

Louis Aragon's *The Bells of Basel* (1934)

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Louis Aragon's *Les Cloches de Bâle* (1934) not only opens the *Le Monde réel* cycle, which also includes the novels *Les Beaux quartiers* (1936), *Les Voyageurs de l'impériale* (1942) and *Aurélien* (1944). Above all, it demonstrates Aragon's break with the surrealism of the 1920s and his embracing of 'socialist realism', which he had discovered during an extended visit to the Soviet Union with Elsa Triolet in 1932-1933. *Les Cloches de Bâle* is in large part a reckoning with Aragon's bourgeois background, with his anarchist dalliances and his amorous misadventures earlier in life. However, the novel also highlights the necessity of a sustained proletarian struggle, fought by both sexes. The necessary conditions for this were to be created by the consolidation of the Soviet Union and the formation of the PCF. Viewed from this perspective, the 1912 Basel Peace Congress must remain a mere parenthesis, doomed to fail. Although it was important in shaping Aragon's political outlook, it occupies only a small place at the end of the novel.

What is the reason for this disparity between the body of the text and its conclusion, despite the fact that the latter provides the novel's title? What does the discovery of socialist realism *à la française* mean in this context and in the broader context of the French narrative tradition and its critical reception?