The Football Fan and Heroism in the Eyes of Maurice Carême

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Introduction

Two years after the publication of his collection of poems entitled *Hôtel Bourgeois* (1926), for which he received the Verhaeren award, the Belgian poet Maurice Carême[1] published an extremely dark novel about football called *Le Martyre d'un supporter.*[2] The novel tells the story of Prosper Goffineau, a loving father and conscientious employee, who becomes bewitched by the lure of fandom and gradually begins to neglect his wife and daughter. In fact, he ruins his quiet life to follow a dream that sees him end up in a cold hospital room. Influenced by the author's memories of life in Walloon Brabant – a parallel may also be drawn with the autobiographical narrative *Fever Pitch* by British writer Nick Hornby (1992) – the novel is both amusing and sad at the same time: amusing because of the colourful yet gently ironic portrayal of the world of football, sad because of the main character's distressing loss of sense of self-worth. This "elite fan", in the words of Constant de Horion,[3] admittedly demonstrates exceptional bravery by committing himself body and soul to his Anderlecht club. He appears to be a unique individual, almost a model of his kind for his peers, a heroic figure showing extreme devotion, on a quest for the absolute and accepting death as the potential price. Yet in sacrificing his family and health, does he not rather leave behind an image of an individual robbed of his humanity? What meaning should therefore be given to such "immoderate love for football"?[4] Although the text is somewhat dated, Maurice Carême nonetheless shows a degree of moder-

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1 Maurice Carême (1899–1978), from Wavre, was a Belgian poet. His many prosaic and poetical works evoke the profound solitude of man and the joy of existence. He has been the subject of several studies, including Jacques Charles: Maurice Carême (coll. "Poètes d'aujourd'hui"), Paris 1965; Gilbert Delahaye: Maurice Carême (coll. "Le Miroir des poètes"), Tournai 1969; Laszlo Ferenczi: Relire Maurice Carême, Brussels 1992; Fondation Maurice Carême: Maurice Carême ou la clarté profonde, 1992; Jacques Dumont: La Narration lyrique de Maurice Carême, Louvain-la-Neuve 1995; Jeannine Burny: Le Jour s'en va toujours trop tôt. Sur les pas de Maurice Carême, Brussels 2007; Brigitte Buffard-Moret / Jean Cléder: Maurice Carême. "Comme une boule de cristal…" Entre poésie savante et chanson populaire (coll. "Artoithèque"), Arras 2012. However, until now there has been no previous academic study on the role of sport in his work.

2 Maurice Carême: Le Martyre d'un supporter, Brussels 1928. References in the text to the novel will be shown using the letters *MS* in brackets, followed by the page number(s). All translations from the original texts: TB.

3 Constant de Horion: "Maurice Carême. Le Martyre d'un supporter", Anthologie, Brüssel, November 1928.

4 *L'Aurore*, 23 October 1928.

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nity with his realistic and sensitive style, not only through his choice of topic – let us remember here that sport was one of the avant-garde subjects widely addressed throughout the 1920s (Cravan, Apollinaire, Géo-Charles, Philippe Soupault and Blaise Cendrars) – but also through his satirical vision of obsession with football. By combining analysis of the work itself with interviews,[5] photographs, archive material and press reviews, this paper aims to show how, under the guise of a moral message about human cruelty in the Brussels working-class and petite bourgeoisie, the author raises the issue of fandom and its excesses. While the chosen term "martyr" is both provocative and a forewarning of a future social phenomenon (soccer hooliganism), it represents above all a deviant form of "sport heroism" in the noble sense of the term.[6]

The fan: a sacrificial victim?

Heroism, in its general sense, is characterized by the extreme courage of an individual in the face of danger and total devotion to the cause the hero is fighting for. A "heroic figure" as opposed to the "fictional hero" – as classified by Pia Pandelakis[7] – is often endowed with strength of mind, and frequently has to sacrifice himself/herself. In the words of Olivier Rollin, heroism represents "this part of humanity which compares us to the gods".[8] Maurice Carême's text reflects this perspective by describing how an ordinary character is transformed into an exceptional fan. As in any *Bildungsroman*, the hero experiences cardinal emotions, including feelings of passion, love, deception, hate and fear of death, etc. Yet, contrary to the classic narrative structure of the fictional genre where the character, first naive and credulous, faces ordeals that make him wiser, Maurice Carême's character loses his common sense and finds himself in a form of excessive and ultimately fatal heroism, a passion that is as much a consequence of his youth as it is reckless and destructive.

In its reflection on the experience of being a fan, Maurice Carême's novel can be divided into three easily identifiable stages: initiation, engagement and the price that is paid. The text first shows the hero's gradual *initiation*. Prosper Gof-

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5 I would like to thank Mme Jeannine Burny, President of the Maurice Carême Foundation in Anderlecht-Brussels, who was also his secretary, his muse and the "beloved" to whom he dedicated his collection entitled *La bien-aimée*. She was kind enough to devote a whole day to me at the poet's home on 22 January 2018.

6 Pascal Duret analyzes heroism from the champion's point of view and, more particularly, the passage from "champion" to "hero" as an educational model. See Pascal Duret: L'Héroïsme sportif (coll. "Pratiques corporelles"), Paris 1993.

7 A "heroic figure" is a being capable of and responsible for extraordinary acts while a "fictional hero" is one who has a pivotal role in a given narrative. See Pia Pandelakis: L'Héroïsme contrarié. Formes du corps héroïque masculin dans le cinéma américain (1978–2006), doctoral thesis in cinema supervised by Jean-Loup Bourget and defended on 29 June 2013 at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3, p. 18.

8 Olivier Rolin: Tigre en papier, Paris 2002, p. 132.

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fineau, respectable notary clerk, dominated by the control of his wife Octavie, accepts his friend Antoine Philivert's invitation to a football match instead of the usual Sunday outing to the cinema. While the beginning of the novel sees Goffineau as the only person in the notary's office to have so far resisted football fever, the reader quickly understands that this "nonsense"[9] will soon take unreasonable proportions in his life (*MS*, 14). Faced during his very first match with a packed and eruptive audience, he discovers the joys of the crowd and its shared collective emotion, its "contagious magnetism"[10] (*MS*, 17). Shivering with excitement, he feels the fervour of the sporting club's fans, heightened further by the fanfare of the club's orchestra. The spectacle revives in him a nostalgic sense of accomplishment, so much so that "a feeling of youthfulness"[11] (*MS*, 22) fills his senses, a "comforting, warm and tender joy" spreads through his veins and a "faint desire to cry moistens his eyelids"[12] (*MS*, 24). The author thus highlights the kinaesthetic, even phenomenological dimension of the vibration spreading through his hero's body as he writes: "Millions of needles collided in the thighs of Prosper Goffineau. His knees trembled as though he himself had sent the ball to the back of the net"[13] (*MS*, 24). The notary clerk thus succumbs to passion and the first signs of tension with his wife appear. Mockingly she calls him "The *S*porting *S*upporter"[14] (*MS*, 31), exaggerating the "s" with disdain. A hostile reaction to such an irrepressible passion for football. A passion in the form of a new addiction: Prosper fights anything that might prevent him from immersing himself completely in his passion. Maurice Carême shows the emptiness Prosper feels when he misses a match by depicting him as being beside himself, incapable of resisting the uncontrollable desire to follow the score from his apartment window.

Then comes *engagement*. Prosper only really becomes a true fan after joining a club. By signing up for his membership card with the *Supporters Club du Centre*, he becomes even more involved. Although his official step into the world of fandom comes as the result of a drunken bet, Maurice Carême takes care to highlight that a destiny is decided and an inevitable process takes root at this moment. A destiny that is made possible by the efforts of a number of Prosper's associates. They succeed in breaking down his final efforts to resist: they reassure him about his attendance (*MS*, 71), introduce him to the importance of group cohesion and show him the code of conduct. By following the "fan's ten commandments"[15] (*MS*, 136), he unwittingly becomes part of fandom in the

9 "niaiserie".
10 "magnétisme contagieux".
11 "jeunesse nouvelle".
12 "une légère envie de pleurer lui humecte les paupières".
13 "Des millions d'aiguilles s'entrechoquèrent dans les cuisses de Prosper Goffineau, écrit-il. Ses genoux tremblèrent, comme s'il venait de projeter lui-même la balle au fond des filets."
14 "Le Supporter du Sporting".
15 "dix commandements du supporter".

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same way one becomes part of a religion – a metaphor used by Maurice Carême on several occasions. Slowly but surely, he becomes increasingly more engaged and proudly shows his new sense of identity. He feels drunk with happiness when he stands beside the 20,000 spectators at the stadium. When he is not wrapped up in organizing sporting events, he fixates on commentaries before and after the match, is obsessed by parades in town and by endless football-discussions over a Geuze beer in one of the local bars: *Le Café des Sports, Le Manneken-Pis, Le Pélican boiteux, Le Filet de Hareng, Le Cosmopolite, Le Gai Shooteur* and *Au Paradis*.

His engagement, however, does not come without consequences. The third part of the novel goes on to raise the problem of the *price of addiction*. Far from enabling Prosper Goffineau to escape his everyday life and be sublimely happy, his obsession with football leads him into mental and physical decline. Goffineau's football fever creates tension in his family and the deleterious nature of fan passion is shown through the gradual deterioration of Goffineau's marital relationship. Everything is a pretext for dispute: repeated absences, lack of interest in the family, travelling far from the family home. Even the cost of the club's annual membership – 40 French francs – is a source of conflict. At times remorseful or still responsive to pressure from his wife, Prosper momentarily promises not to attend matches, but such betrayal of his fellow fans can only be short-lived. Very quickly, he returns to the stadium. He cannot be cured. One day, when his wife startles him while Goffineau is in a particularly drunken state, Prosper Goffineau goes so far as to attempt to strangle her in the hope of ending his misery. Only their daughter's intervention prevents the worst from happening. Nonetheless, his life continues its downward spiral and he falls even deeper into a passion that sucks him in like quicksand. Prosper's passion fuels him to become "the most influential member"[16] (*MS*, 150) of his fan club, but underneath it all he is burning out. The sporting setbacks of the club, the cost of endless drunken evenings, the repercussions of his life as a football fan on his professional life, the consequences of collective brawls, etc., nothing appears to weaken his engagement. With nothing left to lose, he sacrifices his "family happiness for the sporting cause"[17] (*MS*, 151) and finds himself alone. Finally, with an ongoing cough he fails to treat so he can return to the freezing cold of the stands for a match, physical illness gets the better of him. "Obsessed by an evil spirit breathing football passion into him to lead him down the wrong path"[18] (*MS*, 221), he passes away in hospital at the very moment his club loses the match it needed to win to stay in the premier league. In portraying this tragic fate,

16 "le membre le plus influent".
17 "bonheur familial à la cause du sport".
18 "Obsédé par un mauvais esprit qui lui a insufflé la passion du football pour l'entraîner dans une mauvaise voie."

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Maurice Carême demonstrates that, based on heroic devotion, the consequences of fandom can be dire.

A satire of fan heroism

While the structure of the novel shows Prosper's gradual decline, it also offers interesting details concerning his conversion to fandom and the resulting sacrifice. Such is undoubtedly the reason why the following words may be found in *L'Avenir du Tournaisis*: "Rowdy fans convinced of the social role they are fulfilling will consider that Mr. Carême has done them a great honour".[19] Carême does indeed carefully describe Prosper Goffineau's fondness of life at the fan club,[20] materialized, for example, by the use of possessive pronouns: "For the fan says *our* team, *our* victory, *our* flag, *our* goalkeeper, *our* stadium, *our* committee, as if all of that belonged to him"[21] (*MS*, 36). It can also be seen in his pride when wearing the club's colours (*MS,* 150–151) or when he shows his fan card as a distinctive and superior sign (*MS*, 89). Several passages in the novel thus enable the reader to experience vicariously the jubilant spirit prevailing on *Sporting*'s premises or at the *Pélican boiteux* which is, so to speak, the club's headquarters. The author likewise notes the importance of betting, predictions and the sporting press (*MS,* 46), as well as drunken evenings where fans chant their "battle cry"[22] together (*MS*, 111). Journalist M. Thiryn underlined this important point developed by Maurice Carême by adding that the real world of football, the one where this strange social fever burns the strongest, is the world of fans: "I have often pondered the mysteries of this immense and little known sect", he wrote, "on winter Sunday evenings as I pass by the steamed windows of the cafés that are their temples and where they can be seen moving in all directions, libations to hand, as they carry out their rituals".[23]

Maurice Carême adopts a more critical stance vis-à-vis the issue of the violence inherent in fandom. He describes, for example, a derby between *le Daring* and *le Sporting* which escalated prematurely into a full-blown scene of hooliganism:[24] "Stones resounded on the coffin, a furious stampede of figures in black broke up the convoy. Stretched-out hands and eager bodies searching for each other, cries

19 Archives of the Fondation Maurice Carême.

20 Process described by sociologist Patrick Mignon in his book *La Passion du football* (Paris 1998).

21 "Car le supporter dit *notre* équipe, *notre* victoire, *notre* drapeau, *notre* keeper, *notre* stade, *notre* comité, comme si tout cela lui appartenait en propre."

22 "cri de guerre".

23 La Gazette, 28 April 1928.

24 See the definition and history of hooliganism in the article by Dominique Bodin et al.: Le hooliganisme entre genèse et modernité, in: Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire 85.1, 2005, pp. 61–83.

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ringing out, moaning, boiling over, rising like rockets of sound from the chaos"[25] (*MS*, 118–119). Blood begins to spill. And he adds: "A wave of madness now shook the human sea from which a bitter stench of sweat and murder began to rise"[26] (*MS*, 119). Here, the author denounces a form of human decadence embodied by "extreme fans"[27] preferring violence to any other form of expression.

The fact that *Le Martyre d'un supporter* was the first of the three novels written by Maurice Carême[28] and the only text really dealing with football – except for about ten poems on games and sports[29] – raises certain questions, however. Why focus on sport and why choose a fan as the main character? The absence of an explanation from the author himself means it is not possible to provide a categorical answer to the question. Possible answers may nonetheless be drawn from his trajectory. In fact, as pointed out by Jean-Marie Schaeffer,[30] while fiction is a simulation of reality, a way to touch, see and experience an unknown situation, it is evident that Maurice Carême has fictionalized a subject he appears to know well himself.[31] Simply reading the dedication to his "football fan" father is sufficient proof. His father was in fact a fan of the football team of the small market town of Wavre, where Maurice Carême was born and grew up. When the team lost, his father would be in a bad mood for eight days. Yet the novel does not focus on the Wavre team, rather on that of Anderlecht's *Royal Sporting Club* which the author himself supported.[32] That is why the novel, since it is clearly anchored in the history of the Belgian championship, transposes the names of the other great teams with their French-sounding – or at least, as Roland Barthes would have said, having "francophonic plausibility"[33] – names: *Sporting, Berchem-Sport, Daring, Standard, Sporting-Antwerp, La Gantoise, Racing.*

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25 "Des cailloux résonnèrent sur le cercueil, et une ruée furieuse des noirs disloqua le convoi. Des mains se tendirent, des corps avides se cherchèrent, des cris s'entrecroisèrent, gémirent, bouillonnèrent, tourbillonnèrent, giclèrent de ce chaos en fusées sonores."

26 "Une vague de folie agitait maintenant cette mer humaine d'où commençait à monter un âcre relent de sueur et de meurtre."

27 Julie Gaucher: Ballon rond et héros modernes. Quand la littérature s'intéresse à la masculinité des terrains de football, Berne 2016, p. 140.

28 Along with *Un trou dans la tête* (1964) and *Médua* (1976).

29 I would like to thank Jeannine Burny for inventorying the following poems: *Au pays de mon enfance* (1967), *Balle au bond* (1968), *Le Ballon* (1963), *Je nageais* (1967), *Les leçons* (1962), *Qu'il est loin le temps* (1963), *Ski nautique* (1965), *Le Tour de France* (1973), *Tu te baignais* (1972), *Volendam* (1930).

30 Jean-Marie Schaeffer: Pourquoi la fiction?, Paris 1999.

31 See Jeanne Burny: Le Jour s'en va toujours trop tôt. Sur les pas de Maurice Carême, Brussels 2007. She explained, for example, that as a child, Maurice Carême played football with "such intensity" that his teammates moved out the way "as soon as he ran for the ball" (p. 169). She also referred to the grand school fêtes of Anderlecht's local school in July, where Maurice Carême, then a primary school teacher, would organize football matches for the pupils with his colleague (p. 8).

32 *Le Sporting Club d'Anderlecht*, founded in 1908, joined the premier division for the first time in 1921. Today, the 'Mauves' are the most successful football club in Belgium.

33 To use Roland Barthes' expression, 'Proust et les noms'. Roland Barthes: Nouveaux essais critiques, Paris 1972, p. 121–134.

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A further significant element to be taken into account is the fact that sport was one of the recurrent, if not most common, themes of avant-garde literature which fascinated Maurice Carême.[34] Indeed, the theme of sport during the Roaring Twenties can be found in the works of Géo Charles, Philippe Soupault, Blaise Cendrars, Louis Aragon, Jean Prévost and Dominique Braga, etc. Maurice Carême seemed to find much inspiration at the crossover point between fiction, the poetic-sporting theme in contemporary literature and his own personal experience. This may explain why Victor Boin states in *La Conquête de l'air*, dated 1st May 1928, that "We still didn't have any literary sporting novels and it was inevitable that Montherlant, Jean Prévost and Braga would find followers among us. Maurice Carême thus endeavoured to transpose the subject according to our Brabant life."[35] Yet the style characterizing *Le Martyre d'un supporter* is a reflection of the authors who influenced him during this period, such as Jean Giono and Joseph Delteil. As suggested by Edward Ewbank: "This book, poignant and ironic at the same time, with its discretely sensual plot, reminds us of Maupassant through its bitterness and realism, Jules Renard through its acuity and Alphonse Daudet through a touch of sensitivity that belongs only to Maurice Carême."[36]

In the end, should this novel not be considered a satire of fan heroism? Probably, if we are to believe the journalist of *La Province de Namur* dated 6 May 1928: "[...] this novel is rather a satire of sports fanatics, these hotheaded priests of the new religion getting drunk on the wine of their cruets". As underlined by one of his critics, Maurice Carême was not averse to the use of satire[37] and its use of caricature and hyperbole to deliver an alarmist message. Yet, in this narrative, it is well and truly a whole social category that is "portrayed with the sad sagacity of true observers".[38] Considered in this light, *Le Martyre d'un supporter* is an examination of human cruelty, the price of addiction, the irrational and the unusual. In all his novels, destiny appears to hound the characters, and the author constantly highlights the difficulties faced by the poor and feeble-minded.

Carême's choice of topic was therefore both realistic and provocative. Realistic since, in the second half of the 1920s, fandom began to raise serious questions in terms of its vices rather than its supposed virtues.[39] Provocative since by sketching a character with a heroic destiny, Maurice Carême went well beyond a mere description of a phenomenon and actually denounced it as a societal problem which would, half a century later, reappear in an extreme form as football hoo-

34 Brigitte Buffard-Moret / Jean Cléder: Maurice Carême, p. 17–21.
35 La Conquête de l'air, 1 May 1928. On the initiative of Adhémar de la Hault, the Aéro-Club founded the world's first aviation magazine, *La Conquête de l'Air*, in 1904. The magazine provided its readers with information on science, the army, and sport.
36 Anderlecht-Sport, March 1928.
37 Jean-Paul Bonnami: Le poète Maurice Carême, in: L'Archer, June 1936, p. 82–92.
38 La Gazette, 28 April 1928.
39 Examples can be found in the internationally well-known book of Georges Hébert: Le Sport contre l'éducation physique, Paris 1925.

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liganism. Yet nothing appeared to justify such behaviour in his eyes. Moreover, his novel was awarded a medal in 1928 during the Pentathlon of the Muses at the Amsterdam Olympic Games – no doubt due to its ability to reveal and denounce the dark underside of fan culture, a denunciation that was linked, in the spirit of de Coubertin, to the damage caused by the commercialization and professionalization of sport.

From testimony to reception

How was Carême's message received by the literary critics of the time? Did they see it as an exaggerated parody or, on the contrary, as fiction symbolically representing the ills affecting football fans? While only a small number of French journalists showed interest in this work, over forty Belgian critics reviewed *Le Martyre d'un supporter*. Analysed as a whole, their comments acknowledged the modernity and originality of the novel, and, more particularly, Carême's decision to choose football as the topic of the book. As French-language Belgian literature was not rich in "sports" works at the time, unlike France, Britain and Germany, a number of them recognized that it was an "entirely new picture".[40] In the wake of his French counterpart Henry de Montherlant, who dedicated part of his *Olympiques* (1924) to the joys of the beautiful game, Maurice Carême represented novelty by celebrating the splendour of Belgian football. The topic was even considered to be of "general interest" according to *La Nation belge* dated 18th April 1928, since the plot of the novel focused less on the pitch than on what surrounded it, including the spectators and the fans gravitating around the club. Reviewers were universally positive and paid tribute to the book's psychological analysis of football fans and the "ability to enthuse",[41] not forgetting the promising style of Maurice Carême, a style that was "flexible and colourful",[42] "lively and direct",[43] "alert and interspersed with images that were often happy".[44]

All agreed that the author showed a sharp sense of observation and some were inspired to reflect on the scope of the phenomenon of football fandom in Belgium. Georges Marlow was careful to take a number of precautions before speaking of the novel as it was and pointed out that no dictionary to date had yet defined the term "fan". "One must", he wrote, turn to "sports newspapers and more particularly those dealing with football"[45] to know what a fan was. Was the critic feigning candour to better express his disdain for fans? It is impossible to say. Whatever the case, he explained that Belgium had some "turbulent

40 Football, 29 February 1928.
41 La Renaissance, 21 July 1928.
42 La Libre Belgique, 6 July 1928.
43 La Gazette de Liège, 10 May 1928.
44 La Vie sportive, 10 May 1928.
45 Revue de la Quinzaine, in: Mercure de France, 1 September 1928, p. 486–487.

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arrière-garde partisans", succumbing at times to howls of "joy", at others to "anger" against the "rivals".[46] Considered as a form of pedagogical discourse, his words suggest that the notion of fandom was not yet familiar to readers. A similar echo may be heard in the words of the journalist of *La Vie sportive* dated 10th May 1928: "The author […] has painted pictures that some may consider too black, but which are generally well observed". This was likewise the case for the critic from *La Gazette de Liège* on 10 May 1928, who followed Maurice Carême in denouncing "how ridiculous these people are who follow Belgium's football teams across the country every Sunday". As for Georges Godchaux, colleague at the *Journal d'Anvers*, he considered that Prosper Goffineau resembled "this lifeless mass of ridiculous amateurs… incapable of practising sport themselves, but who act as backseat drivers as they yell throughout the matches".[47]

Concerning his literary project – and, between the lines, the question of heroism – several critics reproached Maurice Carême for not following through with his idea. Graillet's words were explicit in this respect: "From the very beginning, Maurice Carême was not clear about his direction. Either the novel could have been comical, bitterly comical and intentionally forced, or black and wrapped in an atmosphere of distress and fatality. The author stopped half way […]."[48] Constant de Horion likewise emphasized a number of inconsistencies and regretted that Maurice Carême did not take a clear stance concerning the unfortunate destiny of Prosper Goffineau and his family. "From these latent hesitations", he pointed out, "comes an annoying impression of incoherence which damages the unity of the novel".[49] Consequently, from humour to irony, from realism to blackness, exaltation to sensualism, this first novel that was intended to be a tragedy suffered, it would seem, from a lack of experience.

On the whole, it should also be noted that no one seemed to consider Maurice Carême really outrageous, nor did anyone reproach him for trivialising the love of the sporting spectacle and the emotions it may induce. No real debate was opened on the question of fan heroism. While the novel symbolically re-raises the issue of concern over the excesses of football passion, Prosper Goffineau remains a mere fictional character.

Conclusion

"The sport hero", Pascal Duret explains, "spreads an idea of greatness, honour, excellence and dignity".[50] In a way, Prosper Goffineau displays heroism by devoting himself body and soul to his football club, attending all the matches,

46 Ibid.
47 Journal d'Anvers, 30 June 2018.
48 La Libre Belgique, 6 July 1928.
49 Anthologie, November 1928.
50 Pascal Duret: Héroïsme sportif, p. 33.

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supporting the players with his cries and exclamations, helping to create an atmosphere of excitement in the stadium, which should bolster the players and their chances of victory. His excessive heroism comes from a form of religious fanaticism, as suggested by Maurice Carême,[51] which pushes his character to the height of suffering and death. Is Prosper Goffineau not ultimately a modern cousin of Polyeuctus, the rich Roman officer martyrized in Armenia under Decius in Melitene?[52] The story narrated in *Le Martyre d'un supporter* indeed resembles that of the enraged neophyte who smashed the idols in the temple, exposing himself not only to death but also to the eternal loss of his beloved Paulina. Even if Pierre Corneille's tragedy, *Polyeucte martyr* (1641), exalts the Roman officer's choice from a religious point of view, Maurice Carême's novel recognizes that it is both irrational and contrary to his own interests. In other words, Goffineau's sport heroism fails to elevate the human condition. He is a character who is socially lost. Roaming around, he is beset by a passion that destroys his environment, consumes him from the inside and makes him lose his bearings, as well as plunging him into an existential and deadly vortex. Through this representation of football fanaticism, it could be argued that one of Maurice Carême's aims was to help real-life football fans to become more aware of their situation and warn them of the dangers of extreme fandom.

51 Maurice Carême wrote that "A club without intelligent, conscientious and convinced fans is like a religion without priests" (*MS*, 70) ["Un club qui manque de supporters intelligents, consciencieux et convaincus est comme une religion sans prêtres."].

52 Polyeuctus of Melitene was an Armenian saint whose story inspired a historical tragedy for Pierre Corneille. The action of the tragedy took place in Melitene, in Roman Armenia, in the third century AD, during the persecution of Christians by the Roman Emperor Decius. In the tragedy, Corneille shows the consequences of Polyeuctus' conversion to Christianity.

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