

Introduction

In occupied France, the national cultural heritage was at stake for the acting forces. This is why they vied for the big names. Having failed to attract André Gide, the collaborators flaunted Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Henry de Montherlant, and Jacques Chardonne. The homegrown (especially Communist) Resistance retorted with Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard, François Mauriac, and Jean Paulhan. At the beginning of 1944, Charles de Gaulle added the names of oppositional writers in exile to those of Gide and Mauriac: Georges Bernanos and Jacques Maritain. The Vichyist contingent had its own stars, from Henri Pourrat to Charles Maurras, through Henri Massis. With more or less success, each camp thus claimed literary legitimacy in this ideological war. Why and how did writers respond to this demand?

My goal in this book is to demonstrate what is specific about the behavior of French writers under the Occupation, in light of the representations and practices proper to the literary world. The political positions taken by these writers obeyed logics that were not simply motivated by politics. The writers themselves rarely differentiated them from their professional practices: their tendency to engage depended on the way they viewed their craft. And they usually became engaged as artists or intellectuals. But the question of writers' conduct during the "dark years" surpasses that of engagement. The working conditions associated with the craft of writing changed drastically during this period and, as a result, the social signification of individual and collective practices was modified. The very meaning of professional practices and aesthetic options—from art for art's sake to invective—became a site of struggles involving individuals, groups, and institutions. I will analyze the effects of this crisis on the literary world, and what the proposed answers owe to its history.

Writers' engagement during the Occupation has most often been approached from the perspective of a politically focused intellectual history. Cultural practices and institutions are generally dealt with in studies of "daily life" or "cultural life" under oppression. This division leads, on the one hand, to an over-politicized and strongly individualized view, one that tends to focus on extreme figures (Céline, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, Robert Brasillach, Lucien Rebatet) at the expense of more moderate examples. On the other hand, it leads to a depoliticized view that underestimates the ideological dimension of the most apparently "neutral" cultural activities. Faced with the tendency to disassociate these two questions, my book aims to shed light on each, using the other. I will reinscribe them in a more global approach to literary milieus and the way they worked during this period.

The achievements of the historiography of the "dark years," especially in the field of cultural production, made this approach possible.¹ Still, by adhering to the geographical and political divisions imposed by the specificity of the issues and the mechanisms of constraint, works devoted respectively to Vichy, to the Collaboration, and to the Resistance remained segregated for a long time. It is not by chance that studies attached to different cultural domains—whether literature, artistic creation, or theater—helped shatter these walls:² the cultural hegemony of Paris, which was largely maintained despite the forced emigration of the government to the Southern zone, forced a reevaluation of the weight of the demarcation line; political divisions appeared less clearly in those milieus, since corporative and professional solidarities sometimes won out over ideological divergences. Recently, a parallel interest has developed for the characteristics of behavior in social groups, professions, or milieus.³ From the viewpoint of the historiography of the Occupation, this book is linked to the latter perspective, although it privileges a sociological approach.⁴ Rather than working from geographical (Northern zone/Southern zone) and political divisions, I will take a given professional milieu, its practices and institutions, as my point of departure, in order to examine the crisis's repercussions within it. I will limit myself to metropolitan France, where the majority of the struggles for redefinition of the literary stakes played out.

◆ "The strange defeat," according to Marc Bloch's expression, that brought an end to the "Phoney War" through the occupation of two-thirds of the territory and the signing of the armistice on June 22, 1940, at Rethondes, would open up a real crisis of national identity. Writers did not escape from the logic of struggle and payback that seems to be the lot of every community caught up in a crisis of what Durkheim called collective consciousness. But the writers'

war was not simply a reflection of the civil war. Like any other professional milieu, the literary world has its own codes, references, rules, and principles of division.

It may seem paradoxical to add this study to an approach targeting professional milieus, given that the literary profession is the most individualistic, the least regulated, and the least organized (to the extent that its professional status is called into question): no technical training prepares writers for their trade (unlike musicians, for example) and there are no official requisites mandating entry. The literary world is nonetheless ruled by laws and value hierarchies that are relatively autonomous, to the extent that they cannot be reduced to external social determinations, as Pierre Bourdieu has shown.⁵ Confronted with political, religious, and economic demands, the literary field has affirmed its autonomy, by instituting the primacy of peer judgment as proof of legitimacy: thus, when the book market was industrialized in the nineteenth century, while a large-scale circulation network was developing under the rule of market logic and oriented toward short-term profits, a network of small-scale circulation emerged concurrently, one in which peer recognition outweighed economic criteria. Tension resulted between a pole that was more disposed to respond to external demand and a pole that was more oriented toward the defense of specifically literary values. This tension structured the literary field. What happens to literary autonomy in a period of crisis, when economic constraints are doubled and subject to political stakes? In what forms does it survive, and how does it resist external pressures?

Subject to the double mechanism of constraint imposed by the Nazis and Vichy, surrendered to the different attempts to harness its power, the literary field witnessed the abolition of those conditions that had assured its relative independence, particularly freedom of expression, during the Occupation. But in spite of its objective destructuration, which was amplified by the confusion born of the debacle, in spite of the manhandling of its channels of diffusion, a form of autonomy survived in the way that this now-shattered space functioned.

Whether exiles or stars of the collaborationist Parisian in crowd, underground or counselors to the prince, politicized or aestheticizing, silent or verbose, writers indeed continued to discuss, debate, and judge each other, above and beyond the geographical, political, and legal frontiers. Gossip and rumors were a powerful vector of group cohesion and self-regulation at a time when standard reference points were in upheaval. While the rumor-mill flourished, payback was in fashion: Pierre Drieu La Rochelle and Aragon traded accusations; Robert Brasillach and Lucien Rebatet tore into François Mauriac for having joined the anti-Fascist camp. When it did not consume them, the crisis

exacerbated preexisting divisions that owed more to the history of the literary field than to the historical conjuncture: Henri Massis thus pursued a fight begun twenty years earlier with André Gide and *La Nouvelle Revue française*. Ideological divergences do not sufficiently explain the principles of division that underpin the struggles surrounding the redefinition of the stakes: although appearing in the specific form they adopted during the dark years, they still contain the constants of generational rifts and opposition between forces of autonomy and heteronomy. These principles, which acted in tandem without necessarily overlapping, were at work in both public polemics and institutional struggles.

While generally speaking, we can differentiate “dominant” from “dominated” writers according to their degree of notoriety (an opposition that often coincides with the rift between “old” and “young”), we can also differentiate between them according to the type of notoriety they enjoyed: on one hand, notoriety of a temporal order (institutional consecration, sales figures, high print runs); on the other, notoriety in the symbolic order (peer recognition). How did these factors of differentiation influence their political choices and the behaviors they adopted during the Occupation? Based on these factors, and according to the forms of dependence that they imply with respect to external demand (of the acting powers, the market, the press, or political parties), I will identify four types of social logics that coexisted in the literary field, and that induced different relationships to literature and politics.

At the temporally dominant pole, near the fractions that wielded economic and political power, the trend was toward a worldly respectability that allied “good taste” with a sense of one’s responsibilities, and coincided with what we might call the state logic. Here, politics were considered “vulgar” and took the form of a morality to which art should remain subordinate. At the pole of large-scale production, close to journalism, the media logic prevailed. Privileging the current, the event, the sensational, it tended to impose itself via public scandal in order to stay connected to “public opinion.” The aesthetic logic prevailed at the pole of limited production, especially among authors who enjoyed a strong symbolic notoriety. In keeping with the precepts of art for art’s sake, this logic gives priority to style and form, and tends to distance itself from politics as well as from morality. Finally, at the temporally dominated avant-garde pole, literature’s subversive dimension was brought to the fore. This often led the avant-gardes to align themselves with the political forces of opposition.

These different logics, which obviously never exist in a pure state, are more or less embodied in practices and institutions. The four institutions that I will examine here—the French Academy, the Goncourt Academy, the *Nouvelle Revue*

française, and the Comité national des écrivains—illustrate them in their most typical manifestations. The forms of dependency that they imply with respect to different social spheres allow us to understand the internal mechanisms that favored the process of autonomy loss during the Occupation. I will pay particular attention to the ways in which the factors of heteronomy conveyed by the literary field's own authorities participated in this process, and to what extent they resisted.

➤ The method that I have favored here is that of a structural history, one that shows not only the coexistence of different logics but also of different temporalities—meaning forms of inertia and rhythms of evolution in the long and short run—in a given state of the literary field: the rapidity of the defeat and the events that followed contrasted with the inertia of representations and the (variable) slowness of readjustments; literary activity was generally slowed by the material difficulties and other dysfunction brought about by the Occupation; finally, the relationship to time varied according to institutional logics (specific inertia), just as it varied among groups and individuals.

In the first part, I examine the literary logics behind writers' engagement. Although it is tempting to interpret attitudes and political choices as direct "reactions" to the event—even more so when the event (defeat, foreign occupation) invades the private sphere and has effects on the most routine daily actions—we must seek out the social mediations that helped orient them. I am less interested in the decisional processes than in the set of factors that overdetermined them at the group level, and especially those factors linked with the mediation of the literary field.

A situation of national crisis such as the Occupation, in which politics carry more weight than usual and all the more so for professional writers, constitutes an ideal-typical case for studying the relationship between writers and politics due to the heightened constraints exerted on their choices. However, while the modalities of writers' engagement are more legible, the interweaving of literary and political logics becomes simultaneously more "transparent" and more difficult to untangle. More transparent, because in times of crisis, tacitly regulated competition becomes a struggle for the symbolic, if not physical, destruction of the adversary, to borrow the terms of Max Weber.⁶ This is what Georges Duhamel, from an "indigenous" point of view, said about the crisis of the 1940s:

I hardly dare confess that literary rivalries have always seemed to me to lack great venom, because they have the benefit of a natural emunctory: they are

settled in public with the aid of strokes of the pen and floods of ink. It has needed the disorders of the present times, when politics can be discerned everywhere under the guise of literature, for me to find enemies in the very place where I was determined to see only competitors or interlocutors.⁷

More difficult to untangle, also, for two major reasons: first, the shuffling of reference points, due to social upheaval; second, over-politicization, which attributed political significance to conducts beyond what was intended by the agents (this is why, even today, the attitudes of writers under the Occupation are generally understood from a strictly political point of view).

The crisis of representations engendered by the defeat and the redefinition of the space of possibles offered to writers in the new conditions of cultural production will first be presented from a synchronic perspective. Starting with the constraints that were specific to the situation, I will move on to the factors that were specific to the literary field, grasped through a quantitative study concerning the trajectories of 185 writers who were active in 1940.⁸ The factorial analysis that I conducted as the basis of this study illuminates the literary field's structuring principles during the Occupation. These principles, which I will later return to in more detail, shed light on the writers' attitudes during the "dark years," as well as the forms of their political engagement.

But these forms of politicization and the relations that they maintain with the categories of literary understanding cannot be grasped without an (at least partial) historicization of the representations that were associated with them, especially those that touch on the "responsibility" of the writer. Centered on the key moments in their crystallization, the diachronic perspective shows the persistence of the representations and the systems of opposition that preceded the crisis. From Agathon's (pseudonym of Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde) polemics against the New Sorbonne to the attacks on André Gide and *La NRF* after the Great War, along with mobilization for the "defense of the West," it was the representations forged twenty, even forty years earlier that reemerged at this time of national crisis, tirelessly renewed by the same actors (Henri Massis played the starring role) or their successors, while adapting them to the contemporary atmosphere. They were mobilized during the "bad masters quarrel," a key moment in the redefinition of the stakes and the redistribution of positions under the Occupation. The relationship to politics is considered here from the vantage point of discursive practices, which tend to differentiate themselves according to the four logics mentioned earlier: "good taste," "scandal," "art for art's sake," and "subversion."

The literary logics of engagement will be considered, thirdly, through the comparison of two singular trajectories, those of two Catholic novelists belong-

ing to the French Academy, Henry Bordeaux and François Mauriac. While the former was a champion of the new regime, the latter was the only “immortal,” as the members of the French Academy are called, to enter the literary Resistance. Centered on the relationship between dispositions, positions, and position-takings, in this case my analysis will privilege the opposition between the types of notoriety, temporal and symbolic, and its implications for the political evolution of these two writers.

The process of redefining the stakes was also driven by institutional struggles. After highlighting the systems of opposition that generally ground the divisions of the literary world under the Occupation, I will examine in the second part how they are embodied in four institutions: the French Academy, the Goncourt Academy, *La NRF*, and the Comité national des écrivains, and how they operate distinctively in each one. Neglected by literary history, the “institutions of literary life,” as Alain Viala has designated them, constitute “the best linkage between the structures of the field and those of the social sphere in which the field is located [. . .]. Their role is crucial, for they serve as spaces for potential dialogue and conflicts between the literary space and political, financial, and religious powers.”⁹ In this respect, they are a good indicator of the forms of autonomy and heteronomy that coexist in that space. As authorities of the literary field that regulate literary life, they help ensure its relative autonomy. They are one of the means by which the peer group exerts control over its members. However, in their conditions of existence and in their very mode of functioning, they bear principles of heteronomy, whether it is a question of dependency on the state, on those who hold temporal power, on the political field and the parties, on the laws of the market, or even on the media. These principles of heteronomy are fully revealed under an authoritarian regime, when the question of institutional survival enters more or less into contradiction with that of maintaining literary autonomy.

In a period of destructuring and representational crisis, these authorities constituted tangible reference points that guided writers’ orientation. While a number of forums disappeared, while certain literary juries, such as the Femina or the Interallié interrupted their activity, both academies and *La NRF* illustrate the literary field’s modes of survival at an institutional level. Ensuring continuity between the previous state of the field and its current state, they allow us to distinguish effects proper to the crisis from changes that were the result of a morphological evolution or previous conflicts. But above all, in a period of ideological war and national identity crisis, these institutions became a stake in the struggle between the acting forces. And this is all the more true since they all claimed to play a national role that justified their survival. Instruments of

literary power in their role as legitimizing authorities, they were also ordinarily powerful instruments of mobilization—to gather petition signatures, group memberships, and so forth—and potential instruments of propaganda, which the different political camps would try to exploit thanks to the crisis. One of the effects of the crisis was precisely the appearance of a new organization, the Comité national des écrivains, which was the principal organization of the literary Resistance.

Taken at once as full-fledged *agents*—endowed with a corporate name and an identity—and as codified groups of positions, these four authorities illustrate the state, media, aesthetic, and political logics that were at work in the literary field. In each one of them, intergenerational struggles, the opposition between forces of autonomy and forces of heteronomy, and ideological stakes had specific repercussions. These characteristics will be examined through a brief reminder of the conditions of their founding, a study of their morphology,¹⁰ and an analysis of their position, as well as of the conflicts that affected them from the 1930s to the Liberation. For clarity's sake, and also to highlight their proper institutional logics, which allow us to better understand their modes of functioning under the Occupation, I have dealt with them separately, while still accounting for the relations between them (the competition between the French Academy and *La NRF*, for example) and with other authorities (thus I will mention the Renaudot Prize in reference to the Goncourt Academy, when appropriate). The schism within *La NRF* team following its takeover by Drieu La Rochelle, who turned it into a “showcase” of the Collaboration, has led me to study the struggles to reappropriate its heritage that punctuated the recomposition of the literary field. They provoked a veritable war of reviews that transcended the demarcation line, and a fratricidal combat between Drieu and Aragon, the great orchestrator of “contraband literature” in the small reviews of the Southern zone. Illustrated by the relationships between its founders (Aragon, Jean Paulhan, Jacques Decour), the alliance between the Communists and non-Communists would make it possible, thanks to literary and militant solidarities, to set up the Comité national des écrivains and constitute a real underground literary community that was able to impose norms of conduct on writers starting in 1943.

The effects of the crisis were not limited to the Occupation period. They largely determined the modes of restructuring the literary field at the Liberation, which is the subject of the last part. Social upheaval favored the crystallization of a new generation that established itself starting in September 1944, particularly through the CNE and the confrontations surrounding the purge. The notion of the “responsibility of the writer” was at the heart of these strug-

gles. Having emerged from the shadows, the CNE claimed to inaugurate a new deontology for the writer's profession. But its power of excommunication was quickly contested. Rocked by internal divisions, the enterprises born of the Resistance also found themselves confronted with the traditional authorities, which intended to regain their place and take part in the national reconstruction. These institutional conflicts, through which the process of "normalization" began, will be sketched out in the last chapter. They culminated in 1953, date of the second amnesty law, after which the issues that the crisis raised, without disappearing, ceased to dominate literary life.¹¹

➤ The choice to found my analysis of writers' attitudes under the Occupation upon the logics proper to the literary world and its institutions, rather than upon preconceived categories of political history, has the merit of reevaluating the relative significance of some actors, to make others emerge, and to establish the share of continuities and ruptures in the collective and individual lives of the members of this atypical social group. A contribution to the social and cultural history of the "dark years," this book also helps to better determine the place of those years as a turning point in contemporary literary history, while shedding a different light on the forms of imbrication between literature and politics in what has been called a "literary nation."¹²