The Wild Pig

The Wild Pig:
A Bilingual Edition of Pierre Boudot's *Le cochon sauvage*

Translated and Annotated,

with an "Introduction to Pierre Boudot"

by

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for Scott and Anna Schad

famille, bienfaiteurs, amis

Pierre Boudot (1930-1988) was a Sorbonne professor, philosopher, translator, literary critic, and author of eighteen books, including essays, novels, and plays. This translation of his second novel, *Le cochon sauvage,* is the first work by Boudot to appear in English.

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

This translation of *Le cochon sauvage* is based on the Gallimard edition of 1968, with only a few corrections having been made to the original French. Even where the Gallimard text is not entirely consistent in matters of punctuation and spacing, that original French edition has been reproduced as faithfully as possible on the left-hand pages of this book.

Pierre Boudot's writing style is very unusual, and alternates between several different timbres. His sentences feature an atypical syntax, with his thought often very compressed and his vocabulary symbolic, as in the dramas of Claudel. At times, the narrative is comprised of highly abstract, moral, and metaphysical observations, as befits a philosopher. Discourse often dispenses with the "surface" meaning of words, to seek out a deeper reality, with the result that the thoughts and speech of the narrator of *Le cochon sauvage* are strangely ontological, sometimes reminiscent of the novels of Bernanos. At other times, the narration resonates with strikingly poetic and vivid descriptions of nature and people. And still elsewhere, a nearly documentary tone is adopted, and the rough language of the common soldier intrudes, as befits a story with a military setting.

All of this makes the novel challenging and thought-provoking for the reader, requiring a substantial investment in the act of reading and deciphering the text. In many instances, a somewhat literal translation seemed the best way to render the French, without engaging in too much personal interpretation of Pierre Boudot's intentions in this very evocative novel.

FOREWORD

Pierre Boudot – novelist, dramatist, philosopher, teacher – did not achieve wide renown in his day, though his work always commanded respect. He died in 1988, age 58, having produced a number of excellent books, including five novels, and leaving behind a number of dedicated readers, some of whom went on to form the Association Pierre Boudot, a group that continues to meet and discuss his work. Yet he is little known to the English-speaking world, and Timothy J. Williams has done a great service by giving us a careful, faithful translation of this extraordinary novel and bringing both it and its author to the attention of a wider audience. Williams provides a fascinating overview of Boudot's life and work in his Introduction, and his notes provide essential clarifications and explanations of many of the specifically Algerian references and terms. In this foreword, I wish to consider *The Wild Pig* both as a novel, that is, to explore what kind of literary work it is that Boudot has left us, and to consider the book also as a species of testimony to the French experience during the Algerian War.

Seven years before the publication of *The Wild Pig*, Boudot had published a non-fictional journal of his own experiences in Algeria, *L'Algérie mal enchaînée* (1961). In that work, he described what we have come to call "asymmetrical" warfare, an endless series of ambushes and bombings by the insurgent Algerian FLN (National Liberation Front), and an endless sequence of brutal reprisals and repression on the part of the French. Boudot documented in that book his sense of a gradual erosion of humanistic values and an increasing cynicism and even despair. While the independence movement in Algeria grew stronger by the day, anti-war sentiment grew likewise in France itself, and Algeria was finally granted its independence in July of 1962. Boudot chose to revisit the war for his 1968 novel, which perhaps can be seen as an attempt to rewrite *L'Algérie mal enchaînée* with several years of hindsight: Boudot may have felt that the France of 1968 could be illuminated by a deeper, more artistically intense depiction of the French soldier in the throes of the war.

The Wild Pig subordinates plot and event throughout; plot events seem implied rather than narrated, so that what matters in the novel is not so much what happens as how the narrator responds to what happens. The

novel is intensely, insistently subjective, as events are refracted through his consciousness of them. The narrator, a sergeant in the French army, reflects on his experiences and feels himself to be psychologically disintegrating under the prolonged stress of the war. By the end, he has become so alienated – from his comrades, from his country, from his own humanity – that he describes himself as an animal. We only encounter the "wild pig" of the title in the novel's final sentences, where the narrator says, "I am returning to my lair. You are free to think that I am a wild pig. Don't come near me, or I will charge" (137). His dehumanization has become complete at that point.

The narrator is a very clearly defined individual – we hear of his childhood in France, and we get to know a great deal about his attitudes and his unique character traits – but at some level he is also a symbol of something much larger, and the remarkable thing is that he knows this. Boudot crafts his fictional narrator a supremely aware and thoughtful person, one who is always in the process of interpreting, or rather trying out various interpretations in a search for some kind of meaning. In one remarkable passage, he is walking through a village (which is unnamed, like the narrator himself):

> On the left are the artillerymen. Straight ahead, the bourgeois part of town. I don't have friends there. I'm cut off from those who can protect themselves. For me, life is in the Negro area. There, I feel the throbbing of bitterness and hatred. It is there that people live, that they secretly resolve their family differences. They tolerate me, but those they love are on the other side. Their friendship for me arises from another sentiment. I am Santa Claus without a big sack. Nobody knows it, but I am also France in search of a better conscience, the ambiguous and perhaps eternal France. (41)

Boudot here inserts the individual into history, into the collective experience of the era; he is both a specific person and, due to the role he is called upon to play in Algeria, "eternal France." Later, there is an extended episode involving a grotesquely fat prostitute called La Barka, and as the narrator approaches her door, he reflects:

> Her face is puffy, and only her eyes have retained an appearance of life behind folds of fat. Truly, France, nourishing and disseminating, has passed by here. She has ploughed La Barka, who splits like fragile earth under the autumn sun. (65)

The narrator, both an individual and a symbol representing "France in search of a better conscience," here contemplates the prostitute, who in

turn is both the individual La Barka and the image of a country abused and raped.

Thus, one effect Boudot seems to have aimed for in revisiting his Algerian years for this novel was to turn the experience of the individual into something larger and more meaningful. This is not to imply that *The Wild Pig* is allegorical, but it comes tantalizingly close to allegory in certain respects. The disintegration of the narrator is meant to suggest the parallel moral disintegration of colonializing France under the pressure of a war that rendered its conventional military strategies useless: as Boudot's narrator puts it, "The great words that France exports, maybe we believe in them, but we no longer believe in the means to defend them" (27, 29).

In his Introduction, Williams discusses the real-life experience that Boudot had had of learning that twenty-six fellow soldiers had been killed overnight. In the novel, the number is changed to twenty, and the incident intensifies and accelerates the narrator's mental and spiritual descent. He vomits after encountering their stacked bodies, and he enters into a powerful sequence of reflections on death and on what was left of morality. He considers himself as having been a kind of sheep, going wherever he was told and doing whatever he was told to do, and finally he concludes, in a metaphor that prefigures the novel's end:

> I've dragged myself around just about everywhere, in places where a well-bred sheep should never have gone, and if I am in the flock, it's because I'm more alone than others. I don't know where to locate good or evil. I am not able to choose like those that take up the shepherd's crook. I hate choices because they divide. Let evil be called evil, and good called good. For me, all of that is a jumbled mess. I think a pig in its wallow is happier than a Plato. So, I'll take one for the pig. (83)

Animals and animal comparisons proliferate throughout the novel, and most often the human being suffers from the comparison.

Moral questions are at the heart of Boudot's novel – and indeed, at the heart of much of his work. His Catholic upbringing and background give him the kind of context that allows him to speak not just of wrongdoing but of sin and evil, and the narrator's meditations on these topics are among the book's most powerful moments, from his recollection of his childhood fears of the devil to his more immediate sensation of "God … knocking on me as if at a doorway to secrets" (63). He echoes one of Dostoevsky's main themes when he declares "by some strangeness, we are all responsible for the evil" (59), which sounds like an assertion of the doctrine of original sin. But he is by no means a dogmatic or even a

conventional believer; he is far too conflicted and anguished for that. He will often contradict himself, as he does in the superb passage in which he meditates on one of his fellow soldiers, Doudoune, a rival for the affections of the Algerian woman Kheira. Williams' translation is especially sure-footed here, giving us access to the narrator's chaotic and painful inner monologue, which at one point confidently asserts "I owe this feeling of inner peace to the war," and "I am no longer aware that sin exists" (21), but his honesty about himself soon pulls off that temporary mask of confidence:

> Doudoune renders me fragile in the face of human weakness. He reinforces my lack of courage. I envy his fornicating without anguish. Being at fault is my own personal state of grace. May it please God to save me as I am! (23)

A sandstorm blows up, and the narrator takes shelter with a soldier friend, giving rise to a strange moment of half-sleep and half-waking, confused images and thoughts passing through his head:

> My head is swimming once more. Where am I, then? God of my childhood, come to me if I am your son. Pathos! Silence. He keeps quiet. Most of the time, he has fun keeping quiet. I hate it when the child I was quietly judges the man I have become. Sand slides down between my shoulders. It is time flowing upon my flesh. That is where death will strike. I am already marked, I hear the sweeping of the scythe. (35)

The child continues to judge the man, though, and this constant sense of sin powers the narrator's downward spiral into complete alienation. The detail of sand on his shoulders segues naturally into the traditional image of sand in an hourglass, which in turn segues into the image of death as reaper. And of course the sand here functions as a kind of metonymy for Algeria itself. *The Wild Pig* is rich in such imagery, and it is poetic in the way that it proceeds via imagistic association rather than traditional plot development.

For all that, the novel does include some humor, especially a fine satiric sequence involving the administrator of the sub-prefecture and his wife. The humor gets much darker soon, when their teenage niece turns out to be rather too highly strung when it comes to sexuality, even going so far as seducing a local donkey. And then the sequence turns sublime, when the niece tries to seduce a young Benedictine: she fails, though he must struggle mightily not to give in. But her failure engenders in her a sense of her own sinfulness, chasing her out of "the Eden where she had

been living" (101). The sequence has the feel of a parable, again lifting Boudot's novel up into something closer to myth than to traditional realism.

So many voices are heard in the book – so many different tones and attitudes and values – that the translator must be very alert to subtle switches in register, sudden lapses from the sublime to the colloquial, from the intensely poetic to the comic and even the obscene. This kaleidoscopic quality presents a continual challenge to the translator, and Timothy J. Williams succeeds brilliantly in capturing it for us in strong, readable, suitably intense English. We readers must be grateful to him for giving us the chance to become acquainted with this fascinating novel, the extraordinary creation of Pierre Boudot.

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INTRODUCTION TO PIERRE BOUDOT

Biography

Pierre Boudot was born on September 22, 1930, in Besançon, France. The only son of Georges Boudot and Suzanne Fregnet, Pierre had twin sisters a year older than himself, and a younger sister born in 1931.[1] His father was a career army officer, a lieutenant colonel in the engineering corps. Like many military families, the Boudots were materially poor, but proud, and deeply attached to the traditions and obligations of military service. "Being a soldier is like being a priest," his father often declared.[2] His mother's family was originally from Alsace, but the grandparents had fled before the advancing Prussians in 1870, and this legendary flight – when even the children's toys had to be abandoned in haste – was an important part of the family's identity, imparting a sense of *gravitas* to family life, and teaching the obligation to forge one's destiny. Thus, the young Pierre was raised in an ambiance where exile was portrayed as a kind of happiness, heroism as necessity, and "gloire" the natural duty of man.[3]

Pierre Boudot's relationship with both his parents was extremely difficult. A poor student of math throughout his school years, he suffered keenly from the disappointment of a father he could never manage to please. "He was so scornful of my inability to learn mathematics that I would have given my life to have a different brain. All of my efforts left me looking more ridiculous. The humiliations became intolerable," Boudot recalled.[4] When the boy manifested a love of music and aspired toward violin lessons, access to the instrument was used as a kind of

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[1] Much of this basic, biographical information is taken from the website of the Association Pierre Boudot, www.pierre-boudot.com.

[2] "On est soldat comme on est prêtre." Pierre Boudot, *Les vents souffleront sans me causer peur* (Paris: Hallier/Michel, 1981) 12. (All translations from the works of Pierre Boudot are my own.)

[3] *Vents* 13.

[4] "Il me méprisait tant de ne pas comprendre les mathématiques que j'aurais donné ma vie pour changer de cerveau. Chacune de mes initiatives me rendait plus ridicule. Les humiliations devenaient intolérables." *Vents* 48.

blackmail to coerce better results in math, but all in vain. The child's efforts to please his frustrated parents were fruitless, and a Jansenistic climate prevailed in the home. His mother appears to have been particularly distant and sententious. Boudot described himself as "strangled by the Kantism" of his mother: "She spoke to me in dictums. 'You only did your duty' is a sentence that makes one roar with hatred."[5]

As a young child, Boudot was something of a daydreamer, but keenly attentive to the simplest sensations and marveling at the world around him: "Very little was needed to feed my enthusiasm. The passing of a biplane in the sky, the majestic voice of the archpriest on Christmas night, the emotion that took my breath away when the dog would freeze at the command of an unseen force, everything seemed astonishing to me."[6] Then, like other children of his generation, Boudot was profoundly marked by the Second World War, by its privations, fears and moral ambiguities. He hated the "Pétainisme" preached by the religious order that directed his school, the Institution Sainte-Marie in Belfort, whose "soutane-wearing tyrants prostituted the faith, the nation and youth to the impotence of a 'glorious protector.'"[7] The priests who instructed him tried to condition the detached young man for the religious orders by preaching contempt for women, but their efforts were fruitless, as Pierre showed no more aptitude for theology than for mathematics.[8] Nonetheless, Boudot credited his education with instilling a great passion for life that distanced him from the shallow pursuits of money and pleasure.[9]

When Pierre's father was taken as a prisoner of war, and was later active in the Resistance, fear was the predominant emotion of these most formative years of the young man's life. The Allied bombardments, the experience of hunger, the unnatural cries of terrorized women, the constant uncertainty over his father's fate – such were the memories of what Boudot described as his "dead childhood."[10] But from the ashes of this national and personal disaster, Boudot acquired a stoical strength and a

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[5] "… étranglé par le kantisme de ma mère. Elle s'adressait à moi par maximes. 'Tu n'as fait que ton devoir' est une phrase qui fait rugir de haine." *Vents* 66.

[6] "Il fallut peu de chose pour nourrir mon admiration. Le passage d'un biplan dans le ciel, la voix majestueuse de l'archiprêtre dans la nuit de Noël, l'émotion qui me coupait le souffle lorsque le chien marquait l'arrêt sous les ordres d'une puissance inconnue, tout me paraissait étonnant." *Vents* 24.

[7] "nos tyranneaux en soutane qui prostituaient la foi, la nation, la jeunesse à l'impuissance d'un 'glorieux protecteur.'" *Vents* 54.

[8] *Vents* 58-59.

[9] *Vents* 23.

[10] "mon enfance morte." *Vents* 14.

lofty vision of France that would later make him a natural and fervent admirer of de Gaulle: "This generation, accustomed to passing through fire, conditioned me to the idea that the army gives France its heroes, the University its thinkers, and religions their saints."[11] The trajectory of Boudot's life would link him with all three of these destinies: as a soldier fighting for France in Algeria, as a professor at the Sorbonne, and as a visionary philosopher, a modern metaphysician and mystic residing in the very shadow of Cluny.

After graduating from the *lycée*, and then completing his *licence* in philosophy from the Université de Besançon, Boudot studied at the Sorbonne, under the direction of Jean Wahl, obtaining his *Diplôme d'études supérieures* in 1955. His thesis was entitled *L'inquiétude existentielle et ses solutions*, a phrase that would seem to describe both what Boudot was experiencing at that point in his life, and also to foreshadow the nature of his life's work as a philosopher, essayist and novelist. Boudot wrote of these difficult student years in Paris, when he was often too poor to buy a stamp to mail home the letters in which he had described his anxieties, and instead wandered the streets of Paris as if engaged in an urban pilgrimage:

> My hunger for something else plunged me into a mentality of enchantment. It often happened that I would leave the Sorbonne, and crisscross Paris on foot, stopping before the altars of churches and chapels, to light candles I could not pay for. Among the hundreds of flames, it seemed to me that mine were the only ones able to evoke the distress of Job and that of Bethlehem.[12]

On a scholarship from the Humboldt Foundation, Boudot next traveled to Heidelberg, where he studied Nietzsche under the direction of the celebrated Austrian philosopher, Karl Löwith, and also conversed with Heisenberg, Jaspers and Heidegger. Then, his philosophical research was dislocated, though not entirely interrupted, by twenty-seven months of military duty, including fourteen months in Algeria. It was there that

[11] "Cette génération habituée à traverser les flammes m'a accoutumé à l'idée que l'armée donne à la France ses héros, l'Université ses penseurs et les religions leurs saints." *Vents* 18.

[12] "Ma faim d'autre chose me plongeait dans une mentalité magique. Il m'arriva souvent en quittant la Sorbonne de parcourir Paris à pied, m'arrêtant dans les églises et dans les chapelles pour y faire brûler devant les autels des cierges que je ne pouvais pas payer. Parmi les centaines de flammes, il me semblait que les miennes étaient les seules capables d'évoquer la détresse de Job ou celle de Bethléem." *Vents* 31.

Boudot worked on a translation of Jaspers' philosophical autobiography, and another text on Nietzsche, while writing a significant and insightful journal of his war experiences as a non-commissioned officer in the French army. Entitled *L'Algérie mal-enchaînée*, this combination war diary, political essay, and philosophical treatise is a fascinating study of the decline of colonialism, as well as a profound meditation on the dehumanizing effects of war. It is also the starting point for any critical study of the novel, *Le cochon sauvage.*

Boudot emphasizes the seamless, formative nature of these years, when formal studies, war experiences, and philosophical inquiry bled into each other: "What a strange apprenticeship! Years of study followed the war years, years of research followed the years of study, the years in Algeria followed the years of research."[13] The Algerian War marked Boudot profoundly, calling into doubt his deepest convictions, just as with the protagonist of *Le cochon sauvage*. After witnessing the savagery of war and the fragility of civilization, Boudot was left with few certitudes. His return to France, where he was astonished to discover an "indifference to terror" in the eyes of his war-weary countrymen,[14] was an equally profound and disorienting experience. Boudot was unsure what to do next, but turned to writing with greater passion than ever: "Not knowing what my life would become, I was certain of only one thing: I would write. … And I made a vow to publish nothing that did not burst into light, even if it was the light of midnight stars."[15] In a way, much of Boudot's writing could be described as an interrogation of the dehumanizing effects of the modern world, and the human capacity to remain indifferent in the face of violence and decay.

In 1960, Boudot married Jeanne Wahl, niece of the Sorbonne philosopher, and herself a tenured professor of mathematics. The couple soon bought a house in the tiny hamlet of Merzé, right next to Cluny, and over the years, they would divide their time between Paris and Burgundy, while raising four children. Boudot held a variety of teaching positions at the secondary and university levels, including at the Université de Besançon, and the Université de Panthéon-Sorbonne.

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[13] "Étrange apprentissage! Les années d'étude succédèrent aux années de guerre, les années de recherche aux années d'étude, les années algériennes aux années de recherche." *Vents* 31-32.

[14] "indifférence à la terreur." *Vents* 31.

[15] "Ignorant ce que ma vie serait, je n'avais qu'une certitude: écrire. … et je fis le vœu de ne rien publier qui n'explosât dans la lumière, même si c'était celle des soleils de minuit." *Vents* 31.

In addition to his activities as a father, an author and a professor, Boudot founded the local Collège Culturel de Merzé, organizing concerts, lectures and art exhibitions. He was equally active in the national intellectual life, lecturing on a broad variety of topics at prestigious academies and institutes, serving on national educational boards, and holding memberships in national and international associations of authors and philosophers. For Radio-France, Boudot produced a program called *Panorama du livre de philosophie*. He served as the book reviewer of *France-culture*, and was a frequent contributor to the *Quinzaine littéraire* and the *Magazine littéraire*. He was a lecturer at the Institut des Hautes Études de Défense Nationale and the Écoles Militaires Supérieures. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, he published novels, plays, and substantial essays on philosophy and politics.

Boudot was a member of the Société des Gens de Lettres, Pen Club International, and the Association des Écrivains de Langue Française. His work on Nietzsche earned him honors from the Académie Française, and a prize from the Société Internationale d'Études Nietzschéennes. His essay on Theresa of Avila was likewise recognized by the Académie, and the novel, *Les sept danses du tétras*, was awarded a prize by the Communauté Radiophonique Internationale de Langue Française.

Fascinated with people, Boudot enjoyed meeting with individuals from all walks of life and all perspectives: from his country neighbors or his blacksmith, to the philosophers Michel Serres and Vladimir Jankélévitch. His home in Merzé was especially open to influential writers, such as André Frossard, journalist and member of the Académie française; the Gaulliste politician, Pierre Lefranc; Olivier Germain-Thomas, writer and radio producer; theologian, Jean Guitton; playwright Eugène Ionesco; Clara Malraux, the Jewish feminist and wife of novelist André Malraux; and the poet, Claude Vigée. These encounters at Merzé were never-ending.

Later in life, Boudot met the controversial international journalist, Wilfred Burchett, who had covered the Korean War from a perspective unsympathetic to the West. In 1981, Boudot – always curious to know other cultures, and especially eager to experience the Orient – made the first of several trips to North Korea at the invitation of Pyongyang. However, from the early 1980s, increasing fatigue and bouts of depression forced him to curtail many activities, and he was no longer able to write, though he continued to deliver highly regarded lectures, especially his graduate courses based on the poem, *Dark Night of the Soul*, by John of the Cross.

Pierre Boudot died in April 1988, from injuries received in an automobile accident. His work and writings continue to be discussed and

promoted by the members of Association Pierre Boudot at their monthly meetings and special colloquia, held in Merzé, Cluny and Paris.

Boudot as professor

In Besançon and Paris, Boudot's pedagogy focused on the problems of creation, communication and language. He lectured on such diverse figures as Plato, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Heraclitus, Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Augustine. He organized meetings between his students and leading figures in the worlds of literature and the fine arts. It was always Boudot's concern to relate literary themes and philosophical questions to issues in the broader arts and sciences, and to make these ideas relevant for all students. For example, when he taught at the UER d'Arts Plastiques (now called the UFR,[16] the fine arts department of the Université de Paris I, Panthéon-Sorbonne) his students executed sculptures and paintings based on his explanations of Zarathustra or the mystery of *Orlando* in Virginia Woolf.[17]

As of this writing, a collection of remembrances of Boudot, composed by colleagues and friends, is being assembled by the Association Pierre Boudot. One certainly hopes that, when completed, the published work will include recollections by former *lycée* and university students of Boudot, since his essays, novels, and commentaries reveal a wide-ranging education, a fertile imagination, strikingly poetic expressions, and many unexpected and intriguing associations. All of this suggests that Boudot's style of lecturing must have been quite unusual and engrossing. For the most part, to confirm this impression, we must rely on Boudot's occasional remarks about his own teaching, scattered here and there among his essays. However, we possess at least one significant, objective testimonial concerning Pierre Boudot's remarkable teaching method.

In the month following Boudot's death, Marcel Conche, a fellow professor and philosopher at the Sorbonne, penned a very moving tribute to his departed colleague. Apparently, Pierre Boudot's lectures were routinely recorded, and a group of his students joined with Conche in Boudot's classroom at the Sorbonne to listen to the recording of his final

[16] "UER" and "UFR" are abbreviations of "Unité d'Études et de Recherches" and "Unité de Formation et de Recherches." Both mean essentially the same thing, referring to departments offering course work and engaging in research activities.

[17] This entire paragraph is paraphrased from material in the biography of Boudot found on the website of the Association Pierre Boudot, www.pierre-boudot.com.

course. Marcel Conche's description of the lecture, published in *Le monde*, is fascinating, quite emotional and thought provoking:

> His voice rises, intense, strong, and ponderous with restrained passion. The talk deals with the essential nature of man, or how, without nobility, one is not yet human. It deals with reason, which is not nothing, but less than nothing, if it does not submit itself to that in the presence of which nothing has importance or substance, which gives to everything the true value it may have: love, love eternal. Is it a class? Yes, no doubt. The analysis of a passage from Valéry, a page of Hamann – the "magus of the North" – a letter of Goethe. But these are just pretexts and crutches for standing upright. One soul is speaking to other souls. What suffering it must have taken to speak in this manner! I feel myself gripped with the same emotion as the students.[18]

Boudot was not a systematic thinker, and his philosophy – much like that of Nietzsche, the object of so much of his attention – is imaginative biography, speculative history, prophetic vision, and poetic enchantment. In his autobiographical essay, *Les vents souffleront sans me causer peur*, Boudot makes a number of enigmatic remarks about his activities as a professor, from which we may gain a further glimpse of the intriguing figure he must have made when in front of a class. For example, he describes teaching more as impromptu reflection than as professorial lecture: "I don't teach. I muse in the presence of humanity."[19] In another context, Boudot insisted once again that he did not simply teach a course in the traditional sense, and he emphasized the collaborative, exploratory nature of education: "I am not teaching courses. I am musing in the presence of several accomplices."[20]

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[18] "La voix s'élève, intense, tendue, lourde d'une passion dominée. Il s'agit de l'essentiel de l'homme, ou comment, sans noblesse, on n'est pas homme encore. Il s'agit de la raison, qui n'est pas rien mais moins que rien si elle ne se soumet à ce devant quoi rien ne compte et ne pèse, qui donne à tout le vrai prix qu'il peut avoir: l'amour, l'éternel amour. Est-ce un cours? Oui, sans doute. On analyse un morceau de Valéry, une page de Hamann – le "mage du Nord" – une lettre de Goethe. Mais ce sont là prétextes et béquilles pour s'élever. Une âme parle à d'autres âmes. Quelle souffrance n'a-t-il pas fallu pour parler ainsi! Je me sens moi-même étreint de l'émotion des étudiants." Marcel Conche, "Une leçon en Sorbonne." *Le monde* 13464 (13 mai 1988): 12. [NB – Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) was a German philosopher of the Counter-Enlightenment, and an important influence on Goethe and Kierkegaard, as well as many other thinkers of the *Sturm und Drang* movement.]

[19] "Je n'enseigne pas. Je rêve devant l'humanité." *Vents* 89.

[20] "Je ne fais pas de cours. Je rêve devant quelques complices." *Vents* 128.

In this same essay – Boudot's last substantial work, in fact – one senses, perhaps, a growing fatigue with pedagogy and the academic life. In a highly imaged passage concerning the futility and unavailability of precise language in the quest for God, Boudot reveals his impatience with magisterial proceedings of all sorts, and hence with education as well: "I have often fantasized of the course that I will not teach and that would begin with these words: 'One would have to keep silent in order to speak about silence.'"[21] The silence Boudot required – "I need silence and simplicity"[22] – points toward the uneasy relationship that may have existed between his philosophical inquiry, his creative writing, and his pedagogical lecturing.

Boudot and Nietzsche

Like many other academics of his generation, Pierre Boudot was attracted to the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, and his books and essays on Nietzsche constitute his most important scholarly work, and his only efforts to receive sustained, international attention. This post-war affinity for Nietzsche might seem somewhat surprising, given that the German philosopher was long considered by many as a major source of inspiration for Nazi political and racial theorists. In 1972, when the French journalist Anne-Marie Cazalis asked Boudot about this perplexing attraction to Nietzsche, his response suggested that Nietzschean stoicism, prophetic voice, and poetic vision were the elements that appealed to a generation that had survived a war, only to be submerged by a tide of materialism:

> From Nietzsche to young people, and by way of de Gaulle, there is perhaps a link, something prophetic founded on the consciousness of change, on the intense excitement that there is in fact something to be lived through, which malcontents identify in advance as the Apocalypse. I think that is what we look for in Nietzsche: the art of lifting one's gaze beyond the horizon, a certain way of not feeling the immediate misfortune, to be so humanly oriented toward the future that daily catastrophes are nothing but current events. … In today's aimlessness, all those who make time for the feeling of the sacred more or less carry the torch of Zarathustra. … The material world will soon acknowledge the fundamental dimension of

[21] "J'ai souvent songé au cours que je ne ferai pas et qui commencerait par ces mots: 'Il faudrait pouvoir se taire pour parler du silence.'" *Vents* 43.
[22] "J'ai besoin de silence et de simplicité." *Vents* 46.

> Nietzsche, that of begetting poetry, without which a new world cannot be born.[23]

Boudot's philosophical writings, musings, and essays on society and politics very much resemble those of Nietzsche. Like Nietzsche, Boudot is not a systematic philosopher, but rather a poetic mind bringing critical attention to the decline of Western culture, to the problems of a materialistic, bourgeois society. In fact, his use of the word "bourgeois" parallels that of Nietzsche, referring less to a social class than to a mentality, the spirit of acquisition and consumption so vital to the functioning of the industrialized, consumerist economies of today. Boudot borrows the term "*effondrement*" (collapse) from Nietzsche, in describing the fate of Western culture:

> Nietzsche had made the diagnosis at the beginning of the collapse. He had foreseen that the breach of industrialization would dry up the sources of creativity, sterilizing the freedom of art, and leading to a diabolical pursuit of money. He knew that the death of God and the perversion of values were inescapably linked to the domination of the bourgeoisie that Dickens and Zola were already denouncing.[24]

In his attempt to make Nietzsche more approachable for French readers, Boudot may have desired to accomplish for them something similar to what Walter Kaufmann was to do for English readers. Boudot's signal contributions in this area are *Nietzsche et les écrivains français* (1970) and *Nietzsche en miettes* (1973), the latter consisting of selected

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[23] "De Nietzsche à la jeunesse en passant par de Gaulle, il y a d'ailleurs peut-être un lien, celui du prophétisme fondé sur la conscience de la mutation, sur l'exaltation qu'il y a en fait à vivre ce que les esprits chagrins identifient à l'avance à l'Apocalypse. Je crois que c'est cela qu'on demande à Nietzsche: l'art de porter le regard plus haut que l'horizon, une certaine manière de ne pas sentir les coups immédiats, d'être si humainement projeté dans l'avenir que les catastrophes quotidiennes ne sont plus que des péripéties. … Dans l'errance d'aujourd'hui, tous ceux qui donnent à la minute le goût du sacré portent plus ou moins le bâton de Zarathoustra. … Le monde concret donnera bientôt à Nietzsche sa dimension fondamentale, celle d'engendrer la poésie, sans laquelle le monde nouveau ne pourra pas naître." Cited in *Présence de Pierre Boudot*; *Bulletin de l'Association Pierre Boudot*, décembre 2011.

[24] "Nietzsche avait pourtant posé le diagnostic, au début de l'effondrement. Il avait prévu que la rupture industrielle tarirait les sources de la création, stériliserait la liberté de l'art, entraînerait une diabolique chasse à l'argent. Il savait que la mort de Dieu et la perversion des valeurs étaient inéluctablement liées à la domination de la bourgeoisie que Dickens et Zola dénonçaient déjà." *Vents* 137.

texts by French authors that exhibit the influence of the German philosopher. Boudot considered Nietzsche to be "the greatest foreman of the critique of our age and of the foundations of tomorrow's culture."[25] He was particularly combative in defending Nietzsche against the attacks of those who viewed the philosopher as an inspirational source of twentieth-century violence. In rather dismissive terms, Boudot describes criticism of Nietzsche as a kind of hysteria, promoted "in the interest of those who try to dominate to make others believe that Nietzsche is a monster whose words destroyed civilization like a mysterious laser."[26]

Always very enthusiastic, Boudot's defense of Nietzsche can also be as sweeping, as poetic, and as imprecise as the discourses of Zarathustra. Sometimes, he does not summarize critiques of Nietzsche so much as to caricature them:

> Nietzsche condemned those who see in democracy the equality of mediocrities, rather than the regal movement of differences nourished by creative forces. The absence of God? Rather the desire for a God in advance of the becoming. The superman? Imbeciles still give him the face of a Tarzan who has absorbed Satan and Genghis Khan! Nietzsche's repeated warning against any kind of anthropomorphism reduces their remarks to nothing. The superman is the starting point of a humanity emerging into a happy Genesis. It has nothing to do with tyranny or mutants! The inventory of misinterpretations is endless. "Nietzsche" has become a magic word, a way for impotent thinkers to ape each other by inserting "little remarks."[27]

Boudot's sympathetic reading of Nietzsche features the more or less standard caveat that the "Superman" is not a philosophy for "Everyman":

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[25] "le plus grand des maîtres d'œuvre de la critique de notre époque et des bases de la culture de demain." *Vents* 140.

[26] "de l'intérêt de ceux qui luttent pour dominer de laisser croire que Nietzsche est un monstre dont la parole aurait détruit la civilisation à la manière d'un mystérieux laser." *Vents* 137.

[27] "Nietzsche a condamné ceux qui voient dans la démocratie l'égalité des médiocres plutôt que le mouvement royal des différences nourries des forces créatrices. L'absence de Dieu? Plutôt le désir d'un Dieu en avant du devenir. Le surhomme? Des imbéciles lui donnent encore le visage d'un Tarzan qui aurait avalé Satan et Gengis Khan! La mise en garde répétée de Nietzsche contre tout anthropomorphisme réduit leurs propos à rien. Le surhomme est le niveau zéro d'une humanité émergeant dans une Genèse heureuse. Rien à voir avec la tyrannie ou les mutants! On n'en finirait pas de faire l'inventaire des contresens. 'Nietzsche' est devenu un mot magique, une façon pour penseurs impuissants de se greffer des 'texticules' de singe." *Vents* 138.