

INTRODUCTION

In *Who's Who in France 1969–1970*, Jean Grenier is described as ‘universitaire (en retraite), homme de lettres’. For some he is an intriguing philosopher and essayist, for others he is primarily the master of Albert Camus. Between 1930 and 1981, seventeen different volumes by Grenier were published by Gallimard, not counting revised editions, and some two dozen by other publishing houses. Between 1922 and his death in 1971 he wrote articles and essays for more than 120 different reviews and newspapers, ranging from the best-known to the most obscure. He was a teacher until his retirement in 1968, holding posts in Avignon, Algiers, Naples, Cherbourg, Albi, Vanves, Montpellier, Lille, Alexandria, Cairo and finally Paris. For much of his career, therefore, he was away from the centre of French literary and philosophical life, and out of the lime-light, although he did attend some of the major congresses and debates during the summer vacations. The critics paid little attention to him until 1957, when three of his books were published simultaneously by Gallimard. Attention then faded again until 1968. In that year Gallimard published his *Albert Camus (souvenirs)*, which brought him to the notice of a wider public, and he was also awarded the Grand Prix National des Lettres. The publication of his important correspondence with Camus in 1981 has brought Grenier into fresh prominence.

Grenier was born in Paris in 1898 and brought up in Saint-Brieuc after the early divorce and remarriage of his mother. His childhood was uneventful. He had no brothers or sisters, and he attended the same school, the Institution Saint-Charles, until his *baccalauréat* in 1915. His philosophical and literary vocations thereafter went hand in hand. His studies prepared him for a career as a teacher of philosophy (*licence* 1917, *agrégation* 1922), while his friendships with such men as Louis Guilloux, Edmond Lambert and Max Jacob¹ encouraged him to write. He combined the two interests in his first articles for *La Vie des lettres et des arts* and *Philosophies*² (1922–25). During this period he was trying his hand at writing short novels, but he had not yet found the right medium for his particular talent. That came in 1926 after a visit to Greece. In the following year Daniel Halévy published Grenier's first lyrical essay ‘Interiorerum’, of which Gaëtan Picon has said that it gave him ‘le sentiment d'une œuvre dont les chances n'étaient pas inégales à celles de quelques jeunes écrivains voisinant avec lui, et qui allaient devenir célèbres’:³ these others were writers like Malraux, Chamson and Henri Petit. In 1927, on his return from a

two-year period teaching at the Institut Français in Naples, he joined the staff of the publishing house of Gallimard and became a regular contributor to Jean Paulhan's *Nouvelle Revue française*.

Thereafter Grenier's normal pattern of publishing was to write essays for the *NRF* or other reviews which would be collected at a later stage to form a volume. Thus *Les Îles* (1933) includes essays first published in the period 1929–33, *Inspirations méditerranéennes* (1941) covers the period 1927–39, *A propos de l'humain* (1955) the period 1934–52. Sometimes the original material is extensively re-written, sometimes retitled, and sometimes both. Thus 'Cum apparuerit' (*NRF*, 1930) becomes 'Initiation à la Provence' in *Inspirations méditerranéennes* with only minor modifications, while the first four chapters of *L'Existence malheureuse* (1957) have been adapted from a series of articles first published in 1949–50 with substantial changes. Even *Le Choix* (1941) may be regarded as an expanded version of a paper written for *Recherches philosophiques* in 1936–37. Grenier's first novel, *Les Grèves* (1957), conforms to the same pattern of prior publication and rewriting. It contains a number of sections that first appeared in several different reviews, sometimes using the true names of people and places which were disguised in the novel itself. Besides the initial fact of the re-use, in a modified form, of older material, there is also the intention and effect of such modifications to be taken into account. Grenier is not a static thinker, and his meditation evolves all the time, not necessarily in a constant direction. At times there is a noticeable shift in emphasis. Thus 'La Certitude de l'unité et le problème des croyances' (1936–37) ends on a note of humanism and love, whereas *Le Choix*, although it is based on that earlier paper, and although it shares the recognition that an attitude of indifference is a practical impossibility for most people, offers little concession to human needs and values. The second edition of *Le Choix*, on the other hand, re-titled *Absolu et choix* (1961), goes some way to reversing the trend, with its final reference to the humanistic solution offered by Camus in *La Peste*. The third edition goes even further. Again, between 1946 and 1948 the tone of the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté* becomes much more uncompromising on the question of the possibility and desirability of an attitude of total indifference. These changes reflect a mind in constant movement, and that in itself provides an important clue to Grenier's understanding of the central themes of freedom and choice. Possibility is not only the object of his meditation; it is also the mode of it. Grenier's thought is intimately bound up with his existence, and it would be a mistake to attempt to isolate too carefully the supposed content of his philosophy without at the same time considering the form of its expression.

Grenier taught philosophy in school and university for forty years; he wrote regularly for the *Revue philosophique*; his thesis on Jules Lequier is still the standard introduction to the work of a philosopher whose importance is

gradually being recognized, and his edition of Lequier's *Œuvres complètes* is indispensable; the collection entitled 'La Métaphysique' which he edited for Gallimard brought together thinkers such as Camus, Lavelle, Le Senne, Parain and others of similar calibre; and his own personal philosophical works are considered significant enough for one of them, *Absolu et choix*, to be published in the collection 'Initiation philosophique' edited for the Presses Universitaires de France by Jean Lacroix. First of all, then, where does he belong in the current of twentieth-century French philosophy?

The titles of some of his major works appear to suggest affinities with existentialist thinkers: *La Liberté*, *Le Choix*, *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté*, *L'Existence malheureuse*. It is certainly true that he shares many concerns with those who are generally called 'existentialists'. Freedom and choice in the context of a problematic human existence are concepts that have, in the twentieth century, been under much discussion from an existential point of view, and not only by Sartrean Existentialists. Jean Lacroix notes that even before the thought of Kierkegaard and Heidegger began to dominate 'existentialist' philosophy, 'la double influence marxiste et nietzschéenne a fait passer l'accent de la liberté formelle à la liberté réelle'.⁴ Within this broad current of thought, Grenier displays 'existentialist' leanings in that he is constantly aware of the precarious metaphysical situation of the human existent, and of the anguish experienced in the face of total possibility (rather than of a specific experience such as death). He is indebted to Lequier (who has been described as the French Kierkegaard)⁵ for some of his expressions of that anguish, without being dependent on him for a knowledge of the experience itself. Furthermore, he is concerned with the possibility of creating value, and with the wider field of human creativity in general. However, these preoccupations are not enough to make him an existentialist, for he maintains a critical distance from the movement in all its forms. His clearest expression of opinion about his own response to it is found in the text of two talks given in Alexandria and later published as 'Deux entretiens sur l'Existentialisme':

Ce que je pense de l'Existentialisme?

Je l'approuve d'avoir dénoncé les soi-disant a priori dans lesquels notre existence est emprisonnée, d'avoir dégagé une vérité première qui est l'existence de ma propre réalité, d'avoir montré que les conditions de connaissance étaient secondaires par rapport aux raisons d'être, et qu'il n'y a pas de valeur sans évaluation, de vérité sans vérification.

Je lui reproche d'avoir cru qu'en dehors de la raison il pouvait y avoir un critérium possible en l'absence d'un Être transcendant. La métaphysique reste nécessaire . . . L'irrationalisme (existentialiste) ne peut pas compenser l'échec du rationalisme.⁶

There is much that is conservative and indeed classical in Grenier's objections. He refuses to rebel openly against Descartes: he accepts the validity of the

Cogito, even if he finds fault with the use that Descartes subsequently puts it to. His idealism is indebted to modern philosophers: his concern with the ordinary and the everyday suggests that he could be seen as a spiritual descendant of Lagneau, himself a schoolteacher rather than an academic philosopher. Brunschvicg, too, may have left his mark on Grenier. He was the doyen of French academic philosophy between the wars, and maintained that freedom was to be found essentially in the development and exercise of a critical reason. At the same time he practised a 'méditation et culte de l'unité spirituelle'.⁷ For him, the necessity of the world was held between two freedoms, that of inventive thought and that of technical application. Grenier's understanding of human creativity and of the practice of composition may owe something to Brunschvicg.⁸ At the same time he is a spiritualist in the terms of Jean Guittou's definition. According to Guittou, the spiritualism that has flourished in France since 1870 has been modest, 'un spiritualisme . . . qui a une horreur naturelle de la facilité . . . qui doute donc de lui, qui loin de chercher d'abord à prouver l'Esprit part plutôt de la supposition contraire, mais qui tout autant se méfie de la précipitation inverse',⁹ sympathetic to those who cannot bring themselves to affirm the reality of the spiritual. Grenier strongly emphasizes the conscious activity of the mind in thinking, but at the same time he cannot escape from the intuition of the existence of some greater spirit on which the human spirit depends.

The spiritualistic strand in Grenier's thought would seem, however, to suggest a closer parallel with Bergson than with Brunschvicg. Jean Guittou divides the Bergsonian school of spiritualists into two groups, the 'chrétiens philosophes' such as Édouard Le Roy and Jacques Chevalier, whose work would stand even apart from the fact of their Christian faith, and the 'philosophes chrétiens' for whom philosophy is essentially a Christian activity, and for whom without Christian faith there can be no philosophy, Blondel falling into this second category. The first group might be considered sufficiently broad to include Grenier: like Chevalier, Grenier maintains a dual emphasis on human life as opposed to academic speculation, and yet also on truth as opposed to mere expediency. He would have approved of the motto taken by Chevalier for his lectures: 'Non nova, sed vera'. His Christian faith is never as explicit as for Chevalier, but Grenier cannot be called non-Christian or anti-Christian. Further reasons for considering Grenier as a Bergsonian are his understanding of intuition, and his practice of allowing 'philosophy' to cover areas of life such as artistic creation, rather than confining it to the more traditional areas of analysis and speculation. Bergson himself, however, at least in his earlier works, was much more sceptical than Grenier in his interpretation of the sense of contingency and possibility, as Grenier recognizes in *Le Choix*, while Chevalier goes further in his theistic doctrine than Grenier is prepared to go.

Two other thinkers with whom a comparison might be fruitful are Gabriel Marcel and Louis Lavelle, both 'philosophers of existence' rather than 'existentialists', and both within the Christian tradition but pursuing a meditation that is very much on the fringes of that tradition. Lavelle and Grenier are both concerned with value. For Lavelle, value is revealed, realized or incarnated in a particular being when the potential of that being is actualized through the exercise of freedom. 'La valeur ne se réalise que par ce va-et-vient où la liberté se concrétise',¹⁰ and hence value 'nous paraît demander tantôt à être produite, et tantôt à être éprouvée'. This is especially true in the case of aesthetic value, and Grenier makes similar statements in his writing about aesthetics. Lavelle, however, openly attacks certain positions which are close to those held by Grenier, and he may indeed have had Grenier in mind, since the sectional bibliography in his *Traité des valeurs*, vol. 1, p. 508, includes both *Le Choix* and also 'De l'indifférence' (1945). While recognizing the legitimacy of a zone of indifference in the individual consciousness, and also of a certain passivity, Lavelle castigates the attitude of non-response if it means that 'je ne consens pas aux possibilités que recèlent les occasions'.¹¹ Grenier is prepared to be more radical than Lavelle and contemplate the possibility of going beyond value altogether, or at least to eliminate the very idea of value from everything except the Absolute which in any case is unattainable. He would be inclined to deny Le Senne's contention that absolute value is diffracted into a set of values that are more easily accessible to finite man. He would be more favourable to Lavelle's understanding of value as something that is realized in response to opportunities offered by Providence, but Lavelle's optimistic doctrine of participation is too presumptuous for a thinker like Grenier for whom the central Being is not the individual but the Absolute. Lavelle of course maintains a firm belief in an Absolute, identified with the Christian God: but it is precisely the firmness of that belief that distinguishes him from Grenier. It leaves him free to turn his attention to man and to the interval between *le Néant* and *l'Être*, whereas for Grenier the reality of the interval and even of man himself is all the time suspect. Grenier may be classified as a 'value-philosopher' in the sense that he is always aware that any form of evaluation points to the existence of an underlying absolute value, but any treatise on value that he might have written could only have been negative and destructive in its approach, in contrast to the positive systems of Lavelle and Le Senne.

Marcel and Lavelle both believe in the basic 'indivision de l'esprit' (J. Lacroix, loc. cit.), but they approach it from different angles. Lavelle is able to envisage an immediate leap on the part of the human spirit to the summit, to the creative unity of the divine spirit. This represents a participation in active Being, which is the source of all values. However, he is in danger of neglecting fundamental human limitations, weaknesses and sinfulness. Grenier, for his part, is all too well aware of human finitude and 'faiblesse', and participation

for him is a one-way process, with no possibility of an authentic downward movement to the world after the initial upward movement of union. Marcel shows himself much more aware of the human predicament, to the extent that he has been called an existentialist. He goes so far in that direction, however, that he places a strong emphasis on the human person in all its bodily materiality, whereas Grenier is more attracted by abstract thought even if it is suggested by quite ordinary phenomena. Indeed, Grenier sometimes seems to be more interested in the concept of 'l'humain' than in actual people. Concerned at the way philosophy was being debased to serve the interests of the moment, Grenier suggested in a lecture given in 1941 to the Société d'Études Philosophiques du Sud-Est:

Il y aurait pourtant avantage . . . à permettre au philosophe d'abandonner les questions de morale et de politique à la religion, à la famille et à l'État (qui ont plus d'autorité pour agir efficacement sur l'humanité) pour lui laisser l'exercice de la pure spéculation dont l'influence ne peut être valable que si elle est fondée sur l'exemple personnel.¹²

Pure speculation and personal example combine to constitute authentic philosophy. It is not authentic existence that is in question, indeed human existence is seen as being quite conceivably (though not necessarily) subordinate to philosophical speculation. That is not the only orientation of Grenier's thought, but it is sufficient to drive him back towards idealism and traditional metaphysics, setting him on the very fringe of the philosophies of existence. But then, as he himself wrote, his vocation was to be always 'en marge' (*LI* (2), 13 (25)).

One reason why it is difficult to classify Grenier satisfactorily is that his thought is not integrated into a single system or around a single intuition. There are two main poles around which it revolves, and even so there are not two distinct systems but two areas of constant shifting, questioning, suggesting and doubting which at times interpenetrate one another and at times seem quite irreconcilable. The first pole is the Absolute, not defined as Spirit, Idea or God, but deliberately left undefined. The second is man, and in particular man as a creative being. The novelty of Grenier's philosophy of the Absolute is that while the contingent human spirit tends necessarily towards the Absolute and may experience some kind of union with it at moments of illumination, there can be no valid itinerary in reverse. The Absolute is the end-point and also the dead-end of all thought. Once the human spirit has recognized the Absolute, the initial intuition of contingency becomes a despairing acceptance of its utter unattainability, with the exception of those moments of illumination. Recourse to human values is always possible, but they have been emptied of all true value by the recognition of Value itself. The second area of thought, then, the human, while it may bulk large from time to time and is not to be underesti-

mated, is always precarious and ultimately valueless. Even this analysis, however, does not do justice to Grenier. Much of the tension and anguish evident in his writings stems from the inability to accept such an unsatisfactory state of affairs as being inevitable. The momentary glimpses of the Absolute continually provide a despairing hope, and the experience of the creative artist seems to indicate further that the Absolute does in some way express itself within a human framework. Beyond that, Grenier is fascinated by the idea that that expression may have a wider scope than merely in the field of art, indeed that there may be some kind of personal mediation through which the Absolute establishes an enduring, and no longer momentary, contact with the world of finite humanity, thus delivering man from his isolation. He is reluctant to see such a mediation in religious terms, because religion and philosophy seem to him to have different tasks to fulfil: that divorce in his own life is one reason why he might fit into Guitton's category of Bergsonian 'chrétiens philosophes' rather than that of 'philosophes chrétiens'.

However, it was pointed out earlier that Grenier is not first and foremost a philosopher. Should he not rather be assessed in quite different terms? Is he not really a man of letters, to be seen within the context of French literary movements? His output includes essays and novels as well as works of philosophy and criticism, and it has been suggested that his literary temperament was that of a poet. In all his writings, while the content is by no means to be dismissed, the most striking aspect is often not what is said but the way in which it is expressed: the choice of approach, the tone, the images. It is legitimate, then, to try to place him in the development of French literature in the twentieth century.

Gaëtan Picon has on several occasions paid tribute to Grenier's talent as a writer,¹³ and other appreciations by leading critics have not been lacking, although they have always been discreet (to use an epithet applied to Grenier's own writings by no less than eight critics).¹⁴ The reasons for his failure to achieve greater prominence are closely connected with his expression of the themes of freedom and choice not only in what he wrote but in his very approach to writing. He is hesitant, elusive, easily distracted from the task in hand, ready to explore side avenues, reluctant to come out into the light, concerned to show the fallacy or the narrowness of generally accepted ideas rather than to put anything positive in their place. Passed over by many, he is appreciated by the discerning for those very qualities. Edmond Jaloux devoted three articles to him in 1933, the year of publication of *Les Îles*, noting: 'Le nom de M. Jean Grenier est à retenir, c'est un des rares écrivains nouveaux que nous ayons vu paraître depuis 1930'.¹⁵ The novelist Raymond Guérin was immediately struck by Grenier's writings. Later, in 1948, he recalled: 'Je ne sais qui a dit de Jean Grenier qu'il donnait toujours l'illusion d'avancer dans son existence comme s'il s'agissait pour lui, avant tout, de se trouver un passage

entre les hommes', and he added his own opinion that Grenier's talent as a writer was equal to his character as a man 'qu'on sait devoir ne jamais renier l'idéal qui a fait de lui ce qu'il est dans cette lutte que l'esprit livre à la matière, la liberté à la contrainte et la vérité à la justice'.¹⁶ For Jacques Howlett, similarly, Grenier is a proponent of a philosophy that may be summed up as 'une tendre lucidité'.¹⁷ That does not mean to say that he is anti-intellectual: his philosophy is progressive as opposed to systematic, 'toujours en quête, insatisfaite, vouée sinon à l'interminable odyssee de la recherche . . . du moins au repos difficile, aléatoire'. Grenier expresses in a simple style the contingency of man, and accepts the limitations of the human condition for his meditation on the highest and most spiritual aspects of existence. In this respect, according to Howlett, he is close to Valéry. Truth is glimpsed through negation and tension, without ever being fully attained, for Grenier's metaphysic of Being is not a system but rather a corrective to the systems too easily adopted by man. He is therefore thrown back into the impossible domain of choice. It may seem preferable to preserve the quality of spirit by a fruitful passivity rather than 'rendre compte du monde selon la quantité'. Howlett sees Grenier's invocation of Taoism as 'une référence féconde', not as a practical solution for rational Western man. Man must learn to be reconciled to his human imperfections and to accept his 'défaillance'. Grenier proposes a long, narrow path that is difficult to follow: not the path of discursive intelligence, of measurement and analysis, but that of poetry and indeed love. His highly intellectual quest has significance not primarily as philosophy but as an expression of love, of that which is most truly human. That is perhaps an over-statement: there is that element in Grenier's thought, but on the other hand he always seems to approach love from the outside, and to shy away from it as soon as it is offered. What is missing from Howlett's article is a compensating sense of the supreme value of something that is outside the self, namely the Absolute. He does indeed speak of an 'humanisme triste apparemment qu'écarterlent l'absolu et la finitude', but he confines his commentary to the human side of that tension. He is more perceptive than some other critics in the weight he gives to that side, but the equally important fascination of the Absolute in an intellectual and often abstract way does not come across at all.

Pierre-Henri Simon promises a more balanced approach.¹⁸ He concentrates on *Les Grèves*, and notes in it the essential ambiguity of Grenier's world. As the conscious intelligence explores existence it encounters a *presque* which has a dual effect. First of all the *presque* speaks of not-nothing, or more than nothing, and thus provides a basis for the heart to build upon with such values as faith, esteem and love. Secondly, however, it speaks of less than completeness, so that even the most wonderful experiences of fulfilment are undermined by metaphysical doubt. Unfortunately Simon does not go on to show how Grenier develops the two terms and what possible resolutions of the tension he

envisages, although *Les Grèves* itself offers ample material for such a study. Robert Campbell, writing in the same year as Simon, 1958, adopts a different approach which is both narrower and wider in scope.¹⁹ He singles out the theme of indifference, and refers to a wide range of Grenier's works in his article, the longest to be published in Grenier's lifetime. It is at times confused, and will be examined in more detail in the course of this study, but many of his insights are valid. He is careful to underline the importance of the Absolute in Grenier's thought, even where there is no explicit reference to the concept. His analysis of indifference as the only valid attitude in the face of the Absolute makes him unnecessarily tentative in his references to the concept of mediation: Grenier does consider it seriously in several places, even if he then draws back. At the same time, Campbell is too dogmatic about other aspects of Grenier's thought. The comparisons he makes with Sartre and Camus are pressed too far. His references to Sartre are discussed elsewhere: his adoption of Camus's claim that 'il ne peut y avoir pour un esprit humain que deux univers possibles, celui du *Sacré* (de la Grâce, comme disent les chrétiens) et celui de la *Révolte*' (quoted somewhat approximately from *L'Homme révolté*), for instance, is not obviously helpful in the context of a discussion of Grenier's thought, for while Grenier has clearly ruled out the way of revolt in any activist sense, it is far from clear that he has therefore turned 'résolument vers le premier terme' and that 'son "style" est celui de la Grâce'. Indifference is opposed to revolt, but it may equally well be opposed to grace. There is a tension in Grenier's thought which Campbell partly recognizes, but which is effectively destroyed by his emphasis on grace. It is a tension which must be seen not only in terms of the extremes but in terms of the oscillation itself, of alternation, ambiguity and the *acte divergent*. Campbell's article is long enough and detailed enough to bring out something of the agonizing complexity of Grenier's thought, but it never quite avoids the danger of trying to resolve that complexity in terms of a simple answer.

Again in 1958, Gaëtan Picon²⁰ sees Grenier's fundamental question as being 'Comment vivre dans et avec ce qui est, comment vivre avec l'Être?'. Like Campbell, he places the initial emphasis on the Absolute, but like Simon he concentrates on *Les Grèves*. He notes that: 'seule relève de la vérité l'expérience intérieure à la source, avant la chute dans le choix et dans l'acte, cette liberté d'indifférence pleine de tous les possibles intacts et comblée par son vide'. Possibility is the key to *Les Grèves*. He also notes that serenity is achieved when the individual consciousness is prepared to accept that the world does not answer to its own values and its other illusions. These are useful insights, but Picon fails to do full justice to the human emphases of *L'Existence malheureuse*, of *A propos de l'humain* and of the lyrical essays as well as of *Les Grèves* itself. He does not recognize that Grenier's protest against what he calls 'the grain of the century' is expressed in his humanism and in his creative

activity as a writer as well as in his exhortation to the serenity of abstention and indifference.

More recently, Robert Kanters and René Andrianne have tried to reassess Grenier's stature. For Kanters,²¹ Grenier is an 'homme du secret', a philosopher of inner experience, who wants to teach us to recognize 'ce que nous devons emporter contre vent et marée dans notre arche intérieure' (an appropriate enough image, if not one used by Grenier himself). Kanters is careful not to specify exactly what that precious cargo consists of: it is not the content as such that is important. Andrianne offers a more detailed analysis.²² He makes the important point that 'Grenier ne croit à la liberté que dans la reconnaissance des limites et se montre sceptique sur la capacité qu'aurait l'homme de modifier le monde en profondeur'. However, he grasps only half the truth when he says that Grenier's indifference is in fact simply 'la volonté d'agir d'une manière modeste et consciente de ses limites'. The parallel with Camus's *La Peste* has blinded him to the other aspect which indifference has for Grenier, namely the exclusive and uncompromising attachment to the Absolute. All these critics have shown themselves able to appreciate something of the quality of Grenier's mind, but have made the balance tip too far one way or the other in their exposition of the tension that is basic to his thought. S.-S. Juka recognizes the tension in Grenier's thought and in his writing, and in two recent articles,²³ she has offered an analysis of it which is in some ways more satisfactory than those of her predecessors, but in other ways is still misleading. In the first article, devoted to *Voir Naples*, she notes that 'le problème qui se pose dans le cas de Fritz (*sic*: the character's name is in fact Franz) est celui qui se pose devant le choix', and she goes on to show how the narrator, faced with Franz's failure, opts for the role of witness rather than that of judge. 'Le divin, qui reste son idéal, n'étant pas à sa portée, il peut, grâce à son témoignage écrit — à son intercession — participer au moins au sacré'. The human and the divine are thus somehow reconciled through art. Juka's article is too short to develop this insight, however, and it is buried in more general comments. The title of the much longer second article sounds promising, but in fact it is disappointing. Not only does Juka, like Treil, fail to recognize that the essay 'L'Attrait du vide' did not appear in the first edition of *Les Îles*, but in her desire to say something about every essay in the book she is led into hasty and superficial comments about the metaphysical positions explored in them. The nuances referred to in her earlier article are not given their full value. The ideal of passive submission to a necessary Absolute is too strongly emphasized, while at the same time the highly intellectual nature of Grenier's understanding of the Absolute is not recognized. An early reference to the importance of creation is not developed to balance the later discussion of the theme of the 'retour aux sources', nor is the concept of mediation given prominence. Juka has done Grenier a service in breaking away from the single central theme of

indifference which Campbell has isolated, and she is correct in saying that *Les Îles* 'contient en germe tous les thèmes que son auteur développera par la suite dans d'autres ouvrages' (p. 529), but her analysis is still unbalanced. This study is an attempt to correct the balance by means of a fuller, more detailed examination of Grenier's thought and writings, taking into account his intellectual development and the influences to which he was exposed, and making use of unpublished and hitherto unavailable material.

Another feature of these critical appreciations of Grenier is that they concentrate on ideas rather than on literary presentation. The first academic dissertation devoted to Grenier²⁴ illustrates the point in an extreme degree: no doubt under the influence of his supervisor, Olivier Lacombe, who is a leading Orientalist, Gérard Barrière devotes an altogether disproportionate amount of his *maîtrise* dissertation²⁵ to Grenier's dependence on Taoism, which, though important, needs to be put into perspective. As a writer, Grenier is very much in the French tradition. He himself acknowledged his literary debt to his compatriot Chateaubriand and to Barrès, 'le dernier des écrivains romantiques, avec ce piment qu'est la sensibilité imprégnant l'intelligence' (*ELF*, 94). Others have seen the influence of Montaigne, Vauvenargues and Joubert, of St François de Sales, Pascal and Fénelon, of Rousseau and Stendhal, of Valéry, Paulhan and even Marcel Arland, as well as of writers and thinkers from other traditions, St Augustine, Spinoza, Dostoyevsky. At times, of course, Grenier does adopt the tone of the Upanishads or of the Taoist classics, but it is as much to indulge his irony, his gift for pastiche and his mischievous delight in disorientating his interlocutors, as it is with serious intent. Even within the French tradition, however, it is a mixed inheritance, and one that does not lend itself to easy appreciation.

While Grenier's ostensible argument is often directed to the acute and alert intellect, his language speaks to the heart and the soul. The abundant imagery of the sea-shore, of the sea itself, of ships and boats, reaches out to embrace the reader as well. He is drawn into the landscape, becoming part of the Breton or the Mediterranean coastline, so that he too encounters the surge of the tide as it fills up the myriad *filières* of the muddy *grève*, he too experiences the human rhythm of existence measured by 'la course d'un jeune homme d'un bout de la plage à l'autre' (*IM*, 88 (90)). The imagery of artistic creation, merging insensibly with that of the sea, is similarly capable of extension to include the reader. Grenier describes a painting which depicts the creative moment: the painting is itself the expression of the artist's creative instinct, Grenier's description of it is similarly creative, and so is the reader's appreciation of it. Grenier's 'illustration et défense de la vie intérieure' (Henri Hell)²⁶ proceeds by inclusion, not by argument and demonstration. His meditation on indifference can only be understood in that way, and the same is true of his constant, unemphatic plea in favour of the Absolute.

The two aspects of his career that have brought Grenier the greatest prominence, his attack on 'orthodoxies' in 1936–38 at the time of the Spanish Civil War, and his position as the 'master' of Albert Camus, have both led to misunderstandings of his intention and of his message. He is not a 'pourfendeur du marxisme', nor is he a proto-existentialist. Perhaps François Bott came closest to his real greatness when he wrote of him, in Socratic terms, that he 'provoque une maïeutique'.²⁷ In his writing as in his teaching Grenier is like a midwife, helping his interlocutors to give birth to philosophical and literary intuitions which they were in danger of missing altogether.

This study of the work of Jean Grenier, then, is not primarily devoted either to philosophy and the history of ideas, although those are not neglected, or to literary analysis. Rather, it is an attempt to present a faithful picture of a little-known figure who, in his life and in his writing, was constantly expressing and resolving, with a greater or lesser degree of success, man's basic problems of freedom and choice in a puzzling contingent existence. His *œuvre* is wide-ranging, and it has not seemed legitimate to leave any area totally out of consideration, simply because, despite its apparent diversity, it presents a remarkable unity. Grenier himself maintained that he had only one song to sing, and the more one explores his philosophy, his art criticism and writings on aesthetics, his essays and novels, his literary criticism, his religious fragments and 'poems', the more the truth of that claim becomes evident.