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Metamorphosis: The Making of Daniel Guérin, 1904-1930*

L'amour, enfin, [...] est la grande, la sérieuse, j'ai presque dit l'unique affaire de l'humanité.

–Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1850, 363–4)

If I found myself entirely absorbed in the service of the community, the reason behind it was my desire for self-realization.

–Mohandas Gandhi (2007, 155)

Daniel Guérin (1904-88) was a prominent member of the French left for half a century, and arguably one of the most original and most interesting. For the late Peter Sedgwick, Guérin's "achievement is scarcely matched in any writer of the Left" (1982, 219). An associate of the revolutionary syndicalists around Pierre Monatte in the early 1930s, he first came to prominence in the Popular Front years on the 'pivertiste' left of the PS-SFIO: the title of his 'témoignage militant', *Front populaire, révolution manquée* (1963), was, as Julian Jackson has put it, "an argument in itself" (Jackson 1990, xi). One of the first on the left to attach central importance to the struggle against colonialism, he became one of the best-known figures in anticolonial campaigns throughout the 1950s and 60s (Boulouque 2007; Porter 2011; Guérin 1954, 1956, 1964, 1973 and 1975). He was also one of the first in France to warn of the rising dangers of fascism, publishing *La Peste brune a passé par là...* in 1933 and, encouraged by Simone Weil and others, *Fascisme et grand capital* in 1936. He met Leon Trotsky in 1933 during the latter's exile in Barbizon, and would work with the Trotskyist resistance during the war years; a respected member of the Fourth International during the 1940s, he was a close, personal friend of Michel Raptis (*alias* Pablo) until his death (Guérin 1963; Berry 2005 and 2012). His controversial, libertarian Marxist interpretation of the French Revolution, *La lutte de classes sous la Première République* (1945) was judged by his friend C.L.R. James to be "one of the most important modern textbooks in [...] the study of marxism", "one of the great theoretical landmarks of our movement" (letter to Guérin, May 24 1956), and by Sartre (in *Questions de méthode*) to be "un des seuls apports enrichissants des

marxistes contemporains aux études historiques” (as quoted in Birchall 1996, 48 and Ducange 2011, 115). According to his then friend the sociologist Michel Crozier, Guérin identified in the 1950s—“l’âge d’or de la gauche intellectuelle”—as an “independent marxist” (Crozier 2002, 79, 86). Increasingly critical of what he saw as the ‘jacobinism’ inherent in Leninism, he went through what he described as a “classical anarchist” phase in the 1960s and can be credited with having influenced a generation of activists with his “rehabilitation” of anarchism (Guérin 1965a and 1965b; interviews with Anne Guérin and Daniel Guerrier, 2013), before playing a role in the resurgence of interest in ‘*Luxemburgisme*’ and becoming better known for his attempts to promote a ‘synthesis’ of Marxism and anarchism (Guérin 1971; Berry 2012). He was also regarded by 1968 as the grandfather of the gay liberation movement in France, as well as being a leading light in antimilitarist campaigns in the 1970s (Martel 1996, Berry 2004a 2004b). His writings have been repeatedly republished both in French and in translation.¹

Yet despite his influence during his lifetime and the continued interest in his writings, very little of a scholarly nature has been published about Guérin, who paradoxically enjoyed a certain fame and prestige, but at the same time suffered from marginalisation (and for a number of reasons: his militancy, his homosexuality, his refusal to conform to ideological tribalisms and pigeon-holing, and the fact that he never held an academic position or any position of authority). Even less has been written about his formative early years.²

The purpose of this article is thus to explore the ‘making of Daniel Guérin’ in two senses. Firstly, the aim is to describe and explain his transformation from a son of the *grande bourgeoisie* into a leading revolutionary socialist, examining his interaction with his social milieu as well as the experiences and intellectual influences which led him to reject bourgeois society in favour of other values—in the process undergoing a series of ‘conversions’.³ It is now a commonplace to refer to the dangers of relying on autobiographies as unproblematically truthful accounts, and the extent to which autobiography is on the contrary “a creative act of self-interpretation”, a practice which helps “to create the private individual through the narrating of a personal history” (Hindmarsh 2007, 3; Marshall 1995, 2).⁴ My second aim is thus to examine critically Guérin’s own retrospective representation of his early years through his several autobiographical or semi-autobiographical works, as well as

published and filmed interviews, and in particular the way in which he tended to impose a structure marked by a certain number of distinct “phases” in his life, punctuated by a series of crises (eg. Guérin 1984, 9–12 and 17). This public self-representation will be complemented and to an extent challenged through a close reading of his *Autobiographie de Jeunesse* (1972) and of his two published novels (1922; 1925), as well as an examination of other sources not intended for public consumption, notably his correspondence with François Mauriac in the 1920s and his copious ‘notes de lecture’ from a 1930 boat journey to which he retrospectively attached great significance.⁵ In the process, I hope to clarify the nature and roots of his later political positions and challenge the common representation of Guérin’s subsequent ideological evolution as protean.

Un fils de bourgeois

Beside its primary purpose as a “cure de psychothérapie” and an “autoanalyse” written as much for the author’s benefit as for the reader’s, Guérin’s autobiographical account of his youth (covering the period up to 1930) was intended to show “par quelles voies inhabituelles un fils de bourgeois a cherché à se confondre avec le peuple pour, finalement, vouloir se mettre au service de la Révolution” (1972, 9). The book would thus also serve, he pointed out, as an “initiation à la vie d’une famille bourgeoise d’avant le déluge”:

Si j’avais à produire un arbre généalogique, y voisineraient, entre autres, le maître-menuisier qui hébergea Robespierre et que l’on retrouve babouviste après Thermidor, une lectrice de la duchesse de Lamballe, mariée en hâte à un sans-culotte pour échapper au couperet, un général d’Empire, un banquier juif du roi de Bavière anobli pour avoir financé la guerre contre Bonaparte dont le petit-fils francisé quittera les siens et le catholicisme pour embrasser la religion saint-simonienne et épouser une juive de souche portugaise, un fils de député légitimiste qui reçoit à Rome la première communion des mains du pape, un maréchal de la noblesse à Vitebsk marié à une baronne balte, un meunier, un marbrier, un notaire, un maître-serrurier, etc. (1972, 13).

Guérin's immediate family were members of the Parisian left-bank bourgeoisie, the family's fortune having been made through its ownership of the Hachette publishing and bookselling firm (Mistler 1964). In the family network created by marriage and distant relations, Guérin wrote, one could detect "tous les fils invisibles du grand Capital: Banque, Industrie, Commerce, Transports, Edition, et caetera - dont la trame forme «le grand monde»" (Guérin 1972, 10). Guérin was in fact born into French high society in a period of bourgeois hegemony: by 1914 thirty per cent of Parisian wealth was controlled by just 0.4 per cent of the population (Magraw 1983, 364–5).⁶ Indeed, during the Popular Front years it was often claimed by the left that the entire French economy was ruled over by '200 families' - each one of which, Trotsky argued in 1936, was "incomparably more powerful" than the government.⁷ The '200 families' slogan may have been "a legend about the power of the bourgeois dynasties", but it was one which, as Magraw puts it, had "a basis in reality" (1983, 364–5). A chart which can be found in Guérin's own papers showing the genealogical and economic interrelationships of these notorious '200 families' makes very clear the importance of the Hachette clan, including the branch sired by Daniel's grandfather Edmond Guérin (1844-1932)—graduate of the *Ecole polytechnique* and of the *Ecole des Mines de Paris*, member of the *Chambre de Commerce de Nancy*, chairman of the *Société des Faïenceries de Lunéville et de Saint-Clément*, director of the *Verreries de Portieux*, chairman of the *Société des Salines de Rosières-Yarangéville*, director of the *Compagnie des Chemins de fer de l'Est* and of the *Compagnie de Châtillon-Commentry et Neuves-Maisons*, chairman of the *Chambre Syndicale des Faïenceries de France*, etc., etc..⁸

To a large extent, the story of Guérin's adoption of the cause of the oppressed was to be coterminous with his growing determination to reject all ties with his own class. Nevertheless, it becomes clear on reading the autobiographies and from interviews that Guérin's politics and more general outlook on life in fact owed much to the influence of his branch of the family: humanist, liberal and cultured, both his parents had been "passionnément dreyfusard" and had incurred the wrath of the more reactionary branches of their respective families as a result (Guérin 1972, 10 and 16). In Guérin's eyes, the latter were representative of "la bourgeoisie engoncée, sotté, rétrograde, laide, sans excuse" (1972, 94). We shall see later just to what extent

Guérin's intimate familiarity with the *grande bourgeoisie* underpinned his passionate rejection of the entire social system over which it ruled.

As for Daniel's immediate family, his father Marcel Guérin had studied the humanities, had published studies of Degas, Manet and Gauguin among others, and was a friend of Proust. In his youth, however, Marcel had served at Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel, and this exposure to the situation of the working class in London's East End had prompted him to read the *Communist Manifesto*, as well as the *Précis historique, théorique et pratique du socialisme* (1892) by Benoît Malon.⁹ These authors would later be joined in Marcel Guérin's library by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Peter Kropotkin and especially Leo Tolstoy.

The Tolstoyan influence was strong on the mother's side of the family too: a "polyglotte consommée", Daniel's great-grandmother had translated two of Tolstoy's novels into French (Guérin 1972, 15).¹⁰ From her father, Eugène d'Eichthal (1844-1936)—sociologist, economist, poet, music-lover, member of the *Institut de France*, director of the *Ecole Libre des Science Politiques* and rail magnate—Juliette had, in Guérin's words, inherited a robust intelligence and a solid literary and musical culture, as well as a heightened sense of the moral values of her milieu (1972, 16). Eugène d'Eichthal's father, Gustave (1804-86), had been a disciple of Saint-Simon and an anti-slavery campaigner, publishing his *Lettres sur la race noire et la race blanche* in 1839 (Guérin 1972, 104).¹¹ Daniel's godfather was Raymond Koechlin (1860-1931), professor of diplomatic history at the *Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques*, art expert and collector, and Secretary General of the Society of the Friends of the Louvre.

Such, then, was the social and cultural milieu into which Daniel Guérin was born on 19 May 1904, the eldest of three children. The children were looked after by nursemaids and a beloved governess, Fräulein Gütthe, with whom they spoke German. Daniel was of course educated privately. Even when it came to swimming lessons at the age of 10, only the best would do: the young Daniel's instructor was the Englishman Thomas Burgess, the second person to swim the English Channel after Captain Webb. In 1913, Daniel was sent to the *Lycée Montaigne*, next to the Luxembourg Gardens in the very bourgeois sixth *arrondissement*, and then to its secondary partner, the prestigious *Lycée Louis-le-Grand*, just round the corner in the

fifth. The children spent a lot of time visiting their grandparents' château in Orly (which today houses the town hall) and, later, their house in St.-Germain-en-Laye;¹² but the main family home was a magnificent building in the Boulevard St.-Michel, "un immeuble de vieille bourgeoisie, comme on n'en fait plus, construit par une seule et même famille enrichie dans l'édition entre 1850 et 1870, à l'occasion du percement du boulevard Saint-Germain" (1972, 35).

‘Pendant qu’ils se tuaient..’

It is a cliché but nonetheless true to say that the war of 1914-18 represented a national trauma and brought in its wake profound changes in French society. It put an end, first, to that period of bourgeois self-confidence which became known retrospectively and nostalgically—not only, but especially, by the bourgeoisie—as the *Belle Epoque*:

La “Belle Epoque”—belle pour une minorité de privilégiés—prenait fin; entraînait en voie de dissolution une société où le tragique était, dans une large mesure, absent, où rien de fondamental n’était, au moins dans l’immédiat, menacé ou remis en question, où l’on pouvait, surtout dans le camp des nantis, s’abandonner à l’insouciance, accorder une relative confiance à la vie et à l’avenir, se laisser engourdir dans une sécurité trompeuse mais plaisante, où ni le spectre de la guerre des classes ni celui de la guerre étrangère ne troublaient sérieusement les nuits des heureux de ce monde” (1972, 55).

Guérin’s mother and grandmother signed up with the Red Cross and served as nurses. Accompanying his mother, Daniel witnessed with his own eyes some of the horrific injuries of the soldiers - including the last moments of a German prisoner of war who became for him no longer an “Alboche”, but “un homme tout court, et qui s’en allait dans les convulsions du tétanos” (62). Like many others, Daniel also ‘adopted’ a soldier (a ‘filleul de guerre’) with whom he corresponded and to whom he sent parcels, meeting him when he came home on leave. His guilty feelings grew at leading “une vie de prince, trop douce, trop protégée, trop choyée” (62).

His feelings of revulsion at the nature of war were shared by his “antimilitarist” father: “l’absurde tuerie le dégoûtait jusqu’à la nausée.” (68, 63)

Invited to participate in some propaganda work designed to boost national morale, Marcel Guérin refused outright, writing afterwards to his friend Jean Lazard: “Je reconnais que j’ai eu une crise d’anarchisme. C’est mon vieux sang jacobin qui bouillonne de temps en temps” (1972, 64). But these pacifist leanings would resurface periodically, with news of further pointless mass slaughters provoking in him, in his own words, “des bouillonnements d’antimilitarisme et d’anarchisme” (64). Towards the end of the Great War, the fourteen year old Daniel dedicated a poem to his father, ‘Pendant qu’ils se tuaient...’, which evoked a feeling of profound incomprehension in the face of the calm and beauty of the scenes of nature and of everyday life around him, “Quand par tout l’univers résonne la souffrance, Quand l’homme stupéfait a perdu l’espérance” (1922, 56–8). Many years later, reading his father’s correspondence from this period would make Daniel realize how much his own attitudes owed to “cet-anarcho-pacifisme en ébullition” (1972, 64).

Religious crisis and spirituality

Guérin was raised in the catholic church, albeit not particularly devoutly. In his autobiography he refers to his parents’ “vague jansenism”, “attitude plus morale que religieuse” (1972, 73), and many years later in an interview with the philosopher and journalist Christian Chabanis he would comment that his grandfather was an atheist, his father was completely irreligious, and although his mother took him to mass on Sundays it was largely “une religion mondaine” (quoted in Chabanis 1973, 222–3). Be that as it may, in 1915, Daniel took his first communion, privately—“on me tenait, comme toujours, à l’écart du commun”—and the following year he was sent to a catholic school, the *Ecole Bossuet* (Guérin 1972, 64). The repeated religious exercises, the sumptuous ceremonies, the candles and the incense induced in Guérin “une crise de mysticisme” and he experienced a taste, he claimed, of “ce que les croyants appellent vie spirituelle” (72). The feeling and the certainty would not, however, last for long: “Je n’étais guère doué pour le surnaturel” (72). Indeed, so negative was the impression made on him by the authoritarianism and the hypocrisy of the priests themselves at the *Ecole Bossuet* that the experience seems to have contributed to his loss of faith and the beginnings of his lifelong anticlericalism.

The real ‘crisis’, as the young Guérin experienced it, would occur soon afterwards. Whilst turning him away from religion in some respects, the *Ecole Bossuet* had nevertheless instilled in him “une certaine tendance à la croyance” (in Chabanis 1973, 221). But at the age of 14, Guérin definitively lost not only his belief in the catholic church but his faith in christianity itself on reading his mother’s copy of Tolstoy’s diaries:

Je l’ai dévoré avec une ardeur bouleversée. Ce livre m’a inspiré, au début, aucune méfiance puisqu’il est l’œuvre d’un chrétien, d’un croyant à la recherche du vrai christianisme, au surplus d’un apôtre social dont mon père, jadis, a suivi les enseignements. Il me parle, pourtant, ce livre, un langage que je n’ai jamais entendu. Il met en doute le caractère de vérité absolue des mythes et des croyances qui naissent chez les peuples aux époques et lieux les plus divers. [...] Tolstoï met en cause toute la formation que j’ai reçue. Le mal vient, selon lui, de ce que je faisais peu cas de la raison. C’est le fruit de la fausse éducation qui m’a été donnée dans l’enfance. [...] Le premier des biens à acquérir, c’est mon affranchissement religieux. [...] Je me donne sans réserve à Tolstoï (1972, 80–1).¹³

The end of childhood

It seems that the post-armistice mood of pleasure-seeking—“Ayant trop souffert, ou trop fait carême, il fallait aux gens des jouissances brutales et, dans les griseries du plaisir et de la vitesse, l’oubli du sang versé à flots” (1972, 87)—combined with the sexual obsessions of adolescence (frequent masturbation and, in Guérin’s case, a predilection for masochism and the smell of leather) encouraged Guérin’s rebellious tendencies, and he became a less than ideal student, deciding that “la vraie vie” lay elsewhere: “Je crois, ma foi, que j’étais, déjà, un contestataire” (89).

He began to commit his thoughts to paper and to write poetry, and declared to his parents his wish to become a writer: conventional study and the prospect of university no longer appealed, and he longed instead to leave all that behind him for a life as a bohemian: “J’avais un extrême besoin d’indépendance” (89). He began to

frequent salons, and in 1920 was a guest at a reception at the *Académie française* where he came across many of the literary celebrities of the time, including André Gide, Paul Valéry and his particular favourite the poet and novelist Anna de Noailles.¹⁴ The same year, he and a group of school friends—all “ardent communists” who criticized him for having “abominably bourgeois” literary tastes—created a monthly literary review they called *La Gerbe du Quartier Latin*, which ran for three years (Guérin 1972, 108–9).¹⁵ He continued to write, producing amongst other things short stories and plays in verse: “J’y défoule une pétarade d’hypersexualité insatisfaite. [...] La vie selon la chair que je ne peux pas encore vivre, je la mène en bouts rimés” (113–5).

In 1922, Guérin managed to pluck up the courage to take a collection of his poems written since 1918, *Le Livre de la Dix-Huitième Année*, to a publisher. Strongly influenced by Baudelaire amongst others, they bore witness to the depth of Guérin’s emotional life and the anguish caused by the conflict between the yearning for platonic love and that for sensuality (“la tyrannie des organes” as Proudhon put it [1850, 363]). Guérin was delighted to receive encouraging letters from a number of literary figures, including Maurice Barrès, René Boylesve, François Mauriac and especially Colette, who wrote: “C’est bien émouvant, Monsieur, la naissance d’un vrai poète.”¹⁶ Guérin was subsequently invited to and fêted at literary salons, including that of Mme Demange-Barrès, sister of Maurice Barrès.

Guérin continued to read Tolstoy as well as the classics of French literature. Tolstoy’s novel *Resurrection* made a particular impression—“peut-être à cause du procès passionnément intenté à une société inique”, he comments in his autobiography (1972, 94–5). One cannot however help but be struck by certain parallels: *Resurrection* recounts the moral and spiritual crisis of a cosseted and self-centred young aristocrat caused by his discovery of the suffering of the poor, and his subsequent determination to reject his own class and the artificiality of society in order help the oppressed, no matter the cost to himself...

Student politics

In 1921 Guérin began his studies at the *Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques*.

“Intuitively on the left” (in Chabanis 1973, 223), his accounts are full of disparaging remarks about snobbish, royalist teachers and favourable ones about progressive, republican teachers. It was also at *Sciences Po* that, as he would later put it, Guérin discovered a whole new world through the lecture course on nineteenth-century socialism delivered by Elie Halévy (Guérin 1972, 123).¹⁷ Guérin was also a regular and (at least initially) enthusiastic participant in the famous *Conférence Molé-Tocqueville*. Modelled on life in the Chamber of Deputies, the *Molé* served as a realistic preparation for accession to a political career and was thus attended by members of France’s future political and diplomatic elite (Le Béguec 1980). According to Guérin, the debates there between left and right were just as vehement as in parliament and even more simplistically sectarian. Guérin sat with what he described as the “extrême gauche marxiste”, but in the end, the *Conférence Molé-Tocqueville* led to his being forever disgusted by parliamentarism (1972, 125–6).

By this stage, then, Guérin identified explicitly with the extreme left in the context of the increasingly polarized debates of the period between extreme right and extreme left: “Maurras contre Marx”, as the *Autobiographie de Jeunesse* puts it (126–7). It was around this time that Elie Halévy persuaded Guérin to choose, for the subject of his final-year dissertation, the social and political ideas of Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869), the royalist poet turned Republican politician and reformer (Guérin 1925a). What he found particularly interesting and admirable in Lamartine was the fact that, for all his failings, “un jeune écrivain légitimiste et catholique ait pu—uniquement par générosité d’âme et logique de raisonnement—apercevoir, avant la plupart de ses contemporains, l’acuité de la lutte de classes moderne” (1972, 129). An article on Lamartine’s social ideas which Guérin subsequently published in the *Revue des Sciences Politiques* in 1924 seems to have been his first publication on social or political issues (1924).

Versailles and the *Boche*

Guérin's first overtly political act, if it can be called that, was to listen to the debate in the Chamber of Deputies on the day in 1923 when the Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré spoke in defence of the French occupation of the Ruhr, for Guérin "une des plus sinistres bévues du siècle", and when the socialist leader Léon Blum's speech attacking the occupation - "courageux et prophétique" in Guérin's eyes - was interrupted by cries of "Juif! Juif! Juif!" (Guérin 1972,133). Guérin had already by this time come to the conclusion that the Treaty of Versailles was utterly iniquitous, merely storing up problems for the future. He did not share the anti-German feelings common to many of the French. In 1921, Guérin's father had sent the 17 year-old to Mainz – in an area then occupied by the French military - so that he could perfect his German. He had taken lodgings with a war widow and her brother, a teacher and musician. When the latter came home one evening covered in blood, having been struck by a member of the French occupying forces, this reinforced Guérin's negative opinion of the French government's policy and his sympathy for ordinary Germans. Guérin enjoyed himself immensely in Germany and got on very well with the 'Boches' he had been taught to hate but with whom he came to feel he had many affinities (120). The occupation of the Ruhr was supposed to have been carried out in order to force Germany to pay reparations, but the interests of the iron and steel industry bosses seemed obvious to Guérin. Just days before the occupation, Guérin claimed, he and his father met the steel and shipping magnate René Fould at the house of a mutual friend: "Le maître de forges au groin repoussant se frotte les mains: 'Nous avons pensé à tout, tout prévu, tout organisé'" (133).¹⁸

François Mauriac

In 1923, during a family holiday in Normandy, Guérin went to visit the painter and writer Jacques-Emile Blanche, and found him in the garden in the process of painting the portrait of François Mauriac.¹⁹ Mauriac had read *Le Livre de la Dix-Huitième Année*, as we have seen, but this was the first time he and Guérin had met. They chatted while Blanche painted. The two got on immediately. Mauriac was particularly attracted to the rebellious spirit and demanding intelligence of this "petit païen" (Letter to Jeanne Mauriac, quoted in Barré 2009, 380). In him, Mauriac recognised "à la fois son double et son contraire au même âge: un jeune bourgeois marginal et

révolté, mais beaucoup plus radical et émancipé dans sa façon de vivre, d'être et de penser" (380).

At first, Mauriac took seriously his role as guardian or mentor, responding to Guérin's assertion that he needed Mauriac: "Il est vrai que je peux réaliser pour vous ce vœu de Barrès adolescent: 'un ami qui serait moi-même plus âgé'", he wrote. "Je vous connais dans la mesure où je me connais et j'entends ce que vous ne dites pas" (letter to Guérin, 19 November 1924, in Mauriac 1989, 99). Guérin, for his part, wrote in his autobiography of that day in Blanche's garden: "Bien qu'il soit mon aîné de près de vingt ans, Mauriac me fait don, ce jour-là, d'une amitié qui perdra vite le formalisme d'un patronage littéraire pour déboucher sur l'intimité et la confiance réciproque" (1972, 135). Guérin quickly became the only person to whom Mauriac felt able to confess his deepest and most troubling feelings, and the profound emotional and spiritual crisis through which Mauriac was going at the time led in a short time to a reversal of roles between the two men.²⁰

The following year, after having been forced by his father to take a job in a bank, Guérin started what was to be a long correspondence with Mauriac. He began it with a nostalgic letter about his loss of faith ("Mystique inconsolable, je le suis, vous le savez. Et cependant plus éloigné de Dieu que jamais" [Undated letter (1924)], "les croyants sont plus heureux que nous" [Letter of 25 April 1924 as quoted in Mauriac 1989, 92–3]), the believer Mauriac, in reply, attempting to console him and encourage faith and moral steadfastness (Guérin 1972, 138). But how, Guérin objected, can one practise a religion which claims to be in the service of the poor and yet which for centuries has been an instrument of oppression in the hands of the powerful? What is more, he argued, it is religion which dirties physical love, "l'acte le plus naturel, le plus sain", by imprinting upon it "les stigmates du Péché" (139) Mauriac's response was to insist that "ce n'est pas la religion qui prête du tragique à la chair, ce tragique *est* réellement, et il faut être aveugle pour ne pas le voir"; and a part of Guérin seems to have shared this feeling that the "frénésie des instincts d'en bas" undermined the "purity" and "nobility" of which humankind is capable (Letter of 2 March 1926 as quoted in Mauriac 1989, 106). This conversation between the two would be repeated in one form or another for some time and would never be resolved. Thirty years later - shortly before coming out - Guérin would argue strongly that sexual liberation was an

essential aspect of the quest for human freedom in general: “Si l’on veut faire des hommes libres, il faut désaliéner, et non réprimer, la Chair” (Guérin 1959, 10).²¹

Towards the end of 1924, Guérin had to complete his military service: six months at the officer school in Saint-Cyr, followed by service as a sub-lieutenant with the reserve in Strasbourg.²² It was during his time in Strasbourg that Guérin, after being tormented by his confused and confusing emotional and sexual needs for several years, finally found happiness in an affectionate (albeit sexually unconsummated) relationship with a sergeant from a different unit: “Ainsi, je n’étais plus un monstre, un paria. Je recevais ma part de joie, comme chaque être vivant. [...] A Strasbourg, je commençais à vivre” (Guérin 1972, 154). Nevertheless, he still struggled with feelings of guilt. A rather allusive letter to Mauriac provoked a fervent reply from the catholic urging him to resist the temptations of the flesh created by his “appétit de tendresse”, so that he might “live”. Guérin comments: “Oui, certes, je voudrais vivre. Mais, pour enfin vivre, il me fallait, d’abord, cesser de résister à l’appel même de *ma nature*. Et non prêter l’oreille au paralysant interdit religieux” (154).

Points of departure

In the autumn of 1925, two texts appeared which Guérin had written during his military service. The first, entitled ‘Point de Départ’, was published in the literary magazine, *La Revue Hebdomadaire*, with an introduction by Mauriac (who had advised Guérin on a first draft). It is in some ways characteristic of the kind of ‘generationalist’ writing which appeared in this period, and the humanist’s malaise to which it gives voice chimes with that of other intellectuals who had lived through the Great War and its aftermath (Gibson 1970; Wohl 1980; Green 1989). Underlining the extraordinary situation of his own generation, Guérin emphasises the significance of the rupture represented by the Great War. He also attacks not only the complacency of pre-war Europe’s belief in the solidity of its “vieilles idoles” - its political institutions, its colonial conquests and its liberal economy – but also the responsibility of earlier generations for the catastrophe of 1914:

En voulant construire, ils ont préparé la catastrophe par laquelle tout périra. La guerre 1914-1918 n'est qu'un commencement. Le capitalisme a forgé de tels moyens de destruction, créé de tels points de friction entre les peuples que l'incendie doit fatalement se rallumer.

He drew on the Indian writer and philosopher Tagore to question the value of the merely material advantages of modern capitalism: "Mais l'intelligence, mais le besoin d'amour?" With the decline of religious belief, he asks: "Quelle nourriture nous reste-t-il? Au fond du regard de chacun de nos contemporains, nous lisons l'insatisfaction totale, la soif, le vide" (Guérin 1925c).

The second text to appear in 1925 was Guérin's first novel, *L'Enchantement du Vendredi Saint*, whose main purpose he described as being to "exhaler, cette fois à travers le rideau transparent d'une fiction, les drames de la tendresse et du désir inassouvis qui avaient empoisonné ma jeunesse" (Guérin 1972, 160). But there is an evident spiritual theme in the novel too. The story's central character Armand is tormented by the conflict between reason, the passions and "le divin besoin d'aimer" (Guérin 1925b, 47). At a moment of crisis in the story, he turns to the Jansenist Pascal, and reads:

Qu'est-ce donc que nous crie cette avidité et cette impuissance, sinon qu'il y a eu autrefois dans l'homme un véritable bonheur, dont il ne lui reste maintenant que la marque et la trace toute vide, et qu'il essaye inutilement de remplir de tout ce qui l'environne, recherchant des choses absentes le secours qu'il n'obtient pas des présentes, mais qui en sont toutes incapables, parce que le gouffre infini ne peut être rempli que par un objet infini et immuable, c'est-à-dire que par Dieu même? (Pascal 1958, no.425)

"De telles phrases", Armand notes, "suffisent à bouleverser la vie d'un homme." Soon after, he attends a performance of Wagner's opera *Parsifal*: the novel's title is a reference to the "*Karfreitagszauber*", the "magic of Good Friday" which, in the climactic scene in the final act, renews the world and redeems humankind, now freed from its burden of sin. Whilst still resistant to the church's dogmas (despite his efforts to rediscover his faith), Armand had found a way forward and a kind of grace.

Starting from zero

In 1925, Guérin was sent to work for the family business, Hachette, in the La Chapelle district of Paris, close to the Gare du Nord:

C'était un quartier authentiquement prolétarien , où régnait, pour ma joie, la casquette et où des chanteurs, installés sous le métro aérien, interprétaient, en s'accompagnant de l'accordéon, devant un large cercle de badauds portant, pour mon régal, le pantalon de velours à côtes: "Valencia, terre exquise, où la brise..." Nous prenions nos repas du midi dans des caboulots bourrés d'ouvriers, qui redemandaient du pain, restaient très longtemps à table, lisaient leur journal après le café, lutinaient les serveuses. Je recommençais ma vie à zéro. (Guérin 1972, 162)²³

The metro journey from Saint-Michel to La Chapelle represented a journey of discovery in sexual as well as social terms for Guérin. It also coincided with the publication of André Gide's groundbreaking study of and apologia for homosexuality, *Corydon*, after reading which Guérin wrote "une lettre de gratitude éperdue" to the author (163).²⁴ Guérin was soon enjoying the first of a series of gay sexual relationships with young working-class men. Guérin's parents had now let him have two attic rooms in the family home in the Boulevard St.-Michel, but with a separate entrance. Guérin took to bringing his lovers back here. Of one such lover, Marcel, Guérin writes: "En le recevant, mon propos n'était pas seulement d'ordre sentimental: il y entraît déjà un appétit de transgression sociale. Je lançais un défi à ma classe" (167). Mauriac warned him, in a letter of 2 March 1926, against his "greed", his "insatiability": "Est-ce aimer que cette chasse, que cette quête perpétuelle? Ne sombrez pas trop dans le plaisir" (Mauriac 1989, 105; quoted in Barré 2009, 388). Indeed, despite his rejection of the christian attitude to sexual pleasure, Guérin confessed that he soon wearied of the string of brief encounters: "Je n'étais pas content de moi. J'avais besoin d'aimer" (Guérin 1972, 171).

The road to Damascus

In 1927 Guérin would embark on another life-changing episode when he was offered the job of running the Syrian and Lebanese branch of the Agence Générale de Librairie, a subsidiary of Hachette, based in Beirut:

Ce départ allait m'entraîner beaucoup plus loin que le Levant. Sans trop le savoir alors, je décrochais, non seulement du giron familial, mais encore de bien d'autres rivages: de la société bourgeoise comme de l'Europe. Je mettais le cap sur une succession de terres inconnues: l'Orient, l'Islam, l'Asie, la décolonisation, et, au-delà, le socialisme.²⁵

It was probably for his anticolonial journalism and campaigns, especially from the 1950s, that Guérin would in later years be most widely known, and this was where it began.²⁶ He would comment in interview years later that his time in the Levant “m’a appris, simplement, le phénomène colonial”.²⁷ Indeed the first thing he noticed on disembarkation was the prevalence of “uniforms and prostitutes”, a sign of the region’s forcible occupation by the French.²⁸ And settling in Beirut to take up his new position, Guérin made a positive decision to live on the Arab side of town rather than in the European quarter by the port, and “changer, si possible, d’identité”.²⁹

It was during his time in Lebanon that Guérin met Louis Massignon, professor at the *Collège de France* and an expert on Islam and sufism, who would exert a great influence on him. Guérin was profoundly moved by a talk he gave in Beirut in 1928, during which - in front of an audience “de galonnés, de décorés, de profiteurs et de soutanes”³⁰ - he repudiated the use of force, deception and dishonesty by the colonial power: “L’idée française d’un rayonnement universel désintéressé de notre patrie dans le monde subit une crise [...] Chacun de nous a une part de responsabilité personnelle.”³¹

Guérin would soon have the chance to learn more about decolonisation. The following year, he met Ibrahim Bey Hanano, who in 1919 had led a revolt against French forces around Aleppo in Syria.³² This was not the first time Guérin had come face to face with the leader of a national liberation movement. On the boat from Marseille to Beirut in September 1927 he had met and befriended Emir Khaled, grandson of Abd el-Kader, leader of the earliest resistance to the French colonisation

of Algeria. Emir Khaled had launched the *Mouvement pour l'égalité ou la réforme* in Algeria in 1919 and, despite having been exiled, was made honorary president of the *Etoile nord-africaine*.³³ Thanks to his encounters with these two figures, Guérin became converted to “Arab nationalism”.³⁴

Indeed, Guérin's representation of his life in the Levant was of a contrast between these two different worlds between which he slipped “without transition”. He had one foot in Beirut, leading the usual, “worthless” life of a privileged member of the French expatriate community (“cette France de pacotille”); the other foot was in Damascus, “au coeur de l'Islam”, a life which included on one occasion, attendance at an all night ceremony of the sufi Aissawa sect, with its ecstatic rhythms and mystic whirling dervishes.³⁵ Guérin became more and more attracted to Islam, reading the Koran with great diligence and listening enthralled to descriptions of Mecca and tales of the English Arabist and muslim convert St. John Philby, recounted by the French consul in Saudi Arabia: “J'ai un faible pour cette religion sans prêtres—comme un peu plus tard, je serai attiré par le bouddhisme, religion sans dieux.”³⁶ Guérin spent the summer of 1928 editing and to some extent researching and writing the *Guide bleu* for Syria, a task which led him to study, amongst many other sources on the region's ancient history, art and religion, Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Alfred Loisy's *Les Mystères païens et le Mystère chrétien* (1919): “L'histoire des religions est, à ce moment, ce qui excite le plus mon irréligieuse curiosité.”³⁷

One of the things which Guérin had been working on so hard in Beirut in his own time was a second novel, *La Vie selon la chair*. This was finally published at the beginning of 1929. The title of the book is a biblical reference: “Car si vous vivez selon la chair, vous mourrez; mais si par l'Esprit vous mortifiez les œuvres du corps, vous vivrez” (Romains VIII/13). In it, Guérin gave vent to what he called his “orages charnels”.³⁸ A psychological novel, it follows the intertwined emotional lives of four characters, and its publication caused something of a brouhaha at home. This is not surprising, given the fairly grim picture the novel paints of four lost souls struggling to find happiness in a decadent, cynical and sexually promiscuous society. It is also explicit for its time (although the treatment of homosexuality is relatively muted). Guérin's family was horrified. Mauriac, in whose novels the bestiality of sex is a recurrent theme, wrote to his young *confidant*: “La vie selon la chair—la vie selon l'esprit: il faut choisir.”³⁹ And yet in a sense the novel is very moral. A recurrent

theme is the characters' constant attempts to find meaning and a new direction in life, the need to make choices about what course to follow, the need in fact for self-discipline: the end of the story inconclusively leaves the main characters on the threshold of new departures, searching for "une valeur capable de remplacer la chair."⁴⁰

Deeply hurt by what seemed to him to be savage and unfair attacks on the novel, Guérin felt rising within him "l'aspiration à la fuite, à un nouveau changement d'identité" pushing him towards "une rupture."⁴¹ On 29 November, he left Beirut (meeting the Vietnamese anticolonialist Huynh Thuc Khang on the way), but, in turmoil and unable to settle in Paris, he decided to devote a three month retreat in the Far East to studying the political, economic and social questions which he had not yet been able to examine in any depth. He left again for Marseille and, on 23 December, without notifying his parents, set sail for the Far East aboard the cargo boat, *Bangkok* - which, ironically, was carrying munitions for the French expeditionary forces in the colonies in Indochina.

On a slow boat to Indochina

The *Bangkok* was a freighter, not a passenger-ship, and he was given "une minuscule cabine, fort inconfortable, mais pour moi paradisiaque".⁴² Like a monk in his cell, he devoted himself to the intense, solitary study of a small library of books he had taken with him:

Pourquoi diable avais-je emporté *Le Capital* de Marx, *La Révolution sociale* et le *Programme socialiste* de Kautsky, *La révolution défigurée* de Trotsky, *Les Réflexions sur la violence* de Georges Sorel, l'autobiographie de Gandhi, et des livres sur Proudhon, Jaurès, Lénine, sur l'Inde et la Chine, sur l'impérialisme américain, sur la Russie des Soviets, sur le travaillisme et le syndicalisme ouvrier? Je cherche aujourd'hui à retrouver, sans y parvenir, la genèse de cette soudaine et multiple curiosité. Socialiste, il me semble l'avoir été, dès la sortie de l'enfance, mais d'une façon assez vague, et ne l'avoir été que par accès.⁴³

Whilst on board the *Bangkok*, Guérin got on well with the crew (several of them PC members) and spurned the company of the ship's officers, whom he found reactionary and loathsome. He also took his turn shifting wheelbarrows full of coal from the ship's hold to the engine-room. Afterwards, he would return to his tiny cabin, physically tired, and in stifling heat try to get to grips with the different schools of thought within socialism. The effort exhausted him:

Je me cognais la tête contre un certain nombre de murs. Mes travaux d'approche en direction du socialisme étaient hérissés de pierres d'achoppement, lourds de dilemmes. Socialisme par en haut (léniniste) ou par en bas (syndicaliste révolutionnaire)? Lutte de classes marxiste ou «amour» tolstoïen et non-violence gandhiste? Pour ou contre la Russie stalinienne? Pour ou contre le Parti communiste? Pour ou contre l'anarchisme? La tension n'était pas loin de me faire éclater le crâne.⁴⁴

Readings

An examination of Guérin's notes from this reading provides us with some insights into his thinking at this point, shortly before his experiences in Indochina would trigger a radical change in his life. His retrospective description of this episode as representing his "apprentissage du marxisme" seems misleading, or at least too simple.⁴⁵ Guérin clearly adopted a Marxist approach, and was in some respects rather orthodox, even deterministic. Yet he also had significant reservations about certain types of Marxism which cast a new light on his later political and ideological itinerary.

Firstly, he complained of the willingness of so many to create for themselves a "Marx standardisé, avec une figure redoutable de prophète barbu", without actually having read him.⁴⁶ He held the bolsheviks in particular responsible for transforming Marxism into "une espèce de religion mystique, avec Lénine pour pontife", and he regarded this as a "betrayal" of Marx.⁴⁷ Stalin had taken this even further, turning Marxism, "système essentiellement expérimental, souple, opportuniste", into "une sorte de religion, fossilisé à l'Etat de dogme".

Second, his reflections on debates concerning the rôle of the state, both as a reformist tool and during a revolutionary ‘transitional stage’, were synthetic. He disagreed with the absolute antistatism of Sorel and the anarchists, and accepted the need to conquer state power.⁴⁸ But he saw this as the end-point of a ‘bottom-up’ process during which the trade unions would take over the workplaces and ensure continued production, in line with traditional syndicalist ideas: “L’Etat nouveau sera simplement l’émulation d’une sorte de CGT, qui n’aura qu’à sanctionner ce qui aura été accompli.”⁴⁹ He thus rejected Kautsky’s view of parliamentarism as a way of familiarising workers with the practical problems of administration: this is “le moyen le plus sûr de démoraliser, d’embourgeoiser les représentants du prolétariat.” The experience of Ramsay MacDonald’s Labour governments of 1924 and 1929 and Edouard Herriot’s *Cartel des gauches* of 1924 were there to demonstrate that “un gouvernement socialiste au pouvoir est absolument impuissant.”⁵⁰ The only realistic strategy was the general strike.⁵¹ He also agreed wholeheartedly with Sorel’s condemnation of “la paix sociale”, noting of the employer class: “Je connais ces gens mieux que ne les connaissent les ouvriers; je ne les ai pas vus à l’usine, mais à table, au bal et au fumoir: il n’y a rien à espérer d’eux.”⁵²

Guérin’s notes also include criticisms of bolshevism which may seem surprising given his membership of the Fourth International in the 1940s. Firstly, he saw the October revolution as “un coup de main blanquiste”.⁵³ Secondly, he reserved some of his more impassioned criticisms for Trotsky, in particular with regard to what seemed to Guérin to be his casual acceptance of violence: “Terrible. Non, je me refuse à croire que ce soit sur une immense flaque de sang qu’il faille édifier l’ordre social nouveau.”⁵⁴ He nevertheless had great personal admiration for Lenin and Trotsky, both “des hommes de génie”.

As for the PC in France, it was guilty of what was for Guérin an unpardonable crime: having created within the proletariat “une scission presque irréparable”. He lamented the PC’s “pauvreté doctrinale” and its “méthodes staliniennes de dictature intellectuelle”.

From the 1960s, Guérin’s name would be associated with the attempt to ‘rehabilitate’ anarchism and to promote a synthesis of Marxism and anarchism, but at this stage in his life, he clearly equated anarchism with absolute individualism and

total licence, the opposite of the collectivism which had his blessing.⁵⁵ Proudhon was dismissed as “un polycritique et non un constructeur”, “un déplorable anarchiste”.⁵⁶

Strikingly, many of Guérin’s reading notes either concerned religion or spirituality, or the importance to socialism of idealism and morality. Gandhi was superior to Sorel because the former always held up “un idéal spirituel au terme de son action”.⁵⁷ Guérin also read Tolstoy’s letters to Gandhi, as well as his *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (1893): “Il y a dans Tolstoï et dans Gandhi, son fils spirituel, une lumière précieuse qui peut éclairer le marxisme et le prolonger dans l’Amour.”⁵⁸ “L’Amour” is a word which appears surprisingly often throughout Guérin’s notes. The idea that a fulfilling human life cannot be achieved through an exclusive emphasis on merely material benefits or physical enjoyment also recurs in Guérin’s notes with some frequency, and was a belief expressed both with regard to some socialists’ understanding of the ‘good life’—“C’est là le terrible danger, le seul danger du marxisme”⁵⁹—and to the developing consumer society under twentieth-century capitalism—“le triomphe définitif de la matière sur l’esprit, la mort de toute vie intérieure et de toute spiritualité.”⁶⁰ Guérin was drawn both to the total personal commitment implied by the bolshevik idea of the ‘professional revolutionary’ and to Tolstoy’s and Gandhi’s ideas on the priority to be attached to moral self-improvement. Bourgeois socialists, he wrote, can never understand working-class realities unless they are completely “expropriated”, cut off from their roots and forced to live as workers: “Ce rôle doit être vécu réellement”...⁶¹ In his notes on Sorel, Guérin commented that “ce n’est pas par l’idéologie que l’on a atteint au socialisme, mais par le corps et par le cœur”, and in his autobiographies and interviews, Guérin was often keen to emphasize the *visceral* nature of his political commitment, derived from his direct personal knowledge of the bourgeoisie and of the colonial system, but also from his sexual experiences:

Si elle s’appuyait sur de vastes lectures, ma mue en direction du socialisme n’était pas objective, d’ordre intellectuel. Elle était bien plutôt subjective, physique, issue des sens et du cœur.⁶²

He felt at that time as if the “metamorphosis” he was undergoing was a kind of sublimation of his own sexuality in his new aim in life: “la libération de tous, qui serait, en même temps, la mienne.”⁶³

Finally, Guérin's reading notes (Folder XVII) include the plan for a book entitled *La Ligne Droite du Socialisme*. The plan is accompanied by a hand-drawn diagram which emphasises Guérin's rejection of both bolshevism and reformism, as well as his belief that socialism needed nevertheless to be grounded in Marxism, but clearly a different kind of Marxism.

Figure 1: The 'ligne droite du socialisme'

Vietnam

The *Bangkok* finally arrived in the port of Saigon towards the end of January 1930. Guérin very quickly understood the extent to which Europeans in Vietnam clearly had a reputation among the indigenous population as racist brutes. He witnessed the skeletal state of the workers employed to produce opium, “une des sources principales de revenus de l’administration française”, and “une exploitation sans merci, aussi bien économique que raciale” in the coal mines of Hongay.⁶⁴ Able to observe the French residents at close quarters, he was horrified by their arrogance, their presumption, their racism and - especially in the case of those who belonged to the French Human Rights League or freemasonry or the Socialist Party - their shocking hypocrisy.⁶⁵ The same day Guérin arrived in Hanoi, a popular uprising began with a mutiny by indigenous troops. The Europeans panicked and the repression was savage:

Quand éclate la rébellion de 1930, tous ces petits Blancs: gardiens de prison, agents de police, douaniers, joueurs de manille et buveurs d’absinthe, ventripotents cravacheurs de coolies, se réunirent au Café du

Commerce et, après avoir proclamé que “le socialisme, c’est l’ordre”, exigèrent contre les Annamites en révolte une répression sans pitié. Les jeunes révolutionnaires aux yeux bridés, désintéressés jusqu’au sacrifice, prodigieusement intelligents et raffinés, sortis dans les premiers rangs de nos grandes écoles, ils les traitèrent de ratés, d’ambitieux déçus, avides de places et de profits, et ils éprouvèrent une joie sadique quand la fleur de la jeunesse du Viet-nam monta sur l’échafaud, en criant des vers de Victor Hugo.⁶⁶

On his return to France he immediately began publishing articles on the iniquities of colonialism in *Monde* and in the revolutionary syndicalists’ weekly *Le Cri du peuple* and monthly *La Révolution prolétarienne*.⁶⁷

This was undoubtedly a pivotal moment in Guérin’s life, and is reminiscent of the moral crisis which led Tolstoy in the 1870s to renounce all his earlier literary works, and of Gandhi’s decision to adopt what he called a ‘religion of service’.⁶⁸ Guérin, vowing to devote his life to “la lutte pour l’abolition du scandale social et colonial”, similarly renounced all the “superfluous” pastimes of his privileged youth, burning his unpublished writings and consigning to silence his published poems and novels, ashamed of their very existence.⁶⁹

Back in Paris in April 1930, Guérin cut his ties with his family and, having found work as a proofreader (and joined the Syndicat des Correcteurs, renowned as a stronghold of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism⁷⁰), he moved out of the family home and found a room in the working-class quarter of Belleville.⁷¹ Guérin liked it there: “C’était l’époque la plus heureuse de ma vie, la découverte de ce milieu prolétarien.”⁷² A police surveillance report describes his meagre resources, his small, uncomfortable room, and presents him as living like “un mystique.”⁷³

As Guérin himself commented, “je me suis cherché, je me suis plus ou moins trouvé”, and an essential part of that was abandoning the class from which he sprang:

J’ai quitté, irrévocablement, un clan familial, qui était relativement large puisqu’il débordait le cadre de la consanguinité, pour entrer dans un autre, infiniment plus vaste, puisqu’il englobe les damnés de la terre. Il est plus

exaltant que le premier, car il compte dans ses rangs la vérité et la justice,
plus puissant, car il a pour lui le nombre.⁷⁴

But it was also less indulgent, and Guérin's first attempts to merge with the proletariat were hard. On first returning to France, he had found work as a labourer on a building site in Brest, and had had to suffer first the taunts of the secretary of the local CGTU when he spotted the blisters on Guérin's hands, and then his insults when he somehow found out about Guérin's sexuality.

Ce ne sera pas la dernière fois que je susciterai la méfiance,
l'incompréhension, l'hostilité. Mon nouveau monde sera dur. [...] J'ai
voulu fraterniser avec tous les hommes. C'était trop attendre. Malgré les
joies de l'indentification avec la masse, la communication ne sera ni aisée
ni totale. J'en souffrirai à l'excès, car je suis aussi un faible.⁷⁵

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would make two main points. First, it is easy when surveying Guérin's political itinerary to get the impression that he repeatedly abandoned one ideological position (and organisation) for another, and he himself sometimes summarised his life as a militant in terms of 'phases', as we have seen. In his autobiographical writings, he was fond of using some kind of journey, real or figurative, and/or some kind of spatial or geographical contrast to connote a turning-point in his life: the metro journey from Saint-Michel to Barbès and La Chapelle, the boat journey from Marseille to Beirut, the road between Christian Beirut and Muslim Damascus, and perhaps especially the month-long voyage to Saigon (which, combined with his studies on board, equated to a political 'journey'). Even his later description of his "discovery" of anarchism (through reading Stock's six volume edition of Bakunin's *Œuvres* [1895-1913]) as "une seconde opération de la cataracte" (the first having been the journey to Indochina) is reminiscent of a Damascene conversion (Guérin 1984, 9). In a study of converts in nineteenth-century Britain and India, Gauri Viswanathan (1998) has shown how such conversions also infringed social, religious, national and racial *identities*, and this is certainly the case with Guérin, in whose writings identity is a recurrent theme: each of his 'crises' involved

some form of transgression, whether it was rejecting heteronormativity and provocatively inviting gay lovers into the family home; or spurning the French expatriate community in Beirut and living in the Arab quarter; or avoiding the officers on the metonymic *Bangkok* in order to spend time below deck; or rejecting his own class in order to work on a building site and live amongst workers; and so on. In terms of political or ideological identities (see Surdez, Voegtli and Voutat 2009), he also suffered incomprehension on the part of marxists, for whom he was too anarchist, and on the part of anarchists, for whom he was too marxist (Guérin 1984, 17).

Nevertheless, I would argue that the evidence of his reading notes from the *Bangkok* is that there was in fact always an underlying ideological consistency to Guérin—even if changing circumstances meant that his ‘organisational options’ (as he put it) changed in different periods of his life. The “ligne droite du socialisme” sketched out in those first weeks of 1930 bears a remarkable similarity to the kind of socialism he would advocate for the rest of his life, albeit using different labels and—the eternal dissident—whilst a member of various organisations (or none): the indispensability of the marxist method, interpreted non-dogmatically; the centrality of the working class and the autonomy of its (syndicalist) organisations; the rejection of parliamentarism, and the importance of a vision of socialism ‘from the bottom up’; the preference for collectivist forms of socialism and the rejection of individualist anarchism; the opposition to nationalism, racism, colonialism and imperialism; the horror of violence; the fundamental importance of comradeship, of ethics and of spirituality.

And this leads on to my second main point. Guérin’s own commentaries on his early years—and secondary literature to date has followed him in this—have tended to be framed either in terms of economic and social issues and the rejection of “l’horreur de l’injustice” (in Chabanis, p.224); or in terms of the break with his own class and his quest for “la grande famille de la camaraderie fraternelle et de la lutte commune”⁷⁶; or in terms of the problems he experienced coming to terms with his sexuality;⁷⁷ or in terms of his quest to “reunify” his self, his identity, as both revolutionary *and* homosexual.⁷⁸ It seems to me that another (complementary) perspective is possible. On such a reading, spirituality—“l’Amour”—acquires a more important and perhaps even central rôle in determining Guérin’s life decisions, and particularly at this crucial moment in his life. In interview he once commented that “le

moteur de ma vie a été l'amour",⁷⁹ and in his 1977 autobiography, he wrote: "Je crois, quant à moi, qu'une seule et même force vitale et selon le terme mélanésien, un seul et même *mana*, a impulsé mon existence, aussi bien politique que charnelle."⁸⁰

Reading of his determination to start his life afresh in 1930 - and recalling the way in which he earlier described his 'discovery' of the working-class quarters of Paris as "restarting [his] life from zero" - one cannot help but be reminded of the closing lines of one of the books he read on board the *Bangkok*, one which seems to have had a more profound impact than most, namely Gandhi's autobiography:

I must reduce myself to zero. So long as a man does not of his own free will put himself among his fellow creatures, there is no salvation for him. *Ahimsa* is the farthest limit of humility.⁸¹

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Notes

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¹ Recent examples include *Fascism and Big Business* (New York: Pathfinder Books, 2000); *De l'Oncle Tom aux Panthères noires* (Pantin: Les Bons Caractères, 2010); *Anarchism and Marxism* (Hastings: Christie Books, 2012); *Ni Dieu ni Maître: Anthologie de l'anarchisme* (Paris: La Découverte, 2012); *Bourgeois et bras nus: Guerre sociale durant la Révolution française, 1793-95* (Paris: Libertalia, 2013); *Front populaire, révolution manquée* (Marseille: Agone, 2013). For a comprehensive primary and secondary bibliography, see the website of the *Association des Amis de Daniel Guérin* (<http://www.danielguerin.info>).

² The only examples are Marshall (1995) and Schwartzwald 2007. Bill Marshall's discussion from a Foucauldian perspective of Guérin's autobiographies aims to investigate "the 'self' constructed in the autobiographical text, and its relationship to the male gay 'self' constructed in history" (p.622); Robert Schwartzwald's article similarly focusses on Guérin's use of autobiography as a way of reasserting his right not to suppress or hide his sexuality.

³ On this notion of 'conversions' and the subsequent production of new life-narratives by the autobiographical subject, see Todd (2010).

⁴ Guérin even attached a note to the papers he left to the *Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine*—one of their biggest collections—giving advice to any future biographer about which papers to give priority to and which of his many publications they should read: F Pièce Rés. 551, "Note du 7 mai 1981". For a methodological overview see Caine (2010); for a more exhaustive study see Dosse (2011).

⁵ An earlier edition of the *Autobiographie de jeunesse, Un jeune homme excentrique. Essai d'Autobiographie* (1965), omitted certain details concerning some individuals still living; the only major change was the inclusion in the later edition of a 16 page appendix, "A la recherche des clés sexologiques".

⁶ Arno J. Mayer has argued for more nuance in such assertions of bourgeois ascendancy, claiming that "by the turn of the century the top layers of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie formed an amalgam whose influence was far-reaching with the Third Republic's governing class" (1981, 105); Charle (1994) is not entirely convinced— see esp. 179–217. For a historiographical overview and discussion of terminology, see Charle 1992.

⁷ The idea of the dominance of the '200 families', first employed in a speech by the Radical Party leader Edouard Daladier in 1934, was taken up by the leftwing economist Francis Delaisi (1936). It referred to the legally defined role of the 200 biggest shareholders in the Banque de France in the bank's management, but is of course not unproblematic. On France's 'aristocracy of wealth' in the nineteenth century, see Plessis 1982.

⁸ "Rapport contre Hachette" and related documents, BDIC FA 721/24/15; *Bulletin de l'Association amicale des anciens élèves de l'Ecole des mines de Paris* (septembre-octobre 1916), available at *Les Annales des Mines*, <http://www.annales.org/archives/x/guerin.html> [accessed 11.10.2013].

⁹ Toynbee Hall was the original university 'settlement house' of the so-called 'settlement movement'. Its purpose was to welcome graduates who volunteered to teach and to do social work in poor urban areas. M. Guérin published a report on his visit in the *Bulletin mensuel du Musée Social* no.12, série B (30 August 1897): Daniel's personal papers in the possession of his daughter Anne contain a copy bearing the handwritten dedication: "A mon cher fils Daniel pour lui donner le goût des questions sociales." Malon was a leading figure in the IWMA and the Paris Commune of 1871; see Vincent 1992.

¹⁰ On 'Tolstoyism' in France, see Hemmings 1950.

¹¹ Gustave d'Eichtal believed that "l'émancipation des juifs et celle des noirs" were "solidaires l'une de l'autre". (The family was partly of Jewish descent.) In D. Guérin's dedication to him in *Les Antilles décolonisées* (1956), pp. 19-21.

¹² Mayer, emphasising the extent to which the grande bourgeoisie aped the aristocracy, informs us that "in 1910 some 4,500 Parisian notables owned châteaux set in parks and surrounded by considerable lands. These second residences were prime badges of seignorial status or pretension and provided rarified space for socializing during the summer and shooting seasons" (1981, 106).

¹³ See Christoyannopoulos 2010 and 2011.

¹⁴ Extremely influential in her time, but rather neglected after her death, Anna de Noailles seems to be enjoying a resurgence of interest. See Perry 2003.

¹⁵ The review, which ran from March 1920 to November 1923, can be found in the BNF. Guérin's collaborators included Georges Altman, future journalist and Resistance leader who would go on to co-found the *Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire* with Sartre *et al* in 1947.

¹⁶ Colette's letter (dated 4 July 1922) can be seen on the web site of the *Association des Amis de Daniel Guérin* at <http://www.danielguerin.info/tiki-index.php?page=Une+lettre+de+Colette> [accessed 30 May 2012]. In his youth, Guérin—like Mauriac—was an admirer of Barrès.

¹⁷ See Halévy 1948.

¹⁸ On the Fould banking, iron and steel and shipbuilding dynasty, see Barbier 1991.

¹⁹ Blanche's study hangs in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rouen and can be seen online at <http://www.photo.rmnm.fr/cf/htm/CPicZ.aspx?E=2C6NU0VUD5XW> [accessed 1 June 2012]. Blanche had produced portraits of Mallarmé, Proust, Barrès, Anna de Noailles, Stravinski and Cocteau, and had been a close friend of Mauriac since 1916. See Barré 2009.

²⁰ It would be thanks to information divulged by Guérin in an interview many years later, that it would first become widely known that Mauriac had enjoyed homosexual relationships. See Barbedette and Carassou 1981.

²¹, p. 10. See David Berry, "'Workers of the World, Embrace!'" Daniel Guérin, the Labour Movement and Homosexuality' in *Left History*, vo.9, no.2 (Spring/Summer 2004), pp.11-43.

²² Guérin would subsequently be demoted to the rank of private "pour indiscipline et activité politique" after posting his 'livret militaire' to the Ministère de la défense in 1930 with a letter

refusing to have anything to do with any future “boucherie guerrière”. Guérin 2000, 5-10; Renseignements Généraux 1949.

²³ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p.162.

²⁴ On *Corydon*’s significance, see Lucille Cairns, ‘Gide’s “Corydon”: The Politics of Sexuality and Sexual Politics’ in *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 91, No. 3 (July 1996), pp. 582-596.

²⁵ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, pp. 178 & 183.

²⁶ See for example

²⁷ Interview in television documentary, *Daniel Guérin*, dir. Jean-José Marsand, questionnaire and interview by Pierre André Boutang (FR3, 4 & 11 September 1989, série Archives du XXe Siècle; film made in 1985); interview material re-used in Laurent Muhleisen & Patrice Spadoni, *Daniel Guérin, 1904-1988: Combats dans le siècle* (Productions Imagora, n.d.). See Martin Thomas, *The French Empire Between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics and Society* (Manchester University Press, 2007).

²⁸ See Anne-Lucie Chaigne-Oudin, *La France et les rivalités occidentales au Levant: Syrie-Liban, 1918-1939* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006).

²⁹ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p.186.

³⁰ Guérin: *Ci-gît le colonialisme*, p. 11.

³¹ Quoted in Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 194; see also Guérin, *Ci-gît le colonialisme*, p.11.

³² Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 195.

³³ Jean-Pierre Biondi: *Les anticolonialistes (1881-1962)*, Paris 1992, p. 125.

³⁴ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 195.

³⁵ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 196.

³⁶ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 199. According to a remark made by Mauriac in a letter to Guérin, the latter was also interested in the late 1920s in the catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain (who was moved to convert to catholicism because of his disenchantment with ‘scientism’ and who would publish *Primauté du spirituel* in 1927). Letter of 2 March 1926, in: Mauriac, p. 105.

³⁷ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p.202. The *Blue Guides* are tourist guidebooks published by Hachette since the mid-nineteenth century. Loisy (1857-1940), a catholic theologian and a professor at the Collège de France, was a modernist (in catholic terms) and was excommunicated in 1908.

³⁸ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 210.

³⁹ Letter quoted in Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 211.

⁴⁰ *La Vie selon la chair*, p. 279.

⁴¹ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 213.

⁴² Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 217.

⁴³ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 218. Guérin’s reading notes are in the International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, Daniel Guérin Papers, Box 1, Folder 62. Subsequent references to these notes will give just the sleeve number within this folder.

⁴⁴ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 221.

⁴⁵ Coversheet attached to file, IISH, Box 1, Folder 62; and Guérin: *A la recherche d'un communisme libertaire*, Paris 1984, p. 9.

⁴⁶ XXI: Notes on Émile Cazalis, *Syndicalisme ouvrier et évolution sociale* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1925).

⁴⁷ XIII: Notes on Luc Durtain: *L'Autre Europe: Moscou et sa foi* (1928).

⁴⁸ I: Notes on Georges Sorel, *Réflexions sur la violence* (1908).

⁴⁹ XI: Notes on Karl Kautsky, *The Social Revolution* (1902).

⁵⁰ XIX: Notes on B. Montagnon, *Grandeur et servitude socialistes* (Paris: Valois, Bibliothèque syndicaliste, 1929).

⁵¹ XII: Notes on Karl Kautsky, *Guidelines for a Socialist Action Programme* (1919).

⁵² I: Notes on Georges Sorel, *Réflexions sur la violence* (1908).

⁵³ XVII: 'La ligne droite du socialisme'.

⁵⁴ XV: Notes on Léon Trotsky, *La Révolution défigurée* (1929).

⁵⁵ *L'Anarchisme, de la doctrine à la pratique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965); *Ni dieu ni maître, anthologie de l'anarchisme* (Lausanne: La Cité-Lausanne, 1965); *Pour un marxisme libertaire* (Paris: Laffont, 1969); David Berry: "The Search for a Libertarian Communism. Daniel Guérin and the 'Synthesis' of Marxism and Anarchism", in: Alex Prichard, Ruth Kinna, Saku Pinta and David Berry (eds.): *Libertarian Socialism. Politics in Black and Red*, Basingstoke 2012, pp. 187-209.

⁵⁶ IV: 'En marge de Proudhon'.

⁵⁷ III: Notes on *Le message révolutionnaire de Gandhi*. When Gandhi visited Paris in 1931, Guérin wrote a very sympathetic report for the fortnightly syndicalist magazine *La Révolution prolétarienne*, and the following month published Gandhi's answers to a questionnaire Guérin had submitted to him through Romain Rolland, who hosted Gandhi's visit: 'Gandhi à Paris', December 1931, 'Gandhi et la lutte de classes. Un entretien avec Gandhi et Romain Rolland', January 1932. Cuttings in BDIC F°Δ688Rés/4/1. Both issues can be read online in the BNF's digital library, Gallica: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb34387382s/date> [accessed 3 October 2013].

⁵⁸ XIII: Notes on Luc Durtain, *L'Autre Europe: Moscou et sa foi* (1928). See also Marie-France Latronche: *L'influence de Gandhi en France de 1919 à nos jours*, Paris 1999.

⁵⁹ XX: Notes on É. Vandervelde, *Jaurès* (1929).

⁶⁰ X: Notes on Octave Homberg, *L'Impérialisme américain* (1929). Despite his antiracism, Guérin was not immune to the essentialising exoticism characteristic of many European writers. See Kate Marsh: "Gandhi and *le gandhisme*: Writing Indian Decolonisation and the Appropriation of Gandhi 1919-48", in: *Modern & Contemporary France* 14:1 (2006), pp. 33-47.

⁶¹ XXII/a: Notes on Hyacinthe Dubreuil, *La République industrielle* (Paris: Bibliothèque d'éducation, n.d.).

⁶² Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 218.

⁶³ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 219.

⁶⁴ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p.224.

⁶⁵ See Jacques Le Gall, *La question coloniale dans le mouvement ouvrier en France (1830-1962)* (Paris: Les bons caractères, 2013).

⁶⁶ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 225.

⁶⁷ “Au secours de nos frères d’Indochine” in: *Le Cri du peuple*, 21 May 1930 and “Tempête sur l’Indochine” in: *Monde* 7 & 14 June 1930, reproduced in *Ci-gît*, pp. 416-8 & 419-30. An extract from an article of 8 October 1930 in *Le Cri du peuple* about the repression of the Yen Bay rebellion is reproduced in: Jean-Pierre Biondi: *Les anticolonialistes (1881-1962)*, Paris 1992, p. 166. On the syndicalists, with whom Guérin would work in the 1930s, see Colette Chambelland, *Pierre Monatte: une autre voix syndicaliste* (Paris: Editions de l’atelier/Editions ouvrières, 1999).

⁶⁸ Gandhi, p. 155: “I had made the religion of service my own, as I felt that God could be realized only through service.”

⁶⁹ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p.227.

⁷⁰ See Yves Blondeau: *Le Syndicat des correcteurs de Paris et de la région parisienne, 1881-1973*, Paris 1973, pp. 46-47.

⁷¹ See Patrice Spadoni: “Daniel Guérin - 5 rue Lesage”, in: Claire Auzias (ed.): *Un Paris révolutionnaire*. Paris 2001, pp. 366-368.

⁷² Boutang, *Daniel Guérin*, and Muhleisen and Spadoni, *Combats dans le siècle*.

⁷³ Archives Nationales, Centre des archives contemporaines (CAC), Versement coté 19940448, Fichier central de la Direction générale de la Sûreté nationale du Ministère de l’Intérieur, Box 450, file 38145; quoted in Antonio de Francesco: “Daniel Guérin et Georges Lefebvre, une rencontre improbable”, in: *La Révolution française (Cahiers de l’Institut d’histoire de la Révolution française)*, <http://lrf.revues.org/162> [accessed 30 May 2012].

⁷⁴ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 229.

⁷⁵ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 229.

⁷⁶ Guérin, *Eux et Lui*, pp.7 & 8.

⁷⁷ Guérin, “Commentaires très libres sur les Mémoires d’un jeune homme excentrique”, Text of a talk given by Daniel Guérin on 17 February 1965.

⁷⁸ Guérin, *Homosexualité et révolution* (Paris: Le Vent du ch’min, 1983).

⁷⁹ “Géographie passionnelle d’une époque. Entretien avec Daniel Guérin”, in: *Débattre* 10 (2000), pp.5-10.

⁸⁰ *Le feu du sang. Autobiographie politique et charnelle*, Paris 1977, p. 7; see also *Eux et lui*, Lille 2000, p. 16. ‘Mana’ is a concept drawn from the cultures of the Pacific islands with a number of meanings associated with spiritual authority, power or energy. Tony Swain and Garry Trompf: *The Religions of Oceania*, London and New York 1995.

⁸¹ Gandhi, p. 454. *Ahimsa* means non-harming or non-violence.