here is that while this is correct, in fact when viewed across the *Labyrinthe* as a whole, as with the constant references to trees, these presentations which involve creatures constitute a main theme running through the narrative. Meanwhile, the domesticated creatures, the dog and the horse, are both so ubiquitous in the day-to-day living practices as to constitute a form of the everyday. The lives of the people Marguerite Yourcenar is writing about were ones in which the dog, domesticated and made into a family companion and also a pet, lends insight into their ways of living and also enables comments to be made on specific vulnerabilities. The role of the creature is to highlight an act as constituting commentary upon certain features of vulnerability and fragility, key issues which inform the entirety of the *Labyrinthe*, both human and natural. The creature enables the registering and rendering into coherence experiences of pain, trauma, hurt and loss, in particular as these are registered by young people, adolescents and young adults. It operates as a kind of

'objective correlative' for these feelings.[1] In the case of the horse, its ubiquity is somewhat differently designed to highlight its embeddedness and central and indispensible role in the functioning of society. Its replacement and disappearance is co-temporal with the demise of a way of life which reached back into the mists of prehistory and deep time. The collapse of the system built round it and the transference to the age of the mechanical engine amounts to a radical departure and a significant moment which may be termed Braudelian.

[1] The notion is associated particularly with T.S. Eliot in his critical writing: *The Sacred Wood: essays on poetry and criticism* (London: Faber and faber, 1997).

3.2 A major shift in social practices and its consequences

In a shift in social practices, on a par and co-temporal with the transition from horsepower to the mechanical engine, the end of the nineteenth century saw a revolution in the practice of infant nourishment. This is the period of the event which will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter. Meanwhile, it was the discoveries of Pasteur and Lister which made the nutritional step possible. The *Labyrinthe* records this process, not in a scientific manner, nor in keeping with the practice of historians, but dramatized through certain preferences Yourcenar associates with her father. In her account of the taking of the decision how as an infant, she, the new arrival, would be fed, Yourcenar relates that her father was opposed to bringing in a wet nurse. In this way the writer gives herself the opportunity to refer to the widespread practice whereby it was customary for a young woman to fulfill that task. So coveted was the position that it was by no means uncommon for the girl's mother to connive at her daughter's pregnancy in the hope that she would find an opening in the château. Yourcenar says of her father on this matter:

> Là aussi, les sordides agglomérations rurales du Nord de la France l'ont instruit: il s'indigne qu'une fille pauvre choisisse de se faire couvrir par un amant de passage, souvent de connivence avec sa propre mère, dans l'espoir de coiffer dans dix ou onze mois le bonnet enrubanné des nourrices et de trouver chez des riches une bonne place qu'elle gardera peut-être des années, si, plus tard, de nourrice elle est promue bonne d'enfants.[2]

Mireille Blanchet-Douspis cites Yvonne Knibhieler writing in Duby-Perrot on this issue. Fundamentally the girl was seen in terms of her body, was well treated and domesticated:

---

[2] *Souvenirs*, p. 724.

> Comme elle constitue pour ses patrons un signe extérieur de richesse, elle est toujours coquettement attifée. […] Elle dort dans la chambre de l'enfant, non pas dans une mansarde comme les autres domestiques. On lui impose une propreté rigoureuse, mais elle mange ce qui lui plaît, et ne travaille guère.[3]

With the growth of a more republican outlook the practice was increasingly condemned in the latter part of the century:

> La sensibilité démocratique, qui grandit en France sous la iii^{e} république, dénonce sa condition comme scandaleuse, et l'assimile à celle de la prostituée.[4]

Blanchet-Douspis notes that by the turn of the century the conversion to bottle-feeding was considerably advanced.[5] Yourcenar presents her father's choice in a different light from that of social reform. She points out that he was no nascent Tolstoy – 'un Tolstoï à l'état d'ébauche' – rather that he was concerned that his wife's breasts might lose their shape if she were to do the feeding, perhaps at least confirming he was opposed to the practice of exploiting a local girl. Yourcenar's possibly somewhat wry views on her father's behaviour here – was she judging him or had he remarked to her that this was his motive? – can be seen against his attempt, following Fernande's death, to set up a charitable initiative along English lines for rural mothers, 'Son idée de fournir des layettes aux filles-mères sans ressources.'[6] The initiative fell flat – 'fait rire les uns et offense les autres' – but his attempts show an awareness of social shortcomings of the time.

---

[3] *Histoire des femmes en Occident – IV – le XIXe siècle*, ed. by Georges Duby et Michelle Perrot (Paris: Plon, 1991, 2002), p. 417.
[4] Duby et Perrot, p. 417.
[5] Blanchet-Douspis, *L'influence de l'histoire contemporaine*, p. 91.
[6] *Quoi?*, p. 1194.

The consequence of these choices is that in an act of biospherical equivalence the new-born infant will be bottle fed. Yourcenar's central point then follows. This transformation in practice entails a total reliance on cow's milk, if the child is to survive, and the physiological equivalence between the plight of the infant and a calf in certain ways is made explicit by Yourcenar. Yourcenar emphatically asserts the close inter-dependent relationship between man and creatures, in this instance specifically the cow, early in the *Labyrinthe*, an issue which she argues is being increasingly lost sight of with ever-expanding urbanization and the loss of direct contact with nature and the soil. The absence of a land ethic or attachment to the soil is seen, for example, in the indifference of the Marchienne family to the loss of the estate once Arthur's will is read. Meanwhile, drawing an equivalence between the animal and the human and following a remark on how as an infant of one hour she was inevitably caught between, 'les réalités de la souffrance animale et de la peine humaine', Marguerite Yourcenar comments on the centrality of milk and the ferocity of the infant child in acquiring it:

> Le lait apaise les cris de la petite fille. Elle a vite appris à tirer presque sauvagement sur la mamelle de caoutchouc; la sensation du bon liquide coulant en elle est sans doute son premier plaisir.[7]

This statement opens the way to a vigorous discussion on a broader front of the milk provider, the domesticated ungulate, the cow. If Yourcenar's point is to be taken at face value, the cow, on which all children will increasingly be dependent for survival, ought to be celebrated accordingly. Well aware, on the contrary, that the paragraph may be received with ridicule, and perhaps, too, in a context like France, Yourcenar goes on all the same, determined to make her case. Not only the animal's milk, but every part of the creature's anatomy is used by man:

---

[7] *Souvenirs*, p. 724.

> Le riche aliment sort d'une bête nourricière, symbole animal de la terre féconde, qui donne aux hommes non seulement son lait, mais plus tard, quand ses pis se seront définitivement épuisés, sa maigre chair, et finalement son cuir, ses tendons et ses os dont on fera de la colle et du noir animal.[8]

In what seems like a spirit of remorseless utilitarianism man pursues his interest in the animal until it is obliterated and there is absolutely nothing left. Two trenchant sentences follow in which the writer highlights the humiliation and suffering heaped on this creature, so central to man's well-being:

> Elle mourra d'une mort presque toujours atroce, arrachée aux prés habituels, après le long voyage dans le wagon à bestiaux qui la cahotera vers l'abattoir, souvent meurtrie, privée d'eau, effrayée en tout cas par ces secousses et ses bruits nouveaux pour elle. Ou bien, elle sera poussée en plein soleil, le long d'une route, par des hommes qui la piquent de leurs longs aiguillons, la malmènent si elle est rétive; elle arrivera pantelante au lieu de l'exécution la corde au cou, parfois l'œil crevé, remise entre les mains de tueurs que brutalise leur misérable métier, et qui commenceront peut-être à la dépecer pas tout à fait morte.[9]

In her discussion of focalisation in the fictional works of Yourcenar (she does not incude the *Labyrinthe du monde* in this cluster), Francesca Counihan remarks:

> Le personage principal étant privilégié comme focalisateur, il est parfois difficile de discerner la présence dans le récit d'une conscience autre que la sienne, qui serait celle du narrateur extérieur ou de l'auteur implicite.[10]

A benefit to Yourcenar of the hybrid character of the *Labyrinthe* wherever the point of view of the narrating is hers is that she is able to represent her own voice when it comes to matters which passionately engage her and which are of a piece with the challenging character of her essays, shortly to be discussed. The effect is sharpened, too, in that, as has also been seen, for example, in the discussion of Rémo and the

---

[8] *Souvenirs*, pp. 724 – 25.
[9] *Souvenirs*, p. 725.
[10] Francesca Counihan, *L'Autorité dans l'œuvre romanesque de Marguerite Yourcenar* (Paris: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1998), p. 254.

figure of Hecate, she allows her feelings on the specific topic to well up on a single occasion of intensity in the narrative, ostensibly in response to the circumstances being described, helping the reader to engage with the ethical issue(s) at stake.

In these sentences on the cow Yourcenar lays out arguments also to be found in a number of her essays. There are four in all in which Yourcenar talks directly about matters relating to the environment, primarily animals.[11] Three were published in the decade while she was working on the *Labyrinthe*: 'Une civilisation à cloisons étanches', published in *Le Figaro* on 16 February 1972, 'Bêtes à fourrure' which appeared in 1976, and 'Qui sait si l'âme des bêtes va en bas?', in 1981.[12] The fourth essay, 'Oppien ou *les Chasses'*, appeared in 1955 and has been discussed above. All four pieces are important for they contain Yourcenar's working out of many of her views on the environment and issues of an ecological character, views which equally inform her *Labyrinthe*.

The problematic in the brief piece, 'Une civilization à cloisons étanches', is that in it the writer makes a comparison between the suffering of animals being transported to their deaths and Jewish people being carried to extermination camps, equally in sealed wagons, and the critic reports the difficulty many have had in accepting this. She attributes Yourcenar's difficulty as arising in part from the manner of her mother's death. In this piece Yourccenar makes 'an emotional issue out of the suffering of the cow, her maternal totem.'[13] The difficulty for Yourcenar, Deprez argues, is that she has failed to appreciate that others may not feel as deeply or in the same way as she

[11] Animals in Yourcenar are discussed by Lucille Desblache, 'Marguerite Yourcenar et le monde animal: éthique et esthétique de l'altérité', *Bulletin de la SIEY*, 18 (Tours: déc. 1997), 148 – 56.
[12] The three are discussed in Deprez, *Marguerite Yourcenar and the USA*, p. 93.
[13] Deprez, *Marguerite Yourcenar and the USA*, p. 101.

does on this issue. Deprez relates further that the Yourcenarian argument found disfavour at a conference she attended at Cerisy in 2006, though it needs to be said that the original publication of the work in the national daily in 1972 seems to have passed unremarked.

In his discussion of Adorno's analysis of the essay Sheringham observes:

> Adorno's essay ends by stressing a transgressive power of negativity at work in the essay that makes it heretical. 'The law of the innermost form of the essay,' he concludes, 'is heresy. By transgressing the orthodoxy of thought, something becomes visible in the object which it is orthodoxy's secret purpose to keep invisible.'[14]

Two pages prior to that assessment Sheringham has already stated that Adorno insists that the essay 'sceptical and unsystematic as it is, has it own epistemology, that it manifests a process of thought, but one that is performed through the formal charcteristics of the genre.' This point finds further support in a statement by Lukács to the effect that the essay is a court, but (unlike in the legal system) it is not the verdict that is important, that sets standards and creates precedents, but the process of examining and judging.'[15] In line with these descriptions, the positions being taken in these Yourcenarian essays on the comparison being made between the plight of cattle and humans both of which in one way and another have been or are being transported, appears at one and the same time as both critical on the part of the writer and heretical in the eyes of her critics.

---

[14] Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, p. 54. Adorno's comments come in: T.W. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form' (1958), trans. by B. Hullot-Kentor and F. Will, *New German Critique*, 32 (Spring-Summer 1984), 151 – 71 (p. 171).

[15] Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, p. 52. George Lukács, *Soul and Form* (London: Merlin Press, 1994), p. 16.

It is important to note that there does appear to be a sense in which Yourcenar is testing her own ideas against herself in this essay and that many of the points on animal suffering she is adducing there will find expression, more or less modified, in the *Labyrinthe du monde* which she was increasingly working on at this time. A case of over-lapping considerations may be found in the choice of illustration and the assessment she makes of her great uncle Octave who chronicled his return from his extended journey to the Mediterranean regions in his *Jours de solitude*. Yourcenar quotes:

> Dans une clairière qui bordait la campagne et qui n'en était séparée que par une haie de viornes je vis deux agneaux mourants balancés aux branches d'un frêne. Le berger venait de les égorger de son couteau, et, pendant qu'un sang pâle pleuvait sur les mousses, les brebis bêlaient, se pressant tête basse les unes aux autres. Telle fut pour moi la pastorale de la Sabine.[16]

In the face of the suffering of the animals which were not without a degree of understanding of what had befallen some of their number, Yourcenar finds here an example of Octave's capacity for compassion and this leads her to a careful analysis of its defining characteristics:

> La compassion – mot plus explicite que celui de pitié, puisqu'il souligne le fait de pâtir avec ceux qui pâtissent – n'est pas, comme on le croit trop, une passion faible, ou une passion d'homme faible, qu'on puisse opposer à celle, plus virile, de la justice; loin de répondre à une conception sentimentale de la vie, cette pitié chauffée à blanc n'entre comme une lame que chez ceux qui, forts ou non, courageux ou non, intelligents ou non (là n'est pas la question), ont reçu l'horrible don de voir face à face le monde tel qu'il est. À partir de cette vision extatique à rebours, on ne parle plus de la beauté qu'avec certaines restrictions.[17]

Apart from the establishment here of Octave as a deeply reflective personality, altogether too likely to be overlooked, as indeed he was in his own time, far from being feeble, he is one of those burdened with the ghastly gift. That this is empathetic

---

[16] *Souvenirs*, p. 856.
[17] *Souvenirs*, pp. 855 – 56.

imagination is made explicit in the essay, 'Une civilisation à cloisons étanches', where Yourcenar points to Oscar Wilde's remark, '…le pire crime était le manque d'imagination.'[18] It seems in fact open to question whether Yourcenar was unaware she might be overstating her case in making the comparison between the plight of humans and that of animals being captured and transported for slaughter, for she posits a vehement challenge to her own position:

> "Mais quoi", s'écrie le lecteur, […] "il s'agit de veaux et de vaches dont le nom seul est ridicule, comme on sait, et vous osez évoquer à leurs propos les pires crimes contre l'humanité."[19]

The writer's response to her own challenge is as resounding as it is unequivocal, 'Oui, sans doute.'

Much of the opening part of this piece is taken up with a description of the methods of slaughtering and the hanging of recently slaughtered domestic animals. It can be seen as a contextualizing of a call for a gradual improvement in the matter of these practices as people become increasingly aware of what is at stake. Furthermore, the last part of the essay makes reference to both the Vietnam war and the struggle also going on at the time between India and Pakistan. '[T]out acte de cruauté subi par des milliers de créatures vivantes est un crime contre l'humanité qu'il endurcit et brutalise un peu plus', states Yourcenar. The phrase 'crime against humanity' resonates strongly with a contemporary audience and forces the case; the writer is arguing here for equivalence, something which will occur again a number of times below. Yourcenar is doing what she can in this regard, pleading for a development of a peace-making sensibility based on compassion and reaching across sensory beings.

---

[18] *Essais et mémoires*, p. 396.
[19] *Essais et mémoires*, p. 397.

The indications seem to be, however, that the members of the audience at Cerisy who were upset by the comparison between animals and human beings been taken away for execution had possibly not caught up with contemporary literary and philosophical reflections on this issue. Corine Pelluchon runs through a number of writers for whom the comparison between abattoirs and the genocidal massacre of humans is all too close.[20] Relevant instances start with Plutarch's *On the Eating of Flesh (Peri Sarkophagias)*, part of the *Moralia*:

> Can you really ask what reason Pythagoras had for abstaining from flesh? For my part I rather wonder both by what accident and in what state of soul or mind the first man who did so, touched his mouth to gore and brought his lips to the flesh of the dead creature, he who set forth tables of dead stale bodies and ventured to call food and nourishment the parts that had a little before bellowed and cried, moved and lived.[21]

The above passage has become something of a *locus classicus* in this debate. It appears in Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* where the issue of the relationship between the human and the animal is treated extensively; two chapters are given to the reviewing by the eponymous central character of issues relating to this matter.[22] Pelluchon notes in addition the change of heart the central character, Alexeï, undergoes in Makine's novel, *La musique d'une vie*, as he considers the significance to him of the shooting of a squirrel.[23] Furthermore, this theme finds expression in two works by Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Enemies* and *A young man in search of love*.[24] Singer reduces, '… à néant "le sophisme selon lequel il y a incompatibilité entre

---

[20] Corine Pelluchon, *L'Autonomie brisée: Bioéthique et philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009, "Quadrige", 2014), p. 365.
[21] Plutarch. *Moralia*, vol. xii, *On the Eating of Flesh* (*Peri Sarkophagias*), ed. and trans. by Harold Cherniss and William C. Helmbold (London: William Heinemann Ltd. and Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 541.
[22] J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (London: Vintage Books, 2004), pp. 105 – 12.
[23] Andreï Makine, *La Musique d'une vie* (Paris: Le Seuil, "Points", 2001).
[24] Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Enemies*, trans. by Aliza Shevrin and Elizabeth Shub (London: Cape, 1972) and *A young man in search of love* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1978).

l'attention portée aux bêtes et le dévouement aux hommes", proclame la communauté de destin entre "tous ceux qui étaient en train de souffrir et avaient souffert à travers toutes les générations."', while in the case of *Enemies* the central character, Herman, who has survived the Second World War, finds the suffering of animals unbearable:

> Il ne supporte pas la souffrance animale, "comme si elle seule avait le pouvoir de le renvoyer à la sienne et à celle des siens."[25]

These reflections make the additional remark, this time by Canetti, particularly sombre, '[L]'horreur de l'abattoir sur quoi tout est fondé.'[26]

As well as the writers the philosophers have added their voice to this debate, an instance being Charles Patterson in his *Eternal Treblinka*.[27] Pelluchon also cites Horkheimer in this connection:

> L'éventualité des pogromes est chose décidée au moment où le regard d'un animal blessé à mort rencontre un homme. L'obstination avec laquelle celui-ci repousse ce regard: "Ce n'est qu'un animal!", réapparait irrésistiblement dans les cruautés commises sur les hommes.[28]

Pelluchon herself sums up the position thus:

> La souffrance des bêtes, peut-être parce qu'elle est sans mots et parce que les animaux se tiennent tout entier dans l'être-là, souligne, par contraste, notre pouvoir d'appropriation, de planification, qui est pratiquement total. Elle suggère la violence qu'un tel pouvoir peut exercer à l'encontre des êtres qui en sont momentanément ou définitivement privés, ou qui nous sont simplement confiés, comme les enfants, les malades, les personnes handicapées, les prisonniers.[29]

---

[25] Pelluchon, *L'autonomie*, pp. 369, 370.
[26] Elias Canetti, *Die Provinz des Menschen: Aufzeihnungen 1942 – 1972* (München: Hanser, 1973), trans. by A. Guerne, *Le territoire de l'homme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1981), p. 202.
[27] Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka: our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002).
[28] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (1951), trans. by E. Kaufholz et J.-R. Ladmiral (Paris: Payot, 1980), § 68, p. 101.
[29] Pelluchon, *L'Autonomie brisée*, p. 370.

The varied evidence confirms a significant stream of opinion, literary and philosophical, on the issue and shows Yourcenar to have been to the fore.

In brief, a whole series of routine practices are being criticized in the Yourcenar passage and a vigorous request is being tendered for an altogether more humane and thoughtful approach to this issue. Important in this portrayal is the move from a new-born infant on a June morning in 1903 not far from a profoundly agrarian context to industrial scale animal husbandry in the mid-1970s, the time of writing. The universal is the need of the infant, just as of the new-born calf, irrespective of the year of birth, which is being juxtaposed with current practice, practice which the argument states is profoundly unsatisfactory and which needs to be addressed urgently. It will not do, she argues, to dismiss the argument on grounds of a lack of seriousness or as fodder for a facetious response:

> Son nom même, qui devrait être sacré aux hommes qu'elle nourrit, est ridicule en français, et certains lecteurs de ce livre trouveront sans doute cette remarque et celles qui précèdent également ridicules.[30]

It is a notable feature of the passage that nowhere in the whole paragraph does she use the word 'vache'. Collocating the concept of the cow with the word 'sacré' raises associations with the status the animal has in Hindu religion and opens the discussion to a wider set of reflections which will be noted later.

Writing more than a quarter of a century later than Marguerite Yourcenar, Jacques Derrida comes to a range of remarkably similar conclusions. In a lengthy discussion

[30] *Souvenirs*, p. 725.

of this point Derrida remarks that any modern consideration must go well beyond the animal sacrifices which feature in the Bible or in Classical literature:

> [B]ien au-delà de la chasse, de la pèche, de la domestication, du dressage ou de l'exploitation traditionelle de l'énergie animale (le transport ou le labour, les animaux de trait, le cheval, le bœuf, la renne etc..[31]

Derrida goes on to point out that the traditional forms of treatment of the animal have been turned upside down as a result of developments in such areas as zoology, ethology, biology and genetic forms of knowledge. In a lengthy sentence he lays out where he is clear the blame is to be attributed:

> Au cours des deux derniers siècles, ces formes traditionnelles du traitement de l'animal ont été bouleversées, c'est trop évident, par les développements conjoints de savoirs zoologiques, éthologiques, biologiques et génétiques toujours inséparables de *techniques* d'intervention *dans* leur objet, de transformation de leur objet même, et du milieu et du monde de leur objet, le vivant animal: par l'élévage et le dressage à une échelle démographique sans commune mesure avec le passé, par l'expérimentation génétique, par l'industrialisation de ce qu'on peut appeler la production alimentaire de la viande animale, par l'insémination artificielle massive, par les manipulations de plus en plus audacieuse du génome, par la réduction de l'animal non seulement à la production et à la reproduction suractivée (hormones, croissements génétiques, clonage, etc.) de viande alimentaire, mais à toutes sortes d'autres finalisations au service d'un certain être et supposé bien-être humain de l'homme.[32]

It is interesting to see the abuses which have been further accrued in the decades between the two writers; industrialised farming and genetic crossbreeding are two in particular which have gained in significance since the 1970s. This consideration prompts us also to consider the careful process of selection Yourcenar is exercising as she references these features of an imperfect world while being careful not to compromise her fidelity to her self-appointed task of reviewing the world of her

---

[31] Jacques Derrida, *L'Animal que donc je suis.* Édition établi par Marie-Louise Mallet (Paris: Galilée, 2006), p. 45.
[32] Derrida, *L'Animal*, pp. 45 – 46. His emphasis.

parents, the world of the *Belle Époque*. This makes it all the more remarkable, then, that Derrida's argument now moves to a central consideration of the Yourcenar text, – violence. He says:

> [P]ersonne aujourd'hui ne peut nier cet événement, à savoir les proportions *sans précédent* de cet assujettissement de l'animal. Cet assujettissement dont nous cherchons à interpréter l'histoire, nous pouvons l'appeler violence, fût-ce au sens moralement le plus neutre de ce terme.[33]

The consciousness of this is something men cannot deny and in a pinpointing and also summative assessment Derrida states:

> Personne ne peut plus nier sérieusement et longtemps que les hommes font tout ce qu'ils peuvent pour dissimuler ou pour se dissimuler cette cruauté, pour organiser à l'échelle mondiale l'oubli ou la méconnaissance de cette violence que certains pourraient comparer aux pires génocides (il y a aussi des génocides d'animaux: le nombre des espèces en voie de disparition du fait de l'homme est à couper le souffle.).[34]

Yourcenar's similar views on these matters find further expression in the other two essays also discussed by Bérengère Deprez. Yourcenar's discussion of 'Bêtes à fourrure' ends with the picture of a self-congratulatory male flaunting his befurred companion revealing himself thereby as being her equal in folly:

> L'homme flatté d'entrer dans un restaurant avec une femme hérisée de poils de bête est éminement un homme, bien que pas nécessairement un *homo sapiens*. Dans ce domaine comme dans tant d'autres, les sexes sont à l'égalité.[35]

Yourcenar understood well that the practice of wearing furs was enshrined in culturally determined behaviour and she makes no attempt to pretend her mother in her generation did otherwise. It is in this spirit too that she notes, for instance, her mother's collection of opera glasses:

---

[33] Derrida, *L'Animal*, p. 46. His emphasis.
[34] Derrida, *L'Animal*, p. 46.
[35] *Essais et mémoires*, p.333.

> Fernande, qui est myope et se dit ravie de l'être ("Tout paraît plus beau, de loin, quand on n'en voit pas les détails"), use pourtant au théâtre et ailleurs d'un face-à-main, cet instrument arrogant qui transforme une infirmité en une sorte de hautain quant-à-soi, et dont elle possède toute une collection en or, en argent, et aussi, je l'avoue avec honte, en écaille et en ivoire.[36]

The views Yourcenar expresses in 'Qui sait si l'âme des bêtes va en bas?', originally a lecture which she gave to the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon on 8 April 1981, are a mature set of reflections. As she makes clear in the epigraph, the title of this third piece is taken from the verse in Ecclesiastes, III, xxi, 21:

> Qui sait si l'âme du fils d'Adam va en haut, et si l'âme des bêtes va en bas?[37]

In a prescient remark which seems to presage the notion of fake news, the piece does contain a brief reference to flora which in tandem with the world of fauna has also come increasingly under pressure from the stresses of modernity:

> [L]'horrible matière première animale est un fait nouveau, comme la forêt anéantie pour fournir la pâte nécessaire à nos quotidiens et à nos hebdomadaires gonflés de réclames et de fausses nouvelles.[38]

The brief remark on the cost to the forests is emphatic and arresting while the association of the vegetative with the animal is made to seem significant and inevitable. Meanwhile, following something of an inventory of the ways in which animals have met their end in earlier times Yourcenar points to the fact that at least there was the compensation that people were at the same time close to their animals and so developed a degree of emotional attachment to them. Modern urban living has brought about a change in that for today whole swathes of people, including children, never experience the sight of or contact with a living domestic animal. Because, too,

---

[36] *Souvenirs*, p. 939 – 40.
[37] *Essais et mémoires*, p. 370.
[38] *Essais et mémoires*, p. 371.

of the way in which food has come to be packaged the reality of what is entailed in the cycle of slaughter and food preparation is one very many people are never brought in contact with. Confronted with the sight of hanging slaughtered animals many cross the road rather than see it for what it is. This 'violence fait à l'animal par l'homme' leads to illustrations of clear examples of an emotional kind. Part of the problem is in cases such as those of young women oblivious of the fact that their cosmetics have been tested on animals who have died or been blinded in the process. As stated in 'Une civilisation à cloisons étanches', ignorance is the key issue here. It is ignorance, combined with a lack of imagination, which makes possible the various kinds of goulags or which sees the prospect of nuclear war in certain circumstances as reasonable.

A love of animals is at least equally as much part of the human experience, Yourcenar argues, and in support of this she cites many examples in particular from early records of monastic practices, though by no means exclusively so. A measure of the blame, she suggests, is to be attributed to the interpretation sanctioned over a long period of the notion of Man as being dominant over Nature following the divine injunction in the Garden of Eden. Yourcenar suggests this is in fact a mistaken reading and would be better understood as an injunction to be responsible for the care and maintenance of Nature instead. In support she cites from examples of early monastic narratives, Eastern and Western, from the example of St. Francis as well as the legends of the Desert Fathers and of Celtic Christianity, to demonstrate a deeper relationship between the practitioners of spiritual life and the creatures of the wild:

> Il y avait dans le christianisme tous les éléments d'un folklore animal presque aussi riche que celui du bouddhisme, mais le sec dogmatisme et la priorité donnée à l'égoïsme humain l'ont emporté.[39]

In this perception an empathy with animal life and its sacred character is deeply entrenched in the human psyche. It should not be denied or repressed. In referencing the two traditions, Western and Eastern, Yourcenar is not offering a preference for one at the expense of the other nor a form of syncretism; she is seeking an amplification of a deep psychic need as attested in this cultural experience common across people in general. Furthermore, a philosophical support may be found, she suggests, in the writings of Descartes who put his finger on something central when he made his observations on 'l'animal-machine', an aspect true of both humans and animals which, if followed, can transform the basis of our modern understanding of physiology and zoology.

The claim is large and the context now explained, for Yourcenar's words come not long after the signing of the Universal Declaration of Animal Rights which had been adopted by UNESCO on 15 October 1978 less than two years before her talk and which she warmly welcomes. In a characteristic turn Yourcenar references this by acknowledging the fact that people may well point to the Declaration of Human Rights already two centuries old and yet so much more honoured in the breach than in the observance. She remains optimistic, nevertheless:

> Je crois qu'il convient toujours de promulguer ou de réaffirmer les Lois véritables, qui n'en seront pas moins enfreintes, mais en laissant çà et là aux transgresseurs le sentiment d'avoir mal fait.[40]

---

[39] *Essais et mémoires*, p. 374.
[40] *Essais et mémoires*, p. 375.

Progress is incremental yet not to be discounted for all that. In view of this it is reasonable for the piece to end with a kind of call to arms:

> Soyons subversifs. Révoltons-nous contre l'ignorance, l'indifférence, la cruauté, qui d'ailleurs ne s'exercent si souvent contre l'homme que parce qu'elles se sont fait la main sur les bêtes.[41]

The insistence on direct equivalence between man and animal is clearly spelt out here. This central Yourcenarian thesis has to be understood not simply as a sentimentalizing of animals. The language of the penultimate sentence of the piece with its carefully structured equivalences is strong and uncompromising:

> Rappelons-nous, puisqu'il faut toujours tout ramener à nous-mêmes, qu'il y aurait moins d'enfants martyrs s'il y avait moins d'animaux torturés, moins de wagons plombés amenant à la mort les victimes de quelconques dictatures, si nous n'avions pas pris l'habitude de fourgons où des bêtes agonisent sans nourriture et sans eau en route vers l'abattoir, moins de gibier humain descendu d'un coup de feu si le goût et l'habitude de tuer n'étaient l'apanage des chasseurs.[42]

The reference to hunting is notable and the issue has already been discussed.

This section began noting the shift in social practice from wet-nursing to bottle feeding in line with scientific developments, a move Yourcenar argues should result in a special reverence for the cow which is now central in human survival. Instead the animal is ruthlessly pursued for every possible utilitarian benefit it can deliver. Integral to this is the slaughter of it and other domesticated animals. The effect is the grave danger of brutalizing our responses and, she argues, there is disastrous related precedent for this. Consequently, she welcomes the drawing up of the UN Convention on the Rights of Animals.

---

[41] *Essais et mémoires*, p. 376.
[42] *Essais et mémoires*, p. 376.

3.3 The complaint generalized: concern for the animal world

This concern for the farm animal so early on in the work, a creature central to the agricultural way of life in the North-Western hemisphere, marks a turn in the *Mémoires* to a theme which informs the entire text. In her discussion of Octave's brother, Rémo, Yourcenar engages with a passage in which he explores his reflections when on a visit to Delos. Rémo, Yourcenar says, wants to create something beautiful, a sentiment she immediately questions for she appears to find his stance a little self-regarding, 'Rémo veut faire beau, ce qui ici équivaut à dire qu'il veut rendre une impression de beauté ressentie par lui en ce lieu saint.'[43] There is an element, she argues, in Rémo's statement which seeks an aesthetic experience. Between 1864 when the young man had this thought and made this statement and his great-niece who wandered in the same area in the 1930s there have been many thousands of pilgrims, 'des milliers des pèlerins', and many more crowds have come and gone since then and the time of writing, but:

> [C]ombien ont pensé aux bêtes journellement sacrifiées sur ces autels de marbre ornés de purs rinceaux?[44]

It is this consideration, she says, which unites them both, acknowledging an affinity between her and Rémo, though it is not quite correct since Rémo has not made any reference to animals. Paradoxically, this is the point she seems to want to make, insisting on an equivalence between the human and the animal, thereby moving the ground of the discussion significantly. At this point Marguerite Yourcenar argues forcefully that the reign of Hecate is far from over as Rémo seemed to think. She states:

---

[43] *Souvenirs*, p. 875.
[44] *Souvenirs*, p. 876.

> Durant ce dernier siècle, des milliards d'animaux ont été sacrifiés à la science devenue déesse, et de déesse idole sanguinaire, comme il arrive presque fatalement aux dieux. Lentement étranglés, étouffés, aveuglés, brûlés, ouverts vivant, leur mort fait paraître innocent le sacrificateur antique, tout comme nos abattoirs, où les bêtes suspendues vivantes facilitent aux tueurs le travail à la chaîne, rendent relativement propre le maillet des hécatombes et les victimes couronnées de fleurs.[45]

As in her essays, in this passage Yourcenar draws together concerns about animals being used for scientific experiment, which would include for the development of cosmetics, vivisection and the matter of abattoirs and their supervision. It is a firm conviction of Marguerite Yourcenar's that however picturesque classical descriptions of animal sacrifice may seem, even adorning the victims with flowers, how we now treat animals is an indication of how we treat our fellow humans. In Pelluchon's words, 'La manière dont nous traitons les bêtes (*Tier, Tieren*) est notre signature.'[46] The danger involved in imposing the picturesqueness of classical description on current practice which is conducted on an industrial scale is the loss of seeing clearly the way in which matters have evolved in response to post-industrial living requirements.

In the manner of one caught in a dream or in a fairy tale, a *Märchen*, such as he might have heard when a student in Weimar, but different, we are told, from anything in Chateaubriand or Renan, stimulated by his surroundings, Rémo has imagined himself to be a statue of the threefold Hecate, lunar deity and guardian of the Dead:

> "Je suis Hecate qui préside à ma propre expiation pour le sang répandu de tant d'innocentes victimes."[47]

---

[45] *Souvenirs*, p. 876.
[46] *L'autonomie*, p. 335.
[47] *Souvenirs*, p. 876.

The association between Hecate and innocent victims, here presented as a quotation from Rémo, provokes strong reactions in Yourcenar. Writing in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Albert Heinrichs states, 'Hecate was a popular and ubiquitous goddess from the time of Hesiod until late Antiquity.' The goddess is not mentioned in Homer, is 'harmless' in Hesiod, but 'emerges in the fifth century as a more sinister divine figure associated with magic and witchcraft, lunar lore and creatures of the night, dog sacrifices and illuminated cakes, as well as doorways and crossroads.' The *Theogony* relates that Hecate has a share of earth, sea and sky, but not of the Underworld. Heinrich goes on to point out, however, that, 'Like all chthonic divinities, Hecate was perceived as simultaneously terrible and benign.' Hecate lacked a mythology of her own, but her nocturnal apparitions were a pack of baying hell-hounds and ghost-like revenants. In the *Aeneid*, vi. 35, 564ff. she gives the Sybil a guided tour through Tartarus. She can be represented as three-faced. In view of the association with the spirits of the dead the version of Hecate Rémo and Yourcenar seem to have in mind appears to be the Virgilian rather than the Hesiodic one.[48]

In this association with the figure of the classical deity, through the linkages with deep time, Marguerite Yourcenar raises here the question of the matter of equivalence between humans and animals. In it, as in so much relating to this field, she is to the forefront in this debate. In addressing the issue of animal welfare through Rémo's observations she is showing a dark development from the classical times of animal sacrifice as part of religious ceremonial to modern animal slaughter on an industrialised scale. While the specific forms of abuse, such as the over-confinement of hens in battery farming conditions feature in her essay though not in the *Mémoires*,

[48] *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. by Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 671 – 73.

the plea for a proper regard and respect for animals continues to find an outlet here. As with the matter of the treatment of cows, her accusation in this vein is limited to just this one focalized, trenchant passage in the course of the *Mémoires*.

In view of Yourcenar's strong views on the matter of the relationships between man and animals, the remarks of Bentham on the subject are intriguing. In a note he discusses this matter at some length.[49] Contrasting the situation in Britain Bentham begins, 'Under the Gentoo and Mahometan religions, the interests of the rest of the animal creation seems to have been met with some attention.' 'Gentoo', an old Anglo-Indian term to describe Hindu people in contradistinction to Muslims, indicates that in speaking of these and 'Mahometans' Bentham has India in mind. He continues:

> But a full-grown horse or dog, is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they reason? Nor, Can they *talk*? But, Can they *suffer*?[50]

The opening of this chapter has seen Yourcenar speak of the cow. The point she is concerned to make there which entails reference to that creature appears early in the opening volume and then nowhere else in the *Mémoires*. In this she precisely limits herself. On the other hand, her concern for creatures is a feature which extends across the entire text. The animals in question, primarily the dog and the horse, the

---

[49] *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ed. by J.H. Burns and H.L.A. Hart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, 1982, Intro., 1996, pub. Online May 2015), p. 300, n. b. Italics in the original.

[50] The quotations are from Chapter XVII, *Of the Limits of the Penal Branch of Jurisprudence* §1. Limits between private ethics and the art of legislation, art. 29. The Burns-Hart edition reads 'conversible', the on-line Library of Economics and Liberty, 'conversable'. According to *OED* the form with '-ible' is an error. The word derives from Fr. *conversable*, attested in Littré in the sixteenth century, ultimately from medieval Latin, *conversabilis*, 'sociable, one with whom one can converse readily.' The Bentham passage is noted by both Audier, pp. 552 – 53 and Pelluchon, *L'Autonomie brisée*, pp. 338 – 41.

ones Bentham chooses by way of illustration, feature extensively across the entire *Mémoires* and the emphasis on these two shows a striking affinity of concern with the arguments of Bentham. It is not being suggested that Bentham was an influence on Yourcenar, but that in the approach taken by the two writers and the manner in which they refer to their characteristic circumstances the affinities are noteworthy. In order to understand Yourcenar's perspective it is necessary to incorporate discussion of this feature. This makes it particularly striking when in his exchanges with Elisabeth Roudinesco Derrida says:

> Il y a un mot de Jeremy Bentham que j'aime souvent citer, et qui dit à peu près ceci: "La question n'est pas: peuvent-ils parler? Mais peuvent-ils souffrir?" (The question is not can they speak? but can they suffer?). Car, oui, nous le savons et personne ne peut oser en douter. L'animal souffre, il manifeste sa souffrance. Nous ne pouvons pas imaginer qu'un animal ne souffre pas quand on le soumet à une expérimentation de laboratoire, voire à un dressage de cirque. Quand on voit passer un nombre incalculable de veaux élevés aux hormones, entassés dans un camion et envoyés directement de l'étable à l'abattoir, comment imaginer qu'ils ne souffrent pas? Nous savons ce qu'est la souffrance animale, nous le ressentons. En outre, avec l'abattage industriel, les animaux souffrent en beaucoup plus grand nombre qu'autrefois.[51]

The passage reads almost like a gloss on Yourcenar. The death-dealing propensity, here in particular to the creatures of the animal kingdom, most especially domesticated ones, finds striking similarity with the assessments of diverse thinkers who both preceded and followed her.

---

[51] Jacques Derrida, *De quoi demain… Dialogue avec Élisabeth Roudinesco* (Paris: Librairie Anthème et Éditions Fayard / Galilée, 2001), p. 118.

3.4 The issue of equivalence considered

The equivalence between the human and the animal, a basic in the predication of a new approach deriving from notions of fragility and vulnerability, in the approach taken by Yourcenar in her *Labyrinthe,* has been a recurring feature in many of the illustrations cited so far in the course of this chapter. Prior to embarking on a review of some of the more foregrounded instances of this feature in the narrative, the issue of equivalence will now be examined further.

In seeking to define the ground for the establishment of a new politics responsive to contemporary bioethical realities Corine Pelluchon sums up her ethic of vulnerability as follows:

> L'éthique de la vulnérabilité, inspirée par la relecture d'*Autrement qu'être*, après la visite de plusieurs hôpitaux et fondée sur une triple expérience de l'altérité dont le socle est la prise en compte de la fragilité du vivant, invite essentiellement à repenser nos rapports aux autres espèces, aux animaux doués de sensibilité, mais aussi aux plantes, aux écosystèmes et à la biosphère.[52]

The relationship of humanity to the biosphere is central and the notion of vulnerability lies at the heart of it. Pelluchon's book, *L'Autonomie brisée*, is, she tells us, to be read as a propaedeutic to the earlier *Éléments,* and so points will be taken from both in this discussion as they help to inform and explain positions taken by this commentator in the process of enriching our understanding of Yourcenar's *Labyrinthe*.[53] For while Yourcenar slips in relaxed fashion into what María José Vazquez de Parga describes as, 'l'aisance de quelqu'un qui entre chez soi pour prendre place dans le fauteuil qui a

---

[52] Corine Pelluchon, *Éléments pous une éthique de la vulnérabilité: Les hommes, les animaux, la nature* (Paris: Les Éditions du cerf, 2011), p. 55. For the Levinas reference, Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (Paris: Le Livre de poche, "Biblio-essais", 1996).
[53] Corine Pelluchon, *L'Autonomie brisé*e (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, "Léviathan", 2009, 'Quadrige', 2014).

la forme de son corps', while recounting nineteenth-century events from a twentieth-century perspective, as the arguments of Pelluchon will show, in doing so she delivers to the reader a startlingly contemporary set of early twenty-first-century insights.[54] To a considerable degree Pelluchon's helpful summary above draws together many of the key aspects, leitmotifs, which run throughout the entirety of Yourcenar's *Labyrinthe*. These constitute a unifying thread which adds further coherence to what in some ways might otherwise seem a loosely designed overall structure.

As may be seen above, the indebtedness to Levinas is explicit in Pelluchon's account. In the process of arriving at that choice she first examines and then finds a number of major thinkers wanting. In the case of Rawls she finds the limitation in his views to lie in a celebration of the individual, 'Mais l'idée d'un individu isolé, existant indépendamment de ses rôles sociaux, est une fiction.'[55] This point, which links with the isolation of the figure of the patriarch in the nineteenth century, which will be discussed in the next chapter, is reiterated and underscored even more substantially when she states:

> À la fin du xx^{e} siècle, presque tout le monde était d'accord pour dire qu'il était impossible de fonder une moralité universelle sur la raison.[56]

Such an approach, she argues, plays only to the strong and it enshrines a set of vertical relationships in society with a concept of man dominant at the apex.

In a further elaboration in *L'Autonomie brisée* Pelluchon notes that while the sovereign individual was paramount in discussion for centuries, such is the manner in

---

[54] María José Vazquez de Parga, 'Rapport du couple et relations familiales dans *Le Labyrinthe du monde'*, in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Écrivain du XIXe siècle?*, ed. by Georges Fréris et Rémy Poignault, (Clermont-Ferrand: SIEY, 2004), p. 413.
[55] *L'Autonomie*, p. 435.
[56] *L'Autonomie*, p. 414.

which things have increasingly developed in recent times that this notion is no longer tenable. The increasingly contemporary perspective arises from bioethics. She states:

> Au-delà de la critique du sujet, dont on peut se demander s'il est encore la source de la légitimité et la référence à partir du moment où l'on sort du cadre du rapport entre citoyens et entre personnes vivantes, également conscientes et autonomes, l'enjeu est celui d'un changement de paradigme et d'une alternative à l'humanisme moderne.[57]

At this juncture Pelluchon points out that if law rests upon the *dictamen rectae rationis*, that criterion no longer serves for the concept of reason has changed; it may have done, falling in line with the *jus civitatis* of Cicero, but nowadays these grounds are held to be powerless to quell the passions. Such an approach would be quite inefficacious even if the unceasing struggle against the sovereign evils of death and frustration required the making and destruction of embryos in order to grow organs. (The argument at this point is deeply bioethical.) The difficulty is that such an approach places no limits on the exploitation of nature, nor does it know how to invite mankind to consume less energy or share natural resources, nor how to avoid depriving future generations of the possibility to avail of them. All these points are of paramount concern to Yourcenar. In short:

> Comment peut-on éviter la guerre écologique, l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme, de certains nations par certaines autres ou même la prise en otage des générations futures avec une telle conception du droit et de l'homme.[58]

Shortly after this she argues that it has become necessary to:

> [R]epenser de l'homme à l'autre que lui en posant les bases d'une responsabilité collective où l'enjeu ne concerne pas seulement l'individu, mais l'espèce humaine, la nature, les générations à venir, c'est-à-dire des objets que l'éthique et la politique classiques ne prennent pas en compte.[59]

---

[57] *L'Autonomie*, p. 27.
[58] *L'Autonomie*, p. 28.
[59] *L'Autonomie*, p. 29.

Even before getting to the heart of her argument about animals and their relationship to us and us to them, we can see two issues emerging here relevant to Yourcenar's ethical stance. Whatever about past practice, there is no longer an excuse for the destruction of the earth's vegetative cover, including its forests, and secondly, while formerly no awareness of the ethical featured in the political arrangements of former times, there is no excuse for its non-inclusion now. This argument of Pelluchon is in line with that of Aldo Leopold, a significant writer for her. Writing in 1949 he states:

> The existence of ethics, so far studied only by philosophers, is actually a process of ecological evolution. […] An ethic, ecologically, is a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for evidence. […] There is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land, and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. […] The land relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges, but no obligation.[60]

For this reason in her quest Pelluchon turns to other possibilities, seeking firstly in Hobbes and Heidegger. These thinkers fall together in her process of consideration and in them she finds that her exploration reveals features common to both which render them insufficient to address the concerns of modern-day medicine and the new forms of biotechnology. Confronted by these she concludes that philosophy has to devise new tools and a new method. What then emerges is the following conclusion:

> Cette "méthode" explique le rapprochement entre Heidegger et Hobbes, c'est-à-dire que, par delà leurs différences, ces deux philosophes ont en commun la prévalence du sentiment de peur sur la compassion, le refus de transcendence et une certaine dénégation de la valeur de la pluralité.[61]

The Heidegger-Hobbes approach flies in the face of the conclusions of another critic, one rather more responsive to the contemporaneity of the biological issue. Pelluchon cites Lévi-Strauss when she states:

---

[60] Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac & Other Writings on Ecology and Conservation*, ed. by Curt Meine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949; Library of America 238, 2013), pp. 171 – 72.
[61] *L'Autonomie*, p. 433.

> La compassion, comme identification à l'autre qui souffre, "à un autrui qui n'est pas seulement un parent ou un proche", mais "un être vivant, du moment qu'il est vivant."[62]

In Pelluchon's view the perceptions of Levinas constitute a major advance in the thinking central to the questions raised by our relation to the other in the new medical, biotechnical age. Pelluchon notes how Levinas fastens on the notion of concern for the other, referencing in particular someone who is seriously ill if not in the final stages of life. This concern he terms substitution and it already constitutes my responsibility for the other. Pelluchon does not find this substitution excessive. It indicates that humanity is not defined by the return of concern to the self and the effort to preserve oneself in being, 'Le droit à l'être se réfère au pour-l'autre de ma non-indifférence à la mort et à la souffrance d'autrui. "Le mot *Je* signifie: me voici."'[63]

In a Levinasian perspective the issue of 'passivité' is paramount. Pelluchon explains:

> La proximité, c'est l'exposition à l'autre, c'est-à-dire que la subjectivité est saisie dans son altérité – celle de l'autre, non synthétisée ou ramenée au même, mais aussi la mienne, atteinte par l'autre, altérité en soi qui rend possibles l'écoute, la proximité, la compassion.[64]

The significance of compassion as a defining quality of Octave in Yourcenar's interpretation of his character has been noted above; it is a central quality in the process here under discussion. Levinas's summing up of his position, meanwhile, is that he will speak of man's responsibility as, 'une passivité plus passive que toute

---

[62] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structural II* (Paris: Éditions Agora, Presses pocket, 1996), p. 50. Cited in: *Éléments*, p. 211.
[63] *L'Autonomie*, p. 252.
[64] *L'Autonomie*, p. 258.

passivité.'[65] It is this passivity which leads beyond the concern for self, but which is engaged with the otherness within. Unlike in Heidegger where care (*Sorge*) is a mode of being, in human cases, including palliative or end of life ones, Levinas has it that certain gestures bear witness to the fact that specific individual human forms of behaviour are not necessarily tied to consciousness.[66] The reason for this is not to be found in an argument that Levinas is a more generous (*plus généreux*) thinker than Heidegger, but that he has thought the alterity in the self as vulnerability and as corporeity, thereby breaking with the modern and also the Heideggerian scheme of things which corresponds to a world in which individuals are separated by their projects, still defining themselves by the notion of liberty rather than by any form of fraternity or fellow relationship, and not taking into consideration together with one another the common good – 'et ne décident pas ensemble du bien commun.'[67] Far from writing off someone who is approaching the end of their lives and viewing them as in effect dead, the Levinasian approach to one in the final stages is to see in them a witness to human fragility and not to be measured by their reduced capacity to assert their autonomy. This new cultural concept is what Levinas terms ethics as primary philosophy. – '[C]e que Levinas appelle l'éthique comme philosophie première, c'est-à-dire à une éthique de la fragilité qui invite à considerer l'humanité au-delà ou au-deçà de l'autonomie de la volonté.'[68] This consideration is applicable to us all, Pelluchon states, irrespective of whether we are inside or outside hospital. She concludes:

---

[65] *Autrement qu'être*, p. 31.
[66] *L'Autonomie*, pp. 258 – 59.
[67] *L'Autonomie*, p. 288.
[68] *L'Autonomie*, p. 264.

> Elle a des conséquences sur la manière dont nous envisageons notre rapport aux autres hommes dans la Cité et dans le monde, et notre rapport aux autres vivants et à la nature.[69]

Concluding with 'nature' in this fashion is important for Pelluchon wishes now to move beyond the Levinasian position. It also serves to remind us of the centrality of nature in the concerns of Yourcenar.

The Levinasian insight into passivity enables the critic to identify and move beyond certain constraints on the conclusions of Heidegger. Turning, then, to Levinas Pelluchon finds limitations in that set of perspectives too. These hinge on the fact that Levinas' envisaging does not embrace forms of life beyond the human. Pelluchon cites the account given by Levinas in his text, *Totalité et infini*, in which he cites the instance of Rebecca giving the traveller the drink requested of her also giving some to her camels, 'qui ne savent pas demander à boire.' In his commentary at this point Levinas stresses the responsibility which should be extended to another fellow being whoever he may be. This account, Pelluchon believes, risks limiting the ethic of what is owed to other beings in whom I can see the face. Crucially, however, the envisaging is not founded on seeing. The engaging with the suffering of the other touches our being directly – 'Elle touche directement notre être' – irrespective of any form of representation. As the examination of *Autrement qu'être* shows, responsibility and the possibility of compassion arise from our corporeity, 'en tant que sensibilité qui est la susceptibilité d'avoir mal.' Pelluchon concludes, 'Aussi l'éthique de la vulnérabilité concerne-t-elle aussi les bêtes.'[70] The entirety of the biosphere

---

[69] *L'autonomie*, p. 264.
[70] *L'autonomie*, pp. 367 – 78.

finds common ground in the ethic of vulnerability, a conclusion which leads to the heart of our understanding of Yourcenar, most particularly as expressed in the *Labyrinthe du Monde.*

Further support for the notion of vulnerability is to be found in Ricœur when he is talking of human suffering. He says:

> The person appears here from the outset as suffering as well as acting, subject to those whims of life which have prompted […] Martha Nussbaum to speak of the "fragility of goodness," the fragility of the goodness of human action, that is.[71]

In her discussion of Stoic philosophy Nussbaum registers their 'implausible' denial that children and animals had emotions, a viewpoint which would have put them at loggerheads with Yourcenar.[72] Nussbaum notes that this was not the case with the Cynics and this will be interestingly shown in the manner in which Yourcenar will sympathetically portray Michel and Trier together, attributing that term to them equally. Because the Stoics denigrated animals as being brutish and inert, lacking dignity and wonder, this led them, Nussbaum indicates, to, 'posit a sharp split (with human beings) where in reality there is overlapping and continuity', and she goes on to point out that Aristotle did not make this mistake.[73]

---

[71] Paul Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990), trans. by Kathleen Blamey, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, pbk. 1994), p. 178.
[72] Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; rvd. ed. 2001), p. XVII.
[73] Nussbaum, p. XVIII.

3.5 A domestic trope: dogs, mortality and the experience of time

While it might be thought unlikely that Yourcenar would seek to point out a connection between deep time and the canine, she finds room to do so, nevertheless. Following the death of Arthur de Marchienne and the break-up of the estate Yourcenar describes the preparations made by the various members of the family as they set about getting ready to leave Suarlée and settle elsewhere. Of Jeanne, Fernande's oldest sister, as she makes her preparations to re-locate in Brussels, she says:

> Dans un site voisin, on a tiré du sol des petits chiens de pierre, très gras, au museau bête, une sonnaille au cou, genre chienchien à sa mémère, portraits fidèles de ceux qui jappaient autour du fauteuil d'une maîtresse de maison du temps de Néron. Justement, Mlle Jeanne a un chien de cette espèce, qu'elle nourrit à la fourchette.[74]

Sensible and realistic all the same, Yourcenar tells us, Jeanne elected to leave the creature with the gardener. Yourcenar's text at this point insists that what the archaeological find makes clear is that the breed can be attested to as being in the region back to Roman times.

Examples of attachment to pet dogs are recorded from Classical times; Homer's account of the final act of Argos, sole living being to recognise his master Odysseus on his return, is a famous example.[75] Like the majority of other examples from this time, Argos was a hunting hound, though the records do mention pet dogs as well. Cernik and Schneider refer to Melitans, a breed named after Malta as this was their

---

[74] *Souvenirs*, p. 907.

[75] Hornblower and Spawforth note this as 'one of the most moving moments in the poem.': *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 490.

original place of breeding. It seems that these animals were 'small, weak, long-haired spitz dogs with short legs, used as watchdogs but primarily as lap dogs.'[76] The evidence is not extensive, but this confirms that the phenomenon of lapdogs was known in ancient times. The feature is further supported by Hornblower and Spawforth who point out that: 'Dogs that fed from their master's table are mentioned by Homer', and they give the reference from the *Odyssey*, 19. 536 – 7.[77] They go on to say that the commonest pet was the small white long-coated Maltese dog. It is interesting that Yourcenar chooses to make the comparison between Jeanne and a Roman matron of the Neronian period rather than with a Greek, in line, presumably, with the archaeological find which had been made in the region making the line of connection much less contestable.

Dogs present an alternative model of human/animal relations from that the text has so far presented of farm animal exploitation. There are three instances of the younger relationship with a favoured pet in the *Labyrinthe*, two in a minor key, one in a much more extended degree, which relates to the portrayal of the dog Trier. They allow a significant means of entry into aspects of the emotional lives of the people of the *Belle Époque* being portrayed, that is to say of the third in the threefold categorization of time in the work. In a way which will be largely uncontentious Yourcenar portrays the dog as an animal naturally to be found in a relationship of companionship to men, responsive and loyal, a significant form of human/animal relations. She does not portray working dogs or dogs used for hunting, the emphasis is on the emotional and the therapeutic. Yourcenar quickly deepens her account and takes it a stage further.

---

[76] Cancik and Schneider, *Brill's New Pauly*, vol 4, CYR – EPY, col. 610.
[77] Hornblower and Spawforth, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 1150.

Following the trauma of the rail accident of 1842 at Versailles, Michel Charles, Yourcenar's paternal grandfather, became particularly attached to his dog Misca:

> Le son grêle de la sonnette et les jappements de sa bien-aimée chienne Misca emplissent Michel Charles d'une douceur qu'il ne croyait plus connaître.[78]

The capacity of a loyal canine to give succour and restore one's sense of well being, almost as if it were the sole bulwark against a deeply traumatizing event, is the defining feature in this relationship. Misca becomes a companion and a source of reassurance to Michel Charles at this difficult time:

> Mais Reine (his mother) trouve nerveux ce garçon qui sursaute au moindre bruit, fait avec Misca de longues promenades solitaires.[79]

When making his return from his grand tour in the South Michel Charles learns:

> En arrivant à Florence, il a trouvé à la poste restante un mot désolé de Gabrielle lui apprenant que Misca, la chienne bien-aimée, atteinte d'un malade incompréhensible, meurt en proie à des tourments qu'on ne sait comment soulager.[80]

Yourcenar asserts that Michel Charles wrote the following lament in his diary, '"Pauvre petite, quelle faute avais-tu commise pour souffrir ainsi?"' These words foreshadow the subsequent catastrophe in his life, the death of his daughter, also named Gabrielle.[81] On that occasion the words attributed lay a striking emphasis on repetition:

> Il aura plus tard l'occasion de se répéter la même question sans réponse au chevet d'une petite fille de quatorze ans, son aînée.[82]

---

[78] *Archives*, p. 1018.
[79] *Archives*, p. 1023.
[80] *Archives*, p. 1044.
[81] *Archives*, p. 1044.
[82] *Archives*, p. 1044.

The repeated wording functions like a subliminal coping mechanism for the response to grief and its violent onslaught and has been burned onto his mind by his earlier experience.

Pain and loss were also part of Michel's lot when it came to his relationship with a cherished animal. As with his father, Michel's relationship with his dog, here called Red, was to play a significant part in his life. Both experienced the painful rupture of violent separation. Following its being shot by the border guard who mistook it for a carrier in a contraband-moving manœuvre, Michel is devastated, 'Son jeune maître se jeta à terre et pleura.' Yourcenar points out:

> C'était ce que Michel avait ramené de plus précieux de ses années d'Angleterre, mais Red était mieux pour lui qu'un mémento de Maud: c'était le camarade animal avec qui il avait conclu un pacte, surtout depuis le jour où celui-ci l'avait jusqu'à l'épuisement cherché et finalement retrouvé.[83]

More to him than a mere memento of Maud, Red had embodied to Michel everything that was memorable about his experience in England which he was now forsaking. There is a sense in which the faith the animal has placed in him has been betrayed. Taking a more distanced perspective on the sequence as she draws it to a close, Yourcenar states:

> [C]'était aussi la victime d'un crime que nous avons tous commis, l'être innocent qui nous faisait confiance, et que nous n'avons pas su défendre et sauver. Si Michel avait été superstitieux, ce crève-cœur lui eût paru un signe.[84]

Laying a heavy emphasis on fragility, this judgement seeks to put us on the same level as the young man, Michel; we have all failed in this sort of regard, we should not see ourselves as different from or better than him. Granted this, as the work

---

[83] *Archives*, p. 1130.
[84] *Archives*, p. 1130.

proceeds, we would seem to be being invited to reflect sympathetically on Michel's subsequent losses, not only of Berthe and her sister Gabrielle, but also Fernande. Michel was not destined to have good fortune in the long term in the matter of emotional devotion. Temporal perspectives and the attendant senses of loss as well as grief are being marked here; once more the emotional side to these experiences is being mediated through attachment to a cherished animal.

The most substantial treatment of the motif of the attendant pet as well as of its loss is that of Trier, a move whereby symbiotic affinities between the creature and its owners are emphasised. In the period prior to their marriage early in their wanderings together Yourcenar's father and mother acquired a basset hound and, choosing the German form, named it after the town where they made the purchase:

> M. et Mme de C*** arrivèrent à Bruxelles avec d'innombrables malles, dont plusieurs contenaient les livres destinés aux rayons de la bibliothèque, et le basset Trier, acheté trois ans plus tôt par Michel et Fernande au cours d'un voyage en Allemagne.[85]

So ubiquitous is the presence of a dog in the midst of this typical bourgeois scene and prior to a birth that the very normality of its presence renders it all but invisible, or at least unremarkable. All the same, Yourcenar takes the trouble to express the hope that more or less as soon as she, the new-born infant, appeared, that Trier, banished from the foot of the weakened mother's bed and bedroom, on coming downstairs would accept the new arrival into his perception and understanding of things:

> J'aime à croire que le chien Trier, qu'on a chassé de sa bonne place habituelle sur la descente de lit de Fernande, trouve le moyen de se faufiler jusqu'au berceau, hume cette chose nouvelle dont on ne connaît pas encore l'odeur remue sa longue queue pour montrer qu'il fait confiance, puis retourne sur ses pattes torses vers la cuisine où sont les bons morceaux.[86]

---

[85] *Souvenirs,* p. 710.
[86] *Souvenirs,* pp. 725 – 26.

The point of this description, already flagged up as an untestifiable occurrence through the opening phrase, 'J'aime à croire', is neither gratuitous nor a mere sentimental evocation. Yourcenar wishes to have it appreciated that from the earliest moment possible in our lives it is desirable that we should establish a close relationship with the animal kingdom.

Notwithstanding his being banished from the sick Fernande's bedroom, Trier manages to make an entry towards the end of her life. Studying the photo of Fernande's final moments Yourcenar relates in detail what may be seen of the room with its poor lighting. This includes:

> Le dossier du lit d'acajou se détache sur les drapés du ciel de lit, avec, entrevu à gauche, un segment d'une autre couche toute pareille, soigneusement recouverte de sa courtepointe à ruches, et dans laquelle cette nuit-là personne assurément n'a dormi. Je me trompe: en examinant de plus près l'image, j'aperçois sur un coin de la courtepointe une masse noire: les pattes de devant et le nez de Trier pelotonné sur le lit de son maître, et que M. de C••• aura trouvé gentil et touchant de laisser là.[87]

Here the creature is faithful to the end, something the photographer has inadvertently captured. Michel is being commended for his sensitivity in allowing the dog to stay, an act of compassion and understanding. At some subliminal level its presence may have given comfort. As well as the question of loyalty, a theme stressed later in Jeanne's loyalty to Egon, and a key value in the text, in the creature's companionship we see a Levinasian point of just being there for the other, so indicating intrinsic worth. Furthermore, the image of the dog lying at its dying mistress's feet evokes medieval effigies showing a similar scene and this is in keeping with Fernande's lineage which will shortly be traced back to fourteenth-century Liège. In more

[87] *Souvenirs*, p. 732.

animated form the close companionship with the dog is what we see once more, this time at the very end of the volume when in the section of *Souvenirs pieux* which carries her name, Fernande curls up with a book, her pet at her feet as her daughter's face begins to outline itself on the mirror of time:

> Fernande étale sur elle son plaid, ouvre nonchalamment un livre, donne une caresse à Trier pelotonné à ses pieds. Mon visage commence à se dessiner sur l'écran du temps.[88]

In a scene which emphasizes the domestic, mother, dog and daughter-to-be are bound up together here in a single interwoven image which carries with it a present idyll and a pending tragedy, the outcome of which, in a manner true to classical tragedy, the reader already knows.

Following his return from Brussels Michel mounts the coach and horses his mother has sent to meet him, carrying Trier in his arms:

> Il installe entre ses jambes Trier, qui, mécontent de ne rien voir, sort sans cesse de sa retraite, dresse contre l'une des deux portières ses pattes torses et son long museau, et jappe contre les chiens de ferme et les douces vaches.[89]

The child herself, and as usual Yourcenar speaks of herself in the third person here, is carried to the new home by the nurse and attendant, Azélie and Barbe. The burgeoning interest the child will manifest in creatures as she grows up is transposed to the interest the dog shows in the farm-yard dogs and cows in this new environment. All the more, then, that when Noémi, Michel's mother rules against the dog being in the house for fear of dirtying it, she is being criticised for this antipathetic approach to the creature; Trier has to live in the stables.

---

[88] *Souvenirs*, p. 943.
[89] *Archives*, p. 1178.

The complex, complementary character of the relationship btween human and animal is further exemplified when Michel attends a performance of *Die Meistersinger* at Bayreuth along with Fernande. Michel, who could listen through *Lohengrin* and also *Tannhäuser*, found this rather too much and by agreement left his wife at the end of the first act to exercise their dog, '… il … prend Trier pour sa promenade du soir.' Yourcenar then goes on:

> Les bec du gaz allumés voient passer ce couple amical et cynique au vrai sens du mot, ces deux personnes franchement liées l'une à l'autre, chacune avec son champ d'action plus ou moins restreint, ses goûts ancestraux et ses expériences personnelles, ses lubies, ses envies de grogner et quelques fois de mordre: un homme et son chien.[90]

The gentle juxtaposition of the two protagonists with which the passage ends is reminiscent of the title of Thomas Mann's novella, *Herr und Hund.*[91] The comparison seems pointed. The Greek *cynikos* means 'dog-like'; the attribute was supposed to indicate the philosophers' indifference to conventional manners. Yourcenar sees her father as conforming to that pattern and taking his dog for its evening exercise rather than feel obliged to conform to bourgeois pressures to see the performance out is indicative of that; there are equivalences between the creature and its master here. On one level in this we see an alignment with Nussbaum's insight, referred to above. Furthermore, in declining to be hidebound Michel takes on something of the character of an 'homme de la rue'. The routine nature of the activity has characteristics of the everyday. On this Sheringham remarks:

> Blanchot sees 'l'homme de la rue' as a key avatar of everyday man, ascribing to him a dangerous irresponsibility, vesting him with a potentially anarchic power, 'une réserve d'anarchie'. If the everyday cannot be objectified

---

[90] *Souvenirs*, p. 941.

[91] The Mann story first appeared as: *Herr und Hund / Gesang vom Kindchen: Zwei Idyllen* (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1919). A recent separate edition of the text is the one published by Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2007.

> historically, commodified into narratable events, its dangerous fluidity and non-alignment make it a reservoir of dissident political energy.[92]

The perception of Michel as one who is sceptical of the assumptions of his class and social grouping rings true here, but there is no sense he will take it anywhere into the level of practice and Yourcenar closes down the topic, keeping the emphasis on the man/creature equivalences. Of walking in and around the city and what it reveals to us Sheringham remarks that 'For Certeau, […], the operations of walking are in themselves "multiformes, résistantes, rusées et têtues."'[93]

It has already been suggested that in examining the writer's emphasis on living things there is a temporal component which must not be lost sight of. This can be seen in the case of Trier too. Towards the end of the section *Les Miettes de l'enfance*, seventh in the sequence of eleven in *Quoi? L'Éternité*, Yourcenar devotes a lengthy paragraph, to an overview of Trier's contribution and role in the narrative. She opens with the information that Trier died shortly before the departure of Barbe, 'Le vieux Trier mourut peu avant le départ de Barbe.'[94] In the opening chapter of the *Labyrinthe*, *L'Accouchement*, Yourcenar lays out forcefully her relationship to this young woman who was appointed an employee of the Mont Noir household at nineteen years of age:

> Je m'inscris en faux contre l'assertion, souvent entendue, que la perte prématurée d'une mère est toujours un désastre, ou qu'un enfant privé de la sienne éprouve toute sa vie le sentiment d'un manque et la nostalgie de l'absente. Dans mon cas, au moins, les choses tournèrent autrement. Barbara ne fit pas que remplacer pour moi la mère jusqu'à l'âge de sept ans; elle fut la

---

[92] Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, p. 19. For the Blanchot reference, Maurice Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 355 – 66 (p. 362).
[93] Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, p. 224. For the Certeau quotation, Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien*, I, *Arts de Faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 146. Walking is discussed by Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Verso, 2001).
[94] *Quoi?*, p. 1344.

> mère, et l'on verra plus tard que mon premier déchirement ne fut pas la mort de Fernande, mais le départ de ma bonne.[95]

The acknowledgement by Yourcenar here that she registered the disappearance of Barbe as a significant loss is commented on by Marie-France Braure. A clinical psychologist specializing in children and adolescents, Mme Braure was invited to comment on this passage and others in the course of the international colloquium which was held at the Centre des Archives du Monde du Travail at Roubaix on 6 – 7 February, 2003. The event was a joint affair organized by le Conseil general du Nord in conjunction with the SIEY. First Mme Braure lays out the ground as she perceives it:

> Dans le cas de Marguerite Yourcenar, la mère disparaît très tôt et le rôle maternel est assuré par Barbe, la gouvernante, qui sera également la maîtresse de Michel de Crayencour. Celle-ci est ensuite chassée du domicile en pleine nuit alors qu'elle est enceinte.[96]

The point about the pregnancy, insisted upon elsewhere in the volume by Michèle Goslar, is nowhere commented on by Yourcenar. In the discussion following the presentation by Maurice Titran, Pédiatre, Médecin Directeur du Centre d'Action Médico-Sociale-Précoce de Roubaix, Goslar states, 'Il faut ajouter ici que l'on n'a pas chassé Barbe parce qu'elle emmenait la petite Marguerite au bordel, mais parce qu'elle était enceinte du père…'[97] Assuming it to be the case, it may be the writer was never aware of it and certainly was not as a child. In any event her maid disappears without any explanation being forthcoming from anywhere and she is baffled and bewildered as a result. Braure sees the experience as a trauma in the

---

[95] *Souvenirs*, p. 744.

[96] Marie-France Braure, 'Et si on voyait les choses autrement?', in *Marguerite Yourcenar et l'enfance* ed. by Mayla Laurent et Rémy Poignault avec la collaboration de Lydia Walerysak, (Tours: SIEY, 2003), pp. 79 – 95 (p. 86).

[97] Maurice Titran, 'Et si on approchait les choses autrement?', in *Marguerite Yourcenar et l'enfance* ed. by Mayla Laurent et Rémy Poignault avec la collaboration de Lydia Walerysak, (Tours: SIEY, 2003), pp. 41 – 49. Goslar's interjection comes on p. 47.

child's life, the timing of which coincides precisely with the, 'pleine période de l'Œdipe.'[98] Yourcenar herself was sceptical of Freud, but the reaction she appears to have manifested carries conviction:

> On constate que, lorsqu'il ne peut s'identifier à sa mère, l'enfant est obligé de réinvestir massivement son propre Moi et il acquiert ainsi rapidement une autonomie plus ou moins complète.[99]

The commentator concludes:

> Cliniquement, ces enfants sont hyper-matures: ils se prennent en charge, ont une capacité d'adaptation extrême, et ne jouent que très peu.[100]

Returning to the text of the *Labyrinthe* and bearing these statements in mind we find a close association being made between the death of Trier and the departure of Barbe which was not commented on at the Roubaix conference. Trier and the loss of the mother are deeply interwoven in the narrative and on a double front. It was a time of significant, not-to-be-forgotten loss and the work chronicles it at this juncture. Trier died at the honorable age of twelve, 'un chien bien traité.' Hardly has Yourcenar voiced this than she challenges her own statement, 'Mais avait-il été bien traité?' Characteristically, Yourcenar will not let the phrase pass without a reflection. She summarises the fact that the dog had three years of glory in companionship with Fernande and Michel before becoming her dog, 'il était devenu mon chien.'[101] This assertion is notable for frequently throughout she has termed Trier Fernande's dog. While Barbe was her de facto mother up to this point, looking back now from the

---

[98] *Marguerite Yourcenar et l'enfance*, p. 86.

[99] *Marguerite Yourcenar et l'enfance*, p. 86.

[100] *Marguerite Yourcenar et l'enfance*, pp. 86 – 87.

[101] Yourcenar's attachment to dogs was strong and remained with her throughout her life. In his double page spread, *La femme au chien*, Achmy Halley records some of the history of this and also shows photographs of Yourcenar with Valentine and Zoé as well as of the little gravestones for deceased canines at the bottom of the garden at Petite Plaisance. Halley, *Portrait intime*, pp. 168 – 69.

perspective of the time of writing Trier constituted a link between her and her biological mother. The 'mon' in 'mon chien' equated to the following:

> [C]'est-à-dire qu'il gardait jalousement mon berceau d'enfant, trottinait derrière moi dans les allées de Mont Noir, désapprouvait bruyamment à Monte-Carlo les trop abondantes volées de pigeons, et à Paris les canards du bois de Boulogne, se risquait avec moi dans les flaques d'eau de mer.[102]

In these non-clichéd, yet everyday aspects, through the loyalty of his companionship Trier impacted on the growing child in natural contexts creating a narrative of recall and a link with the maternal punctuated by highlights and this happened at a time in her life when impressions are deep and lasting.

The matter of the relationship of a child to her pet might seem a trifle inconsequential, yet the following is worth bearing in mind. Shadbolt and Hampson relate how in the 1980s an extensive survey involving thousands of respondents was carried out by the OECD to establish what eight-year olds considered important in their families. While mothers consistently headed the list of people important to them, pets came well up the list in every country in Europe and frequently above fathers.[103] A warm relationship with a pet would have been intensified for a child hardly of this age who had no siblings and who was home-schooled. The loss of Trier was decidedly significant for the growing Yourcenar and the inability of many adults to grasp the importance of close proximity to pets and creatures is indicated in the narrative by the refusal of Noémi to allow Trier to come into the house.

The account which Yourcenar gives us of the lifespan of the dog Trier marks firstly the engagement and marriage of Fernande to Michel and then her death. The rest of

---

[102] *Quoi?*, p. 1344.
[103] Shadbolt and Hampson, *The Digital Ape*, pp. 181 – 82.

the animal's life is co-extensive with Yourcenar's early childhood up to the point when she loses her substitute, non-biological mother, Barbe. The sense of loss at the creature's passing awakens her into the activity which was going to play such a momentous part in her life thereafter: writing. The consequence of Trier's death is a letter she writes to her aunt, her first venture, 'C'est en somme ma première composition littéraire.' This was not a formulaic letter written by a young child to an adult relation under parental pressure, it was an expression of personal grief:

> "Ma chère tante, j'écris pour dire que je suis bien triste, parce que mon pauvre Trier est mort."[104]

By the time Yourcenar was seven it was 1910, hardly more than a year before the death of Noémi and the subsequent sale of Mont Noir. In her early life and in its formative stages the dog Trier with its affectionate disposition towards her plays a crucial role, one which in turn enables the reader to register important moments in cycles of living and which offer key insights. Trier's life and involvement in that of Marguerite Yourcenar constitutes a way of measuring the passing of time, the sense of loss, the fragility and vulnerability of our circumstances. This is presented not in linear or conventional sequential chronological terms, but through personal experience marked by moments of particularly rich association, the way we in fact live and recall time's passing.

---

[104] *Quoi?*, p. 1345.

3.6 A window on antiquity, a link with deep time and everyday mobility

Yourcenar was well aware of a much wider range of animal life than that which she treats of in the *Labyrinthe*; she contributed to many organisations active on a worldwide front and took a lively interest, for example, in Brigitte Bardot's work for seals off Newfoundland.[105] Under the heading *Environmental Organizations* Bérengère Deprez lists forty-two groups to which Yourcenar contributed funds, many of which operated across the world.[106] Yet in the course of the *Labyrinthe* all the incidents Marguerite Yourcenar cites relate only to animals she and her family are likely to have come in contact with in their day-to-day living. The criterion for mention in the *Labyrinthe* is association in some way with Yourcenar's family. It is this which authorizes her comments, including those which are commendatory and otherwise.

The animal which becomes the means whereby Yourcenar can explore deep time, through the historical and so to modern times, that is to say the world she is evoking, is the horse. In 1961 Marguerite Yourcenar renewed her acquaintance with horse-riding, the practice of which enabled her to think through and experience again at first hand the inter-relationships between humans and horses which she wished to emphasise when it came to chronicling her family experiences.[107] Unlike in the case of the dogs which are presented as being close to the developing sensibilities of growing young people, in none of the instances is the name of any horse cited even

---

[105] *Lettres à ses amis*, pp. 357 – 64.

[106] Deprez, *Marguerite Yourcenar and the USA*, pp. 167 – 68.

[107] This activity is discussed in detail by Joan Howard, *We met in Paris*, p. 258. This was not Yourcenar's first time to go riding. Bérengère Deprez, *Marguerite Yourcenar and the USA*, p. 58, reports on photos of Yourcenar and Frick riding in snowy terrain in Maine in the 1940s and Yourcenar relates how when on occasion her father and Jeanne would go riding in the hills of Provence she would accompany them: 'L'enfant de temps en temps les accompagne.', *Quoi?*, p. 1301.

though the animal has a constant presence across the trilogy and the names of many that she indicates are all but certain to have been known to her. This suggests that the treatment is intended to be generic. The creature, which would have been known to its owner by some sort of appellative, is nowhere sentimentalized or individuated in this way; instead it is deeply embedded in the socio-economic character of the society it serves expressly to facilitate its working.

The ancient character of the image of the horse in Europe is not overlooked by Yourcenar; she has already drawn attention to the caves at Lascaux where there are over three hundred equine images. In her survey of the early deities of pre-classical Belgium and Flanders in the third Section of *Le Nuit des temps*, discussed above, she remarks:

> On ne connaît bien un peuple qu'à travers ses dieux. Ceux des Celtes sont peu visible à distance. Nous entrevoyons vaguement Teutates, Bélénos, les Mères gauloises ou germaniques, espèces de bonne Parques, le dieu-Lune conducteur des âmes et assimilé à Mercure, Nahalania, autre mère bienfaisante, implorée au départ et remerciée au débarquer dans les ports de Zélande, et qui a dû l'être aussi plus au sud des côtes, Épona enfin, reine des chevaux de trait et des poneys qui gardent son nom, sagement assise de côté sur sa selle de femme, les pieds appuyés à une étroite planchette[108]

In this lengthy inventory Epona emerges as the one Celtic deity to have been assimilated into the Roman pantheon, tribute to the importance and centrality of the horse in the way of life of all, including transculturally.[109] Magnen's map shows a particularly heavy concentration of monumental remains marking or celebrating the horse in the area reaching from Autun to Belgium, the Moselle and the German *limes*. These findings are of a piece with the remarks by James Boykin Rives in *The Oxford*

---

[108] *Archives*, p. 963.

[109] René Magnen, *Épona: déesse Gauloise des chevaux protectrice des cavaliers* (Bordeaux: Delmas, 1953).

Classical Dictionary where he says that Epona's 'original cult area was in North-East Gaul and that monuments are very frequent in the regions of the Aedui (near Dijon) and the Treveri (around the Moselle) and east of the Rhine to the border.'[110] Writing in the New Pauly that Epona was the tutelary goddess of all equines, Marion Enskirchen states:

> Military dedications show that Epona was not only a particular favourite of all mounted troops, but enjoyed the status of an official Roman deity.[111]

Yourcenar makes the creature a ubiquitous image of the world of her parents and forebears. It seems possible to see in the use to which Yourcenar puts this feature a Bakhtinian chronotope, reaching out geographically and also in time.[112] The dominance of the horse and the roles it played were pivotal to traditional economies and lasted from the earliest times until the beginning of the twentieth century, a point to which Yourcenar wishes to give a special emphasis, while in her account its presence extends widely across the region. Following technological developments the creature's relegation to the history books has happened in step with the fate of nature itself; the animal has been put on the defensive. Through the representation of the role of the horse and its relationship to humans, Yourcenar introduces a broader theme of our interactions with nature and the physical and natural world we live in of which the horse and its fate may be seen as a metonym.

Horses are ubiquitous throughout the narrative. They draw bathing huts to the edge of the sea. When at church service the young Marguerite's mind wanders on to the two black ponies which drew the trap bringing her and her grandmother there and which

---

[110] Hornblower and Spawforth, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 549.
[111] Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, *Brill's New Pauly*, IV, CYR – EPY, col. 1159.
[112] M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: four essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

are currently in a nearby stable. Her father admires the slow, steady reliable beast which draws the plough for the Trappist. Horses lie at the heart of the tragedy which led to the death of Michel's older sister, Gabrielle. That notwithstanding, he is a proud member of the horseguards:

> Il aime l'uniforme: les bottes, les gants à crispins, le casque et la cuirasse qui flambent au soleil, comme des miroirs ardents, si bien qu'il lui arrivera de glisser évanoui de sa monture, au cours d'une revue, par un midi torride de 14 Juillet. Il excelle au pansage et au dressage et trouve délicieux le trot dans le petit matin vers le champ de manœuvres.[113]

During his time in England Michel is able to earn a living by teaching equestrianism along with French. From the many available three sets of relationships to this animal are selected in this discussion to illustrate the character of the rich and integral part played by the horse in the lives of the people it is shown as being in contact with. These are the young Michel and his father doing the rounds of the family estates together, points of comparison and contrast between Michel's two wives, Berthe and Fernande, as these emerge in their relationships to horses, and Octave Pirmez as an unwitting harbinger of a radical change in the role of the animal in society.

The horse was integrated and unremarked as an organic element around which a great deal of life, its living patterns and social practices, pivoted. There were further considerations at work as well. This may be seen when Michel Charles, father to Michel, is doing the rounds of his estates, often along with his son, at which point an important socio-economic fact is stated:

> L'importance des fermes se calcule au nombre des chevaux.[114]

---

[113] *Archives*, p. 1104.
[114] *Archives*, p. 1077.

The perhaps initially surprising fact is that in this context wealth was not estimated by the number of the head of cattle, measures of land or by any other commodity, but by the number of horses owned. Yourcenar continues:

> [U]ne ferme à un cheval donne tout juste au couple paysan et à ses enfants de quoi vivre et payer le propriétaire; les fermes à deux chevaux sont déjà plus prospères; celles qui possèdent une cavalerie plus considérable ont aussi des étables mieux garnies et emploient des ouvriers traités et nourris aussi bien ou aussi mal que la famille. Les mille hectares de terre dont Michel Charles et Noémi tirent vanité représentent une trentaine de fermes.[115]

It is thanks to the proprietor's annual peregrination through his estates that the reader is brought in contact with the material reality of living in tenant dwellings. Drawing on the work of Ariès and Duby Mireille Blanchet-Douspis is able to find ample support for Yourcenar's account of the tiny dwellings to which people renting on the estates were confined.[116] The houses, more in keeping with a style of living suggesting a prehistoric age, had:

> [D]eux pieces au maximum, parfois une seulement, pas d'ouvertures, pas de lumière par conséquent, une atmosphère confinée et humide, un froid glacial l'hiver tant le chauffage est rudimentaire, une saleté permanente dans laquelle évoluent adultes de tous âges, enfants et parfois animaux. Dans ce lieu restreint, s'entassent quelques ustensils de cuisine, quelques vêtements sales et rapiécés, des instruments agricoles, des lits pas toujours pourvus de draps ainsi que des aliments.[117]

As the century progressed the efforts were made to improve these conditions in food, hygiene and living conditions and the effects were reflected in the reduction in the number of conscripts turned down on grounds of height or malformation.[118] It has been seen that Yourcenar was alive to the poor quality living circumstances of the

---

[115] *Archives,* p. 1077.
[116] Philippe Ariès et Georges Duby, *Histoire de la vie privée,* 5 vols (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985 – 87), IV, pp. 355, 356.
[117] Blanchet-Douspis, p. 93.
[118] Christophe Charle, *Histoire de la France,* p. 173.

industrial workers of the coal and steel works of Flémalle. Equally, she has no romantic or golden age sentiment about the challenges of living faced by the rural agricultural tenants and labourers. Their circumstances are referred to on a number of occasions, not least through the account of Michel as he did the rounds of the family estates on horseback with his father as a young boy.

It is through their contrasting reactions in the matter of horses that the two women, Berthe and Fernande, are extensively juxtaposed with one another in their relationship to their husband, Michel, by Marguerite Yourcenar. Berthe inherited her facility in this quarter from her father, le Baron Loys de L***, and is made known to the reader primarily in her capacity as an accomplished horsewoman. In the course of the fifteen or so years of her marriage to Michel she and her husband spent much of their time traipsing round, 'de ville d'eaux en ville d'eaux et de concours hippique en concours hippique.'[119] This notion is elaborated upon subsequently in a section where Yourcenar analyses her father's detachment from the mainstream of life during this period. Following his marriage he, Berthe and Gabrielle, her divorced sister, travel over much of Europe, but in search of a particular section of it:

> Trois personnes semblent dix ans durant glisser sur une piste de patinage aux accents des valses à la mode, sous un éclairage qui fait penser à ceux de Toulouse-Lautrec. D'Ostende à Scheveningue, de Bad-Hombourg à Wiesbaden et aux pâtisseries de plâtre de Monte-Carlo, ils ne manquent pas une redoute, pas une bataille de fleurs, pas une représentation d'une troupe parisienne donnée sur un théâtre de ville d'eaux, pas un dîner de gala, pas un de ces concours hippiques dans lesquels Berthe et Gabrielle, écuyères expertes, décrochent souvent des prix, et surtout pas une de ces soirées éclairées par des lustres et embellies par la présence de croupiers où l'on a plaisir à voir à côté de soi le prince de Galles miser sur son carré favori et Felix Krull tenir la banque au baccara.[120]

---

[119] *Archives,* p. 1131.
[120] *Archives,* p. 1151.

The passage sums up and in many ways encapsulates the hedonistic, wandering, detached *Belle Époque* style of life Michel now leads in close association with the two women, amounting to a window for the reader on the world of the *beau monde* in the final decade of the century. The horse is integral to this as a mode of transport, of social belonging and competition and as an indicator of status. Where in the previous eight years Michel had been driven by a combination of factors focused on the pressures of a strong emotional passion for Maud, the desire to be far from his family and also the charms of life in England, now in what Yourcenar terms, 'ce nouvel avatar'[121], Michel turns to an emptiness, 'Michel tourne à vide.'[122]

The sense of purposeless drifting is also remarked on by Blanchet-Douspis. She states:

> L'impression que laisse le récit de la décennie que Michel passe à voyager, […] est celle d'un tourbillon, d'une espèce d'illusion, de griserie[s] permanentes dans lesquelles des privilégiés engloutissent des fortunes, dans l'ignorance volontaire des réalités et d'un avenir peut-être lumineux.[123]

The compulsive, aimless wandering seems to betoken a vacuity which tends towards something altogether more negative:

> Ce besoin insatiable de mouvement, de futilités, d'extravagances nécessaires pour pimenter chaque journée nouvelle semble dissimuler un vide profond, un ennui caractéristiques d'une couche sociale que l'histoire rélègue peu à peu dans l'oubli et qui, incapable de regarder le néant qui la guette, trouve une échappatoire dans l'ivresse constant et une certaine dépravation.[124]

---

[121] *Archives*, p. 1150.
[122] *Archives*, p. 1151.
[123] Blanchet-Douspis, p. 85. The text reads 'griserie', but there seems to be a need for a final –s.
[124] Blanchet-Douspis, p. 85.

It is for this reason that Yourcenar finds it fitting somehow that there are large gaps in her knowledge of her father's life throughout this decade and more. It is clear that in some sense the horse-riding skills, and in particular those of the women, were a central feature of it; it gave them a profile, a role to play, and confirmed the appropriateness of their belonging to whatever group or activity they pursued. The presence of the names of Toulouse-Lautrec, chronicler of the contemporary and the decadent, and of Krull, who, as Yourcenar remarks, raised conmanship to an art form even while depending on a measure of complicity on the part of those who interacted with him to enable him to deceive them, alerts the reader to by no means identify with the scenes being swiftly sketched for us here. What is essentially a void and the two-dimensional surface quality of what is being evoked are increasingly part and parcel of the world Michel now inhabits. The dynamic image of the skilled horse-riding women but with little else to deepen and give it a three-dimensional character is central to this account and is integral to its meaning. Claude Benoit Morinière comments:

> Des visions plus aimables font revivre les foules de la Belle Époque qui fréquentent les stations balnéaires à la mode. […] L'ambiance des salles de jeux et des casinos, si fréquentée par Michel, Berthe et Gabrielle, révèle la décadence fin de siècle, le mélange des classes et la dégradation des valeurs.[125]

For more than a decade Michel led a wandering, almost nomadic life across Europe with Berthe. With Fernande he becomes domesticated and rooted, much more settled, even though they enjoy touring together. When Fernande first meets Michel Yourcenar tells us she probably registered his large horseman's hands:

---

[125] Claude Benoit Morinière, 'Entre l'Histoire et l'histoire', in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Écrivain du XIXe siècle?*, ed. by George Fréris et Rémy Poignault (Clermont-Ferrand: SIEY, 2004), pp. 21 – 32 (p. 27).

> À table, où elle l'eut pour voisin, elle admira probablement ses grands mains d'homme de cheval, et de forgeron, sans toutefois s'apercevoir que le médius gauche était coupé à la hauteur de la première phalange.[126]

In their survey of occurrences of hands in the writings of Marguerite Yourcenar Frederick and Edith Farrell do not refer to this passage. They note, however, that, 'Pour Yourcenar, donc, le contact avec l'univers humain et non-humain se réflète dans l'image de la main.'[127] They conclude, 'Les mains, donc, nous apprennent à connaître l'univers, notre prochain et nous-mêmes.'[128] 'Probablement' says much here for even as the writer casually acknowledges that there is no textual or oral source for this speculation, at the same time she wishes us to imagine it as being the case.

A now more mature Michel is neither forceful nor scornful of Fernande's nervousness. Following their marriage he provides a mare and encourages her to ride. This she gamely tries to do and Yourcenar relates how she found:

> Une photographie hippique me le montre en chapeau haut de forme, botte à botte avec ces messieurs de L*** en chapeau melon, posé un instant d'un restaurant rustique de l'endroit au retour d'un rallye ou concours local: plus encore qu'aux cavaliers, je donne une pensée aux beaux chevaux dociles dont je ne sais pas les noms. Prise vers la même époque sur l'arrière-plan des écuries du Mont-Noir, Fernande en amazone se tient de son mieux sur la jolie jument que le palefrenier Achille contrôle à l'aide d'un long licou, en riant pour rassurer Madame.[129]

In remarking that she does not know the names of the horses here Yourcenar makes it all but certain that in at least some of the other instances she did. That she deliberately refrains from doing so constitutes a conscious literary choice. The final

---

[126] *Souvenirs*, p. 921.
[127] C. Frederick Farrell et Edith R. Farrell, ' Des mains pour toucher l'univers', in *L'Universalité dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by María José Vázquez de Parga et Rémy Poignault, 2 vols (Tours: SIEY, 1994), I, pp. 41 – 47 (p. 46).
[128] Farrell et Farrell, p. 47.
[129] *Souvenirs*, pp. 942 – 43.

point in the quotation, meanwhile, was already established, though in more general terms, just a few pages earlier, 'Ses leçons d'équitation ne l'ont pas guérie de sa peur du cheval.'[130] This is a world in which it is inconceivable that horses and their role in relation to the privileged classes can in any sense be open to question. Furthermore, they are a distinct social marker of that class. In contrast to Berthe Fernande is here seen assimilated into a distinctive social grouping.

There are symbolic overtones to the relationship between Michel and Fernande as it deepens between them. In their walk on the sands of Ostende together the character of the new relationship is being here gently sketched in.[131] He hires a horse, but she has no riding habit and moreover scarcely knows how to mount. He reassures her that all this can be taught. The passage is contrived to combine a paean to the beauty of the beach, notwithstanding its subsequent, 'laids alignements des villas sur la digue', with a sequence which suggests a rapidly developing union between the couple.[132] Love triumphs over environmental degradation. In the writer's description Fernande is transferred to the balcony of their host's house from where she can observe Michel as he exercises the animal on the beach. Turning his back on the buildings, Michel guides the animal up to its hocks into the water where it can cool off. Fernande watches, we are told, from the balcony while he is gazing not at all at her, but into the farthest distance, 'rien qu'un cavalier et sa bête comme au matin des temps.'[133] The local and immediate are suddenly generalized into the fixed atemporality of a profound image. By the process of enabling the reader to watch Fernande watching him we get a framing of the scene which now, in the manner of a painting, suggests

---

[130] *Souvenirs*, p. 940.
[131] *Souvenirs*, p. 922.
[132] *Souvenirs*, p. 922.
[133] *Souvenirs*, p. 922.

symbolic levels of interpretation. Time is being redefined in their relationship to one another and will be even more so in the outcome which will ensue, their daughter, who will chronicle and present a verbalised evocation of their actions. On a further level there is the erotic symbolism of the horse with its intense energy potential. The beast is tranquil, clearly under the control of the man – and admired by the woman who herself is not certain of her ability to control it, but happy to act on trust and under his guidance, a not unreasonable description of the relationship which ensued:

> À marée basse, Michel tourne son cheval vers la mer; l'animal y entre à mi-jarrets pour s'y rafraîchir; le cavalier qui contemple le large est en ce moment à mille lieues de Fernande.[134]

Michel does not realise he is being watched, yet Fernande too is integral to this scene and very much part of its meaning:

> À la distance où elle est d'eux, Fernande ne distingue plus les détails du costume de l'homme et du harnachement de sa monture.[135]

Even Fernande's myopia lends itself to the symbolic reading of this passage; her knowledge and understanding of the man she admires are limited, as, inevitably, is her sense of what it is lies in store for her as she joins her life to his.

It is to Octave in his ruminative prescience evidenced in a letter to José written in 1880 that Yourcenar grants the anticipatory insight to point to the then entirely unforeseen demise of the horse and with it that way of life. On a visit to the Rhineland Octave notes in the letter the view from some hills which enable him to see ruined fortresses and old religious buildings. Writing near Muffendorf near Bonn, he remarks that in the tumbling buildings of the villages he can see the remnants of hatred and violence. It is then that his senses are impacted upon sharply:

---

[134] *Souvenirs*, p. 922.
[135] *Souvenirs*, p. 922.

> "J'en étais là de mes réflexions, quand le bruit cadencé d'un galop de chevaux monta jusqu'au préau. C'était un escadron de hussards prussiens qui traversaient les rues de la ville, le sabre au clair. La barbarie n'est pas morte: elle sommeille, n'attendant que l'heure du réveil. Reparcourant la plaine avant de rentrer à mon hotel, je me suis trouvé dans le village de Muffendorf formé d'une longue rue étroite, bordée de maisons de terre où des solives noirâtres dessinent leur marqueterie. Rien de plus pauvreteux, de plus sordide, ce qui étonne au milieu d'une contrée florissante."[136]

This important insight identifies two major problems of the age, rising militarism and deep social inequities in a world which fails to address the needs of the poor when there is abundance all round. The symbol which vividly captures this is the proud gallop of the hussars on their steeds, brandishing their swords as they go. Bearing in mind that the *Souvenirs pieux* was published in 1974, it is to be noted that at this point we are close to the then German capital, an association resonant with history.

The terminal shock entailed in the decline of the horse in tragic circumstances, of which this is the first example, finds mention also in the other two volumes of the *Labyrinthe*. The point being made here about actions which would ensue in catastrophic consequences for horses in *Souvenirs pieux* is raised again in both *Archives du Nord* and in *Quoi? L'Éternité*. In a proleptic moment Marguerite Yourcenar describes in the former how as an infant she was brought to Mont Noir by her father in July 1903. She then states:

> Cette route campagnarde, sous un ciel qui est resté le grand ciel des régions du Nord peintes par Van der Meulen, peuplé de nuages ronds, sera dans onze ans flanquée sur toute sa longueur, de Bailleul à Cassel, d'une double rangée de chevaux morts ou agonisants, éventrés par les obus de 1914, qu'on a traînés dans le fossé pour laisser passage aux renforts anglais attendus.[137]

---

[136] *Souvenirs,* p. 855.
[137] *Archives,* p. 1178.

The descent into barbarism foretold by Octave is focused here on the carnage being wrought on the horses which had been put to dragging the guns into position. The equivalence with the plight of the ordinary soldiers goes without saying and is clearly implied. The choice of the Flemish painter Adam van der Meulen, who, like Yourcenar was born in Brussels, seems precisely chosen and apposite. A court painter for Louis XIV, Van der Meulen was well known for his paintings of military campaigns and conquests, many of which contained horses – centerpieces of scenes of victory. Writing in the Introduction to Isabelle Richefort's study of the artist, Alain Mérot writes, 'Assimilé trop exclusivement aux batailles, […] il est aussi et surtout un peintre de la vie militaire.'[138] Inevitably, horses play a centrestage role in many of this artist's works. In her discussion Richefort observes the influence of Van der Meulen on a painter such as Desportes, in particular his studies of animals. She writes:

> L'influence exercée par Van der Meulen sur les peintres animaliers ne doit pas être non plus négligée et c'est sans doute sur Desportes qu'elle fut la plus profonde. […] Van der Meulen ne faisait-il pas de même lorsqu'il peignait ses esquisses de chevaux, dont il trouvait les modèles dans les écuries du roi?[139]

There is a poignancy in Yourcenar's choosing of Van der Meulen and also a deep irony. In choosing this artist to illustrate her point in relation to war seen in a modern perspective she economically points up a modern-day antithesis to the painter's celebration of military success.

When in *La terre qui tremble. 1914 – 1915*, ninth Chapter of *Quoi? L'éternité*, the tocsin is sounded alerting people to the invasion the narrative relates Michel's urgent

---

[138] Isabelle Richefort, *Alain-François Van der Meulen (1632 – 1690): Peintre Flamand au service du Louis XIV* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004), p. 7.
[139] Richefort, p. 183.

efforts to get himself and his household out to safety. Once again it is the cadavers of horses littering the route which are chosen to illustrate the extent of the damage being wrought:

> Michel se réveilla le plus vite. Il s'agissait de fuir, mais la route vers Lille et Paris était coupée; les trains ne fonctionnaient plus. Une automobile peut-être aurait pu passer; Michel n'en avait pas, et le moindre tacot était introuvable. On imagine d'ailleurs ce qu'eût été, du côté de Dunkerque ou de Béthune, un véhicule de ce genre en panne sur des routes encombrées de fuyards qui se frayaient un chemin à pied entre des talus bordés bientôt de caissons défoncés et de chevaux morts.[140]

The outbreak of war, its onset and consequences for the civilian population, its terrifying geographical reach, are all economically encapsulated here, as is the equal extent of the damage being wrought on the world of nature, represented by the cadavers of the horses. Their essential fragility, their vulnerability, could hardly be more graphically portrayed. It is true that by this time the motorcar had been invented, but whatever accommodations might have been made between it and the worlds of agriculture and transport predicated on horse power, the descent into barbaric militarism and consequent slaughter brutally put in question the very way of life which had been in existence from time immemorial and which was in some ways best and most simply summed up in the figure of the horse. A major moment of divide between what was understood as the old world and the present is being enshrined here and the characteristics, patterns and chronicles of this way of life are measured in the centrality of the domestic creature which facilitated and enabled their enactment.

---

[140] *Quoi?*, p. 1373.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter it has been seen that thanks to improvements in pasteurization and sterilization the latter part of the nineteenth century witnessed a major shift in the feeding practice of new-born infants from breast-feeding to cow's milk. A possible consequence of this would have been a new regard for the cow in society's perceptions along with an awakening of a new degree of equivalence between human and creaturely infancy. Instead the facts show a ruthless indifference to the animal. Furthermore, there is a callousness in the social arrangements for animal slaughter symptomatic of a deep indifference to creatures and a consequent danger of spilling over into human relationships more generally. Yourcenar argues that the desensitizing occasioned by all this is worrying and needs to be resisted. The philosophy of fragility and vulnerability which embraces all forms of life as adumbrated in the philosophy of Corine Pelluchon is assessed along with its applicability to the new set of arrangements which characterise the world being increasingly envisaged by Yourcenar and those of a similar outlook. Exemplificatory of that is an understanding of the part dogs can play in offering succour and emotional strengthening in times of loss. The part played by the dog Trier in the course of Yourcenar's formative years is assessed, ending in the important conclusion that by its death it helped precipitate her into the career of writing. The central role of horses in the lives of people up to the outbreak of the Great War is then explored and the catastrophic manner in which this and the age of which it was so representative were brought to an abrupt end is examined.

4. IN QUEST OF A WORLD REMADE

4.1 Introduction

It was pointed out in the opening chapter that in the course of the *Labyrinthe du monde* Yourcenar does not embark on an autobiography; it has been seen how in her account to a notable degree the event of her birth constitutes a terminus, not a beginning. This means that in a very particular way what she relates in connection with that event constitutes a form of the past. It was shown, furthermore, in the opening chapter how, while Yourcenar recounts that which is past, she is really more concerned with what has been termed 'deep time' and less with history. It was argued that Yourcenar conceives of time in this work as having a four-fold character. As stated above, these divisions may be categorized as geological time, the Holocene Epoch, the Anthropocene and the modern. Furthermore, it was pointed out that while Yourcenar indicates the usefulness of the geological in that it provides the setting or location of the narrative, it is otherwise dispensed with and so, that aside, the *Labyrinthe* has a threefold temporal structure. It is this feature which makes it useful to see certain affinities with the Braudelian sense of historical time. In this process of classification his *longue durée* has a measure of equivalence with her use of the Holocene, his conjunctures with the Anthropocene as she portrays it, and finally his sense of the event with her portrayal of the modern. With regard to this last Yourcenar essentially invites us to contemplate the world of the *Belle Époque,* not per se, but as experienced and lived in by her parents. The purpose of this contemplation is to enable her first and thereby the reader to reflect on them and get to know and understand them in the context of their times.

In his discussion of memory Ricœur lays much emphasis on the statement of Aristotle to the effect that 'All memory is of the past.'[1] In proposing a phenomenology of memory Ricœur structures it round two questions: 'Of what are there memories?' and 'Whose memory is it?[2] Insofar as it is relevant to this discussion the first question is answered by the locations and temporalities outlined in the preceding paragraph and in the thesis in general. The second point raised is significant in helping address the final stages of this discussion on time in Yourcenar's *Labyrinthe*, what Braudel terms 'the event', the one he professed to be least interested in. In response to this it has been seen earlier how Ricœur establishes that it is the event which is the very stuff of history. A main point Ricœur's discussion of the domain of memory seeks to emphasise is the 'privilege spontaneously accorded to events among all the "things" we remember.'[3] In a lengthy paragraph Ricœur looks at a number of the ways in which the event is configured. Among others, this includes 'a composite image' of the experience of waking up in Combray in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, that is, the event can be literary in character. His final category is stated as follows: 'Made the target of critique, […], the events considered by documentary history display a propositional form that gives them the status of fact.'[4]

Combining the achieving of the status of fact with an answer to the question, 'Whose memory is it?' would appear to lend insight to the practices of the *Labyrinthe*. There are many examples of which just one is the following. Speaking of the home of Arthur and Mathilde de Marchienne, her mother's parents, Yourcenar says:

---

[1] Paul Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004, pbk. 2006), p. 6.
[2] Ricœur, *Memory*, p. 3.
[3] Ricœur, *Memory*, p. 23.
[4] Ricœur, *Memory*, pp. 23 – 24.

> Tâchons d'évoquer cette maison entre 1856 et 1873, non seulement pour mener à bien l'expérience, toujours valable, qui consiste à réoccuper pour ainsi dire un coin de passé, mais surtout pour essayer de distinguer dans ce monsieur en redingote et cette dame en crinoline, qui ne sont plus guère à nos yeux que des spécimens de l'humanité de leur temps, ce qui diffère de nous ou ce qui, en dépit des apparences, nous ressemble, le jeu compliqué de causes dont nous ressentons encore les effets.[5]

In the account which follows Yourcenar allows herself to reflect on the main bedroom of the house: 'La chambre à coucher du xix[e] siècle est l'antre aux mystères.'[6] Important here to note is that in their day-to-day lives the proprietors, Arthur and Mathilde, would not have registered anything unusual, out of the ordinary or in any sense mysterious in relation to their bedroom. For them their main bedroom, living in it and passing in and out of it, would have constituted part of their everyday, something scarcely to be noted or registered. It is only when as a phenomenon it enters into the category of Yourcenarian recall, of memory and reimagining, that it takes on the aspect of an event, thereby becoming an answer to the question, 'Whose memory is it?' The answer is, 'It is Yourcenar's'. In this regard Yourcenar is not trying to reconstruct the period in the manner of a historian, but to learn from what she can observe or recreatingly imagine of the set of domestic circumstances in the now, her now, her present, not that of her grandparents, in this instance pivoting her enquiry round a contemplation of the role of the bedroom in their lives. It is in part as a result of that scrutiny that she seeks to assess how it was that a set of relationships and a way of life which in its perception of itself saw itself as timeless and unchanging came nevertheless to crumble and disappear. Sheringham draws attention to the tension between history and the everyday. By the act of attention and the interrogative gaze Yourcenar transforms that everyday into an event of the present.

---

[5] *Souvenirs*, p. 783.
[6] *Souvenirs*, p. 787.

This event in turn then becomes permanently of the present every time it is met in the reading of its inscription.

In the construction of his analysis of the event Ricœur tells us he will draw for his analysis on Bergson. 'The event,' he tells us meanwhile, 'is simply what happens. It takes place.' Characteristically, he defines it in greater detail as follows:

> It constitutes what is at stake in the third cosmological antimony of the Kantian dialectic: either it results from something prior in accord with necessary causation or else it proceeds from freedom, in accord with spontaneous causation.[7]

Without wishing to plump entirely for one form of causation or the other, that is to say elements of necessity and also of spontaneity are at play, what emerges from Yourcenar's narrative sequencing is a structuring, a form of concatenation of events, events frequently portrayed in the lives of her forebears. In this final chapter two domains present themselves for discussion along these lines, the first is the etiolation which can be seen in the line of her maternal grandmother's family, which for much of the narrative has seemed to mirror entropy in the universe. The second is the more specific inability of her father to escape from what he himself called his fate, *Ananké*. Yourcenar endorses this interpretation of a Hugolian feature, making it the title of the section of the *Archives* in which she relates Michel's struggles.[8] These topics will be treated in turn. By their conclusion these attempts to find harmony in human relations, familial and individual, have failed.

---

[7] Ricœur, *Memory*, p. 23.

[8] The concept of *Ananké* features in Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* (Paris: Le Livre de poche classique, 1988), p. 53 and *passim*.

Following that discussion the chapter goes on to seek out a key alternative attempt at achieving harmony in human relations. The first essential is the development of the sensibilities of the growing child to the world of natural things. Following this it will be shown how a positive outcome is constantly sought through pursuit of a nexus of love and the pastoral as experienced through environmental considerations. While for Michel this search always ended in disappointment, here it turns out to be successful and the chapter will progress to an examination of this pursuit. The significance of this not only in the *Labyrinthe du monde,* but also in Yourcenar's opus as a whole will be indicated. The outcome has major implications for Yourcenar's understanding of the role of the environment in our lives. Justifications for this view will be put forward. Key to this prospect is integration with biotopic awareness and harmony. The liberation and fulfillment which ensue enable reconciliation with the mother, an experience in turn which permits a growing sense of completion and finality in the lives of the protagonists and of the narrative.

4.2 The family viewed environmentally: isolation and solitariness

The etiolation of the family finds its mirroring in the entropy of their physical universe, that is to say the experience of environmental degradation occasioned by thermo-industrial pursuits, the character of which have already been discussed above. The only child of a tenth child, Marguerite Yourcenar reviews the lives of Fernande's siblings and a number of their children, her cousins. Yourcenar has already reflected on this in her reverie on the occasion of her visit, her first, to the family vault in 1956, a sepulchral moment for her and an encounter with genealogical deep time.[9] Of Arthur and Mathilde de Marchienne's offspring two, the boys Ferdinand and Jean, died young. Of the remainder five were girls and three were boys. Of these boys none married and so the family name died with them. Briefly stated, of the four girls apart from Fernande, Jeanne was born a cripple. The three remaining girls, Zoé, Isabelle and Georgine, all married and were eventually buried in their family graves, not at Suarlée. Yourcenar treats of Zoé and her troubled marriage to Hubert slightly differently; her story too constituted a form of rupture. Isabelle married into her class, but nevertheless was not strong and suffered from, 'une faiblesse cardiaque dont elle devait mourir quelques années plus tard.'[10] By her late forties Georgine was ravaged by diabetes and Yourcenar's memory of her as a child was of seeing in her 'le symbole terrible de la Maladie.'[11] The inventory is striking:

> Je m'aperçois tout d'abord que l'abondante fécondité de Mathilde ne fut plus de mise pour la génération suivante: des huits enfants vivants qu'elle avait

---

[9] Bérengère Deprez, 'La visite à Suarlée: Méditation sur la naissance et rapport à la mère dans *Souvenirs pieux'*, in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Retour aux sources*, ed. by Rodica Lascupop et Rémy Poignault (Tours: SIEY, 1998), pp. 175 – 84.
[10] *Souvenirs*, p. 800.
[11] *Souvenirs*, p. 801.

> laissés, seules quatre filles en eurent à leur tour, totalisant en tout neuf enfants, et trois seulement de ceux-ci, sauf erreur, eurent des descendants.[12]

Yourcenar places human existence on a level of close affinity with organic existence:

> La fertilité de Mathilde, vue sous un certain angle, fait penser à la floraison surabondante d'arbres fruitiers attaqués par la rouille ou par des parasites invisibles, ou qu'un sol appauvri n'alimente plus.[13]

The writer wishes to imply more than a chance metaphor drawn from nature. Here she opens the human condition up to consideration as a biotope or part of the biosphere. There are immediate implications in this for our understanding of the narrative. She has long expressed concern about the rapid increase in human population, fearing that if uncontrolled it will lead to starvation and war. She can conceive of living in such circumstances in the future as, 'une vie termitière.' Yourcenar does refer to Malthus, yet her concern here is for a degree of control and the quality of living, not for massive reduction of population as advocated, for example, by a deep ecologist such as Næss. Yourcenar has here turned the focus of the debate in a manner which is strikingly contemporary

> Il faut à coup sûr se féliciter de ce retour à la modération, qu'elle qu'en soit la cause. […] La même métaphore s'applique peut-être à l'indue expansion de l'humanité d'aujourd'hui.[14]

A defining feature, then, of what in Yourcenar's sequencing of the Cartier de Marchienne family, etiolation followed by stabilization, is the vulnerability of many of its members arising from rupture.

---

[12] *Souvenirs*, p. 806.
[13] *Souvenirs*, p. 807.
[14] *Souvenirs*, pp. 806 – 807.

Isolation and loneliness feature extensively in the *Mémoires*. The norms and domestic mores of this stratum of society in the nineteenth century generated the phenomenon of isolation, among men in particular, though in the text Yourcenar shows that women, and Fernande specifically, were not exempt. One place where this becomes apparent is in the reception given by Octave Pirmez to James Vandrunen. Vandrunen finds the landowner in the midst of his preoccupation involving himself with a number of cages which house a range of animals, the natures of which are not specified, but which from the account we gather to be at least in some cases quite sizeable:

> Il trouva le maître des lieux dans une cour rectangulaire qui ressemblait à celle d'un jardin zoologique, bordée de cages où grognaient, glapissaient, hululaient tout un choix de ces animaux sauvages qu'Octave gardait près de lui, disait-il, pour lui "apprendre la fierté".[15]

All but set upon by Octave's dogs, Vandrunen has to keep them at bay with the help of an iron bar:

> Une bande de chiens se précipta sur l'intrus, montrant les dents, et le suave poète n'eut pas un mot pour contenir sa meute.[16]

Octave has no interest in the reason for Vandrunen's call for, he says, 'les affaires d'Acoz ne le concernaient pas.'[17] What this sentiment, suggestive of a haughty indifference, seems to indicate in reality is a dislocation from a sense of either his own position or that of his social grouping. Octave's behaviour evinces many of the patterns of one who is isolated and lives largely alone. On his return from La Pasture we have been told that he has six dogs and that he can quieten these with a word; here he makes no attempt to do so. Nevertheless, his interest in Vandrunen grows. The

---

[15] *Souvenirs*, p. 860.
[16] *Souvenirs*, p. 860.
[17] *Souvenirs*, p. 860.

sequence indicates a dilemma among the males in the society at this time. Octave was widely known as the 'Solitary of Acoz.' He is not alone in this. Yourcenar refers also to 'Louis de Bavière, le solitaire de Starnberg', Ludwig II of Neuschwanstein, whom shortly after she describes:

> Louis de Bavière, le solitaire de Starnberg, a encore trois ans à se débattre avec ses fantômes, et sa propre chair […] avant la plongée dans les eaux de lac.[18]

The sentiments are similar to those identified by Sheringham when in his discussion of Perec's *Un Homme qui dort* he refers to that work as 'a study of a withdrawal from life.'[19] These words seem like a precise description of Octave Pirmez's state. Acting in this way can have benefits; in Perec the radical deconditioning can 'generate fresh perceptions.'[20] As in the case of Perec's hero, Octave repudiates ambitions, ideas and the material obsessions of modern society. There are, clearly, many differences between the two characters, but a similar resonance arises from the disengagement from society of both when the indifference in *Un Homme qui dort* is seen to stem in part from 'misanthropy bred of solitude, depression, fear of other and defensive pride', which sums up Octave's reception of James Vandrunen.[21] Of both it can be said that 'The protagonist's withdrawal reveals its pathogenic side as a protective strategy and an excuse for not really living.'[22]

The isolation of the leading male in privileged households is further to be seen in the inability of Arthur de Marchienne to engage in any form of light conversation with his

---

[18] *Souvenirs*, p. 872.
[19] Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, p. 253. For the Perec text, see Georges Perec, *Romans et récits* (Paris: Livre de poche, 2002).
[20] Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, p. 254.
[21] Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, p. 255.
[22] Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, p. 255.

family when he meets them over dinner following Mathilde's death. This internalizing and emotional isolation lends the contrasting empathetic portrait of Mathilde much of its poignancy. Yourcenar writes:

> Une telle vie de famille semble de nos jours grotesque, ou odieuse, ou les deux. Mais les enfants de Suarlée n'en avaient pas conservé trop mauvais souvenir. Trente ans plus tard, j'entendis Octave, Théobald, Georgine et Jeanne vieillis évoquer ce passé avec des intonations attendris et de discrets sourires. Les jeunes pousses un peu débiles avaient réussi à s'insinuer et à fleurir entre les pierres.[23]

The social practice she describes seems neither quaint nor admirable and she identifies four of the members of the family whom it has been seen were marked by serious health limitations. The sadness in the situation is put across by the metaphor which compares the inflexible character of Arthur's patriarchy to stone while the flowers which struggle to gain a purchase represent the irrepressible human urge of the children to find an outlet in their sharing of their memories decades later; feeble shoots, hardly able to flourish on stony, unsympathetic ground.

Loneliness was a phenomenon Marguerite Yourcenar herself experienced from an early age. Camille Van Woerkum gives the following example:

> Quand, dans le parc du Mont-Noir, le père de Marguerite, Michel Cleenewerck de Crayencour, organise une fête, la petite Maguerite doit rester enfermée dans la tour du château. "J'apercevrai […] du haut de la grande chambre de la tour des messieurs par petits groupes sur la terrasse, le visage un peu rouge, et à qui Monsieur de C. offre des cigares. Pour ma part, j'attends l'assiette de petits fours et de cerises glacées qu'on ne manquera pas de monter." Ce qui frappe, entre les lignes, c'est la solitude de la petite Marguerite, laissée à l'écarte du monde des adultes et de la fête. Absence absolue de contact.[24]

---

[23] *Souvenirs*, p. 886.

[24] Camille Van Woerkum, 'Marguerite Yourcenar et la Flandre: un espace dévasté', in *Marguerite Yourcenar et l'enfance*, ed. by Maryla Laurent et Rémy Poignault avec la collaboration de Lydia Waleryszak (Tours: SIEY, 2003), pp. 211 – 215 (pp. 211 – 12).

This aspect to which Yourcenar has been enlivened by her childhood experiences, receives attention in her father's case while the alienation Michel Charles experiences at the hands of Noémi is a constant across the narrative. Yourcenar points to the fact that Michel had few male friends:

> Cet homme qui vit de préférence avec des femmes et pour des femmes a peu d'amitiés viriles.[25]

The point is strikingly made at the beginning of *Quoi? L'Éternité*. Opening with the terse sentence, 'Michel est seul' the text pinpoints the dilemma which has befallen him for a second time, the loss of his wife. From not being able to communicate with his father the reasons why he has run away at the age of fifteen, to the repeated loss of a series of soul-mates, Maud, Berthe, Fernande and his dog Red, Michel has now once again found himself alone. Temperamentally at odds with his mother and now burdened with a child, he is again thrown back on his own resources. In an anaphoric sequence nine of the thirteen sentences which make up this opening unit begin with the word, 'Seul'. The moment is dramatic for the question considered is how this man, 'perpétuellement en rupture de ban', will react to the death of his second wife and their infant child now left on his hands; it is the future of his child which hangs in the balance. This too is a form of vulnerability and it affects them both in their respective standpoints. The background consideration which is being addressed here is the public perception of marriage at this time among the well-to-do. Theodore Zeldin states, 'The family was not primarily a sentimental unit.'[26] Michel has no one to guide him or with whom to share his concerns and his mother is alienated from the fact of his having married a second time thereby compromising the inheritance of his first child. There are many directions he could take and society would not fault him

---

[25] *Archives*, p. 1155.

[26] Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848 – 1945: Ambition, Love and Politics*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), I, p. 315.

for it. Reviewing the social perception of marriage at the end of the century Gildea says:

> Marriages were still family alliances centred on property for which under the Civil Code parental consent was needed, even if the intended were over twenty-one.[27]

The attachment is not required to be rooted in affection. While no revolutionary, in an intuitive rather than rationalized and worked through fashion Michel shows many signs of rejecting the staid, fixed, apparently timeless character of nineteenth-century society. Nearly expelled from school for writing a poem sympathetic to the Communards, Michel also evinced sympathy for the Superior of the Trappist monastery at Monts-des-Cats when, following Combes' decrees, they are obliged to leave their monastery and transfer to Belgium. Zeldin reports that as they were regarded as harmless, along with five other orders the silent Trappists were exempt from the general dissolution, but in the Yourcenar account it turns out to be not the case.[28] Michel is instinctively on the side of the person who is being put upon irrespective of political correctness, a set of feelings he shared with Fernande. These were areas on which they found common ground, much of which they bequeathed to their daughter.

Nevertheless, Michel is bound by the codes of his time and like the males of his group is an autonomous unit. The solution comes in the account of him carrying the dog Trier in his arms and bearing it to the carriage for the drive to the family home. As seen above, Yourcenar transposes the sense of attachment and emotional commitment from the child to the domestic creature enabling the outcome to be resolved. The

---

[27] Robert Gildea, *Children of the Revolution: The French, 1799 – 1914* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 366.
[28] Zeldin, *France 1848 – 1945*, I, p. 688.

reader is induced to feel that a man open to this measure of sensitivity will not treat his child unfeelingly either. Yet the dilemma of the isolated patriarch as a social pillar remains. The quest for the union of male and female as a relationship remains necessary if fulfillment is to be achieved. The respective stories of Fernande and Michel will be briefly reviewed below. There it will be argued that not only does the work require us to understand them in this light, fulfillment can only succeed if deference is paid to the extent to which human affairs integrate successfully with one another and also with the biosphere of which they form a part. As Wagner asserts, ecocriticism examines not only the relationship between Culture and Nature, it raises questions of an aesthetic, political, moral, psychological and spiritual character and their relation to the natural world. The former which perceived opposition between Man and Nature, a form of dualism (*Mensch-Natur-Dualismus*), has given way to a new perception which enables us to look at Man's sense of himself in relation to Nature in a more holistic fashion.[29] This approach strikes down the former anthropocentric isolation which characterized the human situation and offers instead a biospheric togetherness (*einen größeren biosphärischen Zusammenhang*). Wagner quotes from Barry Commoner what the latter terms 'the first Law of Ecology', cited by William Rueckert, 'Everything is connected to everything else.'[30] Yourcenar seeks to question the dominance of autonomy which pays no regard to the Other while at the same time requiring a deepening understanding of the relationship between that and vulnerability, human and biotopic.

---

[29] Wagner, p. 208.

[30] William Rueckert, 'Literature and Ecology. An Experiment in Ecocriticism', in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA, and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 105 – 23 (p. 108).

4.3 Harmony, natural and filial: Michel and a quest destined to fail

Michel's serial attempts and ultimate failure to establish a permanent relationship of harmonious union is a distinctive feature of the narrative. He repeatedly fails to retain purchase or a point of permanent tenure in the idyllic garden, figurative or literal. If we are to understand further the trajectory of this theme of rupture in his life, these efforts and their outcome must be seen as constituting a unifying thread running through the narrative. Their history follows a line traceable through the entire work. Valeria Sperti says of Michel, 'Michel est le véritable *homo fictus* du récit,' and she lists as 'les épisodes capitaux' the following: 'enfance, amour, mariage, passion, maladie, agonie, mort', a panoply of a man's life in full.[31] Matters on this front begin when at fifteen he is introduced to sexual experience in the arms of the woman bargee in Antwerp. The reason why this early deflowering came about is because of his alienation from his family. His mother's deep, aggressive insensitivity is paramount here and primarily to blame. Indeed, mothers are crucially important figures throughout the *Mémoires*, whether for better or worse. In this latter idiom, it will be noticed, for example, that Irénée, mother to Octave, who by all social criteria was a paragon of virtue and who certainly meant all that was best for her son, is censured by Yourcenar for her excessive control over his life:

> J'ai montré un biais contre mon arrière-grand-tante. Irénée Drion me semble avoir appartenu au groupe des mères parfaites et abusives qui abondaient à l'époque et pesèrent comme des incubes sur la destinée de leurs fils.[32]

In the present incident Michel is seeking to escape the over-arching pressures of Noémi.

---

[31] Valeri Sperti, '*Le labyrinthe du monde* change-t-il la mémoire de l'autre en miroir de soi?', in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Écritures de l'autre*, ed. by Jean-Philippe Beaulieu, Jeanne Demers et André Maindron (Montréal: XYZ, 1997), 127 – 37 (p. 128 and n. 7).
[32] *Souvenirs*, p. 843.

A significant portion of Michel's formative twenties, is taken up with the time he spent in Britain with Maud. The name given to the personage 'Maud', as of Rolf Nagel himself, is Yourcenar's own. Unabashedly she states: '[l]a jeune femme, que j'appellerai Maud.'[33] From the outset Maud is introduced to Michel as an artist's model, a Pre-Raphaelite beauty, of a sort, we are told, Michel has already familiarised himself with through chromolithographs and art galleries:

> Maud est belle, pâle et rose sous une chevelure roux sombre. Cette fragile Anglaise a le charme un peu inquiétant de certains modèles de Rossetti ou de Burne-Jones, avec lesquels Michel va bientôt se familiariser grâce aux chromos et aux galeries de peinture.[34]

As a name Maud was given considerable currency by Tennyson's love poem of that name, perhaps the best known lines of which are:

> Come into the garden, Maud,
> For the black bat, night, has flown,
> Come into the garden, Maud,
> I am here at the gate alone;
> And the woodland spices are wafted abroad,
> And the musk of the roses blown.[35]

Tennyson's poem *Maud* suggests openness, dawning, and is an invitation to love. At the same time it may be thought that even if the overt reference is to Tennyson, Maud's behaviour is in some ways more reminiscent of a number of the women associated with the Rossetti circle. Her movement between Michel and Rolf resembles Fanny Cornforth, but perhaps even more Jane Morris who was closely involved with and attached to the two artists, her husband William and also Rossetti,

---

[33] *Archives*, p. 1110. Note, too, Yourcenar's comment a little later, 'Le nom et le prénom du mari sont aussi de mon cru'.
[34] *Archives*, p. 1110.
[35] Christopher Ricks, *The Poems of Tennyson*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), II, pp. 562 – 65 (p. 562).

and sat frequently for them both. Meanwhile, the hint of drugs in the shop Maud introduces Michel to in Liverpool, 'l'odeur inquiétante d'une pâte noirâtre', may be suggestive of the drug-taking habit which beset Rossetti's first wife, Elizabeth Siddall, and which resulted in her death.[36]

The idyllic character of the couple's first residence is established by the writer from the outset, 'Ils eurent des mois heureux dans ce cottage du Surrey drapé de vignes vierges que rosit l'automne.'[37] The cottage context which the couple manage to acquire by virtue of Michel's position is described in terms markedly evocative of an English rural idyll:

> Tout les enchante: un tardif colchique sous les feuilles, les lapins dans l'herbe, le ruisseau à demi gelé qui se divise derrière la maison et forme un îlot qu'habitent les oiseaux. À Noël, l'odeur des branches de sapin fraîchement coupées s'harmonise avec celle de la dinde rôtie. Si le bonheur avait ses phosphorescences, la maisonette sous les arbres brillerait de mille feux.[38]

In this instance the pastoral situation is broken into by the cold, disapproving eyes of society. Notwithstanding the delights of her abode, Maud find herself as if in a bed of nettles, '… tombée sur un lit d'orties.'[39] The sense of social disapproval emanates from the wives of the staff:

> Aux yeux des correctes épouses des professeurs, cette trop jolie fille n'est pas tout à fait une dame. Le soupçon que l'union de ce couple s'est faite sans bénéfice de clergé flotte indéfinissablement autour d'eux.[40]

---

[36] *Archives*, p. 1116.
[37] *Archives*, p. 1112.
[38] *Archives*, p. 1112.
[39] *Archives*, p. 1113.
[40] *Archives*, p. 1113.

The uncertainty of the nature of the relationship between the couple costs Michel his job at his first establishment where he is teaching French and instructing in horse-riding.

Following their return from America the couple take up residence, once again in a cottage, 'Il y eut de nouveau un cottage, cette fois drapé de clématite, mais un peu moins commode que le précédent, … Le charme de la campagne anglaise transfigure de nouveau la vie des amants.'[41] A convincing image of this idyll may be seen in paintings such as those of Helen Allingham, her *Craigenputtuck* or the *Saucer of Milk* or her *Cottage With Sunflowers at Peaslake*, for instance.[42] Married to William who was considerably older than her, in 1907 Helen edited his *Diary* which contains many reminiscences of both Tennyson and Rossetti as he visited and moved between the two poets.[43] Maud's reading, meanwhile, is reported to be in the works of the popular Ouida who with her mixed French and English background, interest in the States and facility for generating enormous sums of money from her writing seems an intriguing choice in the circumstances.[44] The very act of Maud's reading produces an incident every bit as sensationalist and declaratively romantic as anything in the Ouida novels when Michel cuts off his 'médius gauche' to attract her attention and convince her of his undying passion for her. This instance of life being stranger than fiction is remarked on by Yourcenar, 'Un tel geste valait bien les épisodes les plus échevelés

---

[41] *Archives*, p. 1118.

[42] Annabel Watts, *Helen Allingham's cottage homes revisited* (England, 2002). *Passim*. Anne Helmreich, 'The marketing of Helen Allingham: the English cottage and national identity', in *Gendering Landscape art*, ed. by Steven Adams and Anna Greutzner Robins (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), pp. 45–60.

[43] *William Allingham, a diary*, ed. by Helen Allingham and D. Radford (London, 1907).

[44] *Ouida and Victorian popular culture*, ed. by Jane Jordan and Andrew King (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2013).

des romans de Ouida.'[45] Paradoxically, the extravagant gesture has the effect of gradually restoring a sense of proportion to Michel's outlook:

> Mais il arrive à Michel, en regardant son moignon cicatrisé, de se dire que s'il est beau de se tuer pour une femme, il est peut-être idiot de lui sacrifier deux phalanges.[46]

The incident has the effect of temporarily restoring their passion for one another, but at the same time it casts a pall over their abode. The anti-pastoral has come to dominate the tenor; the idyll of the cottage has come to an end and they decide to leave:

> Puis, la tendresse reprend le dessus. Le petit cottage est hanté par le souvenir de trop de scènes. Ils décident de recommencer ailleurs.[47]

Notwithstanding any preliminary reservations, Yourcenar finds it not inappropriate to speak of her parents' relationship, 'Ce voyage de noces précédé d'une longue promenade prénuptiale dura, peu s'en faut, mille jours.'[48] It is what this succinct encapsulation signifies which was to become the lost Paradise of the *Labyrinthe du monde*. In contrast to the fractured pastoral with Maud, the relationship between Michel and Fernande takes on qualities of a romantic idyll. Yourcenar's reflection on how her mother's marriage, 'Ce mariage déjà strié de petites fêlures', might have developed had she survived is given the lie by the thousand days Fernande and her husband shared together, the memories of which her father was to be left with and

---

[45] *Archives*, p. 1121.
[46] *Archives*, p. 1121.
[47] *Archives*, p. 1121.
[48] *Souvenirs*, p. 934.

which were to become the very stuff of the *Labyrinthe* more than half a century later.[49] Integral to this was how he was to cherish his daughter in its aftermath.

Where much of the emphasis in the life of Berthe is on the outdoor, horse-riding and nomadic criss-crossing of the continent, Fernande is rooted, domestic, focused on the world of books and culture even as she is happy and willing to travel. Notably, if Octave and her father were 'solitaire' or 'seul' in their respective ways as discussed above, so too was Fernande. In choosing to go on her own smallscale 'grand tour' round Germany along with Fräulein she shows enterprise – and anticipates her daughter's love of travel. Yourcenar inventories a number of the qualities exhibited by Fernande which charmed her husband, including her voice:

> Fernande avait des charmes qui n'étaient qu'à elle. Le plus grand était sa voix. Elle s'exprimait bien, sans l'ombre d'un accent belge qui eût agacé ce Français; elle contait avec une imagination et une fantaisie ravissantes.[50]

At the time of life Michel has now arrived at he finds this charming, 'Il ne se lassait pas d'entendre de sa bouche ses souvenirs d'enfance ou de lui faire réciter leurs poèmes favoris, qu'elle savait par cœur.[51] Fernande and Michel find a common interest in literature and history:

> Comme lui, elle aimait l'histoire, et, comme lui, surtout ou plutôt exclusivement pour y chercher des anecdotes romanesques ou dramatiques, et, çà et là, quelques beaux exemples d'élégance morale ou de crânerie dans le malheur.[52]

Fernande's long-standing interest in cultural matters is remarked on again later by Yourcenar where she states that this interest caused those around her to question whether she might be compromising her marriage chances:

---

[49] *Souvenirs*, p. 713.
[50] *Souvenirs*, p. 713.
[51] *Souvenirs*, p. 713.
[52] *Souvenirs*, p. 713.

> On commençait à lui reprocher d'étre originale. Sa très mince culture, qu'elle cherche à améliorer en lisant tout ce qui lui tombe sous la main, sans en excepter les dangereux romans à couverture jaune, effraie les mères: une jeune personne qui a lu *Thaïs*, *Madame Chrysanthème* et *Cruelle énigme* n'est plus tout à fait mariable.[53]

In her enthusiasm Fernande has tried to embark on a little introductory Latin and even purchased a Greek grammar, all of which taken together gives her something of a reputation of being a young intellectual:

> Elle s'était fait à elle-même une sorte d'éducation libérale; elle comprenait un peu les langues classiques; elle avait lu ou lisait tout ce qui était de mode, et quelques beaux livres que la mode n'atteint pas.[54]

Yourcenar is emphatic that she is nothing of the sort, 'qu'elle n'est pas.'[55] A number of things arise, nevertheless. The society was so blinkered that it could hardly cope with one of their number, and a woman to boot, taking even a mild interest in matters literary which had not been carefully vetted and approved beforehand. It would seem that reading writers such as Anatole France, Loti and Bourget did not fall within this classification. In fact the society was both philistine and anti-educational, particularly when it came to women.[56] A further irony was that it was precisely this breaking with convention and thinking for herself which made Fernande attractive to Michel, resulting, too, in giving them something to share in a relationship of equality of interest and temperament. Furthermore, there is also the important consideration that the little curriculum Fernande designs for herself is the same in embryo as was to become, even if altogether more substantially and more seriously, the bedrock of the course Yourcenar herself would follow: the Classics followed by a detailed and

---

[53] *Souvenirs*, p. 910.
[54] *Souvenirs*, p. 713.
[55] *Souvenirs*, p. 911.
[56] This statement needs to be seen in context. It does not, for instance, take account of the work of Isabelle Gatti de Gamond who founded the first school for the education of girls in Brussels in 1864. Audier notes that her mother, Zoé, lost her money in a Fourierian initiative which was 'particulièrement végétale et fleurie.' Audier, p. 436.

thorough acquisition of literature and history. Yourcenar here attributes that groundwork to her mother and allows it to be assumed that in encouraging their daughter Michel was filling out a recognition of his wife's deeply felt interests to Yourcenar's benefit. The foundations of Yourcenar's intellectual learning and advancement were laid for her by her mother and honoured by her father.

It was only when he was married to Fernande that Michel forsook the 'tapis vert'. This was more than he was prepared to do even for Jeanne. Secondly, his devotion to his daughter tells us something very important about his deep emotional attachment to the memory of his second wife. Unlike in the case of Berthe, Fernande was his choice and his very own alone. It seems to Michel like the cruel workings of *Ananké* when the relationship was cut across abruptly terminating this vibrant idyll. In cherishing his daughter he cherishes its memory.

The transposition from Fernande to Jeanne now follows. Following the rupture occasioned by the loss of his second wife we learn of Michel's oblique private thoughts on the attractiveness of the bridesmaid who turned up at his wedding to Fernande and who was to become a dream of distant and unattainable desire. Michel's world is considerably upended by this encounter, he hopes for the better, when some five or so years following his marriage to Fernande he hears from her. By this time she is married and has a family, something which paradoxically seems to throw them even closer together in a way which enables Yourcenar to go through a process of speculation on whether they ever had relations. The point here seems to pivot on two considerations. There is the transposition by the figure of the young

Yourcenar to a new mother figure along with a reconciliation by the child to that fact. As has been seen, initially this person was Barbe, and yet even more deeply it turns out to be Jeanne. It is because of this that she almost wills Jeanne and her father to have had relations as a kind of post-facto begetting. While such notions are self-evidently physiologically implausible it seems possible that they can be open to a literary understanding. Relevant to this is what Maurice Delcroix observes:

> S'interrogeant sur la possible liaison de Jeanne avec son père, la narratrice considère que l'argument qui doit emporter la probabilité, c'est que chacun des deux, à la veille de sa mort, verse des larmes au souvenir de l'autre et que les souvenirs, nous dit-on, 'brûlent rarement si longtemps à moins qu'il n'y ait eu entre deux êtres connivance charnelle.' Peu convaincant.[57]

In that set of references she can be imagined as the child of Michel and Jeanne, to the extent that they are the people who had the most profound influences on her.[58] By this time in the *Labyrinthe* motherhood in the narrative is no longer biological. It is a giving, a generosity, an openness. Nor is it a form of metempsychosis. It is profoundly a psychological state, one built upon trust, respect and admiration. In this instance it entails the fulfillment of a promise made and then kept. By this process her biological mother has bequeathed her a new mother; her actual mother cared for her daughter beyond the grave and made provision for her in this way. Jeanne is equally maternal and, especially, faithful in that she honoured the promise. It is a further illustration of her capacity for fidelity, a key value in Yourcenar's scheme of things.

---

[57] Maurice Delcroix, 'Le corps de l'amour', in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Écritures de l'autre* ed. by Jean-Philippe Beaulieu, Jeanne Demers et André Maindron (Montréal: XYZ, 1997), pp. 25 – 39 (p. 30). The textual quotation is *Quoi?*, p. 1269.

[58] Yourcenar's sense of her indebtedness to Jeanne de Vietinghoff is not in question; see the tribute presented to Mme Hélène Neville under *Tombeaux* titled *En Mémoire de Diotime: Jeanne de Vietinghoff* in 1929 printed in the collection *Le Temps, ce grand sculpteur (Essais et Mémoires*, pp. 408 – 414).

In the case of the father the matter appears even more complex. Michel is indubitably in every sense of the term Yourcenar's father throughout. What he is no longer is in maturity, following the death of Fernande, is a wholly fulfilled, fulfilling and ardent lover. A crisis comes in the walk with Egon on the beach in the course of which it emerges how the man who will satisfy Jeanne must be – with an artistic dimension and enabled to leave her periodically and also trust her:

> – Elle me veut libre. Elle croit – et elle a raison – qu'il n'y a de liberté que réciproque.[59]

In the final showdown with Jeanne in the Louvre it will emerge that there must be a three-dimensional depth to such a person, an element which in Egon's case is evidenced in his art. Michel, on the other hand, is too two-dimensional for this, a ship without a compass, a vessel without its logbook, and so he cannot find in himself the true depth which would bring fulfillment to Jeanne:

> Mais Michel ne vit que dans l'instant. L'avenir même n'est pour lui qu'un présent imaginaire; son yacht chimérique est sans boussole et sans journal de bord.[60]

Jeanne does not want idolatry, 'Elle se sent idolatrée plutôt qu'aimée.'[61] He is not her true and absolute mate, 'Cet homme de cinquante-six ans lui semble un enfant.'[62] It is because of this that he is defeated finally by a combination of Venus and the Winged Victory of Samothrace, the figures by which Yourcenar quintessentially sums up her vision of Jeanne as she sweeps away from him. Here Jeanne's loyalty, in this case to Egon, is supreme, as the chapter title, *Fidélité*, tells us. The passage is important for

---

[59] *Quoi?*, p. 1281.
[60] *Quoi?*, p. 1325.
[61] *Quoi?*, p. 1324.
[62] *Quoi?*, p. 1324.

its transformatory and visionary qualities as Jeanne is rendered in an elevated perception:

> Elle est vêtue de blanc par ce beau matin de juin. Sa voilette flotte sur sa nuque, sa longue jaquette et sa longue jupe rappellent à Michel le libre drapé des marbres autour d'elle. Elles lui rappellent aussi ce corps qu'elles recouvrent et qu'il ne reverra plus. Sœur de Vénus, sœur de la Victoire.[63]

Commenting on this passage in the article referred to above Delcroix notes:

> [E]lle passe d'un pas vif, depuis la petite salle de la Venus de Milo jusqu'à l'escalier Daru où les ailes de la Victoire de Samothrace s'ouvrent au vent, sœur de l'une et sœur de l'autre et en cela statue qui marche et finalement s'envole, laissant Michel sans amour et Marguerite sans mère substitutive.[64]

While this judgement correctly marks the termination of any aspiration on the part of Michel of being in a relationship with Jeanne – 'Il crie au cocher l'adresse de son propre hôtel' – arguably it does not sufficiently stress the transcendent act by Jeanne which lifts the overall narrative on to a higher plane.[65] Here at this point in the *Labyrinthe* Yourcenar is moving her heroine, Jeanne, into a world which in various ways she will increasingly idealize moving the narrative further away from the details of history. In this connection it is to be noted, too, that it is later in the narrative that she relates a further personal encounter with Jeanne. This comes at the end of the chapter, *Les Miettes de l'amour*, eighth in the sequence, when Jeanne de Reval is paying a visit to Yourcenar's aunt Jeanne. Somewhat unusually, Yourcenar enumerates aspects of Jeanne's attire. The purpose is to create an effect of 'une surprenante et tranquille liberté d'attitude.'[66] Her dress choices and elegance are commended. All leads to the defining moment, 'Elle me tendit les bras.'[67] The

---

[63] *Quoi?*, p. 1326.
[64] Delcroix, p. 32.
[65] *Quoi?*, p. 1326.
[66] *Quoi?*, p. 1367.
[67] *Quoi?*, p. 1367.

child's response is immediate, 'Je m'y jetai avec joie.'[68] The intensity of the moment is captured in what for Yourcenar are unusually short sentences. Other guests will soon arrive, but the child is content:

> Mais il suffisait qu'elle fût là. Le sonnette de la rue tintait; d'autres dames arrivèrent; on m'éloigna. Je n'étais pas même triste. Il suffisait de savoir qu'elle était belle et toute bonne.[69]

This passage confirms that the sense of Jeanne de Reval as a maternal figure which Yourcenar creates for us transcended the rupture between her and her father and suggests that Yourcenar did not in fact lose a mother substitute notwithstanding the rift between Jeanne and her father.

In constantly seeking a harmonious relationship of fulfillment and complementarity but failing to achieve it, Michel emerges as one who is dogged by fate, something he registers by having the word *Ananké* tattooed on his person. The account of his quest extends extensively across the work. He is measured by it and in the end found wanting. Major consequences of this are the emergence of the assessment of his daughter as she is defined in contradistinction to him and the increasingly idealized character of Jeanne who now with Egon moves centre stage in the narrative.

---

[68] *Quoi?*, p. 1367.
[69] *Quoi?*, p. 1367.

4.4 Flora and fauna united in the experience of the child

Midway through *Quoi? L'Éternité* the narrative grants a new importance to childhood. As has been seen earlier in the chapter, in addition to deep time and subsequently conjunctural time around the beginnings of the Anthropocene Period, Ricœur points to personal time or the event. These are instances when one is touched by a moment which will become a memory which helps in the process of marking or of recall. In *Les Miettes de l'enfance*, seventh in the sequence of eleven in *Quoi? L'Éternité* Marguerite Yourcenar tells us that for a long time she thought she retained few memories of her childhood, yet more recently has found that when examining her powers of recall certain images present themselves to her. What soon becomes apparent, however, is that these come together not as memories of people or events as might be characteristic of a typical autobiography, but the experiences of flora and fauna along with certain other associations sparked by these in turn. These childhood memories the writer presents us with are consciously designed to fit into the broad agenda of establishing the centrality of the sensory experiences of nature from the earliest age. They amount to an educational programme:

> Je revois surtout des plantes et des bêtes, plus secondairement des jouets, des jeux et des rites ayant cours autour de moi, plus vaguement et comme à l'arrière-plan des personnes.[70]

The reference to plants confirms that the experience of the environment, so significant for Yourcenar, is not just confined to animals and that it impacted on her from her earliest days. A particular memory is the visual impact of the slope from the grounds of Mont Noir up to the house:

---

[70] *Quoi?*, p. 1327.

> On n'a pas encore fauché. Des bl[e]uets, des coquelicots, des marguerites y foisonnent, rappelant à mes bonnes le drapeau tricolore, ce qui me déplaît, car je voudrais que mes fleurs soient seulement des fleurs.[71]

The child cherishes the flowers for themselves, not for anything they might stand for. Flowers are not to be the voice of a simplistic nationalism though in the case of the poppies they can legitimately commemorate the resistance to nationalistic expansionism:

> … sacrés au sommeil de quelques milliers de jeunes Anglais tués sur cette terre, et dont des reproductions en papier de soie écarlate sont encore vendues de notre temps pour certaines œuvres de charité anglo-saxonnes.[72]

These visual effects are supplemented by auditory and strong olfactory reminiscences. Her little cart, dragged behind her, filled with gooseberries and plums, suggested associations of taste. These frequently overturn, scattering her gatherings; a context of plenty and ripeness neatly evoked in a cornucopia of experiences. When the limes were in season the gathering was laid out in the barn creating a delightful summer-long odour. Switching to creatures, the sensory immediacy and so the educational implications of much of this is intensified by, for instance, the tactile experience of the gilding of a goat's horns, an activity in which her father Michel assists her. The young Marguerite also had a pet sheep which she washed every Saturday. The creature's drying itself on the grass is associated with the auditory and visual billowing of the clothes in the laundry area along with the springtime cries of the washerwomen. Memories recall scents of lavender, of Michel lighting nightlights in the wood, creating an insight into the behaviour of innumerable fireflies. An education of all five of the senses is what is being described here; the recollections are

---

[71] *Quoi?*, p. 1327.
[72] *Quoi?*, p. 1327.

not random. Meanwhile, the window into a fairyland raised a childish concern the rabbits might be disturbed, but she is reassured. Rabbits, too, feature when her hair is being brushed by her nursemaid, Barbe. Playfully, Barbe suggests she catch one by putting salt on its tail or possibly that of a deer, also visible in the garden. At an instinctive level the child knows this would be an intrusion into the sacred world of the animal kingdom, 'Je savais déjà que les dieux nous savent gré de ne déranger leurs jeux.'[73] In this educational programme the inner and the outer are being distinguished and instinctively the child is registering a sense of the transcendent. Notably, the world of animals and nature, fauna and flora, is given sacred overtones, something readily accessible to the eye of the child. On the perceptions of the *sacré* in the eye of the child Camille van Woerkum writes:

> La vision englobante du sacré, dans laquelle l'enfant a une place intégrante, est en revanche liée par la narratrice aux éléments naturels: au régne minéral, végétal et animal.[74]

All the senses of the growing child are engaged in this review of intense experience at this impressionable age when one's knowledge, engagement and involvement with the world are being registered and developed.

While the child may express enthusiasm at the time, the full significance of what he or she is seeing may only come to be registered long after the event. In the midst of the horror of the flight in the face of the advancing troops in 1914 Yourcenar relates how she was greatly excited by what she saw from the vessel taking her to safety and to England:

> … le bond joyeux des marsouins tels que je les ai vus, de l'avant d'un bateau surchargé de femmes, d'enfants, d'ustensiles de ménage et d'édredons

---

[73] *Quoi?*, p. 1328.

[74] Camille van Woerkum, 'Le sacré dans les récits d'enfance de Marguerite Yourcenar', in *Le sacré dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by Rémy Poignault (Tours: SIEY, 1993), 85 – 94 (p. 88).

> emportés au hazard, sur lequel je me trouvais avec les miens en septembre 1914, rejoignant la France non envahie par la voie de l'Angleterre; et l'enfant de onze ans sentait déjà confusément que cette allégresse animale appartenait à un monde plus pur et plus divin que celui où les hommes font souffrir les hommes.[75]

It could be argued that in choosing porpoises to write about at this juncture Marguerite Yourcenar is breaking her rule of not talking about animals in the wild. The point seems to be, however, that the experience was undergone while in the family cluster, even when that grouping was under great stress and in grave danger of fracturing or even of being swept away. This visitation from the animal kingdom is revelatory and uplifting, reassuring even; the sacred is also noted as a component in this account. The incident is related again at some length and in rather different words in *Quoi? L'Éternité*:

> Soudain, en pleine mer, à une bonne distance des côtes, une école de dauphins apparut, traversant obliquement la route du navire.
>
> Une douzaine de grandes créatures luisantes et joyeuses, ne sachant rien des fuyards contenus dans cette misérable arche humaine, libres comme en ces jours où le monde, vieux déjà de millions d'années, se sentait encore neuf et regorgeant de dieux. Race sublime, plus douée que les autres créatures limitées à la terre, à l'aise dans la courbe des vagues comme dans les sinuosités de leurs corps.[76]

The replacement of porpoises by dolphins, unlikely to be in the interests of mere taxonomic accuracy, enables the writer to draw on literary associations suggestive of a nature supportive of humans. This she seizes upon, leading from that to certain reflections which now have more of an environmental than a conflictual character to them:

> Je sais, certes, depuis la brève idylle de la Grèce, où il semble que les dauphins et les fils des hommes se soient secourus et aimés, tous les crimes

---

[75] *Archives*, p. 956.
[76] *Quoi?*, p. 1374.

> que nous avons commis et commettons plus que jamais contre ces bondissantes déités marines. Je sais que notre destruction de la nature justifie celle de l'homme. Je le sais maintenant: à cette époque, l'apparition merveilleuse était une épiphanie sans ombre.[77]

Yourcenar frequently asserts the *sacré,* often in accounts of her experience of seeing animals. As well as the revelations of childhood above, in the course of her work Yourcenar tells of many registerings of a special awareness when observing animals and the choice of 'une épiphanie' is significant and indicative here. Sheringham points out that for Charles Taylor these 'epiphanies of being' derive from Romanticism which had 'resisted mechanistic forms of thought'. He states that for Taylor:

> In an 'epiphany of being' the higher reality (Nature for example) shines through external things: self-revelation goes hand in hand with the simple presentation of phenomena.[78]

In the experiences of envisioning Yourcenar bears witness to when recounting her revelatory sightings of creatures we see instances of 'the transfiguration of the commonplace.'[79] Sheringham notes, furthermore, that the notion that art modifies consciousness and fosters new modes of sensibility is traced back by George G. Leonard to Wordsworth's vision of Paradise as 'a simple produce of the common day', and he connects this idea with 'natural supernaturalism' in Emerson, Carlyle and Ruskin, authors whose thinking has already been cited as being influential on Yourcenar.[80] Leonard also notes that the Wordsworthian 'hallowing' had a spiritual dimension, while he himself was also influenced by Zen Buddhism which was being

---

[77] *Quoi?*, pp. 1374 – 75.

[78] Sheringham, *Everyday Life*, p. 81. The reference is to Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uniiversity Press, 1989).

[79] The phrase was given widespread provenance by the book of that name by Danto: Anthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

[80] George G. Leonard, *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

expounded in the US by D.T. Suzuki at the time. As the epigraph to the *Labyrinthe* shows, Yourcenar had an interest in Buddhism of the Zen kind. While these ideas seem to cohere round Yourcenar, her perception remains personal in being focused in this regard largely on animals. Crucially, the insight is associated especially though not exclusively with childhood, a point Wordsworth would have agreed with.

While an emphasis on the divine remains, this passage is particularly notable for the stress it lays on equivalence between man and the creatures of the natural world. In the course of the final decade of her life Yourcenar has become ever more insistent on this aspect in her attempt to persuade us of the fundamental importance of the natural world. Meanwhile, the juxtaposition with the destructive world of men points to a deeper truth in the relationship between man and the world of nature, one more wide-ranging than that which so far has largely focused on animals, on fauna, alone. The death of one necessarily entails the death of the other. Ready access to the domain of nature is a distinctive aspect of childhood; essential to it is the background of parental support and engagement. The contribution which was made by Michel to all of this in her personal life can hardly be over-estimated. The role of the parent figure is central.

In an important way the issue of the environment is connected in the *Mémoires* with people's personal relationships. In the cosmographic chapter which opens *Archives du Nord,* as has been seen, Yourcenar rejects the conventional notion of the biblical Paradise. At the same time it is important to appreciate that she did not conceive of the period at the beginning of the Holocene as a world in which the lion lay down with the lamb; it was, on the contrary, one of cycles of birth, death and predators. Nor does she see the earliest inhabitants as being in any sense 'good' savages in an idiom

often associated with Rousseau. In the Yourcenar scheme of things where the paradisial might be said to inhere is in the insights and revelations of childhood, a second is in the wonder and enchantment of the elevated state which comes in the discovery of the love relationship, the importance of which will emerge increasingly in the course of the discussion. It is to this that the discussion will now turn.

4.5 Interlocking strands and Jeanne de Reval

'Tout grand amour,' Yourcenar states, 'est un jardin entouré de murailles. *Hortus conclusus.*'[81] The use of this Latin phrase is somewhat surprising. As a topos elaborated upon in the Middle Ages it usually designates the emblematic attribute of the Virgin. The words themselves come from the Song of Songs, 4.xii: 'Hortus conclusus soror mea, sponsa, hortus conclusus, fons signatus.' It may be that Yourcenar was thinking here and was possibly even slightly confused by another Latin topos, the *locus amœnus*. This motif, which was used widely in the Medieval and Renaissance periods, indicated a pleasance which accrued features as time went on. It is discussed by Curtius who points out that, '[I]t also formed part of the scenery of pastoral poetry and thus of erotic poetry.'[82] The purpose of the garden as envisaged by Yourcenar is to centre it on Jeanne to protect her and those close to her from the soiling attentions of the world, 'les ragots du monde qui salissent.'[83] What makes the groves and copses of Scheveningen agreeable is that the little party can retreat to a corner of a pinewood sufficient for it to constitute a garden in which they are protected from the noisiness of the beach and also from the disturbing tumult of the sea, '[É]chapper complètement au brouhaha de la plage, et presque totalement aux rumeurs de la mer.'[84] Although they are without a wall or fence, the pine trees suffice to achieve this outcome; the 'garden' is not actually enclosed. Its symbolic, conceptual character is emphasized by Yourcenar's paradoxical usage of the word, 'Littéralement'. She stresses that the people concerned would have been almost

---

[81] *Quoi?*, p. 1277.
[82] Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, 1990), pp. 199 – 200.
[83] *Quoi?*, p. 1277.
[84] *Quoi?*, p. 1278.

certainly oblivious of the image of the *hortus conclusus* – indicating that she wants the reader to pick up on it. A *locus amœnus* would have readily accommodated a number of people, a *hortus conclusus* two. Yourcenar stresses that there are three people in her enclosure, 'ces trois êtres', thereby including Michel. What will shortly take place will be the intrusion of Hugues into this scene and his presence will be a disruptive one. This pattern will repeat with Jonas – 'Vous avez passé la nuit avec Jonas?' – and finally Franz von Stolberg.[85] One by one each of these attachments will be shed and finally, as seen above, even Michel will self-exclude from Jeanne's 'jardin'. By the end of the Chapter *Fidélité* it cannot be denied that Jeanne and Egon, notwithstanding the vicissitudes they have undergone, are united as a couple together. This is Jeanne's victory. The decision, then, whether Yourcenar actually meant *locus amœnus* or was precisely correct in designating the place to which the group withdrew a *hortus conclusus* has to remain undecided. In any event, and most importantly, unlike the collapse of the anti-pastoral of Michel and Maud, Jeanne's garden will finally triumph and Michel will not be included in it.

As the webpage on the Vietinghoff family makes clear, Jeanne, the model for Jeanne de Reval, was a woman of notable virtue, a wife and mother who wrote a number of spiritual works.[86] The character Jeanne de Vietinghoff is explored by Manuela Ledesma by setting her in the context of Yourcenar's work as a whole and by comparing and contrasting her with other female characters created by Yourcenar in the course of her writing.[87] As a result a number of different kinds of women emerge. The 'femme passionnée' is represented by figures such as Sophie (*CG*), Marcella

---

[85] *Quoi?*, p. 1307.
[86] Vietinghoff-Stiftung, http://www.vietinghoff.org retrieved 25.xi.'17. Accessed, 16.ix.'18.
[87] Manuela Ledesma, "L'Autre et le Même: Jeanne de Vietinghoff', in *Marguerite Yourcenar. Écritures de l'autre*, ed. by Jean-Philippe Beaulieu, Jeanne Demers et André Maindron (Montréal: XYZ, 1997), pp. 153 – 6.

(*DR*) and Anna (*AS*), the 'femme simple' by mère Dida (*DR*) and Greete (*SP*). Electre (*Th II*) and Martha (*F*) may be said to incarnate 'la femme égoïste'. The type, 'une perfection idéale', is to be found in the figures of Monique (*A*), the empress Plotine (*MH*) and Valentine de Gonzague (*AS*). It is the last category which is relevant here; Ledesma poses the question, 'Où trouver, en définitive, l'occurrence fondatrice?'[88] The answer, she suggests, falls into two parts:

> [D]'une part, elle est dans la personne réelle de Jeanne de Vietinghoff… d'autre part, et la même année, on la retrouve sous une forme complétement effacée dans le personnage de Monique Thiébaut.[89]

Monique is the name of the woman in the novel *Alexis* to whom the character, Alexis, addresses his letter.

Ledesma goes on to review the distinctive qualities of the woman who in Yourcenar's opus represents the ideal of perfection. Much of this centres round the character of Plotine, wife of Trajan and devoted friend of Hadrien, and takes its cue increasingly from the inspiration of the figure of Vittoria Colonna, 'mystic muse' to Michael Angelo as portrayed in the essay *Sixtine*.[90] The perception of Plotine and so of the others like her moves increasingly from the erotic or the passionate towards a kind of friendship. The qualities are laid out in the preamble on Valentine:

> Pour ce qui est de donna Valentine, nous considérons que, pour cette créature éthérée, l'expérience de la chair est une expérience, sinon oubliée, du moins entiérement dépassée; mais il faut dire tout de suite que donna Valentine n'a pas ici de véritable répondant masculin. Quant à Plotine, il est visible qu'elle semble se situer d'emblée dans le même registre, celui du renoncement volontaire au profit de la solitude et, dans son cas, de l'amitié aussi: une très solide amitié spirituelle avec Hadrien… Ainsi, après sa mort, 'l'impératrice

[88] Ledesma, p. 154.
[89] Ledesma, p. 154.
[90] *Essais et mémoires*, pp. 281 – 88.

> restait ce qu'elle avait toujours été pour lui: un esprit, une pensée à laquelle s'était mariée la [s]ienne.' (*OR*, pp. 414 – 15).[91]

Ledesma sums up these qualities as they crystallise in the person of Jeanne as follows:

> Il s'agit donc ici d'un personnage féminin qui semble se réaliser pleinement dans un harmonieux équilibre de l'âme et du corps, mais il s'agit aussi d'une femme qui est toutefois malheureuse: bien entendu, l'homme qu'elle aime préfère, lui aussi, les hommes… De toute évidence, la véritable Jeanne nous échappera toujours sous ses masques.

The assertion that the figure of Jeanne de Reval belongs definitively to the realm of literature finds further support in the discussion by Élène Cliche:

> Jeanne de Reval est une construction discursive fabriquée à l'aide des récits incomplets et parfois évasifs entendus par la narratrice de *Quoi? L'Éternité*, où, comme celle-ci l'explique, la part d'invention consiste à 'remplir un blanc', 'boucher les trous de la tapisserie, ou rejointoyer les fragments de verre brisé.'[92]

The significance of these statements is underpinned by a number of facts relating to the life of Jeanne de Vietinghoff and the figure of Jeanne de Reval as this is configured in the *Mémoires*. Élène Cliche points out that in a letter to Yannick Guillou of 21 June, 1985 Yourcenar states:

> En effet, Jeanne de Reval est Jeanne de Vietinghoff. Mais pour des raisons qui vont de soi, je n'ai pas utilisé son vrai nom. J'ai choisi celui de Reval, balte lui aussi, mais pas trop dépaysant pour des oreilles françaises, que portent déjà deux des personnages du *Coup de Grâce*, Sophie et Conrad.[93]

Yourcenar's statement that the name Reval was chosen because it was less noticeably foreign to a French ear is interesting. Reval was the name given to the modern city of Tallinn by people in the region who spoke a language other than Estonian. Yourcenar states that Egon's parents came from Estonia:

---

[91] Ledesma, p. 160.
[92] Élène Cliche, 'Jeanne de Reval et l'échec d'un idéal fusionnel', in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Écritures de l'autre*, ed. by Jean-Philippe Beaulieu, Jeanne Demers et André Maindron (Montréal: XYZ, 1997), 163 – 70 (p. 166).
[93] *Lettres à ses amis*, p. 662.

> En fait, ils s'étaient rendus en Estonie chex les parents du musicien, que Jeanne et Egon n'avaient plus revus depuis la visite qui avait suivi le mariage à Dresde.[94]

Curland, on the other hand, which is where the action of *Coup de Grâce* takes place, as does the action of Egon's visit to his ailing mother in the final Section, *Les Sentiers enchevêtrés*, is in modern-day Latvia, some distance away, but still close enough for it to be plausible that family estates could be located there.

This inclination to make things seem close while not exactly the same can also be seen in a number of other regards which can equally be held to be deliberate on the part of the writer. In her letter to Michel Jeanne writes, 'Je me suis mariée à mon tour peu de mois plus tard.'[95] Michel and Fernande were married on 8 November 1900. As the Vietinghoff website clearly states, Jeanne Bricou and Conrad de Vietinghoff were married on 17 April 1902, substantially more than a month later. A further detail is that Yourcenar makes considerable play of the marriage having taken place in Dresden, 'On décide que la cérémonie très simple se fera à Dresde.'[96] It was in fact celebrated in The Hague.[97] At the time of writing Dresden resonated generally as the city which had been bombed in the Second World War. In choosing to give it profile Yourcenar capitalizes on the true fact that Jeanne and Egon, who was deliberately modelled on Conrad, met there. Conrad de Vietinghoff was an outstanding pianist, but intensely shy. He never performed publicly and moreover he never wrote music, much less a ballet. He was a man of considerable sensitivity which his wife worked hard to manage. As a character he is markedly different from the person Yourcenar

---

[94] *Quoi?*, p. 1303.
[95] *Quoi?*, p. 1236.
[96] *Quoi?*, p. 1263.
[97] Vietinghoff-Stiftung, Accessed 2017-11-25 and 16.ix.'18.

shows us in Egon who not only gets embroiled in a same-sex relationship (Conrad appears to have had predispositions that way, something Jeanne had to contend with), but he initiates concerts and performances as well as composing. In many ways he is a public figure. Once he is reconciled to Jeanne, in the final chapter of the *Labyrinthe* Egon turns out to be even more distinct from Conrad in the way in which he elects to revisit his home country in order to see his dying mother notwithstanding the fact that it entails making his way through treacherous war-torn terrain, something not to be associated with Conrad de Vietinghoff. The upshot is that once Yourcenar moves more and more into the account of this couple the more she increasingly forsakes any connection with the details of history, instead using facts and details to create a fiction of her own choosing.

In addition to the above there is also very much the consideration that Yourcenar wishes to look behind the clichés of superficially grasped history to a quite different set of circumstances in a lengthy and wide-ranging passage, part of which is cited here:

> Ces dames s'établirent pour tout un hiver à Dresde, où l'un des cousins de Mme Van T*** était consul. La ville baroque était encore là, grâcieux rêve de pierre; un peu moins d'un demi-siècle, et ce sera l'enfer où les fugitifs s'enliseront les pieds dans le macadam bouillant des rues et des routes, où les nobles bêtes du jardin zoologique, à demi brûlées vives, tournoieront en hurlant dans une sorte d'horrible carrousel de la mort.[98]

Dresden, located on the Elbe, also referred to in the text, marks a mid-point between the trans-Alpine but southern world and that of the Slavic north; in the eighteenth century the city had been ruled by Polish princes. At the same time as an outlier from the Renaissance it held a number of masterpieces of that cultural era. The whole area

[98] *Quoi?*, p. 1251.

was of great interest to Yourcenar. As has been seen, her great-uncle, Rémo, had been educated at the not too distant Weimar and Jena and Fernande had been, 'élevée comme elle l'avait été dans le respect de tout ce qui de près ou de loin touche à l'Allemagne.'[99]

Initially Jeanne de Vietinghoff was betrothed to a minor Swedish aristocrat, Graf Sten de Lewenhaupt who was asked to wait before finally settling with her. This ordeal had an adverse affect on what appears to have been a fragile nature and eventually he was confined to an institution. Jeanne is pictured as having loyally visited for a time, a pattern confirmed by the record of the historical facts, but eventually was encouraged to break things off. De Lewenhaupt was to become the model for Johann-Karl. In terms of the relations between these two, Yourcenar relates how Johann-Karl and the now more or less literary figure, Jeanne de Reval, have physical relations. In the balance between the facts as they are presented to us in the narrative and how we know them to have been in reality, this means that with regard to the first part of her account what Yourcenar makes of the events in question becomes in a key regard the opposite of what we know to have been the case, a literary choice clearly deliberately taken. It is in the course of her friendship with Johann-Karl that the figure of the horse re-enters the narrative. Once again the animal is associated with a certain social standing, but in addition there is the suggestion of an erotic overtone, 'Elle s'initie avec lui au cheval dans ce décor de landes.'[100]

---

[99] *Souvenirs*, p. 709 – 10.
[100] *Quoi?*, p. 1243.

In Chapter 3 of Part 2 of her discussion of Marguerite Yourcenar in the USA Bérengère Deprez examines changes the writer introduces to the facts of the death of Mrs Frances Nemitz, the account of which comes in the final two pages of the essay, '"L'Italienne à Alger"'.[101] The last picture which was taken of Mrs. Nimitz, who was swept out to sea and drowned by a wave off the west coast of America, appeared in *Life* magazine on 21 February, 1941 is deliberately associated by the writer possibly the period of the Korean, possibly with the Vietnamese War. As Deprez shows, it is also the subject of a series of other subtle changes. The result is as follows:

> In this new vision, the main theme is not merely death coming from the sea, it is the disappearance of the human, sophisticated as it may be […] into almighty and primordial nature.[102]

Yourcenar has made of the facts of the Nimitz story what Deprez terms a *tombeau*.[103] Deprez's comment on the changes is notable: 'If this is the way Yourcenar recreates her own ancestors in her memoirs, then she is indeed much more a novelist than a historian.'[104] This assessment aligns with what has been argued already earlier and conforms to the modifications to the facts which give us the character of Jeanne de Reval above.

---

[101] Deprez, pp. 125 – 30. For the Yourcenar essay, *Essais et Mémoires,* pp. 609 – 18.
[102] Deprez, p. 130.
[103] Deprez, p. 130. As noted earlier, Yourcenar's tribute to Jeanne de Vietinghoff occurs in the last piece in *Le temps, ce grand sculpteur* and is titled *Tombeaux*.
[104] Deprez, p. 128

4.6 Harmony, interpersonal and natural, and the relationship between the two: a climax and a solution

To appreciate the significance of the text at this point it helps to place it in the context of the works as a whole. Enrica Restori points out that concern with the universal has been a feature of Yourcenar's writing from the beginning.[105] Initially, Restori says, Yourcenar concerned herself with a purely human form of the universal which she attached primarily to myth, a kind of algebra of the passions, 'une sorte d'algèbre des passions', which reached beyond the individual and extended into centuries.[106] For instance, Restori suggests that in *Feux* the writer reached the most elaborated form of her effort in this vein and achieved depersonalization and the removal of her individuality thereby enabling the universal aspect of the anecdote to emerge. Man and his complexity interested the writer at this time in her life: it was the time when she was making extended journeys in Greece and Italy and man was at the centre of her interest in myths and religions.

But, Restori insists, the twists and vagaries of WWII brought about the 'passage de l'archéologie à la géologie, de la méditation sur l'homme à la méditation sur la terre' which she relates in the Préface to her drama, *La petite sirène*.[107] These words were written in May, 1970, shortly after the publication of *L'Œuvre au noir*. The effort entailed in this seeking for a universalising perspective broadened the writer's outlook from reflecting on man to reflecting more extensively on the earth. What is being

---

[105] Enrica Restori, 'Un anthropomorphisme à rebours: de la voix humaine à la voix des choses', in *L'Universalité dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar,* ed. by María José Vazquez de Parga et Rémy Poignault, 2 vols (Tours: SIEY, 1994), I, pp. 137 – 51.
[106] Restori, p. 137.
[107] Marguerite Yourcenar, *Théâtre I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 146.

referred to here is what in her reception speech at the Académie when honouring her predecessor, Roger Caillois, as she relates in the essay in which she celebrates him, *L'Homme qui aimait les pierres*, Yourcenar underwent what she terms a Copernican revolution.[108] There she speaks of an 'anthropomorphisme à rebours' where man 'participe avec humilité, peut-être aussi avec orgueil, à tout ce qui est inclus ou infus dans les trois règnes.'[109] The three kingdoms in question are to be undertood as the animal, vegetable and mineral.

Restori's purpose is to examine this broadening of perspective, from the universal human to the universal cosmic, by analyzing certain recurrent images in the work of the writer such as the animal and the vegetable in an attempt to follow a similar trajectory in the lives of three key characters of Yourcenar's writings, Hadrien, Zénon and Nathanaël. In this examination it may be seen how her discussion links with the arguments the writer puts forward in *Les nuits des temps* as discussed above. Consideration of man constitutes the background to this, what Yourcenar in *Les Yeux ouverts* terms, 'un objet qui bouge sur l'arrière-plan du tout.'[110] There is a progression from an involvement in human affairs to an increasing alignment with creatures, the vegetal and also the earth.

Both the emperor, Hadrien, and the alchemist, Zénon, Restori points out, have an awareness of being inserted in a world which reaches infinitely beyond themselves.[111] In their respective ways both attempt to realise their objectives with the greater one of nature. In the case of Hadrien this takes the form of extensive research which he

---

[108] *Essais et mémoires*, pp. 535 – 55.
[109] Marguerite Yourcenar, 'Le discours du récipiendaire', in *Le Monde*, 18 janvier 1981, p. 18.
[110] *Les yeux ouverts*, p. 191.
[111] Restori, p. 138.

defines as a turning point as a result of which our will finds expression in destiny, where discipline supports rather than inhibits nature. Hadrien says:

> Ce qui m'intéresse n'était pas une philosophie de l'homme libre (tous ceux qui s'y essayent m'ennuyèrent) mais une technique; je voulais trouver la charnière où notre volonté s'articule au destin, où la discipline seconde, au lieu de la freiner, la nature.[112]

In place of the hard will of the stoic, 'dure volonté du stoïque', it seeks out a freedom of acquiescence, 'la liberté d'acquiescement', of which Nathanaël represents the limiting case – that is to say he evinces the lack of a genuine will.[113] If for Hadrien life is the movements of a horse one submits to (épouse), but after having trained it to the best of one's ability, for Nathanaël it is a plant shaped by the terrain where it is placed and grows in accordance with the milieu in which it is located so becoming more successful in the vegetative state.[114] Restori notes here the observation made by Feyter, 'Nathanaël est un anti-Prométhée, un homme façonné d'argile qui se décomposera comme l'argile.'[115] This text was composed in 1982, soon after the death of Grace Frick and the theme of dust to dust may have been in part triggered by this occurrence.

Each of the three characters in turn pursues a line of close association with the threefold world of nature. Antinoüs is frequently associated with the animal by Hadrien; he terms him a 'beau lévrier', a 'jeune faon', a 'jeune faucon' and at greater length:

---

[112] *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 318.

[113] *Œuvres romanesques*, pp. 318, 319.

[114] 'Submit' as a rendering for 'épouser' is the wording of the Frick translation.

[115] P. de Feyter, '"Histoire sacrée" et "histoire profonde": Zénon et Natanaël ou l'appétit d'absolu', in *Le sacré dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by Rémy Poignault (Tours: SIEY, 1993), pp. 41 – 52 (p. 42).

> Dans les moments […] les plus ternes, j'avais ainsi le sentiment de rester en contact avec les grands objets naturels, l'épaisseur des forêts, l'échine musclée des panthères, la pulsation régulière des sources.[116]

Restori finds Zénon's visit to the Forest of Houthuist exemplary, and cites the following, 'Ces bois étaient le reste des grandes futaies du temps païen: d'étranges conseils tombaient de leurs feuilles.'[117] The forest is what Restori terms the living expression of the alchemical metaphor, one and multiple at the same time, a true image of the continuity of matter and its constant transformation, a meeting point in the journey between the world of the mineral and the kingdom of the animal. There is a disturbing similarity in the facility with which at this period in time wood can be equally efficacious whether for the burning of books or of men. It is following this visit that Zénon becomes, 'Le compagnon du feu.'[118] This fire is an indication of the union between matter and the spirit. On the animal front, meanwhile, Zénon himself becomes increasingly like an animal which has been hunted down, 'On tombe toujours dans une trappe quelconque', and the final chapter of the second section of the novel is titled La Souricière.[119]

At this juncture Restori states that whereas for Zénon the process of dehumanization was slow and painful, for Nathanaël, 'il s'agit d'une pente tout à fait naturelle ne comportant aucun conflit véritable pour cet *homo animalis*'. Following Feyter, it can fairly be said that he is, 'tombé tout droit de l'arbre de la Vie.'[120] She concludes:

> Si Hadrien représente en quelque sorte l'apologie de l'Homme-Dieu, où la nature et le divin indissolublement liés s'épanouissent dans la figure humaine, avec Nathanaël s'accompli de façon naturelle le movement inverse,

---

[116] *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 438.
[117] Restori, pp. 142 – 43. *OR*, p. 584.
[118] *Œuvres rtomanesques*, p. 593.
[119] *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 780.
[120] Restori, p. 148. Feyter, p. 48.

> d'anthropomorphisme à rebours, qui avait été si pénible pour Zénon: le divin – loin de toute finalité rédemptrice – en passant par *l'homme obscur*, rentre et se dissout dans la terre.[121]

In something of a double track, but working in reverse directions, as in social terms these three characters descend from emperor via intellectual to an everyman, on the other hand the equivalences between man and nature become increasingly marked in an ever intensifying scale until in his final demise the solitary Nathanaël arrives in death in a complete fusion with his surroundings. In the sequence of Yourcenar's entire opus this amounts to an important progression. It seems to be possible to state furthermore that an additional sequence to be borne in mind is that following the rupture in her first work, Alexis, where the eponymous hero recounts his reasons for breaking from his wife and home, death and demise are a consistent feature of many of the Yourcenarian narratives. We see this in many of the characters in *Feux* (*F*), it is true of Marcella (*DR*) and of Sophie (*CG*). It can also be said of characters as Rémo and also Mishima who, like their predecessors, exemplify what Kasja Andersson in her analysis of some of the early narratives has termed, 'Le "don sombre"', that is to say suicide and death.[122]

This inventory, it is suggested, is especially significant for, viewed in this perspective, the *Mémoires* marks an important new turn in Yourcenar's *œuvre*. Here in this text she repudiates the entropic tendency of much of her earlier writing, what some might term a downward spiral in human living. As the relationship with Johann-Karl fades, a key passage, one of the most important in the entire *Labyrinthe* and central to its

---

[121] Restori, p. 151.

[122] Kasja Andersson, *Le "don sombre": La thème de la mort dans quatre romans de Marguerite Yourcenar* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1989).

basic argument, occurs not long after. It describes the courtship of Jeanne and Egon in the course of which they visit the countryside. It is this passage which brings together harmony in nature and harmony in human relations, a welding of the environmental and the human in which each can thrive to the mutual advantage and fulfilment of the other. The passage is explored in some detail. The location is Saxon Switzerland, 'paysages agréablement alpestres de la Suisse saxonne,' situated in the vicinity of Dresden. Access is gained by riverboat on the Elbe and as they wander round they view various buildings in greater or lesser degrees of dilapidation. Certain phrases emphasise the newness of the experience to the couple. It is dawn, 'leur but est d'atteindre à l'aurore le site.'[123] Given the repetition of this term, it takes on an especial significance. In this way the whole is generalized, suggesting the beginning of time, 'Le monde est jeune.' Crucial to their enjoyment is the fact that Egon grew up in the countryside, even if on a large estate, and so is familiar with much of the flora they encounter. A significant encounter, bearing in mind Yourcenar's insistence on the importance of the cow, is their participation in the delivery of a calf. This is described in some detail, even to the writer objectively observing that the some of the placenta still adheres to the mother as she makes her way to the drinking trough. Yourcenar further deromanticises the occasion by having Jeanne and Egon observe the delivery process, 'ils assistent à la facile délivrance.'[124] Significantly, and not least in view of Yourcenar's own personal experience, as a birth in the ordinary course of nature it is, 'facile.' This does not preclude Yourcenar from seeing Jeanne and Egon in a complementary role, 'ils assistent.' The whole occurs, 'au petit matin,' further emphasizing the newness and sense of the world being reborn. They return the following morning and their first encounter is with the new-born calf, now

[123] *Quoi?*, p. 1256.
[124] *Quoi?*, p. 1256.

learning to feed from its mother. The sense of the beginning of time itself inspired in them by the whole experience is summed up on this occasion as follows:

> Tout prend pour eux une qualité de fraîcheur et de simplicité magique, comme à l'aube des temps.[125]

An especially important day comes shortly after when they decide to spend a whole day in a forest clearing silently observing everything round them:

> Il s'agit d'atteindre au cœur de la forêt une clairière isolée, et d'y demeurer tout le long jour d'été, assis sans parler, attentifs à tout.[126]

Once more they arrive in time for daybreak, 'à l'aube,' again a new beginning. The theme of beginnings and of universalizing is being pointedly and repeatedly emphasised. While there they observe much birdlife, whether of native species or birds of passage. As the day progresses they see various creatures gradually emerging, moles, squirrels, hedgehogs, which with their young make them smile. As the light shifts as evening approaches they become increasingly aware of the vegetation:

> Quand la lumière oblique entre les troncs, on voit mieux les brins diaphanes et dorés qui s'élèvent de la toison touffue des mousses, antennes presque invisibles, frémissant si la paume et les doigts s'enfoncent un peu longuement dans ces vallées vertes.[127]

Egon and Jeanne watch hand in hand, 'Fidèles à leur pacte, ils se relèvent sans parler, la main dans la main.'[128] It is this experience which wins Jeanne's heart:

> Le sort de Jeanne se décide par une après-midi comme celle-là. Comment ne pas vouloir continuer à vivre avec quelqu'un, lorsqu'on s'est si longuement tus ensemble?[129]

---

[125] *Quoi?*, p. 1256.
[126] *Quoi?*, p. 1257.
[127] *Quoi?*, p. 1258.
[128] *Quoi?*, p. 1258.
[129] *Quoi?*, p. 1258.

Words are superfluous in this markedly pastoral scene; they do not need them for they understand one another at such a deep level. In their apperceptions when all their senses are vibrant and alive they notice a full complement of growing and living things. They are joined physically through touch, mentally as well as emotionally too. All in all an authentic scene is being envisaged here and while the account has pastoral qualities, there is a significance beyond that in what is being described. This grove, located in the Petite Suisse, become a new omphalos where not only historical, geographical and cultural strands meet, but so too do humans on the threshold of love centered in a world of natural plenty, flora and fauna. Yourcenar has generated this centripetal point herself and has centered it on the young couple. Here any suggestion of a hierarchical relationship between man and nature is absent. Humans find their fulfillment and promise at the centre of the biotope. The moment is universalizing, archetypal.

The concept of an integrative, holistic and interactional approach to nature has become increasingly popular through the writings of modern-day biology experts such as Jean-Marie Pelt. For example, in works such as *La Vie sociale des plantes* and *La Solidarité chez les plantes, les animaux, les humains,* and in keeping with their titles, Pelt tracks and records numerous instances of cooperation in vegetative and animal life, vigorously repudiating the sentiment of 'la loi de la jungle', the title of another of his works, and one in which he also demonstrates that the sentiment in fact does not operate in that simplistic fashion in nature.[130] In perhaps his best known work he defines the relationship to nature by antithesis:

---

[130] Jean-Marie Pelt, *La Vie sociale des plantes*, 2nd edn (Paris: Librarie Arthème Fayard, 1984); *La Solidarité chez les plantes, les animaux, les humains* ((Paris: Librarie Arthème Fayard, 2004); *La Loi de la jungle* (Paris: Librarie Arthème Fayard, 2003).

> À sa place dans la nature, d'abord: ni écrasé par elle, comme il le demeure dans les sociétés traditionnelles, à la merci d'un environnement souvent hostile et rebelle: ni destructeur, exploiteur et prédateur, comme il l'est aujourd'hui dans les sociétés industrielles. Non plus cow-boy conquérant et dévastateur, mais allié d'une nature maîtresse d'harmonie, coopérant avec elle, sur une terre amoureusement jardinée.[131]

These careful, empirically tested and verified scientific positions are increasingly widely confirmed by further research in this idiom. An example is Peter Wohlleben, who describes similar complex and extensive interactions between forest trees.[132] While Wohlleben's text seeks to popularize this understanding, it too is grounded on up-to-date scientific research. These human-natural interactions, phenomena central to the development of the union of the Egon-Jeanne sensibility, and as underscored by the reading of commentators such as Pelt, are crucial to our reading of the entirety of the *Labyrinthe du Monde*. Amplification of the ontological implications of this idea is discussed by Pelluchon:

> L'anthropomorphisme et le fait de concevoir de manière hiérarchique les rapports entre les espèces puis entre l'homme et les autres vivants sont des tentations qui nous éloignent d'une ontologie de la vie. Celle-ci suppose que l'on "considère l'animal comme une totalité, selon la vérité qui lui est propre.", et que l'on cesse de réduire la vie à une simple "organisation pour survivre".[133]

In this matter as understood and explained by Pelluchon as she repudiates the isolating and the hierarchical, the contribution by Jacob von Uexküll is fundamental. In the first place Uexküll argues that the creature is the designer of a world –

---

[131] Jean-Marie Pelt, *L'Homme renaturé* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977, Robert Laffont, 2015), p. 200.
[132] Peter Wohlleben, *Das geheime Leben der Bäume: Was sie fühlen, wie sie kommunizieren: Die Entdeckung einer verborgenen Welt* (München: Ludwig Verlag, 2015), trans. by Jane Billinghurst, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate: Discoveries from a Secret World* (London: Collins, 2017).
[133] Pelluchon, *L'Autonomie*, p. 389. For the quotations, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature: Notes de cours, Collège de France*, cours de 1959-60, texte établi par Dominique Séglard (Paris: Le Seuil, 1995), p. 243.

'configurateur de monde".[134] What the character of this world is has been clarified earlier:

> La bête a un être propre et est aussi dans le monde en étant pour nous. Elle peut contribuer à la constitution de notre monde et elle a un monde qui correspond à ce que Jacob von Uexküll appelle son "monde environnant" (*Umwelt*).[135]

What Uexküll means by the *Umwelt* is is explained by Frederick Amrine as follows:

> For Uexküll, an *Umwelt* is above all a context in which a specific *meaning* has been created through an exchange of *Merkmale* (sensory cues guiding behaviour) and *Wirkmale* (the responsive behaviours themselves). This is why Uexküll is widely considered to be one of the founders of semiotics: for Uexküll behaviour is simultaneously an epistemology. The organism knows its environment by creating its environment, and it creates the environment by behaving within it. Unlike Darwin, Uexküll saw that the behaviour of organisms is first and foremost *an expression of meaning*.[136]

Uexküll's second important contribution to this debate may be stated as follows, '[T]ous les sujets animaux, les plus simples comme les plus complexes, sont ajustés à leur milieu avec la même perfection.'[137] Intuitively, and in an expression of literary insight, Marguerite Yourcenar shows us her by now two central characters, Jeanne and Egon, in the full realisation of this inter-relationship with their natural surroundings. From Uexküll we learn that the world of the creature is perfect for its own purposes and complete unto itself. Human beings when in a state of heightened consciousness, as in the relationship between Jeanne and Egon, constitute a relationship of symbiosis between nature and the human at this level at this moment in time. Secondly, the relationship with nature is not a hierarchical one of superiority,

---

[134] Jacob von Uexküll, *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1934), trans. by Philippe Muller, *Mondes animaux et monde humain* (Paris: Denoël, 1965), p. 24.
[135] *L'Autonomie*, p. 378.
[136] Frederick Amrine, 'The Music of the Organism: Uexküll, Merleau-Ponty, Zuckerkrandl and Deleuze as Goethean Ecologists in Search of a New Paradigm', *Goethe Yearbook* (22) (2015), 45 – 72 (p. 49). His italics.
[137] Uexküll, *Monde animaux et monde humain*, p. 24.

but one of organic centeredness and of equivalence. These insights enable us to comprehend the complexity and unity of nature from a theoretical perspective. Furthermore, the prospect of Jeanne and Egon sitting in the glade observing nature together constitutes a radical counterpoint to the scene in *La Nuit des temps* which saw man as, 'le prédateur-roi'.[138] The present scene amounts to a riposte to that situation. An additional important point to note, too, is that the controlling metaphor of what Amrine terms Uexküll's 'biological archetype' is melody.[139] He goes on to say:

> *A Theory of Meaning* (Uexküll's text) … fits seamlessly into the alternative line of thinking I am tracing because of its controlling metaphor of the biological archetype as *melody*. From the beginning of the treatise, it is abundantly clear that Uexküll shares Goethe's view that biological forms ultimately have formal or archetypal causes.'[140]

In view of these remarks it seems remarkably noteworthy that Egon is cast as a musician and it may be further observed that Octave's love of music constitutes a minor theme to that. Meanwhile, the link with Goethe is significant. Amrine states:

> Goethe … developed an alternative scientific method in which an imaginative faculty previously restricted to aesthetics – *anschauende Urteilskraft*, or 'intuitive judgement' – is transformed into the rigorous instrument of an expanded science of qualities.[141]

Yourcenar's intuitive insights here find an affinity with those of Goethe, essentially an artistic one, but one which also reaches well beyond that domain into an alternative reading of science, of biology and the organic beyond the Newtonian or Darwinian. Like Goethe, and indeed Mann, Yourcenar was deeply read in science, medicine and alchemy as *L'Œuvre au noir* attests. The significance of the Jeanne-Egon scene in the

---

[138] *Archives*, p. 957.
[139] Amrine, p. 50.
[140] Amrine, p. 50. His italics.
[141] Amrine, p. 46.

woodland is not to be limited to a pastoral reading, but is central to and in many ways lies at the heart of our understanding of the work.

4.7 Sense of an ending

Based on a folktale, Egon's ballet, *Le Cheval blanc au bord du lac*, completes the transition of the figure of the horse from the physical to the artistic. Following the success of the performance, the narrative reintroduces the horse in material form prior to giving it its final dismissal. Liberated into doing what was never possible for Michel, Egon carries out his quest for his ailing mother in a spirit of oneness and reconciliation. On entering enemy territory he is placed at mortal risk when he encounters an enemy soldier on horseback whom he is able to unseat as a consequence of which the man hits his head against a stone with fatal consequences. Egon makes no attempt to mount the sweating creature, instead dismissing it, including from the narrative, with a slap to its rump. The terrain that Egon traverses meanwhile is largely treeless confirming the place is a war zone. Egon is successful in his quest to see his mother and experiences in addition the emotional fulfillment of acceptance by old friends. As he effects his safe return from enemy lines he is vouchsafed a glimpse of a château framed by twigs and leaves, 'Des bosquets entouraient de toutes parts le vieux manoir baroque qui semblait sortir d'un songe.'[142] This crucial visionary flash amounts to a brief moment sometimes seen shortly before a death. In the Yourcenarian world this is the primal vision of home.

As noted above, the title Yourcenar gave to the *Mémoires*, *Le Labyrinthe du monde*, was attributed to it at the time of the publication of the second volume.[143] In *Quoi? L'Éternité* Jeanne introduces Michel to the work of Comenius, the full title of which

---

[142] *Quoi?*, p. 1427.

[143] André Maindron, '"L'être que j'appelle moi"…', in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Biographie, autobiographie*, ed. by Elena Real (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 1986), pp. 169 – 76 (p. 169).

is *Le Labyrinthe du monde et le paradis du cœur*, a translation of the original Czech, and they set about the task together.[144] Michel did not quite complete it, possibly a reflection on the final character of their relationship. Throughout the *Labyrinthe du monde* Yourcenar holds the thread which brings her mother out of the Minotaur's cave into the daylight for the reader. Her role as Ariadne in this sequence, as has been seen, was one she loved to play when writing sketches with her friends in the early 1930s, as she relates in her Préface to her play, *Qui n'a pas son Minotaure*.[145] Not dissimilar to the labyrinths found in some of the French cathedrals – Chartres is one – in Comenius's work the labyrinth was designed to lead the pilgrim inwards to his or her quest for salvation.[146] The escape from the classical Minotaur, on the other hand, leads outwards to daylight, not inwards to the centre. In this regard it is notable that, as stated above, Yourcenar begins *Souvenirs pieux* as if she is embarking on an autobiography. Quickly it turns instead into a delving into the past of her ancestors. This swerve realigns her in the reader's perception with a role as a guide or psychopomp who takes us through the archives of the family's past to the extreme limit. Somewhat in the idiom of Virgil, a favourite writer, somewhat as in Dante, the reader is led through images not only of her most extremely connected relations viewed historically, but also of a world, a society and even a religion she argues are in need of a radical revamp if they are to have any serious future. In this perception the future is not without hope. At the outset we saw the monumentalizing of Fernande in death, emblem of a world. Viewing this as the opening of the cave of the Minotaur, we can see in the image of Egon and Jeanne in the glade a counterpart to that. Time

---

[144] John Comenius, *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*, trans. and introduced by Howard Louthan and Andrea Sterk; preface by John Milic Lochman (New York: Paulist Press, 1998). Jeanne and Michel worked from an earlier English-language version.

[145] Marguerite Yourcenar, *Le mystère d'Alceste ; suivi de, Qui n'a pas son Minotaure?* in *Théâtre II* (Paris: Plon, 1954, 1963; Gallimard, 1971), p. 176.

[146] https://www.luc.edu/medieval/labyrinths/chartres.shtml Accessed 21.iv.'19.

and place are thereby brought together. A future is possible and they are on the threshold of it. By the end of the work Egon has returned, an Odysseus to his Penelope. Upon this reuniting they step out of the narrative into the intimacy of their private paradise.

Yvon Bernier suggests that Yourcenar had another fifty pages or so in mind to finish. There is, nevertheless, a sense of an ending.[147] All that is left after the departure of Egon is a bitter, rancorous youth who is unnamed, but clearly determined to blame others for what has befallen in the war and to get revenge. Who this is and what a monster he was to become is largely clear and so to that extent Yourcenar's task is complete. There is no need for her to say anything further.

[147] For this notion in literature see Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction: with a new Epilogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Conclusion

It was pointed out at the beginning of this analysis that hitherto there seems to have been no full-length discussion of the *Labyrinthe du monde,* the text which makes up Marguerite Yourcenar's *Mémoires*, along the lines discussed here. This study has sought to make good that gap. In doing so it has revealed a number of insights, aspects of the work which to a degree at least and on a number of counts have indeed been noticed by commentators, but neither to the same degree nor to a point where many of them are seen as structural and organic, subtending the entire work. The relationship between history and fiction pursued in the composition of the narrative emerges as something of a special category. Examination confirms that the dominant aspect is the fictional, but that even then the result is a work which gives insight into aspects of the historical otherwise not accessible, certainly in terms of motivation, insight and understanding. This makes the work a special kind of literary achievement. Of a piece with this is Yourcenar's strong sense of the primacy of time rather more than specific history. It is time, *Le Temps, ce grand sculpteur*, as she herself names her collection of essays, which shapes our world, a world which is always fleeing from us. It is the genius of her words which arrest the flow of time, capture it and give it shape. Yourcenar's sense of time is strikingly congruent with modern perceptions, whether the Holocene or the Anthropocene, to give them their scientific names. Within that framework she places the environmental problematics of a world determined to eat itself up without acknowledgement of the fact that in destroying it, whether through carelessness, indifference, or downright belligerence, we are destroying ourselves. At the same time we have the capacity to recognise this and to stop it – if we choose to. When finally Marguerite Yourcenar introduces

something of her childhood self she does not give us the inwardly focused subjectivities of an autobiographical child-centered narrative; instead she generously generalizes her own experiences to a point where, universalized, we can see in them matters of prime formative importance. Finally, and remarkably, stretching to the deeply imagined, she (re-)constructs an idyllic scene of integrated biotopic fulfillment between a young couple on the threshold of life together, something she did not experience but imagines for her mother figure, made possible for her by the solicitation of a promise made by her own mother. In remarkable ways the figure of the mother is identified, sought, found and rescued, brought into the light from the Minotaur's cave.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Prefatory note

Wherever the text refers to *Mémoires d'Hadrien,* it does so in full. Otherwise the nomenclature *Mémoires* refers to the three-part memoir, the subject of this thesis, also known by the largely interchangeable title, *Le Labyrinthe du Monde*. *Mémoires,* where it occurs, is not intended as a shortened form for the *Mémoires d'Hadrien*. *Le Labyrinthe du monde* is the three-volume work set within the framework of the *Mémoires.*

Works by Marguerite Yourcenar referred to in this thesis

Alexis ou le Traité du vain combat, in *Œuvres romanesques*, pp, 1 – 76.

Archives du Nord, in *Mémoires, Le Labyrinthe du monde*, II, pp. 951 – 1184.

'Bêtes à fourrures', in *Le Temps, ce grand sculpteur*, pp. 331 – 33.

D'Hadrien à Zénon: Correspondance 1951 – 1956, Texte établi et annoté par Colette Gaudin et Rémy Poignault, avec la collaboration de Joseph Brami et Maurice Delcroix. Édition coordonnée par Élyane Dezon-Jones et Michèle Sarde. Préface de Josyane Savigneau (Paris: Gallimard, 2004).

Essais et mémoires (Paris: Gallimard, 'Bibliothéque de la Pléiade', 1991).

'Le Cerveau noir de Piranése', in *Sous benefice d'inventaire*, pp. 75 – 108.

'Le discours du récipiendaire', in *Le Monde*, 18 janvier 1981.

L'Écrivain devant l'histoire, Conférence faite devant Messieurs les Recteurs, les Inspecteurs d'Académie et les Directrices et Directeurs d'Écoles Normales (Paris: CNDP, le vendredi 26 février 1954).

Le Labyrinthe du monde, in *Essais et mémoires*, pp. 705 – 1433.

Le mystère d'Alceste; suivi de, Qui n'a pas son Minotaure? : théâtre (Paris: Plon, 1954, 1963; Gallimard, 1971).

Les yeux ouverts: Entretiens avec Matthieu Galey (Paris: Le Centurion, 1980).

Le Temps, ce grand sculpteur, in *Essais et mémoires,* pp. 273 – 423.

Lettres à ses amis et quelques autres. Edition établi, présentée et annotée par Michèle Sarde et Joseph Brami avec la collaboration d'Elyane Dezon-Jones (Paris: Gallimard, 1997 (1995)).

L'Œuvre au noir, in *Œuvres romanesques*, pp. 557 – 850.

Mémoires, in *Essais et mémoires,* pp. 703 – 1433.

Mémoires d'Hadrien, in *Œuvres romanesques,* pp, 285 – 515.

Œuvres romanesques (Paris, Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1982).

'Oppien ou *les Chasses',* in *Le Temps, ce grand sculpteur*, pp. 391 – 95.

Portrait d'une voix: Vingt-trois entretiens (1952 – 1987). Textes réunis, présentés et annotés par Maurice Delcroix (Paris: Gallimard, 2002).

'Qui sait si l'âme des bêtes va en bas?' in *Le Temps, ce grand sculpteur*, pp. 370 – 76.

Quoi? L'Éternité, in *Mémoires, Le Labyrinthe du monde,* III, pp. 1185 – 1433.

'… Si nous voulons encore essayer de sauver la terre', Nicole Duplé éd. , *Le droit à la qualité de l'environnement: un droit en devenir, un droit à définir. Ve conférence internationale de droit constitutionnel. Fifth International Conference on Constitutional Law* (Montréal: Éditions Québec / Amérique, 1988).

Sous bénéfice d'inventaire, in *Essais et Mémoires,* pp. 5 – 194.

Souvenirs pieux, in *Mémoires, Le Labyrinthe du monde,* I, pp. 707 – 949.

Théâtre I (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

Théâtre II (Paris: Plon, 1954, 1963; Gallimard, 1971).

'Une civilisation à cloisons étanches', in *Le Temps, ce grand sculpteur*, pp. 396 – 97.

Un Homme obscur, in *Œuvres romanesques,* pp, 943 – 1042.

'Voyages dans l'espace et voyages dans le temps', Conférence faite à l'Institut français de Tókyô, le 26 octobre 1982, *Le Tour de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

Certain Yourenar texts are cited from articles on the author within the discussion. The abbreviations for such of these as occur are listed following the practice of the Société Internationale d'Études Yourcenariennes (SIEY):

Œuvres romanesques: *OR*

Essais et mémoires: EM

Alexis ou le Traité du vain combat: A

Anna, soror…: AS

Archives du Nord: AN

Denier du rêve: DR

Un homme obscur: HO

Le Labyrinthe du monde: LM

Mémoires d'Hadrien: MH

L'Œuvre au noir: ON

Portrait d'une voix: PV

Quoi? L'éternité: QE

Souvenirs pieux: SP

Les Yeux ouverts: YO

Secondary Literature

Adorno, Theodor W., *Minima Moralia* (1951), trans. by E. Kaufholz et J.-R. Ladmiral (Paris: Payot, 1980).

'The Essay as Form' (1958), trans. by B. Hullot-Kentor and F. Will, *New German Critique*, 32 (Spring-Summer 1984).

Amrine, Frederick, 'The Music of the Organism: Uexküll, Merleau-Ponty, Zuckerkrandl and Deleuze as Goethean Ecologists in Search of a New Paradigm', *Goethe Yearbook* (22) 2015, 45 – 72.

Andersen, Kasja, *Le "don sombre": La thème de la mort dans quatre romans de Marguerite Yourcenar* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1989).

Ariès, Philippe, *L'Homme devant la mort* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977).

Ariès, Philippe et Georges Duby, *Histoire de la vie privée,* 5 vols (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985 – 87).

Audier, Serge, *La société écologique et ses ennemis: Pour une histoire alternative de l'émancipation* (Paris: La Découverte, 2017).

Auerbach, Erich, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard D. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

Baguley, David, *Naturalist fiction: the entropic vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Bakhtin, M. M., *The Dialogic Imagination: four essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

Barthes, Roland, *La Chambre Claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard Seuil, 1980).

'Le discours de l'histoire', in *Le bruissement de la langue: Essais critiques IV* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1984).

Benjamin, Walter, 'On some Motifs in Baudelaire', *Illuminations*, trans. by H. Zohn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970).

Berlin, Isaiah, *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and their History*, ed. by Henry Hardy, with an introduction by Patrick Gardiner (London: Pimlico, 1997), trans. by G. Delannoi et A. Butin, *Le Sens des réalités* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2011).

Bernier, Yvon, *Inventaire de la bibliothèque de Marguerite Yourcenar: Petite Plaisance* (Clermont-Ferrand: SIEY, 2004).

Birley, Anthony R., *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor* (London and New York, 1997).

Blanchet-Douspis, Mireille, *L'influence de l'histoire contemporaine dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2008).

Blanchot, Maurice, *L'Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

L'espace littéraire (Paris: Gallimard, 1955).

Blanckeman, Bruno, 'Marguerite Yourcenar, passeur du siècle', in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Écrivain du XIXe siècle?,* ed. by Georges Fréris et Rémy Poignault *(*Clermont-Ferrand: SIEY, 2004), pp. 13 – 19.

Blot, Jean, *Marguerite Yourcenar* (Paris: Seghers, 1980).

Bonali Fiquet, Françoise, 'Du "je" à "l'autre" dans *Le Labyrinthe du monde*', in *L'Universalité dans l'œuvre de Marguerite* Yourcenar, ed. by María José Vázquez de Parga et Rémy Poignault, 2 vols (Tours: SIEY, 1995), II, pp. 93 – 106.

'Les lectures de Marguerite Yourcenar enfant et adolescent', in *Marguerite Yourcenar et l'enfance,* ed. by Maryla Laurent et Rémy Poignault avec la collaboration de Lydie Waleryszak (Tours: SIEY, 2003), pp. 153 – 70.

Bonaventure, intro. by Hugh McKay, *The little flowers of St. Francis: The mirror of perfection: St. Bonaventure's Life of St. Francis* (London: Dent; New York, Dutton, 1966).

Borgeaud, Philippe, *Recherche sur le dieu Pan* (Genève: Imprimerie du 'Journal de Genève', 1979), trans. by Kathleen Atlas and James Redfield, *The cult of Pan in Ancient Greece* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

Bramwell, Anna, *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History* (New Haven, London: Yale University Pres, 1989).

Braudel, Fernand, 'Histoire et sciences sociales, la longue durée', *Annales, E.S.C.,* (oct. – déc. 1958), 725 – 53.

La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II, rev. 2nd edn (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966), trans. by Siân Reynolds, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1972).

Braure, Marie-France, 'Et si on voyait les choses autrement?', in *Marguerite Yourcenar et l'enfance* ed. by Mayla Laurent et Rémy Poignault avec la collaboration de Lydia Walerysak, (Tours: SIEY, 2003), pp. 79 – 95.

Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World, ed. by Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, Christine F. Salazar, 15 vols (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2002 - 10).

Brown, Peter, *Through the Eye of the Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350 – 550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

Burkert, Walter, *Homo Necans: Interpretationen altgriechischer Opferriten und Mythen*, 2nd edn (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), trans. by Peter Bing, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1983).

Canetti, Elias, *Die Provinz des Menschen: Aufzeihnungen 1942 – 1972* (München: Hanser, 1973), trans. by A. Guerne, *Le territoire de l'homme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1981).

Carlyle, Thomas, *The Niebelungenlied – An Essay* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, [n.d.]).

Heroes and Hero Worship (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus Company, 1899).

Carson, Rachel, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962).

The Sea Around Us (New York: The New American Library [s.d.]); (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

The Sense of Wonder (New York & Evanston: Harper & Row, 1965).

Certeau, Michel de, *L'Invention du quotidien*, I, *Arts de Faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

Chamberlain, Geoffrey, 'British maternal mortality in the 19th and early 20th centuries', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 99 (11) (Nov. 2006), 559 – 63.

Charle, Christophe, *Histoire de la France du XIXème siècle* (Paris: Seuil, Points Histoire, 1991).

Chrestien, Florent, *Cynégétique d'Oppian* (Paris: Les Cent-Une, 1955).

Les quatre liures de la Venerie d'Oppian poete Grec D'Anarzarbe (A Paris, : De l'imprimerie de Robert Estienne, Par Mamert Patisson, 1575).

Cliche, Élène, 'Jeanne de Reval et l'échec d'un idéal fusionnel', in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Écritures de l'autre*, ed. by Jean-Philippe Beaulieu, Jeanne Demers et André Maindron (Montréal: XYZ, 1997), pp. 163 – 70.

Coetzee, J. M., *Elizabeth Costello* (London: Vintage Books, 2004).

Collingwood, R. G., *The Idea of History*, ed. with Introduction by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946).

Comenius, John, *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*, trans. and introduced by Howard Louthan and Andrea Sterk; preface by John Milic Lochman (New York: Paulist Press, 1998).

Counihan, Francesca, *L'Autorité dans l'œuvre romanesque de Marguerite Yourcenar* (Paris: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1998).

Crutzen, Paul, & Eugene F. Stoermer, "Have we entered the 'Anthropocene'?", *IGBP Global Change Newsletter* 41, retrieved from IGBP.net, 24.xii.'16.

Cruysse, Dirk Van der, *Le portrait dans les "Mémoires" de Saint-Simon: Fonctions, techniques et anthropologies: Etude statistique et analytique* (Paris: Nizet, 1971).

La mort dans les "Mémoires" de Saint-Simon: Clio dans le jardin de Thanatos (Paris: Nizet, 1981).

Curtius, E. R., *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, 1990).

Danto, Arthur C., *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

Delcroix, Maurice, '*Archives du Nord* au passage du XIX^{e} siècle', in *Marguerite Yourcenar écrivain du XIX^{e} siècle?,* ed. by Georges Fréris et Rémy Poignault (Clermont-Ferrand: SIEY, 2004), pp. 137 – 55.

'Le corps de l'amour', in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Écritures de l'autre*, ed. by Jean-Philippe Beaulieu, Jeanne Demers et André Maindron (Montréal: XYZ, 1997), pp. 25 – 39.

Deprez, Bérengère, 'La visite à Suarlée. Méditation sur la naissance et rapport à la mère dans *Souvenirs pieux*', in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Retour aux sources*, ed. by Rodica Lascupop et Rémy Poignault (Tours: SIEY, 1998), pp. 175 – 84.

Marguerite Yourcenar and the USA: From Prophecy to Protest (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2009).

Derrida, Jacques, *De quoi demain…: Dialogue avec Élisabeth Roudinesco* (Paris: Librairie Anthème et Éditions Fayard / Galilée, 2001).

L'Animal que donc je suis. Édition établi par Marie-Louise Mallet (Paris: Galilée, 2006).

Desblache, Lucile, 'Marguerite Yourcenar et le monde animal: éthique et esthétique de l'altérité', *Bulletin de la SIEY*, 18 (Tours, 1997), 143 – 56.

‘Marguerite Yourcenar, les animaux et l’écologie’, *Alizés: Revue angliciste de La Réunion, Faculté des Lettres et Sciences humaines, Hommage à François Duban* (Réunion: Université de la Réunion, 2009), 172 – 83.

Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer – Derrida Encounter, ed. by Diane P. Michelfelder & Richard E. Palmer (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989).

Dictionnaire Marguerite Yourcenar, dirigé et préfacé par Bruno Blanckeman (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2017).

Dubos, René, *Courtisons la terre* (Paris: Stock, 1980).

Duby, Georges et Michelle Perrot, ed., *Histoire des femmes en Occident – IV – le XIXe siècle* (Paris: Plon, 1991, 2002).

Eliade, Mircea, *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaiques de l’extase* (Paris: Payot, 1951).

Eliot, T. S., *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Faber and faber, 1997).

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, *Essays* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus, 1982) and (Washington: National Home Library Foundation, 1932).

Essays and English Traits (New York: Collier & Son, 1909).

Literary Ethics (New York: Y. Crowell & Co., [n.d.].

Farrell, C. Frederick et Edith R. Farrell, ‘ Des mains pour toucher l’univers’, in *L’Universalité dans l’œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by María José Vázquez de Parga et Rémy Poignault, 2 vols (Tours: SIEY, 1994), I, pp. 41 – 47.

Ferkiss, Victor, *Nature, Technology and Society: Cultural Roots of the Current Environmental Crisis* (New York and London: 1993).

Ferry, Luc, *Le Nouvel Ordre écologique: L’arbre, l’animal et l’homme* (Paris: Grasset, 1992).

Feyter, P. de, ‘“Histoire sacrée” et “histoire profonde”: Zénon et Natanaël ou l’appétit d’absolu’, in *Le sacré dans l’œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by Rémy Poignault (Tours: SIEY, 1993), pp. 41 – 52.

Fischer, Christian, *The Tollund Man and the Elling Woman* (Silkeborg: Silkeborg Bogtrykkeri A/S, s.d., s.p.).

Fourier, Charles, 'Détérioration matérielle de la planète', *La Phalange,* 16e année, tome 5, premier semestre (Paris: Au Bureau de la Phalange, 1847).

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Wahrheit und Methode,* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007), trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, *Truth and Method*, rev. 2nd edn (London: Bloomberg, 2013).

L'Art de comprendre: Herméneutique et tradition philosophique (Paris: Aubier, 1982).

Gaudin, Colette, *Marguerite Yourcenar à la surface du temps* (Amsterdam – Atlanta, Ga: Rodopi, 1994).

'Le roman de l'histoire: l'archive yourcenarienne entre relique et ruine', in *Roman, histoire et mythe dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar,* ed. by Simone et Maurice Delcroix (Tours: SIEY, 1995), pp. 207 – 18.

Genette, Gérard, *Palimpsestes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982).

Gildea, Robert, *Children of the Revolution: The French, 1799 – 1914* (London: Penguin, 2008).

Glob, P. V., *The Bog People: Iron-Age Man Preserved* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969, 2010).

Glotfelty, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology,* ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996).

Gregg, John, *Maurice Blanchot and the Literature of Transgression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Grinevald, Jacques, *La Biosphère de l'Anthropocène: Climat et pétrole, la double menace* ((Paris: Broché, 2008).

Guillon, Ferdinand, *Théorie sociétaire de Charles Fourier: Accord des prophéties de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament avec la théorie sociétaire de Charles Fourier par un prêtre catholique-romain* (Cluny-Lyon: Au Centre de l'Union phalanstérienne, 1841).

Halley, Achmy, *Marguerite Yourcenar: Portrait intime* (Paris: Flammarion, 2018).

Harris, Nadia, '*Le Labyrinthe du Monde*: roman historico-didactique', in *Roman, histoire et mythe dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar,* ed. by Simone et Maurice Delcroix (Tours: SIEY, 1995), pp. 229 – 38.

Helmreich, Anne, 'The marketing of Helen Allingham: the English cottage and national identity', in *Gendering Landscape Art*, ed. by Steven Adams and Anna Gruetzner Robins (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

Hordern, Peregrine and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000).

Howard, Joan E., *We met in Paris: Grace Frick and her life with Marguerite Yourcenar* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2018).

Hugo, Victor, *Notre-Dame de Paris* (Paris: Le Livre de poche classique, 1988).

Julien, Anne-Yvonne, *Marguerite Yourcenar ou la signature de l'arbre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002).

Julien-Dubosclard, Anne-Yvonne, '*Souvenirs pieux* de Marguerite Yourcenar: vers une poésie de l'existence', in *Marguerite Yourcenar et l'art: L'Art de Maguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by J. P. Castellani et R. Poignault (Tours: SIEY, 1990), 299 – 307.

Jonas, Hans, *Der Prinzip Verantwortung: Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), trans. by J. Greisch, *Le Principe responsabilité: Une éthique pour la civilisation technologique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990, 2008).

Kermode, Frank, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction: with a New Epilogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Kuhn, Thomas S., *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962, 2012).

Landrin, Sophie et Marie Sumalle associé au photographe Samuel Bollendorff, *Contaminations*: *Sept voyages en terres sacrifiées*, *Le Monde*, 2 – 10 septembre, 2018.

Ledesma, Manuela, "L'Autre et le Même: Jeanne de Vietinghoff', in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Écritures de l'autre*, ed. by Jean-Philippe Beaulieu, Jeanne Demers et André Maindron (Montréal: XYZ, 1997), pp. 153 – 6.

Lejeune, Philippe, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972, 1996).

Je est un autre: L'autobiographie, de la littérature aux médias (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980).

Leonard, George G., *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Leopold, Aldo, *A Sand County Almanac & Other Writings on Ecology and Conservation,* ed. by Curt Meine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949; Library of America 238, 2013).

Levinas, Emmanuel, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (Paris: Le Livre de poche, "Biblio-essais", 1996).

Lévi-Strauss, Claude, *Anthropologie structural II* (Paris: Éditions Agora, Presses pocket, 1996).

Liddell, Henry George and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, with a revised supplement, 1993).

Loudon, Irvine, 'Maternal mortality in the past and its relevance to developing countries today', *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* vol. 72, Issue 1, (July, 2000), 241S – 246S.

Lukács, George, *Soul and Form* (London: Merlin Press, 1994).

Magnen, René, *Épona: déesse Gauloise des chevaux protectrice des cavaliers* (Bordeaux: Delmas, 1953).

Maindron, André, '"L'être que j'appelle moi"…', in *Marguerite Yourcenar. Biographie, autobiographie,* ed. by Elena Real (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 1986), pp. 169 – 76.

Makine, Andrei, *La Musique d'une vie* (Paris: Le Seuil, "Points", 2001).

Marguerite Yourcenar et l'enfance, ed. by Laurent, Mayla et Rémy Poignault avec la collaboration de Lydia Walerysak, (Tours: SIEY, 2003).

Marx, Leo, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Merchant, Carolyn, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (New York, London: Routledge, 2003).

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *La Nature: Notes de cours, Collège de France,* cours de 1959-60, texte établi par Dominique Séglard (Paris: Le Seuil, 1995).

Mink, Louis O. 'History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension', *New Literary History* 1 (1970).

Historical Understanding, ed. by Brian Fay, Eugene O. Golob and Richard T. Vann (Ithaca: Cornell University Pres, 1987).

Montalbetti, Jean, 'Marguerite Yourcenar dans son île de Mont-Désert: "Je me suis éloignée de la politique: l'essentiel est ailleurs"', in *Portrait d'une voix: Vingt-trois entretiens (1952 – 1987)*, ed. by Maurice Delcroix (Paris: Gallimard, "Les Cahiers de la NRF", 2002), pp. 187 – 99.

Morinière, Claude Benoit, 'Entre l'Histoire et l'histoire', in *Marguerite Yourcenar. Écrivain du XIXe siècle?*, ed. by George Fréris et Rémy Poignault (Clermont-Ferrand: SIEY, 2004), pp. 21 – 32.

Næss, Arne, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, trans. by David Rothenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

'The Basics of the Deep Ecology Movement', in *The Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Naess*, ed. and trans. by Alan Drengson and Bill Devall (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2008), pp. 105 – 119.

Nussbaum, Martha C., *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, 2nd rvd. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986;. 2001).

Ouida and Victorian Popular Culture, ed. by Jane Jordan and Andrew King (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2013).

Parga, María José Vázquez de, 'Rapports du couple et relations familiales dans *Le Labyinthe du monde'*, in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Écrivain du XIXe siècle?*, ed. by Georges Fréris et Rémy Poignault (Clermont-Ferrand: SIEY, 2004), pp. 413 – 421.

Park, Sun Ah, *La Fonction du lecteur dans* Le Labyrinthe du monde *de Marguerite Yourcenar* (Paris: Harmattan, 2003).

Patterson, Charles, *Eternal Treblinka: our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002).

Pelluchon, Corine, *L'Autonomie brisée: Bioéthique et philosophie* (Paris: Presse Universitaire de France, 2009, "Quadrige", 2014).

Éléments pour une éthique de la vulnérabilité: Les hommes, les animaux, la nature (Paris: Les Éditions du cerf, 2011).

Pelt, Jean-Marie, *La Vie sociale des plantes,* 2nd. ed. (Paris: Librarie Arthème Fayard, 1984).

La Solidarité chez les plantes, les animaux, les humains ((Paris: Librarie Arthème Fayard, 2004).

La Loi de la jungle (Paris: Librarie Arthème Fayard, 2003).

L'Homme renaturé (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977, Robert Laffont, 2015).

Perec, Georges, *Romans et récits* (Paris: Livre de poche, 2002).

Plutarch. *Moralia*, vol. xii, *On the Eating of Flesh* (*Peri Sarkophagias*), ed. and trans. by Harold Cherniss and William C. Helmbold (London: William Heinemann Ltd. and Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959).

Poignault, Rémy, *L'Antiquité dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar: littérature, mythe et histoire,* 2 vols (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1995).

'L'Antiquité et l'expression du moi dans *Souvenirs pieux*', in *L'Écriture du moi dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar,* ed. by Rémy Poignault, Vincente Torres, Jean-Pierre Castellani, Maria-Rosa Chiapparo (Clermont-Ferrand: SIEY, 2004), pp. 9 – 24.

Proust, Simone, *L'autobiographie dans* Le Labyinthe du Monde *de Marguerite Yourcenar: L'écriture vécue comme exercice spirituel* (Paris, Montréal: L'Harmattan, 1997).

Rappaport, Helen, *Ekaterinburg: The Last Days of the Romanovs* (London: Windmill Books, 2009).

Real, Elena, 'Biographie, autobiographie et quête de soi', in *Marguerite Yourcenar. Biographie et autobiographie,* ed. by Elena Real (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 1988), pp. 243 – 51.

Restori, Enrica, 'Un anthropomorphisme à rebours: de la voix humaine à la voix des choses', in *L'Universalité dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar,* ed. by María José Vazquez de Parga et Rémy Poignault, 2 vols (Tours: SIEY, 1994), I, pp. 137 – 51.

Richefort, Isabelle, *Alain-François Van der Meulen (1632 – 1690): Peintre Flamand au service du Louis XIV* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004).

Ricœur, Paul, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004, pbk. 2006).

Soi-même comme un autre (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990), trans. by Kathleen Blamey, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, pbk. 1994).

Temps et Récit, 3 vols (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983), trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, *Time and Narrative* 3 vols (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1988, 1990).

Roman, histoire et mythe dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar, ed. by Simone et Maurice Delcroix (Tours: SIEY, 1995).

Rosbo, Patrick de, *Entretiens Radiophoniques avec Marguerite Yourcenar* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1972).

Rothenburg, David, *Hand's End: Technology and the Limits of Nature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1993).

Rueckert, William, 'Literature and Ecology. An Experiment in Ecocriticism', in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 105 – 23.

Saint, Nigel, *Marguerite Yourcenar: Reading the Visual* (Oxford: Legenda, 2000).

Sand, George, *Mauprat* (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1930).

Dialogue des Deux Troubadours. Correspondence entre George Sand et Gustave Flaubert de 1863 à 1876. Choix établi par George Lubin qui en a écrit la préface (Paris: Les Cent Une, 1978).

'Fragment d'une lettre écrite de Fontainbleau' *Les Sept cordes de la lyre* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, août 1837).

Impressions et souvenirs (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1873).

Savigneau, Josyane, *Marguerite Yourcenar: L'Invention d'une vie* (Paris:Gallimard, 1990), trans. by Joan Howard, *Marguerite Yourcenar: Inventing a Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

Schama, Simon, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins, 1995).

Shadbolt, Nigel and Roger Hampson, *The Digital Ape: How to Live (in Peace) with Smart Machines* (Melbourne, London: Scribe, 2018).

Sheringham, Michael, *Everyday Life*: *Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, rpt. 2010).

Simonnet, Dominique, *L'Écologisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France (Que sais-je? 1784), 1994).

Singer, Isaac Bashevis, *Enemies*, trans. by Aliza Shevrin and Elizabeth Shub (London: Cape, 1972).

A Young Man in Search of Love (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1978).

Solnit, Rebecca, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Verso, 2001).

Sperti, Valeri, '*Le labyrinthe du monde* change-t-il la mémoire de l'autre en miroir de soi?', in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Écritures de l'autre,* ed. by Jean-Philippe Beaulieu, Jeanne Demers et André Maindron (Montréal: XYZ, 1997), pp. 127 – 37.

'Le pacte autobiographique impossible', in *Marguerite Yourcenar: Biographie, autobiographie,* ed. by Elena Real (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 1988), pp. 177 – 81.

Stephen, Leslie, ed., *Dictionary of National Biography* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1887).

Starre, Evert van der, 'Entre roman et historie', in *Roman, histoire et mythe dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar,* ed. by Simone et Maurice Delcroix (Tours: SIEY, 1995), pp. 419 – 29.

Taylor, Charles, *The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uniiversity Press, 1989).

The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, ed. by Burns, J. H. and H.L.A. Hart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, 1982, Intro., 1996, pub. online May 2015).

The Oxford Classical Dictionary, ed. by Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3rd edn, 1996).

The Poems of Tennyson, ed. by Christopher Ricks, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Harlow: Longman, 1987).

Thoreau, Henry David, *Walden* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004);

The Maine Woods (ed. by Jeffrey C. Cramer (New Haven Conn., London: Yale University Press, 2009);

Excursions (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1975);

In Wildness is the Preservation of the World (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971).

Titran, Maurice, 'Et si on approchait les choses autrement?', *Marguerite Yourcenar et l'enfance,* ed. by Maryla Laurent et Rémy Poignault avec la collaboration de Lydia Waleryszak (Tours: SIEY, 2003), pp. 41 – 49.

Tocqueville, Alexis de, *De la démocratie en Amérique,* introd. par Harold J. Laski; note préliminaire par J. P. Mayer (Paris: Gallimard, 1961).

Uexküll, Jacob von, *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1934), trans. by Philippe Muller, *Mondes animaux et monde humain* (Paris: Denoël, 1965).

Wagner, Walter, 'Ökologische Utopie und ökozentriches Paradigma: Marguerite Yourcenars *Le Labyrinthe du monde*' in *Reflexe eines Umwelt- und Klima-bewusstseins in fiktionalen Texten der Romania*, ed. by Cornelia Klettke / Georg Maag (Berlin: 2010), pp. 207 – 225.

'"Notre monde de fin de monde". Sur la rhétorique apocalyptique de Marguerite Yourcenar', *Bulletin de la SIEY*, 38 (Clermont-Ferrand: déc. 2017), 73 – 89.

Watts, Annabel, *Helen Allingham's cottage homes revisited* (England, 2002).

Went-Daoust, Yvette, 'Les registres d'une autobiographie. La part du roman et de l'histoire dans *Quoi? L'Éternité*', in *Roman, histoire et mythe dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by Simone et Maurice Delcroix (Tours: SIEY, 1995), pp. 465 – 474.

White, Hayden, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973.

William Allingham, a diary, ed.by Helen Allingham and D. Radford (London, 1907).

Woerkum, Camille van, 'Marguerite Yourcenar et la Flandre: un espace dévasté', in *Marguerite Yourcenar et l'enfance*, ed. by Maryla Laurent et Rémy Poignault avec la collaboration de Lydia Waleryszak (Tours: SIEY, 2003), pp. 211 – 15.

'Le sacré dans les récits d'enfance de Marguerite Yourcenar', in *Le sacré dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by Rémy Poignault (Tours: SIEY, 1993), pp. 85 – 94.

Wohlleben, Paul, *Das geheime Leben der Bäume: Was sie fühlen, wie sie kommunizieren: Die Entdeckung einer verborgenen Welt* (München: Ludwig Verlag, 2015), trans. by Jane Billinghurst, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate: Discoveries from a Secret World* (London: Collins, 2017).

Wyss, Antoine, 'Auteur, narrateur, personnage: quelle historiographie pour *Mémoires d'Hadrien'*, in *Roman, histoire et mythe dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar* ed. by Simone et Maurice Delcroix (Tours: SIEY, 1995), pp. 483 – 91.

Zanone, Damien, *L'autobiographie* (Paris: Ellipses, 1996).

Zeldin, Theodore, *France 1848 – 1945: Ambition, Love and Politics*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Electronic resources

https://www.cidmy.be/index.php/oeuvre/discours/128-conference-l-ecrivain-devant-l-histoire.

https://www.luc.edu/medieval/labyrinths/chartres.shtml Accessed, 21.iv.'19.

Stein, Ben P., '45 Years Ago: How the 1st Photo of Earth From the Moon Happened', *Science & Astronomy* (August 23, 2011), https://www.space.com/12707-earth-photo-moon-nasa-lunar-orbiter-1-anniversary.html Accessed, 8.vi.'19.

Vietinghoff-Stiftung, http://www.vietinghoff.org Accessed, 25.ix.'17.

www.stratigraphy.org. *Formal subdivision of the Holocene Series/Epoch.* Accessed, 21.v.'19.