
"VOL DE NUIT":

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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A critical analysis of Vol de Nuit, discussing the thought and style, and its place in the works of Saint-Exupéry.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
I. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF "VOL DE NUIT" AND ITS ORIGINS	4
1. General Description	4
2. Origins and Details of Composition and Publication	7
3. A Précis of Contents	10
II. THEMES	15
III. LITERARY TECHNIQUE	31
1. Characterisation	31
2. Structure	43
3. A Note on Language and Style	50
IV. "VOL DE NUIT" IN RELATION TO THE OTHER WORKS OF SAINT-EXUPÉRY	72
CONCLUSION	98
BIBLIOGRAPHY	101

"Aimer ceux que vous commandez.
Mais sans le leur dire."

(Saint-Exupéry, Vol de Nuit)

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to give a detailed critical analysis of Saint-Exupéry's second work, Vol de Nuit (1931), and then briefly to relate this with the author's six other main works, namely Courrier Sud (1928), Terre des Hommes (1939), Pilote de Guerre (1942), Le Petit Prince (1943) and Citadelle (1948).

Saint-Exupéry's works are often divided into three groups, the first being the two "reportages romancés" (Courrier Sud, Vol de Nuit), the second two "témoignages directs" (Terre des Hommes, Pilote de Guerre), and the last group "allégories" (Le Petit Prince, Citadelle).¹

In Vol de Nuit much will be found to throw light on all the other works, both in the field of style and in that of ideas, for this work is perhaps the author's most concise and accomplished. Its predecessor, Courrier Sud, is generally regarded as the work of a young man. The books which follow, rather than adding to Saint-Exupéry's thought, essentially do nothing more than expand what has already been said in Vol de Nuit.

¹ L. Estang, Saint-Exupéry par lui-même, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1959), p.61.

If Saint-Exupéry appears to repeat himself throughout his works, this tendency will help to establish more clearly an emphasis on the relationships between his thought and his life. The reason is that while the roots of his thought remain the same, his thought nevertheless goes on evolving and continually finding new expression. But the fundamental directives and desires expressed are constant and consistent. Citadelle in no way contradicts his first novel. On the contrary, there is a definite link, for what was rejected by Barnis² (a religious solution to the human condition) is taken up again in his posthumous book, Citadelle. The priest in Courrier Sud anticipates the Grand Calé³ when he says,⁴ "Que deviendrez-vous hors de ma demeure, hors de ce navire où l'écoulement des heures prend son plein sens (. . .) Venez à moi, vous à qui l'action, qui ne mène à rien, fut amère."⁵ (45)

Therefore, by a close examination of what is for many Saint-Exupéry's most successful book, this study will

²
The hero of Courrier Sud.

³
The chief character of Citadelle.

⁴
P. Chevrier, Saint-Exupéry, (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), p.46.

⁵
Numbers in parenthesis following a quotation refer to pages of the Pléiade Edition of Saint-Exupéry, Œuvres, (Paris: Gallimard, 1959).

attempt to show how Vol de Nuit is fundamental to the study of the author's life and work as a whole. In Vol de Nuit we find the base upon which Saint-Exupéry's language and style is built. In addition the themes which are introduced in Vol de Nuit, such as the themes of action, participation, fraternity, man and the individual, sacrifice, discipline, "devenir", etc., will reappear in various forms in his later works. Chapter III will display the author's skill in the novel form, and perhaps explain why he moved from this form to the direct narrative of Terre des Hommes.

I

A GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF VOL DE NUIT AND ITS ORIGINS

1. General Description

Vol de Nuit is concerned with the early days of an airline company in South America, the Aeroposta Argentina, founded for the purpose of transporting mail to and from Europe. At the outset, planes flew during daylight hours only, because night flying was considered a practical impossibility. It was soon realised by the organisers of the airlines that if the competition of overland and sea transport (which was able to operate twenty-four hours a day) was to be challenged, night flights would become a necessity. It became obvious, indeed, that the very existence of the airline depended on the success or failure of these night flights.

Flying in complete darkness is an everyday occurrence now, because airmen can rely on countless aids to navigation, and in particular on radar. Formerly it was fraught with such hazards that it was often compared to man's first venture onto the sea centuries ago.¹ It was considered a very dangerous challenge, since the only aids the pioneer pilots could rely on were very primitive,

¹ R. Marill, Saint-Exupéry, (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1961), p.48.

indeed they often amounted to no more than a compass and an altimeter.

In order that the obvious dangers, and the fear they instilled in the pilots, could be overcome, a good organiser and leader of men was found to be indispensable. In Vol de Nuit this figure is Rivière, who succeeds in inspiring those whom he commands to courageous acts.

The book relates the fate of three night flyers who are transporting mail from points in South America, from Chile, Paraguay and Patagonia. All three are converging on Buenos Ayres, where a fourth aircraft will fly the mail to Natal (Brazil). The mail will then be shipped by boat to Dakar (West Africa) from where it is delivered northward to Europe.

Rivière, the head of the line in Latin America, is awaiting anxiously the arrival of the three aircraft in Buenos Ayres, the headquarters of the network. Pellerin, the pilot flying from Santiago, Chile, lands safely under clear skies. Fabien, flying the Patagonia mail, however, encounters bad weather. A storm centre gradually spreads to cover the whole portion of his route. Simone, Fabien's wife, arrives at the airport to enquire after her husband's safety, when she realises that his flight is delayed. However, radio contact is eventually lost, and it soon becomes apparent that the aeroplane can no longer be in flight, since the gasoline supply must now be exhausted.

Later the mail from Paraguay lands safely after a smooth, uneventful journey through clear weather. The arrival of this last flight is for Rivière a great consolation. It enables him to surmount the grave difficulty created by the loss of an aeroplane, and a defeat becomes, for him, a victory. The mail-plane to Europe is finally ordered to leave in spite of the recent loss.

Vol de Nuit recounts the happenings of a single night in the life of Rivière, no doubt the central figure of the work. Saint-Exupéry describes in detail the anxieties of this leader of men, and the obstacles which lie between him and the success of his venture, for failure will endanger the very life of the airline. Rivière is a thinker, continually meditating on the nature of life and his work, and the value of his and his pilots' mission. The author very skillfully draws our attention to Rivière's humanistic philosophy in between the descriptions of Fabien's flight. Rivière, the principal person in Vol de Nuit, represents thought. Fabien is the principal pilot and represents action. Thought and action are thus very effectively interwoven throughout Vol de Nuit.

2. Origins and Details of Composition and Publication

The sources of this "novel"² are to be found in Saint-Exupéry's life as a pilot of the line. This began on 11 October 1926 when one of his teachers, the Abbé Sudour, introduced him to Beppo de Massimi, a director of the Compagnie Générale d'Entreprises Aéronautiques (founded in 1921 by Latécoère).³ The young flying enthusiast was immediately referred to Didier Daurat who was director of the company at Toulouse. Daurat offered Saint-Exupéry work on the ground staff, which he refused, making clear his wishes to become a pilot. Before he could do so, he was obliged to serve a short apprenticeship of a few months in the workshops of the airport, and then began to fly mail-planes on the Toulouse-Casablanca route. At that time the Spanish government reluctantly gave permission to fly over Rio de Oro. Certain Arab tribes were proving to be a great hazard to both pilots and airline property at the North African refuelling stations. Since Saint-Exupéry had proved his dependability as a pilot, as well as his tact in dealing with the Moors, he was soon appointed airport chief at Cap Juby on 19 October 1927. Here he was entrusted with the exacting task of improving French relations with the

² In his preface to Vol de Nuit, André Gide describes the work as a "récit". Saint-Exupéry, Vol de Nuit, (Paris: Gallimard, 1931), p.9.

³ Biographical details from Chevrier, pp.21-24.

Spanish government, acting often as diplomat between the Spaniards and the dissident Moors. It was whilst employed at Cap Juby that he wrote Courrier Sud, his first book. In March 1929 he returned to France, taking his manuscript to Gaston Gallimard. His work was accepted for publication and he signed a contract to publish his next seven works at the Gallimard publishing house.

On 12 October 1929 Saint-Exupéry left France for Buenos Ayres to become director of the Compagnie Aéroposta Argentina (a subsidiary of the Compagnie Générale Aéropostale, formerly called the Société Latécoère).⁴ Jean Mermoz (1901-1936) and Henri Guillaumet, two of the author's flying comrades had gone to South America to establish the routes from Natal to Buenos Ayres and across the Andes to Santiago. Saint-Exupéry's task was to extend these routes southward to Punta Arenas, a task in which he succeeded, creating bases at Trelew, Bahía Blanca, Comodoro Rivadavia and San Julian.

Late in 1929 Saint-Exupéry began to write his second work, Vol de Nuit. The book is said to have been inspired by Didier Daurat, the "patron" who had ordered Mermoz to fly over the Andes,⁵ a then formidable task, and who also had ordered the same pilot to attempt the first ever night flight on 16 April

⁴

Estang, p.68.

⁵

On 28 February 1929 Mermoz became the first commercial pilot to fly across the Andes. R. Delange, La Vie de Saint-Exupéry, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1948), p.48.

1928 between Rio and Buenos Ayres.⁶ Rivière, the main figure in Vol de Nuit, is often said to be modelled on Daurat.⁷ However, it is not the purpose of this study to examine the veracity of such statements.

In January 1931 Saint-Exupéry took two months leave in France. He took with him the completed manuscript of Vol de Nuit, the record of the beginnings of an airline in Latin America. André Gide read the text at the author's request, wrote an enthusiastic preface to it, and the book was published by Gallimard. In December 1931 Vol de Nuit received the Prix Fémina, a prize established in 1904, and awarded each year to an outstanding literary work. Vol de Nuit was immediately translated into English, and a film was made of it by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 1934, with John Barrymore as Rivière.⁸

However, while Vol de Nuit was being prepared for publication, the Aéropostale was liquidated on 13 March 1931 because of some disagreements on company policy. The network arduously established by Mermoz, Guillaumet and Saint-Exupéry, was taken over later by Pan-American Airlines. What was, for Saint-Exupéry, the best part of his life had come to an end.

⁶

Estang, p.69.

⁷

Delange, pp.25-27

⁸

Saint-Exupéry, Vol de Nuit, ed. E.M. Bowman (school ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p.xiii.

3. A Précis of Contents

The book opens with a description of Fabien's flight from the southern tip of America. As evening approaches, San Julian, a stopping place, comes into view, and the radio operator is aware of the first signs of a nearby storm which is filling his earphones with interference. However, for the moment the sky is perfectly clear, and the pilot is indulging in meditations of the security and fixity of the quiet life on the ground. The temptation is brief, and he easily resists it. After a brief stop at San Julian, Fabien takes off again, confident of a smooth journey.

Rivière, meanwhile, is awaiting the arrival of the three aeroplanes due to land at Buenos Ayres. A radio message informs him that the mail-plane from Chile is in sight of the city. Then follows a description of Rivière's struggle against the elements. He is weary, for his struggle is an endless one, as there is always at least one aircraft in flight at any given time.

Fellerin, the pilot from Chile, finally lands and accompanies Rivière and Robineau, an inspector, by car into Buenos Ayres. His mind is continually plagued with memories of his journey over the Andes, their violent winds and swirling snows, and their utter loneliness. Rivière asks the pilot for details of his flight. He is given a frightening description of the storm which Fellerin met, and which was not forecast when he left Santiago. All the while, Robineau

remains outside this world of action, for his life amounts to no more than reporting mistakes and ensuring the punctual departure of the mails. When Rivière leaves the car to visit the airline offices, Robineau invites Pellerin to dine with him. The pilot accepts.

Upon Rivière's appearance in the offices, activity there immediately increases. After checking the recent weather reports, all of which are good, he sends for Robineau. The inspector, who is busy making friends with Pellerin, leaves immediately only to discover on his arrival that he has been completely forgotten, or so it appears at the outset. Rivière is aware that the inspector has been attempting to befriend a pilot, and for this ill-advised act, orders him to inflict an unjustified penalty on Pellerin. The reason for this apparently harsh decision is that in Rivière's view there is no room in flying for sentimental relationships between those who give commands and those who must carry them out.

Then the novel takes the reader back to Fabien who is now feeling the first effects of an approaching storm. His plane is buffeted by violent currents of air, and in addition clouds gradually obscure part of the sky and the earth.

Then begins the long period of waiting for those who are at the airport at Buenos Ayres. As far as Rivière is concerned, the anguish of waiting is intensified when he feels

the dull pain in his side which afflicts him from time to time. His thoughts wander, and he begins to question whether he is justified in allowing men to die. In spite of the difficulty encountered by Fabien, Rivière telephones the pilot who is due to take off with the mail to Europe. The pilot is awakened by his wife who has been meditating on his work and on her love for him. Here is a striking contrast between the "métier" and the warm comfort of a home. But the pilot makes ready and leaves for the airfield.

Here Rivière charges him with showing fear during his previous flight, to which the pilot gives his reasonable excuses. After the pilot leaves him, Rivière meditates on his work and his hopes, and rejects the many objections brought forward by the financial backers of the undertaking. These objections are nothing other than fear of the failure of the company to compete effectively with other means of transport.

Fabien is now entering a very extensive storm. He decreases his altitude, and has his navigator radio four of the nearest bases. However, three are affected by storms or approaching storms - Comodoro Rivadavia, San Antonio and Bahia Blanca -, whilst the other, Trelew, is experiencing a hurricane.

The Paraguayan mail is not affected by this region of bad weather, and is due to arrive at Buenos Ayres in two hours. The skies are clear, too, from headquarters to Natal,

the route to be flown by the European pilot. In the southern portion of the continent, however, overland communications are gradually breaking down as the cyclone approaches. Rivière alerts all radio stations. They are to inform him immediately they receive a message from Fabien, so as to enable Rivière to point out a refuge to him.

Fabien's wife, Simone, prepares a meal for her husband and telephones the airport to enquire about the progress of his airplane. It is soon obvious that no information is forthcoming, and that Fabien is being seriously delayed. When Simone speaks to Rivière, he merely repeats what she already knows. Rivière then begins to reflect on the value and meaning of individual human sacrifice.

When Fabien finally loses all contact with the ground he releases a flare to ascertain his position, but only to discover that his airplane has veered off course and is flying over the Atlantic. A rift in the cloud cover appears overhead, through which the stars are visible, and Fabien gains height, only to find himself in a brilliant, calm world above the storm illuminated by the moon and countless stars. This move is irreversible, the pilot's position being further endangered by the fact that the remaining gasoline will permit only half an hours flying time.

On the ground Simone is still waiting in the hostile surroundings of the airfield. Work is gradually slowing down because it is becoming increasingly evident that the European

mail will be delayed. A broken radio message reaches the base at Bahia Blanca. Fabien, after the fuel supply is exhausted, is making a dive. Police throughout the area are alerted.

Rivière orders the European mail-plane to take off after the arrival of the Paraguayan flight, in spite of the recent loss. This decision stresses further Rivière's determination to continue his worthwhile task.

II

THEMES

The works of Saint-Exupéry revolve around one basic theme, which is that of man, his condition and his destiny. Vol de Nuit is no exception. The many ideas set out in this book display the author's one concern, a fact which contributes so much to making Vol de Nuit a very concise and compact piece of work. However, it is possible to analyse this central theme by making so many sub-divisions each of which leads so easily to the next to form a complete whole.

Since Vol de Nuit concerns the birth of an airline in South America, it would perhaps be convenient to begin by discussing Saint-Exupéry's ideas regarding flying itself. This is more readily possible because the lives of all the chief characters in the book revolve around the "métier". All the pilots and the ground personnel, especially Rivière, firmly believe that what they are achieving is contributing very substantially to mankind's progress. Their work has a real meaning when seen in the context of civilisation as a whole. In the same way as a craftsman takes a certain pride in what he does, so the pilots and their comrades believe that what they are involved in helps to preserve man's position in the universe.

Leroux, therefore, a humble mechanic, becomes one of the many exemplary figures in Vol de Nuit:

Cet homme éprouvait, en face de sa vie passée, le tranquille contentement du menuisier qui vient de polir une belle planche: "Voilà. C'est fait." (86)

Furthermore, when Rivière is commenting on Leroux's ugliness which prevents his being loved by a woman, he observes:

Tout ce que Leroux avait de grand il le devait peut-être à cette disgrâce, qui avait réduit sa vie à celle du métier. (97)

Rivière is constantly nourishing this feeling of pride in work well done, and it is quite natural that the characters to whom this encouragement is most frequently directed should be his pilots, for it is upon their skill and enthusiasm that the success or failure of Rivière's purposes in establishing the airline depends. When Pellerin, the pilot who has just arrived from Chile, is describing his flight to his chief, the author succeeds in giving us some insight into Rivière's thoughts:

Aussi Rivière le félicita-t-il: "Comment avez-vous réussi?" Et l'aima de parler simplement métier, de parler de son vol comme un forgeron de son enclume. (99)

The delivery of mail may seem a commonplace matter, but Rivière endows it with an almost sacred quality. Thus Rivière succeeds in giving his men something to work for. His pilots' task takes on a positive and meaningful purpose in the affairs of men. They are thus provided with a necessary

stimulus to which they can direct all their efforts:

Grâce à Rivière, sur quinze mille kilo-
mètres, le culte du courrier primait
tout. (92)

Very closely related to this idea of the "métier" is Saint-Exupéry's feelings for the aeroplane, which lie at the foundations of his whole work. Since the author was one of the pioneers of flight he is able to communicate to us some of the mystery surrounding this new operation. There is an air of wonderment present in the many descriptions of the sky and the earth, especially at night, which perhaps approach what man felt when he first ventured onto the sea. Saint-Exupéry is describing to his readers a fresh view of the universe,¹ as was Conrad in his Mirror of the Sea. However, his primary concern is with the aeroplane as an instrument which has come to him as an aid to discovering more about the universe and about himself. All Rivière's pilots indulge frequently in this mystical "méditation du vol".² Flight places these men in the very midst of the elements, often violent, and their reactions to this struggle with nature help to bring out the best in them, and perhaps to force them to ponder on their own human condition and aspirations:

¹ The similarity between Saint-Exupéry's Terre des Hommes and Joseph Conrad's Mirror of the Sea is pointed out in G. Pélissier, Les Cinq Visages de Saint-Exupéry, (Paris: Flammarion, 1952), p.63. A lengthy comparison between the two writers is also to be found in J. Roy, Passion de Saint-Exupéry, (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), pp.27-36.

² For the subtle difference in meaning between "méditation du vol" and "méditation en vol", see Estang, p.67.

Puis, comme rien ne vacillait, ni ne vibrait, ni ne tremblait, et que demeuraient fixes son gyroscope, son altimètre et le régime du moteur, il s'étira un peu, appuya sa nuque au cuir du siège, et commença cette profonde méditation du vol, où l'on savoure une espérance inexplicable. (34)

The cult of action is also an integral part of Saint-Exupéry's thoughts on man. The pilots, of course, are the chief exponents of this, although Rivière is often referred to as the man of action par excellence simply because it is he who incites the pilots to this action. Rivière is the driving force behind all that is achieved by the night flights, and this energy is directed towards raising man to his rightful place in the scheme of things:

"Le but peut-être ne justifie rien, mais l'action délivre de la mort." (130)

Rivière's whole existence depends on action which is a necessary factor in man's discovery of himself:

"Je vieillis..." Il vieillissait si dans l'action seule il ne trouvait plus sa nourriture. (35)

Further, the success of the enterprise undertaken in South America is largely dependent on there existing among both pilots and ground staff the conviction of having a common task. Rivière and all his subordinates are dedicated to the same task, to which their undivided attention must be given. Hence, Rivière fosters in his men a feeling of fraternity and of participation in a project which must be wrestled with together:

Pourtant, dans cette lutte, une silencieuse fraternité liait, au fond d'eux-mêmes, Rivière et ses pilotes. C'étaient des hommes du même bord, qui éprouvaient le même désir de vaincre. (111)

Whilst they are striving towards the same aims, they will give of their best, and at the same time, will form very firm bonds one with the other, since each man's whole being depends on his comrades' devotion to duty. This is true even of the most humble employee on the ground, a fact of which Rivière is ever aware:

Quelque part il rencontrerait l'unique secrétaire de veille. Un homme travaillait quelque part pour que la vie soit continue, pour que la volonté soit continue (. . .)

"Cet homme-là ne sait pas sa grandeur."

(.)

Rivière se découvrait une grande amitié pour cet homme, que chargeait aussi le poids de la nuit. "Un camarade de combat, pensait Rivière. Il ne saura sans doute jamais combien cette veille nous unit." (101-103)

The interdependence which is an essential part of such a fraternity is further strengthened by the responsibility which they must all bear towards other men, for their mission by definition is to execute the safe delivery of the property of others. Thus Rivière is speaking on behalf of the whole operation when he says:

"Ce soir avec mes deux courriers en vol, je suis responsable d'un ciel entier." (100)

Indeed the wife of the European pilot is also aware that something important is at stake, something which perhaps goes beyond the simple delivery of mails:

Elle regardait ces bras solides qui, dans une heure, porteraient le sort du courrier d'Europe, responsables de quelque chose de grand, comme du sort d'une ville. Et elle fut troublée. Cet homme, au milieu de ces millions d'hommes, était préparé seul pour cet étrange sacrifice. (107)

This brings us at this point to consider Saint-Exupéry's thoughts on the individual and man, and the nature and purpose of "cet étrange sacrifice". Saint-Exupéry's insistence on the sacrifice of the individual for the common good is motivated by his deep love of mankind. Individual happiness has no place in such values, for it is the species and its advancement which is all important:

Rivière eut l'obscur sentiment d'un devoir plus grand que celui d'aimer. (121)

In this light the meaning of heroism becomes much more apparent: it is man's self-sacrifice to a cause beyond his comprehension and demanding all his efforts, all his being. And for each hero a sense of identity is gained in conquest. However, Rivière has the idea of seeking something much more valuable to preserve than human life, something with an element of eternity. He firmly believes that man can give "un sens à la vie" by working to build something of lasting value. This idea justifies his harshness and determination in the face of numerous opposing factors. A human truth is to be found outside the individual and in the acceptance of a more important duty to a lasting cause.

Au nom de quoi les a-t-il arrachés au bonheur individuel? La première loi n'est-elle pas de protéger ces bonheurs-là? (. . .) Il existe peut-être quelque chose d'autre à sauver et de plus durable; (. . .) "Il s'agit de les rendre éternels..." (121)

Such a view could readily lead to the inhumanity of the fanatic, but Rivière's attitude is mellowed by the fact that it is love which guides his actions and words, "Aimez ceux que vous commandez. Mais sans le leur dire." (98) This is Saint-Exupéry's view of charity: It is a love for man and his civilisation at the expense of the individual, who is invited to consider his actions in terms of a general structure.

Before this ideal can be accomplished, two elements foreign to the life of action, and striving against it, must be overcome. These are the life of security and the love between man and woman. for in the author's view both tend to stifle that creative spirit which must remain completely altruistic. The temptation of the easy life on the ground is a constant menace to Rivière's pilots, and a threat to all that their mission represents:

Tout ce qui fait douce la vie des hommes grandissait vers lui: leurs maisons, leurs petits cafés, les arbres de leur promenade. Il était semblable à un conquérant, au soir de ses conquêtes, qui se penche sur les terres de l'empire, et découvre l'humble bonheur des hommes. Fabien avait besoin de déposer les armes. (82)

This does not form a fundamental doubt nor a real weakness in the main characters of Vol de Nuit. It only shows that they are all human beings with normal desires, and that they are distinguished from others only in that they choose the life

which, in their eyes, is the most satisfying. Fabien longs for the fixity of a home and of sentimental human relationships, sheltered and unmenaced by any danger from the hostile outside world. Yet this is incompatible with the creative spirit of a common enterprise which is capable of forming a true unity among men:

Ce village minuscule, il l'eût accepté:
après avoir choisi on se contente du hasard
de son existence et on peut l'aimer. Il
vous borne comme l'amour. (82)

To Rivière and his pilots, although the idea occurs to them, it is seen as an absolutely impossible solution. Indeed, anything which has a suggestion of values built on the basis of the material and sentimental is rejected completely. For instance, no personal relationship is allowed between Robineau and Pellerin. Robineau wishes to find completeness in himself, and since he is liable to distract the pilot from Rivière's scheme, he is forbidden to approach him as a friend. This shows us the amount of distrust which Rivière places on an emotional approach to people, and it helps us to distinguish two separate universes - that of hardships, duty and complete self-sacrifice, and that of personal happiness and sentiment:

Il [Pellerin] penserait peut-être: "Je suis bien fatigué...sale métier!" Et à sa femme il avouerait quelque chose comme: "On est mieux ici que sur les Andes." Et pourtant tout ce à quoi les hommes tiennent si fort s'était presque détaché de lui: il venait d'en connaître la misère. (89)

However, the greatest obstacle which lies in the path of Rivière's mission, and which is therefore his greatest enemy, is the love that exists between a man and his wife. It is Fabien and Simone who personify this obstacle. This kind of human relationship is absolutely incompatible with the notions of duty and obligation expressed by Rivière in Vol de Nuit:

Les éléments affectifs du drame commençaient à se montrer. Il pensa d'abord les récuser: les mères et les femmes n'entrent pas dans les salles d'opération. (. . .)

Il était parvenu à cette frontière où se pose, non le problème d'une petite détresse particulière, mais celui-là même de l'action. (119-120)

Such emotional, and therefore dangerous, elements form the worst stumbling block in Rivière's scheme of things, for individual happiness and the cult of action are two separate worlds:

Elle devinait, avec gêne, qu'elle exprimait ici une vérité ennemie, regrettait presque d'être venue, eût voulu se cacher, et se retenait, de peur qu'on la remarquât trop, de tousser, de pleurer. (. . .) Elle révélait aux hommes le monde sacré du bonheur.

Elle venait plaider timidement pour ses fleurs, son café servi, sa chair jeune. (126-129)

In Rivière and his subordinates there is a firm belief in something much more valuable than human love, more valuable even than an individual human life. Rivière sums up the question very briefly, "Aimer, aimer seulement, quelle impasse!" (121)

The ideas which are brought in opposition to the sentiments are those contained in the theme of discipline and Saint-

Exupéry's view of the meaning of liberty, both of which are closely linked with a dynamic view of life and man. Saint-Exupéry is an idealist interested in forming man's mind and character according to certain strict principles. He finds the occasion to put into practice these principles in the dangers and privations of the airline company, knowing that the pioneer airmen are willing to sacrifice themselves to an ideal which serves humanity, and therefore gives meaning to their endeavours. His conception of man is that he is infinitely adaptable, but that he requires direction and inspiration in order to realise an obscure urge, and to save him from the temptation of mediocrity. He does not advocate virtues such as courage, loyalty and responsibility for their own account, nor for gain, but to give an objective to human effort. He is aware of the possibilities open to man, and also of the fact that men do not unfortunately realise their own powers:

"Il y a dans toute foule, pensait Rivière, des hommes que l'on ne distingue pas, et qui sont de prodigieux messagers. Et sans le savoir eux-mêmes." (89)

It is for this reason that Rivière is compelled to impose his point of view on others, thus organising characters with his own opinion of what they should be. We see Rivière as being a born leader possessing a sense of achievement in his work and completely free from any fundamental doubts or weaknesses. Thus he forms a link between action and belief, and has, together with his pilots, a vision of man and men, and signi-

fies the creation of man by man.

Flight is the conquest of an element, but for Saint-Exupéry it is also the symbol of human enterprise, and of a human effort to create. The organisation of the mails, too, is a symbol of man creating in the face of the unknown and by extension represents man's whole quest and existence on Earth, demanding the greatest effort and the sacrifice of many individuals for a purpose which is all-important. With each new arrival of an aircraft a step is made forward in conquering the elements, fear of the unknown and of fate. It also supports the author's belief in the inauguration of night-flights and in the power of discipline in human affairs:

"Mes raisons pèsent, je vaincrai, pensait Rivière. C'est la pente naturelle des événements." (. . .)

Après une longue année de lutte, Rivière l'avait emporté. Les uns disaient: "A cause de sa foi", les autres: "A cause de sa tenacité, de sa puissance d'ours en marche", mais, selon lui, plus simplement, parce qu'il pesait dans la bonne direction. (111-112)

But to have any real meaning his struggle must be a constant one, there being no ultimate resting place. It is an eternal fight, for man's eternity is involved, and the pilot in flight discovers a sense of infinity towards which his hopes and gestures are directed:

L'arrivée des avions ne serait jamais cette victoire qui termine une guerre, et ouvre une ère de paix bienheureuse. (. . .) Mais il n'y a pas de paix. Il n'y a peut-être pas de victoire. Il n'y a pas d'arrivée définitive de tous les courriers. (85-86)

Men are thus snatched from passivity by acting in accordance with their vague inner urges, although the end has no importance, since the will to strive forward is the only aim of this discipline.

Consequently, happiness is not individual liberty, but one of the rewards of accomplishing a set task by accepting a duty, "le bonheur de l'homme n'est pas dans la liberté, mais dans l'acceptation d'un devoir."³ Man can find no worthwhile purpose in himself, but only in the destiny that he devotes himself to completely:

Rivière disait parfois:

"Ces hommes-là sont heureux, parce qu'ils aiment ce qu'ils font, et ils l'aiment parce que je suis dur."

Il faisait peut-être souffrir, mais procurait aussi aux hommes de fortes joies. "Il faut les pousser, pensait-il, vers une vie forte qui entraîne des souffrances et des joies, mais qui seule compte." (92)

In order to approach this objective, the first essential is the ruthless elimination of man's subjective barrier, and it is for this end that Rivière imposes the most rigid of moral codes on his subordinates. He is aware of the imperfections present in mankind, and it is to overcome this frailty that he tolerates no weaknesses. He punishes the slightest error by demanding complete obedience to his instructions and exacts the maximum from those under his command:

3

André Gide in his preface to Saint-Exupéry, Vol de Nuit, (Paris: Gallimard, 1931), p.12.

"Le règlement, pensait Rivière, est semblable aux rites d'une religion qui semblent absurdes mais façonnent les hommes." Il était indifférent à Rivière de paraître juste ou injuste. (92)

Rivière's conception of justice is connected with the idea of order. To him justice is a tool to be used to combat fate. Chance must not be allowed to rule events; on the contrary, events must be controlled by man, and it is for this reason that Rivière is very exacting:

"Suis-je juste ou injuste? Je l'ignore. Si je frappe, les pannes diminuent. Le responsable, ce n'est pas l'homme, c'est comme une puissance obscure que l'on ne touche jamais, si l'on ne touche pas tout le monde. Si j'étais très juste, un voi de nuit serait chaque fois une chance de mort." (103-104)

Events are constructive if they are ordered by man's mind, but destructive if brought about by chance. Consequently Rivière seeks to eliminate this unpredictable factor completely, as is shown by the dismissal of Roblet, a mechanic:

"Parce que les événements, on les commande, pensait Rivière, et ils obéissent, et on crée. Et les hommes sont de pauvres choses, et on les crée aussi. Ou bien on les écarte lorsque le mal passe par eux." (104)

The constraints which he imposes, however, are aimed at man's imperfections, and not at man personally. The battle is not directed against persons but against events which, if left unchecked, contribute in no way to man's "creation". Thus, by eliminating or repressing man's weaknesses he is able to

bring to light and emphasise man's strength and greatness, and to direct these towards the common good:

Rivière pensa: "Ce n'est pas lui que j'ai congédié ainsi, brutalement, c'est le mal dont il n'était pas responsable, peut-être, mais qui passait par lui." (104)

Fear, too, must be banished, for Rivière needs to hold in his hands his own destiny and the destiny of his men, and, more important, that of the mails. If his struggle is to have any significance at all, it is essential that events should be under the control of man. He achieves this by means of his role of absolute guide to his pilots, and by his idea of justice. Night flying being a then new and dangerous experience, any failure to observe his orders may result in the mails being delayed or perhaps lost, and this would mean a step backward in man's quest:

"C'est le plus courageux de mes hommes. Ce qu'il a réussi ce soir-là est très beau, mais je le sauve de la peur..."

(.)

Il pense au pilote:

"Je le sauve de la peur. Ce n'est pas lui que j'attaquais, c'est, à travers lui, cette résistance qui paralyse les hommes devant l'inconnu. Si je l'écoute, si je le plains, si je prends au sérieux son aventure, il croira revenir d'un pays de mystère, et c'est du mystère seul que l'on a peur." (110)

And so Rivière, by his knowledge of men and the destructive nature of fate, and by his constant demand for the utmost from his men, succeeds in eliminating fear from the struggle. By conquering the unknown, the efficiency of the pilots takes a step forward:

Sa bouche s'entr'ouvrit, et ses dents brillèrent sous la lune comme celles d'un jeune fauve. (. . .) voici qu'il [pilote d'Europe] commençait un rire silencieux. (. . .) Un faible rire, mais bien plus fort que ces nuages, ces montagnes, ces fleuves et ces mers. (135-136)

Vol de Nuit is essentially the novel of the "métier" and an explanation of the mystique of the airline. However, the themes concerned with this mystique are by no means poetic; on the contrary, they are very pertinent, since they all concern man. Egoism, and Sartre's "l'enfer c'est les autres" are replaced by comradeship and a happiness founded on duty and solidarity.⁴ Saint-Exupéry is extolling man's power to overcome his weaknesses through action and submission to a voluntary discipline. The characters are taking part in a common struggle which creates and justifies the civilisation they are striving for. They are by no means fatalistic, for when their lives have a meaning, so will their death. They all possess a sense of responsibility, of spiritual wealth connected with "love" and human relations. Individual sacrifice, then, becomes an act of "love", and death is overcome by partaking in the creation of something which outlives the individual. Saint-Exupéry proposes a dynamic humanism assuring the advancement of certain spiritual values.

⁴ Estang, pp.92-93.

Etang gives a very general summary of Saint-Exupéry's philosophy when he says:

L'humanisme classique demandait: Qu'est-ce que l'Homme? Un humanisme moderne, peu ou prou existentiel et de filiation nietzschéenne, demande: Que peut l'homme? (Malraux). L'humanisme exupérien articulerait volontiers les deux interrogations l'une sur l'autre pour une sorte de synthèse; et demanderait: que sera l'Homme?⁵

This is a direct reference to Saint-Exupéry's notion of man and his spiritual destiny, often referred to as man and devenir. All the main themes of Vol de Nuit point to the author's concern with man's potential and his role on this planet, and Rivière, Saint-Exupéry's mouthpiece, seems to have an indefinable insight into the advantages of a civilisation founded on discipline, comradeship and compassion.

⁵

Ibid., p.107.

III

LITERARY TECHNIQUE

1. Characterisation

From Vol de Nuit emerges a strict division of characters into three distinct types, the first being Rivière, the leader responsible for the whole action in the book, the second being the pilots and workmen who carry out Rivière's orders. Finally there are those who belong to an entirely separate universe and possess a different set of values: these include Robineau and the pilots' wives. This grouping, which forms a very definite hierarchical framework, helps to promote a better understanding of Saint-Exupéry's ideas, by throwing certain exemplary characters into relief. Indeed a clearer insight is afforded into all the characters simply by the sharp contrast of one type with another. The themes in Vol de Nuit, too, become much more clear when viewed in terms of the character and purpose of each individual in the work.

Of twenty-four separate scenes in Vol de Nuit, twelve are devoted to Rivière, the remainder being shared between four pilots, Robineau and two wives. Without any doubt, Rivière dominates the book and directs the lives and actions of all the other characters.

We are given not the slightest insight into his private life, since his whole existence is devoted to the fulfilment of his duties:

Il s'aperçut qu'il avait peu à peu repoussé vers la vieillesse, pour "quand il aurait le temps", ce qui fait douce la vie des hommes. (85)

These duties which completely absorb him consist in creating a new humanity which will further man's knowledge of the world and of himself. Hence he continually forces his charges to their limits and beyond. Rivière, it is evident, has set himself up as a guide to the men he commands, so as to "forge" them both physically and mentally, and in so doing, to invite them to attempt and complete what would seem to be impossible tasks:

L'homme était pour lui une cire vierge qu'il fallait pétrir. Il fallait donner une âme à cette matière, lui créer une volonté. Il ne pensait pas les asservir par cette dureté, mais les lancer hors d'eux-mêmes. (92)

This sense of identity which Rivière experiences through conquest is perhaps his only human relationship, and yet because of its very nature it is very meaningful in the general framework of human affairs. There is a strong mystical link formed between him and the rest of mankind, which brings him ever closer to his fellow man as his work progresses. The more the air routes are extended, the greater this feeling of responsibility and oneness will become:

Il ne s'étonna pas de ce sentiment de grandeur: le ciel de Santiago du Chili, un ciel étranger, mais une fois le courrier en marche vers Santiago du Chili, on vivait, d'un bout à l'autre de la ligne, sous le même voûte profonde. (95)

Rivière's great enemy is that destructive power which creates events detrimental to man's progress. It is this power which he is determined to challenge through an equally powerful concerted effort, and consequently, by this firm refusal to admit defeat, the opportunity will always remain of taking a short but irreversible step forward. Hence a sense of defeat will never be allowed to take root in Rivière's scheme of things:

Rivière avait conscience d'arracher quelque chose au sort, de réduire la part d'inconnu, et de tirer ses équipages, hors de la nuit, jusqu'au rivage. (85)

Later, Rivière reflects:

"C'est peut-être clair. Ainsi la lutte perpétuelle du jardinier sur sa pelouse. Le poids de sa simple main repousse dans la terre, qui la prépare éternellement, la forêt primitive." (110)

In this way, and by retaining the initiative against fear, his chances of failing are infinitely decreased.

Rivière is very exacting, and no error is overlooked, whether it be human or otherwise. Roblet, for instance, is dismissed because he makes one mistake, even though he was one of the first mechanics to work for the airline in South America. Should a mechanical or electrical fault occur in an aircraft, the responsible person is sought out and punished.

The effect which Rivière has on those under his command is obvious. His very presence is sufficient reason to encourage exactness, speed and efficiency:

Les secrétaires somnolaient dans les bureaux de Buenos-Aires, quand Rivière entra. (. . .) Et pourtant un zèle anima les hommes. Les secrétaires s'émurent, le chef de bureau compulsa d'urgence les derniers papiers, les machines à écrire cliquetèrent. (94)

Rivière's discipline is harsh and is calculated to act as a spur and inspiration to his men. For all that, he is not inhuman. He has a deep respect for his men, not so much as individuals, but inasmuch as they are representatives of man as a whole. Rivière has a general rather than an individualistic view of his own purpose, which is synonymous with that of man, to create a lasting life and civilisation, to exchange material reality for something far more valuable. By creating an airline which has meaning within a civilisation, Rivière seeks to perpetuate a human construction which cannot be erased by time or the elements:

"Au nom de quelle dureté, ou de quel étrange amour, le conducteur de peuples d'autrefois, contraignant ses foules à tirer ce temple sur la montagne, leur imposa-t-il donc de dresser leur éternité?" (. . .) Le conducteur de peuples d'autrefois, s'il n'eut peut-être pas pitié de la souffrance de l'homme, eut pitié, immensément, de sa mort. Non de sa mort individuelle, mais pitié de l'espèce qu'effacera la mer de sable. Et il menait son peuple dresser au moins des pierres, que n'ensevelirait pas le désert. (121)

However, through this apparently impervious barrier of harsh discipline, a few signs of human feeling stand out, for Rivière is no superhuman being. He is fifty years old, and beginning to feel the weight of the burden he must bear. Fatigue and a recurring pain afflict him from time to time, and this he resents because he is forced to think of himself, a fact which detracts from his work. Occasionally he feels a deep pity for certain individuals whose lives are affected by the power he wields. For example, he considers reversing his decision to dismiss Roblet. He pities the pilot of the European mail when he admits to fear on a previous flight, and also Simone Fabien when she waits helplessly for word of her husband. But if Rivière often feels such emotion, it is short-lived, and he never displays it openly for this would have an adverse effect upon his work, which for him is all-important.

In addition, Rivière displays from time to time a certain discomfiting arrogance when dealing with characters outside the "métier". A few haughty remarks are addressed chiefly to Robineau, the rather weak-willed inspector. Although very pertinent perhaps, such remarks are unnecessary and unkind, indeed some readers may, because of them, view Rivière and his philosophy in an unfavourable light. Of Robineau, Rivière remarks:

"Il n'est pas très intelligent, aussi rend-il de grands services." (91)

Elsewhere he observes caustically:

"Il ne pense rien, disait de lui
Rivière, ça lui évite de penser faux."
(91)

Such remarks in no way contribute to the validity of a humanistic philosophy, nor do these comments aimed at the petty "bourgeoisie":

Les petits bourgeois des petites villes
tournent le soir autour de leur kiosque
à musique et Rivière pensait: "Juste ou
injuste envers eux, cela n'a pas de sens:
ils n'existent pas." (92)

Indeed, Rivière is made to seem arrogant when Saint-Exupéry writes:

Il s'était, comme ce soir, senti
solitaire, mais bien vite avait découvert
la richesse d'une telle solitude. Le
message de cette musique venait à lui, à
lui seul parmi les médiocres, avec la
douceur d'un secret. (100)

However, in spite of this, Rivière's is a positive, constructive reaction against the negative tendencies in man, his purpose being to give meaning to an apparently indifferent universe. Liberty for him is a constructive process involving constraint and guidance, the result of which will be the liberty to act and so increase one's stature by affirmation. It is a dynamic ideal, but one which recognises that there are no absolute values. An ascetic, Rivière firmly believes that the only way to save man is by implementing this cult of power, and establishing a prescribed hierarchy of values. His personal vision dominates Vol de Nuit, and this leads one

to believe that he represents the organisation of a valid attitude to life rather than a real character. His role in the plot is to form a link between action and a belief, and he can impose his point of view on others because he possesses an intuitive view of man's possibilities, indeed he appears to know more about the other characters in the book than the characters themselves.

Rivière is undoubtedly the hero of Vol de Nuit even if only because he is viewed from within more than any of the other characters. But as one critic has said, "Saint-Exupéry n'explique pas Rivière. (. . .) Le lecteur subit Rivière comme le subissent les pilotes."¹ Rivière is only given a few words to speak, yet these are sufficient to give us a clear picture of the man and his thoughts.

Robineau, the "inspecteur morne", is also viewed from within, but is the exact opposite in outlook to Rivière. This inspector belongs to a world far removed from that of his chief, and appears to be without hope of ever approaching it. He is the best example in Vol de Nuit of those belonging to the lowest category in Saint-Exupéry's hierarchy. His function is vague - "appelé par Rivière pour de vagues besognes" (90) - indeed it is reduced to ensuring punctuality and reporting errors. Whereas one of Rivière's aims is to know men,

¹

Chevrier, p.50.

Robineau's is the knowledge of rules. What is more, Robineau also displays some of the characteristics which to Rivière have no place in an airline. For instance, he shows an admiration for Pellerin, and even makes an attempt to befriend him, even though he fully realises that such relationships are forbidden by Rivière.

In a way this restriction imposed by Rivière seems out of keeping with Saint-Exupéry's idea of fraternity. Robineau is refused the privilege of friendship, whilst the élite, the pilots, enjoy it to the full:

Il n'avait le droit d'admirer ni la fantaisie, ni la verve: il admirait par fonction la ponctualité. Il n'avait le droit de boire un verre en compagnie, de tutoyer un camarade. (. . .) Il n'était guère aimé, car un inspecteur n'est pas créé pour les délices de l'amour. (90-91)

Saint-Exupéry even goes so far as to mock Robineau, perhaps unduly, when referring to his wish to make friends:

Chacun pensait: "S'il n'a encore rien trouvé pour son rapport, comme il a très faim, il ne mangera." (93)

Such remarks seem almost contemptuous in a work designed to praise man and lift him out of mediocrity. But they also suggest a personal antipathy that Saint-Exupéry felt for the complacent and the self-satisfied.

Also in opposition to Rivière's scheme, although in a different way, are the two female characters, the wife of the European pilot, and Simone, Fabien's wife. These two characters have no real individual identities, and can, therefore,

be considered together. In the author's eyes the two women are simply pilots' wives. They are representatives of a completely different world from that of the "métier", indeed their purpose and that of Rivière are at variance. Security, warmth, tenderness lie at the centre of their universe:

Elle le chargeait de tendres liens: de
musique, d'amour, de fleurs. (107)

This way of life is irreconcilable with the one that Rivière is proposing. The two will by definition have to remain in conflict, since they both have different values driving them in opposite directions. For Saint-Exupéry, a sentimental relationship is a mutual escape sought after by two people. He considered such a state to be static, contrary therefore to his ideal of continual development.

The characters who lie at the centre of this conflict are the three pilots who appear in Vol de Nuit, Fabien, Pellerin and the pilot of the European mail. These, also, are seen as a group by the author. It cannot be said that any one of them possesses real individuality, because all have the same aims and desires. Fabien is tempted by the security of home life:

Et Fabien pensait aux amitiés, aux filles
tendres, à l'intimité des nappes blanches,
à tout ce qui, lentement, s'apprivoise pour
l'éternité. (82)

Pellerin is tempted in the same way:

Et à sa femme il avouerait quelque chose
comme: "On est mieux ici que sur les
Andes." (89)

They all seek something lasting, although they agree that it
is to be found elsewhere:

Ce village défendait, par sa seule im-
mobilité, le secret de ses passions, ce
village refusait sa douceur: il eût
fallu renoncer à l'action pour la con-
quérir. (82)

Each pilot represents identification with the world
through action, but at the same time personifies the nature
of human undertakings on the ground. Adventure, then, is
redefined by Saint-Exupéry. It has become for the author
self-discovery and creation of the self through action. No
longer merely risking his life, the pilot is consciously
involving himself to discover a meaning in his inner self.
And a certain physical pleasure is evident in Rivière's men,
for their acts no longer stand alone in the endless flow of
time. They are aware of what their work really represents,
and are completely free to develop within certain constraints.

However, they become superior beings who are making
their own kind of contact with humanity, and are unavoidably
an elite race, often made to stand out against inferior men
such as Robineau:

Il venait surtout de découvrir que lui,
Robineau, malgré son titre d'Inspecteur
et son autorité, valait moins que cet
homme rompu de fatigue, cassé dans
l'angle de la voiture, les yeux clos et
les mains noires d'huile. (93)

In the same way the pilot who has to fly the mail to Europe stood out in the nondescript crowd:

Et fermant la porte derrière lui, il
fit dans la rue, au milieu de l'incon-
naissable peuple nocturne, le premier
pas de sa conquête. (109)

As they represent a kind distinguished by moral characteristics, the pilots have little physical presence. They are faceless actors seen from the inside, for this is the only part² of man which interests the author. Hardly any of the characters are described physically, their appearance being only hinted at or left to our imagination. We feel that all the pilots are strong, well-made men, but we are never told this directly. A brief description is given of one pilot, the European mail pilot. His wife watches him, her attention fixed on "ces bras solides" (107). This impression of virility is emphasised by a description of his clothes:

Il s'habillait. Pour cette fête, il
choisissait les étoffes les plus rudes,
les cuirs les plus lourds, il s'habillait
comme un paysan. (108)

Robineau is described as being "morne" and displaying a "dignité mélancolique" (90). We also know that he has embarrassingly large hands as well as a body afflicted with a "gênant eczéma" (94). The adjective "silencieux" is often applied to Rivière, and he is shown as a small, grey-haired man wearing at all times a hat and overcoat, presumably because his work keeps him moving between the airport and the airline offices. Of Simone Fabien

we are merely told that, "Cette femme était très belle." (128) These few glimpses are all we have of the outward appearance of Saint-Exupéry's characters in Vol de Nuit. Brief though they may appear to be, they are very precise and revealing. Only those features which give us a clearer picture of the person are permitted by the author. No words are wasted on irrelevancies.

In assessing the characters in Vol de Nuit, it must be emphasised that in the final analysis the same three types dominate the book. The first, Rivière, the second, the group of pilots organised around him, and the third, Robineau and the pilots' wives. It must be noted that the latter are made to appear deliberately weaker characters, completely lacking direction, and basing their lives on admiration of the individual for himself. In using this technique, Saint-Exupéry ensures that the "élite" stand out as possessing a more valid attitude to life, whilst their "opponents" must remain far more inferior.

However, technically speaking, each character of Vol de Nuit is essential to the plot and the action. Each has a purpose in the book and fulfils it effectively. Rivière's character would not stand out so much, were Robineau absent completely. The pilots would not appear to be so human if their work were not contrasted with their home life. As in

most effective plots, each character depends so much on the attitudes and reactions of those around him.

2. Structure

The word "classical" has been given to Vol de Nuit³ by at least one critic of Saint-Exupéry to describe the well-balanced, concise nature of its composition. The book consists of twenty-four distinct episodes or scenes, each one of which contributes in some way to the plot. The scenes are brief, but none of them are superfluous.

Within the first two paragraphs of Chapter I of Vol de Nuit we are given a complete introduction to the plot. Fabian is flying mail from Patagonia to Buenos Ayres where it will be transferred to the airplane that is to take it to Europe. Evening is approaching and the weather is perfect for flying.

From this point the plot is unfolded quite rapidly, with scenes alternating from the pilot, Fabien, to some point on the ground, usually the airport at Buenos Ayres, with special prominence given to Rivière. The action moves forward as Fabien approaches the centre of the storm, eventually leading to the climax, when his gasoline supply is exhausted. After this the pace slows a little when the ground staff assume that no more night flights will be permitted. However, the activity resumes its former pace when Rivière orders the pilot

3

D. Anet, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, (Paris: Corrêa, 1946), p.40.

of the European mail to prepare to take off.

The rapidity with which the action of Vol de Nuit moves forward can be appreciated when one realises that the first reference to the storm, which eventually takes Fabien's life, occurs in the first half of Chapter I:

Mais le radio pensait que des orages s'étaient installés quelque part, comme des vers s'installent dans un fruit; la nuit serait belle et pourtant gâtée: il lui répugnait d'entrer dans cette ombre prête à pourrir. (82)

The next reference to a storm is from Pellerin who recounts his flight over the Andes to Rivière, to which the latter replies:

- C'est un cyclone du Pacifique, on nous a prévenus trop tard. Ces cyclones ne dépassent d'ailleurs jamais les Andes. (90)

This opinion is later supported by the promise of good flying weather from each meteorological station:

Chaque aéroport vantait son temps clair, son ciel transparent, sa bonne brise. (94)

However in the next chapter the scene changes to Fabien in flight. His aircraft is feeling the first effects of the storm ahead:

Maintenant, il apercevait, en face d'eux, un miroitement imperceptible au ras de l'horizon: une lueur de forge. (. . .)

Les premiers remous de l'orage lointain attaquaient l'avion. (99)

Because of the cloud cover Fabien can no longer see the stars nor any lights on the ground. In contrast, Rivière can see stars above Buenos Ayres, although they too are almost

obsoured:

Il leva les yeux vers les étoiles, qui
luisaient sur la route étroite, presque
effacées par les affiches lumineuses.
(100)

By linking episodes on the ground and in the air in this way, the author is able to avoid any dull chronological succession of scenes, and achieves great simultaneity and unity of action.⁴ All our attention is slowly but cleverly brought to bear on the fate of Fabien. Firstly the storm is introduced very gradually, beginning with a hint of some distant atmospheric disturbance in the earphones of radio operators. Secondly, as the storm advances, radio stations are silenced and all contact with the airplane is lost completely. Events are further thrown into relief by the fact that weather reports state that the route to be taken by the European pilot is clear, and in addition the Paraguayan mail is experiencing perfect flying weather. When Fabien's wife arrives at the airport, tension is further increased, then, soon afterwards, is swiftly released:

Alors quelqu'un remarque:
- Une heure quarante. Dernière limite
de l'essence: il est impossible qu'ils
volent encore.
Et la paix se fait. (131)

The action of Vol de Nuit takes place over a period of only a few hours (between dusk and approximately 2:00 a.m.). However, of the twenty-four separate scenes, twenty are devoted

⁴
Ibid., p.83.

to descriptions of activity on the ground, the remaining four to Fabien in the air. Despite this the author is able to concentrate our attention on all the events taking place. Thus the parallelism of action between Fabien and Rivière soon becomes apparent. Both are involved in the organisation of an attitude, having met on the common ground of an essentially human enterprise. This impression is maintained throughout the book very effectively. Rivière and Fabien have a new vision of man and the world, the vision of the former being explained in his many meditations on the ground, and that of the latter in the descriptions of the earth and human institutions as seen from above. Thus, unity of action and purpose are stressed throughout Vol de Nuit.

The abundance of scenes devoted to Rivière's meditations is deliberate, since he is the only character in Vol de Nuit who is fully aware of the nature of the enterprise, and further, it is upon these meditations that the whole action of the book is based. The pilots' flights are naturally indispensable, but amount to nothing without the guidance of the inspired leader. Of the twelve scenes featuring Rivière, ten contain philosophical digressions. This fact alone indicates clearly the importance given such episodes in the book.

A close examination of the distribution of scenes to the other characters is also very interesting. Fabien, the character second only to Rivière in importance, appears in four scenes, whilst Robineau, the weak-willed character,

appears in five scenes. But it must be remembered that except on one occasion, when he is with Pellerin, Robineau always accompanies Rivière. By thus having them appear side by side the weak person seems weaker, and the strong person seems stronger. The same technique is employed with Pellerin (one of the only two pilots who are given a name) and Simone Fabien, both of whom appear in two scenes each. Pellerin is obviously held up for our admiration, whilst Simone represents a way of life considered by Rivière and the author to be completely alien to that of the "métier". Fabien's wife, it must be remembered, also appears with Rivière, which again throws the latter into bold relief. The juxtaposition of two widely differing characters for the purpose of more vivid characterisation, is fairly common in Vol de Nuit. In addition to the instances cited above, Simone is also seen against a background of workshop employees, when she arrives at the airline headquarters; Robineau is contrasted with Pellerin, while going in the car to Buenos Ayres; in Chapter X the warmth of a home, suggested by the European pilot's wife, contrasts sharply with the cold upper atmosphere, suggested when her husband puts on his heavy flying coat and boots in preparation for his flight.

In spite of Rivière's many digressions, the plot holds together very well, our interest being sustained by the very lack of too many scenes taking place in the air. Action is concentrated as much on the community on the ground striving

together to save Fabien's life and the mails he carries, as on the pilot's struggle itself. In this way a certain compelling suspense is maintained throughout the book, especially when scenes featuring Fabien appear at the very moment when our curiosity is at its peak. Chapter I, for example, introduces us to the plot. In this chapter we are led to believe that there is a storm in the vicinity which could possibly affect the Patagonia mail. But the next five chapters lead us away from Fabien to Rivière, Pellerin and Robineau. Only after an introduction to the characters of Rivière and Robineau, as well as a description of Pellerin encountering violent weather over the Andes, does the author refer us back to Fabien. At this point, Chapter VII, the pilot is entering the storm. But the episode is very brief, and the reader is given only a minimum of information. Chapters VIII - XI inclusive show Rivière patiently awaiting news from Fabien, the scene between a pilot and his wife, and this pilot discussing fear with Rivière. Then in Chapter XII we see Fabien in the centre of the storm trying desperately to find a way out. After Fabien's unsuccessful attempts to contact air-fields on the ground where he might land, the author takes us back to Buenos Ayres where Rivière speaks with some of the company's observation posts in an attempt to secure a safe landing strip for his pilot.

From this point in the book, the tension increases quite rapidly, and scenes alternate between Buenos Ayres and

Simone who telephones Rivière for news of her husband, then suddenly to Fabien who has veered out over the sea. Following this, in Chapter XVI, the author describes the deceptive calm and peace above the cloud cover. A momentary relief from tension occurs here, for next we are told that the airport at Comodoro has received a message from the aircraft to the effect that Fabien is now trapped above the clouds with only half an hour of gasoline remaining. Chapters XVIII and XIX consist in awaiting the obvious outcome of events, which occurs in Chapter XX when a broken message is received, which are Fabien's last words.

By a clever arrangement of scenes in the air, the action and tension begins to accelerate from the very beginning. Between Chapter I and Chapter VII, the first two chapters where Fabien appears, there are five other chapters describing events on the ground. Between Chapters VII and XII, where Fabien appears for the third time, four intervening chapters are devoted to characters on the ground. And between Chapters XII and XV, only two chapters refer to ground operations. But then Fabien appears in two consecutive chapters (Chapters XV and XVI) for the first time. This occurs immediately preceeding the climax of the book.

By techniques such as these, and by making full use of characters and plot, Saint-Exupéry has achieved a balance of composition which is an ideal vehicle for the explanation of

some rather difficult themes, for none of these themes appears incongruous when seen in the context of the general structure of Vol de Nuit.

3. A Note on Language and Style

The words most frequently encountered in Vol de Nuit are undoubtedly those which Saint-Exupéry employed in real life, namely those concerned with flying. At least one of the words belonging to this category appears on every page of Vol de Nuit. Most of these terms are in everyday use; a few are technical or semi-technical. Their inclusion in a work of this kind not only adds authenticity, but also gives an added interest, for it must be borne in mind that flying was, in 1931, the year of the publication of Vol de Nuit, a comparatively new field of human endeavour. The interest aroused by such new words can be compared to that caused by words concerning flights into space in this present decade. Words in common use in the year of publication of Vol de Nuit would include: pilote, avion, ailes, échappement, équipe, équipage, poste radio, T.S.F., antenne, le radio, boussole, compas. Other words met fairly regularly in the book must have been less well-known to the general public. It is not the intention of this work to give an exhaustive list of such terms, however, the vocabulary included here will no doubt serve to illustrate the sort of terms used by Saint-Exupéry throughout the whole of Vol de Nuit: carlingue, commandes, contacts, manette des gaz, lampe de secours, tableau de dis-

tributien électrique, cadran, gyroscope, altimètre, manomètre.

500 chevaux du moteur, régime du moteur, moteur au ralenti,
pression d'huile, pompe à huile, axe.

feux de bord, feux de position, longeron, capot, prise d'air,
moyeu d'hélice.

atterrir, décoller.

postes de la ligne, escale, terrain de secours, terrain
d'atterrissage, hangar, balisage, messages météo, télégrammes
de protection.

Meteorological terminology is also quite prominent in Vol de Nuit, the following words being the most common: cyclone, tempête, orage, ouragan, rafales de pluie, and trombes d'eau.

But obviously Saint-Exupéry's talent does not merely lie in his knowledge of certain technical words and phrases, but rather in his vivid descriptions of the sky at night, and the beauty of these passages excels everything else in Vol de Nuit.

Saint-Exupéry is the first French writer to have captured the varying moods of the night sky. From his vantage point situated in the very heart of a storm, Saint-Exupéry is able to give the reader his first real glimpse of the fury of the elements. He sees not just a single lightening flash, but a "ligne d'éclairs" (112); he sees not merely a thick, dark

cloud, but "ce béton noir" (112). At other times the air is filled with strange shapes, "On ne pouvait abandonner deux hommes parmi ces trombes et ces flammes dans les nuages."

(122). When this violent weather occurs over the Andes, the picture becomes nightmarish:

Pellerin regardait, avec un serrement de coeur inexplicable, ces pics innocents, ces arêtes, ces crêtes de neige, à peine plus gris, et qui pourtant commençaient à vivre - comme un peuple. (88)

This feeling of a strange presence is further expanded later on in Vol de Nuit:

C'était le niveau des collines. Il les sentit rouler vers lui leurs vagues vertigineuses. Il comprenait aussi que toutes les masses du sol, dont la moindre l'eût écrasé, étaient comme arrachées de leur support, déboulonnées, et commençaient à tourner, ivres, autour de lui. Et commençaient, autour de lui, une sorte de danse profonde et qui le serrait de plus en plus. (123)

But in Chapter XVI, when Fabien rises above the storm, Saint-Exupéry describes quite a different world. Beyond the clouds lies a silent, eerie world of light. This is even further removed from the experience of the ordinary reader, and the effect of Saint-Exupéry's description of it must have been very great in 1931. The world of weather below becomes a "boue d'ombres" (124), and the sky above "une mer de nuages" (127).

The brilliance and splendour of the scene is evoked by a masterly piece of prose:

Sa surprise fut extrême: la clarté
 était telle qu'elle l'éblouissait. (. . .)
 Il n'aurait jamais cru que les nuages, la
 nuit, pussent éblouir. Mais la pleine lune
 et toutes les constellations les changeaient
 en vagues rayonnantes. (. . .) La tempête
 (. . .) tournait vers les astres une face de
 cristal et de neige. (. . .) Car la lumière
 ne descendait pas des astres, mais elle se
 dégageait, au-dessous de lui, autour de lui,
 de ces provisions blanches. (124-125)

In addition to this Saint-Exupéry gives different descriptions of the night itself by a clever use of words. The depth of night is evoked by such phrases as "la grande nuit" (84), "l'immense nuit" (83), and "une telle profondeur de nuit" (114). It is compared with "une fumée sombre" (83) and then "une vaste nef" (95) and a "voûte profonde" (95). But most of the time, Saint-Exupéry seems to look upon the night with a certain dread, which can be felt, for example, in his frequent use of the verbs gâter and pourrir:

la nuit serait belle et pourtant gâtée:
 il lui répugnait d'entrer dans cette
 ombre prête à pourrir. (82)

Later Saint-Exupéry employs the verb gâter in a similar way:

Un monde où rien ne menaçait l'équilibre
 des masses s'ombres et de lumière. Où
 ne s'infiltrait même pas la caresse de
 ces vents purs, qui (. . .) peuvent gâter
 en quelques heures un ciel entier. (115)

Another notable example of the use of this verb is:

Quelle nuit étrange! Elle se gâtait
 brusquement par plaques, comme la chair
 d'un fruit lumineux. (. . .) Nuit mena-
 çante qu'un vent mauvais touchait et
 pourrissait. (117)

The night is for the pilot a dark, mysterious thing which must remain a constant threat to his very existence. This feeling is explained by such phrases as "un monde d'aveugle" (84), "les obstacles de la nuit" (95), "une ombre d'origine des mondes" (123), and "la nuit qui poussait contre lui, à la vitesse d'un éboulement, son torrent noir" (122).

There is such a wealth of imagery in Vol de Nuit that it will only be possible here to mention the more common devices employed by Saint-Exupéry. Again it will be noticed that the vast majority of these will occur in passages describing flight itself - sometimes the actual airplane, sometimes the ground seen from above.

Similes occur quite frequently in Vol de Nuit. Only two will be mentioned here, both of which are self-explanatory: "le ciel était calme comme un aquarium" (82) and "un capot lourd comme un chaland" (84). The use of words such as comme, pareil à and semblable à, often to introduce a simile, is very common throughout Vol de Nuit. Chapter I, for example, contains eleven such instances.

Metaphors are used to much greater advantage. The opening line of Vol de Nuit is intended to jolt us a little, and indeed we can be left in no doubt that this is poetry of flight at its best:

Les collines, sous l'avion, creusaient
déjà leur sillage d'ombre dans l'or du
soir. (81)

On the very same page we find yet another excellent example of this poetry:

Quelquefois, (. . .) il croisait une
ferme perdue, et qui semblait emporter
en arrière, dans une houle de prairies,
sa charge de vies humaines; alors il
saluait des ailes ce navire. (81)

However it is in his use of personification that Saint-Exupéry is at his best. For most people objects often come alive, but for the pilot whose life is continually surrounded by movement, mostly violent, the feeling is much more acute. To him, for instance, his plane is throbbing with life, hence he speaks of, "une chair vivante" (83). He argues that, "le métal ne vibrait pas, mais vivait", (83). Towards the end of Vol de Nuit, another pilot has the very same sensation:

Le pilote allait sentir dans ses épaules,
appuyées à l'avion, cet avion vivre. (135)

The aircraft is not pushed up and down by air-pockets, but appears to be breathing:

quand il vient de mille kilomètres et
sent des lames de fond profondes soulever
et descendre l'avion qui respire. (84)

In violent weather the airplane even seems to reveal human emotions:

Le moteur, à chaque plongée, vibrait si
fort que toute la masse de l'avion était
prise d'un tremblement comme de colère.
(123)

The Earth below him, too, appears to be in continual motion. From his standpoint, his plane is at rest, as it were, in the void:

Tout ce qui fait douce la vie des hommes
grandissait vers lui. (82)

Similarly we later read:

Et le village montait vers l'équipage et
vers lui s'ouvrait. (82)

Again, on the same page is an almost identical image:

Et le village coulait déjà au ras des
ailes. (82)

Earlier, in a very poetic, but precise image, cities become flocks of sheep drinking at the water's edge:

il était le berger des petites villes.
Toutes les deux heures il en rencontrait
qui venaient boire au bord des fleuves
ou qui breutaient leur plaine. (81)

But this same Earth can be very violent, especially in a cyclone over the Andes. Mountains seem to break away from their foundations and stagger about the hapless pilot in the storm-rack:

Pellerin regardait, avec un serrement
de coeur inexplicable, ces pics innocents,
ces arêtes, ces crêtes de neige, à peine
plus gris, et qui pourtant commençaient à
vivre.

(.)
Et tous les pics, ainsi, l'un après l'autre
s'enflammèrent (. . .) C'est alors qu'avec
les premiers remous de l'air les montagnes
autour du pilote oscillèrent. (88)

Saint-Exupéry frequently uses ordinary everyday words and gives them a very special poetic meaning. For this very reason, they are often very difficult to translate into English. Five of the most prominent of these will be discussed briefly.

The first, or, appears twice in the opening paragraph of Vol de Nuit:

Les collines, sous l'avion, creusaient déjà leur sillage d'ombre dans l'or du soir. Les plaines devenaient lumineuses mais d'une inusable lumière: dans ce pays elles n'en finissent pas de rendre leur or, de même qu'après l'hiver elles n'en finissent pas de rendre leur neige. (81)

The meaning here is fairly obvious. Or probably refers to the gold of the evening sky, in the first instance, and in the second, perhaps the same gold colour, or the golden grass reddened by the setting sun. However, when Rivière is later contemplating the night sky, this same word appears, and yet the sun has long since set:

Il regardait avec rancune, par la fenêtre, ce ciel découvert, enrichi d'étoiles, ce balisage divin, cette lune, l'or d'une telle nuit dilapidé. (98)

Or here obviously refers to the white light emitted by "the stars, those heavenly marking lights, the moon". The colour here is different, but the word remains the same. Or is also employed to describe not light, but sound:

On suivait, du poste radio de Buenos-Aires, sa plainte mêlée au grésillement des orages. Sous cette gangue sourde, l'or de l'onde musicale se perdait. (95)

The word or here refers to the essence of the sound being transmitted. In other words, it means the actual signal.

The phrase "fond de mer" is used by Saint-Exupéry to evoke something hidden, secret and unattainable. It is used especially to describe a pilot's feelings towards the security

of home and all it stands for:

La ville n'est plus qu'un fond de mer.
 (.)
 Elle restait là. Elle regardait,
 triste, ces fleurs, ces livres, cette
 douceur, qui n'étaient pour lui qu'un
 fond de mer. (108-109)

The verb peser is used in different contexts to give various results. For example, the following denotes his fight against the storm:

Sans doute ces mains, fermées sur les
 commandes, pesaient déjà sur la tempête,
 comme sur la nuque d'une bête. (99)

But "Ces larges épaules pesaient déjà contre le ciel" (108) can only mean that he was pushing back the sky, or shouldering it. We find a similar use of peser in the following:

Doucement soulevées, les masses métal-
 liques pesaient contre la chair même
 du radio. (99)

However there are two completely different impressions created in two other sentences:

Le silence des bureaux lui plut. (. . .)
 L'idée lui vint qu'il visitait les caves
 d'une banque; là où pèsent les richesses.
 (101)

Here, peser must mean to lie heavily, whereas in, "il pesait dans la bonne direction" (112), it obviously means that Rivière is moving in the right direction.

Epaisseur is frequently used to evoke the depth and darkness of the night or the storm as in the following four quotations:

il lui semblait que l'on se heurterait
plus loin à l'épaisseur de la nuit comme
à un mur. (99)

des changements de densité, dans l'épaisseur
des ombres. (113)

Puisque l'on serait obligé, tôt ou tard,
de couler en aveugle, dans cette épaisseur.
(114)

Tout se résoudrait, bien ou mal, dans cette
épaisseur. (114)

Saint-Exupéry often borrows from nautical terminology to describe sensations encountered in flying. This is understandable when one recalls that flying was in its infancy in 1931, and an exact vocabulary was lacking. Hence, "lames de fond" (swells) is used for the surging of air; "remous", normally an eddy, is used to describe an air current ("remous de l'air," (99), "grands remous", (99), and "les remous le soulevaient", (122). Similarly, "houle", as in "une sorte de houle puissante pénétra son corps" (122). In addition, more concrete terms appear from time to time. A mountain peak becomes a ship's stem:

Ces arêtes, ces pics, tout devenait aigu:
on les sentait pénétrer, comme des étraves,
le vent dur. (68)

Obstacles in the night are described as flotsam:

La nuit, et tout ce qu'elle portait de
rocs, d'épaves, de collines, coulait
aussi contre l'avion avec la même étonnante
fatalité. (113)

Even the pilot lying asleep must be included in this category:

Elle admirait cette poitrine nue,
bien carenée, elle pensait à un beau
navire.

Il reposait dans ce lit calme, comme dans un port, et, pour que rien n'agitât son sommeil, elle effaçait du doigt ce pli, cette ombre, cette houle, elle apaisait ce lit, comme, d'un doigt divin, la mer. (106-107)

By taking the image further, Buenos Ayres becomes "un rivage" (85) or "un port" (114), just as the calm above the cloud cover is "les eaux réservées" (125). Some of the description is very poetic. Indeed, Saint-Exupéry succeeds in explaining the same sense of mystery in the air which Conrad gives in his nautical tales,¹ but he employs nautical imagery:

Et le pilote Fabien (. . .) reconnaissait l'approche du soir aux mêmes signes que les eaux d'un port (. . .). Il entraît dans une rade immense et bienheureuse. (81)

Almost identical is the following:

Fabien admirait que l'entrée dans la nuit se fît cette fois, comme une entrée en rade, lente et belle. (83)

Lights on the ground at night hold a certain fascination for Saint-Exupéry. They symbolize life, and the warmth of houses and human beings. They are not simply "lumières" but "étoiles", "constellations", "appels lumineux", or "foyers". More than anything else, lights become for him evidence of the human presence on Earth:

Il se retourna vers San Julian: ce n'était plus qu'une poignée de lumières, puis d'étoiles, puis se dissipa la poussière. (83)

¹

See above, Chapter II, note 1.

More beautiful, perhaps, is the following:

Déjà pourtant s'éclairaient les villages,
et leurs constellations se répondaient.
(. . .) La terre était tendue d'appels
lumineux, chaque maison allumant son
étoile, face à l'immense nuit, ainsi
qu'on tourne un phare vers la mer. Tout
ce qui couvrait une vie humaine déjà
scintillait. (83)

In the same way the "lamp" is a symbol of home and safety.

Sometimes he refers to the airport:

Ces camarades, (. . .) instruits comme
des savants, penchés sur des cartes,
tout-puissants, à l'abri de lampes
belles comme des fleurs. (122)

Sometimes he imagines the lamp in his own home:

Cette femme parlait elle aussi au nom
d'un monde absolu et de ses devoirs et
de ses droits. Celui d'une clarté de
lampe sur la table du soir. (120)

In Vol de Nuit pilots are nearly always likened to shepherds, presumably because they, like shepherds, lead a lonely life, and bear great responsibility. The image is very effective, but unfortunately the author plays on the theme too often. Each of the pilots, in fact, is compared with a herd at some point in the book:

Il [Fabien] eût pu croire aussi, dans
ce calme, faire une lente promenade,
presque comme un berger. (81)

Pour cette fête, il [pilote d'Europe]
choisissait les étoffes les plus rudes,
les cuirs les plus lourds, il s'habillait
comme un paysan. (108)

Le pilote [d'Ascuncion], à l'avant
soutenait de ses mains sa précieuse
charge de vies humaines, les yeux
grands ouverts et pleins de lune,
comme un chevrier. (135)

Trois pilotes (. . .) descend-
raient lentement de leur ciel d'orage
ou de paix, comme d'étranges paysans
descendent de leurs montagnes. (84-85)

In a very beautiful image, the moon becomes the shepherd of the stars: "Parfois la lune se promenait comme un berger".

(118) The names of other workmen also feature quite prominently in Saint-Exupéry's use of language. He employs certain craftsmen to illustrate the pride, which Rivière and his men have in their work:

Cet homme éprouvait, en face de sa
vie passée, la tranquille contente-
ment du menuisier qui vient de polir
une belle planche. (86)

Speaking to Pellerin, Rivière remarks:

"Comment avez-vous réussi?" Et l'aima
de parler simplement métier, de parler
de son vol comme un forgeron de son
enclume. (89)

Saint-Exupéry does not use the image excessively, and thus it remains very effective.

However, the phrase "kiosque à musique" is repeated three times by Saint-Exupéry to show Rivière's dislike for the common herd. The arrogance of such remarks has been dealt with above; they are quoted here merely to illustrate the unnecessary repetition of certain words:

Les petits bourgeois des petites villes
tournent le soir autour de leur kiosque
à musique. (92)

Note here the emphasis given to the adjective petit, as also
in:

Il pensa qu'autour de leur kiosque à musi-
que les petits bourgeois des petites villes
vivaient une vie d'apparence silencieuse.
(100)

The idea is repeated once more:

Rivière revit encore en songe les foules
des petites villes, qui tournent le soir
autour de leur kiosque à musique. (121)

It is not difficult to see that certain words, or groups of
words, are used twice or three times in different parts of
the book, often without particularly adding anything new to
our knowledge of Saint-Exupéry's feelings for the hoilpólloi.

A study of Saint-Exupéry's style would be incomplete
without discussing the structure of the sentences and para-
graphs. Vol de Nuit is a short book. The twenty-three chap-
ters occupy only fifty-six pages, giving an average of about
two and a half pages per chapter.¹ The longest chapter is
Chapter VI, comprising four and a half pages; the shortest,
Chapter XXIII, occupies only half a page.

Similarly the individual paragraphs, and occasionally
the sentences, are quite brief. The longest paragraph in Vol
de Nuit is twenty-eight lines long (page 82, also page 107),
whilst the shortest amounts to a single line. Indeed, the

¹
i.e., in Saint-Exupéry, Oeuvres.

book contains many unnecessarily short sentences, displaying a rather halting style. One would expect to meet such sentences at points of crisis (which are quite frequent), but this is not always the case. Saint-Exupéry is often loath to use conjunctions, as can be seen below. When the "Pilote d'Europe" rises to go to work we read:

Il se leva. Il marchait lentement
vers la fenêtre en s'étirant. (107)

When the same person is by the window:

Il s'inclinait toujours. Il respirait
profondément, comme avant de se jeter, nu,
dans la mer. (108)

When the pilot is dressed:

Elle [his wife] le regardait. Elle
réparait elle-même le dernier défaut dans
l'armure. (108)

Later, when the pilot leaves:

Elle restait là. Elle regardait,
triste, ces fleurs. (109)

The use of telegraphic sentences, however, is understandable in the many radio messages encountered throughout Vol de Nuit. Indeed, they can be very effective, especially at times of acute crisis.² When Saint-Exupéry abandons straightforward prose description in favour of radio dialogues, we are left with a strong feeling of actuality. When Fabien has to attempt a landing, his last message contains all we have to know:

²
It will be remembered that Courrier Sud actually closes with a very meaningful radio message. See Oeuvres, p. 77.

"Descendons. Entrons dans les
nuees..."

Puis ces deux mots d'un texte
obscur apparurent dans le poste de
Trelaw:

"...rien voir..." (130)

Occasionally we meet a brief sentence, full of meaning and extremely concise. For instance, after Fabien's crash we read, "Fabien quitterait lentement sa maison." (129) These few words explain very effectively the fact that his presence, indicated by his belongings, would remain with Simone for a very long time.

Saint-Exupéry is very unpredictable in his use of the paragraph. Vol de Nuit contains many instances of poor paragraphing:

L'isolement d'une maison. L'une
s'éteint: C'est une maison qui se
ferme sur son amour.

Ou sur son ennui. (84)

Some paragraphs are quite long, notably those on pages 82, 83-84, 85-86, 89, 107 and 128, whilst many are unnecessarily short. Four examples are given here:

- ...Paieriez à boire!
Et il descendit.
Il voulut raconter son voyage:
- Si vous saviez!...
Jugeant sans doute en avoir assez dit,
il s'en fut retirer son cuir. (87)

"C'est tout à fait pareil à une révolte:
des visages qui palissent à peine, mais
changent tellement!"

Il fit un effort pour se souvenir

Il franchissait, paisible, la
Cordillère des Andes. (87)

Il attendit, essuya un peu de
sueur, et, quand il fut délivré, trav-
ailla.
Il compulsait lentement les notes.
(103)

Il rit encore.
Il s'habillait. (108)

Double spacings between paragraphs are quite common in Vol de Nuit. However, occasionally they are misused, as, for instance, on page 114, when Fabien is enquiring about the weather conditions at various cities in South America.³ At several points they are particularly useful, because they serve as a warning that Saint-Exupéry is about to indulge in a little philosophizing (e.g., pages 120 and 121).

Vol de Nuit is dominated by the figure of Rivière, and when Rivière speaks or thinks, Saint-Exupéry often employs a one-line paragraph to emphasise his speech or thought:

Rivière disait parfois: (92)

Il réfléchit encore: (110)

Il pense au pilote: (110)

Of the eight paragraphs which form Chapter XVIII, six begin with a mention of Rivière. To illustrate this, the first two or three words of the opening line in each paragraph of

³
To illustrate this, two photocopies, taken from the 1931 edition of Vol de Nuit, are included here.

VOL DE NUIT

Quand les dix minutes d'escale furent écoulées, Fabien dut repartir.

Il se retourna vers San Julian : ce n'était plus qu'une poignée de lumières, puis d'étoiles, puis se dissipa la poussière qui, pour la dernière fois, le tenta.

« Je ne vois plus les cadrans : j'allume. »

Il toucha les contacts, mais les lampes rouges de la carlingue versèrent vers les aiguilles une lumière encore si diluée dans cette lumière bleue qu'elle ne les colorait pas. Il passa les doigts devant une ampoule : ses doigts se teintèrent à peine.

« Trop tôt. »

VOL DE NUIT

Je crois être obligé de remonter bientôt l'antenne à cause des décharges. Ferez-vous demi-tour? Quels sont vos projets?

« — Foutez-moi la paix. Demandez le temps de Bahia Blanca. » .

« — Bahia Blanca a répondu : prévoyons avant vingt minutes violent orage Ouest sur Bahia Blanca. »

« — Demandez le temps de Trelew. »

« — Trelew a répondu : ouragan trente mètres seconde Ouest et rafales de pluie. »

« — Communiquez à Buenos-Ayres : Sommes bouchés de tous les côtés, tempête

Chapter XVIII are listed below:

Et Rivière médite (126)

Rivière se souvient (126)

Rivière pense (126)

Peu à peu (127)

Rivière connaît (127)

Rivière pense (127)

Fabien erre (127)

Rivière pense (127)

From the author's constant references to Rivière in this deliberately repetitive way, we can remain in no doubt as to the importance that must be given to what Rivière says or thinks.

In concluding, it must be said that, when Saint-Exupéry becomes involved in descriptions of flight, he is at his very best. It is at these points in Vol de Nuit that we are aware of the author's capabilities as a poet. However, Saint-Exupéry is very selective. Fabien, because he is one of the chosen few, can indulge in reverie, whereas Robineau is described in very blunt, dull terms. This, of course, is deliberate.

There is one notable use of dramatic irony, which occurs after Fabien's stop at San Julian:

Il se retourna vers San Julian: ce n'était plus qu'une poignée de lumières, puis d'étoiles, puis se dissipa la poussière qui, pour la dernière fois, le tenta. (83)

One outstanding feature in Saint-Exupéry's style is the great number of repetitions. When he discovers a good image, Saint-Exupéry will often repeat it elsewhere, rather than seek a fresh one. "Kiosque à musique" has been mentioned; "éternel voyageur" is used twice to describe Rivière:

Il avait gardé son manteau, son chapeau,
il ressemblait toujours à un éternel
voyageur. (94)

Much later in the book the same idea is repeated:

Rivière à sa porte, venait d'apparaître,
serré dans son manteau, le chapeau tou-
jours sur les yeux, éternel voyageur. (117)

The second sentence is obviously a simple variation of the first. Rather than merely using the same words in a different order, better effect might have been achieved had Saint-Exupéry used a different image.

However, the value of Vol de Nuit lies more in the realms of philosophical ideas than in its style. This, of course, does not imply that Saint-Exupéry's style can be ignored in any appraisal of Vol de Nuit. On the contrary, his style of writing in this book possesses certain remarkable characteristics. He is very consistent, for example, in his use of certain literary devices, such as the simile and the metaphor, and his descriptions, especially of sky, earth and weather, are highly poetic. Throughout Vol de Nuit Saint-Exupéry also displays a remarkable skill for impressing the outstanding features of the characters on the reader, without indulging in lengthy descriptions. Certain traits, all essen-

tial ones, are suggested, and we are left with a very clear picture of all the important characters. In addition, our attention is never allowed to wander. There is a marked absence of unnecessary digression from the plot, and this is important in a work based on the adventure theme.

IV

VOL DE NUIT IN RELATION TO THE OTHER WORKS OF SAINT-EXUPÉRY

Vol de Nuit is based on Saint-Exupéry's experiences¹ in South America during the early development of "The Line". Similarly, Courrier Sud, his first book² was written during the author's stay in North Africa between 1926 and 1928.³

Courrier Sud concerns only three main characters. Firstly, Bernis, who is a mail-plane pilot flying on the Toulouse-Dakar route. Secondly, Geneviève, ex-fiancée of Bernis, and now married to Herlin. Finally, the author, who, we are informed, is a close friend of the pilot.

Bernis is almost a projection of Saint-Exupéry himself, as he was during the early years of his flying career. He is aware of his life and of its unfulfilable possibilities, but feels also the attraction of the past and a desire for fixation. Fundamentally the pilot needs security, but the dilemma arises when he is unable to decide whether it should be sought

¹ The Aéropostale Argentina was referred to by the South American crews as "La Ligne", a term which Saint-Exupéry uses for the title of Part I of Terre des Hommes.

² A short version of Courrier Sud was published in the review Le Navire d'Argent on 1 April 1926 under the title L'Aviateur. Chevrier, p.21.

³ At this time the mail was transported by the Société Latécoère. Estang, p.7.

in flying or in Geneviève, for both represent two different kinds of ordered universes. Geneviève, the symbol of all that is stable, becomes for Bernis the interpreter of a meaningful existence:

Geneviève...tu te souviens, nous la
disions, elle, habitée. Je l'ai
retrouvée comme on retrouve le sens
des choses et je marche à son côté
dans un monde dont je découvre enfin
l'intérieur... (22)⁴

Bernis is the nostalgic man of action. Although he is aware of his quest, he is unable to bring it to realisation, for a man who has found a meaning to life has no need to revert to memories of childhood. He believes he has found the fixity he longs for in Geneviève, although, in effect, she needs this herself. For her, life is given a meaning because it represents some sort of pattern, but when she finds herself in unfamiliar surroundings she loses this assurance she had at home. Thus, a sentimental solution is impossible for Bernis. Yet his sense of basic necessity is not to be denied. The fundamental drive must find its outlet.

Failing to find an ideal in love, Bernis turns to religion. This outlet, a cry of despair and a negative solution, is soon condemned. His last attempt, to find hope in sensual love, he knows to be useless in advance.

Bernis' quest is vague, with a mystical sense of reality beyond things. There is no real conflict, for he

4

The original appears in italics.

Does not fully understand what he wants. It is an essentially poetic quest, pointing to the anguish of human existence. This, he feels, must be provided with a context, a vision of man in a sense of brotherhood, removed from all thoughts of sentimentality and subjectivity. But this idea is only suggested, there being no development of such themes.

The delivery of mails by air introduced to the readers of 1928 a new dimension of human experience, and a new awareness of the challenge of time and space. In their real sense of conquest the individual's gestures are precise and meaningful, their purpose being to impose a pattern on the world. But Bernis, one feels, is a little unreal, and Courrier Sud is often viewed as being a novel of poetic sensibility. The airline pilot is always seeking something which he cannot define. The constructive theme of the "métier", though still in embryo form, is too often overshadowed by the persistence of nostalgic themes recalling childhood. The legendary mysticism and wonderment, the intuitive sense of things evoked by this nostalgia gives rise to a fairyland atmosphere introduced as an escape from the world of reality. The virile pilot displays a rather unreal sensibility. This poetic self-indulgence results in a somewhat rarified atmosphere, creating a gap between the author and his readers.

The themes dealt with in Vol de Nuit are not nearly so well defined in Courrier Sud. For instance, although the attraction of the "métier" is seen to be stronger than that of

Geneviève and the comfortable life of security on the ground, the cult of the airline is explained much more precisely and developed to a greater extent in Vol de Nuit. We are aware of the presence of a harsh discipline in Courrier Sud, but there is no real development of this. There is no-one in Courrier Sud comparable with Rivière, and therefore Bernis is rather self-centred. Consequently Bernis' death is meaningless, there being no stress on any idea of sacrifice, as is the case with Fabien. The reason for this great difference between the main characters of the two novels is simply because those in Courrier Sud seem to be almost completely wrapped up in themselves, whilst Rivière, Fabien, Pellerin and the other pilots of Vol de Nuit are fully aware of a higher purpose, and their desires are stated in more precise terms.

Because of this, the characters of Courrier Sud and Saint-Exupéry's treatment of them are vastly different from those of Vol de Nuit. There is not the same division of characters into types as there is in Vol de Nuit. Since Bernis and Geneviève are too close, and since the narrator is at times too close to both of them, there cannot be the same contrast between characters which is so effective in Vol de Nuit.

There is also a certain ambiguity in the role of the narrator. He is neither a full participant in the action, nor a completely detached observer. He tries to be at the same time a participant of the action and an omniscient being detached from the drama, commenting from above with a superior

viewpoint. At times he is too close to the characters, often too reluctant to leave them alone, and at others he is too far removed from them.

Events in Vol de Nuit flow very smoothly despite Rivière's digressions, which, though quite numerous, are brief and at least closely linked to the main action. Most of Courrier Sud on the other hand consists of one extremely long digression. However, this, together with the irregular use of tenses, though a little confusing, does manage to give the impression of indecision on the part of Bernis and the narrator. The element of suspense is very marked in Vol de Nuit, but it is practically non-existent in Courrier Sud.

The author's use of language and various images is surprisingly similar to that found in Vol de Nuit. In the first and third parts of Courrier Sud the abundance of terms connected with flying is quite striking, reflecting the newness of Saint-Exupéry's genre. On the other hand, the second part of the book is steeped in all that is homely - fleurs, maison, arbres, parc, amoureux - and there is a marked absence of airplanes and flying. Yet when the author is describing flight, the imagery bears a close resemblance to that of Vol de Nuit. Bernis, for example, is likened to a shepherd:

Appuyé à l'avion en panne, devant cette courbe du sable, ce fléchissement de l'horizon, il veillait ses amours comme un berger... (17)

Earlier we are given the same picture of the heavily clothed pilot as in Vol de Nuit:

Le pilote s'habille. Chandails, foulard, combinaison de cuir, bottes fourrées. (. . .) Les mains encombrées de sa montre, de son altimètre, de son porte-cartes, les doigts gourds sous les gants épais, il se hisse lourd et maladroit jusqu'au poste de pilotage. (5)

Like Fabien's airplane, Bernis' seems to be almost a living organism:

Maintenant, il résiste moins à l'avion qui cherche à monter, laisse s'épanouir un peu la force que sa main comprime. (6)

Much more use is made of the simile in Courrier Sud. At the beginning of Part II alone there are six similes in the space of five pages. But these cannot match Saint-Exupéry's use of the metaphor and personification. These are scattered throughout Courrier Sud, but are particularly effective when they occur in the flying episodes:

La terre, de là-haut, paraissait nue et morte; l'avion descend: elle s'habille. Les bois de nouveau la capitonnent, les vallées, les coteaux impriment en elle une houle: elle respire. Une montagne qu'il survole, poitrine de géant couché, se gonfle presque jusqu'à lui. (12)

However, unlike Vol de Nuit, Courrier Sud abounds in references to the pilot's childhood. This fact, of course, reflects one of the main differences between the two novels - that of Bernis' much stronger feeling of nostalgia.

Since Courrier Sud is one of the first books to have been written about aviation, it is not at all surprising to

find that Saint-Exupéry makes great use of the radio message. Part I contains six such messages and Part III no fewer than twelve. Part II, in view of its nature, contains none. The technique is admirably suited to the novel, since it has the advantage of being brief and to the point, as well as sounding dramatic. The opening lines of Courrier Sud consist of a very short radio message:

"Par radio. 6h. 10. De Toulouse pour escales.
Courrier Franco-Amérique de Sud quitte Tou-
louse 5h. 45 stop." (3)

The book closes with the reply:

"De Dakar pour Toulouse: courrier bien arrivé
Dakar. Stop." (77)

Thus, in order to say all that is essential, Saint-Exupéry uses a method which restricts itself always to the essential.

Courrier Sud is an "oeuvre en puissance", its author,⁵ at 28 years of age, being yet an apprentice⁶ in life, in the "métier" as well as in writing. Action, thought and dream are intermingled,⁷ but we can see in Bernis a hint of the hero to come, for Fabien, too, is involved in the effort to choose⁸ acts conforming to his destiny. However, Bernis has no leader to urge him on, and so he is afflicted by doubts. The pilots of Vol de Nuit are privileged in that they have a guide in

⁵ Chevrier, p.48.

⁶ Ibid., p.49.

⁷ Ibid."

⁸ Anat, pp.214-215.

Rivière, and know, therefore, in which direction their inner desires are bent.

After the publication of Vol de Nuit in 1931, Saint-Exupéry's life as "pilote de ligne" came to an end with the liquidation of the Aeropostale.⁹ This period also saw the disappearance of the discipline, comradeship and the pioneer spirit which meant so much to the author. In 1936 Mermoz died in the South Atlantic,¹⁰ and in 1940 Guillaumet died over the Mediterranean.¹¹ Between 1931 and the war, Saint-Exupéry worked as a test-pilot and a journalist. With these striking changes in his life, it is by no means surprising to find that his books changed too. Although Courrier Sud and Vol de Nuit were based on his own experiences flying mail, they are both written in the third person and also in the novel form. Terre des Hommes, however, is the first of two books described by Luc Estang as "témoignages directs".¹² The author uses his own experiences for subject matter, as he did in his previous works, but Terre des Hommes takes the form of a direct narrative written in the first person.

This, Saint-Exupéry's third book, was published in 1939, and consists of a series of accounts of his own personal

⁹
Delange, p.58.

¹⁰
8 December 1936. Pélissier, p.14.

¹¹
27 November 1940. Chevrier, p.31.

¹²
See Introduction.

experiences and those of Mermoz and Guillaumet, his close friends, in various parts of the world. Each part - there are eight - is isolated from the next, although often the same theme will reappear in several parts of the book. The description of each incident is accompanied by meditations, memories, reflections on life, flying, comradeship, the desert, and man. In each case there is a message which the author is trying to communicate. In short, Terre des Hommes, is a collection of philosophic commentaries on experiences from which Saint-Exupéry draws a universal moral.¹³ Here, the moralist undoubtedly dominates the novelist,¹⁴ far more than in either of his two preceding books.

From the form of Terre des Hommes and the ideas put forward in it, it is obvious to the reader that Saint-Exupéry is no longer an active pilot. The themes which we encounter in Vol de Nuit are still very prevalent in Terre des Hommes, although some of them are given more emphasis, and a few new themes appear. The feeling of brotherhood, which must have been very strong in the early days of flying, is accorded a special place in Terre des Hommes, and leads us gradually into the theme of l'Homme. Saint-Exupéry gives us a much clearer idea of his humanistic philosophy by employing certain figures to personify man's greatness. Man's spiritual aspects are also given more emphasis than they are in Vol de

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Chevrier, p.56.

¹⁴

Id., p.44.

Nuit. But as with Courrier Sud the most important difference between Terre des Hommes and Vol de Nuit is that of the chief character. Rivière has no real counterpart in any of the other works of Saint-Exupéry, except in Citadelle.

The structure of Terre des Hommes is not that of a conventional novel in which a pilot takes certain characters through some action leading to a climax. Terre des Hommes is more like a collection of extracts taken from a diary and arranged in no particular chronological order. In this sense Terre des Hommes is more autobiographical than Vol de Nuit. In fact the longest section in the book, "Au Centre du Désert", concerns Saint-Exupéry himself in an episode taken directly from his own life. "Au Centre du Désert" is the longest single part of Terre des Hommes.¹⁵ However, all the themes lead up to the general theme of man, and the final section of Terre des Hommes is entitled "Les Hommes".

Because of the structure of Terre des Hommes and Saint-Exupéry's treatment of the themes, characterisation differs vastly from that of Vol de Nuit. Guillaumet, Mermoz, the Arab who appears in "Au Centre du Désert", and Saint-Exupéry himself are introduced in order to illustrate a particular aspect of man's greatness. But these characters are not linked dramatically in one single action, as are Fabien and Rivière in Vol de Nuit. They all take part in separate episodes.

In his use of languages and images, Saint-Exupéry borrows to a certain extent from Courrier Sud but more noticeably from Vol de Nuit. Note the similarity between the following two extracts, the first from Courrier Sud and the second from Terre des Hommes:

Les pays inconnus ne livraient plus de chiffres morts, mais de vrais champs avec leurs fleurs - où justement il faut se méfier de cet arbre (8)

Il ne parlait pas de Guadix, mais des trois orangers qui, près de Guadix, bordent un champ: "Méfie-toi d'eux, marque-les sur ta carte..." (144)

The "petits bourgeois" of Vol de Nuit reappear in Terre des Hommes:

Mais dans la grisaille du restaurant, parmi les petits fonctionnaires qui répètent ici les humbles fatigues du jour, ce camarade aux lourdes épaules me parut d'une étrange noblesse. (142)

The craftsmen referred to in Vol de Nuit have their counterparts in Terre des Hommes:

Au-delà de l'outil, et à travers lui, c'est la vieille nature que nous retrouvons, celle du jardinier, du navigateur, ou du poète. (170)

The passages describing the sky, the weather and the Earth are very similar to certain passages in Vol de Nuit. However there are many more such passages in Terre des Hommes, and Saint-Exupéry displays a greater sensibility towards the elements than he does in any other book. For example there are numerous references to wind, sand, stars, clouds, moun-

tains and volcanoes. Even the title, Terre des Hommes, reflects this new awareness of our planet. The place-names, too, are familiar to readers of both Courrier Sud and Vol de Nuit, as is the author's frequent and effective use of similes and metaphors. Certain new words are given more emphasis in Terre des Hommes than in Vol de Nuit. This is very significant in that they point to a transfer of interest from flying to a more general view of man and his place in the universe. The more noteworthy terms are esprit, claise, Homme, sécurité, aventure, maison, intérieur, mystère, and dignité. The closing lines of Terre des Hommes contain three of these words in one sentence:

Seul l'Esprit, s'il souffle sur la glaise
peut créer l'Homme. (261)

Terre des Hommes is much wider in scope than Vol de Nuit. For example, the characters held up for our admiration in the latter are all connected with the airline, whilst the elite of Terre des Hommes is man in general. In addition to this, the themes of Vol de Nuit are not explained directly, except occasionally by Rivière, whereas Saint-Exupéry describes certain incidents in Terre des Hommes and then concludes by giving a very clear explanation of what he is attempting to say.

Terre des Hommes appeared in February, 1939,¹⁶ and was awarded the Grand Prix du Roman de l'Académie Française in the same year.¹⁷ The Second World War broke out the following Autumn, and on November 3, 1939 Saint-Exupéry joined a reconnaissance group based at Orléans in France.¹⁸ A mission over Arras the following year¹⁹ gave rise to the author's fourth book, Pilote de Guerre, published in 1942.

Death, disorder, ennui, futility, and anxiety are the key-words necessary for an understanding of the first part of Pilote de Guerre. This feeling of the total absurdity of war accounts for Saint-Exupéry's nostalgia for his childhood days, when everything was order, security and love. But this attitude soon yields to the more constructive themes of participation and patriotism. Once this change is completed, Pilote de Guerre becomes Saint-Exupéry's clear statement of his thoughts on man and his civilisation. The theories put forward in Pilote de Guerre are very similar to those of Terre des Hommes, the only difference being that his own civilisation, France, has now undergone the vital test, with the result that this civilisation is strengthened through its feeling of community. These ideas are far removed from anything expressed in Vol de Nuit. Saint-Exupéry has now reached

¹⁶ Estang, p.11.

¹⁷ Chevrier, p.245.

¹⁸ Delange, p.31.

¹⁹ Armand Bottoquin, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: Essai, (Brussels: A. de Boeck, 1949), p.44.

the stage where he must state his philosophy in unmistakable terms, since human civilisation is facing destruction.

All these factors must be born in mind whilst considering the characters of Pilote de Guerre. Several of his comrades are mentioned in this novel, namely Rochédé, Israël, Lacordaire, Alias, Vozin, Sagon, Gavoille and Dutertre. However, Saint-Exupéry himself is obviously the main character of Pilote de Guerre. In Vol de Nuit Fabien plays the role of the pilot, and was referred to in the third person. But now Saint-Exupéry appears to be more desperate, and takes this role upon himself in order that he can speak to his readers in the first person. Because of this urgency, the characterisation in Pilote de Guerre is very scant, the pilots mentioned above being referred to quite briefly.

The plot of Pilote de Guerre is a slight variation of the plot of Vol de Nuit. Fabien's mission is to fly between two cities with a consignment of mails. Saint-Exupéry's mission is to fly to Arras, take some photographs, and then return to the aerodrome. Both pilots have their orders, but chance allows Saint-Exupéry to fulfil his task, whereas Fabien's attempt is unsuccessful. Basically both Pilote de Guerre and Vol de Nuit consist of one night in the life of a pilot. But there can be little doubt that the immediate action - flying - is given more prominence in Vol de Nuit than it is in Pilote de Guerre. The plot of this latter work acts merely as a framework for Saint-Exupéry's deliberations.

In Vol de Nuit the action and philosophising are given equal importance.

The language and style of Pilote de Guerre differ considerably from those of Vol de Nuit. Although flying terminology plays its usual part, the vocabulary, generally speaking, tends to be much more abstract. Among the words which really stand out are: mort, désordre, esprit, intelligence, angoisse, identité, participation, étendue, densité, civilisation, devenir, communauté, liberté, and sacrifice. Definitions and several re-definitions appear in all parts of Pilote de Guerre, for Saint-Exupéry feels that what he wants to communicate must be expressed in easily comprehensible terms. Adventure is no longer connected with physical excitement:

L'aventure repose sur la richesse des liens qu'elle établit, des problèmes qu'elle pose, des créations qu'elle provoque. (299)

We are also made more aware of what civilisation means:

Une civilisation est un héritage de croyances, de coutumes et de connaissances, lentement acquises au cours des siècles, difficiles parfois à justifier par la logique, mais qui se justifient d'elles-mêmes (314)

Man, love, sacrifice, liberty and charity are defined in a similar way.

Brief sentences are often employed in Vol de Nuit to give the impression of actuality or danger. The same technique is employed in Pilote de Guerre to impress upon us the very real danger facing man in general. In the following extract a frightening sense of urgency is skilfully established:

Il faut une phrase pour dire:

- Rendez-vous à quatre heures chez X.

Ou:

- On dit que dix millions d'hommes sont morts.

Ou:

- Alois est en feu.

Ou:

- On a retrouvé votre chauffeur.

Tout ça sur le même plan. D'emblée, dix millions d'hommes. La voiture. L'armée de l'Est. La Civilisation Occidentale. On a retrouvé le chauffeur. L'Angleterre. Le pain. Quelle heure est-il? (326)

Nothing quite like this exists in Vol de Nuit. The same effect is achieved by the deliberate repetition of one or two words in very rapid succession. Two examples of this technique are given here:

La victoire seule s'enveloppa de fièvre.
La victoire organise, la victoire bâtit. (272)

Chacun est responsable de tous. Chacun est seul responsable. Chacun est seul responsable de tous. (368-9)

This device is very common throughout the whole of Pilote de Guerre. In a thirteen-line paragraph on page 368, for instance, the word France appears ten times. What is more significant is that l'Homme is used eighteen times within the space of a few paragraphs at the end of Chapter XXV, and fourteen times at the beginning of Chapter XXVII.

Pilote de Guerre differs from the other works of Saint-Exupéry in that it enables him to bring into opposition the actual human condition, and the possible human condition which could be achieved through a reawakening of the Spirit. It differs also by the fact that his Credo is the point of depar-

ture of his search for God and a religious solution in Saint-Exupéry's works, which will become more pronounced in Citadelle.

At the beginning of Pilote de Guerre the author feels himself left passive in the void, experiencing a sort of anguish or disruption in that scheme of things ensuring man of a purpose in life. Then the book becomes the description of a voyage of discovery during which intelligence is rejected in favour of the spirit, and passivity in favour of involvement. Thus the book moves from a feeling of despair to one of hope. Defeat in war becomes a moral victory. Strengthening, and clarifying somewhat, his statements in Terre des Hommes,²⁰ Pilote de Guerre reiterates man's need for new moral codes, although what begins as a narrative becomes very didactic towards the end.²¹

Pilote de Guerre is Saint-Exupéry's last work in which aviation plays an important role.²² After his demobilisation from the Air Force, the author left for America where he composed his fifth book, Le Petit Prince.²³ The first of his two allegories,²⁴ Le Petit Prince takes the form of a meeting

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Anet, p.180.

²¹

C. Brée and M. Guillon, An Age of Fiction, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1957), p.202.

²²

The setting of Le Petit Prince is that of a pilot lost in the desert following the break-down of his aeroplane. However, no discussion of flying appears.

²³

Bottequin, pp.18-19.

²⁴

The other is Citadelle.

Between a pilot and a little boy who is visiting Earth from a small asteroid. Both characters are in effect Saint-Exupéry as a man, and as a youth.²⁵ The prince bears a very marked resemblance to Bernis in Courrier Sud, since both are in search of an eternal truth concerning the human condition to which they can adhere with all their might. Both, however, are aware that it has to be sought and fought for. The basic themes which are met in Saint-Exupéry's previous works have, in Le Petit Prince, a very prominent place and are easily recognisable, since the work is a kind of fairy story and the language is extremely simple yet evocative.

In order to reach the essential meaning behind life and the universe, the little prince visits several small planets and recounts his travels to the pilot. However, of the six asteroids only one is inhabited by a man possessing any purpose. The lamp-lighter is, "fidèle à un consigne" (454), and it is this quality which enables him to attach some real significance to his acts. The other characters whom the prince meets, the king, the vain person, the business man, the alcoholic and the geographer, live lives centred around their egos, and are therefore empty and meaningless. They owe no allegiance to any discipline, nor have any aspirations to a higher demanding purpose. Referring to the lamp-lighter, the prince remarks:

"Peut-être bien que cet homme est absurde. Cependant il est moins absurde que le roi, que le vaniteux, que le businessman et que le buveur. Au moins son travail a-t-il un sens. (. . .)" (451)

Later he remarks:

"(. . .) c'est le seul qui ne me paraisse pas ridicule. C'est, peut-être, parce qu'il s'occupe d'autre chose que de soi-même." (454)

Courrier Sud and Le Petit Prince are fundamentally the same in outlook. In the former the discipline of the "métier" is opposed to a life of ease and security, whilst in Le Petit Prince the lamp-lighter personifies the same ideas of responsibility and discipline, as opposed to the meaningless lives of the other absurd characters. Indeed, Bernis, Fabien and the Prince are all basically intended to illustrate a search for truth. The reasons for such a change in form from Courrier Sud to Le Petit Prince are due, perhaps, to two factors: firstly, the failure of man to realise his folly during the Second World War, and secondly, the author's increasing lack of faith in a world which relies increasingly on a materialistic outlook on life brought about, perhaps, by his dislike of capitalism in the U.S.A. These feelings lead to such remarks as:

Je suis "malade" pour un temps inconnu.
(. . .) Je suis triste pour ma génération qui est vide de toute substance humaine. (. . .) J'ai hais mon époque de toutes mes forces.²⁶

Men can no longer seem to grasp what Saint-Maupéry is attempting to say. To children, however, and the prince, explanations are unnecessary, for:

on ne voit bien qu'avec le cœur.
L'essentiel est invisible pour les
yeux. (474)

Le Petit Prince does not propose any new themes. It merely repeats the previous themes in a new way. The search for truth and the answers to certain questions regarding man and the universe are still as evident as they are in Vol de Nuit, and the little prince's search is essentially identical to that of Fabien. Whilst Fabien regards flying as something meaningful, so the little prince attaches great importance to his flower.

But the most striking difference between Le Petit Prince and Vol de Nuit is in the matter of form. Vol de Nuit is written in the novel form, Le Petit Prince takes the form of a children's story. Obviously, then, characterisation differs immensely. The little prince, the main character of the book, has embarked upon a voyage of discovery in which he meets various people, including the author-pilot. However, there does emerge a definite division of characters. If the prince and the lamp-lighter resemble Fabien, then the inhabitants of the other planets correspond to "les petits bourgeois" of Vol de Nuit.

There is very little emphasis on the element of time in Le Petit Prince. This is due, of course, to the fact that

it is a fairy story. The structure of the book is also extremely simple. The prince appears on the Earth, recounts his experiences, and then disappears. No trace of intrigue is evident.

Since this work is intended for children, the language and style bear little resemblance to those of Vol de Nuit. The sentences are quite short and concise, and the vocabulary very simple. However, it abounds in symbols. The prince represents man searching for truth; his love for his flower is a symbol of his desire for responsibility; when he rakes out his volcanoes, this symbolises his need for meaningful work; and the baobabs which infest his asteroid can be said to symbolise the seed of evil which must be controlled. Some of these symbols often have their counterparts in Vol de Nuit: Rivière is responsible for the pilots and the mails, and his work is the cult of the airline. But apart from the ideas expressed, Le Petit Prince is very far removed from Vol de Nuit.

It has been pointed out that, "Saint-Exupéry's books are usually brief, almost to a fault; there is no redundancy in them, few irrelevant digressions, no trace of superfluous fat, as it were."²⁷ Citadelle²⁸ is perhaps the only exception.

27

H. Peyre, The Contemporary French Novel, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p.165.

28

Estang, p.155, states that the title was not Saint-Exupéry's choice. Pélissier, pp.71-72, says that the title was first suggested by Saint-Exupéry, although at one point he wanted to call it Le Soldat. An extract was published in July 1948 in the review, La Table Ronde, and was entitled Seigneur berbére. Pélissier, p.73.

²⁹
 begun in 1936, the book was not published until four years after Saint-Exupéry's death, after being edited from a large collection of notes, both typed and hand-written, amounting to ³⁰ over 948 pages in all. In the present edition of the complete works Citadelle takes up 485 pages, approximately the same number of pages as Saint-Exupéry's previous books combined.

The setting of Citadelle is that of a remote desert region in which a Chief rules his people with a harsh discipline in the framework of a feudal civilisation. The Chief ³¹ is a kind of king by divine right, ³² a "super-Rivière", whose only desire is to inflict upon his subjects his view of what they should be. But man is given no choice, the ideas of the Chief being imposed upon him against his will. ³³

Written in a pseudo-biblical style, Citadelle amounts to no more than a rambling series of disconnected ideas. The reason for this is that Saint-Exupéry never intended to have them published during his lifetime, "C'est mon œuvre posthume!" (502). Had he wished to publish it he would, no doubt, have ³⁴ reduced the book to about a third of its present length.

²⁹
 Bottequin, p.52 and Hstang, pp.88 and 115. Péliissier, p.71, states that Citadelle was begun in 1939.

³⁰
 Bottequin, p.52.

³¹
 Ibert, p.59.

³²
 Erda, p.202. cf., also Marill, p.170.

³³
 Marill, p.172, points out the difference between Christianity and Saint-Exupéry's philosophy, the former having as its first principle man's freedom to choose between belief and disbelief. Citadelle may be, as Ibert suggests, p.79, an attempt to reconcile Marxism and Christianity.

³⁴
 Ibert, p.96.

As it stands, Citadelle contains far too much material to be interesting, and so many repetitions that it is very monotonous. All or most of the themes which appear in it can be found in his previous works, in which they are expressed in a much more precise and effective way.

In spite of its form, Citadelle is a restatement of all the salient themes mentioned in the works published during the author's lifetime, together with thoughts on a variety of other subjects. Indeed, a ten and a half page index of key-words has been included in the Pléiade edition of the complete works, in order to facilitate location of certain ideas of the author. By far the most outstanding theme of Citadelle is that of discipline in human affairs. The Chief holds absolute power, but is also shown to possess a Solomonic wisdom. His ministers and people appear as ignorant puppets in need of a manipulator. Whereas Rivière, in Vcl de nuit, has pilots yielding to his will, the omniscient Chief has a whole nation under his sway. The parallel is so close that some of the Chief's words could easily be attributed to Rivière without affecting in the slightest our picture of the patron. The following two examples will serve to illustrate this:

Je suis le chef. Je suis le maître.
Je suis le responsable. Et je les sollicite
de m'aider. (523)

Je les sauve par ma rigueur. (745)

And yet the following two extracts illustrate the aggressive and dictatorial statements which occur rather frequently throughout

Citadelle, and which one could never imagine being uttered by Rivière:

"Tu entendras, me dit mon père, leur rumeur ce soir sous les tentes et leurs reproches de cruauté. Mais les tentatives de rébellion, je les leur rentremerai dans la gorge." (513)

Si tu refuses mon temple, mon cérémonial et mon humble chemin de campagne à cause que tu ne sais m'énoncer l'objet ni le sens du charroi, je t'enfoncerai le nez dans ta propre crasse. (524)

With regard to style and language, Saint-Exupéry employs devices not encountered hitherto in any other of his works. Countless sentences begin with the biblical or, car, ainsi or celui qui, ceux qui and quiconque. Many other sentences begin with the pronoun je, or its possessive adjective, referring to the Chief:

J'ai imposé ma loi qui est comme la forme des murs et l'arrangement de ma demeure. (518)

Saint-Exupéry's explanations of the themes of Citadelle often appear in metaphor form, reminiscent of many biblical proverbs:

Le temps n'est plus un sablier qui use son sable, mais un moissonneur qui nous se gerbe. (514)

He also makes great use of the temple image, in which he likens Man to a temple consisting of many stones representing man.

Citadelle and Vol de Nuit are the only works by Saint-Exupéry which develop the theme of the leader to such a degree. But Vol de Nuit develops the theme much more effectively than Citadelle, since Rivière is made to appear more human. The

reason for this is obviously because Saint-Exupéry is writing, in Vol de Nuit, about a subject very close to his own personal experience.

Vol de Nuit, then, occupies a very special place in the works of Saint-Exupéry. It was composed during a period of his life when he believed he was in his real element, and also during a period of general world optimism in the inter-war years. Man had seen his folly and was indulging in a programme of readjustment. Saint-Exupéry, too, had made not a few mistakes in the composition of Courrier Sud, and had achieved a very accomplished piece of work in Vol de Nuit. However, there is little doubt that his third book, Terre des Hommes, contains much more human feeling and compassion than his first two. Rivière and the pilots embody very noble ideas, and yet a philosophy which places so much emphasis on discipline could be dangerous. Terre des Hommes clarifies the author's position to a great degree.

After a period of depression in Saint-Exupéry's personal life, his tone changes somewhat, and there is a definite feeling of lack of purpose in his writing, especially in Le Petit Prince and Citadelle, in which one detects a hint of escapism from the reality around him. The fact that the last work published during Saint-Exupéry's lifetime is a fairy tale, together with the medieval attitudes prevalent in his posthumous

book, are very relevant points which should be considered in any general appraisal of the author's philosophy.

CONCLUSION

The success of Vol de Nuit is due mainly to two factors. Firstly, the events which are unfolded and the characters we meet had their counterparts in real life. Secondly, the attitude expressed by Vol de Nuit is a valid one. Vol de Nuit is a very short book,¹ and so there is little room for character analysis or development. The work has no intrigue, but contains only intensely dramatic events told in a style admirably suited to the subject matter. It has its flaws, of course, and some of these have been dealt with above. However, most of the objections raised against Saint-Exupéry's Vol de Nuit concern the author's ideas rather than his style or technique. The more common general arguments directed towards Vol de Nuit are discussed below.

Saint-Exupéry indulges in a certain amount of hero-worship in Vol de Nuit. The idea of a pilot who dies whilst fighting the elements in the name of French aviation cannot pass the French public unnoticed. Add to this the picture of pilots buried in bulky flying jackets and big boots, and that of an unobtrusive Rivière, and the image is complete. Yet the closing lines of Vol de Nuit are a little too sensationalist:

¹ It is the shortest of all the works of Saint-Exupéry mentioned in the introduction of this study.

Et Rivière, à pas lents, retourne à son travail, parmi les secrétaires que courbe son regard dur. Rivière-le-Grand, Rivière-le-Victorieux, qui porte sa lourde victoire. (136)

In contrast to this is the scene in which Rivière is undecided whether to dismiss the mechanic Roblet, who is practically grovelling at his employer's feet begging to be retained on the staff. Roblet is not a member of the élite and the whole incident is somewhat unhealthy. In spite of this, Saint-Exupéry's heroes are contributing to French national pride. They are doing the same work that American astronauts are doing for the U.S.A. in this present decade. The idea is a constructive one, and should certainly never be confused with the aggressive nationalism of modern China or Nazi Germany.

This brings us to examine the claims that Exuperian philosophy in Vol de Nuit has pro-Fascist tendencies. Such claims have no foundation in truth when one realises that Saint-Exupéry could never advocate the actions perpetrated by Italy and Germany in the last war, because he places so much emphasis on the value of each individual irrespective of nationality. Indeed, the very spirit which Saint-Exupéry wishes to develop overpowered in the end the enemies of France and of the free world.

That Saint Exupéry's ideas are rather naive is undeniable. But does this statement necessarily render his attitude invalid? Life, after all, may not be as complicated as Sartre's difficult concepts might lead us to believe. Like Sartre,

Saint-Exupéry "is concerned with the anguish of man facing himself, war, and death".² But unlike his contemporary, Saint-Exupéry seeks simple, human answers to the problem, and he succeeds in finding them. He agrees with Pascal's theory of man's weaknesses, but affirms the power to overcome these weaknesses through action and a positive discipline.³

In the end, however, we must not lose sight of the fact that Vol de Nuit proposes a theory, albeit one based on very personal experience, and that however pertinent this theory might be, it is practicable only to a certain degree. Although communism or democracy are excellent ideas in theory, this does not of course necessarily imply that they are the same in practice. The philosophy proposed by Saint-Exupéry in Vol de Nuit must be seen in the same light, and compared with other theories.

²
Peyre, p.157.

³
Ibert, pp.109-110.

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