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**Maumort: het literaire testament van Roger Martin du Gard**  
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**Citation**

Snoeij, P. (2022, April 19). *Maumort: het literaire testament van Roger Martin du Gard*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3283712>

Version: Publisher's Version

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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

## SUMMARY

### ***Maumort*, the literary testament of Roger Martin du Gard**

The French writer Roger Martin du Gard (1881-1958) had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1937 for the volume *L'Été 1914* of the novel cycle *Les Thibault*. This great novel (8 parts) was also included in the Pléiade edition (1955) of the *Œuvres complètes* (2 parts). Despite the numerous other works (and projects) in the author's name, the *Thibault* parts (created between 1920 and 1940) are still considered the most important. Later, between the years 1941 and 1955, the author put the novel *Le Lieutenant-Colonel de Maumort* (simply referred to as: *Maumort*) on paper; with follow-up work until 1958, a period of three years during which he changed virtually nothing textwise. *Maumort* has remained unfinished and was released posthumously in 1983 as the third Pléiade volume, dedicated to the author. The book was initially seen by the critics as (clearly) autobiographical. In the thesis, an explanation of this view is provided in chapter 3 '*Maumort*: between novel and autobiography'.

The thesis covers in seven chapters a number of aspects of the author's latest work, *Le Lieutenant-Colonel de Maumort*. In its present form, *Maumort* consists of three Sections, namely: I 'Mémoires du lieutenant-colonel de Maumort' (pp. 9-804), II 'Lettres du lieutenant-colonel de Maumort' ('Lettres à Gévresin') (pp. 805-857), III 'Les Dossiers de la Boîte Noire' (pp. 859-1059). In Chapter I of the thesis, 'Introduction', this classification is extensively discussed: it was made clear how these Sections relate to each other. In the largest (first) Section, the septuagenarian Bertrand de Maumort looks back on his life (the story is in the first person). His childhood, which he spent in a castle in Normandy (Le Saillant), and his studies in Paris were given the most space by the former colonel.

In Martin du Gard's last major work, among the planned seven movements (plus Epilogue) of Section I (= the 'Mémoires'), two segments are missing: 'Cinquième Partie' and 'Sixième Partie'. There was little to be found in the manuscripts about an extended period of Bertrand's life (= his 'courbe de vie'). Broadly speaking, it concerns the years from his marriage to the invasion of the Germans in 1940. One also searches in vain for a report on the Moroccan (and Algerian) period of the soldier (there are only loose notes) and we actually hear nothing about the First World War. In total, the 'Mémoires' are now composed of 24 'chapitres' (which are numbered in the 'Table'). They have uneven lengths; some have barely come to fruition. In the Epilogue of the 'Mémoires' (= Chapitre XXIV) the sad circumstances of the death of the main character (Maumort) are but briefly mentioned. The curious thing here is that a choice is left to the reader: either a suicide (opening of the gas by Maumort) after a brain hemorrhage or the death that overtakes Maumort in his sleep after a (second) attaque.

Instead of 'Mémoires', the final basic form of *Maumort* could also have been that of letters. The former soldier Maumort corresponds with his friend, the doctor Gévresin (by whom he was given shelter for a large part of the war) about everything he experiences after his return to Le Saillant and whom he provides while doing so with many memories from his younger years.

Martin du Gard has opted for a one-sided form: the answers of the addressee (= the doctor), who lives in Piérac, in the former 'zone libre', are missing. There are now (only) nine letters, with dates that run from 31 December 1944 until no later than mid-January 1945. After that, the correspondence stops. Even though France has already been liberated, we do not read anything about the further post-war period.

There are critics who believe that if Martin du Gard had enjoyed better health after 1950, the readership would have been presented with a third form of expression: a *novella cycle*, with a main character, Maumort, returning almost from story to story. It would have become unique in literary history. Now, in *Maumort*, of the literary genre of the novella only the account of Xavier de Balcourt: *La Noyade* (*The Drowning*, first bearing the title *La Baignade*) that is included remains. It is about the love between an officer in training (= Xavier de Balcourt, also: the I-figure) and a baker's boy. Initially, Martin du Gard had thought he had to 'name' another narrator, Maumort himself, who did remain the one who composes all the 'Mémoires' and who introduces and comments on the story of *La Noyade*.

The large *mosaic* (the patchwork) that *makes up Le Lieutenant-Colonel de Maumort* is described extensively in the before mentioned Chapter 1, 'Introduction'. Eighteen thick files contained the contents of the 'Souvenirs' (= 'Mémoires') and the 'Lettres'. They were once delivered in the loose form of densely written sheets (handwritten but also typed) to the old Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) in Paris. The evaluation of both the 'Mémoires' and the series 'Letters' thus becomes a dare. Moreover, it is not known whether the letters were collected by the Gallimard publishing house in a way that was desired by Martin du Gard. Added to all this is the fact that, at the express request of the author's grandson (Daniel de Coppet), the necessarily incomplete publication also required adding reflections of a philosophical, literary, political and historical nature: the Boîte Noire texts. These were so named after the method of sending them in a large black box to the address of the BnF ('Site Richelieu', Paris IIe). They had not arrived there at the same time as the 'souvenirs' and the letters; they were kept separately.

In the Boîte Noire, 70 files (= folders in which Martin du Gard stored thoughts on specific subjects that he had written) should have been given their place, but in the end, in the book, there were about 30 fewer. The reflections were partly drawn up long before 1941, the year in which the author began working on *Maumort*. Some of them mention *Les Thibault*, especially regarding the character Antoine Thibault. But, and this is of greater importance, in other, more recent texts, Martin du Gard often asked himself what Maumort might have thought of a particular issue. The reader therefore regularly finds at the beginning of a paragraph: 'Maumort dira: ...' or words to that effect. As a result, we are dealing with three types of performances and statements by Bertrand de Maumort. The character who in the 'Mémoires' is regularly inclined to put things into perspective and is detached, presents himself in the 'Lettres' as changeable in his moods (but nevertheless usually more 'approachable'). In the subjects of the 'Boîte Noire' he is also more firm in many of his opinions than in the other two sources.

After the arrival of the manuscripts at the BnF, a lot has happened. Two inventories were drawn up, then researchers went to work (sequentially) organizing the texts and making parts

of them publishable. The for the most part excellently readable documents were not bound until after 2008. All texts of Sections I and II are deemed to have been written by the same (fictitious) lieutenant colonel. Nevertheless, two major problems immediately arose. What attitude should the researchers adopt towards the gaps in the 'souvenirs' of the soldier? And also: how were they supposed to deal with the inevitable fact of the incompleteness of the letters? In the end, the fourth researcher, André Daspre (deliverer of the Pléiade edition), succeeded in compiling an edition of *Maumort* (with a large number of notes) that garnered great appreciation. Among the readers, however, one important question has arisen: can one (completely) equate the character Bertrand de Maumort with the person Roger Martin du Gard? Or, in other words, can one expect that the differences between the character and his author are sufficiently explained? In retrospect, the novel should at most be called a fictional (auto)biography. The correlation between the two designations (biography-autobiography) is briefly discussed.

At the time of placing the usual thesis question, the PhD candidate had to exercise caution. After all, *Maumort* was never finished. The chosen research question ('What does this unfinished, intriguing text that is *Maumort* say about Martin du Gard's authorship, and his vision of it, after *Les Thibault*?'), posted in Chapter 1 'Introduction', is directly related to the success of the author's previous cycle of novels (*Les Thibault*). Yet it is hard to deny that the final work of Martin du Gard (*Maumort*) has become a hybrid literary product.

The thesis on *Maumort* also includes five appendices of varying sizes. Its titles are (successively, in numbers and letters): I. 'Impetus to a biography of Roger Martin du Gard'; II 'Three novellas by Roger Martin du Gard: *La Sorellina*, *La Noyade*, *Confidence africaine*' (an unpublished manuscript version of the first two novellas is presented); A. 'On the position of Roger Martin du Gard in the French literary landscape' (with excerpts from three literary critics and from the author himself); B. 'The Issue of the *Journal inédit*' (a text by Martin du Gard published in France in 2014 which the author himself very quickly disapproved of; yet actually did end up in *Maumort* in another passage about the summer days of 1940); C. 'Excurs-vocabulary research' (examples of quotes by Martin du Gard represented in *Le Grand Robert de la langue française*, *Trésor de la langue française* and *Grand Larousse de la langue française*).

Outside of the direct framework of the thesis, there are about forty database texts. They provide complementary information to the thesis papers and to the appendices.

A real biography of Roger Martin du Gard has never been published, but such a document could have been an important tool in the attempt to clearly explain the differences between character (Bertrand de Maumort) and author (Roger Martin du Gard). This remiss has been rectified by me to some extent because I have drawn up a short sketch of the life of Martin du Gard in the above mentioned Appendix I 'Impetus to a biography of Roger Martin du Gard'.

After the 'Introduction' of Chapter 1, Chapter 2 'Maumort: from "brouillons" to edition in the Pléiade' attends to the appeal that still emanates from *Le Lieutenant-Colonel de Maumort*; for this text, almost four decades after its launch in 1983, still attracts a large audience. Certain facets of the book however are apparently not the ones that can bring about a favorable 'reception': for example, the (indeed lacunar) chronology is not clearly portrayed by the author,

the main character (= the lieutenant colonel) hardly operates as a soldier and the 'Mémoires' of Section I turn out not to be memoirs in many places. But at the end of Chapter 2, a number of reasons is put forward for claiming that the appreciation for Maumort is permanent. An essential aspect of Bertrand de Maumort's personality undoubtedly plays a role in this: he often invokes his 'esotericism' and he is sparsely communicative about his 'code moral'. This makes him (very) special, and... maintains our curiosity.

In Chapter 4 'Thematic Constants by Roger Martin du Gard' the question is raised whether one can discover themes in the work about the lieutenant-colonel that one could see as a continuation of those that already occurred in previous works (*Les Thibault* in particular). It becomes clear that, despite the distinctive character of the posthumous work, this is indeed the case, notwithstanding the fact that in *Maumort* certain emphases are put differently.

The tone there is more thoughtful and *Maumort* 'allows' himself to be 'read' differently because of the choice of a narrator expressing himself in the first person. In Chapter 4, two series of 'key words' from *Maumort* and from other works by *Martin du Gard* are distinguished; a selection of which is made that is discussed in three main categories: Politics, Personality and Sexuality. In 'Politics', for example, one finds views on Germany and Nazism, in 'Personality' one finds insights about the integrity of the soldier Maumort (or: the author Martin du Gard) and in 'Sexuality' one elaborates on the various experiences that the young Bertrand de Maumort acquires in the field of love. Passages in which homosexuality is mentioned appear, sometimes in disguised form, not only in *La Noyade*, but also in other parts of *Maumort* and in earlier works of the writer. In 1934, he exchanged a number of letters with André Gide to protest against the inclusion of a small fragment, written by Gide, in a diary entry that Gide is going to publish. From Martin du Gard's *Souvenirs d'enfance*, André had concluded that Roger would have had the same sexual problems as he did in his youth.

In Chapter 5 'Descriptions and portraits in *Maumort*' an aspect of the novel is discussed that, in relation to the previous literary production of the writer (*Les Thibault* included), can verily be seen as a change of course. It is Martin du Gard's increasing tendency to lose himself in descriptions, both of spaces and of persons. This phenomenon is becoming more and more frequent in *Le Lieutenant-Colonel de Maumort*. The author had previously already been a gifted compiler of portraits, but the sketches of characters in *Maumort* become longer on average and sometimes even determine the development of the story because Martin du Gard finds it to be a vehicle for developing moral insights: the sketches that the novelist delivers via the character of Maumort of Henriette, Bertrand's sister, are among the most successful of the novel. Briefly, Chapter 5 refers to the interfaces between the two types of descriptions (spaces and persons), whereby the fragment of the castle *Le Saillant* (which is a sublimated representation of Martin du Gard's own *Le Tertre*) can be seen as an appropriate illustration.

For the purpose of discussing, in Chapter 6 'The style in *Maumort*: reflection and application', the language and stylistic tools used by the author, the main focus has been on the content of Section I of the novel, namely Chapitre II 'La prime enfance' and, to a lesser extent, Chapitre IX 'Les Chambost-Lévadé'. In Chapitre II, the young Bertrand de Maumort learns from various teachers the constituent elements of the language; In Chapitre IX, now an adolescent, he

becomes acquainted with the language of his uncle and of many representatives of the French intelligentsia in the eighties of the 19th century. A particular topic of discussion here are certain sentence structures that occur frequently in *Maumort* (in relation to their use in *Les Thibault*). This concerns components in the sentences that are threefold; they bear with a general term the name 'triads' or with a more specialist term 'trinômes'. The process is, of course, widespread; many writers (and orators) make use of it. However, with Martin du Gard one has to speak of a deliberately applied extra stylistic remedy. In the triads, Roger Martin du Gard seems to have been diligently searching for all kinds of nuances to ward off monotony. And precisely because of these very personal attempts, one could also call his triads 'martinades'... In addition, this novelist repeatedly puts sound-related words in each other's immediate proximity. Looking at the totality of the stylistic means employed, one must conclude that the number of actual stylistic figures is not excessively high and that the strength of the style lies precisely in its unadornedness. This is Martin du Gard's 'style neutre' (or, in the author's own words, the 'style objectif'); very well-groomed and virtually nowhere offering unfinished sentences.

In part of the 'Conclusion' (Chapter 7), words are devoted to what has actually been reviewed in Chapters 2 to 6 of the thesis. These remarks are the counterpart of the announcements that were made in Chapter 1 'Introduction' concerning the excursion that was to be made into the novel *Maumort*. Furthermore, in the 'Conclusion' the research question is answered in two ways: 1. the authorship of Roger Martin du Gard after completing *Les Thibault* should be considered a long-term attempt at a 'reprise' or a 'répétition' of the great first novel cycle. 2. the actual execution of the work was difficult but, over time, the author almost appropriated the right to regard the relative failure also as a search for a new literary form of expression. While putting together the novel cycle *Les Thibault*, Martin du Gard felt like an author who was allowed to 'congratulate' himself on the project he had undertaken. But in working on the fourth novel, which was even larger in design (*Maumort*), the satisfaction he experiences in seeing the work progress becomes less: times have changed and Martin du Gard himself has become older while his ambitions are paradoxically even greater than when writing *Les Thibault*. The short Chapter 7 of the thesis concludes with a comparison between the two 'projects' *Thibault* and *Maumort*. Both deal with the concept of individuality and both times the author reports on the lives of the representatives of two families, the Thibaults and the Fontanins (in *Les Thibault*) and the Maumorts and the Saint-Galls (in *Maumort*). Martin du Gard tells us that the main characters among them, Antoine Thibault and Bertrand de Maumort, are independent minds no matter the circumstances and regardless of the professional obligations imposed on them by their occupations (specialized doctor and army officer respectively).

Many *Maumort*-manuscripts were again not used when the second edition (published in Gallimard's Collection Blanche, 2008) was compiled, long after the appearance of *Le Lieutenant-Colonel de Maumort* in the 1983 Pléiade edition. That is why the very last lines of the thesis 'fervently argue' for the publication of a third, more complete, edition of *Maumort*.

That might just yield some big surprises.

