



## HUMAN NATURE IN CÉLINE AND DRIEU LA ROCHELLE

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**SUMMARY:** Céline and Drieu La Rochelle are representatives of that generation of French writers who went through trenches of the Great War, started their literary activity during inter-war period drawing on both their wartime experience and life in post-war Paris. Moreover, both were influenced by profoundly ideologized *Zeitgeist* and their experience with German occupation. For these authors concept of human nature was one of the basic themes they treated of. Even though it seems that irrationalism, moral relativism, stress on depth psychology and biological dimension of human existence make Céline and Drieu "*compagnons en route*" and even though Drieu professed Céline as one his soulmate, it is not the case. There is number of differences between Céline and Drieu. Both reject basic theses of enlightened philosophy and progressist vision of society, but whereas Drieu assumes Nietzschean vision of decadence overcome by means of "*revolution du corps*" and "*Führerprinzip*", Céline is much less ideological: his characters are at the mercy of Hobbesian "*homo homini lupus*" and a nihilist void. Even though both writers' world is dominated by the merciless Darwinism, Drieu believes in its meaning whereas Céline does not.

**Key-words:** Luis-Ferdinand Céline, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, human nature, mind, body.

**RESUMO:** Céline e Drieu La Rochelle constituem representantes daquela geração dos escritores franceses que passou pelas trincheiras da Grande Guerra, estreou a sua atuação literária durante o período entre guerras, aproveitando-se tanto da sua própria experiência na guerra, como da vida em Paris de pós-guerra. Por cima, ambos foram influenciados pelo *Zeitgeist*, profundamente ideologizados quanto da sua experiência com a ocupação alemã. Para esses autores, o conceito da natureza humana era um dos temas essenciais. Apesar de parecer que irracionalismo, relativismo moral, ênfase na psicologia de profundidade e dimensão biológica da existência humana fazem Céline e Drieu "*compagnons en route*" e apesar de Drieu declarar Céline sua alma gêmea, não é exatamente assim. Há muitas diferenças entre Céline e Drieu. Ambos rejeitam explicitamente as teses básicas da filosofia das Luzes e da visão progressista da sociedade mas enquanto Drieu assume a visão nietzscheana da decadência superada via "*revolution du corps*" e "*Führerprinzip*", Céline é muito menos ideológico: seus caracteres estão à mercê do "*homo homini lupus*" hobbesiano e

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do vazio niilista. Embora o mundo dos dois escritores seja dominado pelo darwinismo inexorável, Drieu acredita no sentido dele e Céline não.

Palavras-chave: Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, natureza humana, mente, corpo.

In some of previous articles I attempted to explain what exactly constituted basic elements of fascist intellectual climate emerging long time before the birth of fascism or nazism, it is before 1900. If one decides to apply oneself to so-called literary fascism – in the case of Drieu and Céline – one has to take into consideration not just specific factor of the French fascism but also 19th-century European apocalypticism (LAQUEUR:1996), psychologism and individualism of romantic and neo-romantic literature, Darwinism and its different vulgar forms.

What was these authors' vision of the world and human nature ? Was it dominated by strong subjectivism, irrationalism, stress on biological aspect of human existence, rejection of principles of Christian morals, Darwinist "struggle for life", contempt for bourgeois morals of western modern societies (materialism, consumption, hypocrisy), swing to Nietzschean vision of existence ? In closer look one discovers that many elements of such philosophical scheme were already present in great figures generally viewed as situated outside nazi-fascism. An excellent example is not just Nietzsche but also Bergson, C.G.Jung, German *lebensphilosophie* (in Ernst Jünger) or *völkisch* thought (Lagarde, Langbehn). Hunger for "total man" (cultural ideal Drieu called "*l'homme hitlérien*" and others "*l'uomo nuovo*" or "*Übermensch*") is linked with more or less clear rejection of Cartesian rationalist tradition as present especially in France, rejection of tradition Christian values and interest in pagan cults.

Some of them focus on anti-rationalism, others on biological and instinctive aspect of man, others speak about soul and others consider man as an "impenetrable" being. It is frequently instinct that plays role "reason" did in classicism or "feeling" in romanticism. Human nature is closely linked with the nature itself – it is Darwinist embrace that links human with animal and its instincts. Man is essentially as merciless as nature itself regardless of his religious or philosophical dogmas.



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Such *Weltanschauung* did not come into being with authors like Drieu La Rochelle or Céline, it is apparent already in Barrèsian cult "*la terre et la mort*" even though in Barrès himself "instinct" is not so mysterious because it constitutes voice of ancestors (blood, traditions, religions). Nevertheless, Barrès in *L'Appel au Soldat* exclaims "*L'intelligence, quelle très petit chose à la surface de nous-même*" (BARRÈS:1900, p. X) thereby announcing "*résurgence des valeurs irrationnelles, (...) culte du sentiment et de l'instinct*" (STERNHELL:1978, p.16) and substitution of "*explication mécanique du monde*" by "*explication organique du monde*". Such a shift had been preparing at least since 1850s and echoed in literature, social sciences and psychology.

Literary *fin-de-siècle* is full apocalyptic imagery expressing this or that version of destruction, ruin, doom or decadence. Laqueur places beginning of *fin-de-siècle* culture in 1880s but links it with essential element of fascist cultural revolution:

Symbolism and *fin-de-siècle* was a European phenomenon but the differences in various countries were as striking as the common features. Some critics later argued that *fin-de-siècle* had originated in Germany with Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Wagner, who had decisively influenced French cultural life. But one should not overrate the interest and receptiveness of the French in German culture in the 1880s (...). If the typical figure of French, and even more of British *fin-de-siècle* had been the world of the weary dandy with the cult of the self, he was succeeded within ten years by a very different prototype. It was fascinating to see how Maurice Barrès and D'Annunzio managed to make the change from hyperaestheticism to a super patriotism which came close to fascism. (...) Even in retrospect the rapid change in mentality and outlook is amazing (LAQUEUR:1996, p. 10-11)

When Drieu tries to understand and explain arts, philosophy or politics, he turns to human soul. It is not return to Christian symbolism but one of new expressions of fundamental human nature. Drieu is not Bergsonian philosopher, but admits influence of instinctive forces on human behaviour: human soul has physiological qualities. What seems to be a spiritual



aspect of the soul is just sublimated form of the instinctual. Drieu is neither rigid follower of Le Bon's thesis about "*la constitution mentale des races*" (LE BON:1894, p.4-5). Even though one can find accusations of Jewry for the decline of the West, modernization and urbanization in his novels and even though his "*Révolution du corps*" is implicitly linked with the body, instincts and race, Drieu is not a biological determinist. For Drieu modern western society has been going through a degeneration process for at least one century which leads to misplacement of its very essence – that is what he expresses in his early poetical work (*Restauration du corps*): degeneration leads to physical deviations (DRIEU:1941,p. 49-53). Soon, Drieu rejects Cartesian philosophy and its differentiation between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* and adopts voluntarist concept of intellect "(...) *la volonté est intelligence ne font qu'un*" (DRIEU:1922, p.25). Primacy of instinct and will is present in all his works.

### **IRRATIONALISM AND INSTINCT: ROYAL ROAD TO KULTURPESSIMISMUS**

Irrationalism can be found in many inter-war writers. Not only they understand politics and society in terms of instinct and unconscious, but in terms of arts as well. Cult of the irrational and the instinctive rests in the base of German expressionism for example. There reformer of modern poetry Gottfried Benn or nazi dramaturgist Hanns Johst find their inspiration. That is why they attack rational concept of human nature in Marxism.<sup>2</sup> Benn is convinced that it is instinct that controls what seems to be clear and rational aspect of the soul. Man is primarily motivated neither by economics nor by climate, bases of his behaviour rest in unconscious which means they are "unknowable". Thus, Benn's thoughts approximate those defended by Italian philosopher Julius Evola according to whom rational methodology should be substituted by depth psychology (*psychologie des profondeurs*). Secrets and riches of life, strength, vitality, true meaning of life rest exactly here. Benn believes that nazi ideology, expressionism and the true art must draw from here. Drieu's "*Révolution du corps*" refers to the same unconscious forces in which he views key for European renewal. Symbol of

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<sup>2</sup> Benn criticized concept of art conceived by Soviet art theorist Tretjakow (1931).



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such vital forces is not just "soul", "unconscious", "instinct" or "body", but also "blood". For German writer Hellmuth Langenbucher *"l'instinct, c'est la voix du sang"* (WULF 1968: p.272). Reason is supposed to be subordinated to instinct once for all.

Fully adopting that philosophy Drieu welcomes fascism (1934) and maintains such attitude at least till 1943. During that "fascist" period Drieu becomes confessor of Nietzschean philosophy. Withal as Yves Avril writes: *"Tout au long de sa vie (il le découvre à quatorze ans), il lit et relit Zarathoustra, Naissance de la Tragédie, la Volonté de puissance"* (AVRIL:1970,p. 347). Reference to Nietzsche appears in Drieu repeatedly – especially in *Interrogation* and in the pages of *Mesure de la France*:

J'ai essayé de lire pour la première fois *Zarathoustra* à l'âge de quatorze ans. Je n'y ai rien compris, mais dans un livre touffu quelques phrases qui jaillissent, cela fait la voix de Jéhovah au milieu du buisson flambant. J'avais bouleversé par cet appel de feu. Cet homme me demandait quelque chose, exigeait de moi quelque chose. La jeunesse veut se donner et cherche quelqu'un qui lui demande de se donner (AVRIL:1970, p. 347)

Nietzschean monism of soul and body is strongly present even in Drieu's last novel *Mémoires de Dirk Raspe*: *"La pensée humaine ne peut assurer son triomphe dans le monde qu'en faisant de son corps un trésor de force et de joie, d'harmonie et de sagesse"* (DRIEU:1966, p.116). Joining fascism, Drieu bets on Germany as an agent of renewal and declares: *"la nature humaine prend sa racine dans la biologie. Qu'est-ce que l'humanisme ? la recherche et le maintien du point d'équilibre entre ce qui chez l'homme est animal et ce qui est désincarné, entre ce qui est trop brutal et ce qui est trop pur"* (DRIEU:1943, p.151). In *Drôle de voyage*, in *Rêveuse bourgeoisie* or in *L'Homme couvert de femmes* it is sexual instinct that dominates "decision-making" of his characters. Behind self-destructive turn of Drieu's characters rests sexuality and incapacity to control it. The control Camille Le Pesnel exerts over his wife is purely sexual. Agnès knows about adultery of her husband but her



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sexual instincts are too strong and is ready to forgive him everything. Even though Drieu had – likewise many other fascists authors and ideologues – reserves to Freudian psychoanalysis, in *Rêveuse bourgeoisie* described Oedipal relationship or Oedipal fantasies Yves feels towards his mother:

(...) à ses yeux enchantés, quelque chose alors rayonnait du front au menton et d'une oreille à l'autre chez la jeune femme, qui faisait valoir chaque trait, les yeux vifs et dévorants de vie, le nez mince aux narines frémissantes ... (...). Il y avait aussi la bouche. C'étaient des lèvres minces, souples et très rouges, même sans fard et il aimait ces lèvres au matin, même un peu séchées, craquelées et gercées (DRIEU:1937, p.108).

Similar irrationality of Drieu's novels constitutes Margot in *Une Femme à fenêtre*. Margot lets unknown man, Boutros, enter her hotel room even though she knows it can lead to many serious problems. All that takes place just because of instinctual intuition: "*Elle l'examina avec cette acuité du premier regard qui fait que les femmes d'abord jugent un homme d'une façon qui, tant elle est exacte, devient profonde. Quand elle sont la force, elle la reconnaissent en un clin d'oeil*" (DRIEU:1930, p.30). Time will tell that mutual instinctive attraction is a genuine love.

Céline's hero, Bardamu, gradually discovers that noble feelings have purely instinctive essence: "*Comme elle me fuyait, Musyne, je me prenait pour un idéaliste, c'est ainsi qu'on appelle ses propres petits instincts habillés en grands mots*" (CÉLINE:1934, p.106).

Instinctual forces underlie both war and fascist movements:

Guerre, espèce de solitude, tu m'a obsédé, tu me tiens. Voici ton suprême assaut. Il faut que m'abandonne à toi, corps et biens. Tu as mis en moi une tendresse incurable: je ne saurais plus vivre hors de toi. Tu m'as pénétré d'un amour étrange. Je suis un pauvre enfant fasciné et perdu (DRIEU:1941, p.25)

Drieu is an enemy and opponent of French traditional rationalism. He is not mere critic of rationalism but consequent anti-rationalist author and thinker for whom instinct becomes harbinger of a new historical epoch, new deity as for Le Bon:



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La naissance de dieux nouveaux a toujours marqué l'aurore d'une civilisation nouvelle, et leur disparition a toujours marqué son déclin. Nous sommes à une de ces périodes de l'histoire où, pour l'instant, les cieux restent vides. Par ce fait seul, le monde doit changer (LE BON: 1894, p.170)

Irrationality is closely linked with revaluation of human nature whose center of gravity is now situated far from rationality and rational concepts of human nature including Marxism or socialism. Nietzsche and after him right-wing intellectuals mocked at optimism of socialists and Marxists that, according to them, resulted from 18th-century concepts of "*perfectibilité humaine*". All these attitudes stood for attack against democratic concept of society because that resulted from the thesis of natural goodness of man. Such distrust to human nature was typical of conservative Catholics including Pétain or Maurras:

L'homme ne peut avoir l'homme sans l'imaginer aussitôt comme conquérant ou conquis, comme exploiteur ou exploité, comme victorieux ou vaincu, et, enfin, pour tout dire d'un mot, comme ennemi. Aristote a beau dire que l'homme social. Il ne serait pas social s'il n'était industriel, et les fruits de son industrie lui sont si nécessaires ou si beaux qu'il ne peut les montrer sans être mainte fois obligé de courir aux armes. La défense de ces biens ou leur pillerie, c'est toute l'histoire dumonde (MAURRAS:1941, p.8).

Our authors naturally accept animal essence of man. Human think essentially just of himself, his pleasure, his material and spiritual well-being. Some consider noble emotions as mere hypocrisy, dissimulation or lack of authenticity. Thus, pity and compassion get transformed in disguise, democratic ideal of brotherhood becomes false. In fact, people are fisty, voracious, selfish beasts. Authors as Drieu, Céline, Jünger or Benn accept it without any problem. Already before Hitler's coming to the power Gottfried Benn links confidence in human rationality and kindness with decadence (KUNNAS:1972, p. 43). Evil in man is not a consequence of social organization as suggested by Rousseau or Marx. According to Benn these and similar theories attempted to obscure tragic dimension of human existence. Modern liberal society makes human alienated and non-authentic: humans do not pay attention to



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unconscious and instincts. They are perhaps useful and helpful but they are not authentic (BENN: 1968, p.716-718).

These ideas are present already in Drieu's early poetry written shortly after his wartime experience: "*(...) je n'ai point confiance dans l'homme/il ne vaut rien sans sa souffrance*" (DRIEU:1941, p.81-82). In Céline they appear number of times in his first novel: "*Je ne croirai plus jamais à ce qu'ils disent, à ce qu'ils pensent. C'est des hommes et d'eux seulement qu'il faut avoir peur, toujours*" (CÉLINE:1933, p. 21). Bardamu's fellows make him feeling fear of them:

Il existe pour le pauvre en ce monde deux grandes manières de crever, soit par l'indifférence absolue de vos semblables en temps de paix, ou par la passion homicide des mêmes en la guerre venue. S'ils se mettent à penser à vous, c'est à votre torture qu'ils songent aussitôt les autres, et rien qu'à ça. On ne les intéresse que saignants, les salauds ! (CÉLINE:1933,p.106).

Innate human malice Bardamu finds in his voyage to Africa both among crew of the ship and among other passengers. Their evil, malice and hatred are simply natural and reveal Bardamu's infantile naivety:

Le Commandant du navire, gros malin trafiqueur et verruqueux, qui me serrait volontiers la main dans les débuts de la traversée, chaque fois qu'on se rencontrait à présent, ne semblait même plus me reconnaître, ainsi qu'on évite un homme recherché pour un affaire, coupable déjà ..De quoi ? Quand la haine des hommes ne comporte aucun risque leur bêtise est vite convaincue, les motifs viennent tout seuls (CÉLINE:1934, p.150-151)

Bardamu scoffs his mother's education and morals, her belief in human goodness and Christian Providence:

Elle n'en ratait jamais une ma mère pour essayer de me faire croire que le monde était bénin et qu'elle avait bien





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fait de me concevoir. C'est le grand subterfuge de l'incurie maternelle, cette Providence supposée (CÉLINE:1934,p.121-122)

For Bardamu, trust in man is simply naive and disastrous: "*Faire confiance aux hommes c'est déjà se faire tuer un peu*" (CÉLINE:1934, p. 227). Drieu's heroes Mme Pragen, Camille Le Pesnel are too distant to good man as conceived by Enlightenment. Another figure Michel Boutros admits that no human feeling is really altruistic: "*Toute passion est intéressée. La passion des hommes pour les idées est intéressée...*" (DRIEU:1930, p.106). Love is accompanied by hidden egoism. Distrust to goodness of other humans is a dominant element in Drieu's works. Such psychology is clearly visible in characters as Gilles or Dirk Raspe. The latter of them declares: "*Ça n'existe pas, la bonté; c'est une ruse comme une autre*" (DRIEU:1966, p. 211). In Drieu's world evil triumphs and generates all forms of weakness, resentments and hatred.

Human will belongs to the same category. This Nietzschean principle forms background of whatever activity, feeling and faith (DRIEU:1939, p. 382). In Drieu compassion is usually ironized: it is not a symptom of decline as in Nietzsche but rather of non-authentic feeling like in Johst and Pound (KUNNAS:1972, p.45). Drieu's heroes despise penitence, they reject it as Gilles does: "*Pourquoi cette pitié intense qui s'empare des vivants devant les morts ? Ils ont pitié d'eux-mêmes*" (DRIEU:1939, p.121). Such scepticism is visible in the way Drieu views politics, political thought and ideologies as well. Drieu rejects positive, progressist or utopian visions, does not believe in humanism and humanitarian ideals and hence makes towards fascism and against communism. If Drieu feels aversion towards weakness, he admires virile strength and gets convinced that the strong individual is able to put an end to decadence and to introduce a new vital order. According him, masses are "*un peu efféminées*" and that is why easily manipulated by dictators and running risk that their dependance will be abused. On the other hand – with the same distrust – Drieu believes that dictators come at times when masses are the weakest. In his play *Chef* (1933) Drieu clearly expresses such weakness of masses: "*Il y a une épouvantable faiblesse dans les hommes qui se donnent à un autre homme. Quand il y a un dictateur, c'est qu'il n'y a plus plus d'élite ne fait plus son devoir*" (CORDAY:1944, p.272). The paradoxical is that Drieu himself trusted in nazism so much, that collaborated with



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it. Drieu declares himself Anglophile ("*Je n'ai jamais été germanophile. J'ai horreur des philies. Mais j'admets les manies [je suis anglomane]*"; AVRIL:1970, p.347). What he admires in Englishmen is their sport and athletic spirit. Drieu is convinced that the sport is the source of English vitality. Benignity of sport is supposed to result from joy, strength, effort and self-control ("*leur plaisir, c'est l'effort*") and Drieu gets disappointed when unsuccessfully trying to play football. However it just raised his admiration to athletics and to England. Such admiration of insular mentality is not far from his admiration of what he understands as German "*socialisme fasciste*". Under normal conditions Drieu would not wish Germany dominating France but neither Pétain nor Doriot managed regenerating French decadent society. In such a case it was German nazism that was supposed to put an end to decadence. Drieu adopted opinion according to which it could be only Hitler who could put an end to European decadence. Writing about his motives he declares in 1943:

(...) je suis fasciste parce que j'ai mesuré les progrès de la décadence en Europe. J'ai vu dans le fascisme le seul moyen de contenir et de réduire cette décadence, et par ailleurs, ne croyant plus guère dans les ressources politiques de l'Angleterre comme de la France, réprouvant l'intrusion d'Empires étrangers à notre continent comme ceux des États-Unis et de la Russie, je n'ai vu d'autres recours que dans le génie de Hitler et de l'hitlérisme" (DRIEU:1943, p.105)

Regeneration he expected from sport, German cultural and political mission was not so much result of his political pragmatism but rather idealism behind which there was no renewal of traditional Christian virtues but rather military virtues: physical strength, vitality, will, courage and asceticism of life in trenches. Drieu was approaching such notions when witnessing German triumph over French and ejection of English from beaches near Dankerque (SOUCY: 1967, p.76). This ideal of German(ic) "*l'homme fasciste*" is probably reason of his later disappointment but is firmly connected with his cult of body and instinct and ideal of medieval Crusader.

As it is visible, in spite of his *Kulturpessimismus* Drieu maintained number of cultural ideals. In comparison with his contemporary Louis-Ferdinand Céline he seems to be as a



confessor of great cultural ideals. His political attitudes, joining Doriot's PPF and nazi-fascism presuppose sincere faith in "*l'homme hitlérien*" and his future.

### CÉLINE: *KULTURPESSIMISMUS* OR IDEOLOGY ?

In his work about "*le romantisme fasciste*" (SÉRANT:1959) Paul Sérant placed Céline next to Robert Brasillach, Alphonse de Chateaubriant, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, Abel Bonnard and Lucien Rebatet. Even though this proximity is questionable in many respects and even though fascism is a doctrine surrounded by a number of ambiguities, Céline can be linked with it just with some reserves. Whereas Drieu was active in the external world (commentator, journalist, writer, playwright, poet), Céline was probably more immersed in his own inner imagery and his work reminds much more of a house with many unexplored rooms. Even though Drieu ended his life committing suicide, his vision was not so pessimistic as that depicted by Céline because at least from 1917 he systematically invested in the vision of renewal of both France and Europe. In Céline, there is no idea of renewal but rather a severe critique of society in general: "*les masses despiritualisées, dépoétisées sont maudites*". Céline girds at intellect and so-called "*penser la vie*", but he is not representative of whatever Utopian vision either. It is true that Céline admired some fascist regimes (MORAND:1972, p.126), but such illusion lasted only a few years: such admiration is clearly present in *L'École des cadavres* where Céline views Hitlerian Germany as a mixture of racism, pacifism and socialism.

On the first sight Céline's *Kulturpessimismus* may seem similar to that of Drieu. Besides, Drieu himself considered him a kindred spirit ("*Moi, je me situe entre Céline et Montherlant et Malraux*"). But contrary to Drieu it is very difficult to find whatever ideal in Céline's work. As mentioned above, Drieu's idea of "*révolution du corps*" or athletic renewal is just in his pamphlets. Likewise Drieu he is convinced that renewal of the body leads to renewal of spirit:

Il faut réapprendre à créer, à deviner humblement, passionnément, aux sources du corps, aux accords plastiques, aux arts élémentaires, les secrets de danse et musique, la catalyse de toute grâce, de toute joie et la



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tendresse aux animaux, aux tout petits, aux insectes, à tout ce qui trébuche, vacille, s'affaire, échoue, dégringole, trimbale, rebondit, recommence de touffes en brin d'herbe et de brin d'herbe en azur, tout autour de notre aventure, si précaire, si mal disposée ...Que pense de nous la coccinelle ? ... Voilà qui est intéressant ! Point du tout ce que pense Roosevelt, ou l'archevêque de Durham (...)  
(CÉLINE:1941, p.175)

Likewise Drieu Céline denounced phenomenon of decadence he called "*roi bistrot*". In the second chapter of *Bagatelles pour un massacre* Céline says: "*La France est le pays le plus fort consommateur du monde*" and the French:

Type d'homme auquel le Français joueur de belotte ou pêcheur à la ligne, buveur d'apéritif à bedaine ou intellectuel émâcié ne cesse d'être opposé comme un vivant repoussoir (CÉLINE:1941, p. 34).

There is no doubt he deplors France is lacking its "*chefs patriotes*":

Le plus grand politique que la France ait connu depuis Louis XIV ... Il connaissait nos droits. Il plaidait le dossier de la France l'un dans l'autre tous les huit jours. Avec lui, ça périmait pas. Jamais il perdrait notre cause, il gagnait toujours. S'il était encore vivant, ça ne serait pas passé comme ça (CÉLINE:1941, p. 34).

None of what has been already said does not make Céline to profess either "*Führerprinzip*" or salutary enlightened elite. It seems that such idea is totally alien to Céline. In two chapters of *Beaux Draps* deals with "*élite*" but rather in a satirizing way. Céline does not share conviction that "*l'homme fasciste*" could put an end to the decadence. In contrast to Drieu, Céline does not attempt to define his political attitudes or convictions. When, in 1940s, accused from number of crimes and collaboration, Céline tried to explain his fundamental anti-ideological and anti-political position and labeled himself as "*homme à style et non à idées*" (thus referring to his anti-rationalism). In spite of that his political convictions were discussed even a long time after his death.

Rejection to be classified and categorized is proper not just to Céline-thinker but also to Céline-writer. This is the attitude Céline manifested already at the beginning of 1930s when publication of his first novel was being prepared:



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Publication procedures were further complicated by the "corrections" made by overly enthusiastic typists who, (...) took it upon themselves to put the manuscript into "proper" form by adding commas and periods in the conventional manner. "They're trying to make me write like François Mauriac!" was Céline's curt and annoyed comment on this. Three of four revisions of the galley were necessary before the novel, which revolutionized traditional prose for min France, could finally be rendered into typographical terms. (OSTROVSKY:1967, p.6)

Céline obstinately stood and wanted to stand apart even though style of his first novels situated him among "*populaires*" authors and the left-wing leaders tried to usurp him:

J'adhère jamais rien ... Ni aux rascidots ... ni aux colonels ...ni aux doriotants...ni aux "Sciences Christians" ...J'adhère à moi-même, tant que je peux ...C'est déjà bien mal commode par les temps qui courent (CÉLINE:1937, p.34)

In extremely ideologized times of 1930s and 1940s Céline's trajectory did not cease to confuse those who were trying to classify both him and his work. Even though his first novel was almost immediately designed for *Prix Goncourt* and Céline won *Prix Théophraste Renaudot*, it provoked not just admiration but also violent attacks. However, there were no doubts that it was an important, original and revolutionary contribution to the French and world literature. Drama *L'Église* (1933), lecture known as *Hommage à Zola* (1936) and second novel *Mort à crédit* (1936) followed, confirmed author's fame and established him firmly among the most prominent 20th-century writers. Another confusing moment constituted Céline's travel to U.R.S.S. (together with Louis Aragon and Elsa Triolet) which led many left-wing intellectuals to precipitate ideological labeling, to appropriate him as "their" author and speaker. Paradoxically, after his return to France Céline wrote *Mea Culpa* which was scathing critique of "proletarian paradise" in U.R.S.S. At that point Céline's systematic rejection to be associated with whatever group or category starts.

Céline's "pamphlet period" (*Bagatelles pour un massacre*, 1937; *L'École des cadavres*, 1938; *Les beaux draps*, 1941) managed to convince many about his violent antisemitism and



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racism even though none of it is present in his two previous novels. At the very beginning of *Voyage Bardamu* sarcastically condemns racism:

La race, ce que t'appelles comme ça, c'est seulement ce grand ramassis de miteux dans mon genre, puceux, transis, qui ont échoué ici poursuivis par la faim, la peste, les tumeurs et le froid, venus vaincus des quatre coins du monde. Ils ne pouvaient pas aller plus loin à cause de la mer. C'est ça la France et puis c'est ça les Français (CÉLINE:1934, p.11-12)

Thus confusing period started and Céline became misunderstood. Following period of Céline's life constitutes even more confusion: Céline's visit of Berlin (1942), later crossing of French-German frontiers (1944), detention and internation in the camp for "free-thinkers" and rejection to promote nazi regime, reaching Denmark (1945), French charge from collaboration, imprisonment in Denmark (1945) and final condemnation by the French law court (1951) raised even more questions and confusion.

In spite of condemnation he suffered from French society and his fellows all his work was published worldwide both during his life and after his death. On the other hand many legal complications have stifled publication of certain of his works in France, many critics referred to Céline as "*Il maledetto*" or "*L'Impardonable*" so that even decades after his death Céline remained "the unquiet dead, which is probably the best testimony to his immortality" (OSTROVSKY:1967, p.13).

Controversies do not surround just Céline's life but also his work. What "*famille d'esprit*" does he belong to? What was the ideology he professed? His work has been subject to various but frequently contradictory interpretations. One of them says that Céline belongs to leading writers of all the modern European literature but his true place and importance are controversial. Some place him among giants as Kafka, Joyce or Proust and some even divide French literary history before and after Céline (OSTROVSKY 1967:14). Others disregard him completely or put him among minor authors who expressed pessimistic or nihilist feeling of 1930s.

Céline is one of those authors "*whose work proceeds in a vertical rather than in a horizontal direction*" because his literary vision develops "*in an ever-deepening fashion*"



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where *"the architecture of one repeats and reflects the other"* (OSTROVSKY:1967, p.16). Such description of Céline's work reminds Heraclitan vision of soul as the depth (chthonos) : *"You could not discover the limit of the soul (psyche), even if you traveled every road to do so; such is the depth (bathun) of its meaning (logos)"* (HILLMAN:1975, p. xi) and a typically romanticist procedures avoiding linear in favour of *circumambulatio* - contemplation about object from various perspectives. Romanticism preferred Platonic ideas to Aristotelian categories and got focused on eternal transcendent forms (PAPADOPOULOS:2006).

In Céline a dark vision – or what Ostrovsky calls "blackening" (*"noircir"*) – is enduring and repeated phenomenon lying far beyond "ideologies". As an arch-individualist Céline makes us investigate in older literary traditions and discover broader genealogy he belongs to: *"ancient tradition of irrationalist, mystical, obscurantist literature which (...) would link him most closely to the Middle Ages and the sixteenth century and to a tradition which preceded that of the Classical Age with its emphasis on reason, formal beauty, elimination of excess"* (OSTROVSKY:1967, p. 17) which is exactly the current that reappears *fin-de-siècle* literature and manifests as rejection of classicism dictate.

Céline's militant pessimism, satiric derision, dark vision of human existence puts him into the current flowing from Villon to Becket but is not alien to one of his tributaries – 20th-century existentialism – either. That is why one can say that Céline is close to authors like Pascal, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Dostojevski, Flaubert and others. Affinity to existentialism is apparent, but Céline – so scornful to *ratio* and French intellectual tradition – does not establish problem of human existence in typically philosophical and academical way, e.g. in abstract philosophical terms and concepts. Perhaps that is the reason why he is not generally mentioned in history of French existentialism.<sup>5</sup> But Céline is also revolutionary of literary style with significant influence among at least two generations of American prose-writers and poets,

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<sup>5</sup> In France philosophy and literature had long time mutually complementary roles. In such a context Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir emerge as *'writer-philosophers'*, e.g. as artists who investigate what they consider the most important questions concerning human existence both in theory (philosophical article or essay) or in literature (novels, plays, screenplays, etc.). LEAK, A., "Existentialism". In: Burgwinkle, W., Hammond, N., Wilson, E. (eds.). *The Cambridge History of French Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 585.



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especially those pertaining to *San Francisco renaissance* (Allen Ginsberg, William Carlos Williams) or the *Beat generation* (William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac) or Henry Miller whose interest in Céline started already in 1940 with reading of *Voyage*.<sup>6</sup>

Essentially one can understand Céline as a fundamental destroyer or denunciator, who blackens not just human existence in itself but all the western civilization, its "progress", its myths, institutions, religious and literary tradition:

There is no doubt that Céline belongs in the ranks of the great destroyers. Uprooting secure concepts of existence and literature at the same time, he commits what for many is an unpardonable sin – that of leaving us no refuge of any kind, no exit from the trap he has shown our world to be (OSTROVSKY:1967, p.18)

Ostrovsky's approach could be called existential or depth-psychological whereas Morand's ideologico-political because Morand attempts to go beyond Céline's literary creation and find its intersections with modern ideologies (socialism, pacifism, fascism, antisemitism or anarchism). Thus, whereas the first embarks in analysis of "Célinian darkness" and "mythology of night", the latter tries to relate Céline-destroyer with great western ideologies. Such intersections get particularly visible when comparing Céline's pamphlets and other works. On the other hand ideological aspect lurks behind in his novels as well. Thus, Princhard, Céline's "philosopher" in *Voyage*, reveals – at least partly – author's condemnation of modern society, rationalism, intellectualism and idea of progress:

(...) Les Philosophes, ce sont eux, notez-le encore pendant que nous y sommes, qui ont commencé par raconter des histoires au bon peuple ...Lui qui ne connaissait que le catéchisme ! Ils se sont mis, proclamèrent-ils, à l'éduquer ...Ah ! ils en avaient des vérités à lui révéler ! a des belles ! Et des pas fatiguées ! Qui brillaient ! Qu'on en restait tout ébloui ! C'est ça ! qu'il a commencé par dire, le bon peuple, c'est bien ça ! C'est tout à fait ça ! Mourons tous pour ça ! Il ne demande jamais qu'à mourir le peuple ! Il est ainsi. "Vive Diderot !" qu'ils ont gueulé et puis "Bravo Voltaire" En voilà au moins des philosophes ! Et vive aussi Carnot qui organise si bien les victoires ! Et vive tout le monde ! Voilà au moins des gars qui ne le laissent

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<sup>6</sup> one can compare two Kerouac's characters from his novel *On the Road* (Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise) with Céline's postavami z *Voyage* (Bardamu a Robinson).





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pas crever dans l'ignorance et le fétichisme le bon peuple !  
Ils lui montrent eux les routes de la Liberté ! Ils  
l'émancipent ! Ça n'a pas traîné ! Que tout le monde  
d'abord sache lire les journaux ! C'est le salut ! Nom de  
Dieu ! Et en vitesse ! Plus d'illettrés ! Il en faut plus ! Rien  
que des soldats citoyens ! Qui votent ! Qui lisent ! Et qui  
se battent ! Et qui marchent ! (CÉLINE:1934, p. 89)

Céline's anti-rationalism/irrationalism is of different origin than that of Drieu. Morand speaks about "*désacralisation en vertu d'un primaire bon sens*":

Le soldat, autrefois valet de guerre rémunéré, mercenaire au service d'un maître et non d'une idée, s'est changé en soldat-citoyen, soldat "gratuit". Les philosophes du XVIIIe siècle sont cause de cette mutation. Au nom de la Liberté, "on se mit à fabriquer des héros en série, et qui coûterent de moins en moins cher, à cause du perfectionnement du système". C'est l'occasion pour Céline de se livrer à une attaque en règle de la philosophie humanitaire de la Révolution française. Homme du Moyen-Age, comme il se plaisait à le rappeler, il afficha toujours un profond mépris envers les innovations de la Renaissance et de la Révolution. Selon lui, lorsque les grands de ce monde se mettent à aimer le peuple c'est qu'ils complotent de le "tourner en saucissons de bataille" (MORAND:1972, p.28)

A long passage of Princhard's monologue leads Bardamu to severe condemnation behind which contempt for French rationalism is clearly visible ("*Il avait le vice des intellectuels, il était futile*"), yet this Céline's character is one of those who reveal the author's intellectual desacralization of those parts of western modernity generally viewed as "superior": masculine virtues (heroism, courage, strength), rationalism, progress, liberty ! Contrary to Drieu's characters Bardamu admits his own cowardice because there is "no exit from the trap he has shown our world to be" (OSTROVSKY:1967, p.18):

Oh ! Vous êtes donc tout à fait lâche Ferdinand. Vous êtes répugnant comme un rat ...  
- Oui tout à fait lâche, Lola, je refuse la guerre et tout ce qu'il a dedans ... Je ne la déplore pas moi ... Je ne me résigne pas moi ... Je ne pleuriche pas dessus moi ... Je la refuse tout net avec tous les hommes qu'elle contient, je ne veux rien avoir à faire avec eux, avec elle. Seraient-ils neuf cent quatre-vingt-quinze millions et moi tout seul, c'est eux qui ont tort, Lola, c'est moi



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qui ait raison, parce que je suis le seul à savoir ce que je veux: je ne veux plus mourir ! (CÉLINE:1934, p.84-85)

Thus Bardamu differs in this respect from Drieu's characters. Where Drieu – as commentator, journalist or writer – believes in mystic virility transforming decadent people into Hitlerian heroes, Céline tears down all the masks of the modern world and rejects joining masses of its worshippers. Bardamu must pretend that he too believes in "great truths" of the modern world even though his proper body cries for help. In *Voayge* Bardamu again and again discovers the world where "great truths" blend with boundless void of nothingness. In sanatorium Bardamu discovers vital importance of deceiving in human world:

Mais quand on est faible ce qui donne de la force, c'est de dépouiller les hommes qu'on redoute le plus, du moins prestige qu'on a encore tendance à leur prêter. Il faut s'apprendre à les considérer tels qu'ils sont, pires qu'ils sont c'est-à-dire, à tous les points de vue. Ça dégage, ça vous affranchit et vous défend au-delà de tout ce qu'on peut imaginer. Ça vous donne un autre vous même. On est deux. Leurs actions, dès lors, ne vous ont plus ce sale attrait mystique qui vous affaiblit et vous fait perdre du temps et leur comédie ne vous est alors nullement plus agréable et plus utile à votre progrès que celle du plus bas cochon (CÉLINE:1934, p. 81-82).

In the Parisian rear people pretend there is no terrible war, no killing, no victims. Lie is literally everywhere:

On mentait avec rage au-delà de l'imaginaire, bien au-delà du ridicule et de l'absurde, dans les journaux, sur les affiches, à pied, à cheval, en voiture. Tout le monde s'y était mis. C'est à qui mentirait plus énormément que l'autre. Bientôt, il n'y eut plus de vérité dans la ville. Le peu qu'on y trouvait en 1914, on en était honteux à présent. Tout ce qu'on touchait était truqué, le sucre, les avions, les sandales, les confitures, les photos; tout ce qu'on lisait, avalait, suçait, admirait, proclamait, réfutait, défendait, tout cela n'était que fantômes haineux, truquages et mascarades. Les traîtres eux-mêmes étaient faux (CÉLINE:1934, p.70)



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It is especially women who worship "great truths" with particular fervour. Bardamu soon discovers that repeating empty words is the easiest way how to get their respect and love:

Les femmes surtout demandaient du spectacle et elles étaient impitoyables, les garces, pour les amateurs déconcentrés. La guerre, sans conteste, porte aux ovaires, elles en exigeaient des héros, et ceux qui ne l'étaient pas du tout devaient se présenter comme tels ou bien s'apprêter à subir le plus ignominieux des destins. (CÉLINE:1934, p.117)

In his amorous relations Bardamu must learn how to lie and hide his own attitudes and feelings:

En somme, il était salement mauvais. Si je lui avais dit ce que je pensais de la guerre, à Lola, elle m'aurait pris pour un monstre tout simplement, et chassé des dernières douceurs de son intimité. Je m'en gardais donc bien, de lui faire ces aveux (CÉLINE:1934, p.69)

Confronted with his love he confesses his dark vision and disbelief. What seemed to be great and noble is tiny and miserable:

Lâche ou courageux, cela ne veut pas dire grand-chose. Lapin-ici, héros là-bas, c'est le même homme, il ne pense pas plus ici que là-bas. Tout ce qui n'est pas gagner de l'argent le dépasse décidément infiniment. Tout ce qui est vie ou mort lui échappe. Même sa propre mort, il la spéculait mal et de travers. Il ne comprend que l'argent et le théâtre (CÉLINE:1934, p.107-108)

Bardamu desecrates sacrament of modern times and patriotism:

Ma conclusion c'était que les Allemands pouvaient arriver ici, massacrer, saccager, incendier tout, l'hôtel, les beignet, Lola, les Tuileries, les Ministres, leurs petits amis, la Coupole, le Louvre, les Grands Magasins, fondre sur la ville, y foutre le tonnerre de Dieu, le feu de l'enfer, dans cette foire pourrie à laquelle on ne pouvait vraiment plus rien ajouter de plus sordide, et que moi, je n'avais cependant ajouter de plus sordide, et que moi, je



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n'avais cependant vraiment rien à perdre, rien, et tout à gagner)

That was also a reason why Céline was labeled as "*pacifiste*", "*anarchiste*" or, most frequently, "*individualiste*". Pacifist label was largely justified. Céline declared himself an anarchist several times (OSTROVSKY:1967, p. 30-31). Almost all his works (including posthumous novel *Pont de Londres* and dissertation about *Sommelweiss* written before *Voyage*) take place in the wartime context, all constitute accusations of war. Even "Céline-pamphlétaire" is pacifist. Moreover we must take into consideration tradition of French pacifism and renewed internationalism of 1920s. In all Céline's work we can find denunciation of military virtues as false and feigned which is something we cannot find either in Drieu or Montherlant. At the very beginning of *Voyage* Céline demythizes great battlefield virtues by means of naive and gullible Bardamu whom makes central knight-errant of his dark universe. But soon Céline rejects fatherland cult, liberal optimism and its faith in progress as well. Like that Céline tears off the mask of western modernity and its concept of human nature. That is something that contradicts Drieu's worshipping of "*l'homme hitlérien*". Céline declared himself an anarchist several times, but his anarchism is rather result of anti-ideological attitudes than a doctrine. Céline is convinced that the true literature has to be thoroughly anarchistic, e.g. must not follow any doctrine because just like that can reflect real condition of the world. Céline is too sceptical to believe in application of whatever doctrine including various versions of anarchism or pacifism. Contrary to Drieu Céline is not a reformer, moralist hidden behind indefatigable pamphleter. Neither he is an idealist wishing better social order, worshipper of "new man" believing in fascist "constructive destruction". Label "existentialist" would be probably much more appropriate because he touches the very bottom-line of human existence or rather dark side of it:

The idea, that Céline is interested in achieving changes in a particular social system is fallacious. Not only does he refuse to attribute to literature the ability to reform existence, but he also also firmly believes that the present social system is as rotten as any other, past or future. His horror and disgust go much further; the attacks are directed against life itself. His goal is not to reconstruct



society, nor even to suggest palliatives  
(OSTROVSKY:1967, p. 30)

But Céline's existentialism is not a doctrine that could be categorized in some school of thought. It is a profoundly experienced anger and indignation which takes form of horrific farse in *Voyage au bout de la nuit* whereas in other novels and pamphlets one can feel outspoken rage.

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