Fascist Commitments

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The articles Paul de Man wrote for *Le Soir* in 1941–42 furnish the evidence, beyond a reasonable doubt, that he was at that time a fascist and an anti-Semite as well as an active collaborator with the Nazi occupation of Belgium.

A juridical stance and prosecutorial attitude respond to the circumstances of the controversy that has begun to unfold since these articles were discovered and made known. De Man eschewed any acknowledged reflection on his writing and activity during the war. He participated in fascism publicly, but did not abandon it publicly. Those of us concerned with his work and career—ourselves participants in an intellectual culture he helped shape—are obligated to investigate his involvement with fascism as thoroughly as possible. The prosecutorial stance establishes the aggressiveness required of such an inquiry. By the same token, I have demanded of myself the limiting standard of being convinced beyond a reasonable doubt before drawing conclusions as to de Man's positions, beliefs, and actions.

PUBLICIST AND PROPAGANDIST

From December 1940 until November 1942 de Man wrote book reviews and cultural criticism for the Brussels daily *Le Soir*. The paper was published under the censorship of the German military authority which administered Belgium after the German invasion of May 1940. Its owners' power was abrogated by the occupying power. The Germans made Raymond de Becker editor-in-chief. De Becker and many other members of the editorial staff belonged to the Rexist party, a fascist organization that originated in the 1930s from the ultra-right youth movements and split from the Catholic party in the 1930s. *Le Soir* had a circulation of 230,000, making it the largest publication in Belgium during the occupation.[1]

De Man regularly performed the duties of publicist and propagandist. During the first several months of his tenure at *Le Soir* he frequently reported—always uncritically, often enthusiastically—cultural events designed to foster fascist ideology.

He praised lectures by a scholar named Luigi Pareti on Italian history for "reveal[ing] fundamental aspects of the current revolution," from "the suppression of the struggle among classes" to a colonial and racial policy which "sends colonists into conquered territories to organize the social life of the natives without any intermingling with them, assures the solidity of the empire and the maintaining of the race."[2] In Pareti's second lecture he saw a "lesson. . . important for Belgians wanting to see their country reconstructed," in particular, a greater reliance on their own native qualities. The lecture had been a re-

futation of the influence of the French Revolution on the Risorgimento. The real key to Italian unification had been "a philosophy of the meek. . . in which labor and earth were exalted and where the necessity of an amelioration of the relations between classes was noted" (3/17/41).

De Man reported the publication of four pamphlets in Flemish on the Third Reich. He found they provided "precious clarifications and important data" on Nazi policies and reforms. One pamphlet explained worker support for Hitler. Another revealed "how the attitude of the German victors was more worthy, more just, and more humane than that of the French in 1918" (4/14/41).

De Man interviewed Abel Bonnard, Vichy Minister of Education and member of the governing committee of Groupe "Collaboration,"[3] just before the latter's lecture on "the constitution of an elite in the new Europe." The idea that "'the collapse of democracy is not alien to this reviving of the mind'" is among the views approvingly quoted by de Man as "some of the principles that must lead to this regrouping of forces which, in Belgium, as in France, is a necessary condition for the nation to be able to revive" (6/7–8/41).[4]

He reported, with apparent approval, the words of the burgomaster-commissioner of Ghent. Hendrick Elias was an activist and theoretician of the Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond (VNV), a fascist party within the Flemish nationalist movement; the Nazis had designated the VNV the one political organization permitted in Flanders (its counterpart in Wallony being the Rexist party) and installed Elias in his governmental position. During a German-Flemish cultural event in Ghent, "M. Elias indicated how the current war had given birth to an immense hope for definitive emancipation, a hope which will be realized when this people [that is, Flemings], who live from Dunkerque all the way to Dollart, with its own spiritual unity, its language and its own culture, will have firmly established its collaboration with the German Reich" (8/16–17/41).

FASCIST COMMITMENT

De Man's more active contribution to fascist ideology and right wing opinion came in the book reviews and cultural commentaries. There emerges from those writings a constellation of social and cultural ideas, political values, and historical interpretations that places de Man's thinking squarely within radical right wing doctrine of the times. Particularly attuned to the intellectual currents of Italian fascism and the anti-bourgeois strains of Nazism, de Man looked to the fascist revolution as the promise of an anti-democratic, anti-individualistic era that would replace class antagonisms with class cooperation; that would stabilize social hierarchies and educate youth to assume roles within a disciplined, highly centralized social order; and that would couple authoritarian political rule with an expanded role for managerial and intellectual elites entrusted with the task of reviving the economy and renewing national cultural traditions within a harmonious rather than conflictual environment of European spiritual values.

De Man consistently emphasized the popular basis of Nazism. Reviewing Jacques Chardonne's *Voir la figure,* he praised the author's grasp of the situation in Germany. Others had mistakenly assumed that there was

> an integral dualism between Germany on the one hand and Hitlerism on the other. The latter was considered a strange phenomenon unrelated to the historical evolution of the German people. . . . It is not merely a matter of a series of reforms but of the definitive emancipation of a people who in turn find themselves called to exercise hegemony in Europe (10/28/41).

De Man asserted that German actions had been "systematically and knowingly deformed by a tendentious propaganda" and a "policy based on incomprehension and lying" (10/28/41). And he decried a situation in which, "by dint of undergoing long years of brain-washing by French and British propaganda, the Belgian reader is unaware of all that has been done in Germany from the social and political point of view" (4/12–14/41).

An extremely favorable review of a book by Bertrand de Jouvenal—a supporter of Jacques Doriot's pro-Hitler Parti Populaire Français—established the central theme of de Man's view of Nazi Germany:

> Thanks to his feeling for the psychology of crowds he is able to provide a very pertinent analysis of the moral evolution that leads German youth to become the most furious enemies of the triumphant democratic bourgeoisie of 1914–18. Up until now this inner evolution has not been taken seriously enough. Fascism was considered a kind of passing madness, whereas it is on the contrary an extremely normal and lasting reaction in the face of the circumstance created by world politics; de Jouvenal is eager to explain its depth. (3/18/41)

He found similar merits in a book by Pierre Daye, a Rexist journalist and political correspondent for *Le Nouveau Journal,* a significant collaborationist periodical edited by Robert Poulet. De Man found especially "pertinent and judicious . . . the paragraphs that demonstrate that the present war is, beyond an economic and national struggle, the beginning of a revolution that aims at organizing European society in a more equitable manner" (8/26/41).

What de Man expected of the fascist revolution was a hierarchical social order that would overcome the individualism of the pre-fascist era:

For a long while . . . a certain form of individualism claimed that everyone had to choose for himself what kind of person he desired to become and to resolve with his own consciousness the difficulties born with that effort. . . . It is not the least innovation of the totalitarian regimes to have substituted for this imprecise anarchy a framework of definite obligations and duties to which everyone must adapt his talents. (10/28/41)

Overcoming bourgeois individualism, particularly its risks of alienation, held the promise of ending a situation that had created "a large number of unstable people unable to adapt to any of the norms in fashion and forced to search in solitude for the realization of their stability and happiness" (10/28/41).

This kind of lament, coupled with the hope that new, more collective ideals were emerging, also became a motif of the literary criticism de Man wrote for *Le Soir*. He developed the idea that over against the preoccupation of pre-war, especially French writers with the psychological ordeals of the individual, an emergent trend—sometimes associated directly with fascism, sometimes more generally with what he considered the Germanic resurgence in European culture—was "in search of a perhaps simpler, but more energetic, more productive, and happier kind of man" (6/30/42).

The rejection of individualism did not stop at the critique of bourgeois culture. It extended to a condemnation of workers' pursuit of class interests over national interests. And de Man was willing to lend legitimacy to the Nazis' social disciplining of labor. In March 1942, he contributed directly to a highly controlled public discussion designed to justify compulsory labor and, potentially, the deportation of Belgian workers to Germany. A crisis gripped Belgium beginning March 9, when the German authorities announced their intention to establish a policy of compulsory work, supposedly in response to "the fact that a shortage in the labor force is making itself felt in certain branches of the economy."[5] *Le Soir* carried the announcement on the front page. Widely interpreted with alarm as the signal that Belgians would be forced to work in Germany to sustain the war effort, the policy was quickly explained by officials in the following terms by March 13:

The ordinance is related to the Belgian market in order to combat certain forms of "visible" and "invisible" unemployment and to repress abuses. It is with this aim that the Office of Labor will be able to make those asocial elements take a job who are often simply professionally unemployed, living to the detriment of the collectivity. The authorities will also be concerned with unemployed people who are sponging off their families, or living by some less blameless expedient, instead of devoting themselves to a useful job. The constraints will only have to be exercised on elements refractory to all social discipline.[6]

De Man entered the discussion on March 17, with a review of a book entitled *L'Emotion Sociale,* by Charles Dekeukeleire. He again sounded the theme that the current era was far more than "a simple conflict of political powers. . . . The military events, as gigantic and full of consequence as they are, cannot make us forget that a crisis of a spiritual order is proceeding at the same time." He then approvingly summarized Dekeukeleire's contention that

the mentality of the worker is warped at its base. He has completely lost the notion of the collective and does not realize that through his action he collaborates in a task from which the whole community profits. If he could succeed in recovering this sentiment he would soon be led back to a more joyous and more harmonious state of mind. (3/17/42)

The rhetorical strategy of this review followed a pattern de Man had begun to perfect. The high-toned, visionary announcement of imminent social renewal—of "a more joyous and more harmonious state of mind"—was used to justify repressive measures. In this instance, his vision of workers' participation in harmonious social cooperation entailed more immediately the abolition of workers' most basic rights. And his laments against selfishness and individualism served the call for discipline in the service of the German war effort. Indeed workers were eventually forced, first, into mines in Belgium, and later into German factories.

De Man's anti-individualism was a nodal point in his social thought. On the one hand, it furnished a means of legitimating the assault on workers' rights, including the imposition of compulsory labor and potential deportation. On the other hand, anti-individualism voiced a reaction against the alienation and solitude of bourgeois forms of maturation. Through this doubly charged anti-individualism de Man's writings participated directly in fascist ideology. Beginning with what George L. Mosse has examined as the Volkish "search for a 'third way,' an alternative to capitalism and Marxism,"[7] fascism combined the repression of workers' rights with the rejection of bourgeois values. The anti-Marxist, anti-bourgeois synthesis was accomplished through the notion of a hierarchical social order cemented with popular nationalist feeling on the one hand and

political authoritarianism on the other. It was just this synthesis that informed de Man's social and political outlook.

Moreover, de Man ably articulated the cultural critique of bourgeois values to the political dimension of fascist ideology and Nazi practice. His commitment is especially apparent in an article devoted to several French fascist intellectuals. He looked to the works of de Jouvenal, Robert Brasillach, Alfred Fabre-Luce, Drieu la Rochelle, and others, as a means of achieving self-understanding as an intellectual in the Belgian situation:

> The best evidence that [their] recapitulative sentiment corresponds to a genuine necessity of the moment—at least for us, inhabitants of a country that has not yet made its revolution and for whom the war years are like a moment of meditation in the face of future tasks—is the very particular pleasure one feels in reading these books in which a part of our experience turns out to be reflected. (1/20/42)

Not only did de Man underscore his commitment to the fascist revolution he thought lay ahead for his own country but he also criticized his French counterparts for a mentality that he thought inhibited their commitment. They continued to adhere to the "individualist French spirit," just when the times required that one be able to "abandon oneself without second thoughts to the intoxication of common efforts" (1/20/42). De Man chastised these writers for seeking in individualism an "inoffensive loophole" through which to escape the political exigencies of the era:

> Paradoxically, at a moment when all energies are bent toward collective accomplishments, the idea that predominates in the mind of these French men of letters is the protection of the individual. . . . Here then is a group of authors all of whom are preoccupied with saving man before saving the world. . . . (1/20/42)

De Man presented himself as ready to envision the new social order that writers like Brasillach and Drieu glimpsed but did not fully accept. The terms in which he framed his critique rejected the very notion that the rights of individuals could take precedence over the power of rulers. De Man's critique of individualism took the form of a wholesale rejection of the ideological heritage of 1789:

> The problem that presents itself is no longer that of knowing what political forms the sacred laws of the individual will dictate to the reigning power, but indeed of elucidating the considerably more modest question: how to insert the human person into a highly centralized and disciplined order. (1/20/42)

The article of January 20, counts against the hypothesis that de Man's interest in 1941–42 lay exclusively in his practice and career as a literary critic, as though the political context had been a circumstance he adapted to more out of ambition than conviction. In fact, it was de Man who pictured his French counterparts as mere "men of letters" who did not fully appreciate the political needs of the age.

Similarly, de Man's first extended discussion of Brasillach's *Notre avant-guerre,* on August 12, 1941, stressed "how much the members of that generation lacked political sense" (8/12/41). When writing of the student life in Paris, Brasillach, according to de Man,

> writes excellent pages filled with poetry and freshness. But when he gets down to circumstances relating to political upheaval (the failure of the Popular Front, war in Spain, the triumph of National-Socialism in Germany), one feels him losing his way in a domain that is not his own. . . . Without wanting to rush into too risky a generalization, one can nevertheless underscore that this kind of apolitical life, turned toward aesthetic and poetic delights, fits the French mentality particularly well. Unhappily for the French, the demands of the moment come from just the opposite direction. (8/12/41)

What was the political sense Brasillach lacked? The key example de Man presented illuminates much about his own attitudes. In 1937, Brasillach attended one of the weeklong celebrations of the Nazi Party held at Nuremberg. His account—along with Leni Riefenstahl's film *Triumph of the Will* and the post-war memoir of Nazi architect Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*—remains a significant historical source because of its descriptions of the liturgy and rituals of the Nuremberg rallies. Even though Brasillach's narrative is shot through with expressions of awe and envy regarding these Nazi rites of political participation, de Man emphasized those moments where Brasillach expresses some reserve or admits a lack of understanding. There de Man saw signs of the Frenchman's lack of political commitment:

> Brasillach's reaction before a spectacle like that of the Nazi Party congress at Nuremberg, when he expresses horror before that "strange" [or: "foreign"] demonstration, is that of someone for whom this sudden importance of the political in the life of a people is an inexplicable phenomenon. (8/12/41)

Brasillach hesitates when it comes to those inventions of symbol and ritual which seem, on the one hand, to make political participation a virtually religious experience and, on the other hand, are such a departure from traditional forms of political expression as to make him doubt their effectiveness outside Germany. His most explicit concerns—couched as a reminder to his French readers that fascism in France need not conform

exactly to its German model—are expressed in reflections on the ceremony he witnessed Hitler perform. The Führer, holding in one hand the "flag of blood" commemorating the failed *putsch* of 1923, blesses new flags with the other hand—as though the power of the bloody flag were being transmitted through him to the "new symbols of the German fatherland." I will quote Brasillach at some length in order to give a feel for what de Man found compellingly present, and what unfortunately absent, in Brasillach's account of Nazism:

> A purely symbolic ceremony? I don't think so. There really is in Hitler's thinking, as in that of the Germans, the idea of a kind of mystical transfusion analogous to that of the priest's blessing of the water—if not, dare say, to that of the Eucharist. Whoever does not see in the consecration of the flags the analogues of the consecration of the bread, a kind of German sacrament, risks understanding nothing of Hitlerism.[7]
>
> And it is then that we are uneasy. Faced with these solemn and delightful scenes of ancient romanticism, this immense flowering of flags, these flags of Oriental origin, I asked myself on the last day if indeed everything were possible. One can give a people more strength. But can one expect to transform everything, to the point of inventing new rites that penetrate the life and heart of the citizens to this degree? The Frenchman, who understands the foreigner poorly, begins, before understanding, by being amazed. . . .
>
> In many aspects of this new politics—one wants to say, instead, this poetry—not everything assuredly is for us, and one need not dwell on that point. But what is for us, what is a constant call to order, and undoubtedly a kind of regret, is that unfailing preaching to the youth on behalf of faith, sacrifice and honor.[8]

De Man's allusions to this discussion in Brasillach establish that he found the new politics appealing rather than "foreign" or "strange," and that he saw in the rituals and symbols of the Nazi Party the inauguration of a new, and valued, form of political participation. It may well have been Brasillach's descriptions themselves—always vivid, frequently insightful—of "the incontestable novelty of the Third Reich" that inspired de Man in the first place. Brasillach describes the anti-Marxist and anti-Semitic exhibits, the cathedral of light that turned the *Zeppelinfeld* into "the sacred site of the national mystery," the ceremonies over which Hitler presided, and the torchlight parades of S.A. groups. And Brasillach's own enthusiasms are by no means slight. He emphasizes in particular the importance of the Hitler Youth and the fact that Nazism addressed itself so much to the nation's youth: "It is the character of their discipline that is striking to us. The militarization of children in Germany is not at all what one would think. Those who speak with us approach us joyously, without fear, and on their own."[9]

Brasillach's reserve—the sense of estrangement at "the astonishing mythology of a new religion"[10]—provoked de Man's criticism because it diminished the scope and stake of Nazism's innovation in *political* life. The focus of de Man's critique of Brasillach clearly indicates that his commitments to fascism were deeply ideological and political, rather than merely opportunistic; that his cultural critique of bourgeois values had become linked to a program of social change and political reconstruction; and that his political hopes included the spread of the new politics inaugurated by the Nazis, not merely the stability and peace of his own country.

THE YOUNG DE MAN'S INTELLECTUAL SELF-PORTRAIT

A self-portrait of the radical young intellectual emerges from de Man's review of Brasillach and from a later article on representations of adolescence in the pre-war novel. That self-portrait confirms that de Man, at the time in his early twenties, saw his work at *Le Soir* as a participation in a larger political movement and a reflection of political choices and intellectual commitments made at a historical crossroads. These implicit self-reflections center on the stresses and opportunities peculiar to his own generation.

De Man's chastising of Brasillach's generation may well have concealed envy of their aesthetic life, their carefree student days in Paris, their devotion to style. He may well have begrudged Brasillach his pre-war. In any case, the predicament and the possibility of his own generation he located in the political as distinct from the aesthetic realm:

> Since 1935, young people coming out of adolescence have no longer known this sweetness. Upon their first contact with an independent life they found themselves face-to-face with political realities—in the form of a threatening war—and social realities—in the form of a nearly always uncertain material future. This is why their mentality has a completely different orientation. And things will be even sharper for those who will come immediately after them. Instead of seeing in political activity a mere exciting and lively game, they will consider it an inevitable necessity that demands all their attention and devotion. For the tasks that will assert themselves will be so urgent that no one will be able to ignore them. This does not mean that artistic creation will be suspended, but that indeed literature will not hold the same place in the life of those we call intellectuals. An attitude that will better suit those peoples who have a very de-

veloped sense of the collective and have spontaneously reached less individualist lifestyles. (8/12/41)

This kind of oblique autobiography was continued in an article the next year on the "problem of adolescence." De Man was again concerned to define the generational difference that distinguished pre-war literature and culture from his own period. The varying treatment of adolescence in novels was his key. Before the war, "the adolescent's mentality had become in some way the symbol of the spirit of an entire era that found the image of its troubles and its restlessness in the torments of young people" (6/30/42). The portrait that de Man painted of the ordeal of adolescence—"that particularly delicate crisis that man goes through around his twentieth year"—crystallized his sense of the life experience to which fascism's anti-individualistic, hierarchical, and authoritarian elements appealed:

If one had to characterize the state of mind of the man on the threshold of maturity in one word, I would choose the term "indecision." . . . Being indecisive means not only that one proves incapable of making a choice in the world of ideas, consolidating the political, philosophical and religious doctrines to which one intends to adhere, but also—and moreover—that one does not succeed in having a stable opinion of oneself. This constant doubt about one's own value, about one's possibilities for happiness or greatness, literally poisons the adolescent's existence. There results a sterile inactivity, a deep instability, an incessant inner tumult in which, disordered and unrestrained, the best mixes with the worst. There results especially a strong feeling of solitude, for only the person who has successfully stabilized his inner orientation proves capable of living with his fellows on a plane of equality. The relations of the undecided with the rest of humanity are always marred by incomprehension, misunderstandings, even quarrels. (6/30/42)

This experience was no longer, in de Man's view, a symbol of the spirit of the age. The life crisis undergone at the end of one's teens had ceased to be a valid figure of social life as a whole as it had been for Gide and others. A new set of values was emerging. They glorified, as we have seen in other of de Man's articles, conformity rather than individualism, action rather than contemplation, established hierarchy rather than endless searching, social discipline rather than inner turmoil. In a very rare use of the first-person singular, de Man expressed his utter distaste for the adolescent hero of a recent novel under review; his remarks indicate how thoroughly he sided with the transformation of values associated with fascism, even as the poignancy of his account of adolescence reveals that those values went in part against the grain of his own recent experience:

For my part, I found that his hero—is it intentional?—was perfectly odious. Incapable of doing anything with simplicity and feeling himself obliged to accompany action as natural as loving with a multitude of abstract and profound considerations, this reasoner seems the very incarnation of what is artificial in intellectualized youth. (6/30/42)

The autobiographical resonance of these passages suggests that de Man, having recently crossed the threshold of maturity, having chosen his "political, philosophical, and religious" doctrines, and having passed from confusing solitude to "the moral solidity that is the index of an authentic maturity," invested fascism with the power not only to provide the psychological solution to his individual crisis but also the cultural alternative to the individualism and alienation of the pre-war era. Fascism had become for de Man the grid through which to interpret the pattern of his own experience and to connect it with an ongoing historical process. He did not take on fascist ideology lightly. As ideology, it linked private with public experience, personal with historic choices.

COLLABORATION

Likewise, de Man's collaboration—his active participation through his intellectual practice as critic and commentator in the aims of the Nazis—was not a casual choice. It was a commitment renewed and extended many times in the writings published between 1940 and 1942.

To reconstruct the meaning of de Man's collaboration several questions need to be answered. What purposes and intents underlay his own cooperation with the Nazi occupation? What arguments did he marshall in appealing to *Le Soir*'s readership to accept collaboration? Where did he situate himself within the array of ideological and political stances held by those who cooperated with the Nazis? How did his intellectual practice enter into the processes of discipline and punishment, obedience and acquiescence, complicity and common cause exacted by Nazi policy in occupied Europe?

Reference to the French situation—including de Man's own understanding of it—helps to clarify the sorts of choices collaborators of differing intentions, assumptions, and ideologies made.

In France, collaborators fell initially into two quite distinct camps. David Littlejohn has termed the positions, respectively, "French survival" collaboration and "German victory" collaboration. Proponents of the former dominated the scene at Vichy; proponents of the latter were concentrated in Paris in

loosely affiliated fascist organizations and included several journalists with strong, often longstanding ideological commitments to fascism. In the wake of France's military defeat, the Paris groups pushed for an alliance with the Nazi regime and a German victory over France's erstwhile ally Great Britain. From the armistice in June 1940 until Vichy moved decidedly into the German war effort in April 1942, the Paris group was agitating for a closer alliance.

The "French survival" collaborationists hoped to steer France back to sovereignty along a path of neutrality in the war, combined with economic cooperation with Germany and controlled acquiescence to German demands for anti-Jewish measures. They were, however, gradually pulled toward positions that were less and less distinct from those of "German victory" collaborators. Littlejohn describes the process as follows:

> The two meanings of the word "collaboration" were these. To the majority of "collaborators" it signalled only that degree of cooperation with the occupying power necessary to secure for France a tolerable life in the "New Order." To another, and much smaller group, it meant actively working, and if necessary, *fighting* for German victory. . . . [B]ut fine distinctions between working *for* and working *with* the enemy tended to become progressively more blurred until, in the end, the two were virtually indistinguishable. The tragedy of those who collaborated because they felt that it was in the best interest of France is that they were driven more and more into the camp of those who collaborated because they thought it was in the best interests of Germany.[11]

Important documentation of this process comes from the second volume of Alfred Fabre-Luce's *Journal de la France,* published in 1942. Fabre-Luce had been an early recruit to the Parti Populaire Français (PPF),[12] founded by Jacques Doriot in 1936 and one of the most influential pro-German organizations in occupied Paris. The book was reviewed enthusiastically by de Man on July 21, 1942. And his response to Fabre-Luce's narrative and arguments reveals where he stood along this spectrum of collaboration—and how he read, or wanted to read, the historical processes in which collaborators participated.

De Man was, to use Littlejohn's terminology, a "German victory" collaborator who most often made his arguments for collaboration through more modest proposals for "survival" collaboration. He began his review by lamenting "a certain indifference on the part of the public toward political problems of France." He urged his readers to recognize the "genuine parallelism" between Belgium and France, and to see the stakes in France's ordeal with Germany: "the clash of two complementary but often hostile civilizations, the birth of a new spirit on the ruins of past errors, the agonizing problem of knowing if one of the pillars of Western culture will successfully adapt to the exigencies of a new era" (7/21/42).

Addressing himself to "every man desirous of finding his bearings in the present chaos," de Man recommended Fabre-Luce's book for its objectivity. Collaboration was here shown to be a necessity of the times, an adaptation to the irreversible direction of history, in short a means of survival, that would be vindicated by the ultimate outcome of events:

> One could not, at first sight, point out a tendency in this book, so scrupulously does it maintain the tone of perfect objectivity, detached above reality to the point of averting any personal reaction. However, a line of argument does unfold without ever relying on ideological considerations, but by sticking jealously to the necessities inscribed in the facts. What emerges is a demonstration of that ineluctable historical truth according to which, at certain moments, the weight of events reaches the point where it drags nations in a particular direction even though their will seems to go against it. That is what happens in this case: the policy of collaboration results from the present situation not as an ideal desired by the whole of the people, but as an irresistible necessity from which no one can escape even if he believes he must go in another direction. *Attentisme* is thus condemned not from the moral viewpoint, but from the viewpoint of the overbearing reality: it is untenable because contrary to the current of history, which continues to flow without bothering about the reticence of a few individuals who persist in not understanding its power. Those rare perspicacious minds who have grasped it appear at present isolated, alone to combat the inertia and the hostility of the masses. Later it will turn out that they were the precursors of a unanimous will. There is no better demonstration of this phenomenon of belatedness in the reaction of the masses—and of the leadership—than this "Journal de la France." (7/21/41)

Attentisme—meaning a "wait-and-see" attitude—was the label "German victory" collaborators pinned on "French survival" collaborators. The term had been coined by Marcel Déat, founder of the Rassemblement National Populaire (RNP), another significant fascist organization centered in Paris.[13] Fabre-Luce builds to the conclusion of his account by citing a speech Déat gave on April 13, 1942, in which he "undertakes to formulate the ultimatum that has not yet been delivered to us: 'Either we will have a French government whose policies will correspond to the necessities of the hour, or French sovereignty in the occupied zone will be put back in question by the direct administration of the conqueror.'"[14]

Déat, and then Fabre-Luce, evoked the superior might of

Germany to justify the course of action—obedience to the Nazis—they wanted all along. De Man repeated the gesture. By subscribing to Fabre-Luce's critique of *attentisme* de Man associated himself with the more radical and pro-German elements in France. At the same time, he addressed his argument to a reluctant Belgian public whose passivity, even recalcitrance toward the occupying power had to be overcome.

De Man admired the "tone of perfect objectivity" that enabled Fabre-Luce to demonstrate the need for collaboration "without ever relying on ideological considerations." Fabre-Luce's narrative and argumentative strategies are worth examining as a way of illuminating the political and intellectual values embedded in de Man's admiration of his French counterpart. Moreover, we can glimpse in the more evolved political rhetoric of Fabre-Luce the sort of intellectual practice that de Man was striving to attain.

The narrative of *Journal de la France* is crafted to make the culminating event appear the only rational outcome of the nation's struggle for survival. That event was Pierre Laval's return to power as the Chief of Government in April 1942. Laval had been the Vice-Premier at the beginning of the Vichy regime. Pétain ousted him in December 1940 under pressure from those who thought he was pushing France into the war as a German ally. Vichy had reached a new crisis in the spring of 1942. The crisis had several elements. Since the German invasion of Russia on July 22, 1941, internal and external pressure had built on Vichy to support Germany. On the one hand, Paris fascists fanned enthusiasm for the war against the Soviet Union and began forming the Legion of French Volunteers Against Bolshevism; Pétain himself began to speak of the Germans' "defense of civilization in the East" and "the crusade against Bolshevism." And, on the other hand, Germany increased its demands for economic and military support. Meanwhile, Vichy staged a trial at Riom in 1941–42 accusing several figures from the Third Republic of "political responsibility for the war." The defendants were so successful in turning the trial into an indictment of the Vichy regime's leaders' role in the defeat that Hitler himself ordered the embarrassing trial stopped. Still unable to control the degree or the form of his government's collaboration with the Nazis, Pétain reinstated Laval.[15]

Fabre-Luce's narrative does indeed achieve an appearance of objectivity. The story he tells recasts the *actions* of the Nazis as merely the *condition* of France. The actions are therefore never evaluated, or even open to evaluation. The story's only significant actor is "France." But this "France" is an ideal emptied of all particular values, traditions, and institutions. Actions are evaluated on one basis alone. Do they enhance or do they threaten the survival of this mythical entity? The nation has no purpose other than to persist, and it is given no identity other than being that which has persisted. And, finally, Fabre-Luce can, as de Man put it, "avert any personal reaction" in telling this story because he always identifies himself with "France." With this posture he acknowledges no interests other than those that enhance the survival of "France." The formula *we* = *France* runs throughout the book, and even the ambiguity in the title, Journal *of* France, signals this same identification.

What results—"without ever relying on ideological considerations"—is an argument in the guise of chronicle, a political testament in the guise of survival manual, values in the guise of "necessities." Fabre-Luce's stratagem and style are evident in the following excerpt from his concluding argument; his stylistic powers are stretched to their limit, for he is advocating, by means of appeals to necessity and survival, that France become Germany's co-belligerent at a point when the war's likely duration and the hardships to be suffered had increased with the entry of the Soviet Union and the United States:

> The choice offered us is simple. A new Europe is being built. We are invited to participate in its construction. If we refuse, slavery is kept in store for us. Our response can no longer be held back. . . . If we tergiversate again, there will be a sanction. . . . To keep from being overwhelmed by domestic and foreign events, Pétain has to recall the man who, in the eyes of Germany as in the eyes of France, incarnates collaboration: Pierre Laval. Sixteen months earlier the news would have been the sign of an assuagement of our misfortune. That possibility (limited from the beginning) has disappeared. Germany loyally warns us, and Laval is careful not to raise false hopes. . . . To begin with, France will have to impose new efforts on itself. . . . But at least we have avoided the worst: a rupture with Germany, a putting in question of national unity.[16]

While Fabre-Luce speaks of a national unity to be saved, he was actually aiming at a national identity yet to be fully constructed. He wanted to see Vichy—already flying the banner of Work, Family, Fatherland—replicate the Nazis' ability to forge a link in popular consciousness between the deaths inflicted or suffered on behalf of the State and the symbolization of collectivity and tradition as the Fatherland. He relished what he considered the beginning of just that process. In June 1941, Vichy forces gathered in Syria at the behest of the Germans went into combat against a British-led force that included Free French troops. The fact that the Vichy forces were overrun at the cost of 1,038 lives did not mean for Fabre-Luce military defeat, or the tragedy of Frenchmen killing Frenchmen, or the consequences of fighting proxy wars for Germany.[17] Rather, it meant that na-

tional identity could be refashioned in the imagery of blood and soil: "The army has fought. Vichy has been died for! Impossible, henceforth, to maintain that the government of Marshal Pétain does not represent France."[18]

De Man's other articles dealing with collaboration suggest how he viewed his own relation to the occupying power. As regarded the prospects for social revolution in Belgium and elsewhere, he considered collaboration a rare opportunity and a duty. As regarded the fact of occupation and Belgium's loss of sovereignty, he regarded collaboration as a harsh necessity that had to be undergone to restore national sovereignty on a new, justifiable basis.

On March 25, 1941, de Man reviewed a book by the right wing French author Jacques Benoist-Méchin. Entitled *La Moisson de Quarante,* the book chronicles the author's months as a prisoner of war. Having fallen into German hands shortly after the armistice was signed in June 1940, Benoist-Méchin and his fellow prisoners were required to harvest the crop. De Man, presumably picking up on Benoist-Méchin's own message, drew out the fable contained in the Frenchman's account of his role in helping to organize his fellow prisoners' forced participation in the harvest. The prisoner of war is transfigured into the very image of the good citizen:

> In the cooperation between Germans and Frenchmen, in the purifying solidarity that is created between men who endure the same hardships and overcome the same ordeals, he has sought out signs of what the future might hold. His experience was hardly disappointing: it turns out that, when strictly controlled and rationally administered, this fragment of the French people, in which all social ranks were represented, courageously did their duty. (3/25/41)

Besides representing collaboration as a cooperation based on common experience, de Man also sounded the theme that necessity was bringing out the commonality between the Germans and the French. Despite "the very different mentalities of the two peoples," he argued, "no abyss separates them in reality, and when a common task has arisen, understanding has been perfect. That is the principal lesson to be drawn from this lovely book" (3/25/41).

Five months later—two weeks after the review of Brasillach—de Man again discussed collaboration. His review of Pierre Daye's *Guerre et révolution* praised the right wing Belgian journalist's commentary on the current situation. Subscribing to Daye's view that the war had in fact opened the possibility of sweeping social changes, de Man chastised those Belgians "who remain blinded by nationalist passions." The war was in fact "the beginning of a revolution." Collaboration was pitted against resistance as good will to ill.

Resistance to the Nazis was, in de Man's view, a stubborn refusal to fulfill a social duty, whereas collaboration offered active involvement in revolutionizing an inequitable society. De Man crafted an indictment of resistance and a praise of collaboration designed to reverse the identification of resistance with patriotism, collaboration with treason. His call for collaboration was an appeal for social transformation. He relegated the Nazis' invasion and occupation of Belgium to "secondary" significance:

> Leaving aside questions of supremacy, which are in fact secondary, the situation creates a certain quantity of practical possibilities for replacing a political apparatus that has become harmful with an organism that would assure a distribution of goods more in keeping with justice. For whomever has thought that such achievements are possible and necessary, it is his duty not to absent himself under current conditions. For undoubtedly he will never again find circumstances so favorable for a renewal as at this moment when all institutions are in the process of being replaced. And even if this new program does not yet happen to be established with precision, things had come to such a point of decomposition and degeneration that the will to change must exist before everything else.
>
> Pierre Daye's "Guerre et révolution" recalls in clear and simple terms just such fundamental truths which must guide the action of men of good will. (8/26/41)

De Man's comments, published in August 1941, appeared in the context of a multi-leveled struggle between resistance and collaboration. Several incidents occurred in July and August.

In mid-July, the Germans organized a trade exposition, but attendance was very poor. *Le Soir* editorialized against this "passive resistance" of the population. The editorial's tone differs from de Man's as that of the "bad cop" to the "good cop," but it contains the same double appeal to survival and uprightness:

> This exposition offered to small and large manufactures, as well as to artisans, a means of getting work and of creating jobs. At this moment when English generosity has placed the barrier of its blockade between us and our overseas customers, only one market is open, the continental market. Germany comes to us as a buyer, and what's more as a peaceful buyer. And the Belgian economic world sulks. Waiting with arms crossed for an English victory, taking refuge behind the pretext of a false patriotism, in a passive resistance whose only victim is Belgium, is not only absurd but criminal.[19]

Active resistance too occurred during the summer of 1941. Moreover, the choice between resistance and collaboration en-

tailed significant consequences, especially as the Nazis intensified their response to acts of sabotage and of defiance.

Journalists were targeted. Franz Peeters, director of the Belgian wire service, had been arrested at the end of February and charged with having done a disservice to Germany through a "lack of neutrality." He fell into a coma during his detention and interrogation by the Gestapo. He died at his home on May 29, 1941, without having regained consciousness.[20]

On June 2, the Nazis announced their policy of taking revenge on hostages when the perpetrator of some "crime" could not be found. In response to the fatal shooting of a German soldier, the authorities incarcerated one hundred male residents of the Laeken quarter, where the attack had occurred.[21]

The German authorities had also cracked down on Belgians who assisted English pilots downed over Belgium. While the reporting of acts of resistance was tightly controlled, some incidents were reported. Thus, on August 11, the papers reported—presumably as warning and example—the trial of a woman and her parents who had aided a British pilot after he had crash-landed and been brought to their home. All three were sentenced to death.

Citizens had several confrontations with German soldiers and with Belgian units of the S.S.

In the Flemish town of Hasselt, "black brigades" of the Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond (VNV, Flemish National League) had been harassing residents who wore the national colors of Belgium on their lapels. In response, a crowd attacked a group of the black brigades on June 15, injuring as many as thirty, including a VNV deputy.[23]

On the national holiday, July 21, crowds in Brussels jeered German officers and soldiers, setting off several physical confrontations. The next day the authorities condemned such "anti-German demonstrations" and tightened the curfew. On July 23, similar incidents outside Brussels led to several arrests and detentions. The next day the authorities announced the widening of its policy of taking hostages in retaliation for anti-Nazi activity. On August 12, an altercation broke out at a tavern between a group of uniformed black brigades and residents of the Marolles quarter of Brussels. The fighting spread into the streets, and several pro-Nazi soldiers were seriously beaten.[24]

When *Le Soir* editorialized against "false patriotism" on July 16, and when de Man intoned against "nationalist passions" on August 26, they spoke against these kinds of acts of sabotage, protest, and resistance. The struggle for public opinion —collaboration vs. resistance—complemented the Gestapo's methods of guaranteeing acquiescence to the new order: unwarranted detentions, retaliatory arrests and hostage takings, torture, and executions. De Man, as well as his paper, was actively complicit in the process of bringing a subjugated population to obedience. As an intellectual practice, de Man's writing responded to the surrounding context in general and in specific. Beyond his willingness to propagandize for the Nazis and beyond his general contribution to fascist ideology, he carried out the orders of the day and actively furnished the required justifications for an entire range of measures taken by the

One more episode from the summer of 1941 will illustrate how de Man's choices stood in sharp contrast to those of others who directly faced the pressures of the occupying power. It involves another act of conscience and resistance of the kind de Man condemned in August. Throughout the month of June a crisis unfolded between the burgomaster of Brussels, a man named Van de Meulebroeck, and the man whom the Nazis had installed as general secretary of the Interior, a VNV activist named Gerard Romsée. Romsée tried to force on Van de Meulebroeck a new slate of aldermen, all Rexists and Flemish nationalists; Van de Meulebroeck refused and protested Romsée's usurpation of powers that lawfully belonged to the burgomaster himself. On June 26, the German authorities dismissed Van de Meulebroeck. In defiance, he first convened a meeting to appoint a successor and then made a visit to the hundred hostages being held in retaliation for the killing of the German soldier. On June 29, he had a letter posted all through the city informing the population that he was being unlawfully removed from office: "I am, I continue to be, and I will continue to be the only legitimate burgomaster of Brussels." He called his refusal to obey Romsée a matter of "honor and duty." On July 1, Van de Meulebroeck was arrested, along with the printer who prepared the posters of his letter. In addition, the city of Brussels was fined five million francs in the form of a "Van de Meulebroeck tax" to be paid by the residents.[25]

Circumstances gave even de Man's most empty phrases very precise and concrete meanings. The intellectual's participation in fascism was carried out in the struggle over the meaning of keywords and the interpretations to be given to specific forms of conflict and action. Over against Van de Meulebroeck's sense of his duty not to obey the orders given him, de Man spoke of "one's duty not to absent oneself under present conditions." Over against Van de Meulebroeck's protest against the illegitimacy of Nazi rule and appeal to the legitimacy of Brussels' civic government, de Man welcomed the replacement of a "harmful political apparatus" with a new and more just "organism" for governing the society. And over against those who took to the streets against the presence and the emblems of

Nazi power, de Man elevated the collaborator as the image of those "men of good will" who could transcend "nationalist passions."

ANTI-SEMITISM

On March 4, 1941, *Le Soir* published a special page under the banner "The Jews and Us." It included several articles, one of which, entitled "The Jews in Contemporary Literature," was written by de Man.

He advanced three sets of claims in the article:

(1) He challenged the idea that European literature and culture since 1920 were "degenerate and decadent because Judaized." That idea, he argued, reflected a "vulgar anti-Semitism" that accepted "the myth of Jewish dominion" in modern culture, a myth that "the Jews themselves have helped spread."

(2) He advanced the idea that European literature possessed an evolutionary continuity that linked even the "most revolutionary" trends in modern literature to the longer span of the tradition. That continuity refuted the notion that the "particular mentality of the 1920s" could have been responsible for the development of modern literature. "So too, the Jews could not claim to have been the creators of it, nor even to have exercised a preponderant influence on its evolution."

(3) On the basis of this challenge to "vulgar anti-Semitism" and this view of literary tradition, de Man drew his conclusion: If the Jews were "isolated" from Europe and its cultural life, the contemporary European literature and its ongoing evolution would not be significantly affected.

The article is rhetorically complex. But it is not ambiguous. The complexity derives from the fact that it was aimed at two radically distinct audiences. On the one hand, de Man was engaged in an ongoing discussion conducted by fascist intellectuals, within earshot of the occupying power, about the evaluation of modern culture and the role of Jews within it. On the other hand, he was contributing directly to an anti-Semitic campaign addressed to the Belgian public and designed to legitimate the anti-Jewish measures of the Nazis.

Within the first of these contexts, de Man's position can be sharply distinguished from the other contributors to the March 4 issue. Indeed, his charge of *vulgar* anti-Semitism could easily have been directed at them. He did not explicitly evoke the specifically racial ideology of Nazism, whereas the lead editorial declared, "Our anti-Semitism is racial. . . .. We are resolved to forbid all cross-breeding with [Jews] and to rid ourselves of their destructive influence in the domain of thought, literature, and the arts." And, de Man's whole line of aesthetic argument concerning the continuity of modern art with the European tradition directly contradicts the view presented in Georges Marlier's attack on modern painting, particularly expressionism, cubism, and surrealism, as caught in "the grip of Jewish nihilism."[26]

De Man's argument was designed to contain anti-Semitism. But he did not object to the repression of Jews; he was objecting to the repudiation of modernism. He in fact used the prevailing stereotype of the soulless Jew to turn the tables on the anti-modernists:

> On closer examination, this influence would even appear extraordinarily slight, for one might well have expected, considering the specific characteristics of the Jewish mind, that they would have played a more shining role in this artistic output. Their cerebralness, their ability to assimilate doctrines while maintaining a certain coldness toward them, would seem quite precious qualities for the lucid analytical work that the novel requires. . . . That [Western intellectuals] have been capable of protecting themselves from Jewish influence in so representative a domain of culture as literature attests to their vitality. We could not entertain many hopes for our civilization if it had let itself be invaded without resistance by a foreign force.

De Man's response conforms to a pattern that was fairly typical among non-German fascist intellectuals. Mosse has shown that many French fascists initially rejected the philosophical and scientific underpinnings of the racial doctrines, yet actively fostered cultural and religious anti-Semitism. Brasillach, for example, in 1938 "criticized the Nazis for making race into a metaphysical doctrine (whatever that meant) while he himself considered all Jews as an alien people with undesirable characteristics."[27] Doriot's Parti Populaire Français did not become racist until the German victory and occupation. The pattern Mosse discerns is that of a gradual adaptation to, and then adoption of, Nazi doctrine on the part of other fascist movements.

It is really the shape and scope of that adaptation on de Man's part that needs to be interpreted. The article should not necessarily be considered a centerpiece of de Man's thinking at the time. It was his one sustained foray into openly anti-Semitic writing, and he managed before and after its publication to develop his ideas about literary trends and traditions without explicit recourse to anti-Semitism. The fact that it appeared as part of a special page of *Le Soir* suggests the possibility that de Man did not initiate the article but responded to an editor's request. I propose, therefore, to approach the question of de Man's relation to anti-Semitism through a more narrowly focused question:

How could he have come to the point of writing this particular article?

Let us assume that anti-Semitism had not been part of de Man's intellectual-moral makeup before the war. The article would then lie somewhere along a path of decisions taken in the wake of the invasion and occupation. Indeed, de Man had to have crossed several thresholds to write the particular article he contributed to *Le Soir*'s anti-Semitic supplement.

First, he had to have already found that the advantages of association with the Nazis outweighed the moral, intellectual, and personal costs of acquiescing to their anti-Semitism. His own convictions must not have obligated him to contest the racial doctrines, even if he did not subscribe to them. And he must have found that his ideological commitments and intellectual ambitions could tolerate, even adapt to, the anti-Jewish measures the German military authority had already undertaken by March 1941. According to Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg, those measures began with two decrees issued in October 1940, "which ran the whole gamut of the preliminary steps of the destruction process. The concept of 'Jew' was defined; Jewish lawyers and civil servants were ousted from their positions; Jewish enterprises and stocks were subjected to registration; and all transactions were made subject to official approval. Finally, the Jewish population was also ordered to register for future surveillance."[28] These policies encountered opposition from Belgian officials. Several officials in the judiciary and bar protested that the decrees were "in opposition to our constitutional rights and our laws."[29] The country's secretaries general likewise protested to the German military authority against the order to dismiss all Jewish public employees: "The principle of the eligibility of all Belgians for employment means that everyone, without distinction based on birth or religious or political opinion, has an equal right to obtain public employment."[30]

De Man crossed a second threshold when he reached the point of being able to make a written contribution to the anti-Semitic campaign. Minimally, he must have deemed the contribution a means of demonstrating his loyalty to the occupying power. He may well have been instructed by an editor to write something on literature and the "Jewish problem" which would satisfy the German overseers. But the skill with which he evoked key anti-Semitic themes went beyond merely fulfilling his assignment. He fashioned an argument that not only might have been a convincing performance for his superiors but also aimed at convincing his readership that the anti-Semitism of the Nazis need not become an assault on highly esteemed cultural values and institutions.

De Man subordinated the anti-Semitic themes to his focal argument about modern literature and tradition. Does that argumentative structure indicate a reserve on his part toward anti-Semitism, perhaps even the core of a disguised critique? To the contrary, the argumentative structure of the article shows that de Man had crossed a third threshold in his complicity with Nazi anti-Semitism. He had become willing to voice a whole cluster of anti-Semitic ideas in order to enhance the acceptability of his own cultural criticism. He had taken up anti-Semitism as an instrument of persuasion. He thus reproduced an essential procedure of Nazi propaganda; anti-Semitism had long served Nazism as a means of articulating other features of its ideology and program: for example, the Jew as figure of capitalistic greed and of communist conspiracy.

The *way* de Man made the linkage between anti-Semitism and his own defense of modern literature, especially in his article's final remark, marks the crossing of a fourth threshold. For he passed from an ideological association with Nazi policies toward Jews over to an overt acceptance of further acts of repression. He presented the prospect of deporting and colonizing the European Jews as a means of underscoring his notion that the long continuities of the cultural tradition proved the "resistance" of "our civilization" to the "foreign force" of "Jewish influence." De Man thus made the absence of the Jews an image for the vitality of European literature:

> By keeping its originality and character intact despite the Semitic meddling in every aspect of European life, [our civilization] has shown that its deep nature was healthy. Moreover, one thus sees that a solution of the Jewish problem which would aim at the creation of a Jewish colony isolated from Europe, would not entail deplorable consequences for the literary life of the West. The latter would altogether lose some personalities of mediocre value and would continue, as in the past, to develop in accordance with its greater evolutionary laws.

Between 1938 and 1941 the idea of forcibly removing the European Jews to a colony was the prevailing proposal for a "solution of the Jewish problem." Various schemes were discussed by the leadership of the Third Reich, both among themselves and in diplomatic contacts with foreign governments. The idea had also been publicly presented in terms that made clear that the Nazis' intention was to remove the Jews from all of Europe, denying them citizenship rights and expropriating their property to pay for the scheme. The Berlin government held a news conference for foreign journalists on February 7, 1939. Alfred Rosenberg, author of the Nazis' key racial doctrines, presided and challenged the Western governments to help solve the "Jewish problem":

What territories are the democracies willing to provide for the purposes of settling some fifteen million Jews? The Jewish millionaires and multi-millionaires will have to place their means at the disposal of, let us say, the office of the Evian Conference. If millions of Jews are to be settled, elementary humanity toward the Jews demands that they shall not be left to themselves, but that the colony be placed under administrators trained in police work. There is no question of establishing a Jewish State, but only of a Jewish Reserve.[31]

By 1940–41 the Reich leaders were exhausting the last of the "emigration" plans, the so-called Madagascar plan. The plan called for France to cede the African island to Germany. But the diplomatic requirements could not be met. According to Hilberg's account, the plan "hinged on the conclusion of a peace treaty with France, and such a treaty depended on an end of hostilities with England. . . . When the project collapsed, the entire machinery of destruction was permeated with a feeling of uncertainty. No one could take the decisive step on his own, for this decision could be made only by one man: Adolph Hitler."[32] It is a very grim coincidence that in March 1941, even as de Man was promoting the idea of deportation and colonization in the pages of *Le Soir,* the leadership of the Third Reich was deciding that the "emigration" plans were unrealizable. The decisive turn toward the Final Solution followed.

Even though the Final Solution was probably unfathomable to de Man early in 1941, he was asking his readers to imagine that their society could be emptied of the Jews and yet remain unchanged in all its essentials. As a message crafted for a public that was proving uncooperative with German policies, his brief discourse evidences an acute sense of what might be required to transform that resistance into acquiescence. It was a question of maximizing the sense of the foreignness of Jews while minimizing the sense of their importance to the common life of the country. De Man may also have been looking to strike some chord of resentment toward the 30,000 Jewish refugees who had fled into Belgium beginning in 1939, increasing Belgium's Jewish population to 90,000. By trying to use the deportation and colonization of European Jewry as an image of the harmony and continuity of Western culture, de Man was experimenting with the most virulent form of anti-Semitism within his political culture.

That he backed away from it after the article on "The Jews in Contemporary Literature" may indicate that he found that step morally untenable. It may, however, merely indicate that thereafter he abandoned the attempt to connect his cultural criticism to anti-Semitism—either because of the nonreceptiveness of the Belgian population to anti-Semitic propaganda or because of an inability to find a systematic connection. The question cannot be answered based on the evidence at our disposal. What the evidence does show is that he did not, at least through August 1942, repudiate the notion and image of the absence of Jews. The theme recurred twice more in his writings. On March 16, 1942, in his role of publicist, de Man reported, in glowing terms, on a History of Germany exhibition in Brussels. He praised the unity of the exhibition:

> That's the first element that will interest the visitors: to have a clearer vision of the very complex history of a people whose importance is fundamental for the destiny of Europe. It will be seen that the historical evolution of Germany is governed by a fundamental factor: the will to unify a set of regions that have one and the same racial structure, but which its enemies ceaselessly endeavor to divide. (3/16/42)

And then on August 20, 1942, de Man published an article on contemporary German fiction in the Flemish journal *Het Vlaamsche Land.* By this time, the anti-Jewish measures had extended to the "Aryanization" of Jewish property, the requirement that Jews wear the yellow star, roundups, forced labor, and the first deportation of Jews from Belgium to Auschwitz. It is extremely unlikely that de Man would have failed to feel the magnitude of the possible complete deportation of Jews from Belgium. Of the 90,000 Jews in the country at the time of the German invasion in May 1940, nearly all lived in Antwerp and Brussels. There had been 50,000 Jews in Antwerp, a city of 273,000 (the Antwerp agglomeration being 493,000); there were 30,000 Jews in Brussels, a city of 192,000 (the agglomeration 912,000.)[33] Raised in Antwerp and working in Brussels, de Man could not have been unaware of the presence of the vulnerable population whose absence he was so ready to imagine. Nonetheless, the pattern of his thinking had not changed since March 1941:

> When we investigate the post-war literary production in Germany, we are immediately struck by the contrast between two groups, which moreover were also materially separated by the events of 1933. The first of these groups celebrates an art with a strongly cerebral disposition, founded upon some abstract principles and very remote from all naturalness. The in themselves very remarkable theses of expressionism were used in this group as tricks, as skilful artifices calculated [for] easy effects. The very legitimate basic rule of artistic transformation, inspired by the personal vision of the creator, served here as a pretext for a forced, caricatured representation of reality. Thus, [the artists of this group]

came into open conflict with the proper traditions of German art which had always and before everything else clung to a deep spiritual sincerity. Small wonder, then, that it [was] mainly non-Germans, and in specific Jews, that went in this direction.[34]

The consistency in de Man's thinking lay in the absence of the Jews as an image of some valued unity or harmony. Their absence from Europe a sign of cultural vitality and literary continuity; their absence from Germany the realization of a national and racial destiny; their exile, imprisonment, and deportation after 1933 a sign of German literature's recovery of the true tradition of German art.

There is a pointed lack of evidence that de Man undertook any moral reassessment of his relation to anti-Semitism during the occupation. Moreover, there is significant, though indirect evidence that his moral commitments included a detached acceptance that innocent people had to die. On September 1, 1942, he reviewed Hubert Dubois' *Le Massacre des Innocents*—a poem I have not been able to locate in order to comment more precisely on de Man's interpretation—and used it to present a moral vision of the ongoing war:

> One could readily call this *Massacre des Innocents* a meditation on the culpability that has led humanity to the frightful state in which it finds itself at the moment. Complaint and lamentation cannot be justified, even in so pitiful a situation. For all that is now happening is not the blind and pitiless action of destiny, but the consequence of a misdeed [*faute*], an accumulation of moral misdeeds committed in the course of the ages. The utility of such an ordeal is to force an awareness of this culpability, to make the masses [*les foules*] see that they have acted badly. Consequently, the harsher the punishment the greater the hope of seeing arise, at last, the true values which must permit harmonious living instead of the false indulgences that have led to the catastrophe. (9/1/42)

This particular moral vision cast the Nazi war machine and police state as instruments of moral renewal. It envisioned the specific crimes of Nazism as, instead, the response of the moral universe to unspecified historical crimes committed by the masses. By adopting that vision, de Man intricated himself in a web of self-justification from which he never did disintricate himself.

I have set out to make the case that Paul de Man was a fascist, an anti-Semite, and an active collaborator with the Nazis during the German occupation of Belgium.

I have reconstructed the various levels of de Man's intellectual practice in order to disclose the precise degree and nature of his commitment to fascism. The results of the inquiry are incontrovertible. De Man responded, consistently and actively, to an entire range of ideological imperatives associated with European fascism and political imperatives specifically dictated by the Third Reich.

He reported uncritically on cultural events that the Nazis and the Belgian fascist parties staged to foster fascist ideology. In a context defined by continual confrontations between Nazi rule and Belgian resistance, de Man also supplied rationalizations and legitimations for the repressive measures the Nazis took against armed and unarmed acts of resistance, against journalists and civic leaders, against workers, and against Jews.

Fascism provided de Man with a means of interpreting his private experience, including the psychological-cultural crisis of maturation, and of connecting that experience to values that would orient his active participation in a public world. He placed himself within, and measured himself against, the intellectual and political culture of French fascism. The writers who actively collaborated with the Nazis and pressed the Vichy regime toward stronger alliances with Germany in the war served as models for his own intellectual practice. He actually saw his own political commitment to fascism as more informed and less restrained than theirs.

De Man went beyond merely voicing anti-democratic, anti-bourgeois, and anti-communist sentiments. The intellectual project he pursued aimed at synthesizing a critique of bourgeois culture and an authoritarian politics that would cement a hierarchical society through totalitarian discipline and mass ritual. In striving to articulate that synthesis, de Man tested the usefulness of anti-Semitism as a means of persuasion in the struggle over the cultural values of fascism. In the process he promoted the image of a Europe without Jews as a fitting symbol of the new order he anticipated and the new values he desired.

I have dwelt on de Man's writings of 1941–42. Two questions that have great relevance today—By what path did he arrive at his post-war intellectual identity? And how do his later writings respond to the earlier?—cannot really be addressed until, and unless, we come to grips with his fascist commitments. Otherwise critique and apology alike will ring false.

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NOTES

1. Paul Delandsheere and Alphonse Ooms, *La Belgique sous les nazis* (Bruxelles: Edition Universelle, 1953), II, 155; 412; III, 317–319.

2. *Le Soir,* March 31, 1941. Hereafter I will cite, by date, de Man's writings in *Le Soir* in the text.

3. David Littlejohn, *The Patriotic Traitors: A History of Collaboration in German-Occupied Europe,* 1940–45 (London: Heinemann, 1972), p.222.

4. In addition to other works cited, I have found the following works extremely helpful:

Geographical Handbook Belgium, B. R. 521 (Restricted), Naval Intelligence Division (Great Britain, February 1944).

G. Carpelli, "Belgium," in S. J. Woolf (ed.), *Fascism in Europe* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), pp.283–306.

Jean Stengers, "Belgium," in Hans Rogger and Eugen Weber (eds.), *The European Right: A Historical Profile* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965).

Jacques Willequet, "Les fascismes belges et la seconde guerre mondiale," *Revue d'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* 66 (avril 1967), pp.85–109.

5. Quoted in Delandsheere and Ooms, II, 105.

6. Ibid., II, 110.

7. George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), p.280. See also his *Germans and Jews: The Right, the Left, and the Search for a "Third Force" in Pre-Nazi Germany* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1970), esp. pp. 3–33, and pp.144–170.

8. Robert Brasillach, *Notre avant-guerre* (Paris: Plon, 1941), pp. 276–277.

9. Ibid., p.272.

10. Ibid., p.278.

11. Littlejohn, pp.210–211.

12. Eugen Weber, "France," in Rogger and Weber, p.109.

13. Littlejohn, pp.213–215, 222–223.

14. Alfred Fabre-Luce, *Journal de la France:* 1939–1944 (Paris: Fayard, 1969), p.443. In this edition, "Part III: Vichy"—pp. 281–444—corresponds to the original second volume.

15. Littlejohn, pp.239–246; and Fabre-Luce, pp.340–352; 424–444.

16. Fabre-Luce, pp.432–444.

17. Littlejohn, pp.225–226.

18. Fabre-Luce, p.362.

19. Quoted in Delandsheere and Ooms, I, 397.

20. Ibid., I, 342–343.

21. Ibid., I, 345–346.

22. Ibid., I, 419–420.

23. Ibid., I, 361–362.

24. Ibid., I, 399–406; 422–423.

25. Ibid., I, 359–360; 368–376; 381–383.

26. De Man renewed his polemic with Marlier in a review of the latter's book on Belgian painting (8/4/42). Though respectful in tone, de Man clearly rejected Marlier's judgments of French surrealism and German expression. According to Delandsheere and Ooms, I, 150, Marlier was on the editorial board of the Rexist daily, the *Nouveau Journal.*

27. George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1978), p.195.

28. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), p.384.

29. Cited in Lucien Steinberg, *Le Comité de défense des Juifs en Belgique* 1942–1944 (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1973), p.32.

30. Cited in Delandsheere and Ooms, I, 159.

31. Cited in Gerard Reitlinger, *The Final Solution: The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe,* 1939–1945 (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1953), pp.21–22.

32. Hilberg, p.261.

33. The population figures are from *Geographical Handbook Belgium,* p.217. The figures are 1939 estimates, based on the 1930 census. The figures for the number of Jews in Belgium are from Hilberg, p.383.

34. Paul de Man, "Blik op de huidige Duitsche romanliteratuur," *Het Vlaamsche Land,* August 20, 1942, p.2. Text and translation supplied by Ortwin de Graef.