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the poetry of Saint-John Perse*

John Roger Graham Little

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ABSTRACT from

E X I L E A N D T H E P O E T

A study of the theme of exile in the poetry of  
S A I N T - J O H N P E R S E

by

John Roger Graham Little

Against a background of the geographical removes in Alexis Leger's life, solitude and its variations are traced through the work of his alter ego, Saint-John Perse. Exile is seen as a constant in the human condition of which artists have become increasingly aware since the Industrial Revolution. Beyond reference, through sympathy, to other literary and historical exiles, Perse expresses the concept through images, examples of which (salt, trees, the sea-shore etc.) are studied in detail to show how they become the 'objective correlatives' of the theme safeguarding the poet against abstraction. The dialectic of exile shows particularly in the image of the threshold, expressed in various spatial and temporal terms, which is seen as fundamental to both Perse's mode of thinking

and his poetic, the very precariousness of the here and now heightening awareness. An encyclopaedic vocabulary and verbal ambiguities both reflect this preoccupation in their different ways. Exile is the gap richly filled by Perse's twofold attention: to the world around him and to the language through which he communicates his experiences. A study of the wealth of his observation and poetic techniques therefore derives directly from the theme and, by showing the positive pole, defines it by contrast. Thus various paradoxes, both biographical and poetic, are resolved through the key images of exile used by the poet as mediator. Staticity is compensated by dynamism; deprivation by enthusiasm. Exile precedes exhilaration.

Appendices include early articles by Perse not previously reprinted or mentioned in bibliographies, and a listing by category, with definitions, of his rare and technical terms.

E X I L E   A N D   T H E   P O E T

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S A I N T - J O H N   P E R S E

by

John Roger Graham Little

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the University of Durham, 1969.

The present study has left me many debts. While countless friends and colleagues, even the poet himself, have suffered occasional interrogations, two have borne them constantly and with exemplary patience, and offered profoundly constructive advice and encouragement. In naming them, my debts are not discharged: Louis Allen, my supervisor, and Pat, my wife.

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p. 282, l. 2 for north read North  
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p. 306, l. 5 for occuring read occurring  
p. 313, l. 11 for harnassed read harnessed  
p. 329, l. 2 for vois read voie  
p. 338, title for Epiloque read Epilogue  
pp. 360-363 Delete in toto.  
p. 403 Delete entry "Le 'représentant du Midi'".  
p. 419 Delete entry Aicard, Jean.  
p. 420 Delete entry Arêne, Paul.  
p. 423 Delete entry Daudet, Alphonse.  
p. 429, s.v. Neiges for 44 read 43-4  
p. 431 Delete entry "Le 'représentant du Midi'".

J. R. G. L.

Southampton, 30th December, 1969.



§ 1

INTRODUCTION

Les maîtres-mots du poète,  
. . . il faut les faire  
sonner avec leurs plus  
lointaines harmoniques.

Mikel Dufrenne

(Le Poétique, p. 74).

Eloges. Exil. Two titles crucial in the poetry of Saint-John Perse.<sup>1</sup> Two themes equally crucial to an understanding of his work. "The theme of praise, which in Saint-John Perse's poetry has always alternated with the theme of exile, has become more pronounced in his later works."<sup>2</sup> The welter of praise sung in Amers, however, owes much of its positive nature and unremitting power to the negative pole of political exile which had preceded it. The same pattern is also true of the earlier Eloges, filling the gap of a less well documented and in some ways less comprehensible sense of exile, that of the poet's childhood in the West Indies.

What follows is not a psycho-analysis of the man but rather an analysis of the poems. Apart from points of reference, the subject is Saint-John Perse and not Alexis

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise specified, reference is made to Perse, Oeuvre poétique, édition revue et corrigée, 2 vols. (Paris 1960), which contains the bulk of Perse's poetry to date. Both for ease of reference to other editions, however, and to avoid the proliferation of footnotes, quotations in this study from the poems will be followed in the text by the title, with section and canto as appropriate.

<sup>2</sup>C. A. Hackett, Anthology of Modern French Poetry, "Introduction to the second edition" (Oxford 1964), pp. 1-li.

Leger. It hopes to show that exile is the "commun dénominateur thématique"<sup>1</sup> necessarily preceding that of praise and in consequence more fundamental to an understanding of Perse's poetry. Being poetry, the concept of exile is presented mostly through concrete imagery, and the various connected images will be studied in due course. The principal "modulation" of the theme,<sup>2</sup> the central image most fully and most consistently expressing in its various manifestations the notion of exile, will be shown to be the threshold. As such, it clearly does not correspond to a recognisable Freudian or Jungian complex, nor may one associate Perse's highly conscious art with the primitive indifferenciation of Lévy-Bruhl's participation mystique. It is closer to Bachelard.

Le thème personnel s'écarte du complexe en vertu de sa spécificité même. Il se situe en deçà du vocabulaire universel des pulsions et des complexes, tel que les freudiens l'ont patiemment constitué. Il définit une couche différente de significations implicites, couche plus personnelle, dosée d'une infinité de structures et de nuances.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Paul Weber, Domaines thématiques (Paris 1963), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>"Nous entendons par modulation, tout analogon du thème, en d'autres termes, le thème symbolisé" (ibid., p. 9).

<sup>3</sup>Id., Genèse de l'œuvre poétique (Paris 1960), p. 13.

The ramifications around the image of the threshold as exile, with all its insecurity, its "in-between" twilight connotations, strongly support the idea that Perse displays a strong mytho-poetic sense.<sup>1</sup> His communion with natural phenomena, primitive in the best sense, finds a highly sophisticated and articulate voice in his poetry.

The poet's position as mediator between fundamentals and his reader is in itself strength in his solitude.

Ecrire, c'est entrer dans l'affirmation de la solitude où menace la fascination. C'est se livrer au risque de l'absence de temps, où règne le recommencement éternel.<sup>2</sup>

For the knowledge of the recurrences, the rhythms and seasons of life--a knowledge almost essential to the attitudes of courage and patience in misfortune and of temperance in prosperity--we depend upon participation in a moral and psychological tradition conveyed through the great images of tragic poetry and myth.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Gabriel Bounoure rightly differentiates this, in his term le sacré, from the mere trappings of mythology when he writes of Perse: "Le sacré est partout dans cette œuvre, mais tout laïcisé, et tout en poésie. Pas de mythologie, pas de surnaturel." ("Saint-John Perse et l'ambiguïté poétique," Cahiers de la Pléiade, X, été-automne 1950, 108). (This very important volume will henceforth be designated CP, X.) The obsolete definition of "mythology" in the SOED is also fruitfully castigated by Kathleen Raine, Defending Ancient Springs (Oxford 1968), § 7 "On the mythological," pp. 123-138.

<sup>2</sup>Maurice Blanchot, L'Espace littéraire (Paris 1955), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup>Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry (London 1934), p. 85. Cf Mircéa Eliade, Le Mythe de l'éternel retour (Paris 1949).

It is remarkable that in the threshold, Perse has chosen--or perhaps instinctively homed on--an image conveying ideas both of exile and of mediation. The poet's inevitable solitude as a prerequisite of his function therefore supports the particular poignancy of political exile in Alexis Leger's life, and validates autobiographical references for a wide audience.

It has been said that "la poésie est destinée à l'éloge, non au dénigrement."<sup>1</sup> Perse's desire to call his poems Eloges ("Ce titre est si beau que je n'en voudrais jamais d'autre, si je publiais un volume--ou plusieurs"<sup>2</sup>) tallies fully with such a view of poetry as well as with the particular content of his own writings.<sup>3</sup> With this view and its realization, "un choix fondamental . . . de dénombrer tout ce qui

<sup>1</sup>Roger Caillois, Art poétique (Paris 1958), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in André Gide, "Don d'un arbre," CP, X, 26.

<sup>3</sup>Cf "Je voudrais être né dans un temps où n'avoir à chanter, poète, que, simplement en les dénombrant, toutes les choses. -- Mon admiration se serait posée successivement sur chacune et sa louange l'eût démontrée; c'en eût été la raison suffisante." André Gide, Les Nourritures terrestres in Romans (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), p. 225.

existe au monde de singulier, de précieux et d'irremplaçable,"<sup>1</sup>  
 is connected Perse's linguistic interest. The wealth of his  
 vocabulary is matched by the sheer prowess of many of his  
 techniques.<sup>2</sup> Both are undoubtedly evidence of a sense of  
 creation by the Word similar to that expressed in the Bible  
 or, to quote an example closer to Perse, by Claudel:

Ainsi quand tu parles, ô poète, dans une énumération  
 délectable  
 Proférant de chaque chose le nom,  
 Comme un père tu l'appelles mystérieusement dans son  
 principe, et selon que jadis  
 Tu participes à sa création, tu coopères à son  
 existence!<sup>3</sup>

Some of the sacerdotal qualities assumed by late nineteenth  
 century poets have thus remained with Perse, though typically  
 he traces such assumptions back to their origins in other  
 charismatic figures like the shaman, but he for his part is  
 neither exclusive nor oracular. What he retains is rather a  
 hieratic sense of order and a ceremonious use of language.

<sup>1</sup>Caillois, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>2</sup>See Caillois, Poétique de St.-John Perse (Paris 1954),  
passim, and § 11 below.

<sup>3</sup>Cinq Grandes Odes: "Les Muses" in Oeuvre poétique (Bibl.  
 de la Pléiade), p. 230. Cf "Appelant toute chose, je récitai  
 qu'elle était grande, appelant toute bête, qu'elle était belle  
 et bonne." Perse, "Pour fêter une enfance," II.

If he is the medium he is in command of his material as far as it is humanly possible. "L'écriture médiumnique"<sup>1</sup> where human control is lost may be a powerful image of inspiration, but inspiration (like sincerity) is no guarantee of a good poem.<sup>2</sup> Maritain's high estimate of Perse is based on a radical misconception of his poetry.<sup>3</sup> Similarly his distance from surrealism--unspecified by Breton when he called Perse a

<sup>1</sup>Perse, Oiseaux (Paris 1963), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>"L'inspiration à elle seule ne suffirait pas à faire un grand poète." (C Claudel, "Introduction à un poème sur Dante" in Oeuvres en prose (Bibl. de la Pléiade), p. 422). Cf Mikel Dufrenne, Le Poétique (Paris 1963), p. 116: "Si l'inspiration ne garantit rien et pas même sa propre authenticité, c'est que par elle-même elle n'est rien ou plutôt ne fait rien." Similarly "sincerity" is a sine qua non that at the same time guarantees nothing." (Stravinsky, Conversations with Igor Stravinsky (London 1959), p. 107). Cf Roger Caillois, Vocabulaire esthétique (Paris 1946), p. 41: "Il est impossible de décider si un écrivain est sincère ou non. J'ose, pour ma part, m'en réjouir. Car, à supposer qu'il le soit, son œuvre n'en tirerait aucun avantage."

<sup>3</sup>See his Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry (London 1954), pp. 77-78 where Perse is listed among those who have allowed "the pure, free, and immediate passage into the work, of the creative intuition born in the depths of the soul." Again, pp. 261-262, one reads: "With Saint-John Perse . . . the intellectuality of the word is treasured only as a richer and more pungent vehicle of the subconscious rush of poetic knowledge."

"surréaliste à distance"<sup>1</sup>--is immense. In him there is neither narrow partisanship nor gratuity. Considerable space will therefore be given in this study to certain aspects of Perse's use of language: if in the last analysis it indicates fullness rather than poverty, the gap between the poles is all the wider, and the negative pole more important, by implication.

As with winds constantly shifting to fill areas of low pressure, so much of Perse's sense of exile is expressed in movement. This and the nature of solitude seen through his work combine to form the concept of exile. As such it may sound very dry, but when related to the poet's biography, of which the general lines are well known,<sup>2</sup> the integrity of the poetry appears as a faithful reflection of the probity of the man. The qualities of courage and independence dearly won by Leger only emphasise a certain distance in those human relationships where trust and respect are lacking. Hence the recurrence of certain words in describing him: hauteur, décon-

<sup>1</sup>Manifeste du surréalisme (1924) in Manifestes du surréalisme (Paris 1962), p. 41.

<sup>2</sup>Or readily available: see e.g. Jacques Charpier, Saint-John Perse (Paris 1962), pp. 25-58.

certant, etc. But hence too his remarkable understanding of men with a similar grandeur d'âme.

His qualities as man and poet are perhaps not those in vogue. He has been called an "untimely poet."<sup>1</sup> But if his work has more affinity with apollonian than with dionysiac poetry, the undercurrent of exile is very much, though not exclusively, a thing of our times. A brief analysis of the increasing consciousness of exile and sensitivity to it will help to situate both the man and the poet in relation to the present study of the theme of exile in his work.

\* \* \*

<sup>1</sup>Arthur J. Knodel, Saint-John Perse (Edinburgh 1966), p. 168.

§ 2

BACKGROUND TO EXILE

Ce monde est la patrie de  
l'âme; elle doit apprendre  
à reconnaître sa patrie dans  
le lieu même de son exil.

Simone Weil

(Sur la science, p. 242).

Exile is not a new phenomenon, nor are the ideas of solitude, transience and insecurity products of the twentieth century. There is an "éternité de l'exil dans la condition humaine"<sup>1</sup> of which Perse is fully aware. Yet it seems that since the Industrial Revolution there has been an increase in the intensity of a thinking man's awareness of the condition.

One might well find material for comparisons with Perse in studies of poets from Alcaeus to du Bellay, from Li Po to Dante, from Ovid to Jouve. But there is some danger in accepting the notion of exile as an undifferentiated universal. The Old Testament Exile, for instance, does not share the metaphysical overtones of the Greek tradition which gradually sophisticated the Judaeo-Christian view.<sup>2</sup> A group exile, especially one showing such fundamental solidarity, cannot share the qualities of individual exile. What is more, Yahweh was "with" the Israelites in Babylon: the state and its

<sup>1</sup>Perse, quoted by Pierre Mazars, "Une journée à la villa 'Les Vigneaux'," Le Figaro littéraire, 5 Nov. 1960, 5.

<sup>2</sup>"Ce qu'ils [les Grecs] ont eu intensément, c'est le sentiment de l'exil, le sentiment que l'âme est exilée dans le monde. C'est de chez eux qu'il est passé dans le christianisme." Simone Weil, Sur la science (Paris 1966), p. 241.

spiritual leader had simply shifted ground under external pressure. Such an exile may therefore be termed merely "geographical". With the Platonic idea, retained essentially by Stoics and Gnostics alike, that we are only "strangers and sojourners" in this world, an important extra element is introduced. We are all exiles on earth, and are conscious of the fact to a greater or lesser degree according to our particular sensibilities. Paradoxically this may therefore mean that when an individual is deprived of state and lares for whatever immediate political reasons, he may draw some consolation from the metaphysical or spiritual exile which he shares with all men.

The position is further complicated by hypersensitivity and by a subtle combination of pressures conspiring to give an individual a sense of solitude or of being pursued although no geographical move occurs. The sense of exile is no less real. The increasing privileges, and corresponding burdens, allotted to the individual with the development of the Industrial Revolution modified the relationship between a man and the state. More than anything else, it is the sense of alienation that increased, with a collateral increase in schizoid symptoms.

Whatever a critic's point of view when surveying the general trends in literature, there is remarkable agreement on the period when fundamental attitudes changed: the end of the eighteenth century. With Rousseau and Romanticism came a concentration on the solitary individual, and Goethe's Werther is a prime example of the Romantic "outsider".<sup>1</sup> The revolution was not of course only industrial: it was also scientific and political, and each field has intensified its evolution since. Whether it is progress or mere change, and whether real or simply apparent in either case matters little: the effect is the same. "C'est que la dissociation semble s'accroître entre l'œuvre poétique et l'activité d'une société soumise aux servitudes matérielles. Ecart accepté, non recherché par le poète."<sup>2</sup>

Karl Jaspers posits the end of the eighteenth century as the terminus a quo for schizophrenia in modern society.<sup>3</sup> Before that, not schizophrenia, a personal matter, but hysteria,

<sup>1</sup>Perse mentions Werther in "Des villes sur trois modes," Pan (Montpellier), No. 4, juillet-août 1908, 189.

<sup>2</sup>Perse, Poésie (Paris 1961), unpaginated p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Strindberg et Van Gogh, Swedenborg, Hölderlin, tr. H. Naef (Paris 1953); see esp. last §, pp. 271-276.

a group reaction, had been the order of the day. He writes of "une affinité particulière entre l'hystérie et l'esprit régnant avant le XVIIIe siècle, affinité qui existerait entre la schizophrénie et l'esprit de notre temps."<sup>1</sup> In literature, this division may be seen as "deux courants de sens inverse: d'une part, une tentative d'adaptation au réel positif, à l'univers "mécanique" de notre temps; d'autre part, un désir de s'enfermer dans l'enceinte du moi, dans l'univers du rêve."<sup>2</sup> Jung's division into types is expressive more of a different jargon applied to a different view of the problem than of an appreciable change in the nature of the problem itself. The link between extraversion and hysteria and that between introversion and schizophrenia is clearly made by Caudwell:

Jung's division of psychological types into extraverted and introverted is based on the assumption that extraverted types, when mentally disturbed, tend to hysteric and manic-depressive states, while introverted types are more likely to suffer from the psychasthenic neuroses and schizophrenia.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jaspers, op. cit., p. 272.

<sup>2</sup>Marcel Raymond, De Baudelaire au surréalisme, édition nouvelle revue et remaniée (Paris 1952), p. 221.

<sup>3</sup>Christopher Caudwell, Illusion and Reality (new edn., London 1946), p. 223.

Expressing a communist's view of the capitalist middle classes boosted by the Industrial Revolution, he adds: "Psychasthenic neurosis is a characteristic bourgeois disease."<sup>1</sup>

Through the artist's capacity to express and so to crystallise what his human sensitivities perceive and experience, this mal du siècle has been very fully recorded. Some, a Rousseau or a Lamartine, paid considerable attention to it, but it inevitably permeates every form of expression. Living fully in the present involves by definition being haunted by the Zeitgeist. But if the first stage of the reaction was maudlin and self-pitying, a more positive and virile period followed. With Baudelaire came a clearer recognition of the dilemma of man in an urban civilisation, and while he made some defence against its encroachment he made in return a contribution to its richness. At the same time, however, appeared a profound and irreconcilable ambiguity in the very condition of the artist.

Les années situées alentour 1850 amènent la conjonction de trois grands faits historiques nouveaux: le renversement de la démographie européenne; la substitution de l'industrie métallurgique à l'industrie textile, c'est-à-dire

<sup>1</sup>Caudwell, op. cit., p. 230.

la naissance du capitalisme moderne; la sécession (consommée par les journées de juin 48) de la société française en trois classes ennemies, c'est-à-dire la ruine définitive des illusions du libéralisme. Ces conjonctures jettent la bourgeoisie dans une situation historique nouvelle. Jusqu'alors, c'était l'idéologie bourgeoise qui donnait elle-même la mesure de l'universel, le remplissant sans contestation; l'écrivain bourgeois, seul juge du malheur des autres hommes, n'ayant en face de lui aucun autrui pour le regarder, n'était pas déchiré entre sa condition sociale et sa vocation intellectuelle. Dorénavant, cette même idéologie n'apparaît plus que comme une idéologie parmi d'autres possibles; l'universel lui échappe, elle ne peut se dépasser qu'en se condamnant; l'écrivain devient la proie d'une ambiguïté, puisque sa conscience ne recouvre plus exactement sa condition. Ainsi naît un tragique de la Littérature.<sup>1</sup>

The fundamental fragmentation of art had begun in earnest.

The private worlds of experimentation in literature, and particularly in poetry, in the latter part of the nineteenth century went to extremes of non-communication through literature, an insoluble paradox, or to variations of didacticism.<sup>2</sup> The failure, on his own terms, of Mallarmé, the reduction to silence of Rimbaud, are expressive of a search into the solitary recesses of a hypersensitive individual. The poet as high-

<sup>1</sup>Roland Barthes, Le Degré zéro de l'écriture (Paris 1964), p. 53.

<sup>2</sup>See Caillois, Babel (Paris 1948), passim, and Louis Allen, "The Contempt of Literature," Essays in Criticism, V, 1955, 229-241.

priest, the poet as geographical or social exile, the poet as drug-addict and so on may have extraordinary perceptions, may be explorer or escapist, but ultimately it must be admitted that these attributes in themselves are totally irrelevant to literature. Like integrity and sincerity, they are a guarantee of nothing. Poetry consists of words, and aspires, in however concentrated a manner, to communication. So the poet's greatest efforts will, at best, be directed towards finding a language appropriate in all respects to the communication of his experiences, however complex. Whether l'exil or le royaume is dominant, neither can be expressed to the exclusion of the other: both elements must be present in some measure for a true picture to emerge.<sup>1</sup> The negativity of exile must be balanced by the work of the poet.

\*

In discussing the theme of exile in Saint-John Perse, there are various paradoxes to be resolved. Some of them have already

<sup>1</sup>So Camus attempts to balance the notion of the étranger against, for example, the lyrical "mediterraneanism" of the end of L'Homme révolté, § "La Pensée de midi" (in Essais, Bibl. de la Pléiade, pp. 700-709).

been considered, and their resolution will be fully illustrated in the course of the present study. Perse himself has in his poetry achieved a remarkable synthesis in his view of the world while remaining alert to details. His detachment and linguistic powers have combined to enable him to assimilate the complex concepts of exile at various levels and express order where chaos is the usual view. As fundamentally as in mythology, his art is aimed at "the adaptation of man's emotions to the necessities of social co-operation."<sup>1</sup> His poetry is highly civilised and in turn a civilising force. But this very fact poses a further paradox.

To all appearances, Alexis Leger is not and has never been an "outsider". On the contrary, if ever there seemed to be an established figure, with conservative views in good measure, it is he. Born of a well-to-do family of colonial landowners, he enjoyed a liberal education, chose and succeeded brilliantly in a highly respectable profession, the diplomatic service, and, after some understandable confusion in time of war, settled among his trophies in elegant residences in Washington and on

<sup>1</sup>Caudwell, op. cit., p. 36.

the French Riviera. It seems perverse to see exile as a theme central to such a man's writings.

Reversing the medal, not only do signs of dissent become apparent in Leger's affiliations and policies during his period of office,<sup>1</sup> but, more relevant to our purpose, greatness is seen to imply solitude. The image of the Prince is common in Perse's poetry: he understands the leader's burdens and essential solitude. But he is not a king, and the distinction may be inferred from the memorable phrase uttered on the threshold of exile: "J'habiterai mon nom" (Exil, VI). It is at one and the same time a recognition of destitution and a proud claim to posterity. But at least he has a name, even two, whereas a dethroned king has none.<sup>2</sup> He is a person, not a function, but

<sup>1</sup>For an account of his diplomatic career, see E. R. Cameron, "Alexis Saint-Léger Léger" in The Diplomats: Fighters for Lost Causes, 1919-1939 (Princeton 1953), pp. 378-405.

<sup>2</sup>Cf the utter loss of identity central to Shakespeare's Richard II which crystallises in Act IV, i, 255 ff:

"I have no name, no title--

No, not that name was given me at the font--

But 'tis usurped. Alack the heavy day,

That I have worn so many winters out,

And know not now what name to call myself!"

Perse's customs declaration and Oscar Wilde's--"Nothing but my genius"--are poles apart.

comprehends the solitude of kings.<sup>1</sup>

Even his childhood in an island demi-paradise had left him conscious of his separation from the world, a feeling heightened by the fact that to reach even Pointe-à-Pitre meant crossing water, and heightened further by the wretchedness of the town itself when one arrived, so different from the tales told of the cities in the mother-country.<sup>2</sup> Saying this does not preclude a full enjoyment of immediate surroundings. But each geographical remove, from Guadeloupe to France, France to China, later to the U. S. A., increased the sense of separation because of lived experiences, while at the same time increasing correspondingly the opportunity to make a summa of those same experiences. The context of Perse's life cannot fully explain, however, an attitude which must be partially innate. A man of

<sup>1</sup>Cf "Ce n'est pas la perte de leurs biens qui accable les réfugiés, mais celle de leur identité." (Ghița Ionescu, "Introduction à un essai sur l'influence des exilés politiques au XXème siècle" in Salvador de Madariaga: Liber amicorum (Bruges 1966), p. 340.

<sup>2</sup>M. Leger readily confirmed these ideas about his island upbringing at our meeting in August 1966. To locate the island of Saint-Léger-les-Feuilles (of which Saillet (p. 134) doubted the existence), a map showing the "Ilet à Feuille" belonging to the Leger family will be found at Appendix A below.

honour and discretion, Perse is generally recognised as being inscrutable, and he enjoys the enigmas of inscrutability. He keeps his distance to keep his liberty: "La politesse n'est-elle pas encore la meilleure formule de liberté?"<sup>1</sup>

Some closer examination of the idea of solitude seen through the poems against a more detailed background of aspects of the poet's life is now in order. A study of the major ingredients of exile, displacement and solitude, physical and metaphysical, will reveal important image patterns and suggest outstanding sensitivity to man's present condition and to an expression of it through language. Firstly, however, one needs to see certain echoes of other literary exiles and see Perse's "elective affinities" in this field.

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<sup>1</sup>Perse, "Fragments d'une lettre privée de Saint-John Perse à Archibald MacLeish (1942)", CP, X, été-automne 1950, 155.

§ 3

EXILE THROUGH LITERATURE

Un homme s'en vint rire  
aux galeries de pierre  
des Bibliothécaires.

Perse (Vents, I, 4)

A writer feeds on other writers' work, though decreasingly shows it as he establishes his own style and gains maturity as both person and artist. Perse's mature work appears unusually free of literary references, however 'literary' (with "the limitations, and the virtues, which that word implies"<sup>1</sup>) his approach to poetry. Yet there is little doubt that in the later, longer poems, Perse feeds at times on himself. Phrases, concepts and rhythmic cadences from earlier poems are taken up for expansion, concision, elucidation or modification. The principal study of influences, the delight of the sourciers, a study not only unflattering but totally irrelevant from the poet's point of view, is largely restricted to the early poems.<sup>2</sup>

Certain aspects of the influence exerted on Perse by Baudelaire (and therefore Poe), Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Laforgue (and so Whitman), Claudel, Valéry, Jammes, Gide, Fargue, Larbaud and so forth, as well as by Father Düss, have been dealt with in more or less detail, and no attempt to investigate

<sup>1</sup>Hackett, Anthology..., p. 291.

<sup>2</sup>For a neat and witty castigation of influences, see C. Day Lewis, The Poetic Image (London 1947), p. 15. For another relating directly to Perse, see Arthur Knodel, Saint-John Perse (Edinburgh 1966), p. 11.

their influence will be made here. Note has also been taken of the influence of writers of classical antiquity, and wild suggestions made that Leger read Chinese, ancient Hebrew and Egyptian texts in the original, as well the Greek and Latin with which he is certainly familiar. If none of the proposed relationships throws light on Perse's meaning or poetic method, and few of them so far have, the suggestions remain sterile. And the separation of influence from affinity and from chance similarity is often conjectural. Even the careful tracing of a source, with a lengthy exposition of the hypothetical processes which took place between the 'source' and its 'product',<sup>1</sup> often leaves one with the disappointed question: "Et alors?..."

One is therefore thrown back on the poetry, and this is as it should be. It is not that Perse necessarily owes less to other writers, but that he has assimilated their influence more completely, and achieved a more original synthesis. The remarkable achievement of the Images à Crusocé, for example,

<sup>1</sup>Such, for instance, as is offered regarding the influence of Baudelaire's "Une Charogne" on Eloges, XIII, by Mechthild Cranston, "La Rêverie vers l'enfance dans l'œuvre d'Apollinaire, Perse et Char," unpubl. thesis, Univ. of California, Berkeley 1966 (ref. 66-8294), pp. 88-91.

written when Leger was seventeen years old, is that they prefigure the later poems both thematically and stylistically to an extraordinary degree, and even beside them scarcely seem to be juvenilia.

The whole of Images à Crusoé is already a poem of exile, the exile suffered by a boy who had to leave behind a shimmering tropical paradise and acclimatize himself to the provincial towns of southwest France. This same theme, stripped of every literary device, is developed even more poignantly in Pour fêter une enfance, composed in 1908.<sup>1</sup>

The literary device, the one feature which really distinguishes Images à Crusoé from the mature opus, is the use of Robinson Crusoe as a persona with whom Perse identifies himself to avoid the directly autobiographical. The device will later be transferred to men of action who also have to wrestle with the problems of leadership and solitude but are drawn from real life, and with whom the poet will always be present in the poems as a separate character. More often than not, then, reference is made to historical people rather than fictional characters, action, for Perse, speaking louder than words. If, like Babur, it is someone "qui vêt la robe du poète entre deux grandes actions viriles" (Exil, VI), so much the better.

<sup>1</sup>Knodel, p. 19.

But a list of travellers, conquerors and exiles found in the work of Perse shows a very high proportion of fact against fiction: Assuérus, Baber, Cambyse, César, Colomb, Cortez, Crusoé, Drake, Jason, Nuñez de Balboa etc., alphabetically.<sup>1</sup> A list of characters suggested periphrastically would give a similar result.

One of the ways in which Perse's preoccupation with the notion of exile may be seen is therefore through his attention to other writings on the subject, but it cannot be called a major aspect. The persistence of this attention nonetheless suggests that the poet feels, consciously or otherwise, an affinity with other exiles or writers about exile. Except in one particular case, to be argued below, where an influence on the presentation of the Exil tetralogy is perceptible, any analogies stem from affinity or chance similarity rather than direct influence.

The interest Perse shows in the nature of solitude and nomadism as a constant in la condition humaine may be seen as the principal undercurrent of literary references through his

<sup>1</sup> Established from my Word Index of the complete poetry and prose of Saint-John Perse (2nd impr. with supplement, Southampton 1967).

work, which however rare are not entirely negligible. They are nonetheless integrated into his poems with increasing subtlety, so that never again, after Images à Crusocé, does one see a literary figure overtly woven into the fabric of a poem. And yet by tracing the pattern of references in Exil, for example, hinting at Jason and Moses, as clear a parallel to the poet's own circumstances may be discovered as that offered by Crusoe. It is one way among many of presenting a general human problem in terms of the particular. A study of certain literary references in the Exil tetralogy may consequently serve as an example of Perse's mature usage, admittedly fragmentary and often hypothetical, of other instances of exile to parallel his own, and may indicate at the same time the limited way in which such a study can help towards an understanding of the work.

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Bosquet restricts the possibility of a biblical influence to a general tonal echo:

Son éducation catholique lui a certainement ouvert l'accès de la Bible, et quelque chose du ton biblique a pu lui demeurer familier. Dans le Livre de l'Exode, notamment, des récits comme celui du passage de la Mer Rouge, par leurs vertus épiques et par répétition de certains mots, se développent selon un mode qui n'est

pas sans rappeler celui du poète... Mais . . . il ne peut être question que du ton.<sup>1</sup>

The biblical aspect of the versets in Perse is acknowledged, but reference to the Bible is by no means as overt and direct as one might expect after reading the versets of Claudel, for whom Perse's great admiration is well known. Nevertheless, a small number of passing and seemingly unimportant references to biblical situations or to allied religious ritual, placed so as not to interrupt the flow of the poem and so distract attention from the central idea of "l'éternité de l'exil dans la condition humaine,"<sup>2</sup> finally appear to add a thread of imagery to the complex mesh of the tetralogy's structure. The idea of wandering and deprivation conjured up in Exodus forms the first parallel pattern to be considered.

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In Exil, III, a comparison of "cette grande chose sourde" is made to "un dénombrement de peuples en exode." Given the poet's statement that the poem "n'est pas une image de la

<sup>1</sup>Alain Bosquet, Saint-John Perse (édition revue et augmentée, Paris 1964), p. 111.

<sup>2</sup>Perse, quoted by Mazars, "Une journée..."

Résistance,"<sup>1</sup> one may legitimately set aside (though not entirely forget) the idea of the exode before the German advance in June 1940. The Book of Numbers takes its very name from the census taken among the Israelites in their flight from Egypt. Two significant references to this occur in Neiges: in canto II, the snow is said to be "plus fine qu'au désert la graine de coriandre," and in canto IV we read: "tant d'azymes aux lèvres de l'errant." In Exodus 16, 31, manna is described as follows: "Elle ressemblait à de la graine de coriandre; elle était blanche..."<sup>2</sup> There is no need to underline the connection of manna with the flight from Egypt, and azymes are the unleavened loaves used in the Passover:

On mangera des pains sans levain pendant les sept jours; on ne verra point chez toi de pain levé, et on ne verra point chez toi de levain, dans toute l'étendue de ton pays.

(Exodus 13, 7)

God's chosen people were enjoined to remember the escape from captivity under the Pharaohs, and Perse is perhaps asking us, however indirectly, to do likewise. Indeed this is not the

<sup>1</sup>Perse, quoted by Mazars.

<sup>2</sup>All biblical references in French are to the translation by Louis Segond (nouvelle édition revue, Paris, 1963).

first time that the poet has had the biblical exodus in mind if the interpretation which Murciaux suggests for the following lines from Anabase, VIII, is correct:

Nos compagnons ces hautes trombes en voyage,  
clepsydras en marche sur la terre,  
et les averses solennelles, d'une substance  
merveilleuse, tissées de poudres et d'insectes, qui  
suivaient nos peuples dans les sables...<sup>1</sup>

Once these points of reference are established, other words and phrases assume an added significance. The plagues of Egypt are obliquely echoed in "les pestilences de l'esprit" (Exil, II) and later in "la fin des grandes épidémies" (Exil, VI). The word for plague in French translations of the Bible however is plaie, which occurs in the opening section: "L'été de gypse aiguise ses fers de lance dans nos plaies." But the sense would have to be stretched too far for one to read more than 'wound' into such a context, even if one considers that the arrow-heads of the gypsum summer could recall Moses' rod, and the next line refer to his choice of the desert and freedom as opposed to subservience in Egypt: "J'étais un lieu flagrant

<sup>1</sup>"Il /Perse7 peint en une seule image la manne nourricière et la colonne de nuées qui précédaient Moïse." (Christian Murciaux, Saint-John Perse (Paris 1960), p. 103, and see also p. 17.)

et nul comme l'ossuaire des saisons." Moses' rod might more appropriately be recalled in Pluies, VI, when the leader is left to his loneliness:

Un homme atteint de telle solitude, qu'il aille  
et qu'il suspende aux sanctuaires le masque et le bâton  
de commandement!

Such an assimilation of Moses to the figure of the Leader, Saint-John Perse's alter ego, would tally with similar characters in other poems, notably with the Prince in La Gloire des Rois and Anabase, and would clearly not be out of place. Certain other details serve to support the notion without reducing it to triteness. At the very end of the long list of those whom Perse honours as "Princes de l'exil" in Exil, VI, comes "celui à qui l'on montre, en très haut lieu, de grandes pierres lustrées par l'insistance de la flamme..." In a position of such importance, introduced by a series of references to great books and the calculation of religious festival dates, this phrase, if taken as an allusion to Moses on Mount Sinai, provides a culminating point for the pattern here suggested.

L'Eternel dit à Moïse: Monte vers moi sur la montagne, et reste là; je te donnerai des tables de pierre, la loi et les ordonnances que j'ai écrites pour leur instruction. . . . L'aspect de la gloire de l'Eternel était comme un feu dévorant sur le sommet de la montagne.

(Exodus 24, 12 & 17)

One of the instructions received by Moses on this occasion concerned the building of the tabernacle altar:

Tu feras l'autel de bois d'acacia; . . . Tu feras, aux quatre coins, des cornes qui sortiront de l'autel; et tu le couvriras d'airain. (Exodus 27, 1-3)

In Exodus 30, 3, the metallic covering is no longer brass, but gold, and it becomes clear that "the horns of the altar" have a special sacred quality. Sacrifices made on them have a particular significance, as is evidenced by the offering requested as an atonement for sin in Exodus 29, 10-14 and 30, 10. The meaning of the sentence in Exil, II, "D'autres saisissent dans les temples la corne peinte des autels," will be dealt with when other biblical references are considered. Suffice it to say that this image evokes the isolation and courage of the Moses-figure who is partly assimilated into the poet himself. In the closing section of the Poème à l'Etrangère, it is the poet who presents himself finally as the potential leader and liberator:

pour délivrer à fond d'abîme le peuple de vos lampes,  
. . . je m'en vais, ô mémoire! à mon pas d'homme libre,  
sans horde ni tribu, parmi le chant des sabliers...

The situation, and especially the resonances of the closing word, sabliers, cannot help recall the poet, or Moses, standing

on the shifting sands of exile, knowing that the only way to lead is to stand utterly alone, "dépouillé sur les sables [de] toute allégeance humaine."

Comme le Cavalier, la corde au poing, à l'entrée du désert,

J'épie au cirque le plus vaste l'élan des signes les plus fastes.

Et le matin pour nous mène son doigt d'augure parmi de saintes écritures.

(Exil, II)

One is reminded of Pharaoh's horsemen chasing the Israelites who were led by the pillar of fire or cloud:

Les Egyptiens les poursuivirent; et tous les chevaux de Pharaon, ses chars et ses cavaliers, entrèrent après eux au milieu de la mer. A la veille du matin, l'Eternel, de la colonne de feu et de nuée, regarda le camp des Egyptiens...

(Exodus 14, 23-24)

Once clear of the Egyptians, and having advanced into the parched wastes without hope of turning back, the Israelites 'murmured'. To satisfy their hunger, they were given manna, white as coriander seed; but they satisfied their ritual requirements by setting up the golden calf while Moses was collecting the tablets of stone. "Et la truie d'or à bout de stèle sur les places désertes" (Pluies, VIII) perhaps alludes to this event; at least there is a very strong echo. Other words might be evoked to add weight and fullness to the

parallelism: the alliances 'covenants' which "assistaient les grandes castes de prêtrise" (Exil, II) recall the covenant made initially with Noah, but also the one made with Moses on Mount Sinai: "Si vous gardez mon alliance, vous m'appartiendrez entre tous les peuples" (Exodus, 19, 5). The commandments prescribed on that occasion find a verbal echo in the line already quoted: "le bâton de commandement." Their transmission was accompanied by thunder and lightning, favourite images with Perse.<sup>1</sup>

La montagne de Sinaï était toute en fumée, parce que l'Eternel y était descendu au milieu du feu; cette fumée s'élevait comme la fumée d'une fournaise, et toute la montagne tremblait avec violence. (Exodus 19, 18)

This recalls the line in Exil, I: "L'esprit du dieu fumant déserte sa couche d'amiante." The principal image is clearly that of a heat-haze, but Perse's poetry allows of multiple though not unrestricted interpretations and associations confirming and amplifying the central image.

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This being the case, we may turn to the parallelism to

<sup>1</sup>See Monique Parent, "Le thème de l'orage dans Exil de Saint-John Perse" in Actas do IX Congresso internacional de linguística românica (Lisbao 1959), II, 209-214.

be found in classical as opposed to Judaeo-Christian mythology and see how the field of reference broadens in another direction. Just as the biblical exodus in no way pretends to explain the tetralogy, but illustrates the central concept, so Jason does not hold the key to a complete understanding of the poems, but adds a further element to the complex image structure.<sup>1</sup>

The one unequivocal evocation of the voyage of the Argo occurs in Nciges, III, with the mention of l'Oiseau du Phase. However awry early Greek mythological geography may have been the names of Jason and Medea are irrevocably linked with the River Phasis. It was at Phasis that Aphrodite sent the bewitching wryneck down to Medea to keep her love for Jason burning, according to Pindar's fourth Pythian Ode. Perse is known to have been acquainted with this work both from the fact that he presented his copy of the rare 1814 Oxford edition to Claudel when they met in Hamburg in 1912,<sup>2</sup> from the translations

<sup>1</sup>A concise account of the Jason-Medea story will be found in Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (Harmondsworth 1960), §§ 148-157. My study of the parallelism with the Argonautica appeared under the title "Elements of the Jason-Medea myth in Exil by Saint-John Perse" in MLR, LXI, 1966, 422-425.

<sup>2</sup>See Perse, "Silence pour Claudel," NRF sept 1955, 387-391 and Charpier, p. 38.

of Pindar which Perse is known to have made but left unpublished,<sup>1</sup> and from the mention made in Oiseaux, 12.<sup>2</sup> The wryneck was spread-eagled on a wheel, or a firewheel, and its close association with the reward of a golden ball which leaves a fiery trail like a meteor when thrown in the air, and with which Aphrodite bribed Eros, may have prompted the line at the beginning of Exil: "L'astre roué vif sur la pierre du seuil." In view of the poet's denial that the poem alludes to the French Resistance movement, the idea that this star broken on the wheel is restricted to the swastika of Hitler's Germany may be disregarded for the moment. The effect of the image is twofold: the element of torture is apparent, but the association of fire and love underlines the importance of the threshold, mentioned eleven times in the tetralogy. It lies at the critical point between two worlds:

Le seuil est à la fois la borne, la frontière qui distingue et oppose deux mondes, et le lieu paradoxal où ces mondes communiquent.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See Bosquet, p. 105, and E. Noulet, Le Ton dans la poésie de Saint-John Perse (Bruxelles 1969).

<sup>2</sup>Oiseaux, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Mircéa Eliade, Le Sacré et le profane (Paris 1965), p. 24. See § 7 below for a general discussion of the image.

Here these worlds are specifically the Old World which has been and the New World where the Host offers refuge. The image similarly leads both ways.

"Constellations labiles" and "l'hyade pluvieuse" (Exil, IV) are other astronomical terms used in the poem. The latter provides an introduction to the idea of rain from which the second poem will be expanded, but it is the former which is of particular importance for the present theme, since, if labile is taken not only in its obvious astronomical sense but also in relation to the rotation of the zodiacal wheel, one notes the connection traditionally made between the Argo's voyage and the signs of the zodiac: among others, the Ram of Phrixus, the Bulls of Aeëtes, the Dioscuri as the Heavenly Twins, Medea as Virgin, and the Serpent as Scorpion.

The wryneck's habits have further implications for the poems. It hisses, for instance, like a snake, as well as twisting its neck in snake-like fashion, and Exil comes full circle when we read: "aux sables de l'exil sifflent les hautes passions lovées sous le fouet de l'éclair..." Medea's charming of the dragon which guarded the Golden Fleece on its oak is recalled, and a psylla, or snake-charmer, is said in Fluies, II,

to be the Idea dancing at the opening of the poet's sentences guarding against the impatience of the poem. The Idea is essentially that of using the legend of the Golden Fleece as a basic pattern restraining the poet from some indulgence or excess by which he might otherwise be tempted. When in exile, Medea is said to have visited the Marrubians in Libya and taught them her art, and the name Psylli is given to a people living near the coast of Libya--where the Argonauts were stranded at one stage of their journey--off which lies the quicksand of Syrtis Major. Although used in Exil, II, as a common noun, the syrtes are where this "grand poème né de rien" is assembled. The comparison of the sky to a Sahel, the "oiseau de Barbarie" and "ma course de Numide" are further references to the same region.

Another geographical indication, given in the first part of Exil, is Tauris. While one may immediately, and reasonably, think that some reference to the Iphigenia-Crestes story is implied, it should also be noted that some accounts have the Argonauts follow the northern coast of the Black Sea on their homeward journey. That they were following the Amber Route may have prompted the allusion to "l'aile fossile prise au

piège des grandes vèpres d'ambre jaune," especially as it follows straight on from "le pur nautille des eaux libres, le pur mobile de nos songes" (Exil, 1V). The nautilus (Greek ναυτίλος 'sailor') is also known, in French as in English, under its other name of 'Argonaut'. This then is the pure motive of the poet's dream.

Certain other elements in the first poem occur in the Jason tale while not being restricted to it. The propitiation rite which may be taken as an extension of the image of the heat haze above a beach exposed to the fierce glare of the sun in "l'esprit du dieu fumant déserte sa couche d'amiante" may be applied to tales besides that of Jason and his men. Similarly the seizing of the altar's horns may be seen as a ritual task, and therefore assimilated to the labours of Heracles--or of Kilhwych, for that matter--as well as to Jason's grasping of the bulls' horns to yoke them together as part of his ordeal. The main image, giving a clue to the principal meaning of the line, probably lies elsewhere, and will be dealt with in detail later in this chapter. The Sirens are met with on more voyages than this, yet "l'ossuaire des saisons" (I) recalls the bone-heaps these bird-women left after beguiling

unwary sailors. And are not bird-women, this time Harpies, referred to in one of the most opaque passages of Exil?:

Tant de hauteur n'épuisera la rive accore de ton  
 seuil, ô Saisisseur de glaives à l'aurore,  
 O manieur d'aigles par leurs angles, et Nourrisseur  
 des filles les plus aigres sous la plume de fer!

(III)

While the full sense of these versets remains obscure, episodes of the Jason story clarify them to some extent. The Argonauts swore to Apollo of the Dawn never to desert one another in case of danger. Apollo, as Sun-god, grasps the sunbeams at dawn, just as one may seize the blade of a sword to swear faith by it. The handling of eagles could be attributed to the Sons of Boreas, the North Wind, who chased the Harpies from Phineus' wretched home, and the feeding either to that same episode or to the visit of the Argonauts to the Amazons, the Guerrières of Pluies, III. But these elements seem tangential, and a satisfactory solution appears to lie elsewhere.

"La plume de fer" nonetheless brings to mind another moment of the Argonauts' voyage. As they reached the island of Ares, the war-god's birds flocked overhead, attacking them with pointed brazen feathers; but this clearly does not explain

the rest of the image.<sup>1</sup> The relation of "Tant de hauteur

<sup>1</sup>The idea of metallic feathers, sometimes being used for attack, occurs in many literatures, and some references have affinities elsewhere in Perse. In one of the Vedic hymns, for example, Agni, as a sparrow-hawk with golden wings, lets fall a feather producing the plant which gives soma (see Goblet d'Alviella, La Migration des symboles, p. 163). In the Koran, the Ababil birds mentioned in Oiseaux, 12, hurl lethal stones, each marked with its victim's name, against the army of Abraha attacking Mecca (Surah 105, "The Elephant"). But it should also be noted that Mongol horsemen and shamans, in both of whom Perse shows considerable interest, wear something resembling "la plume de fer." "Pour l'action, /les cavaliers mongols/ se revêtaient d'une cuirasse faite de lamelles et d'écaillés de fer, rappelant curieusement le plumage métallique d'oiseau porté par les shamans lors de leurs vaticinations" (Maurice Percheron, Genghis Khan, p. 148). A different light is thrown on the sense however by a sentence in Pour Dante: "Et l'aile acerbe de son génie nous frôlera encore de sa plume de fer..." When compared with the phrase "des filles les plus aigres sous la plume de fer," it will be seen that the concepts cancel out to leave the equation of filles with génie. This could well be another personification of the poetic muse. The military image-pattern suggests the war being waged between the poet and this Amazon Muse, which recalls the imagery of inspiration in Pluies, III: there, the "Guerrières" are "casquées de plume et haut-troussées." The link which Jean-Pierre Richard makes (Onze études..., pp. 42-44) between maigre and masculinity applies by extension to "nos filles /qui/ s'aiguisent sous le casque" (Vents, IV, 5) (where the verb s'aiguiser joins aigre both phonically and through the Greek root ἄκρος). The girls are both slender, like the prince in Amitié du Prince, aigre echoing maigre, and ready for action, "les instigatrices ardentes et court-vêtues de l'action" (Vents, I, 6). The "aigles" may then be taken to be not birds but Roman legionary standards (the reading suggested by Philippe Vandecasteele, "L'Oiseau..." p. 24), and "filles" may be understood as swords, in line with the phrase about a girl which Perse quoted from Cervantes to Pierre Guerre ("Dans une haute maison de mer..." p. 353):

n'épuisera la rive accore de ton seuil" to the other elements of the image is difficult to fathom. It may be that we are looking for too much complexity, and that the "answer" is much simpler: just as the sun holds its beams like swords, it shines on eagles' wings, beak and claws, and so may be said to master them, and also provides nourishment for even the surliest and most ferocious girls. But the gratuitous nature of this is so untypical of Perse that the problem must for the time being remain unsolved.<sup>1</sup>

The introduction of the Sibyls into the poem amplifies these references. In their green grottoes, which are here identified with a bedchamber as is the cave in the Jason story --and it may be recalled that Dido and Aeneas also shared one of these "grottes nuptiales"<sup>2</sup>--the Sibylline Books are counted among "de saintes écritures." In the last poem of the tetralogy the Sibyls enter again, when a whole nation of them is whistled up by the exiled Medea-figure of the Poème à l'Etrangère. Until this final poem, specific reference to the Jason adventure

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"Elle était comme la lame d'une épée sans garde ni poignée, dont on ne sait par où la prendre."

<sup>1</sup>For a further suggestion see below § 7, pp. 201-206.

<sup>2</sup>Aeneid, IV, 165 ff. Argonautica, II, 910.

is restricted to the Phasian Bird. Yet the appendages of mythology are by no means lacking. The Sibyls are obliquely referred to as "Vierges prophétiques," and certain rituals, especially those concerned with rain-making, are detailed. The idea that storms are caused by combing the hair is twice brought forward in Pluies,<sup>1</sup> and the importance of the colour black in sympathy with the black rain-clouds to be found in the mention of the "vierge noire" and "la bête noire."<sup>2</sup>

In the first part of *Keiges* is the splendidly evocative image:

l'aube muette dans sa plume, comme une grande chouette  
fabuleuse en proie aux souffles de l'esprit, enflait son  
corps de dahlia blanc.

Besides being a superb visual image, if one thinks of Medea as the "souffles de l'esprit" which are haunting the poet throughout, this brings to mind that 'owl' in Greek is Glauke (γλαύξ/-κός), and that this name was given to King Creon's daughter who suffered such a painful death at Medea's hands. Another echo

<sup>1</sup>Sir James Frazer, The Golden Bough, III, Taboo and the Perils of the Soul, p. 271.

<sup>2</sup>Frazer, I, The Magic Art, Vol. I, p. 247 ff.

of the Argonauts' adventures is:

Et du côté des eaux premières me retournant avec  
le jour, comme le voyageur, à la néoménie, dont la  
conduite est incertaine et la démarche est aberrante...

(Neiges, IV)

Lynceus, wandering through the Libyan desert, sees Heracles  
on the horizon only to lose sight of him immediately:

As for Heracles, Lynceus thought he saw a lonely  
figure on the verge of that vast land, as a man, when  
the month begins, sees or thinks he sees the new moon  
through the clouds.<sup>1</sup>

Just as in the myth the emphasis shifts from Jason to  
Medea, so the poet exteriorises his own feelings more and more,  
and finally transfers them to the Etrangère. A parallelism  
is evident between the poet and Jason: both were obliged to  
leave their mothers, and try to console them at their departure;<sup>2</sup>  
both suffer only a semi-voluntary exile, glory and the gods  
prompting Jason, circumstances forcing Perse to do what was  
nonetheless inherent in his nature, namely to travel and  
"chanter l'ailleurs." As the myth becomes more personal when

<sup>1</sup>Apollonius Rhodius, IV, 1477 ff. (tr. E. V. Rieu, p. 187).  
Virgil borrows the image for Aeneas discovering Dido in the  
underworld (Aeneid VI, 453-454): "... qualem primo qui surgere  
mense/ Aut videt aut vidisse putat per nubile lunam."

<sup>2</sup>Neiges, III and Apollonius Rhodius, I, 295 ff.

Medea herself suffers exile, after personalities had counted for much less on the actual voyage of the Argonauts, so a personification is presented for the first time in Exil in the character of the foreign woman. Medea may be partially identified with the Etrangère. This may have been the reason for the transfer of the Poème à l'Etrangère from second to last position in the tetralogy, and would certainly lend the poems a unity which otherwise might have seemed somewhat strained.

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So, as with the Book of Exodus, there would appear to be too many echoes of "cestuy-là qui conquit la toison," as another exile wrote, for the tale of the Golden Fleece to be disregarded as an influence on the imagery and overall form of Exil. Both themes persist side by side to broaden the impact of the poems, and support Perse's claim for the universality of their significance. A study of the sentence in Exil, II, "D'autres saisissent dans les temples la corne peinte des autels," will show not only how the two themes may overlap, but also how a correct reading may on occasion be obtained by reference to sources and influences.

Mention has already been made of the idea of a ritual task which has become proverbial: seizing the bull by the horns. Professor Parent has selected an isolated reference in the Psalms (118, 27) and concluded:

Ce geste de supplication est peut-être en rapport avec la situation tragique du monde: mais pour sa part, /le poète/ le refuse.<sup>1</sup>

Neither in this Psalm, however, nor in Exodus or Leviticus where the horns of the altar are mentioned fifteen times, is there any question of seizing hold of them. But in the first Book of Kings, Adonijah and Joab are said in turn to catch hold on the horns of the altar, and the principal motivation in either case is fear:

Adonija eut peur de Salomon; il se leva aussi, s'en alla, et saisit les cornes de l'autel. On vint dire à Salomon: Voici, Adonija a peur du roi Salomon, et il a saisi les cornes de l'autel, en disant: Que le roi Salomon me jure aujourd'hui qu'il ne fera point mourir son serviteur par l'épée! (I Kings 1, 50-51)

And later:

Et Joab se réfugia vers la tente de l'Eternel, et saisit les cornes de l'autel. (I Kings 2, 28)

The meaning deduced by reference to secular sources is

<sup>1</sup> Monique Parent, Saint-John Perse et quelques devanciers (Paris 1960), p. 217.

quite different, but is perhaps worth presenting in some detail since the comparison will show the value of reference to the Bible--beyond a mere tonal echo--for what would appear to be the most reasonable interpretation. The Latin tag usque ad aras, meaning 'to the last extremity,' was particularly used in reference to taking an oath:

Usque ad aras amicus. Your friend even to the horns of the altar--i.e. through thick and thin. In swearing, the ancient Romans held the horns of the altar, and one who did so in testimony of friendship could not break his oath without calling on himself the vengeance of the angry gods.<sup>1</sup>

Cicero, in his Pro Balbo 5, 12, mentions it as a Greek custom; it was clearly a widespread practice, testified in writers as diverse as Plautus (Rudens, V, 2) and Virgil (Aeneid, XII, 201). The phrase has been retained in French, according to both Littré and Robert who give identical definitions, with a considerably changed meaning:

Ami jusqu'aux autels: ami à tout faire, excepté à agir contre la religion, contre la conscience.

In the context of the poem, it is evident that an evocation of fear will make very good sense. The direct contrast of the interior of the temple with the open seascape of the

<sup>1</sup>E. Brewer, Dictionary of Phrase and Fable (London n.d.), art. horns

following line: "Ma gloire est sur les sables!" points to the effect of fear on others, and at the same time proclaims the poet's freedom from fear, from being enclosed or restricted in any sense, and also perhaps from allegiance to the orthodox gods.

The Bible has clearly given rise to other phrases in the work, or else provides an echo which cannot be ignored. In the Old Testament, for instance, one knows of the "mâchoire d'âne" (Exil, II) with which Samson performed such feats of strength (Judges 15, 15-17); of other "dénombrements de peuples en exode" (Exil, III) such as when the exiled Jews return from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 7 and Nehemiah 2); and of similar invocations to humble the mighty that one finds in Pluies, VII, in the Book of Job 12, 15-24:

Il /Dieu/ retient les eaux et tout se dessèche;  
 Il les lâche, et la terre en est dévastée.  
 Il possède la force et la prudence; . . .  
 Il trouble la raison des juges. . . .  
 Il fait tomber les puissants. . . .  
 Il ôte la parole à ceux qui ont de l'assurance; . . .  
 Il verse le mépris sur les grands;  
 Il relâche la ceinture des forts. . . .  
 Il enlève l'intelligence aux chefs des peuples,  
 Il les fait errer dans les déserts sans chemin.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Cf Lao Tzu, Tao te ching, §§ XIX & XX:

These and similar attributes are those which the Rains are conjured to wash away: they are invoked as a power quite as great as God was for Job.<sup>1</sup> The New Testament is recalled by mention of the "changeurs" (Exil, VI) echoing the money-changers of Matthew 21, 12 and Mark 11, 15; by the "pierre roulée sur la bouche des puits" (Pluies, V) reminding one of the stone over Christ's tomb; and by "Moi, je portais l'épongé et le fiel aux blessures d'un vieil arbre chargé des chaînes de la terre" (Pluies, VI) which is a graphic description of the sponge and gall offered Christ on the cross immediately before his death (Matthew 27, 48; Mark 15, 36 and John 19, 29), but into which one may read a number of far-reaching implications. These are by no means all the references to the Bible in the tetralogy, nor have any of the evocations of religious ritual been detailed. For essentially the movement of interest should be away from the particular source reference to the general intention and effect of the poems.

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Exterminate the sage, discard the wise,  
 And the people will benefit a hundredfold;  
 Exterminate benevolence, discard rectitude,  
 And the people will again be filial;  
 Exterminate ingenuity, discard profit,  
 And there will be no more thieves and bandits.

. . . . .

Exterminate learning and there will no longer be worries.

(tr. D. C. Lau, Harmondsworth 1963, pp. 75-76).

<sup>1</sup>See also F. J. Carmody, "Saint-John Perse and several oriental sources" *Comp. Lit. Studies*, 1965, II, 139-143.

There is no need, then, to restrict understanding to a single myth, for the basic urge to create a myth--whether by a subtle interchange of cultures or by a more spontaneous creative process--seems universal, and it is perhaps in this way that Exil may be claimed as "un poème de l'éternité de l'exil dans la condition humaine." Caillois, writing as an anthropologist rather than literary critic, details what he terms "les devoirs de l'exilé" as expressed in yet another community, but which are essentially ideas unrestricted by tribal or political boundaries.<sup>1</sup> If there appear to be more references to the Bible and classical writings than to other mythologies, it is because they are the birthright of our particular community, and so more familiar both to ourselves and to the poet. One's choice of "sources" tends inevitably to reflect one's own limitations rather than reveal much about the poet, and is bound, with however good a will, to be arbitrary.

Such a heritage must nonetheless be integrated into the pattern of immediate circumstances, and in this case this means the United States and exile for a man of the twentieth century.

<sup>1</sup>Caillois, L'Homme et le sacré (Paris 1939), p. 49.

This aspect is perhaps the one dealt with most fully so far by critics, who have added successive explanations of Perse's references to his host country. Caillois rightly insists that however broad the poet's net, his catch is one which actually exists or existed at some time and in some place.<sup>1</sup> A number of critics have in their turn added to the list of actual things explained in their prosaic colours. Similarly it has been shown that, naturally enough, Perse often has his own immediate circumstances in mind. But such raw materials do not in themselves "explain" the poems: they only add to one's respect for the integrity and scope of the poet as a writer and as a man, and perhaps deepen one's appreciation once the details of the references have been fully assimilated and half forgotten. Bachelard wisely wrote: "Il ne faut pas trop vite s'adresser aux constructions de la raison pour comprendre un génie littéraire original."<sup>2</sup> And Perse himself (like Ezra Pound with his view of "Kulchur") denigrates the sort of acquired culture obtained from book-learning in favour

<sup>1</sup>Caillois, Poétique..., pp. 137-152, 191-198.

<sup>2</sup>Bachelard, Psychanalyse du feu (Paris 1949), p. 173.

of a lived and living awareness:

Mon hostilité envers la culture relève . . . de l'homéopathie: je crois qu'elle doit être portée au point extrême où, d'elle-même, elle se récuse, et, ingrate à elle-même, s'annule.<sup>1</sup>

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It would consequently appear to be in accordance with the poet's wishes that attention be shifted from the question of literary sources and influences to other aspects of poetic creation. In the case of Saint-John Perse, there seems to be, as has already been suggested, a predisposition towards the state, both physical and psychological, of exile. It is therefore interesting to find as the first of three epigraphs appended to the first poem published by Perse, "Des Villes sur trois modes,"<sup>2</sup> the following words from the De Trinitate of Hilarius: "Quies inops vitae ipsius exsilium..." SAILLET provides the completed quotation and a translation to which italics have been added to indicate the words selected by Perse:

<sup>1</sup>Perse, "Fragments d'une lettre privée à Archibald MacLeish (1942)," CP, X, 155.

<sup>2</sup>in Pan (Montpellier) No. 4, juillet-août 1908, 189-191 (signed "Saintléger Léger").

... le repos (la quiétude) dépourvu-de-ressources apparaît-à-l'intelligence comme une sorte d'exil de la vie elle-même...<sup>1</sup>

In the earliest poem to remain included in the Ceuvre poétique, the Images à Crusocé, the "Vieil homme remis entre les hommes" speaks of "un exil lumineux" and of "la sueur des sèves en exil." Finding himself at long last among his countrymen again, he cannot help feeling a stranger to all the activity of the town.

Repris par la vie urbaine, il a pourtant plus d'une raison de se réjouir, car la joie est la plus grande richesse qu'il a rapportée de son périple:

... Joie! ô joie déliée dans les hauteurs du ciel!...<sup>2</sup>

Some of the maxims to be found in De Foe's Robinson Crusoe<sup>3</sup> seem singularly relevant to the attitude Perse was to take when he himself suffered exile, and no doubt influenced his ways of thought from his adolescence onwards:

<sup>1</sup>Maurice Saillet, Saint-John Perse, poète de gloire, (Paris 1952), p. 181.

<sup>2</sup>Bosquet, Saint-John Perse, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>See § 27 for Crusoe's departure from his island; §§ 29-30 for his brief stay in England. It is interesting to note that Crusoe's travels are far from over at this stage, due to what De Foe calls "the native propensity to rambling."

He told me that grief was the most senseless insignificant passion in the world, for that it regarded only things past, which were generally impossible to be recalled, or to be remedied, but had no view of things to come, and had no share in anything that looked like deliverance, but rather added to the affliction than proposed a remedy.

(§ 37)

Exile and the desire to travel are two sides of the same medal. This is plainly seen by Perse when he writes of Crusoe:

Le regard fixé au large, tu attendais l'instant du départ, le lever du grand vent qui te descellerait d'un coup.

(Images à Crusoé, "Le livre")

It is similarly clear in the next published poem, Pour fêter une enfance, where we read of "une mer . . . hantée d'invisibles départs." But despite what we might call the "geographical double-take" in these early works, they are essentially static evocations when compared with the development of movement seen increasingly in La Gloire des Rois, Anabase, Vents and Amers. In Arctié du Prince, where the poet is addressed as "Voyageur," the urge to wander is recognised as a "tourment de l'esprit:"

La guerre, la négoce, les règlements de dettes religieuses sont d'ordinaire la cause des déplacements lointains: toi tu te plais aux longs déplacements sans cause. Je connais ce tourment de l'esprit. Je t'enseignerai la source de ton mal.

(III)

Anabase explores the nature and results of this malaise: the

"tourment de l'esprit" is also a "goût de l'âme," and the essential solitude of the man with such a metaphysical and psychological leaning is fully underlined. "Chemins du monde, l'un vous suit" (Anabase, VIII). There is no question of settling for such a man: pleasures are great and real but transitory: "mais par-dessus les actions des hommes sur la terre, beaucoup de signes en voyage..." (Anabase, IX). At no time is the wanderer free of his thoughts of going further:

Terre arable du songe! Qui parle de bâtir? --J'ai vu la terre distribuée en de vastes espaces et ma pensée n'est point distraite du navigateur. (ibid.)

The theme becomes more obvious still in the immense movement of the two great epics, Vents and Amers, the first of which Claudel categorised as "une poésie nourrie par l'espace et à qui il faut de l'espace pour développer."<sup>1</sup> The second has received handsome treatment at the hands of Professor Henry on this very theme.<sup>2</sup>

The Exil tetralogy stands at the crossroads between the poems dealing with the leader-figure, the Prince, and the later

<sup>1</sup>Claudel, "Un poème de Saint-John Perse: Vents", CP, X, 58.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Henry, "Amers" de Saint-John Perse: Une poésie du mouvement (Neuchâtel 1963), passim.

poems where movement stands as a force in its own right. It has the added interest of reflecting a personal experience of capital importance in the life of the poet--and not without its importance in the history of world affairs--one which coincided strangely with a certain predisposition to be elsewhere. Pierre Guerre sees the swing of emphasis over the years in the following terms:

Avant les poèmes d'exil, c'est une errance née de la lassitude du pouvoir ou d'une vocation naturelle. . . . Et dans les plus récents poèmes, cette errance s'élargit en un vaste mouvement, à la mesure de ceux de la nature et de l'histoire:

S'en aller! S'en aller! Parole de vivant!<sup>1</sup>

The same critic can even speak of Perse's "nomadisme frénétique."<sup>2</sup>

Of Exil, Louis-Marcel Raymond writes some lines which stand at the very root of the present study:

Ce poème symbolisait l'exil d'un être de race supérieure, l'exil du Poète, qui restera toujours l'Exilé par excellence.

. . . . .  
Saint-John Perse a voulu seulement rappeler que de tous les exilés par le monde, le poète l'est le plus totalement et le plus absolument.<sup>3</sup>

Elsewhere Raymond makes the general claim: "L'exil est le

<sup>1</sup>Pierre Guerre, Saint-John Perse et l'homme (Paris 1955), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>3</sup>"Humanité de Saint-John Perse," CP, X, 126, 129.

climat réel de la poésie."<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps the extra sensitivity which a poet is rightly or wrongly supposed to possess that makes him more conscious of exile and so increase both the suffering involved and a corresponding capacity for poetry. But it is perhaps this very sensitivity that should make us look further still for the aim of this desire to travel and its associated predisposition to the state of exile.

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Pierre-Jean Jouve suggested that Perse has "le sentiment d'être à toutes choses un étranger,"<sup>2</sup> and states more precisely where he considers the root of the feeling to lie:

En son premier aspect, Exil manifeste la solitude étrangère en dehors d'une guerre, d'une catastrophe du temps. Dans les plans les plus lointains, c'est la solitude comme surgissement intime, et le gouffre de la perdition du moi--qui n'est ni absence mystique, ni frustration érotique, ni macération de mélancolie, mais perdition métaphysique pure. (Italics added).

The last three words are of particular importance, throwing the emphasis away from the immediate concrete world of migrations

<sup>1</sup>Louis-Marcel Raymond, "Lecture de Saint-John Perse," L'Action universitaire (Montréal), Apr. 1948, 21.

<sup>2</sup>Jouve, "Exil," CP, X, 57.

and exiles into the metaphysical realm of a basic yearning to create but not to stagnate, to build but not to develop a servile and comfortable attitude or attachment to one's surroundings. Claudel's article on Vents ends with this searching question:

Dieu est un mot que Saint-John Perse évite, dirai-je religieusement? et que pour un empire il ne laisserait pas sortir de les lèvres. Et cependant, conduit par le soleil au rebours de ce souffle tantôt violent, et tantôt perfide, et tantôt méditatif, qu'allait-il chercher au delà de toute barrière, qu'allait-il demander aux réservoirs de l'Incommensurable?<sup>1</sup>

Perse's letter thanking Claudel for this article is most revealing, and confirms the metaphysical aspect of the attraction for him of l'ailleurs:

Votre geste a remué beaucoup de choses en moi. Mais plus haut que tout ce bienfait littéraire, je pense à tout ce que je dois moralement à votre cœur d'ami. Et où pourrais-je mieux en trouver la mesure que dans la pensée même qui guide votre conclusion? Oui, j'attendais cette conclusion. Elle ne va pas plus loin que mon attente, et n'a rien en elle-même qui puisse rien heurter en moi. Merci du mot "religieusement" que vous avez su insérer là. Il n'est que trop vrai que je dois, scrupuleusement, m'interdire de mésuser d'un mot marqué aujourd'hui d'acception confessionnelle tant que les notions métaphysiques d'absolu, d'éternité ou d'infini ne peuvent rejoindre pour moi la notion morale et personnelle qui est à la base des religions révélées.

<sup>1</sup>Claudel, "Un poème..." CP, X, 67.

La recherche, en toute chose, du "divin," qui a été la tension secrète de toute ma vie païenne, et cette intolérance, en toute chose, de la limite humaine qui continue de croître en moi comme un cancer, ne sauraient m'habiliter à rien de plus qu'à mon aspiration. Vous seul, sans doute, pouviez saisir, dans mon poème, la portée de cette "Mer au-dessus de la mer" qui tend toujours plus loin ma ligne d'horizon.<sup>1</sup> (Italics added).

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There is no doubt that in certain circumstances and in a limited way allusion to other writings can throw light on Perse's work. By reference and inference he also shows his particular sympathy with those literary figures whom he feels to have shared his sense of exile. But to attempt to see his poetry solely in terms of literary antecedents would be to limit an appreciation of Perse's own contribution, even when one sees how thoroughly assimilated and tranformed those sources are. It is tendentious and restrictive to see any one facet of a diamond without relating it both to the other facets and, it might be added, to the carbon of which it is composed. Any

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated 7 Jan. 1950 in Claudel, Oeuvres en prose, pp. 1482-83. As Claudel's letters to Perse were mostly lost, M. Leger is not prepared at this stage to allow his other letters, kept at Claudel's house in Paris, to be consulted. The same is true of the correspondence with Gide held in the Fonds Doucet of the Bibliothèque Ste.-Geneviève.

restriction of the breadth of significance in the tetralogy, whether to the immediate political circumstances of a transatlantic exile, to the exploration of the host country by the poet, or to the private anguish of a son must necessarily falsify the true total picture. No appreciation can possibly remain at a consideration of "levels of meaning" in a set of poems where the complex textures of both language and imagery interplay so closely. The private, the political, the geographic, the historical, the mythological and the spiritual cannot be untwined, and any attempt is both abortive and prejudicial. The "complete consort dancing together" seems to demand both an awareness of the facts and an immediate forgetting of the facts in the interest of the poetry as a value in itself.

As vague a term as "poetry as a value in itself" however, bending to all the subjective interpretations imaginable, is unsatisfactory unless qualified by a close study of the words and methods used by Perse to translate the real world into poetry. Ultimately the words on the printed page must stand alone or not at all. Not for Perse the would-be "explanatory" notes of an Eliot, nor the narcissistic cult of the man behind the words, where misplaced vanity takes the place of a just

pride. Perse has avoided the hall of mirrors in which so many writers have enjoyed distorting their features. His assumption of a pseudonym could be, indeed has been considered as a form both of escapism and of narcissism. The poet's answer is clear:

Je peux vous dire que mon pseudonyme a été choisi uniquement pour me permettre un dédoublement de ma personnalité, un dédoublement que je crois indispensable pour un poète qui est engagé en même temps dans une activité publique.<sup>1</sup>

In this clear-headed organisation of his own life, he reflects the sense of precision so evident in his poetry.

In all respects, the gateway to the abstract is the concrete, to the metaphysical the physical, to the possible the actual, and the concrete, the physical, the actual acquire in consequence paramount importance in Perse's poetry. "Le réel singulier se présente comme un au-delà de l'imaginable."<sup>2</sup> The poet himself has made a crucial statement in this respect, one to be borne in mind throughout this study and which largely defines his very concept of poetry:

<sup>1</sup>New York Times, 27 Oct. 1960, p. 18, quoted in Jacques Courrent, "Autour d'un pseudonyme: Saint-John Perse," Vie et langage, No. 110, mai 1961, 278-9.

<sup>2</sup>Bachelard, L'Eau et les rêves (Paris 1964), p. 139

Le poète a parfaitement le droit, et même le devoir, d'aller explorer les domaines les plus obscurs, mais plus il va loin dans cette direction, plus il doit user de moyens d'expression concrets. Aussi loin qu'il pénètre dans l'au-delà irrationnel ou mystique, il est tenu de s'exprimer par des moyens réels, même tirés de sa vie expérimentale. Gardez votre emprise au sol et bâtissez avec tout cela une œuvre hors du temps, hors du lieu, édiflée dans cette récréation.<sup>1</sup>

The notion of exile in the poems should therefore be seen through the images and against a background of the poet's own experiences.

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<sup>1</sup>Perse, quoted by Nazars, "Une journée..."

§ 4

SOLITUDE

Numquam minus solum esse  
quam cum solus esset...

Cicero

(De re publica, I, 17)

Just as there is little need in Perse's case to look for literary sources for his work, so one should not presume, as Jacques Rivière did when first meeting Leger in Bordeaux,<sup>1</sup> that his farouche aloofness was a pose. The young student already had a volonté de solitude which was never to desert him. He had already begun the long dialogue of a man by himself which was to continue between quotation marks in so many of his poems. Hannah Arendt, in a penetrating analysis of solitude, declares: "All thinking, strictly speaking, is done in solitude and is a dialogue between me and myself."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Il était là dans un fauteuil, silencieux, refusant un sourire aux finesses de Frizeau, d'un mutisme presque insolent. . . . Il m'irrite." (Quoted in Honneur..., p. 603).

<sup>2</sup>The Origins of Totalitarianism (London 1958), p. 476. Cf "Je suis seul, donc nous sommes quatre," Gaston Bachelard, La Poétique de la rêverie (Paris 1960), p. 70. Durand's interpretation of Bachelard's remark is equally apposite: "Ce que révèle l'ambiguïté même du symbole et celle de la pensée qui projette des signifiants, c'est que nous ne sommes jamais seuls. L'immanence de notre rêverie suscite comme une animation dialoguée de l'âme solitaire: l'anima se lève alors face à l'animus, et la conscience rêvante devient couple, devient étreinte d'images, dialogue parfaitement accordé. Cette ouverture, cette amplification intérieure de la conscience rêvante, lui interdit l'aliénation comme le solipsisme. La dialectique intérieure à la rêverie dialoguée rééquilibre sans cesse son humanité, et comme par une sorte de pilotage automatique, ramène sans cesse la connaissance à la problématique de la condition humaine." (Gilbert Durand, L'Imagination symbolique (Paris 1964), pp. 76-77).

This two-in-one process requires the unity of communication, a single voice, for completion and consummation. Solitude thereby becomes a positive and creative state.

Le drame profond de Saint-John Perse, comme celui de l'Homme, c'est la solitude. Solitude par inclination --hauteur et inaccoutumance--solitude du chef, extranéité du voyageur, solitude amère de l'exilé et du nomade.

Cependant la solitude est un état dans lequel l'homme s'interroge, se révisé et se fortifie, où il trouve des raisons nouvelles et un regain de qualité. Paradoxalement presque, la solitude est créatrice.<sup>1</sup>

Loneliness is quite different: it is negative and non-productive, Verlaine's "la solitude où s'écœure le cœur." "Lonely is not the same as being alone."<sup>2</sup> Professor Arendt paraphrases the ideas of Epictetus on the difference thus:

The lonely man (eremos) finds himself surrounded by others with whom he cannot establish contact or to whose hostility he is exposed. The solitary man, on the contrary, is alone and therefore "can be together with himself" since men have the capacity of "talking with themselves." In solitude, in other words, I am "by myself," together with my self, and therefore two-in-one, whereas in loneliness I am actually one,

<sup>1</sup>Pierre Guerre, S.-J. Perse et l'homme (Paris 1955), p. 44. Robert Graves envisages only the first stage of a complex process when he writes "Solitude sobers only." ("To Walk on Hills" in Poems selected by himself (Harmondsworth 1961), p. 104.)

<sup>2</sup>R. D. Laing, The Divided Self (Harmondsworth 1965), p. 122.

deserted by all others.<sup>1</sup>

The failure to communicate by a lonely person clearly has little to do with the Romantics' "bliss of solitude." Lamartine himself recognised the duality inherent in isolation in the opening lines of his meditation on "La Solitude:"

Heureux qui . . .  
 Efface, encore vivant, ses traces sur la terre,  
 Et dans la solitude enfin enseveli,  
 Se nourrit d'espérance et s'abreuve d'oubli!

The poles of hope and oblivion are bleak, however, beside Perse's approach, which Saillet sees as "ces deux solitudes, . . . l'isolement voulu de l'auteur et l'isolation naturelle de sa veine lyrique."<sup>2</sup> If one interprets "bourgeois" as "false" or "bad"--quite legitimate in the communistic jargon of the 1930s when it was written--this notion from Caudwell's Illusion and Reality is seen to link social and artistic sterility in loneliness:

The bourgeois poet . . . finds the loneliness which is the condition of his freedom unendurable and coercive.

<sup>1</sup>Arendt, op. cit., p. 476, and see Epictetus, Dissertationes Book III, § 13.

<sup>2</sup>Maurice Saillet, Saint-John Perse, poète de gloire (Paris 1952), p. 15.

He finds more and more of his experience of the earth and the universe unfriendly and a restraint on his freedom. He ejects everything social from his soul, and finds that it deflates, leaving him petty, empty and insecure.<sup>1</sup>

The immediate contrast of this with the richness of Perse's solitude is striking.

Because an artist's solitude presupposes creative communication, it presupposes an audience. Goethe's idea that "we escape the world through art, and art is also our link with it"<sup>2</sup> has been echoed by Caudwell's view of "that paradox of art" as "man withdrawing from his fellows into the world of art, only to enter more closely into communion with humanity."<sup>3</sup> Perse says much the same (and of course it can be applied by implication to himself) of Léon-Paul Fargue: "Sa part de solitude humaine fut moins un fait d'insularité

<sup>1</sup>Illusion and Reality (New edn. London 1946), p. 61.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted by C. Day Lewis, The Poetic Image (London 1947), p. 144.

<sup>3</sup>Op. cit., p. 28. The idea is of course not specifically communist, but it is nonetheless surprising to find Roger Garaudy, the secretary of the French communist party, applying a Marxist attitude to a criticism of Perse's work and by no means stinting his praise. See D'un réalisme sans rivages (Paris 1963), pp. 117-149.

que de communauté."<sup>1</sup> Other people are "represented in the self with whom I lead the dialogue of thought."<sup>2</sup> With some people it may be supposed that this incarnation of society in the self provides an adequate foil for the thought-processes. In others the full identity of the self is only restored by renewed contact with their fellow-men, "companionship . . . saves them from the dialogue of thought in which one remains always equivocal."<sup>3</sup> If this dialogue presupposes communication through society, a prerequisite for its existence and continuance is a form of seclusion from society, solitude. Yet if the cycle is not completed, solitude assumes its unfulfilled form, loneliness. "So the negative cult is in one sense a means in view of an end: it is a condition of access to the positive cult."<sup>4</sup> Durkheim's basic classification of forms of abstinence and renunciation holds true as a dialectical movement for the solitude of the artist. The nature of communication and

<sup>1</sup>Perse, "Léon-Paul Fargue, poète" in Léon-Paul Fargue, Poésies (Paris 1963), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Arendt, op. cit., p. 476.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Emile Durkheim (tr. J. Swain), The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (London 1964), p. 309.

and companionship is nonetheless going to differ from person to person, and--because there is always a subtle shuttling between solitude and loneliness--from moment to moment.

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From Perse's earliest extant poems a fascination with solitude is evident, and a sympathy expressed for the lonely man. A precise distinction is drawn between the two major types of isolation in Images à Crusoé: nostalgia--"non d'un passé mais d'un ailleurs" (as Perse was later to say of Larbaud)<sup>1</sup>--nostalgia for his island home suggests a hankering for the fruitful solitude. Crusoe in London and Leger in Bordeaux were felt by the young poet to share the sterility of loneliness sensed most poignantly in the city. And this sense was heightened by the sheer contrast of the memory. "L'âme robinsonnesque"--to use Laforgue's eloquent if inelegant term--depicted in Images à Crusoé is writing its autobiography. Through the choice of a completely parallel set of circumstances and reactions to them in the persona of Crusoe, Perse barely hides his own feelings as he dreams of his native island,

<sup>1</sup>"Message pour Valery Larbaud" in Cahiers de la Pléiade, XIII, automne 1951-printemps 1952, 14.

looking metaphorically back from Bordeaux across some three thousand miles of open sea. The pictures, like magic-lantern slides, come to life for the spectator. After an introductory poem setting the scene, showing Defoe's character at the close of the book, as it were in a postscript, the bare wall in front of him becomes the screen for his projections and for those of the poet. "Ce Robinson voit sur l'écran de la solitude."<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the closing poem, still staring at "le pan de mur d'en face," the old man back among men admits failure in trying to recapture "l'éblouissement perdu" and turns blankly to his Bible, his focus blurring as he stares into the distance waiting for revelations and a new departure.

Underpinning the antithesis between the paradise lost and the city, each poem opposes the two. "Les Cloches" hinges its diptych on the words "O Dépouillé!" "Le Mur" shows Crusoe leaning against the greasy wing of his armchair watching the wall for images of his past to appear, and so introduces an important image pattern into the poems. The greasy chair-covering invades even his mouth with its sour impurity: "le

<sup>1</sup>Paul Valéry, "Histoires brisées: Robinson" in Oeuvres (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), II, 416.

goût des graisses et des sauces infecte tes gencives." These are not the pure fats and oils either of Crusoe's or of the poet's island.<sup>1</sup> There is nothing impure or insipid about them in his recollection:

... C'est la sueur des sèves en exil, le suint amer  
des plantes à siliques, l'âcre insinuation des mangliers  
charnus et l'acide bonheur d'une substance noire dans  
les gousses. ("Le Mur")

The positive delight, negated by the city, belongs to the days before solitude had suffered a sea change and veered to loneliness: fat and grease can be splendid until debased by the town:

le coco . . .  
détourne du dalot  
la splendeur des eaux pourpres lamées de graisses  
et d'urines, où trame le savon comme de la toile  
d'araignée. (Eloges, XIII)

The Queen in the "Récitation à l'éloge d'une Reine," which also dates from 1908, is a "Reine parfaitement grasse," is the "Haut asile des graisses vers qui cheminent les désirs/ d'un peuple de guerriers muets avaleurs de salive." Both through her position as Queen and as archetypal woman, highly charged with

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Pierre Richard, in Onze études sur la poésie moderne, p. 32 ff, indicates the images of viscosity in Ferse's early work, but concludes that the poet suffers from a "nausée du gras" (p. 42) and fails to differentiate between natural oils and city grease.

sensuality, her political and sensual functions overlapping, she holds aloof: "Ha Nécessaire! et Seule!..." Her very solitude is a guarantee of the purity of her fat.

again in "La Ville" oiliness found in the city is equated with sweat and filth; the purity is gone:

Graisses!  
 Odeur des hommes pressés, comme d'un abattoir fade!  
 aigres corps des femmes sous les jupes!  
 O Ville sur le ciel!  
 Graisses! haleines reprises, et la fumée d'un peuple  
 très suspect -- car toute ville ceint l'ordure.  
 . . . . .  
 -- La Ville par le fleuve coule à la mer comme un  
 abcès...

A sudden switch to the island evokes as suddenly the idea of creative solitude, applied this time to the stars: "le silence multipliera l'exclamation les astres solitaires." And again the fatty substances are restored to their purity and positive value:

Tout est salé, tout est visqueux et lourd comme la  
 vie des plumes.  
 L'oiseau se berce dans sa plume sous un rêve huileux;  
 . . . . .  
 L'île s'endort au cirque des eaux vastes, lavée des  
 courants chauds et des laitances grasses, dans la  
 fréquentation des vases somptueuses. ("La Ville")

"Vendredi" again indicates the debasement of oils: "près de l'homme taciturne," near Crusoe silent in his island solitude, Man Friday still had the bloom on his skin which negroes lose

when they desert the tropical sun. Now his moral rectitude has also gone:

Tu bois l'huile des lampes et voles au garde-manger; tu convoites les jupes de la cuisinière qui est grasse et qui sent le poisson. (Italics added).

Debasement and dereliction are seen through Crusoe's parrot suffering sadly from psittacosis, the goatskin parasol gathering dust in the attic, the bow which splits along its length for lack of atmospheric humidity, and the seed which fails to germinate. The original version of "La Graine" had drawn a specific moral. The first text reads:

Dans un pot tu l'as enfouie, la graine de gambeau demeurée à ton habit de chèvre. -- Elle n'est pas "sortie."

Ainsi pourrit le germe de ta dernière vision enfouie.<sup>1</sup>

Even the Bible to which Crusoe finally turns, as he had done so often during his "exil lumineux," provides no consolation.

... Ne me laisserez-vous que cette confusion du soir -- après que vous m'ayez, un si long jour, nourri du sel de votre solitude, témoin de vos silences, de votre ombre et de vos grands éclats de voix? ("Le Livre")

\*

In an image which would no doubt appeal to Perse,

<sup>1</sup>NRF, août 1909, 28.

Baudelaire, who had a "sentiment de solitude, dès [son] enfance, . . . sentiment de destinée éternellement solitaire,"<sup>1</sup> wrote:

Grand délice que celui de noyer son regard dans l'immensité du ciel et de la mer! Solitude, silence, incomparable chasteté de l'azur! une petite voile frissonnante à l'horizon, et qui par sa petitesse et son isolement imite mon irrémédiable existence, mélodie monotone de la houle...<sup>2</sup>

The essential difference between the two poets is that while Baudelaire had a landsman's vision of the sea, looking out at an image of his solitude, Perse, an expert yachtsman, lives his solitude, making a landfall only when he wishes. "Like a 'wave of absence' throughout the entire poetic work of Saint-John Perse runs an affirmation of voluntary solitude."<sup>3</sup> This means that escapism is reduced to a minimum, and that his life is conducted--and orchestrated--according to his own will. "La volonté aussi est une solitude."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mon cœur mis à nu, XII, in Oeuvres complètes (Bibl. de la Pléiade), p. 1210.

<sup>2</sup> Le "Confiteor" de l'artiste, ibid., p. 284.

<sup>3</sup> Eugenia Vassylkivsky, "The Main Themes of Saint-John Perse," unpublished thesis, Columbia Univ., 1964 (ref. 64-9911), p. 131.

<sup>4</sup> Albert Camus, Carnets (Paris 1962), p. 235.

Perse's very strict ordering of his own life, evident from an early age, indicates an iron will-power--as well as its half-brother wilfulness--wanting to master the data of the human condition. Certain passages in his letters to Valery Larbaud now housed at Vichy make Leger's organisation of his own life abundantly clear. One, dating probably from June or July 1910 and sent from Pau, tells how he had devoted two years of his life to making a complete recovery after a serious illness, presumably caused by the incident recorded by Charpier: "Echappe de peu à une mort solitaire en voulant traverser à la nage un lac de montagne (lac d'Estaens)."<sup>1</sup> Another regrets the inevitable lack of control over certain areas of his life,<sup>2</sup> and a third, written after his success in the quai d'Orsay examination, expresses satisfaction that his "mise de volonté" had been rewarded.<sup>3</sup> If the solitude is willed, however, so is the attempt to communicate.

<sup>1</sup>Saint-John Perse, p. 32

<sup>2</sup>Dated Pau, 17 octobre 1911.

<sup>3</sup>Dated Paris, 29 Mai XIV. The three letters referred to here are numbers S 28, S 4 and S 13 respectively in the Vichy collection, housed at the Bibliothèque municipale. M. Leger does not wish any part of them to be reproduced at this stage.

If, for normal social purposes, the effort of communication stemming from our solitude proves adequate, it is no less true that solitude is an integral part of our being, and that expression can take forms other than poetry or everyday speech.

... Man is essentially a solitary being. He is also of course an essentially social being. The life that we know could not be conceived without relations with others, mediated though they must be. The mediation is so unobtrusive that we are not usually aware of it and only sophisticated people reflect upon it. We can therefore have extremely close and intimate relationships, and the solitary aspect of human experience is thus not always obtrusive. But it is never absent. Nothing can eliminate it, for it is an essential characteristic of finite experience as such. This is what ultimately lies behind such expressions as "the flight of the alone to the Alone" or the oft-quoted, and rarely understood, definition of religion as "what a man does with his solitude."

Aloneness in this sense is apt to be made obtrusive by loneliness in the ordinary sense. When relations with others are slight or have been cut off, a person is thrown much on his own resources and apt to be driven in on himself. He becomes in this way more conscious also of the special inwardness which characterises all finite experience as such and which is made more explicit for us in some situations, very often the situations which impress on us also the irrevocable character of external events and those features of our environment which most resist moulding to our own desires. Realism and proper subjectivity go together more often, and more naturally, than is usually appreciated.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>H. D. Lewis, "The Idea of Creation and Concepts of Salvation" in The Saviour God (Manchester 1963), pp. 107-108.

The importance of this concept, and particularly that expressed in the closing sentence, for a study of Perse cannot be overstressed. Realism, in the poet's terms "le monde entier des choses," goes hand in hand with a "proper subjectivity." This is truly religious, "what a man does with his solitude," outside the sectarian or doctrinaire bounds of any particular denomination. The letter Perse wrote to Claudel thanking him for his article on Vents<sup>1</sup> shows that he is well aware of the distinction, and embraces the broader term while rejecting its restricted application.

The very recognition of the metaphysical presents a further mode of isolation. "Higher consciousness, or knowledge going beyond what we are conscious of at the moment, is the equivalent of being all alone in the world. The loneliness expresses the conflict between the bearer or symbol of higher consciousness and his surroundings."<sup>2</sup> But as Perse is a poet not a mystic, and keeps abstractions at bay despite the

<sup>1</sup>in Claudel, Oeuvres en prose (Bibl. de la Pléiade), pp. 1482-83, and see above p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>C. G. Jung, "The Special Phenomenology of the Child Archetype" in Jung and Kerényi, Introduction to a Science of Mythology (London 1951), p. 122.

temptations, it would be as well to return to an analysis of his presentation of the idea of solitude through character, situation, and image. The pattern traced in the solitary figures presented, whether Conqueror, Leader, Stranger, Explorer or Artist, shows clearly against the vast expanses of desert, sea or sky. The attractions of unworldly asceticism are curbed and brought squarely back into the concrete world of image and personification. Metaphysical speculations are reined in and the real experience used to express their fascination.

Et à celui qui chevauchait en Ouest, une invincible main renverse le col de sa monture, et lui remet la tête en Est. "Qu'allais-tu désertter là?..."

(Vents, IV, 3)

\*

If the cycle of Images à Crusocé presents both loneliness and solitude side by side, Eloges, picturing only "la corbeille antillaise," understandably concentrates on the latter. In the positive world of the poet's childhood, solitude assumes a quality of dignified self-reliance side by side with one of human adventure. The first aspect, static, is seen through the virtues of silence and aloofness, the second, dynamic, through the desire to explore, here simply to travel,

suggested by images of harbour and sea. Crusoe had been depicted as "l'homme taciturne;" the planter of "Ecrit sur la porte" has his daughter bring "de l'eau pure pour rincer mes dents de silencieux." Fusing the human animals with other beasts, each sharing the other's qualities, the poet recalls, in Pour fêter une enfance, that "alors, de se nourrir comme nous de racines, de grandes bêtes taciturnes s'ennoblissaient." In Images à Crusocé, again to point the contrast, silence was attributed only to life on the island: the town's bustle, in destroying silence, also turned solitude into loneliness.

Crusocé! -- ce soir près de ton île . . . le silence  
multipliera l'exclamation des astres solitaires.

("La Ville")

Addressing his God, Robinson Crusoe remembers that he had been "nourri du sel de votre solitude,/ témoin de vos silences." The importance of the image of salt linked with the notion of solitude is to be taken to its full extent in Anabase. The ambivalence of salt, bitter but necessary for life, is presented in the early poems as the constant shuttling between isolation and communion similar to the equivocal position of the Orphan God as seen by Kerényi, who recognises "the

solitariness of the child-god, and the fact that he is nevertheless at home in the primeval world."<sup>1</sup>

The static and dynamic elements of solitude are combined in the man evoked in Eloges, III:

Sois un homme aux yeux calmes qui rit,  
silencieux qui rit sous l'aile calme du sourcil,  
perfection du vol.

The slow-moving dignity of life in the Caribbean, likewise seen in the opening section of Pour fêter une enfance, is here taken through an exquisite series of transitions from stillness to movement. The eyebrows arching over calm eyes and a smile bring to mind the arching curve of a sea-bird's wing. In time and space the traveller's yarns invite the child to travel:

il fait retour aux choses qu'il a vues, empruntant  
les chemins de la mer frauduleuse... et du bord immobile  
du cil

il nous a fait plus d'une promesse d'îles,  
comme celui qui a dit à un plus jeune: "Tu verras!"

(Eloges, III)

The highly perceptive envoi serves to link such a man with another champion of silence and adventure to whom Perse will return in later poems either in different guises as leader or, as here, as the ship's captain:

<sup>1</sup>C. Kerényi, "The Orphan God" in Jung and Kerényi, op. cit., p. 39.

Et c'est lui qui s'entend avec le maître du navire.

\*

Here, as for instance in Elores, IX, one see the immense attraction of sailing for a man with a propensity for solitude. It is an exhilaration equalled on land only perhaps by horse-riding, another of Perse's great joys, and had he belonged to a slightly later generation or had a technical upbringing he would no doubt have taken up gliding, their aerial equivalent. All three combine solitude and movement, self-reliance and relaxation (the resultant forces being greater than the physical effort required, this movement being mediated by mechanical motive power of various kinds). He can scarcely have failed to be excited by the early years of aviation, in which his home town Pau played such an important part. Side by side with some of his own articles on the town's artistic activities on the front page of the Pau-Gazette came news of the men on their flying-machines,<sup>1</sup> men like the Wright brothers and Blériot whose names loom large in the history of aviation and who made their trial flights over the landes outside the

<sup>1</sup>See e.g. Pau-Gazette, 28 mars 1909, a few months before Blériot's channel crossing. All Perse's Pau-Gazette articles may be found in Appendix B below.

town. According to Charpier,<sup>1</sup> Leger made Wilbur Wright's acquaintance after greeting his experiments enthusiastically. Perhaps the early machines lacked the ease and grace of sailing or riding, the calm which is the keynote of the remembered island:

Il fait si calme et puis si tiède,  
il fait si continuel aussi.

(Eloges, V)

The "solitudes molles du matin," the "solitudes vertes du matin," are those of peace and paradise, of aisance and douceur.

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The radical difference between these values and those of the city, providing the tension of Images à Crusoé, is tackled and in part resolved during a decade which has apparently left no poems in Perse's published works, the years 1911-21. There is of course no reason to suppose that Perse stopped writing poetry during the gaps in publication. On the contrary, certain scraps of evidence indicate that only his scruples prevented him from allowing the publication of

<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., p. 34.

several works.<sup>1</sup> After a spate of literary activity producing all the poems which figure in the 1911 volume of Eloges which Gide had printed to atone for the many errors of the original NRF publication in review,<sup>2</sup> there is silence until the appearance of the first Chanson of Anabase in the NRF of April 1922. A new wave of publication ensued, giving the new poems of La Gloire des Rois and Anabase, followed by a further break, imposed by Perse, after 1925. No reprinting of these poems was allowed until 1945, although the new sequence of Exil made its appearance from 1942 onwards. Perse's conscious ordering of his life, and a stern sense of duty and honour, explain both periods of reticence. The first followed the completion of his law studies at Bordeaux and coincides with the efforts he was obliged to make against considerable odds, particularly financial, to achieve his ambition to enter the diplomatic corps, and with his early years in the foreign service.

<sup>1</sup>e.g. the letter from André Gide of 1913 reprinted in Honneur..., p. 611: "La joie que m'apporte hier soir votre lettre, c'est de m'annoncer de nouveaux poèmes."

<sup>2</sup>The 1911 volume includes Pour fêter une enfance, "Ecrit sur la porte," Récitation à l'éloge d'une Reine and nineteen Eloges, the third of which is to become the "Histoire du Régent" in the Oeuvre poétique.

Encouraged by Claudel, he decided on a career only after long consultation and heart-searching. Although still frequenting literary milieux on both sides of the Channel, and corresponding with literary friends, he set his sights on passing the "concours des Affaires étrangères" in April 1914. His travels in Spain, Germany and England were prompted by his requirement to study international affairs, but he clearly let no opportunity slip of pursuing his many other "amateur" interests: ornithology, botany, sailing, riding, poetry and so on. Unlikely as it may seem with a person of so alert and interested a disposition, Perse was at times bored and depressed by the approaching competitive examination, as he confessed to Larbaud in a letter of 28 November, 1913.<sup>1</sup> Once installed at the Quai d'Orsay, political events can have left little time for writing and even for maintaining friendships: learning a new job is always time- and energy-consuming, and Perse wanted, as in everything, to do the job thoroughly. The outbreak of war in August 1914 saw him attached to Delcassé's ministry on press relations, moved with the government to Bordeaux and then back to Paris. At Bordeaux, Claudel handed him the newly-completed manuscript of Le Pain

<sup>1</sup>He speaks of his "tristesse de goujat" and wanting to slough his ennui (letter S 12 in the Vichy collection).

dur which Perse told the present writer prompted his own philosophical drama, lost when his flat was ransacked by the Gestapo in 1940. Of the other papers lost at that time, there were five completed poems and a méditation besides the play, but little is known of them. Some poems are mentioned in a letter to Larbaud dated 13 October 1923,<sup>1</sup> but the reference is perhaps to Amitié du Prince and the "Chanson du Présomptif," almost certainly written in China along with Anabase, and included in La Gloire des Rois. The third inédit mentioned in the letter is more problematical and may be one of the lost poems. But many more manuscripts were lost if Perse's own account of meeting his literary friends on returning from the Far East has been correctly reported by Pierre Mazars:

J'ai ouvert une cantine pleine de manuscrits.  
Alors Larbaud, avec son gros visage concupiscent, a  
pris les manuscrits à pleines mains en s'écriant:  
"What a grasp!"<sup>2</sup>

The impression given in the interview with Mazars that

<sup>1</sup>Letter S 17. Perse writes of three unpublished poems he proposes to present with the first edition of Anabase, specifying his requirements of large format and "une belle et pleine italique."

<sup>2</sup>Professor Knodel's account of the incident (Saint-John Perse, p. 38), apparently authenticated by M. Leger, differs in some details.

Perse was averse to publication of any sort is dispelled by the correspondence with Larbaud: he would only allow publication on his own terms. There is no reason, however, to doubt the poet's word that it was his public office which gave him such scruples about appearing in print as a poet, and which made him decide to take a pseudonym.<sup>1</sup> Where the pen-name came from is obscure and unimportant; Perse has kept silent on the matter other than to indicate the necessity of dédoublement, and it would be merely perverse to follow an unlit trail. Whether the christian name derived from a Caribbean island or some Anglo-Saxon writer seems as immaterial as whether the surname was chosen for its echo of Persia, Persius or both. What is important is that the name provided yet another mask for the poet, yet another willed solitude.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>If the attribution to Perse of "Le 'représentant du Midi'" (Le Feu, No. 91, nov. 1912, 1210-12, reproduced as Appendix C below, pp. 360-363) is correct, and he was prepared, before his entry into public service, to bandy words with Jean Aicard, weight is added to his argument.

<sup>2</sup>Courrent ("Autour d'un pseudonyme..." loc. cit.) invokes the nineteenth century travel writer Percy Saint-John. Renato Poggioli proposes Saint John the Baptist and Persius, a "voice in the wilderness" and a random 'favourite author' (Yale French Studies, I, 2, 1948, 5). For the present study of a man 'by himself' the Latin per se could be invoked with as much point.

His very choice of a career was in itself a recognition in practical terms of a desire for solitude, the kind of solitude which implies a deep involvement in human affairs without impinging on the individual's liberty. Diplomacy is an extended form of politeness, a virtue on which Perse sets considerable store. The fixed formulae of politeness, of diplomacy and of all forms of ceremonial provide the most satisfactory forms of relationship between people and peoples who for one reason or another stop short of friendship or love, where a more intimate contribution is demanded. Perse's attachment to hieratical and hierarchical ceremony, matched by the stately splendour of his rhythms, indicated among other things that he places a high value on his complete freedom of action in private life. His diplomatic career in China had afforded him both the privacy and the adventure. From his poetic record of the experience, in the Chanson du Présomptif, Amitié du Prince and principally in Anabase, can be seen the development of Perse's view of solitude, and the stress shifting from the static to the dynamic to produce the quality of stillness-in-movement.

The Chanson du Présomptif first appeared in the winter 1924 issue of Commerce along with Perse's adaptation of T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men." It therefore postdated by a couple of years the appearance of the parenthesising Chansons from Anabase, and Amitié du Prince and the central sections of Anabase by a few months. But being the shortest of the group it may usefully be treated briefly before the others.

Like the two Chansons from Anabase, it has three stanzas of some half a dozen lines each. Unlike the other Chansons, however, it has a free-verse rather than a prose presentation, reminiscent of the earlier poems rather than heralding the later style. Yet despite its brevity it has a wealth of suggestion through imagery which was to demand expansion into a larger work. One senses the solitude of the Heir-Presumptive without its being made explicit. By mentioning their presence, he associates with the thinker, or dreamer, the sailor and the rider:

Et l'un parle à ma droite dans le bruit de son âme,  
et l'autre monte les vaisseaux,  
le Cavalier s'appuie de sa lance pour boire.

The temptation of both dreaming and the sea of unseen departures is present: "l'homme marche dans les songes et s'achemine vers la mer." The final stanza brilliantly effects the conjunction

of the familiar with the taste for departure. The Heir calls his dogs to him, dismisses as of little value "la maison chargée d'honneurs," and ends: "tous les chemins du monde nous mangent dans la main!" Adventure is familiarised through a single substitution: the earlier line, "Chiens, ho! mes chiens, nous vous sifflons..." provides the image of an animal eating out of his hand. The switch from chiens to chemins reveals a verbal and notional awareness which is the hallmark of Perse's mature style. Saillet speaks well of "ce don de poésie, qui se confond avec sa vocation de solitude."<sup>1</sup>

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What Amitié du Prince adds is stamina, the first real indication of the poetic stamina which increases steadily from Anabase to Amers.<sup>2</sup> The Prince's function, like the Queen's in Récitation à l'éloge d'une Reine, is simply to be present; again the solitude of great men may take a static or dynamic form.

Tu peux te taire parmi nous, si c'est là ton  
humeur; ou décider encore que tu vas seul, si c'est  
là ton humeur: on ne te demande que d'être là!

(I)

<sup>1</sup>Saint-John Perse..., p. 21.

<sup>2</sup>Anabase was in fact written considerably before Amitié du Prince according to the poet (see Knodel, p. 185, n. 2).

The notion that a fuller understanding between two solitary men, the Poet and the Prince, can be cemented in silence is explicitly stated in an otherwise strange oxymoron: "J'ai des présents pour lui et plus d'un mot silencieux." The letter received by the poet, "ami du Prince taciturne," contains the line: "Mais d'une race à l'autre la route est longue; et j'ai moi-même affaire ailleurs" (III). Yet even if his duties call him elsewhere, the Prince is always present: the function is separable from the person to give continuity. It is a kind of geographical equivalent to "The King is dead; long live the King!" "The Prince is absent; here stands the Prince!" His government is through his own acquisition of wisdom, of stillness as a positive value, rather than through force or tyranny.<sup>1</sup> The poem juxtaposes a general concept of East and West in a confrontation which is all to the honour of the former.

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If Amitié du Prince represents the meeting of western

<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of stillness see Vassylkivsky, passim, and Fung Yu-Lan, The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy (London 1947), e.g. p. 183: "Lao Tzū and Chuang Tzū, together with the original Buddhists, all made stillness their guiding principle."

poet with eastern sage, Anabase traces their journey together. It follows an archetypal rebirth pattern easily understood across national frontiers and through the vicissitudes of translation.<sup>1</sup> Despite its difficulties, perhaps greater from the linguistic point of view and from its oriental setting than those of Perse's other poems, it has attracted more critical attention than most and is still often considered his central work.<sup>2</sup> Eliot's translation of 1930 drew admirers initially because it was Eliot and entered his canon.<sup>3</sup> Kathleen Raine has spoken of the influence of the translation on the poets and critics of the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> Works like Auden's The Orators<sup>5</sup> and F. T. Prince's poem about Chaka, the warrior

<sup>1</sup>See Mircéa Eliade, Le Mythe de l'éternel retour (Paris 1949), passim, and Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns... in which a number of works are seen in these terms.

<sup>2</sup>See e.g. F. J. Carmody, "Saint-John Perse and several oriental sources," Comparative Literature Studies, II, 2, 1965, 125.

<sup>3</sup>For a fuller assessment of Eliot's translation, see my "T. S. Eliot and Saint-John Perse," Arlington Quarterly (forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup>"St.-John Perse: Poet of the Marvellous," Encounter, Oct. 1967, p. 51 (reprinted in Defending Ancient Springs, Oxford 1968).

<sup>5</sup>(London 1932), see esp. pp. 20-23, 30-34.

chief who formed the Zulu nation,<sup>1</sup> show a clear influence of Perse's concept and diction as transcribed by Eliot. Perhaps it is more important therefore with Anabase than with any of the other poems to prune the accretions and see one's way clear to the text itself. For present purposes, Perse's own reported statement about the work will be taken as a point of departure:

Anabase a pour objet le poème de la solitude dans l'action. Aussi bien l'action parmi les hommes que l'action de l'esprit envers autrui comme envers soi-même.<sup>2</sup>

Solitude, complete with exclamation mark to stress its significance, occurs as a word four times within as many pages in parts IV and V of the poem:

(a) ... Solitude! l'œuf bleu que pond un grand oiseau de mer, et les baies au matin tout encombrées de citrons d'or! -- C'était hier! l'oiseau s'en fut!

(b) Solitude!.nos partisans extravagants nous vantaient nos façons, mais nos pensées déjà campaient sous d'autres murs.

<sup>1</sup>"Chaka" in The Doors of Stone (London 1963), pp. 47 ff. The section headings themselves are indicative: I - The King watches at night; II - He compares old customs with those of his kingdom; III - How festivals were celebrated; IV - He bathes in the morning; V - The people rest after conquests. The poem dates from the 1930s.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted by Mazars, "Une journée..."

(c) Solitude!... Des compagnies d'étoiles passent au bord du monde, s'annexant aux cuisines un astre domestique.

(d) "Solitude! Je n'ai dit à personne d'attendre...  
Je m'en irai par là quand je voudrai..." Et l'Etranger  
tout habillé  
de ses pensées nouvelles se fait encore des partisans  
dans les voies du silence.

In (a), the solitary sea-bird's blue egg is contrasted with the piles of golden lemons littering the bay, an image no doubt of the sun's reflection on the sea. The contrast is both of number and colour, and is heightened by the very similarity of shape. The fragility of the egg, deserted by its parent is similarly underlined by its having to fend for itself against the host of lemons, against, that is, the invasion of sunlight. It is an observed image of solitude and precariousness, a statement standing for itself and not necessarily for anything beyond itself. If there should lurk an idea of the cosmogonic myths which take a primeval egg as their starting-point,<sup>1</sup> it is an extension of the image perhaps legitimate in the circumstances but by no means essential to it. Verset (b) involves the notion of departure and so is

<sup>1</sup>See Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion (London 1958, tr. R. Sheed), pp. 413-416.

dynamic where the egg was static. But the desire to move on is prompted by escapism and is consequently negatively motivated: the satisfaction expressed by "nos partisans extravagants" is to be avoided just as the Heir-Presumptive had shunned honours. In (c), battalions of stars make a new recruit of the kitchen lamp, or put more prosaically the one light visible in the camp at night seems to take its place alongside the stars. Baudelaire, in "Paysage", had juxtaposed domestic and celestial lights in a similarly striking way:

Il est doux, à travers les brumes, de voir naître  
L'étoile dans l'azur, la lampe à la fenêtre.<sup>1</sup>

What he had not done was to stress the solitary nature of the lone "recruit" in the sky's army. In Perse, the onlooker identifies himself with the man-made light and moves with it into a spiritual realm. With this vision behind him, the Stranger in (d) wins more genuine partisans to the cause of solitude. Restating his fundamental right to solitude and to go wherever he wishes, fully clad in his new thoughts he follows the ways of silence. His ideas are imposed not by force but by example, the best--and silent--version of persuasion.

<sup>1</sup>Oeuvres complètes, p. 154. Cf "L'homme n'est qu'une lampe, elle /i.e. la solitude/ en fait une étoile." (Victor Hugo, "Magnitudo parvi" in Les Contemplations, III, 30).

Solitude and silence therefore combine in a further migration: the static and dynamic forms go hand in hand. "Action" in the poet's sense is both physical and spiritual, and so performed by both Leader and Stranger, but it is one word, inseparable into cartesian body and soul or mind and passions, just as the Prince and the Poet are one man.

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Anabase is "placé sous l'invocation du sel,"<sup>1</sup> and the concentration of salt is higher in this poem than in any other. The image enjoys a multiplicity of aspects shared by all Perse's central images, and the substance seems to crystallise around itself the principal themes of the poem, as if to illustrate by its very nature and uses the poetic concretion of that shuttling dualism already in solitude. Opposites are not mutually exclusive, but embraced and accepted. There is, as it were, in chemical terms, a suspension of salt rather than a solution of it. Just as in Pour fêter une enfance, III, light and shade had been "plus près d'être une même chose," so "Je sais qu'aux chutes des grands fleuves se nouent d'étranges alliances, entre le ciel et l'eau" (Neiges, II).

<sup>1</sup>Saillet, pp. 62-63.

Independence is retained by each element within this fruitful coupling: it is a true marriage. "Jamais chez aucun poète l'harmonie universelle ne s'est trouvée si naturellement juste; jamais elle n'a moins dépendu de quelque premier désaccord."<sup>1</sup> The constant give and take is not therefore to be seen as a straightforward discordia concors, as Saillet recognises when writing of the role of salt in Anabase: "Il nous semble assister à la spiritualisation de la matière, ou à la minéralisation de l'esprit."<sup>2</sup> As the double movement is perpetual, being self-generating, atrophy is impossible.

As in Amers, salt in the early poems is normally associated with the sea, and is sometimes mixed with an alkaline substance. Just as in "Le Mur" in Images à Crusocé we find "l'air laiteux enrichi du sel des alizés," so in Amers do we have "l'acide avec le lait mêlé, le sel avec le sang très vif," (Strophe, IX, 2 - 1), where salt is seen as a life-giving principle. The virtues of salt, with its special ambivalence between distaste and necessity, between preservation and vivification, are all

<sup>1</sup> Georges Poulet, "Saint-John Perse," Etudes sur le temps humain, III: Le Point de départ (Paris 1964), p. 163.

<sup>2</sup>Saillet, p. 63.

evoked in Anabase. Salt, "the substance that is indispensable to human metabolism, that lends savor to food and drink, that awakens thirst--throughout the poem it is the symbol of the pure stimulus that is the mainspring of action."<sup>1</sup> The opening section leaves no doubt as to its importance.

In it the word sel occurs no less than six times. "L'idée pure comme un sel tient ses assises dans le jour." The open dialogue is seen as a court session, with all its overtones of subtle presentation and defence leading to a fully considered and just conclusion. "Maître du grain, maître du sel, et la chose publique sur de justes balances!" Corn and salt combine for the common weal, the res publica only enjoying an equilibrium because of the care taken over such basic products. The saunier takes his honourable place in the list of "toutes sortes d'hommes dans leurs voies et façons" (X). From personal knowledge, Perse realised the importance of salt. Direct experience in the deserts of Mongolia was added to what he must have known of the history of the Caribbean, chequered as it was by wars in which islands were seized for

<sup>1</sup>Knodel, "Towards an understanding of Anabase," PMLA, LXXIX, June 1964, 333.

little other than their salt deposits.<sup>1</sup> In deserts where, being excessively hot and dry, men have to replace the body salt lost through perspiration, food is heavily salted and salt is sometimes taken by mouth without it having the bitter effect on the palate associated with it in more temperate climates. The piquancy is reserved for the mind:

Au délice du sel sont toutes lances de l'esprit...  
J'aviverai du sel les bouches mortes du désir!

(Anabase, I)

In these parallel sentences of fourteen syllables each, with the cesura after the sixth at sel, the appetite for salt and its revivifying effect on both body and mind is linked with the more general notion of appetency in the word désir, which is to receive fuller treatment and expansion in Amers.

Addressing the "hommes, gens de poussière et de toutes façons," Perse writes:

ô chercheurs, ô trouveurs de raisons pour s'en

<sup>1</sup>Curaçao was taken by the Dutch for its salt-pans as well as its use as a trading base, and the vast salt resources of the mainland lake Araya in Venezuela brought it the belligerent attentions of the Dutch and Spanish in turn. See J. H. Parry and P. M. Sherlock, A Short History of the West Indies (London 1965), pp. 46-47, 51.

aller ailleurs,  
 vous ne trafiquez pas d'un sel plus fort quand  
 . . . les tambours de l'exil éveillent aux frontières  
 l'éternité qui bâille sur les sables. (I)

Salt here stands for the ambiguous attraction of solitude and exile: removal from one place to another cannot diminish an ingrained sense of solitude. A clear distinction is drawn between geographical déplacement and the mental state of exile inherent in man. The salt-caravans in the desert perform a vital function, but their migrations would not satisfy the Etranger. The poet's mind is wandering less on a geographical than on a spiritual plane. Yet concrete reality demands our attention; the everyday turns philosophy into poetry:

Mathématiques suspendues aux banquises du sel!

Commerce makes its demands on a practical level besides being a "commerce de l'âme." The scales are out again for the purchase of salt in fair trade. But the floes of salt, like ice-floes, conceal seven-eighths of their whole selves: the white heaps which the caravans have brought have implications in both life and poetry far in excess of their apparent substance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For a different interpretation of the image of salt in Perse, see Richard, Onze études..., pp. 54-57.

Perse, like his own Crusoe, is still "nourri du sel de votre solitude." Salt is the concrete image of the abstract notion, sharing all its polyvalent virtues. The poet can consequently remain true to what he sees as his task, namely to explore the obscure and the abstract but to express his findings and experiences in concrete terms. That he should choose a common mineral not generally or traditionally honoured by poetry but nonetheless vital for existence is typical of his refusal to limit his poetry to literature. The poignancy of isolation is a gap which Perse fills richly and lavishly, his very praise being partially motivated through his natural abhorrence of a vacuum. The nostalgia of Eloges produces just such a positive creation from negative motivation. In Anabase the balance was somewhat redressed: the career, and the solitude, were chosen, so that the poem was free to deal with a great human theme rather than simply sing Asia's praises. In Exil, with the coincidence of an enforced exile and a lifetime's experience of solitude, there is a return to the fundamental approach of the Bordeaux poems, but with the added technique and experience of twenty very important years.

Those years do not belong in any direct way to Perse's poetry, although their lesson was necessarily assimilated. Speculation about the lost manuscripts is clearly pointless, but the diplomatic interests of Alexis Leger show through in the writings of his alter ego in Amitié du Prince and Anabase. The details of his diplomatic career as seen in the entry in the Annuaire diplomatique have been reprinted often enough for his speedy rise to high office to be well known.<sup>1</sup> Judgements on his career praise his integrity and firmness in the face of frequent governmental changes and the growing menace beyond the Rhine.<sup>2</sup> If his values seem increasingly old-fashioned and his faith in other people's honour unrealistic or ill-founded, it is all to his credit. Memoirs of the period are fiercely partisan. Leger himself warns against the opinions expressed by Paul Reynaud,<sup>3</sup> the Minister for Foreign Affairs who engineered his removal from the Quai d'Orsay in May 1940:

<sup>1</sup>See e.g. Honneur..., pp. 681-682.

<sup>2</sup>See e.g. E. R. Cameron, op. cit.

<sup>3</sup>in e.g. La France a sauvé l'Europe (see e.g. II, 98, 131). See also Henri Hoppenot's independent and decisive refutation of the charge that Leger burned the Ministry archives, reprinted in Honneur..., pp. 769-771.

Je dois vous mettre en garde contre les présentations tendancieuses de cet auteur, dont je conteste, en particulier, toutes les observations à mon sujet: allégations sans fondement, ni vraisemblance, relevant moins du souci historique que de la passion politique ou de l'animosité personnelle.<sup>1</sup>

The reaction is remarkably measured (and restricted in any case to a private letter) in view of the change du tout au tout brought about in Leger's life. One thing is clear: after occupying with distinction positions of high responsibility, entailing that same "quant à soi" which Frizeau had noted at Bordeaux,<sup>2</sup> Leger bore dismissal with nobility. His letter to Edouard Herriot, president of the Assemblée nationale, written from Arcachon a mere ten days after his disgrace shows his outraged honour smarting through the dignity and sincerity of his account of the episode.<sup>3</sup> Like the Chinese President Li's daughters of whom he had written so amusingly in 1917, he reacted with a "stiff upper lip": "Les filles de Mme Li

<sup>1</sup>Postscript to letter from Leger to Dr. K.-J. Muller dated 15 Sept. 1955, reprinted in Honneur..., p. 726.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Claudel, Bordeaux, le 10 mai 1911, reprinted in Honneur..., p. 608.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Herriot, reprinted in Honneur..., pp. 713-714.

se turent, s'attachant à montrer dans leur maintien l'égalité d'âme qui sied aux grands de ce monde dans l'infortune."<sup>1</sup>

Leaving his family at Arcachon, Leger escaped clandestinely to England, transferring from a French fishing vessel to an English warship off the Breton coast. He stayed only a matter of three weeks at Denham House, the home of his British opposite number, Lord Vansittart, who had similarly received harsh treatment at the hands of politicians. No direct contact was made with De Gaulle, despite Leger's support for Resistance groups abroad, since the notion of a self-styled "government" which existed only through the good offices of the British government was repugnant to him. He sailed for America from Glasgow on the same ship that carried Britain's bullion reserves into safe keeping, the "Monarch of Bermuda."<sup>2</sup> A man who had long sought solitude ironically more than achieved his aim. "The nomad is now a refugee."<sup>3</sup> "A l'exil de Crusoé, à la solitude du Conquérant, les événements substituent, maintenant, un exil et une solitude réels."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Leger to Alexandre Conty, reprinted in Honneur..., p. 690.

<sup>2</sup>Previously unpublished biographical details in this paragraph were offered me verbally by M. Leger.

<sup>3</sup>Poggioli, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>4</sup>Charpier, p. 121.

§ 5

EXILE

What grief is greater than  
to leave behind the frontier  
of your home-land?

Euripides

(Electra, ll. 1314-15)

Exile involves compulsion. Only in its more general usage is it considered voluntary, and only by a further extension of meaning can the word cover the various notions of solitude which have already been discussed. The isolation may be the same, but the motivation is different, and so puts a different complexion on attitudes to it. The more agreeable aspects of solitude are undercut by the knowledge that it is no longer the result of volition but an imposed state. And yet of course, in Perse's case, one may reasonably look at his attitudes and position before 1940 and see in them the schooling for political exile, a long and willed preparation for his summary dismissal from office. Not believing on foresight, one may look to his solitary nature, to a predisposition to separation from his fellow-men, for the reasons underlying the outward calm and dignity he showed in that fateful month of May.

Circumstances forced upon the poet a revision of his approach to solitude. Neither his birth in a colony far from metropolitan France, nor his subsequent removal to Europe, nor again his journeys in China had been as irrevocable as his exile to the United States. The sense of distanciation bred in him from being born in Guadeloupe was soured by separation

from his work and family. Other poets of the time had perhaps more choice over where they should spend the war, but whether like Aragon, Char or Eluard they remained in the thick of things, or like Jouve or Supervielle felt they could make a greater contribution from outside France, the circumstances elicited some remarkable poetry.

Une grande poésie française, de 1940 à 1945, s'est écrite en dehors de la France. Pierre-Jean Jouve en Suisse, Saint-John Perse en Amérique bénéficiaient de l'éloignement nécessaire pour mieux entendre chanter en eux la chose française, et la fixer, dans le meilleur et le plus pur, le plus immuable de son incorruptible essence.<sup>1</sup>

Thibaudet's comments on the effect of the French Revolution in this respect apply equally well to that of the Nazi occupation:

Les élites émigrées vivent tragiquement. Elles sont contraintes à une vie hasardeuse, solitaire, humiliée. Elles sont amenées par l'exil et l'épreuve à réviser leurs valeurs, et à en connaître ou à en créer d'autres. Les dieux qu'elles ont emportés prennent contact et font alliance avec les dieux étrangers. . . . Il y a les émigrés qui perdent leur pays et ceux qui en découvrent d'autres. Il y a les émigrés qui n'ont plus de société et ceux qui s'en font une nouvelle, il y a les émigrés qui n'ont pas de jeunesse et ceux qui créent une jeunesse.

<sup>1</sup>Louis-Marcel Raymond, "Lecture de Saint-John Perse," L'Action universitaire (Montréal), avril 1948, 21.

Trois dissonances, qui produisent chacune leur étincelle de vie littéraire.

L'émigré qui perd son pays, qui n'a plus de société, qui n'a plus de jeunesse, représente au bilan le passif, la négation, la déficience. L'émigration est mortelle aux faibles.<sup>1</sup>

It is perfectly clear that Perse belongs to the active, positive category.

As with solitude, the idea of exile is by no means new to Perse. Aspects of his interest in the literature of exile have already been discussed, showing that books are only a part of his world, and tend to be mere points of reference in the expression of lived experiences. The poems written after 1940 show his reconciliation with and resolution of that necessary paradox, the act of writing. "Words are also actions, and actions are a kind of words."<sup>2</sup> Poetry for Perse is clearly an act, and as such counteracts the negativity of exile.

Being forced to uproot oneself brings about a corresponding

<sup>1</sup>Albert Thibaudet, Histoire de la littérature française de 1789 à nos jours (Bruxelles 1946), pp. 9-10.

<sup>2</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet" in Essays and other Writings (London 1907), p. 232.

decrease in the active desire to move on. Hence in the Exil tetralogy we find the poet taking stock of his position, summoning up the courage to face it, but having little desire to "fare forward." This contrasts on the one hand with the early poems which had been a stock-taking but not by any means a final reckoning, and with the Chinese poems where the ascending movement was all-important, geographically but also spiritually.<sup>1</sup> The poet, "seul à faire le compte, du haut de cette chambre d'angle" (Neiges, IV), has only smouldering and smoking ashes at the beginning of his exile: "Et, sur toutes grèves de ce monde, l'esprit du dieu fumant déserte sa couche d'amiante" (Exil, I), but he reverses the situation by sheer strength of character and the act of poetry: "Et soudain tout m'est force et présence, où fume encore le thème du néant" (Exil, III). In other terms, in an image reminiscent of the phoenix rising from the ashes, but no doubt alluding to some American bird which changes its plumage in winter, we find "un oiseau de cendre rose, qui fut de braise tout l'été, illumine soudain les cryptes de l'hiver" (Neiges, III).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The question of movement will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter.

<sup>2</sup>Given Perse's knowledge and fondness of Audubon, the

"S'abolir pour renaître: telle est la démarche du Poète."<sup>1</sup>

The Exil tetralogy shows the gradual coming to terms with exile, or rather the conversion of an enforced loneliness into an acceptable and viable solitude, with an accompanying assertion of the positive value of the ultimate in uselessness (judged by practical standards) which poetry seems to be.<sup>2</sup>

The whole very painful and private process is exposed to view in the four poems. They are consequently not only the most intimate of all Perse's writings but also in many ways the richest and most revealing, since they depict his reaction to the nadir and stand in relation to his work rather as a philosopher's tabula rasa approach to method before the

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reference may well be to the only bird to figure in The Birds of America which is red and grey ("cendre rose," "braise") in summer and whose red parts turn white in winter, namely the Red Phalarope (Phalaropus fulicarius, or in Audubon's terminology Phalaropus platyrhynchus). Plate 255 shows both states. (For reproductions, see the edn. by Wm. Vogt, New York, 7th printing 1965).

<sup>1</sup>Christian Murciaux, Saint-John Perse (Paris 1960), p. 43.

<sup>2</sup>"De toutes ces valeurs [de l'esprit], en est-il de plus luxueuse que la poésie, appréciée à sa parfaite 'inutilité'?" (Perse, Speech accepting Award of Merit medal for poetry from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, reproduced in Honneur..., p. 635).

construction of positive statements. In this respect, the American poems from Exil to Vents are exceptional in Perse's canon: exile itself provides, in fact imposes, a negative term. While all the other mature poems are immediately seen adding positive to positive, having no straightforward dialectic since no negative pole exists, Exil starts from zero. It is significant that even here there is no minus quantity: the poem opens bravely on a note suggesting limitless possibilities: "Portes ouvertes sur les sables." Only when the reader continues, only when he learns the context, does the blank page before the poem begins reveal itself as the negative moment of exile when the poet abandoned all thought or hope of writing poetry.

The resultant sympathy for those inflicted with solitude, and for their desire to renounce office, is deepened:

Un homme atteint de telle solitude, qu'il aille  
et qu'il suspende aux sautoires le masque et le bâton  
de commandement.

(Pluies, VI)

The leader-figure of the preceding poems, like the poet, has been dismissed. The reaction mingles dignity with dismay, and recourse is made to permanent spiritual values beyond the vicissitudes of history:

Il n'est d'histoire que de l'âme, il n'est  
d'aisance que de l'âme. (Exil, V)

The years 1940-41 consequently represent the lowest of the ebbs in the poet's--and France's--fortunes, and Perse shows the highest qualities of man, of soul, and of poetry in depicting the new search for values and expressing them in terms of widely comprehensible images drawn from nature.

J'ai fondé sur l'abîme et l'embrun et la fumée  
des sables. (Exil, II)

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The principal image of the first poem of the tetralogy, the sea-shore, with all its implications, will be dealt with at length in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup> For the moment it is enough to see the heroism behind the closing line:

Et c'est l'heure, ô Poète, de décliner ton nom,  
ta naissance, et ta race... (Exil, VII)

The poet has reached a beginning, accepting a footing in his adopted country. The world of anguish behind the simple act of stating one's name, date of birth and nationality for some official document is fully explored before this decisive ending.

<sup>1</sup>See § 7, "The threshold."

"Un tel orgueil ne va pas à tout le monde. Beaucoup d'humilité le prépare."<sup>1</sup> The other poems of the tetralogy start with the advantage of this determination behind them.

The next in date, Poème à l'Etrangère (1942), stands under the sign of the Alien Registration Act in the terms of which the Spanish woman, like the poet, would have to report to the Aliens' Bureau at regular intervals after making the initial statement of name, date of birth and nationality.<sup>2</sup> Like him--"J'habiterai mon nom" (Exil, VI)--she is living out of a suitcase, "chaussée de crêpe ou d'amarante entre vos hautes malles inécloses;" like him, she has nothing to declare.<sup>3</sup> Seeing her, therefore, in a state much like his own so shortly before, the poet is moved by the deepest sympathy. In poetic terms, she provides a character through whom he can externalise his own feelings, a less painful way of presenting further

<sup>1</sup>Caillois, Art poétique, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>"That act, passed in 1940, required all foreigners . . . to register and report periodically concerning their whereabouts and activities." (Knodel, Saint-John Perse, p. 71).

<sup>3</sup>Cf the following conversation from B. Traven (the pseudonym of another war exile), The Death Ship: "You ought to have some papers to show who you are," said the policeman. "I don't need any papers," said the sailor, "I know who I am." (Quoted in Encounter, 170, Nov. 1967, p. 52).

aspects of his own case.<sup>1</sup> This "homme très seul" (III) has a profound empathy with her sadness, and shares her wanderings across the Washington scene.

The temptation of sadness, for which death had been the threatened penalty in Anabase, III, is here at its greatest:

Sur le tambour voilé des lampes à midi, nous  
mènerons encore plus d'un deuil, chantant l'hier, chantant  
l'ailleurs, chantant le mal à sa naissance  
et la splendeur de vivre qui s'exile à perte d'hommes  
cette année. (III)

Nostalgia for time past and for elsewhere, where "la splendeur de vivre" could be enjoyed, is made more poignant by the pointed use of "s'exiler" and the rejuvenation of the fixed phrase à perte de vue as "à perte d'hommes." Not only does one imagine peering over crowds of nameless faces, but also that every man lost in the war in Europe represents a deep personal loss for the poet, and so reduces the possibility of recalling lost happiness. The poet's answer to the temptation of sadness is to use his recollections as material for poetry:

<sup>1</sup>Perse does not identify himself entirely with her as he had with the persona of Crusoe, but sympathises deeply with someone in a similar situation to himself. The poet is present in the poem distinct from his character, although this dramatis persona necessarily springs directly from him. In Images à Crusoe the poet is not presented distinct from his character.

je m'en vais, ô mémoire! à mon pas d'homme libre,  
 sans horde ni tribu, parmi le chant des sabliers, et,  
 le front nu, lauré d'abeilles de phosphore, . . . je  
 flatte encore en songe, de la main, parmi tant d'êtres  
 invisibles,  
 ma chienne d'Europe qui fut blanche et, plus que  
 moi, poète.

(III)

"Le passage est destiné à illustrer l'autonomie et la puissance du poète."<sup>1</sup> Asserting his independence, the poet turns with modest indirectness to the notion of poetry which gives him his strength.

Pluies, written in Savannah, Georgia, in 1943, while staying with the Biddles,<sup>2</sup> fuses in its central image of a torrential rain-storm the negative and positive elements presented in different ways in Exil and Poème à l'Etrangère. The rains annihilate and fecundate: "Pluies s'assimile à un autre phénomène à double sens: celui de la renaissance féconde et celui des lessives destinées à purifier la mémoire; la pluie devient ainsi un facteur d'avenir assuré, alors même qu'elle est un facteur d'oubli."<sup>3</sup> The rhythm gathers

<sup>1</sup>Caillois, Poétique..., p. 105, and see pp. 105-110 for a full analysis of the passage.

<sup>2</sup>See Charlton Ogburn, "Comment fut écrit Pluies" in donneur..., pp. 273-279.

<sup>3</sup>Alain Bosquet, "Saint-John Perse ou la rhétorique rédemptrice" in Verbe et vertige (Paris 1961), p. 136.

momentum as the versets lengthen to culminate in the central apostrophe to the rains of canto VII. With the passing of the storm--and with the passing of the judgement, the "sentences d'orage" of Exil, V, by the court session which forms a further part of the poem's image armature--the poet is refreshed and ready for another poem.

C'est la fraîcheur courant aux crêtes du langage,  
 l'écume encore aux lèvres du poème,  
 Et l'homme encore de toutes parts pressé d'idées  
 nouvelles, qui cède au soulèvement des grandes houles  
 de l'esprit:  
 "Le beau chant, le beau chant que voilà sur la  
 dissipation des eaux!..."

(Pluies, VIII)

The section concludes with this triumphantly paradoxical statement: "et mon poème, ô Pluies! qui ne fut pas écrit!" The 1953 and earlier editions had read "qui ne sera pas écrit!" The change of tense was required to show that Perse had not simply decided after all never to write the poem in question: he wants to remove any ambiguity about what he means, which is that he never had any intention of writing a poem for the sake of writing a poem. What interests him is rather the necessarily ambiguous, even paradoxical creative process which, like the rains, must liquidate the dross of memory: "Lavez, lavez, ô Pluies! les hautes tables de mémoire" (VII).

The dialectic imposed by exile is present even in this

poem where the relentless rhythm of expanding versets in groups of three seems to indicate a return to the additive technique of Anabase. But there is a notable development away from the private emotional involvement of Exil and from the use of a character in Poème à l'Etrangère. Here an image based on observation of a natural phenomenon provides the skeleton of the poem. Such an extended use of what had been limited to individual images or patterns of imagery on a relatively small scale triggers off, after Pluies, a series of increasingly long poems--Neiges, Vents, Amers-- using an elemental phenomenon as their thematic substructure.

The ambiguity observed in rain, as a cleansing and an enriching force, gives way to that of snow, cold and isolating, but gentle. The poet, still very much alone, celebrates his silence and absence by a tender address to his mother. The surrounding snow emphasises the poet's isolation: "Seul à faire le compte, du haut de cette chambre d'angle qu'environne un Océan de neiges" (IV). The tender intimacy felt in filial affection is expressed more fully and freely than any similar relationship to date. His family had been cursorily mentioned, but he had not indulged in more than passing or cryptic

evocations of his relatives.<sup>1</sup> In this respect, Neiges paves the way for the closely detailed relationship explored in "Etroits sont les vaisseaux" (Amers, Strophe, IX). It is an examination of purity of character in terms of the purity of the snow and the purity of language. The "pur langage sans office" (Exil, IV), the "langage sans paroles dont vous avez l'usage" (Neiges, III) is found upstream, where the snows first melt into the river of human history.

Yet there is little play on the potential ambiguity of snow: gentleness carries the day. The negative pole of exile is nonetheless clearly opposed by the positive pole the poet's mother represents. The son would not share her religious practices, but this is not to say he has no deep religious conviction. His ode to absence, the plastic equivalent to silence, has, on the contrary, those qualities of resignation and resolution, faith, hope and charity which proclaim the truly religious man. "La poétique de la neige est indicatrice

<sup>1</sup>Although no mention appears to be made of his surviving sisters, Perse mentions his mother (Pour fêter une enfance, IV; Eloges, VIII and XV), father (Pour fêter une enfance, VI), dead sister (ibid., II), and "les Oncles" (ibid., VI).

d'une religion."<sup>1</sup> Embracing both poles of the dialectic, he can look forward with a reasoned hope towards a life among men. The basis of that life is spiritually firm, however changeable man's fortunes. Perse, in his own way, makes a wager for what Pascal termed "une éternité de vie et de bonheur:"

là où les neiges encore sont guéables, nous  
 passerons ce soir une âme non guéable... Et au delà  
 sont les grands lés tissés du songe, et tout ce bien  
 fongible où l'être engage sa fortune...

(Neiges, IV)

Such a preoccupation with the spiritual and metaphysical is not rare in Perse, but rarely does it enjoy such open and extended expression. Sparked off here by thoughts of his mother's worship and the virgin purity of the "plain-chant des neiges," it allows a current of religious language and imagery through the poem which adds to its liturgical qualities. Set in "un lieu de grâce et de merci," this ode to silence depicts a new ascension, that of the New York skyscrapers apparently rising behind motionless snow-flakes falling. The optical illusion provides a real experience, however illusory the

<sup>1</sup>Gilbert Durand, "Psychanalyse de la neige," mercure de France, août 1953, p. 624.

fact. The snow, like death, like exile, like God for some, renders all things equal, but like Perse it ignores denominational limits: "Il neige, hors chrétienté" (II). If the poet, referring to "neige plus fine qu'au désert la graine de coriandre," allows himself a biblical echo, it suggests literary and not doctrinal assent. Yet he derives some measure of benefit from his mother's piety:

Et Celle à qui je pense entre toutes femmes de ma  
race, du fond de son grand âge lève à son Dieu sa face  
de douceur. Et c'est un pur lignage qui tient sa grâce  
en moi.

(III)

Her prayers are followed by Ave Maria echoing around:

et comme un grand Ave de grâce sur nos pas, la  
grande roseraie blanche de toutes neiges à la ronde...

(IV)

The word roseraie invites translation as 'rosary,' since the English word means both rose-garden, the true sense of the French, and beads, the meaning clearly implied by both its context and sound, and all the more potent for its absence.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This and a number of other features remind one forcibly of Mallarmé: e.g. snow, whiteness, silence, absence. Perse's "pur délice sans graphie" echoes Mallarmé's "pur délice sans chemin" ("Autre éventail"), and "Désormais cette page où plus rien ne s'inscrit," "le vide papier que la blancheur défend" ("Brise marine").

Mention is made in Neiges, III, of churches underground because of the war, of a devotional Book of Hours dating from the millennium, of crypts and crosses, of plain-song and thorns, and of the divine bee of which more will be said later.<sup>1</sup>

The purity of the evocation of the poet's mother in occupied France pervades the whole poem, and lends it a graceful and peaceable quality suggesting the poet has found consolation for exile in spiritual values.

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"A lonely place is really the only conceivable natural habitat for Saint-John Perse."<sup>2</sup> "Rejoignant l'Amérique par le Canada, il débarquera à New York, le 14 juillet 1940, pour y apprendre bientôt les mesures dont il est, un des premiers, frappé par le gouvernement de Vichy: dénationalisation, confiscation de biens, radiation de l'Ordre national, etc..."<sup>3</sup> News of this further indignity reached him in October.<sup>4</sup> In

<sup>1</sup> See below, § 10, pp. 271-281.

<sup>2</sup> Knodel, Saint-John Perse, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond, "Humanité de Saint-John Perse" in Honneur..., p. 113.

<sup>4</sup> Charpier, Saint-John Perse, p. 48.

February 1941, he moved to Washington D. C., and settled there. His friend Igor Stravinsky said: "I admire him for the way he has continued to live, with all his laurels, in that loneliest of cities."<sup>1</sup> To satisfy both his immediate material needs and his refusal to accept any form of payment from a foreign government, he agreed to take a post as literary adviser at the Library of Congress. Such monies as he received were derived from private sources and their use determined by the library's director, Archibald MacLeish. During the war period spent by Perse at the Library of Congress, he compiled a bibliography giving A Selection of Works for an Understanding of World Affairs since 1914. At the same time he established or re-established friendships in diplomatic, Resistance, scientific and literary circles.

Far more important is the effect of exile on Perse's work, and particularly, for the present purposes, the change of attitude towards solitude in his poetry. From being the privilege or prerogative of the world's leaders it becomes an

<sup>1</sup>Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, Dialogues and a Diary (New York 1963), p. 75 (quoted by Knodel, p. 75).

integral part of everyone's life. The foreign woman, like the poet's mother, is given the difficult honour of solitude. Their status is thereby raised in nobility to rank them with the leaders and Princes of earlier poems, but solitude is also democratised. Never again does the single leader-figure appear with the prominence he had enjoyed in Anabase or Amitié du Prince. Exile, and the experience of wartime suffering, is a leveller. In this respect Exil marks the end of the autocratic poems. Humbler people are allowed to play the major roles, replacing the kings and queens of ancient drama with the more everyday heroes appropriate to our age. After the Prince, the pilot; after the Queen, the foreign woman. And yet, despite the greater familiarity, the essential tone remains unchanged. Respect is consequently accorded these new characters as if they were Princes--and indeed they are "Princes de l'exil," the more remarkable for being more ordinary.

"La solitude de l'œuvre--l'œuvre d'art, l'œuvre littéraire--nous découvre une solitude plus essentielle. Elle exclut l'isolement complaisant de l'individualisme, elle ignore la recherche de la différence."<sup>1</sup> Perse finds what

<sup>1</sup>Maurice Blanchot, L'Espace littéraire (Paris 1955), p. 11.

Blanchot terms "la solitude essentielle" in Exil: his noble reaction to the circumstances of exile makes him transcend any charges of being a poseur which could have been levelled earlier. Having now no diplomatic face to maintain, the poet was allowed free rein. A refusal to indulge the lucrative proposals made by publishers for his memoirs left him free, as Saint-John Perse, to write poetry. The gradual reconciliation with exile, matched by increasing material security, made writing more congenial as anguish was replaced by memories of it. When, after the liberation of France in 1944, his full rights were restored and his status as "Ambassadeur en disponibilité" regained, he chose not to leave his adopted country. Through the processes seen in the Exil tetralogy, he had turned the tables on exile, mastered an enforced solitude and gained a great affection for the immensely varied and vital land which had given him a home.

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His homage to the United States is paid in Vents.

Chez des exilés qui n'oublient pas leur pays--et ceux qui l'oublient sont perdus--le cœur est si irrésistiblement tourné vers la patrie malheureuse qu'il y a peu de ressources affectives pour l'amitié à l'égard du pays qu'on habite. Cette amitié ne peut pas vraiment germer et pousser dans leur cœur s'ils ne se font pas

une sorte de violence. Mais cette violence est une obligation.<sup>1</sup>

Perse does not shirk this obligation. The fundamental dialectic of exile is given the image of the winds, mighty forces filling the gap, bringing both destruction and refreshment, both the dishevelment of established ideas and the breath of inspiration.

Il semble que le vide immense, en trouvant soudain une action, devienne une image particulièrement nette de la colère cosmique. . . . Avec l'air violent nous pourrions saisir la furie élémentaire, celle qui est tout mouvement et rien que mouvement. . . . La colère fonde l'être dynamique. La colère est l'acte commençant. Si prudente que soit une action, elle doit d'abord franchir un petit seuil de colère.<sup>2</sup>

If one sees Perse's exile in Bachelard's terms as the moment of anger, however well concealed by self-control, then the return from the relative staticity of Exil to the dynamism of Vents and Amers makes sense. Movement is equated with living, and exile represented an attack on movement.

Si vivre est tel, qu'on s'en saisisse! Ah! qu'on  
en pousse à sa limite,  
D'une seule et même traite dans le vent, d'une seule  
et même vague sur sa course,  
Le mouvement!...

(Vents, IV, 1)

<sup>1</sup> Simone Weil, L'Enracinement (Paris 1949), p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> Bachelard, L'Air et les songes, pp. 256-258.

A timely reminder: "Ce n'est pas un garçon de vingt ans, ivre d'aventure et d'inconnu, qui écrit ces lignes: c'est en somme, oui, un vieil homme déjà, de soixante ans, avec un grand passé derrière lui d'homme du monde, de diplomate et d'homme politique."<sup>1</sup> The reasons for movement have changed. The "déplacements sans cause" (Amitié du Prince, III) of a younger man have known the enforced halt of exile, when questioning the "mouvement des choses de ce monde" (Vents, II, 4) had time to go deeper.

... C'était hier. Les vents se turent. --  
N'est-il rien que d'humain? (Vents, IV, 1)

These three clipped sentences appearing at the opening of the final canto of Vents summarise the argument.<sup>2</sup> Movement has come to mean more than it had for the earlier Perse, for whom, as for Baudelaire, "les vrais voyageurs sont ceux-là qui partent/ Pour partir" ("Le Voyage"). It is "un principe amer et fort" (IV, 4) with which the wind is intoxicated, and which in turn intoxicates "l'homme dans le vent" (I, 6). Beyond being a means of disorder, of violence and destruction, the

<sup>1</sup>Paul Claudel, "Un poème de Saint-John Perse: Vents" in Oeuvres en prose (Bibl. de la Pléiade), p. 624.

<sup>2</sup>Cf a similar effect in Anabase, VII: "Lois errantes. Et nous-mêmes. (Couleur d'hommes.)"

wind is a principle of order, an image to replace with its fresh immediacy the tired accretions around orthodox religious symbols, the whole stale history of men who refuse to stand in the open air and face the wind:

A quelles fêtes du Printemps vert nous faudra-t-il laver ce doigt souillé aux poudres des archives--dans cette pruine de vieillesse, dans tout ce fard de Reines mortes, de flamines--comme aux gisements des villes saintes de poterie blanche, mortes de trop de lune et d'attrition?

Ha! qu'on m'évente tout ce lœss! Ha! qu'on m'évente tout ce leurre! Sécheresse et supercherie d'autels...

(I, 4)

Et si un homme auprès de nous vient à manquer à son visage de vivant, qu'on lui tienne de force la face dans le vent!

(I, 6)

A sense of mission unites the poet with his fellow-men: "Qu'on se lève de partout avec nous" (I, 6); "Que nul ne songe, que nul ne songe à désertier les hommes de sa race!" (IV, 4). He is their leader, sharing his discoveries, communicating his enthusiasm,

Car c'est de l'homme qu'il s'agit, et de son renouement.

. . . . .

Que le Poète se fasse entendre, et qu'il dirige le jugement!

(III, 4)

The nature of his solitude has therefore changed again. By purging himself of resentment, and learning to accept and

love his new homeland, the poet has learned to use his solitude. Opening his eyes, indeed all his senses, to the American experience, he records the gradual compensation of exile through the central image of wind filling areas of negative pressure. In consequence there is a new blending of aspects of solitude seen earlier. There is a foreigner taking stock of a strange land, a poet working out his own salvation through poetry, a leader communicating his sense of excitement, and a thinker recognising that solitude is not self-indulgence or physical isolation but something reached through communion with men and one's own mind.

Letting his ideas travel westward across the breadth of the continent towards and across the Pacific Ocean, Perse depicts his new concept of the solitary. The words solitaire and solitude occur in Vents only in this passage, which leads to a twofold conclusion, firstly that Perse is so fully assimilated into the American community that he no longer feels alone, and secondly that he is aware more fully than before of a new area of inexpressible metaphysical solitude, set into relief by the thought of death. Geographical isolation may be complete, but the sheer nothingness conceivable sub specie aeternitatis can only be suggested through poetry, that is, through imagery:

... Plus loin, plus loin, où sont les premières  
îles solitaires--les îles rondes et basses, baguées d'un  
infini d'espace, comme des astres--

. . . . .  
... Et au delà, les purs récifs, et de plus haute  
solitude--

. . . . .  
... Et au delà, et au delà, qu'est-il rien d'autre  
que toi-même--qu'est-il rien d'autre que d'humain?...  
. . . Et l'homme seul comme un gnomon sur la table des  
eaux... Et les capsules de la mort éclatent dans sa  
bouche...

... Et l'homme en mer vient à mourir. S'arrête  
un soir de rapporter sa course. Capsules encore du  
néant dans la bouche de l'homme...

(IV, 2)

Fuller speculation on the nature of the nothingness beyond  
death is withheld until later poems, and particularly until  
Chronique when the dimension of time--chronos--comes into its  
own.

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A full understanding of what solitude has finally come  
to mean for Perse may be gleaned from Amers. Here man is  
completely integrated into the world around him, into the  
community, and his special relationship with woman explored  
in the closest detail. Yet solitude not only exists in man's  
heart as a constant, solitude is man's heart: "Au cœur de  
l'homme, solitude" (Strophe, IX, 2 - 2) is closely echoed on  
two occasions by "... Solitude, ô cœur d'homme!" (ibid.,

5 - 2 and 6 - 1). The ultimate spiritual solitude is appreciated, "la solitude essentielle" which the poet attempts to express--and in some ways cannot help expressing--through his work.

Because the ninth section of the Strophe, "Etroits sont les vaisseaux," combines a detailed account of a sexual relationship, a searching exploration into the nature of love and the culmination of Perse's study of himself as a solitary, it stands apart from the rest of the epic. In some respects it is a paradoxical parenthesis, setting the values of solitude not only against the community activities seen in the homage paid to the sea but also against the very possibility of loving a single other person. Part of this approach must stem from the poet's age at the time of writing, part from a fundamentally hierarchical attitude in which woman plays second fiddle to man's solo, and part from an ingrained self-reliance and independence bred from sheer circumstances and a profound volonté de solitude. But it means that even in the intimate relationship shown in "Etroits sont les vaisseaux" the man wanders away in dream from the woman at his side. However much she rebukes him for it, he cannot help himself somewhat

uncharitably imagining her incapable of such flights:

... Solitude, ô cœur d'homme! Celle qui s'endort  
à mon épaule gauche sait-elle du songe tout l'abîme?  
Solitude et ténèbres au grand midi de l'homme...

(Strophe, IX, 5 - 2)

Yet Perse himself recognises the kind of sympathy one should  
have for a woman faced with such a man:

Comment aimer, d'amour de femme aimer, celui pour  
qui nul ne peut rien?

(ibid., 6 - 1)

The nature of her solitude is different, as is the nature  
of her love. Left to herself, she is allowed a sense only of  
fear:

J'ai crainte, et tu n'es là. L'épouse est seule  
et menacée, l'amante bafouée. . . . L'épouse désertée  
sera-t-elle aussi trahie?...

(ibid.)

The man feels responsible for the woman, and this only adds  
to his isolation:

Je veille seul, et j'ai souci: porteur de femme  
et du miel de la femme.

(ibid., 5 - 2)

Her rebuff extends throughout section IX, 6 - 1, and gives  
the measure of Perse's sensitivity to another point of view,  
since the rebuke is aimed at just those qualities which he  
values and cultivates, and which he recognises as intransigence  
when seen through someone else's eyes:

Ne me sois pas un Maître dur par le silence et  
par l'absence. O face aimante, loin du seuil...

(ibid., 6 - 1)

Whether tenacity or stubbornness depends on the point of view.

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The increased recognition of fundamentals brought about by exile means that the image of salt broadens and deepens in implication. As in Anabase, salt is frequently referred to in Amers. Its association with the sea and its basic importance to life form a further image-link between the sea and love. Being bitter, it is itself amer, so completing a linguistic bridge between mer and amour of some complexity. As a life-principle, it plays an important role in the basic imagery of the poem, providing a concrete parallel to the more abstract notions on man's relations with man, with woman, and with himself.

It is instructive to see the extent of the importance attached to salt by Jung.<sup>1</sup> His researches show that "in philosophical alchemy, salt is a cosmic principle,"<sup>2</sup> and this is also true for Perse. "The most outstanding properties of

<sup>1</sup>C. G. Jung, The Collected Works, Vol. 14: Mysterium coniunctionis (London 1963), see esp. pp. 183-198, 238-252.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p. 188

salt are bitterness and wisdom,"<sup>1</sup> features salient again in Perse's imagery. "At the dissolution of living bodies it is the 'last residue of corruption,' but it is the 'prime agent in generation'."<sup>2</sup> Finally, "salt becomes an analogue of God,"<sup>3</sup> an analogue expressing a religious concept by means of a ubiquitous substance free of any narrowly religious connotations.

In the process of reaching such views of salt as an image of a life-principle, Perse neither rejects the view of salt held at the time of writing Anabase nor restricts the variety of possible applications of the image. If salt, as a vital requirement, implies appetency, appetency itself must, for the poet, be seen in concrete terms. Thus the desire and need for salt gives rise to the following line in Exil, where the immediate visual image is of a clear sky as vast and yellow as a desert crossed by a camel-caravan:

Le ciel est un Sahel où va l'azalaïe en quête de  
sel gemme. (Exil, V)

The image of the desert, although the western Sahara is

<sup>1</sup>Jung, op. cit., p. 246.      <sup>2</sup>ibid., p. 251.      <sup>3</sup>ibid., p. 241.

specified, cannot fail to recall Anabase, where a parallel passage helps an understanding of the line. There is the same yellow sky, the same suggestion of hump-like hills moving in procession, the same notion of a distant quest:

Chamelles douces sous la tonte, cousues de mauves cicatrices, que les collines s'acheminent sous les données du ciel agraire--qu'elles cheminent en silence sur les incandescences pâles de la plaine; et s'agenouillent à la fin, dans la fumée des songes, là où les peuples s'abolissent aux poudres mortes de la terre.

(Anabase, VII)

Other references to salt indicate Perse's awareness of sal sapientiae. Apart from the wit referred to in "le sel de l'atticisme" (Pluies, VII),<sup>1</sup> salt and wisdom are linked in the following line:

Sagesse de l'écume, ô pestilences de l'esprit dans la crépitation du sel et le lait de chaux vive!

(Exil, II)

The sea lashing the reef<sup>2</sup> is an image of the mind's activity,

<sup>1</sup>"Sel attique, raillerie délicate et fine," Petit Larousse, art. attique.

<sup>2</sup>A reef is suggested by association: cf "Un polypier hâtif monte à ses noces de corail dans tout ce lait d'eau vive" (Pluies, I), where the echo of "le lait de chaux vive" is quite clear. Both lait de chaux and chaux vive separately mean 'quicklime'. By putting the word chaux into relief in this way, Perse is revivifying a fixed expression, reminding the

and knowledge comes only through some measure of cruelty or suffering, an idea ratified by the following line: "Une science m'échoit aux sévices de l'âme..." (II). The mind's scourgings shuttle from the aural and acid of sputtering salt to the visual and alkaline of whitewash, so allowing a certain knowledge and wisdom. The precious item of knowledge the poet's suffering and insight have won him is the very basis of his poem, its hidden strength:

O Prodigue sous le sel et l'écume de Juin! garde  
vivante parmi nous la force occulte de ton chant!

(Exil, VII)

He has "sur la langue encore, comme un sel, ce ferment du vieux monde" (Exil, VII). It is his cross, and just as the gypsum summer sharpens its arrowheads in his wounds in the opening canto, so salt is rubbed in them by the "cilice du sel" which he wears in canto IV. A similar link between salt, violence and the mind is made in another line, where the winds encourage "les virulences de l'esprit aux abords des salines" (Vents, I, 3).

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attentive reader that coral has a lime base deriving from living organisms. Over the white reef the sea is churned into foam--milk, le lait de chaux vive, 'the milk of living lime' as well as being a quicklime wash.

Salt is also used in a purely descriptive way, however, often to suggest a texture for a specified colour, but it is then used, no doubt, as salts of substances other than sodium. Neiges, I, provides the first example: "le sel gris de l'aube." Others follow: "l'arbre Juniper aiguise sa flamme de sel noir" (Vents, II, 2), and the salt of the sea takes on various colours: "les sels d'or du large" (Amers, Strophe, I, 1), "le sel violet de mer" (ibid., III). These are extended to other phenomena, at times less tangible: "sel noir du présage" (ibid., VI), "nos fronts sont parés du sel rouge des vivants" (ibid., IX, 6 - 1), "son âme de sel vert" (ibid., 6 - 2), "clartés d'iode et de sel noir du songe médiateur" (ibid., Chœur, 2). Such a list in itself shows the increased preoccupation with the spiritual, and with salt as an image of a life-principle.

Beyond the lines that may be read literally or as a metaphor of this vital source, such as "tu as goûté le sel aux paumes de l'Amant" (Amers, Strophe, IX, 5 - 2), one finds direct references to the fundamental qualities of salt as a cosmic principle:

Et comme le sel est dans le blé, la mer en toi dans son principe. (ibid., 2 - 2)

Et ma lèvre est salée du sel de ta naissance, et ton corps est salé du sel de ma naissance. (ibid., 5 - 1)

Yet the practical level of necessity is never forgotten, so that far from becoming a mere abstract symbol, salt remains a substance to be fetched and carried, and the necessary reserves are laid in for winter: "Les maîtres de maison se fournissent en sel" (Amers, Strophe, IX, 7). And we find "le bouvier porteur de sel parmi ses bêtes orientées" (ibid., Chœur, 3) dreaming, among many others whose specialised occupations fascinate the poet, of a sea whose multiple qualities include salinity. The dialectic inherent in the ambivalent nature of salt suggests that it is one "modulation" of the exile theme.

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Perse's increased material stability after the war and increasing circle of friends allowed him both greater peace of mind and additional possibilities to travel around the United States. As often as not, he went sailing or in pursuit of some rare animal or plant. A taste for the unusual never deserted him, nor indeed a deep interest in world affairs. If he counted men of letters among his friends, he numbered more scientists and diplomats, eschewing as ever, since the beginning of his own diplomatic career, "des manifestations

temporelles de l'écrivain. Il ne faut pas substituer l'action littéraire à la création poétique."<sup>1</sup>

A contract with the Bollingen Foundation assured Perse of a certain income, and in 1949 special permission was granted him by Congress to remain a resident in the U. S. A. as a French citizen. In 1950, the American Academy awarded him its medal for poetry, the first time the Award of Merit had been bestowed upon a foreigner.<sup>2</sup> The publication of Amers in 1957 coincided with his first return to France since 1940, this time to take possession of a colonial style house overlooking the sea on the Giens peninsula offered him by a group of American literary friends and admirers. A year later, at the age of 70, he married in Washington,<sup>3</sup> and has since spent the summer months at Giens and the winter in the American capital.<sup>4</sup> Literary honours, accepted only when he considered

<sup>1</sup>Perse, quoted by Hazars, "Une journée..."

<sup>2</sup>See CP, X, 157.

<sup>3</sup>He had known Dorothy Russell, née Milburn, since at least 1949, since she had made indian ink sketches of him at that time (see Charpier, p. 287).

<sup>4</sup>The winter 1968-69 was the first spent at Giens.

his honour as a Frenchman rather than as a littérateur to be at stake, were heaped upon him. A doctorate honoris causa at Yale in 1959 was closely followed by the French Grand Prix national des lettres and the Grand Prix international de poésie at the Knokke Biennale. The culmination was the Nobel Prize in 1960 after the publication of Chronique.

Saint-John Perse has continued to live a full and remarkably active life, including writing a considerable body of poetry. Oiseaux, a "méditation poétique" written in part at least in response to Georges Braque's series of painted birds, first appeared in 1962, and the seventh centenary speech Four Dante in 1965. A number of other works remain unpublished, and are often only in draft form. Some inédits are likely to appear in the volume of his works to appear in the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade on which M. Leger is working at present.

\*

Nous avons marché seuls sur les routes lointaines;  
et les mers nous portaient qui nous furent étrangères.

(Chronique, 3)

The retrospective view suggests a strong sense of geographical solitude. But that is far from being the whole story:

L'étage est le plus vaste, et le site si haut que

la mer est partout--mer d'outremer et d'outresonge et  
nourrice d'eaux mères.

(Chronique, 6)

Exile thrust self-reliance on Saint-John Perse. The mental processes it stimulated led to an exceptional awareness of man's fundamental solitude, of "l'éternité de l'exil dans la condition humaine," a solitude which could generate pessimism or misanthropy but which did neither in Perse's case. His pursuit of happiness as a value in itself shows in his answer to the question "Pourquoi écrivez-vous?": "Pour mieux vivre, et plus loin!"<sup>1</sup> The clear implication is that any such creative activity fosters an interest which alerts the senses to natural phenomena, whether physical or psychological. All appetencies are therefore valid. In Amers especially, desire shows in different forms. The sheer will to live to the full redeems the negativity of exile:

Et qu'il y eût en nous un tel désir de vivre à cet  
accès, n'est-ce point là, ô dieux! ce qui nous qualifiait?

(Amers, Invocation, 6)

Desire, seen in various guises including as beasts of prey, is violent to be valuable. The sexual appetite equals

<sup>1</sup>Perse, quoted by Mazars.

the craving for salt, and the desire to journey onward is as strong as spiritual longing. The phrase "Mer majeure du désir" (Strophe, II) summarises the central images of the poem in this particular, and a series of parallel phrases show the importance of desire, a fundamental driving force which, like the Rains and the Winds, creates disorder for the ultimate achievement of order:

Enseigne-nous, Puissance! le vers majeur du plus grand ordre, . . . le mode majeur enseigne-nous.

(ibid., III)

Et au-delà s'ouvre la Mer étrangère, au sortir des détroits, qui n'est plus mer de tâcheron, mais seuil majeur du plus grand Orbe et seuil insigne du plus grand Age, où le pilote est congédié.

(Chœur, 3)

Desire, the pilot, guides the poet through the experiences encountered on the odyssey from exile, and his patient Penelope helps him return to his birthright. Open to him now are the world beyond space and the eternity beyond time. There is not the slightest paradox in the striking cry in part VI of the Strophe:

Solitude, ô foison!

\* \* \*

§ 6

MOVEMENT

Magicien de l'insécurité,  
le poète n'a que des  
satisfactions adoptives.

René Char

("Partage formel" in  
Seuls demeurent).

If one of the ingredients of exile is solitude, the other is movement.<sup>1</sup> The idea of travelling is joined by images of things which move, not only horses and ships, but rains, winds and seas. To them are added ideas based on the earth's movement through time and space, and man's capacity to imagine beyond the immediate present. The increasing complexity of the images of movement through Perse's poetry matches the pattern seen in conjunction with other images, namely development from the concrete through multiple ramifications towards the metaphysical.<sup>2</sup>

The viscosity noted in Images à Crusoé suggests very

<sup>1</sup>The concept is dealt with at length by Albert Henry in "Amers" de Saint-John Perse: Une poésie du mouvement (Neuchâtel 1963). § VIII, pp. 117-137, traces various aspects of movement through Perse's poetic output, but the order for study is that of the Oeuvre poétique rather than that of composition or first publication. This falsifies the picture, particularly in respect of the poems of La Gloire des Rois.

<sup>2</sup>No study of Perse's rhythms, another aspect of movement, is envisaged here. Some general and detailed work has been done, notably by Monique Parent, Saint-John Perse et quelques devanciers: Etudes sur le poème en prose (Paris 1960), pp. 165-243; id. "Le rythme dans Chronique de Saint-John Perse," Brochure-programme du Centre de philologie romane de l'Université de Strasbourg, fasc. 6, 1961, pp. 109-117; Roger Caillois, Poétique..., passim; E. Noulet, "L'octosyllabe dans Amers" in Honneur..., pp. 316-326.

precisely the lack of dynamism behind Crusoe's feelings at being "remis entre les hommes." Apart from the nostalgia for a paradisaal island, there is only the rather negative desire to escape, the wishful thinking indulged by dreams. The original version of the series of poems ends with a clear echo of the closing line of Baudelaire's "Le Voyage":

tu attendais l'instant du départ, le lever du  
grand vent qui te descellerait d'un coup, et qui te  
charrierait sans saute, comme un typhon, divisant les  
nuées devant la soif de tes yeux,  
jusqu'au gouffre effroyable où l'on plonge!<sup>1</sup>

The next in date of the published poems, "Des Villes sur trois modes," 1906, presents a similar situation but through a pirate's eyes. Of the three towns portrayed, with brilliant touches characterising each by synecdoche, only the third is far away, and only the third is really alive:

Je sais le port lointain où le soleil brutal  
Fait jaillir de son lit une mer de métal.  
. . . . .  
Sonorité du ciel étayé de volcans,  
Tumulte des parfums dans l'éternel balan,  
O gloire sur les eaux, lumineuses cadences!<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>NRF, août 1909, p. 29 (dated 1904 as in collected edition.)

<sup>2</sup>Pan (Montpellier), No. 4, juillet-août 1908, p. 191.

The pirate's violence and lust find an appropriate home, however temporary, in this port quite clearly modelled on recollections of Pointe-à-Pitre. The other towns suggest Pau and Bordeaux, the first so genteel a resort that

là c'est un grand heurt  
Si la Servante laisse choir l'argenterie...

the second,

La grand'ville comme une bête sur le dos.  
.....  
Et puis les Tribunaux, l'Hospice et les Prisons;  
Et les Théâtres clos, les Jardins dans les grilles!

Neither satisfies the young Leger, yet the swashbuckling picture of the islands is so different from that painted in Pour fêter une enfance and Eloges that it too was clearly unsatisfactory. Perhaps this and the poem's overt attachment to the alexandrine led to its exclusion from the collected works.

An exile from the Antilles, where he had had his own horse and boat from the age of eight, Leger made capital from the sheer distance in two ways. One was the praise of the tropical paradise he had left behind, the other the comparison between south-western France and Guadeloupe. Neither, however, as is evident from the very nature of the

attitudes, can play more than a limited part in the development of the idea of movement in his poetry. Again there are two outlets, the first, surface travel over a limited area, such as in a small yacht or on horseback, and the second dreams about faraway places. When those dreams begin to be realised, when the young diplomat moves to China, the first major development in the theme occurs. The second uprooting, this time at a mature age when the implications could be grasped, allowed a profounder sense of distanciation. The immense desert spaces of China provided a visual image to explore.

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Anabase shows a full awareness of the poetic possibilities inherent in the notion of movement through space, and one can only regret the lack of poems showing the transition from those evoking the static cradling of "la corbeille antillaise" to the dynamism of Perse's first large scale work. It is a study of man's fundamentally nomadic and questing spirit seen in terms of a wealth of concrete images which by particularising remove banality from the generalised statement of intent. Perse is reported as saying:

Anabase a pour objet le poème de la solitude dans

l'action. Aussi bien l'action parmi les hommes que l'action de l'esprit envers autrui comme envers soi-même. J'ai voulu rassembler la synthèse, non pas passive mais active de la ressource humaine. Mais on ne traite pas de thèmes psychologiques par des moyens abstraits. Il a fallu "illustrer": c'est le poème le plus chargé de concret.<sup>1</sup>

The complexity of "the loneliness of a man of action"<sup>2</sup> is reduced by Professor Parent to the following formula: "Il s'agit en réalité d'un même thème polyvalent, celui de l'aventure, dont le sens est à la fois concret, spirituel et historique."<sup>3</sup> The first two elements are obvious enough; the last requires some explanation and modification. The term "historical simultaneity"<sup>4</sup> seems the most appropriate, since "l'histoire est assoiffée de précisions et on s'est efforcé sans succès de localiser dans le temps et dans l'espace l'univers décrit par le poète."<sup>5</sup> Any attempt to see Anabase as a poem of movement or development through history seems

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Pierre Mazars, "Une journée..."

<sup>2</sup>Knodel, "Towards an understanding of Anabase", PMLA, 79, June 1964, p. 329.

<sup>3</sup>Parent, Saint-John Perse..., p. 205.

<sup>4</sup>Knodel, ibid., p. 330.

<sup>5</sup>René Girard, "L'histoire dans l'œuvre de Saint-John Perse" in Honneur..., p. 549.

doomed to frustration through lack of evidence.<sup>1</sup> Of the polyvalency of the theme there can however be no doubt.

Rather than repeat what critics have said on movement in Anabase<sup>2</sup> which is summarised in the poem itself by the phrases

Chemins du monde, l'un vous suit. Autorité  
sur tous les signes de la terre.  
O Voyageur dans le vent jaune, goût de l'âme!...  
(canto VIII)

a single image so far unnoticed as a pattern in this context will be traced through the poem. The idea of grass is quite opposed in Perse's botany to the idea of a tree. Bachelard noted the possibility of such an opposition:

La vie imaginaire vécue en sympathie avec le végétal réclamerait tout un livre. Les thèmes généraux curieusement dialectique en seraient la prairie et la forêt, l'herbe et l'arbre etc.<sup>3</sup> (italics added).

<sup>1</sup>Knodel, ibid., pp. 341-342 and n. 23.

<sup>2</sup>Professor Knodel's article gives the fullest account. The only variant approach appears to be that of René Micha, "Au sujet du mouvement dans l'Anabase" in Honneur..., pp. 246-249, where the poem is discussed in cinematographic terms.

<sup>3</sup>L'Air et les songes (Paris 1943), p. 231.

The seed-heads of grasses are shaken by the wind ("comme le souffle même de l'esprit," Pluies, IV), and the seeds carried towards some unknown destination. The fixity of a tree militates imaginatively against such a migratory power.<sup>1</sup>

However much Bachelard may ascribe dynamic qualities to the root,<sup>2</sup> and imaginative flights to the branches,<sup>3</sup> or an anthropologist study the various ramifications of the cosmic tree,<sup>4</sup> Perse sees the tree as a halt, a respite. In the context of a desert, such a view of the tree as an oasis is

<sup>1</sup>Cf Aimé Césaire: "Ma poésie est celle d'un déraciné et d'un homme qui veut reprendre racine. Et l'Arbre . . . est le symbole de ce qui a des racines." (Quoted in Lilyan Keseloot, Aimé Césaire, Paris 1963, p. 54). The critic adds: "C'est l'antithèse dialectique du voyage, de l'exil." Cf also Supervielle's trees, contrasted with the pampas, and called "Princes de l'immobilité" ("Arbres dans la nuit et le jour" in Choix de poèmes, Paris 1947, p. 265). Perse's own Pour fêter une enfance opens on the word "Palmes...!" which remains a cradling leitmotif throughout the poem which ends "sous les arbres à plumes." Cf Mallarmé's linking of the idea of cradling and the word "Palmes!" in "Don du poème".

<sup>2</sup>La Terre et les rêveries du repos (Paris 1948), pp. 290-322.

<sup>3</sup>L'Air et les songes, pp. 231-255.

<sup>4</sup>See e.g. Mircea Eliade, Traité d'histoire des religions, Images et symboles, etc.

quite comprehensible, but the ramifications go beyond Anabase. The image of the banyan tree in Pluies, for instance, springs to mind as a graphic image not only of torrential rain,<sup>1</sup> but of massive immobility: "Le banyan de la pluie prend ses assises sur la Ville."

In the opening Chanson of Anabase, "Il naissait un poulain sous les feuilles de bronze."<sup>2</sup> To this static scene comes the Stranger, "Et nous parle d'une herbe. Ah! tant de souffles aux provinces!" The tree and grass are already posited as images of fixity and movement. The tree reappears at intervals to suggest a halt on the westward march, and in the final Chanson, full of doves, it shades the horseman as he communes with the tree and peers into the dawn. The

<sup>1</sup>A popular expression similarly translates rainwater into wooden shafts: "Il pleut des hallebardes."

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of the significance of the bronze leaves see Knodel, "Towards an understanding...", p. 331 and Bernard Weinberg, "Saint-John Perse's Anabase," Chicago Review, 15, 3, Winter-Spring 1962, pp. 79-80. Cf also Vents, IV, 7: "Et un autre arbre de haut rang . . . /Avec sa feuille magnétique . . ." W. B. Yeats makes specific reference to a metal tree in both "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium", and notes: "I have read somewhere that in the Emperor's palace at Byzantium was a tree made of gold and silver, and artificial birds that sang" (Collected Poems (London 1961), p. 532.)

travelling undertaken during the course of the poem suggests that the self-same tree is not always meant, but only one halt on the journey occurs at a specified place, when the caravan moves "jusqu'au lieu dit de l'Arbre Sec" (VIII).

The place of the Dry Tree, the modern Sabzawar in the Khorasan, was a halt on Marco Polo's journey,<sup>1</sup> and the tree itself was considered of such significance that it was festooned with fetishes.<sup>2</sup> But such halts only serve to emphasise the persistence of the movement: "Que m'a donné ce monde que ce mouvement d'herbes?" (VIII).<sup>3</sup> The tree, to be given its due importance, stands alone, a fixed point in the desert which lies beyond the civilisation represented by the grasses.

Those grasses, duly cultivated, are the staple of civilisation,

<sup>1</sup>See § XXII of the Travels, and the lengthy note 2 in The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian concerning the kingdoms and marvels of the East, ed. Sir Henry Yule, 3rd edn. revised Henri Cordier (London 1903), pp. 127-139, and see map facing p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>See ibid., p. 134, and cf Vents, I, 1: "ce grand arbre de magie sous sa pouillierie d'hiver, vain de son lot d'icônes, de fétiches, / Berçant dépouilles et spectres de locustes."

<sup>3</sup>Cf Amitié du Prince, IV: "Et il se fait un mouvement à la cime de l'herbe."

barley and wheat. So, in canto VII, the desert is shown as a place where no such seed has penetrated: "Pas une graine pure dans les barbes du vent." Society is shown by contrast at harvest-time, with the "Maître du grain" supervising, for the general good, "les spéculations au souffle des moissons et la ventilation d'herbages à bout de fourches, sur les toits" (X). "A la moisson des orges, l'homme sort" (III). The important thing, however, is that "la terre en ses graines ailées, comme un poète en ses propos, voyage..." (V). The temptation which the Story-teller represents is considerable: he takes his place at the foot of the turpentine-tree, and two men are seen conversing beneath another tree. The temptation of the tree, the temptation to settle and be satisfied with what one has, is very great,

mais par-dessus les actions des hommes sur la terre, beaucoup de signes en voyage, beaucoup de graines en voyage, et sous l'azyme du beau temps, dans un grand souffle de la terre, toute la plume des moissons!... (X)

Agriculture may define a society and suggest a settled way of life, but the wind, "ce souffle d'autres rives . . . portant au delà les semences du temps," has a way with seeds, and especially with those of the poet's imagination: "Terre arable du songe! Qui parle de bâtir?"(X). So beyond the

association of grasses with men moving into action lies the suggestion of greater dynamic forces unleashed. In Vents the idea is made perfectly explicit:

Murmurantes les grèves, parmi l'herbe grainante,  
 et tout ce grand mouvement des hommes vers l'action.  
 Et sur l'empire immense des vivants, parmi l'herbe  
 des sables, cet autre mouvement plus vaste que notre  
 âge!  
 (Vents, I, 6)

\*

The Exil tetralogy stands in relation to both Anabase and Vents as a tree does to Perse's grass. The four poems represent an enforced halt. There is a distinct reduction in the vocabulary of movement, and such as there is relates as often as not to aspirations rather than reality.<sup>1</sup> The poet is left "chantant l'hier, chantant l'ailleurs" (Poème à l'Etrangère, I), and can only think of "celui qui démêle en songe bien d'autres lois de transhumance et de dérivation"

<sup>1</sup>Full details may be gathered from my Word Index..., but the following table of occurrence is indicative as a sample:

	<u>Anabase</u>	<u>Exil</u> tetralogy	<u>Vents</u>
mouvement	2	0	15
route	5	2	16
voyage			
- er	7	1	7
- eur			

(Exil, VI) at a double remove of dreaming. Movement is restricted to phenomena seen or imagined by the poet: he himself stays still. Thus in Exil, II, the sea "roule son bruit de crânes sur les grèves;" in Poème à l'Etrangère, Washington revolves around both the foreign woman and the exiled poet; in Pluies, "nous reconduirons aux portes de la Ville/ Les hautes Pluies en marche sous l'Avril" (VIII); and in Neiges the immobility caused by the coming of the snow is broken only by excursions in the poet's mind. The poet is at the still point of the turning world, caught in the vortex of exile. The similarity with the situation in the early poems may be seen by referring to Pour fêter une enfance, II, where the black sorcerer held forth in the servants' quarters and crystallised the islanders' image of the world: "Le monde est comme une pirogue qui, tournant et tournant, ne sait plus si le vent voulait rire ou pleurer..."

The circular experience of both Eloges and Exil throws off tangential forces which find expression in the essentially linear movement of Anabase and Vents. This is not to deny that both Anabase and Vents come full circle, but rather to see their circularity at a cosmic level. The relative freedom enjoyed by Perse at the time of their composition

allowed him the expansion they embody.

\*

Vents epitomises linear geographical movement. Currents of air in turn symbolise currents of life, a clear image of appetency. They blow above the "chaussée des hommes," itself an image of man in motion, first used in Pluies, VIII, but repeated along with "la route des hommes" as a leitmotif in Vents. Infinitely more powerful than men, the winds are a constant example of the irresistible force of movement, and a reminder too of man's fragility:

C'étaient de très grands vents sur toutes faces de  
ce monde

. . . . .

Qui n'avaient garde ni mesure, et nous laissaient,  
hommes de paille,

En l'an de paille sur leur erre...

(Vents, I, 1)

Egging man on, and yet making man aware of his limitations, the winds, a natural phenomenon, thus perform the basic function of the supernatural. The drought in man's soul makes him straw in the wind. The poet goes through the City gates "vers les pailles, parmi la chair tavelée des femmes en plein air,"

Et les femmes étaient grandes, au goût de seigles  
et d'agrumes et de froment moulu à l'image de leur corps.

Et nous vous dérobiais, ô filles, à la sortie des  
salles, ce mouvement encore du soir dans vos chevelures

libres -- tout ce parfum d'essence et de sécheresse,  
votre aura, comme une fulguration d'ailleurs...

(Vents, II, 1)

The grass, the wheat and rye of civilisation are as dry as the crackle of a comb through hair, as that of distant summer lightning. It is consequently left to the happy few to respond to the wind's urgings, to the soul's itching, and to try and make sense and order from the chaos of hollow men "faits de paille" scattered by "le souffle du vent parmi l'herbe stérile:"<sup>1</sup>

Irritable la chair où le prurit de l'âme nous tient encore rebelles!

Et c'est un temps de haute fortune, lorsque les grands aventuriers de l'âme sollicitait le pas sur la chaussée des hommes,

Interrogeant la terre entière sur son aire, pour connaître le sens de ce très grand désordre.

(Vents, III, 5)

Movement at a physical level is important, but on a metaphysical plane infinitely more so. Only the "souffle de l'esprit" can inspire the body to work to its utmost capacity and help it fulfil its desires, and in so doing stretch that capacity and those desires so that they are never realised.

<sup>1</sup>The phrases are from Perse's adaptation of the opening section of T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men," in Commerce, hiver 1924, unpaginated.

Les revendications de l'âme sur la chair sont extrêmes. Qu'elles nous tiennent en haleine! Et qu'un mouvement très fort nous porte à nos limites, et au delà de nos limites!

(Vents, I, 6)

Such a capacity in man makes him less unworthy of attention, and the realisation of this allows the poet to sing of man without moderating his praise. Man's very self-sufficiency, born of an awareness of the wind, breeds a new humanism:

Et l'homme encore fait son ombre sur la chaussée  
des hommes,  
Et la fumée de l'homme est sur les toits, le  
mouvement des hommes sur la route,  
Et la saison de l'homme sur nos lèvres comme un  
thème nouveau...

(Vents, IV, 2)

Yet the poet is there to guide the exploration, assuming the functions of the wind. He pursues "sur les routes méconnues l'essaim des songes vrais ou faux," and asserts his "cri de vivant sur la chaussée des hommes:"

Et nos poèmes encore s'en iront sur la route des  
hommes, portant semence et fruit dans la lignée des  
hommes d'un autre âge --

Une race nouvelle parmi les hommes de ma race, une  
race nouvelle parmi les filles de ma race, et mon cri  
de vivant sur la chaussée des hommes, de proche en proche,  
et d'homme en homme,

Jusqu'aux rives lointaines où déserte la mort!...

(IV, 6)

The Poet's embodiment of the wind is made clear, as so often in *Perse*, by the substitution of words within a pair of parallel rhythmic phrases. Just as Exil, for instance, opens on two octosyllables allowing us to equate the idea of exile with its corresponding image of the sands, so in Vents, when two phrases some number of pages apart are juxtaposed, the concretion of the abstract becomes clear: "Et le Poète aussi est avec nous, sur la chaussée des hommes de son temps" (III, 6): "Avec vous, et le Vent avec nous, sur la chaussée des hommes de ma race!" (IV, 5). The fact that the first sentence is repeated in fragmented form and the second opens a canto only serves to assist the memory and heighten the echo.

The association between the poet's work and the wind is an obvious feature of the poem, just as poet, poem and sea are to be fused in Amers; and *Perse* frequently suggests the rhythmic parallelism:

Et c'est d'un même mouvement à tout de mouvement  
lié, que mon poème encore dans le vent, de ville en ville  
et fleuve en fleuve, court aux plus vastes houles de la  
terre, épouses elles-mêmes et filles d'autres houles...

(Vents, II, 1)

But if the poet is in the vanguard, the host of natural phenomena is moving with him "au mouvement des choses de ce

monde" (II, 4). There are "migrations d'insectes sur les mers" (I, 3), "migrations d'oiseaux . . . par le travers du Siècle" (II, 3) and "migrations de crabes sur la terre" (II, 4). Winter is the colour of "vieilles migrations célestes, et de pelleteries errantes" (II, 2); man is seen caught up almost despite himself in the universal migration: "L'homme pousse son ombre sur les versants de grande transhumance!..." (II, 6). To live fully is to accept the offer proposed by the wind, embracing its dynamism partly for its own sake and partly for what it may lead to:

Si vivre est tel, qu'on s'en saisisse! Ah! qu'on  
 en pousse à sa limite,  
 D'une seule et même traite dans le vent, d'une seule  
 et même vague sur sa course,  
 Le mouvement!...

(IV, 1)

"S'immobiliser, c'est mourir."<sup>1</sup>

\*

Mankind is not endowed with unbounded tolerance or an infallible sense of justice. Perse's sympathies lie less with the crowd than with the outcast, with the "gens de péril et gens d'exil, et tous bannis du songe des humains sur les

<sup>1</sup>Gaston Bachelard, La Dialectique de la durée (Paris 1963), p. 2, characterising Bergson's idea of continuity.

chemins de la plus vaste mer" (Vents, III, 2). He himself had known that sea-route, and uses the sea as the centralising image of Amers. By its nature, the sea cannot express the same linear motion as the wind. "Par comparaison à Vents, Amers est un monde moins centrifuge, moins en expansion, plus fermé et plus centré, plus apaisé et même serein, on oserait dire plus classique."<sup>1</sup> The increased serenity stems partially from private circumstances, partially from the very nature of the image used. Its storms are not shown in Conrad-like detail; it is seen rather as a natural constant, neighbour to man on land. Its tides are traced, and some of its moods; its rocking swell is seen and felt. It is a life principle with which some are in the closest sympathy, for instance "celui dans le sommeil, dont le souffle est relié au souffle de la mer, et au renversement de la marée, voici qu'il se retourne sur sa couche comme un vaisseau change d'amures..." (Exil, VI). But Amers is not a poem written simply for fellow-sailors. "Les références terrestres abondent, et accusent le mouvement; on ne peut entendre croître la mer qu'à ses confins de mer."<sup>2</sup> It is the intimate and varied

<sup>1</sup>Henry, "Amers"..., p. 155.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

effect of the sea on man, the ultimate poetical interiorisation of the sea's movement within man, which interests Perse. The shore-line, where men and sea meet, consequently assumes a position of the greatest importance. There is "un plus large mouvement de choses à leur rive" (Amers, Strophe, I, 4).

Although categorisation distorts, one may say that there are four kinds of movement, apart from the rhythms of "le texte même . . . et son mouvement de mer," (ibid., Chœur, 4),<sup>1</sup> to be studied in Amers. The first is the simple rocking motion of the sea governed by moon and weather; the second the evocation of travel across the sea; the third the human and terrestrial procession down to the sea in its honour; and the fourth, the least tangible, the image of the sea itself moving through space and time. The first three aspects have already found their commentators.<sup>2</sup> The first is closely

<sup>1</sup>Cf: "Le rythme du flux marin représente le rythme linguistique," (Monique Parent, "Le rythme dans Chronique de Saint-John Perse," p. 116). Although no analysis is being offered of Perse's rhythms, a discussion of the sea as an image of language and vice versa will be found in § 10.

<sup>2</sup>Notably by Henry, op. cit. For the vocabulary of movement see esp. pp. 68-80, and for its imagery pp. 81-94.

linked to vital rhythms of breath, heartbeat and sex, so allowing extended similes such as the love dialogue of "Etroits sont les vaisseaux." The second is no newcomer to Perse's work: the theme of Anabase is re-echoed: "O Voyageur sur les eaux noires en quête de sanctuaires, allez et grandissez, plutôt que de bâtir" (Amers, Strophe, VI). Migrations continue, of Kings (ibid., IV) and wings (ibid., IX, 4 - 1 and 6 - 2), of "sables vers la mer" (ibid., 3 - 2) and bees across the sea (ibid., 6 - 2). The years of suffering are over: "Enfuie la peine, migratrice! Et j'aime, et tu es là" (ibid., 5 - 1). The third, the homage paid to the sea by those recognising its quasi-divine power and seeking its revitalising force, forms the armature of the poem. It is the last, the least clear, the least noticed, which claims our attention.

The sea, "avec . . . ses vieux Nomades en exil" (Invocation, 6), is itself nomadic. By the end of the poem, Perse can ask of the sea: "Est-ce toi, Nomade, qui nous passeras ce soir aux rives du réel?" (Chœur, 5). Although the overtones are metaphysical, the poet clearly implies a quite physical progression of the sea, as is evident from the first reference in the poem to

La Mer mouvante et qui chemine au glissement de ses

grands muscles errants, la Mer gluante au glissement de plèvre, et toute à son afflux de mer, s'en vint à nous sur ses anneaux de python noir,

Très grande chose en marche vers le soir et vers la transgression divine...

(Invocation, 6)

"Transgression" retains its full Latin sense of cross-movement, as Professor Henry makes clear in the following comment: "ces thèmes (= la réalité, les puissances de vie, l'homme dans son éternité agissante, la solitude, la liberté, l'amour, la louange, la création de l'œuvre, la mer...) sont essentiellement cinétismes: ils sont matérialisés, mais même souvent en cours, en métamorphose, en transgression."<sup>1</sup> Materialised, certainly, through an image as dynamic as they. Whereas earlier poems had expressed movement in terms of travel across land and sea, Amers goes one step further and shows the sea itself as a traveller: "Qui sait nos routes? . . . Heureux les égarés sur mer! Et de la Mer aussi qu'on dise: heureuse l'égarée!..." (Strophe, IX, 6 - 2). In a clear echo of a Heraclitan fragment,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>2</sup>Heraclitus, fragment 12 in H. Diels (ed. W. Franz), Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker (Berlin 1934-54). "Upon those that step into the same river different and different waters flow" (tr. G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, The Presocratic Philosophers (Cambridge 1962), p. 196.) A French translator gives "On ne peut pas se baigner deux fois dans le même fleuve" (J.

Perse is quite specific:

M'es-tu le fleuve, m'es-tu la mer? ou bien le  
fleuve dans la mer? M'es-tu la mer elle-même voyageuse,  
où nul, le même, se mêlant, ne s'est jamais deux fois  
mêlé?...

(Strophe, IX, 5 - 2)

The loved one is certainly a traveller ("... O Voyageuse  
jusqu'à moi hors de ta nuit de femme", ibid.), but the element  
from which she appears to proceed, a Venus rising from the  
waters, is a cosmic traveller too. And because sheer movement  
is a life principle with Perse, the sea is a stronghold against  
death.

O Mer levée contre la mort! Qu'il est d'amour  
en marche par le monde à la rencontre de ta horde! Une  
seule vague sur son criç!...

(Strophe, IX, 4 - 1)

It is a "Mer d'ailleurs et de toujours," a sea enticing man

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Brun, Héraclite (Paris 1965), p. 136). Of Amers, Perse wrote:  
"Je m'étonne grandement de voir des critiques favorables  
apprécier le poème comme une cristallisation, alors que la  
poésie pour moi est avant tout mouvement--dans sa naissance  
comme sa croissance et son élargissement final. La philosophie  
même du "poète" me semble pouvoir se ramener, essentiellement,  
au vieux "rhéisme" élémentaire de la pensée antique--comme celle,  
en Occident, de nos Pré-Socratiques. Et sa métrique aussi,  
qu'on lui impute à rhétorique, ne tend encore qu'au mouvement  
et à la fréquentation du mouvement, dans toutes ses ressources  
vivantes, les plus imprévisibles. D'où l'importance en tout,  
pour le poète, de la Mer." (Quoted in Caillois, Poétique...,  
pp. 180-181.) For another important statement about the poem,  
see "La Thématique d'Amers."

geographically and historically through space and time to follow its example. Not "la terre promise" but "ô Mer promise!"

pour la scansion d'œuvres futures, de très grandes œuvres à venir, dans leur pulsation nouvelle et leur incitation d'ailleurs.

(Strophe, III)

The unknown attracts through the known. Whatever fascination the visible sea may have, and whatever fundamental effect on the concept and rhythms of his poetry, Perse praises the sea for being "l'errante sans retour, et mer d'aveugle migration" (Chœur, 4). The "goût de l'âme très foraine" has a spiritual aftertaste.

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Chronique explores that aftertaste and reiterates the human question, posed in Amers, about death. Its relative brevity as a poem means that the intricate complexity of kinds of movement perceptible in Amers gives way to a more single-minded discussion of movement through time. It continues at the same time Perse's exploration of la distance intérieure. Its terms are, like those of the later méditation poétique, Oiseaux,<sup>1</sup> aerial rather than terrestrial or maritime, as

<sup>1</sup>For a study of movement in Oiseaux see Vandecasteele, "L'Oiseau...", pp. 51-82.

traditionally befits a more metaphysical speculation. "Et ce n'est point de même mer que rêvons ce soir" (Chronique, I). Continuing along life's "routes sans bornes," the poet faces "ce grand vent d'ailleurs à notre encontre" (ibid., 2). Reminiscences about the past--"Nous avons marché seuls sur les routes lointaines" (3)--evoke past journeys, but "n'y a-t-il pas pour nous le ton d'une modulation nouvelle?" (Vents, I, 6): everything is transposed into a higher key. As opposed to the straightforward "règlements de transhumance" (Amers, Strophe, I, 1) of earlier poems, there are "de plus hautes transhumances" (Chronique, 1), "la transhumance du ciel sur terre" (ibid., 7). Beyond the highways and roads of this world, "notre route tend plus loin" (2), like the birds "se frayant route d'éternité" of Oiseaux, 10. "La mort est au hublot, mais notre route n'est point là" (Chronique, 6). The wind is a "brise d'ailleurs" (6) and the "très grand souffle voyageur" (5) a breath of the spirit. The sea is a "mer d'outremer et d'outresonge" (6), and the shore where the poet seems to stand, as at the close of Amers, is that other shore, "comme l'outrepas du songe" (Amers, Chœur, 3). Like his birds, the poet "naviguait avant le songe, et sa réponse est: 'Passer outre!...'" (Oiseaux, 9).

Beyond "le mouvement des choses de ce monde," Perse is on the brink of the ineffable. Death holds no terror for him.

Siffle plus bas, brise d'alliance, à la veillée des hommes de grand âge. Notre grief n'est plus de mort. La terre donne son sel. Le soir nous dit un mot de Guèbre. L'esprit des eaux rase le sol comme mouette au désert. Et l'ineffable est sur son aile à hauteur de nos tempes. Il n'est plus mot pour nous que nous n'ayons créé...

(Chronique, 6)

The poet has made his mark, his gesture of permanence. To move is to live: "L'inertie seule est menaçante."<sup>1</sup>

Where there is a beyond counterbalanced by such an appreciation of natural phenomena, the thin line between the two is of particular importance. Whether at a simple homely level, where a doorstep marks the threshold to broader and freer movement, or at a terrestrial level, at the sea-shore, or again at a spiritual level where body meets soul, there is a point of interpenetration as well as of separation. As the point of hesitation it crystallises all notions of movement, and so all notions of exile.

Ce qui sensibilise à un tel point le seuil dans

<sup>1</sup>Perse, Poésie, /p. 47.

cette poésie, c'est probablement son ambiguïté et son double visage: car il est à la fois tourné vers le dedans et le dehors... S'il forme d'abord l'espace de l'accueil, s'il donne accès à la chaleur d'une intimité recluse, il peut aussi, en un renversement de son signe moral, présenter cette même intimité à l'appel du grand vide extérieur, la livrer à toutes les tentations de l'horizon. Frontière aiguë et ligne de passage, qui peut évidemment se franchir dans les deux sens...<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jean-Pierre Richard, "Saint-John Perse" in Onze études sur la poésie moderne (Paris 1964), p. 48.

§ 7

THE THRESHOLD

Quasi sacrae sunt fores.

Porphyry

(De antro nympharum § 27)

There seems little need to speak at length about the importance of the threshold in any community, however primitive or sophisticated. We recognise in everyday life the particular ambivalence of its nature, providing a point of separation from the outside world which lies beyond our possession and immediate control and, at the same time, our means of access to that world. Alternatively, looking from the outside, respect is shown for the private lares and penates, and so polite custom requires the visitor to request access by some form of greeting or indication of his presence. The special attributes of the threshold have given rise at different times to different rituals. The Old Testament provides a number of examples, many of them violent, but others simply indicating the respect shown to the threshold.

And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him.

Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon to this day.

(I Samuel 5, 4-5)

The violence done to this pagan god of the Philistines finds an echo in Perse's view of the sea, the primal untameable element which pervades his work:

Mer de Baal et de Dagon--face première de nos songes.

(Amers, Chœur, 1)

And the sea's constant lashing of the earth's shores indicates a cosmic equivalent to the image of the threshold recurring throughout Perse's poetry: the sea-shore itself.

A more peaceable biblical reference is one instance among many that could be evoked of a ceremony taking place on the threshold:

And the prince shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate without, and shall stand by the post of the gate, and the priests shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate: then he shall go forth; but the gate shall not be shut until the evening.

(Ezekiel 46, 2)

Both tone and topic remind one strangely of Perse's writing in Amitié du Prince or Anabase. The poet's observation and reading have led him to see the significance of the threshold, and to restore the primitive meaning to some of today's empty mimes: carrying the bride over the threshold, "first-footing" and the like.

If one applies the following observation by Mircea Eliade not only to the threshold of a church but also, as he suggests, to any domestic threshold by virtue of the special nature of

one's home, the paradoxical qualities peculiar to the threshold become clear:

Pour mettre en évidence la non-homogénéité de l'espace, telle qu'elle est vécue par l'homme religieux, on peut faire appel à un exemple banal: une église, dans une ville moderne. Pour le croyant, cette église participe à un autre espace que la rue où elle se trouve. La porte qui s'ouvre vers l'intérieur de l'église marque une solution de continuité. Le seuil qui sépare les deux espaces indique en même temps la distance entre les deux modes d'être, profane et religieux. Le seuil est à la fois la borne, la frontière qui distingue et oppose deux mondes, et le lieu paradoxal où ces mondes communiquent, où peut s'effectuer le passage du monde profane au monde sacré.

Une fonction rituelle analogue est dévolue au seuil des habitations humaines, et c'est pourquoi il jouit d'une telle considération.<sup>1</sup>

After listing a number of rites associated with the threshold, Eliade summarises neatly the nature of the ambivalence:

Le seuil, la porte montrent d'une façon immédiate et concrète la solution de continuité de l'espace; d'où leur grande importance religieuse, car ils sont tout ensemble les symboles et les véhicules du passage.<sup>2</sup>

The poetic extensions, apart from language itself considered as mediator, which may be taken from the concrete facts are perhaps indicated by the attributes heaped on the Roman "God

<sup>1</sup>Eliade, Le Sacré et le profane, pp. 24-25.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 25. Contrast Jean Paulhan: "Il n'y a pas la moindre solution de continuité dans ses poèmes" ("Enigmes de Perse" I, NRF, 20, Nov. 1962, 773).

of Gods," namely Janus. Starting as a sun-god, his position was gradually usurped by Jupiter, but he was left to open and close the day, holding its keys as well as those of heaven and of all doors and gates on earth. From there to being the god of all beginnings and all departures was an easy step, and so Janus bifrons, looking both ways from any threshold with appropriate ambivalence, became also a god of wells, rivers and harbours.<sup>1</sup> The god whose two faces are known essentially from a wealth of Roman coins had as his symbol on the obverse side the same as Perse would have emblazoned on Cybele's gates or nailed to the Lovers' door: a ship.<sup>2</sup>

With the mention of one further, central word which characterises two-headed Janus, namely uncertainty, the major aspects of Perse's use of the image of the threshold have been

<sup>1</sup>For Janus, see The Oxford Classical Dictionary, art. Janus, and J. M. Robertson, Christianity and Mythology (2nd edn. revised and expanded, London 1936), pp. 349-352. Gaston Bachelard's view of salt is remarkably apposite here: "C'est une puissance insidieuse qui travaille aux confins de la terre et de l'eau. Le sel se dissout et se cristallise, il est un Janus matériel" (La Terre et les rêveries de la volonté, p. 262).

<sup>2</sup>See Amers, Strophe, IX, 7: "Il est temps, ô Cités, d'armorier d'une nef les portes de Cybèle." And again: "Aux portes closes des amants clouez l'image du Navire!"

anticipated.<sup>1</sup> One recognises with Bachelard "l'importance du rôle de l'hésitation imposée par la réflexion au seuil des actions."<sup>2</sup> As with other themes, this moves from the immediate and physical through highly-charged extensions to take on, finally, metaphysical associations while still remaining firmly rooted in the concrete. From doorstep to sea-shore, and from sea-shore to the threshold of eternity in space and time are natural and understandable progressions.

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Before dealing with Perse's central images attached to and deriving from the threshold, a relatively minor one, introduced memorably in Amitié du Prince, will serve to link the image with a particular form of uncertainty: gambling. If "un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard" for Mallarmé, neither can it for Perse:

<sup>1</sup>In the case of Raymond Roussel, the uncertainty and ambiguity connected with the threshold became pathological, according to Michel Foucault, Raymond Roussel (Paris 1963). But cf Rayner Heppenstall's measured reaction in Roussel (London 1966), e.g. "That Roussel's death took place on the actual threshold of a locked door has too much dazzled M. Foucault with its metaphorical and symbolic possibilities."

<sup>2</sup>Bachelard, La Dialectique de la durée (Paris 1963), p. 72.

Non point stérile sur son seuil, mais plutôt  
 fleurissant en bons mots, et sachant rire d'un bon mot,  
 assis, de bon conseil aux jeux du seuil, grattant  
 sagesse et bonhomie sous le mouchoir de tête (et son  
 tour vient de secouer le dé, l'osselet ou les billes):  
 tel sur son seuil je l'ai surpris, à la tombée du  
 jour, entre les hauts crachoirs de cuivre.

(Amitié du Prince, IV)

If the Prince can enjoy a game of chance, the occupation is worthy of figuring in the first of Perse's great enumerations, in Anabase, X: "celui qui joue aux dés, aux osselets, au jeu des gobelets" can stand in all honour beside the latter-day Pythagorean "qui a déployé sur le sol ses tables à calcul." Similarly whole lands can be played for, and chance be recognised as a universal force. Perse writes of the sea as a "province d'herbe folle et qui fut jouée aux dés..." (Amers, Invocation, 1). From a starting-point in the particular and immediate, the image has broadened out and become depersonalised at a universal level.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Cf Johan Huizinga: "Le jeu est une action ou une activité volontaire . . . accompagnée d'un sentiment de tension et de joie, et d'une conscience d'"être autrement" que dans (?) la "vie courante"." (Homo Ludens, Paris 1951, pp. 57-58). Cf also Roger Caillois, Les Jeux et les hommes (Paris 1958), p. 19: "Dans tous les cas, le domaine du jeu est ainsi un univers réservé, clos, protégé: un espace pur." See also ibid., pp. 34-38 on the category Alea.

From the poems of the early 1920s onwards the importance of the threshold is recognised. In the opening section of Anabase comes a clear cry: "Au seuil des tentes toute gloire!" echoed later by "Et voici que des Rois sont assis à ma porte." And just as the young béké's uncles had tethered their horses at the door of the family house in Guadeloupe (recorded in Pour fêter une enfance, VI), so now we hear of "le guerrier licencié qui a planté sa lance sur son seuil pour attacher un singe..." (Anabase, X). But the pointing of the image does not remain simply at this level of recognition of the threshold's importance, with both the Prince in Amitié du Prince and the old man in the Chanson du Présomptif sitting on the threshold, in half-light. Its breadth is hinted at not only in the phrase "au seuil d'un grand pays" (Anabase, IX, used twice again in Vents, II, 2) but also more importantly in canto VI:

--Ainsi parfois nos seuils pressés d'un singulier destin et, sur les pas précipités du jour, de ce côté du monde, le plus vaste, où le pouvoir s'exile chaque soir, tout un veuvage de lauriers!<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The "veuvage de lauriers" seems to refer to the tale in Ovid's Metamorphoses (Bk. I) where Daphne, escaping Apollo's amorous advances, is transformed into a laurel tree. The same work (Bk. 10) may also throw light on an earlier passage in Anabase: "'... Fruit de la femme, ô Sabéenne!...' Trahissant

The singular fate treading on these thresholds is expressed here with a clarity which hindsight calls prophecy, linked as it is with the notion that each evening, power goes into exile, an archetypal image of the sun's daily disappearance, but also suggesting that for men too, "l'exil n'est point d'hier" (Exil, II).

The next published poem, Exil, links the image of the threshold inseparably with the idea of exile. Given the data of the image, it is hardly surprising that it receives its fullest expression when the diplomat is thrown from power, and the poet stands alone on the uncertain shore of a completely New World.

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l'âme la moins sobre et soulevé des pures pestilences de la nuit,/ je m'élèverai dans mes pensées contre l'activité du songe" (V). After an incestuous relationship with her father, Myrrha flees to Sabaea, where she gives birth to Adonis. It provides a more satisfactory reading that reference either to the Sabaeans at Haran in the Middle Ages, to the Queen of Sheba, or to the Garibbean Saba where Perse wrote his obituary notice for Claudel, "Silence pour Claudel," and reminds one that Saba, a point, like the Arbre Sec, on Marco Polo's route, is in Jabal (Anabase, III) and is traditionally connected with the journey of the Magi (see e.g. Psalms 72, 10, Isaiah 60, 6) because of its myrrh, derived, according to Ovid, from the tree into which Myrrha was transmogrified. Could T. S. Eliot have made this connection in the poem which shows the strongest direct influence of his work on Anabase?

Portes ouvertes sur les sables, portes ouvertes sur  
 l'exil,  
 Les clés aux gens du phare, et l'astre roué vif sur  
 la pierre du seuil:  
 Mon hôte, laissez-moi votre maison de verre dans les  
 sables... (Exil, I)

The Roman tradition was to close the gates of the Temple of Janus in time of peace and open them in time of war.<sup>1</sup> In 1941, when Exil was written, with the second world war in full devastating swing, it is quite appropriate that the lighthouse doors on Long Beach Island should remain firmly open. Fully appropriate too is the intimate association through imagery of exile and the beach, indicated from the very beginning by the complete parallelism of the two octosyllables of the opening line, with the simple substitution of "l'exil" for "les sables." The lighthouse keys are with the keepers and the star, we are told, is broken on the wheel on the threshold stone.

This multiple image has elicited a number of interpretations. Saillet attached it specifically to the immediate circumstances of war and saw only the Nazi swastika: "L'ennemi est nommé de façon transparente au début du poème: 'l'astre roué vif sur la

<sup>1</sup>See C. E. Robinson, A History of Rome (London 1959), pp. 40, 243, 294, and the Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology (London 1961), p. 215.

pierre du seuil' désigne non sans magnificence la croix gammée qui règne d'un bout à l'autre du pays."<sup>1</sup> Professor Parent, justifiably wary of a critic who claims to see the meaning of one of Perse's complex images "de façon transparente," adds a feasible extension.

Un commentateur y voit la croix gammée, les branches brisées pouvant être assimilées aux membres d'une victime du supplice de la roue; la croix gammée est un symbole solaire. Mais alors, de quelle porte s'agit-il? Le même commentateur pense qu'il s'agit des abords de la France. Cela n'est pas impossible, mais nous éloigne du sens le plus obvie: les portes sont aussi celles de la maison des sables. D'autre part cette interprétation n'est-elle pas trop étroite? Je verrais plutôt dans cet astre supplicié et brisé, d'abord l'image concrète d'une tache de soleil sur le seuil, car la vision du sang s'impose à nous à travers l'expression "roué vif," puis dans cette image, je trouverais le symbole de la gloire de la France, peut-être aussi celle du poète, détruite, broyée. C'est finalement le signe de la guerre et de la destruction qu'elle entraîne.<sup>2</sup>

Without wishing to take sides in the bickering which Saillet and Paulhan indulged in on the subject, it is at least interesting to note that the latter wrote: "Il est certain que: L'astre roué vif sur la pierre du seuil et la dernière palpitation solaire sur le seuil solitaire ne contiennent pas la moindre allusion

<sup>1</sup>Saillet, Saint-John Perse..., p. 84.

<sup>2</sup>Parent, Saint-John Perse..., p. 216.

à la croix gammée."<sup>1</sup> A study of the image in context will perhaps lead to a just assessment of its function and meaning in the poem, and confirmation that some of Professor Parent's suggestions are the most valuable.

The first important feature is the time-setting: there is a clear suggestion, as is specified later in the poem, that "c'est un peu après midi, à l'heure de grande viduité" (VI). Whereas in earlier poems the threshold had been associated with shadow, with that half-light which suggests the ambivalence of dawn or dusk, on the threshold between day and night, here the fierce midday sun puts the poem, like Anabase, under the sign of Leo, in July and August. In Exil, we stand at the "partage de midi." On the threshold of a new country and of a new life, the poet exposes himself at the pivotal point of the day to the sun's twofold effect: its destructive power and its life-giving force. It is understandable that Perse's

<sup>1</sup>See SAILLET, pp. 183-187 and CP, X, 188 for Paulhan's remarks. The second of the Paulhan quotations does not occur in Perse's published work. It is of course possible that it features in a private letter from the poet, or, less probably still, is from a draft of the poem which came into Paulhan's hands. It is more likely to be the sort of hybrid formation à la manière de Perse such as Caillois created on the word "explication" (Poétique..., p. 206).

feelings should be reflected in the searing, white-hot images of the summer sun's rays sharpening their arrowheads in his wounds, and of the heat-haze rising invisibly, yet distorting the vision, from the asbestos beach. The particular characteristic of asbestos is that it is heat-resistant, and the Greek root of the French word, ἀμίαντος, means incorruptible, undefiled or pure. It is not impossible that Perse knew Aeschylus' reference to the sea as simply ἡ ἀμίαντος 'the pure' (Persae, 578): it would tally with the idea of moisture evaporating from the sea's edge that provides the immediate visual source of the image. Certainly the whole notion of purity is of central importance for Perse. The purity of the beach is its nakedness, chosen by the poet as a place that chimes with his longing for solitude to reflect on the events which have brought him to the New World and all the welter of emotions his uprooting has evoked.

The spring of 1941 was a dark moment for France and for most of the rest of Europe, and Leger's state of mind seems to have been particularly distressed at that time. Feeling the need for complete isolation, he accepted the offer of Francis and Katherine Biddle to spend some time at a beach-house of theirs on Long Beach Island.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Knodel, Saint-John Perse, p. 61.

Francis Biddle, the United States Attorney General, and his wife also received the dedication of Pluies, but for the moment we must return, with the circumstantial details now sketched in, to the image of "l'astre roué vif sur la pierre du seuil." There seem to be no good reasons for denying a connection with the swastika, but again no good reason for restricting its significance to the emblem of Hitler's Germany, since there is no pejorative overtone in the context. The swastika has, after all, a history going back to the remotest times, and is essentially a sun-symbol. "Les images le plus fréquemment associées à la croix gammée sont les représentations du soleil et des divinités solaires."<sup>1</sup> A variant on that most primitive of symbols, the cross, it serves to indicate rotatory motion by its crooked arms:

Dans l'ordre des figures cruciformes, la spirale a pour correspondant le swastika, symbole des plus riches que d'innombrables civilisations ont adopté comme emblème majeur. Le swastika symbolise l'axe vertical d'un manège à quatre bras, dont le mouvement de rotation est exprimé par le retour de chacun des bras.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Goblet d'Alviella, La Migration des symboles (Paris 1891), p. 72. § 2 of this work provides ample evidence of the distribution and importance of the swastika, ending on a note filled for us with bitter irony: "La croix gammée . . . a complètement disparu de la symbolique et même du folklore aryen."

<sup>2</sup>Gérard de Champeaux & Dom Sébastien Sterckx, Le Monde des symboles (La Pierre-qui-vire, Yonne 1966), p. 25.

As a form of conjunction between square and circle, it consequently finds expression in most societies, however primitive, and as the mandala forms a vital symbol in Jung's collective unconscious.<sup>1</sup> Here an element of torture is suggested in bringing the sun to preside as a divinity over the threshold: the poet's private situation is thrown on to a universal and cosmic level. To restrict the meaning of the image to any one aspect or level would be not only to do it less than justice but also to miss the very nature of ambiguity which is central to the poet's work. It is natural that the threshold should appear at the very heart of this ambiguity, and natural too that the threshold should extend from the doorstep of Perse's retreat to the beach itself, standing at the threshold between land and sea, holding the balance between 3000 miles of Atlantic Ocean separating him from France and his family, and the 3000 miles of his adopted continent. The poet, bifrons, and in more ways than one "bilingue" is at the vital fulcrum-point, and the precision and power of his evocation can be shown by further reference to this brief but intense opening section of Exil.

<sup>1</sup>See Jung, "Concerning Mandala Symbolism" in Collected Works, 9, Part 1 (London 1959) and Frieda Fordham, An Introduction to Jung's Psychology (Harmondsworth 1966), pp. 65 ff.

L'Eté de gypse aiguise ses fers de lance dans nos plaies.

The heat of summer, white like gypsum, twists the tips of its shafts of burning sunlight in the exile's wounds. The image is amplified, without undergoing modification, in the following lines:

J'étais un lieu flagrant et nul comme l'ossuaire des saisons,  
Et, sur toutes grèves de ce monde, l'esprit du dieu fumant déserte sa couche d'amiante.

The barren, burning beach is a place of the poet's own election, and stretches before him like a bone-heap of passing years. The rattling of pebbles on the beach is later given a further link with bones: "Et la mer à la ronde roule son bruit de crâne sur les grèves" (II). Colour is virtually absent: white, or at most a touch of pale yellow, alternates with complete transparency. The negation of colour itself reflects the state of exile, the fragile world of glass at the critical translucent point of juncture between earth and sea, expressed with brilliant precision later in the poem in the image of "le pur nautille des eaux libres" (IV). The thin skirt of the nautilus mollusc is as transparent as the edge of the sea washing the shore. In the lines from canto I, then, every aspect of the picture is

right: the delicate balance between two worlds, the colourless state of the exile, the insecure sand on which he may try to build his future, the exact poetic transcription of observed phenomena. One's responses are fully satisfied, but for the intellect at least there are further rewards.

One of the natural forms in which gypsum occurs is known as 'swallow-tail' or 'arrow-head' gypsum, and in French gypse fer de lance. Two rhomboid crystals are joined to suggest the shape, and whereas gypsum in its powdered form is white (as alabaster or plaster of Paris), this crystalline macle is yellowish.<sup>1</sup> The use of gypsum as an epithet for summer is consequently more than justified: even the colour is no longer, by implication, the white of alabaster but the yellowish tinge of arrow-head gypsum, and no longer matt but gleaming. A slight excursion out of the all too often closed world of literature, in which Perse has refused to be imprisoned--*Mon nom n'appartient pas aux lettres*<sup>2</sup>--reveals something of his

<sup>1</sup>"C'est la macle de deux cristaux lenticulaires qui produit la variété connue sous le nom de fer de lance; sa couleur est jaunâtre" (Grand Larousse Encyclopédique, art. gypse).

<sup>2</sup>Perse, "Lettre sur Jacques Rivière," NRF, 139, avril 1925, 455.

breadth and depth of interest in the world around him and the exactness of both his observation and notation in this superb transferred epithet.<sup>1</sup>

The word seuil recurs eight times in Exil alone. Leaving aside the occurrences of the word which have maritime connections, one finds a close link with a shadowy but forceful girl who reappears at different moments through the poem. Seen as a wandering courtesan haunting the poet's dreams and standing enticingly on the threshold, she comes to represent Poetry itself, a Romantic Muse figure who could say to Perse what Musset's vision said in the "Nuit de décembre:" "Ami, je suis la solitude." MacLeish indicates the same interpretation:

Certainly when Perse came to Washington, poetry was the last thing in his mind. When, cautiously, I spoke to him at that time of the opportunity for his own work which the Library could offer, I was told, almost harshly, that there could be no thought, no possibility, of poetry again. But all this is explained, for those who have ears to hear, in Exil: "Que voulez-vous encore de moi, ô souffle originel? Et vous, que pensez-vous encore tirer de ma lèvre vivante..." There is a small,

<sup>1</sup>Bachelard includes in his "herbier minéralogique" this very macle, though making a different association: "Sans doute, un beau gypse en fer de lance nous fait songer à une feuille de la sagittaire" (La Terre et les rêveries de la volonté, p. 245).

naked house on the long New Jersey beaches, facing east across the whole Atlantic, where, if I do not misread the poem, Perse faced not only his exile from his country, but the demand upon him--the ancient and often silenced demand--of that one companion of his journey whom, of all companions, he could not leave behind.<sup>1</sup>

A continuation of the sentence quoted here from Exil, III, will show clearly how the insistence and persistence of poetry is personified:

Et vous, que pensez-vous encore tirer de ma lèvre vivante,  
O force errante sur mon seuil, ô Mendiante dans nos voies et sur les traces du Prodigue ?

The beggar-girl will allow the exile no respite, no time for self-commiseration or indulgence in silence. He has tried to dismiss her, but she comes again and again in the night to remind him of the almost sacred duty--that is, the irresistible urge--of a poet to write:

Et qui donc avant l'aube erre aux confins du monde avec ce cri pour moi ? Quelle grande fille répudiée s'en fut au sifflement de l'aile visiter d'autres seuils ? . . .

Partout-errante fut son nom de courtisane chez les prêtres, aux grottes vertes des Sibylles, et le matin sur notre seuil sut effacer les traces de pieds nus, parmi de saintes écritures...

(IV)

On the threshold of his temporary refuge, at the threshold of

<sup>1</sup>Archibald MacLeish, "Le Temps de la louange," CP, X, 117-118.

day, the poet lies in wait on the threshold of poetry "pour l'échéance d'un mot pur" (IV). Any doubt that this courtesan is the poet's Muse is dispelled when the following lines, again from canto IV, are stood parallel:

Et l'épouse nocturne avant l'aurore reconduite...

Et les poèmes de la nuit avant l'aurore répudiés.

Her name, "Partout-errante" (IV) finds a further echo in the final section of the poem:

... Tais-toi, faiblesse, et toi, parfum d'épouse dans la nuit comme l'amande même de la nuit.

Partout errante sur les grèves, partout errante sur les mers, tais-toi, douceur, et toi, présence gréée d'ailes à hauteur de ma selle.

Je reprendrai ma course de Numide, longeant la mer inaliénable...

Applying faiblesse and douceur to his mother, mentioned earlier in this canto and later the dedicatee of that most poignant of the poems of exile, Neiges, the second toi in either case is addressed to the Muse who shares his exile. Any anger of grief felt at the outset, expressed in the image of the sun tortured on the threshold, has been exorcised, and principally through the very act of writing. So a fresh start can be made, "et la consigne est de laver la pierre de vos seuils..." (VII).

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It seems improbable that the image of the threshold could

assume richer connotations, and yet, apart from its appearance as a thing in itself, its significance is extended into the realm of the metaphysical, linked closely in this sense with the increasingly insistent image of the sea-shore which understandably finds its fullest expression in Amers. In Vents, apart from its mention in the same terms as in Anabase ("Au seuil d'un grand pays sans titre ni devise, au seuil d'un grand pays de bronze vert..." Vents, II, 2), the implications are always associated with the metaphysical, however much the image remains rooted in concrete reality. Introduced, significantly, by the mention of shamans (spelt in the Anglo-Saxon way, with an initial s, to designate perhaps the American Indian rather than the Asian medicine-men, though this spelling is a variant form in French, and nearer the Sanskrit root), we read of the winds smelling of fires on invisible thresholds.

Les vallées mortes, à grands cris, s'éveillent dans  
les gorges, s'éveillent et fument à nouveau sur leurs lits  
de shamans!

Les vents sentent les feux sur d'invisibles seuils.

(II, 5)

Besides the idea of valleys awakening, suggesting dawn, there are further echoes here of that particular "in-between" state of things we have already seen associated with the threshold. The dust rising from dried-up valleys is equated with the heat-

haze rising from the beach in Exil, I, and the notion of divinity echoed in those ecstatic mediators between men and gods, the shamans. But here the thresholds are invisible: geographically, they are distant, but they are also gateways to a visionary, metaphysical world which is not available to human sight. What the shamans do for others, the threshold does for Perse. Later references in Vents indicate this as the meaning the poet is driving at.

Et l'ausculteur du Prince défaille sur son ouïe--  
comme le visionnaire au seuil de sa vision. (III, 2)

And again, after a splendid passage to which we shall have to return about the poet's own position and function:

Tu te révéleras, chiffre perdu!... Que trop d'attente  
n'aille énerver  
L'usage de notre ouïe! nulle impureté souiller le  
seuil de la vision!... (III, 6)

These are still, necessarily and understandably, linked with the poet. Indeed the poem continues: "Et le Poète encore est avec nous, parmi les hommes de son temps, habitué de son mal..." But the language has become more abstract than before, and the poet has time to speculate beyond the immediate requirements of everyday existence. Where these speculations take place, and where Perse makes poetry both of them and of the realities

of his environment is again the threshold, in its guise as the beach: "Lieu du propos: toutes grèves de ce monde" (III, 6). The choice of this place of ambiguity par excellence could not be stated more emphatically, and in Amers the theme is to recur so insistently that no doubt can remain as to its importance. The poet, "l'homme parlant dans l'équivoque," recognises the fundamental duality of human nature, but rather than separating off the two components, allows the whole to stand in ambiguity.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that Perse should be viewed as a philosopher rather than as a poet. The clarity of the threshold image throughout Perse's work acts as a corrective to any such tendency, with the dialectic presented in concrete terms, but it is interesting to see Bachelard, philosopher of poetry, dwelling on what he calls "la dialectique du dehors et du dedans" and stating that "l'homme est l'être entr'ouvert."<sup>1</sup> With his comments on the door we come full circle and echo the notations of anthropologists:

<sup>1</sup>Bachelard, La Poétique de l'espace (Paris 1964), pp. 191-207 (see esp. pp. 200-201).

Pourquoi ne pas sentir que dans la porte est incarné un petit dieu du seuil? Faut-il aller jusqu'à un lointain passé, un passé qui n'est pas le nôtre, pour sacraliser le seuil?<sup>1</sup>

With a sure poetic instinct, Perse focuses attention through the image of the threshold on an exploration of the fundamental dialectic of the human condition.

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The various aspects of the threshold, from the doorstep to the shore, and from there to the threshold of the other world, receive in Amers their fullest and clearest expression. The intricate interaction of the various aspects in Exil is understandably teased out in the later epic, and the metaphysical facet is developed more fully.

Perse's long-standing love of the sea shows throughout his work. In the earliest of his published poems, Images à Crusoé, dating from 1904, the original version of part of the opening poem, later called "Les Cloches," runs:

Tu pleurais de songer aux brisants sous la lune;  
aux sonorités du ciel vide; aux musiques étranges qui  
naissent et s'assourdissent dans le temple clos des

<sup>1</sup>Bachelard, ibid., p. 200.

oreilles solitaires,  
 semblables aux cercles enchaînés que sont les ondes  
 d'une conque, ou à l'amplification de clameurs sous la mer.<sup>1</sup>

At some time between 1911 and 1925 amendments were made to the text, one of which can only serve to underline the importance of the threshold image: the phrase "aux sonorités du ciel vide" makes way, in the definitive edition, for "aux sifflements de rives plus lointaines."

The child's early acquaintance with the sea and ships developed into a love of sailing and swimming, with all their associations of spatial solitude and sensuous well-being, such as the young men experience when bathing naked before their Queen in the Récitation à l'éloge d'une Reine. Perse has contrived to have a pied à terre overlooking the sea at most times during his life, so that the very doorstep of his house coincides as it were with the edge of the sea. The same is true of the lovers' house in Amers: "La pierre du seuil est au travers du seuil, et la mer au-delà de la pierre du seuil" (Strophe, IX, 5 - 1). The sea is immediately beyond the

<sup>1</sup>NRF, août 1909, 22; changed in original edition (Paris 1911): "dans le temple clos" reads "sous le temps clos". See also Michel Dassonville, "Discret appendice à la Poétique de St.-John Perse," Revue des sciences humaines, 113, janv.-mars 1964, 86.

threshold-stone, so close in fact that salt spray lands on it and around it: "L'ondée de mer est sur le carrelage et sur la pierre du seuil" (ibid.). The lovers' weapons link beach and doorstep closely by trembling beneath them both: "Tressaillement d'armes sous les sables et sous la pierre du seuil..." (ibid., 6 - 1). The whole drama of loving is played out on the threshold, which becomes at times a synecdoche for the house itself. The loved one expresses her fears: "O face aimante, loin du seuil... Où combats-tu si loin que je n'y sois?" (ibid.). And the lover replies with meagre comfort: "... Amies! j'ai tant rêvé de mer sur tous nos lits d'amants! et si longtemps l'Intruse a sur nos seuils traîné sa robe d'étrangère" (ibid., 6 - 2). Salvation clearly lies with the sea: "Et toi, tu nous assisteras contre la nuit des hommes, lave splendide à notre seuil, ô Mer ouverte au triple drame" (Chœur, 2). The Intruder is the sea and poetry, breaking in on the triple human drama of birth, copulation and death. Clearly the invitation to look beyond the immediate limitations of the human condition is accepted; the conjunction of the physical and the spiritual is both stated and explored: "La pierre du seuil se couvre d'arborescences pâles, de présages" (Strophe, IX, 5 - 1). It is love itself, desire and passion, which is the maieutic force

creating the very need in man to look for something beyond:

"O passion, voie royale . . . ! Désir, désir . . . O toi qui fais crier au loin le sable sur d'invisibles seuils" (Strophe, IX, 4 - 2). And love itself is seen as sharing the ambiguous qualities associated with the threshold: the poet links Eros and Janus in his benediction to dispel any doubt: "Bonne course à vos pas, divinités du seuil et de l'alcôve" (Strophe, V).

Even this, however, is not restricted to a straightforward image relationship. The cosmic overtones of love-making are expressed, and this is increasingly the case as the poem progresses, so that the elemental qualities of a creation myth are made apparent. Land and sea couple at their point of juncture, at the "région critique."<sup>1</sup> Perse is restating one of the basic myths, and familiarity with almost any creation myth on the part of the reader will elicit echoes in the poet's work. He himself mentions in his poetry Ea, Cain and Baal, all of them connected with various Middle Eastern creation myths in which water or slime is the original chaotic element from which Order was created.

<sup>1</sup>Paul Valéry, "Inspirations méditerranéennes: Nage" in Oeuvres (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), I, 1091.

Blessure ouverte au flanc terrestre pour l'intrusion sacrée, déchirement de notre nuit et resplendissement de l'autre--pierre du seuil lavée d'amour et lieu terrible de la désécration!

(Chœur, 3)

On the threshold of the unknown, one's frequent recourse is to the sort of basic tale of one's ancestors that creation myths represent: "Au seuil d'un si grand Ordre où l'Aveugle officie, nous nous sommes voilé la face du songe de nos pères" (Strophe, IV). Order, with a capital, is of prime importance for Perse who is himself consciously creating order of a high degree out of the disparate data the world presents. Hence the importance of the cry: "Seuil de la connaissance! avant-seuil de l'éclat!..." (ibid., II).

The éclat, a central word in Perse's vocabulary, is a symbol of the quasi-divine insight or intuition, lying somewhere beyond the mere knowledge of things and facts, which opens the door for him to understanding and so to poetry, the sublimation of data. A greater sense of order is implied than is traditionally the case with inspiration, however. "Nous franchissons enfin le vert royal du Seuil; et faisant plus que de rêver, nous te foulons, fable divine!..." (Chœur, 2). The divine fable is trodden underfoot because Perse has managed to re-tell

it starting from purely human and material data. His mythology is as intensely anthropomorphic as that of the Greeks, with the difference that the objects with which he starts retain their complete individuality and honour as objects.<sup>1</sup> The question posed by the Patrician women, echoing so many similar questions throughout Perse's work,<sup>2</sup> "Où vint la chose à nous manquer, et le seuil quel est-il que nous n'avons foulé?" (Strophe, IV), is to receive an answer to its second part at least in the course of the poem. Taken quite literally, with "la chose" in its generic and general sense of 'things', the poem also attempts an answer to the first part, and to discover at what point "things fall apart."

That point is the threshold, where one stands, like the sea, "au seuil d'une autre Immensité..." (Chœur, 4). To a

<sup>1</sup>In this Perse anticipates the theoreticians of the nouveau roman: "Si je dis: 'Le monde c'est l'homme,' j'obtiens toujours l'absolution; tandis que si je dis: 'les choses sont les choses, et l'homme n'est que l'homme,' je suis aussitôt reconnu coupable de crime contre l'humanité." (Alain Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman (Paris 1963), p. 47).

<sup>2</sup>Cf "Sinon l'enfance qu'y avait-il alors qu'il n'y a plus?" (Pour fêter une enfance, III); "Que m'a donné ce monde que ce mouvement d'herbes?" (Anabase, VIII); "Mais qu'est-ce là, oh, qu'est-ce en toutes choses qui soudain fait défaut?" (Exil, V); "Et qu'est-ce là qui m'est ravi?" (Vents, II, 5), etc.

further question, essentially rhetorical, the answer implied is similar: "Est-ce toi, fumée du seuil, qui de toi-même montes en nous comme l'esprit sacré du vin?" (Chœur, 2). This is an echo of "cette grande chose sourde par le monde et qui s'accroît soudain comme une ébriété" from Exil, III. "Il faut être toujours ivre," perhaps, but Perse is more Apollonian, wishing to give coherence and structure to his heady vision. And yet beyond the possibility of order comes a point where a metaphysical fervour which can only be called Dionysiac overcomes him:

Et au-delà s'ouvre la Mer étrangère, au sortir des détroits, qui n'est plus mer de tâcheron, mais seuil majeur du plus grand Orbe et seuil insigne du plus grand Age, où le pilote est congédié--Mer ouverture du monde d'interdit, sur l'autre face de nos songes! ah, comme l'outrépas du songe, et le songe même qu'on n'osa!...

(Chœur, 3)

All the elements have been scrupulously prepared in the course of the poem: the fisherman has approached and passed through straits reminiscent of the Symplegades, and the pilot, associated with the lover, has played his part. The image of the far side of the dream started with the face of the loved one forbidden to the lover like the far side of satellite moons (for the poem dates from a decade before the first photographs of our moon's far side): for man on earth, only a half can be

known at any one time whether of faces or moons, but the poet somehow manages to turn the spheres and see the forbidden face: "Aux clartés d'iode et de sel noir du songe médiateur, . . . la face, soudain, du monde révélé dont nous ne lirons plus l'avert" (Chœur, 2). Once the light is seen, there is no turning back.<sup>1</sup>

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Chronique continues the metaphysical speculation on the "mer d'outremer et d'outresonge," and it is scarcely surprising to find the threshold image retained:

Une autre mer au loin s'élève: . . . très haut seuil  
en flamme à l'horizon des hommes de toujours. (1)

This almost apocalyptic vision, reminiscent in some aspects of certain surrealist paintings, is true to the mystical expressions which speculation on death provokes. "Nous vivons d'outre-mort, et de mort même vivrons-nous."<sup>2</sup> If flights of this sort or investigations into the things of this world and the nature of human relationships, including that, most central, of man with

<sup>1</sup>Cf Bachelard's discussion of "l'envers de la face" in L'Air et les songes, pp. 16-17.

<sup>2</sup>Cf St. John of the Cross, "Coplas del alma que pena por ver a Dios."

himself, were not so firmly rooted in such a material object as a doorstep, not only would proportion and human relevance be lost or tend to be lost, but there would also be a danger of losing the poetry. Perse guards scrupulously against abstraction. The threshold allows him to range into the supremely fascinating world of ambiguity, and use it as a springboard, sublimating the image into the realms of this world and the other, the universal and the metaphysical.

What must also be clear, however, is that there is no neat one-to-one relationship between a particular poem and a particular theme: as we have already seen, the threshold is not restricted to Exil, and the sea-shore stretches well beyond Amers. This is not to deny development. However much one may see seeds of Perse's style and imagery in the earliest published work, and see the same forceful guiding hand behind all the poems, a development is similarly clear. Again it is a gradual move away from the specific preoccupation with the physical, through broader connotations of the material image, towards a gesture of speculation on the metaphysical. It is a shift in emphasis rather than of subject, which remains essentially grounded in this world.

Early suggestions of an interest in the in-between states on which Perse was to build so much offer only in retrospect a basis for wider application. Reading Eloges, for example, the immediate reaction is to the physical and sensual qualities:

Des enfants courent aux rivages! des chevaux courent  
aux rivages!... . . . et le nageur  
a une jambe en eau tiède mais l'autre pèse dans un  
courant frais. (XVI)

The plenitude of land and solitude of the sea are posited explicitly, without the poet delving into the nature and implications of their point of meeting.

... Or ces eaux calmes sont de lait  
et tout ce qui s'épanche aux solitudes molles du  
matin.  
Le pont lavé, avant le jour, d'une eau pareille en  
songe au mélange de l'aube, fait une belle relation du  
ciel. (V)

Such halcyon expanses of purity stand in opposition to the "végétales ferveurs" of the poet's tropical island home.

Les crabes ont dévoré tout un arbre à fruits mous.  
Un autre est plein de cicatrices, ses fleurs poussaient,  
succulentes, au tronc. Et un autre, on ne peut le toucher  
de la main, comme on prend à témoin, sans qu'il pleuve  
aussitôt de ces mouches, couleurs!... (IV)

The brilliant colours in both light and shade reflected the child's clear-cut ideas, brought up with a sure sense of hierarchy and propriety in all things: "Et tout n'était que

règnes et confins de lueurs" (Pour fêter une enfance, III & IV). One sees a poetic parallel to the bright, often unshaded colours in the tropical canvasses of Gauguin (whose work Perse certainly knew from 1905 since his friend at Bordeaux, Gabriel Frizeau, then owned the great canvas "D'où venons-nous? Qui sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?" of 1898), or in those of the Douanier Rousseau. But there is also a similarity in their sense of two-dimensional mass--their expanses of green, blue or ochre.

The idea of the door is similarly not expanded or fully developed until later work. If the child has an instinctive liking for the doorstep (and how often children seem to concentrate their activities at this point midway between safety and adventure)--"Et l'enfant veut qu'on le peigne sur le pas de la porte" (Eloges, XVII)--it is Exil that brings us face to face with its full poetic significance. It is Exil too, as we have seen, that specifies and elaborates upon the conjunction of threshold and beach. One passage, purposely left aside from the earlier discussion, can now serve to indicate, through its very complexity, the links between the various aspects of the image.

... Plus haute, chaque nuit, cette clameur muette

sur mon seuil, plus haute, chaque nuit, cette levée de  
siècles sous l'écaïlle,

Et, sur toutes grèves de ce monde, un fãambe plus  
farouche à nourrir de mon être!...

Tant de hauteur n'épuisera la rive accore de ton  
seuil, ô Saisisseur de glaives à l'aurore,

O Manieur d'aigles par leurs angles, et Nourrisseur  
des filles les plus aigres sous la plume de fer!

(Exil, III)

Certain elements of these very involved lines have already  
been discussed.<sup>1</sup> The silent clamour is essentially the  
insistent demand of the Muse. The stanzas within quotation  
marks in this canto (including the above passage) are all the  
voice of "mon frère le poète." Much of the imagery is drawn  
from writing poetry: the repeated "clameur" evokes in turn  
"un gonflement de lèvres sur la naissance des grands Livres,"  
"une seule et longue phrase sans césure à jamais inintelligible,"  
"les stances de l'exil" and here "un fãambe plus farouche à  
nourrir de mon être." The exile's introductory words are,  
quite logically, the clue to the threshold/beach image of the  
passage: "Et soudain tout m'est force et présence, où fume  
encore le thème du néant."

One is immediately reminded of the data of the poem, of  
the barren beach and the nothingness from which the poem is

<sup>1</sup>See above, pp. 40-42.

composed, with the full support of verbal echoes in both "fumée" and "néant":

J'élis un lieu flagrant et nul comme l'ossuaire des saisons,

Et, sur toutes grèves de ce monde, l'esprit du dieu fumant déserte sa couche d'amiante.

(I)

Ma gloire est sur les sables! ma gloire est sur les sables!... Et ce n'est point errer, ô Pérégrin,

Que de convoiter l'aire la plus nue pour assembler aux syrtes de l'exil un grand poème né de rien, un grand poème fait de rien...

. . . . .

J'ai fondé sur l'abîme et l'embrun et la fumée des sables.

(II)

No doubt can remain that it is on the shore--the threshold--of the New World, though essentially on any shore in the world, that Perse can construct his poem out of the very quicksand ambivalence of the site.

The second pair of versets of the passage under consideration presents further difficulties. The clamour is said to rise higher each night, and so to get louder, but its relation to what follows is difficult to fathom. What can be affirmed with a fair degree of assurance is that the "Saisisseur . . . Manieur . . . et Nourrisseur" is the sun. Apart from the visual effect of the sun's rays at dawn and their traditional designation as swords--the word shafts in English is a parallel

example of what Emerson called "fossil poetry"--a phrase from Amers dispels all doubt: "avant l'aurore et les glaives du jour" (Strophe, IX, 6 - 1). SAILLET guessed that the subsequent phrase derived from Perse's reading of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, but the poet denied knowledge of it.<sup>1</sup> Others have drawn legitimate attention to the interplay of sound in the words "aigles," "angles" and "aigres," but Perse is not a poet to play emptily with sounds for their own sake.

The eagle is traditionally associated with the sun, and the Manieur may be assimilated with the Saisisseur by their function. From this a circus image is revealed, and continues in the Nourrisseur. So, with the double meaning of both cirque and arène in mind, an earlier line is perhaps recalled--"J'épie au cirque le plus vaste l'élanement des signes les plus fastes" (II)--and a later one prefigured--"et sur l'arène sans violence, l'exil et ses clés pures" (V). An analysis of such material necessarily gives an unfortunate impression of ingenious contrivance. The poet, with this major theme of "la rive accore de ton seuil" in mind as a springboard for the imagery,

<sup>1</sup>Saillet, Saint-John Perse..., p. 108.

would have made the analogies and necessary cross-fertilisation without the slightest difficulty. Apollo, the Sun-god, is seen as the ring-master of dawn: "Toute chose à naître s'horripile à l'orient du monde, toute chose naissante exulte aux premiers feux du jour!" (III). Caillois has shown how the second half of this verset develops the first to give a splendid sense of day breaking, and for Perse the word orient retains its full Latin force to emphasise the sun's rising. But the central issue of the meaning of hauteur has still to be tackled.

One should consider what the eye sees. From sea-level, the poet looks eastwards over the Atlantic towards the rising sun. Behind him lie the dunes, before him the sharply lit line of the horizon. Thinking of an image in Pluies, I, "la réponse des hautes dunes à l'étagement des mers," which recalls Rimbaud's "et l'on tira les barques vers la mer étagée là-haut comme sur les gravures,"<sup>1</sup> we are reminded that the horizontal expanses of the sea are translated in painting on to a vertical plane. The sea becomes vertical on the human retina:

<sup>1</sup>Rimbaud, "Après le déluge" in Les Illuminations, Oeuvres complètes (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), p. 175. Rimbaud also uses the word orient strongly in "Mystique" (ibid., p. 193).

Rétine ouverte au plus grand cirque; et l'âme  
 avide de son risque... Voici la chose vaste en Ouest,  
 et sa fraîcheur d'abîme sur nos faces.

This line from Chronique, 6, has the poet facing no longer east but west, but the echo is nonetheless clear. Once the verticality of the sea can be established, the difficulty is all but resolved: the horizon is an immense doorstep for the sun, and the poet's Muse can never hope to compete with the height of an utterly cosmic threshold or express fully the sun and everything under it. History and art merely lap against the doorstep of such total powers as the sun and the sea. And yet the Muse still insists: "Tu ne te tairas point, clameur! que je n'aie dépouillé sur les sables toute allégeance humaine" (Exil, III). While the poet is alive, the voice of poetry will not be silenced. The impulse towards the deification of poetry, a lure for any writer, is both a danger--which Perse's detractors have seized on<sup>1</sup>--and a motivation for supreme artistry.

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Both Exil and Amers are played out at the edge of the sea, and both derive much of their central imagery from the fact. But in most of the other poems too the critical shore is

<sup>1</sup>See e.g. Michel Maxence, "Saint-John Perse ou la tentation de la démesure," Tel Quel, 4, hiver 1961, 57-64.

mentioned or its equivalent proposed. If it starts essentially as an expression of la poésie des départs with which Perse was to sympathise so much in the form given it by Valery Larbaud, it did not remain at that stage. The nomadic nature of man's spirit means that we are always in a state of exile, and none more so than the man who uses his faculties to the full, since he is more fully receptive to the present and also more acutely aware of his unfulfilled potential.

Vents, although basically set inland like Anabase, shows that Perse remains perpetually aware of the sea-shore's importance. "Ici la grève et la suture" (IV, 2), for example, is clipped and forceful. The mighty forces of the winds "disposaient, sur toutes grèves, des grands désastres intellectuels" (I, 3). But it is a corresponding inland image, that of slopes down either side of a central watershed, which takes over the ambiguous position of the sea-shore. We have "tous les versants offerts au vent qui passe" (II, 2), and "les étagements gradués de ce versant du monde" (IV, 2) which support a passage frequently quoted as a guide to Perse's poetic:

-- Textes reçus en langage clair! versions données sur deux versants!... . . .

O Poète, ô bilingue, entre toutes choses bisaiguës, et toi-même litige entre toutes choses litigieuses--homme assailli du dieu! homme parlant dans l'équivoque!...

(II, 6)

The poet's own position is clearly allied to that of the special intercourse of land and sea, or of any equivalent image evoking ambiguity, insecurity and at the same time creativity, poetry being born of the conjunction of such forces, in themselves nothing, but being sublimated through the art of words. The refrain from Pluies pinpoints the relationship: "l'écume aux lèvres du poème." ("Et ne l'ai-je pas dit? les écritures aussi évolueront. -- Lieu du propos: toutes grèves de ce monde," Vents, III, 6). He as poet is creative mediator. It is understandable that one of a poet's main preoccupations should be with the nature of poetry and of words, and with the mystery of creation. Perse's concern lies almost constantly just below the surface. For creating order is man's highest function, in his eyes, and at least a worthy occupation not only for the poet but for any human being.

In consequence our investigation will automatically turn to this central question, but for the moment we must return to "les très longues plages renouvelées." It is clear that the beach does not have the same value in Exil as in Amers. The sense of deprivation and nudity after suffering political exile is reversed in the richness of love. And yet with the foregoing

argument in mind, it can be seen how the point of maximum precariousness may become that of greatest fulfilment. "The aristocrat of the present age is a déraciné."<sup>1</sup>

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The beach in Exil is a place for stripping, both physically and spiritually:

Comme celui qui se dévêt à la vue de la mer, . . .  
 Les mains plus nues qu'à ma naissance et la lèvre  
 plus libre, . . .  
 Me voici restitué à ma rive natale... Il n'est  
 d'histoire que de l'âme, il n'est d'aisance que de l'âme.

(V)

Exile has as its key words purity, nullity and nudity, and as its pivotal image the deserted beach. There is, however, the resourcefulness of the experienced man, "le grain semé sur la côte déserte pour le voyage de retour..." (Amers, Strophe, IX, 5 - 2). With a sure sense of hierarchy the poet writes: "Où vont les sables à leur chant s'en vont les Princes de l'exil" (Exil, II). And he turns the tables on exile by the self-inflicted command: "Honore, ô Prince, ton exil!" (Exil, III). If there are high passions on the sands of exile, then the poet must express them. While one can sympathise with the

<sup>1</sup>W. H. Auden, "A Song of Life's Power to Renew," The New York Times Book Review, 27 July 1958, 1.

poet having "no thought, no possibility, of poetry again" at the moment of crisis, it is evident that his very integrity demanded it of him once a material and psychological readjustment had taken place. Exil describes the very birth of this new awareness, building poetry afresh on that paradoxically surest of foundations--sand. "Je reprendrai ma course de Numide, longeant la mer inaliénable" (Exil, VII).

The extension of this newly found positive aspect of the sea-shore as the threshold to new vistas of plenitude can well be seen by reference to Amers. The multiplicity of connotation in the title itself suggests that of the poem: apart from the "Seamarks" of the translated title, there are echoes of bitter gall, of "amour" (sometimes spelt amer in mediaeval French), and of "mer" itself. From the poem, with its central imagery revolving around the sea and love, the title could be a crossing of mer with amour. It is typical of Perse that an actual word with even wider associations, and just as appropriate, should have been used. But lurking also is what Milosz called "l'amer amour de l'autre monde."

If in Perse parts of the body are applied to the shore (and in the word côte both meanings coincide for another example

of "fossil poetry" waiting to be unearthed), so the procedure can allow parts of the body to be designated in terms of the shore. Not only, therefore, do we read "Etrange, l'homme, sans rivage, près de la femme, riveraine" (Amers, Strophe, IX, 2 - 2), but also "Tu sens les dunes immortelles et toutes rives indivises où tremble le songe, pavot pâle" (ibid., 3 - 2), and again "Et sur la grève de mon corps, l'homme né de mer s'est allongé" (ibid., 2 - 1). The union of sea and land is mirrored in that of the lovers, and again the image plays midwife to the metaphysical issue: "O goût de l'âme très foraine, nous diras-tu la rive que tu suis?" (ibid., 5 - 2). The word foraine is less connected here with its origins at the foire than with its use in the expression rade foraine, or with its Latin root foranus 'foreign'. The soul had earlier been associated with the sea when in Exil, VII, the poet's mother is addressed: "ô toi plus prompte à tressaillir sur l'autre rive de son âme," but there the other shore of his soul was as much the sheer memory of the France and family he had had to leave.

In Amers the very opening of the Invocation throws us straight away on to other shores: "Et vous, Mers, qui lisiez

dans de plus vastes songes . . ." The sense of bringing to the brink--sometimes implying disaster, sometimes fruition--is expressed in "Ah! qu'un plus large mouvement des choses à leur rive, de toutes choses à leur rive et comme en d'autres mains, nous aliénât enfin l'antique Magicienne" (Amers, Strophe, I, 4). This constantly repeated notion of being on the verge of some marvellous discovery, whether of a rare plant or bird or of some mystical insight, provides intense excitement, and captivates by its immense enthusiasm for life in all its forms. But one can understand that it can be wearing, and sympathise with the loved one's despairing question:

Qui donc es-tu, Maître nouveau? Vers quoi tendu,  
où je n'ai part? et sur quel bord de l'âme te dressant?  
. . .

Comment aimer, d'amour de femme aimer, celui pour  
qui nul ne peut rien?

(ibid., IX, 6 - 1)

The march of earthly phenomena down to the sea--Cities, Tragediennes, Patrician women, in fact "toute chose," on the earth's "incessante avancée de sa lèvre d'argile" (Chronique, 7)--is an act of homage performed not only "au bord des Grandes Eaux" but also "à la limite de l'humain" in every sense. And a certain question mark still of necessity remains at the end of the poem:

Quelles filles noires et sanglantes vont sur les  
sables violents longeant l'effacement des choses ?

(Dédicace)

Hence the necessary ambivalence of a closing line:

-- Nous qui mourrons peut-être un jour disons l'homme  
immortel au foyer de l'instant.

(ibid.)

On the threshold of eternity, "le doute s'élève sur la réalité  
des choses" (Anabase, III). Yet again there is a sort of  
double-take on the relationship between things and the sea:  
if things pay homage or lemming-like disappear into the primeval  
element, it is the sea, "elle-même voyageuse," which allows  
things to be appreciated for what they are:

ô Mer plénière conciliée,  
Est-ce toi, Nomade, qui nous passeras ce soir aux  
rives du réel ?

(Chœur, 5)

The sea is in its turn the threshold to that sort of "super-  
reality" in which things play their part, both as themselves  
and as images of metaphysical counterparts:

Et au-delà s'ouvre la Mer étrangère, . . . seuil  
majeur du plus grand Orbe et seuil insigne du plus grand  
Age.

(ibid., 5)

Both spatial and temporal concepts are included in a sort  
of "pan-time" partaking of both immensity and eternity. Like  
Braque's painted birds, all phenomena "emplissent l'espace

poétique de l'homme, portés d'un trait réel jusqu'aux abords du surréel" (Oiseaux, 12). The thing itself, "prise en son vif et dans son tout," is respected for what it is. The maieutic of threshold and beach sharpens sensitivity so as to allow an over-all appreciation of its significance. Only an attachment to concrete phenomena can permit any exploration of mystery and abstraction.

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Not only in space, but also in time does Perse show a predilection for the threshold of day and night, and again these are gradually assembled into a broader conception of man standing on the verge of eternity. Any mystical tendency which this might suggest is, as in other fields, subordinate to the physical bases of the idea. The mention of dawn or dusk comes so frequently to Perse's pen that elaboration seems scarcely necessary. What is true of the spatial images is also true of the temporal.

Addressing the sea, Perse writes: "Tu vas, tu vas, l'Immense et Vaine, et fais la roue au seuil d'une autre Immensité" (Amers, Chœur, 4).<sup>1</sup> Fusing the two dimensions,

<sup>1</sup>The line recalls "l'astre roué vif sur la pierre du seuil" (Exil, I).

"les tambours de l'exil éveillent aux frontières/ l'éternité qui bâille sur les sables" (Anabase, I). Later, in Oiseaux, 10, Braque's birds act as mediators for the human being to stretch his whole being to its fullest extent, to fulfil himself as completely as possible in both space and time. And they fly in between sea and sky at the hic et nunc which is Perse's key to infinity, and the only one, in his view, with which it is humanly possible to open the doors of perception:

A mi-hauteur entre ciel et mer, entre un amont et un aval d'éternité, ils sont nos médiateurs, et tendent de tout l'être à l'étendue de l'être...<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Pierre Richard, Onze études..., pp. 61-62, recognises the importance of l'instant in Perse's work. He does not, however, connect it with the idea of the threshold.

The notion of the threshold, both spatial and temporal, has also been studied in relation to Julien Green by Janine Carrel, L'Expérience du seuil dans l'œuvre de Julien Green (Zurich 1968), where certain observations are pertinent to the present study. "Pour qui se situe au seuil il y a donc un mouvement de va-et-vient, un dynamisme perpétuel de la vie spirituelle." (p. 67). "Le moment parfait est le point suprême de ce qu'on peut appeler l'itinéraire du seuil; c'est là qu'effectivement l'expérience du seuil a lieu dans toute sa plénitude, et que le personnage, loin de glisser simplement dans l'au-delà sans se rendre compte du moment précis où ce changement a lieu, prend au contraire une conscience aiguë du moment qui lui fait quitter la terre et qui constitue le point médian entre ces deux mondes avec l'un ou l'autre desquels chaque personnage greenien est au fond toujours familier. Puisque dans ce moment il s'est libéré des attaches de la terre, il a déjà l'impression de flotter au-dessus de la terre, d'être non plus seulement dans

Dawn and dusk are not, however, the only fulcrum points of the fourth dimension. Noon and midnight are also springboards to something greater, and are frequently evoked in Perse's work. On three occasions a hyphen is added to mi-nuit to stress its origins as mid-point of the night. A broader time-scale may be seen by availing oneself of the special qualities of noon:

à midi . . . l'homme clôt ses paupières et rafraîchit  
sa nuque dans les âges, (Anabase, VII)

d'autres ont vu ta face de midi, où luit soudain la  
majesté terrible de l'Ancêtre. (Amers, Strophe, IV)

From the beginning, Breton and Aragon had said of Eloges:

"Cherchez Monsieur Saintléger Léger dans Noon."<sup>1</sup>

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un lieu intermédiaire, mais dans l'élément spirituel même. . . . On peut dire que ce bonheur qui se révèle comme étant un véritable bonheur divin et surnaturel, accompagne toujours le moment exceptionnel, et plus encore, il peut le constituer; le personnage est comme immobilisé, (l'immobilité fait toujours essentiellement partie du moment parfait) il est ravi, étant dans une véritable extase, éloigné de sa vie habituelle." (p. 73). The overtly Christian context and paramount spiritual content of Green's preoccupations should not of course be transferred to Perse, but of both writers can it be said that "le moment du seuil se transcende lui-même; d'un moment d'entre-deux il se transforme en un moment d'au-delà." (p. 75).

<sup>1</sup>André Breton & Louis Aragon, "Treize études," SIC, 29, mai 1918 (unpaginated).

Reference is not restricted, however, to extension in time alone: the third and fourth dimensions interlock so much in Perse that he can fuse history and geography and write of "la maturation, soudain, d'un autre monde au plein midi de notre nuit..." (Vents, III, 5), and of the "Solitude et ténèbres au grand midi de l'homme" (Amers, Strophe, IX, 5 - 2), and so speak of the poet "attentif à sa lucidité, jaloux de son autorité, et tenant clair au vent le plein midi de sa vision" (Vents, III, 6). Here, as elsewhere, from humble origins, "everyday" in all the senses of the word, the poet builds his more abstract notions on a sure and readily accessible basis.

Corresponding to the four main points of the day--dawn, noon, dusk and midnight--which are all temporal thresholds in Perse's world, are their equivalent seasons in the course of the year: the solstices and equinoxes. Again links are forged with broader connotations, with the doorstep itself, with love, and with the intoxication of creation:

Mer innocence du Solstice, Mer insouciance de  
l'accueil.

Mer innocence du Solstice, ô Mer comme le vin des  
Rois.

(Amers, Chœur, 2 & 3)

Comme au temps d'équinoxe, dans les jumenteries,  
quand il est recommandé aux gardiens de juments de prendre  
femmes au pays...

(Vents, IV, 5)

What becomes clear from an investigation of such examples is that, although capable of crossing "le gué d'une quatrième dimension" (Oiseaux, 5) through the medium and mediation of poetry, itself a threshold, Perse is far more attracted to spatial than to temporal extension. Beyond "les sagaies de Midi /qui/ vibrent aux portes de la joie" (Amers, Invocation, I) lies for Perse all the movement of geography and history, and the continuous spiritual paradox which Eliot expressed in East Coker: "We must be still and still moving." So, with all the creative overtones (both sexual and poetic, which again overlap so much), the final Dédicace of Amers concentrates on noon:

Midi, son peuple, ses lois fortes... . . .  
 Midi, ses forges, son grand ordre... . . .  
 Midi, sa foudre, ses présages.

The moment of noon opens out in a widening gyre to suggest the immensity that man can reach through the present alone. A temporal awareness is by no means absent, therefore, however fully integrated with the spatial. Perse's words to Henri Hoppenot, "La vie n'est que la dilatation d'une seule journée,"<sup>1</sup> suggest the inter-relationship he senses between the two

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Henri Hoppenot, "D'Alexis Leger à Saint-John Perse," Le Figaro littéraire, 5 nov. 1960, 1.

dimensions.

The virtue, then, of threshold, beach, dawn, noon and so forth is a precariousness that heightens awareness. In itself each threshold remains unchanged, stated unequivocally as valid for its own sake. But like a catalyst in a chemical reaction, it must be present for the reaction to take place. Perse stands in the honourable line of poetic alchemists. Sublimation occurs without denying or denaturing the area of space or time which lies to either side of the threshold, yet with a very complete exploration of both the contents and limits of either direction. The dialectic is a form of dualism in which both elements are positive. According to Mazars, Perse said: "Chacun de nos écrivains est précédé du signe + ou du signe - ." Perse's sign would be a plus in bold type. His quest for order leads him from the precarious here and now into universal history and geography, but also into that spiritual infinity which alone can suggest a sense and pattern in existence. "Lorsque les philosophes eux-mêmes désertent le seuil métaphysique, il advient au poète de relever là le métaphysicien."<sup>1</sup> The threshold is a fine and central example of the application to his poetry of Perse's doctrine that any exploration of the unknown must be expressed by the poet in concrete images.

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<sup>1</sup>Perse, Poésie, [p. 37].

§ 8

LIMITS

Le but de la poésie n'est pas, comme dit Baudelaire, de plonger "au fond de l'Infini [sic] pour trouver du nouveau," mais au fond du défini pour y trouver de l'inépuisable.

Paul Claudel

(Introduction à un poème sur Dante).

Bounds are for beating, or for breaking. Perse shows an unusual degree of interest both in exploring every detail within the limits of man's world, in stretching things to their limits, and in standing at those limits to see what might lie beyond. Confines in their turn become thresholds to the unknown. And again the geographical concept is extended from the physical to the metaphysical with many variations and ramifications on the way.

A fruitful interaction occurs between the apparently definite notion of a limit and the associated, more ambiguous idea of something both peripheral and standing at the edge of the unknown. The particular fascination this has exercised over poets since Baudelaire plunged "au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau" scarcely needs underlining. But Perse rejects out of hand the need for artificial stimulants, finding observation of the real world stimulus enough and in many ways more valid in its presentation of rare phenomena. In him, the rare replaces the artificially induced. His sense of delight and wonder is satisfied by the marvels of nature and man's finest exploits--sometimes normal, sometimes freakish--and would not be increased by taking drugs.

Homme infesté du songe, homme gagné par l'infection divine,

Non point de ceux qui cherchent l'ébriété dans les vapeurs de chanvre, comme un Scythe,

Ni l'intoxication de quelque plante solanée--belladone ou jusquiame,

De ceux qui prisent la graine ronde d'Ologhi mangée par l'homme d'Amazonie,

Yaghé, liane du pauvre, qui fait surgir l'envers des choses--ou la plante Pî-lu,

Mais attentif à sa lucidité, jaloux de son autorité, et tenant clair au vent le plein midi de sa vision.

(Vents, III, 6)

As far as it is in man's power to do so, Perse wants to retain control. But that very "as far as" holds a fascination for him, and we must follow him to the frontiers and peer beyond before returning to the rich and varied world which the poet describes so fully.

Understandably one of the central images of the edge of the earth, with the poet looking further, is that of a headland or cliff-top towering over the sea. "Nous nous sommes avancées jusqu'aux corniches blanches sur la mer" (Amers, Strophe, IV). In the Chanson du Présomptif, the brief and relatively early poem which anticipates and illustrates succinctly both the manner and themes of later poems, "l'homme marche dans les songes et s'achemine vers la mer/ et la fumée s'élève au bout des promontoires." The list of Princes of Exile includes

Celui qui peint l'amer au front des plus hauts caps  
 . . . ; celui qui prend logement, pour la saison des  
 pluies, avec les gens de pilotage et de bornage--chez le  
 gardien d'un temple mort à bout de péninsule.

(Exil, VI)

In both Anabase and Amers, riders steer their horses to the  
 edge of the cliff or follow the poet's "course de Numide,  
 longeant la mer inaliénable" (Exil, VII):

Les cavaliers au fil des caps, assaillis d'aigles  
 lumineuses et nourrissant à bout de lances des catastrophes  
 pures du beau temps, publiaient sur les mers une ardente  
 chronique.

(Anabase, VI)

Ainsi, les Cavaliers en armes, à bout de Continents,  
 font au bord des falaises le tour des péninsules.

(Amers, Dédicace)

Earlier in Amers the same movement had been intimately connected  
 with the idea of exile, when Perse writes of "les routes en  
 corniche que suit la migration des Rois" (Strophe, IV). The  
 image is both more specific and much richer in depicting the  
 temptations of exile in the following versets from Vents:

Des caps ultimes de l'exil--un homme encore dans le  
 vent tenant conseil avec lui-même--j'élèverai une dernière  
 fois la main.

Demain, ce continent largué... et derrière nous  
 encore tout ce sillage d'ans et d'heures, toute cette lie  
 d'orages vieillissants.

The poet himself sings "un chant du large pour qui veille"

(Pluies, VI), and is himself seen "comme guetteur penché sur le bord des falaises" (Amers, Strophe, IX, 6 - 1). The association with the leader-figure, and so by extension with the poet himself, comes precisely in this idea of watching. Waiting alertly has in Perse a positive, active value, attente implying attention: "L'attention extrême est ce qui constitue dans l'homme la faculté créatrice."<sup>1</sup>

Prince flairé d'abeilles sur sa chaise d'un bois violet très odorant, il veille. Et c'est là sa fonction. Et il n'en a point d'autre parmi nous.

(Amitié du Prince, II)

Attente is attention and attentiveness rather than merely kicking one's heels:

Le regard fixé au large, tu attendais l'instant du départ, le lever du grand vent qui te descellerait d'un coup, comme un typhon, divisant les nuées devant l'attente de tes yeux.

(Images à Crusoé: "Le Livre")

Louée l'attente sous nos cils! (Anabase, V)

Et la douceur est dans l'attente, non dans le souffle ni le chant.

(Amers, Strophe, VI)

Through a brilliant piece of word-play, reminiscent of techniques used by Mallarmé,<sup>2</sup> Perse also links watching with wonderment by

<sup>1</sup> Simone Weil, La Pesanteur et la grâce (Paris 1948), p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Cf e.g. Mallarmé's "Remémoration des Belges" in Feuillets

the juxtaposition, in the following passage, of veille and émerveillement:

Nous fréquenterons ce soir le sel antique du drame, la mer qui change de dialecte à toutes portes des Empires, et cette mer aussi qui veille à d'autres portes, celle-là même en nous qui veille et dans l'émerveillement nous tient.

(Amers, Strophe, IV)

The syllable veille is found in conjunction with attente on other occasions:

La terre, tout attente en ses barbes d'insectes,  
la terre enfante des merveilles!...

(Anabase, VII)

Fini le songe où s'émerveille l'attente du Songeur.

(Vents, I, 6)

A sense of wonder overbalances into dream or rêverie when watch is kept "à la limite de la terre" (Amers, Chœur, 3), and precisely the same thing happens "à la limite de l'infime" (Vents, I, 4), "aux limites de la perception" (ibid., III, 6),

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d'album, Oeuvres complètes (Bibl. de la Pléiade), p. 60, where "pli selon pli" is echoed by "multipliant" and recalls Caillois's understandable mistake over "explications" (Poétique..., p. 206). Perse uses the technique elsewhere, e.g. ris and irritable in Eloges, IX: "... Et moi qui vous parlais, je ne sais rien, ni d'aussi fort, ni d'aussi nu/ qu'en travers du bateau, ciliée de ris et nous longeant, notre limite,/ la grand'voile irritable couleur de cerveau." And again "les vases et les évasements" (Vents, II, 4).

"à la limite spectrale du vol" (Oiseaux, 7) and "à la limite de la félicité" (ibid., 8). From early days, the point, often purely conventional, where one thing ends and another begins had fascinated the observant child:

Aux lisières le fruit  
pouvait choir  
sans que la joie pourrît au rebord de nos lèvres.

(Pour fêter une enfance, III)

In this case the boy picks up the fruit fallen at the edge of the forest, but the sensual and sensuous delight is not lessened as teeth sink into a flesh which shares the same texture with the lips' own fleshiness, and so can scarcely be differentiated from them. Similarly the quality of tropical sunlight evoked by the young poet suggests a world where adult definitions, both physical and linguistic, were not yet accepted by the child:

Et tout n'était que règues et confins de lueurs.  
Et l'ombre et la lumière alors étaient plus près d'être  
une même chose...

(ibid.)

As this verset introduces the idea of the windfall fruit, the confusion of textures is underscored, and it is scarcely surprising that in such a unified and harmonious world "Il y/ avait plus d'ordre."

Scarcely surprising either, therefore, that having once

recognised such harmony Perse should wish in later life to see conventional categorisations done away with. He would like to see the earth cleansed of many accepted guide-lines and cut and dried conventions (Pluies, VII), and cleared of many comforting landmarks. Let the winds scatter, he says,

Balises et corps-morts, bornes milliaires et stèles votives, les casemates aux frontières et les lanternes aux récifs; . . . les tables d'orientation du géographe et le cartouche de l'explorateur; l'amas de pierres plates du caravanier et du géodésien; . . . la pierre levée du sectateur et le cairn du landlord...

(Vents, I, 3)

By, and only by ridding the earth of such a limiting framework which makes men think small, can he hope to stretch his being to the limit of his capacity. By concentrating on detail we become myopic: Perse wants us to be able to flex our irises more freely, as the bird does, "de l'extrême myopie à l'extrême presbytie" (Oiseaux, 4). He has writ large both to stretch himself and his reader to the utmost and to be free to encompass things both great and small.

The nomadic settlers of Anabase declare:

Pour nous qui étions là, nous produisîmes aux frontières des accidents extraordinaires, et nous portant dans nos actions à la limite de nos forces, notre joie parmi vous fut une très grande joie.

(VI)

The delight is intensified by the difficulty of the task achieved. The spirit is the driving force behind the body's actions:

Les revendications de l'âme sur la chair sont extrêmes. Qu'elles nous tiennent en haleine! Et qu'un mouvement très fort nous porte à nos limites, et au delà de nos limites!

Enlèvements de clôtures, de bornes...

(Vents, I, 6)

The winds which are the breath of the spirit can speak in similar terms: "Nos revendications furent extrêmes, à la frontière de l'humain" (ibid.).

A distinction is drawn quite clearly between interim points of reference (bornes in the sense of milestones) and the utmost limits of human experience in all directions (bornes in the sense of frontiers). The former are to be swept away, the latter indicate a further cosmic threshold to the unknown, a challenge to man. By keeping these alone in view, Perse builds up enormous momentum. It is as if by sheer speed and energy he will be carried beyond them. In Vents, the vital question is posed, and it proves rhetorical: "Mais quoi! n'est-il rien d'autre, n'est-il rien d'autre que d'humain?" (IV, 1). And yet at the same time even the poet, obliged to relate all experience to man, is reduced to silence: "O frontière, ô mutisme!" (Vents,

IV, 1). And silence for a poet is death. "Et les capsules de la mort éclatent dans la bouche" (Vents, IV, 2) echoes "Et les capsules encore du néant dans notre bouche de vivants" (ibid., IV, 1). Life has to find an answer to "l'emphase immense de la mort," and the answer proposed is movement:

Si vivre est tel, qu'on s'en saisisse! Ah! qu'on  
 en pousse à sa limite,  
 D'une seule et même traite dans le vent, d'une seule  
 et même vague sur sa course,  
 Le mouvement!...

(ibid.)

Perse's attitude to exile is exactly similar. It is a form of nothingness or death, and with the rhythms of language he fills the gap created by loss and privation, and the value of sheer movement is almost as great as the actual material he uses for the task. The claim is that it is not a mere substitute for living, but life itself lived more richly for being more keenly sensed. The value of movement, and so the value of life, stems directly from an appreciation and recognition of the value of the threshold. It holds the key to all man's explorations.

\*

From Perse's attempts at breaking bounds, we must now turn to his beating the bounds, to an exploration, that is,

of Perse's breadth of interest within the world's frontiers, of the precision and wealth of his observation of natural phenomena. For this is the material with which he fills the negative pressures of exile. "Le thème de la louange équilibre alors celui du néant."<sup>1</sup>

At Appendix D will be found a list of rare and technical terms used by Perse.<sup>2</sup> The attempt to classify his more extreme range of vocabulary serves to indicate where his interests lie and also to show his total attachment to things which actually exist. The problems of classification are complicated by the fact that metaphor implies cross-fertilisation of such categories. Some attempt to counteract this inevitable separation is made in Chapter 10 below. The list not only illustrates those fields in which Perse shows a particular interest, but also reveals whole areas which fail to attract him. In the first category, judging by the sheer number of rare and technical words, occur all forms of plant and animal life, with a special emphasis on birds, trees and flowers. Then terms associated with ships,

<sup>1</sup>Caillois, Poétique..., p. 133.

<sup>2</sup>See below, pp. 364-399.

and history and law also play a prominent part. But such interests have long been noted by critics: the list serves to ratify the impression. By demonstrating the precise areas of meaning of Perse's rarer words, however, it is possible to specify those in which he takes no special interest. Immediately noticeable therefore is the lack of technological or mechanical vocabulary. Manufactured goods play a tiny role in Perse's language. Human institutions on the other hand--philosophy, law, mathematics and the various arts--account for a high proportion of the rare terms left after setting aside the main group devoted to natural phenomena. After honouring nature, Perse's honours that aspect of man which creates order.

The poetic theory governing Perse's use of language and the application of his extensive vocabulary to particular poetic usage now needs further investigation.

\* \* \*

§ 9

TOWARDS A POETIC

Le Mot poétique ne peut  
jamais être faux parce qu'il  
est total; il brille d'une  
liberté infinie et s'apprête  
à rayonner vers mille rapports  
incertains et possibles.

Roland Barthes

(Le Degré zéro de l'écriture,  
p. 44).

To a reader considering any page of Perse's poetry, the scrupulous precision and care of the language will be apparent. The following three chapters are intended partly to analyse that precision and partly to assemble the scattered texts which show the poet's passion for words, first in theory then in practice, both for their wealth of connotation and for their physical qualities.

If his vocabulary is rich, if he is deemed a "difficult" poet, it is due in considerable measure to the exactness which he brings to his art. To enrich the active movement of his poems, he embraces, as has just been shown, words from the obscurest regions of human experience and endeavour. A close attachment to the naming of actual things presents a problem to the reader who has not shared, even at second hand, the poet's experience.

Perse does not wilfully retreat into obscurity for its own sake.<sup>1</sup> The obscure is worth exploring, ultimately perhaps the thing most worth exploring, but the presentation of one's

<sup>1</sup>For a distinction between "difficult" and "obscure" in this respect, see Knodel, Saint-John Perse, pp. 7-8.

findings must in all honesty--and in recognition of a duty towards one's fellow human beings--remain as clear as words will allow. Perse frequently praises his literary friends and his favourite authors for such integrity--indeed the quality seems to be a basic imperative for any of Perse's chosen affinities:

Fargue fut toujours de ceux pour qui la poésie entend traiter l'obscur par le clair, et non le clair par l'obscur. Sous cette réserve formelle, la fréquentation de l'obscur lui demeure légitime.<sup>1</sup>

Of André Gide he writes:

La langue elle-même est son premier souci. Et c'est de propriété d'abord qu'il s'agit: de cette propriété du mot, à défaut de laquelle il n'est point d'"appropriation" intellectuelle, ni même de pertinence humaine.<sup>2</sup>

In recognising such qualities in other writers, he is of course obliquely drawing attention to these same virtues in his own writing. Beyond the Heraclitean reference, one senses the autobiographical force of "Ils m'ont appelé l'Obscur et

<sup>1</sup>Perse, "Léon-Paul Fargue, poète" in Léon-Paul Fargue, Poésies (Paris 1963), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Id., "Face aux lettres françaises, 1909," NRF, nov 1951, 75-76.

j'habitais l'éclat" (Amers, Strophe, II). His statement of the poet's position is unambiguous, although the position itself is by nature ambivalent:

Le poète a parfaitement le droit, et même le devoir, d'aller explorer les domaines les plus obscurs, mais plus il va loin dans cette direction, plus il doit user de moyens d'expression concrets. . . . Gardez votre emprise au sol et bâtissez avec tout cela une œuvre hors du temps, hors du lieu, édiflée dans cette recréation. Je prétends que ma langue est précise et claire...<sup>1</sup>

This very important statement finds echoes elsewhere. Dante is praised for following the poet's maxim: "Aussi loin qu'il pénètre dans l'au-delà irrationnel ou mystique, il est tenu de s'exprimer par des moyens réels, même tirés de sa vie expérimentale."<sup>2</sup>

Parce que l'aventure spirituelle du héros fut d'abord celle du poète, l'œuvre vécue du grand Toscan demeure fidèle à la vie même; et traitant, vive, d'absolu sans désertier l'empire du réel, gardant racine dans le concret, et dans l'humain, et jusque dans le quotidien, elle échappe, récit, aux pires méfaits de l'abstraction.<sup>3</sup>

The idea is applied to modern poetry in general in the Nobel Prize speech:

<sup>1</sup>Perse, in Mazars, "Une journée..."

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Perse, Pour Dante, p. 11.

L'obscurité qu'on lui reproche ne tient pas à sa nature propre, qui est d'éclairer, mais à la nuit même qu'elle explore, et qu'elle se doit d'explorer: celle de l'âme elle-même et du mystère où baigne l'être humain.<sup>1</sup>

Just as abstractions are grasped through concrete images, so language finds its balance between scientific prose and the verbal self-worship of "la poésie pure" in illustrating the world anew with the poet's personal stamp. But just as abstraction is to be avoided at all costs, so are private references, using "private" in the sense distinguished from "personal" by Day Lewis.<sup>2</sup> The application of this idea to Perse's own work is expressed in his letter to Caillois:

Mon œuvre, tout entière de récréation, a toujours évolué hors du lieu et du temps: aussi attentive et mémorable qu'elle soit pour moi dans ses incarnations, elle entend échapper à toute référence historique aussi bien que géographique; aussi vécue qu'elle soit pour moi contre l'abstraction, elle entend échapper à toute incidence personnelle.<sup>3</sup>

In this way, the poet has been able to say to the present

<sup>1</sup>Perse, Poésie, [p. 47].

<sup>2</sup>See The Poetic Image (London 1947), p. 116. For such private allusions as occur in Perse's work, see Knodel, Saint-John Perse, pp. 180-181.

<sup>3</sup>In Caillois, Poétique..., p. 180.

writer that "il n'y a aucun exotisme dans Eloges, aucun orientalisme dans Anabase." Each poem represents an episode in the real life of Alexis Leger, and the language is appropriate in either case, but works away from the personal towards the universal.

Caillois's study of Perse's language shows that precision in the use of words involves not only what may be termed a geographical exactitude, limiting and defining a word in its present state, but also a historical purification, pruning away semantic branches to reveal the original root meaning. With this process is associated the idea in Perse of the original breath, of the pure source: "O fraîcheur, ô fraîcheur retrouvée parmi les sources du langage!..." (Vents, IV, 5). The source of language is equated with the source of life, and most especially therefore with Perse with the source of movement. The final canto of Neiges is a lyrical invitation to share the poet's delight in language and to explore those sources with him:

et remontant les fleuves vers leur source, entre  
les vertes apparences, ils sont gagnés soudain de cet  
éclat sévère où toute langue perd ses armes. . . .  
Voici que j'ai dessein d'errer parmi les plus vieilles  
couches du langage, parmi les plus hautes tranches

phonétiques: jusqu'à des langues très lointaines,  
jusqu'à des langues très entières et très parcimonieuses,

comme ces langues dravidiennes qui n'eurent pas de mots distincts pour "hier" et pour "demain"... Venez et nous suivez, qui n'avons mots à dire: nous remontons ce pur délice sans graphie où court l'antique phrase humaine; nous nous mouvons parmi de claires élisions, des résidus d'anciens préfixes ayant perdu leur initiale, et devançant les beaux travaux de linguistique, nous nous frayons nos voies nouvelles jusqu'à ces locutions inouïes, où l'aspiration recule au delà des voyelles et la modulation du souffle se propage, au gré de telles labiales mi-sonores, en quête de pures finales vocaliques. (Neiges, IV)

In the Ursprache, Perse rediscovers the springs of language as an integral part of life. At no level can poetry be dissociated from action.

In his tribute to Fargue, Perse writes of "ce lieu très sûr, et très suspect, où l'homme et le langage confondus sont, comme dans un seul acte et dans une même parole, d'un même souffle proférés."<sup>1</sup> The echo of Exil, III, is clear:

Toujours il y eut cette clameur, toujours il y eut  
cette grandeur,

Cette chose errante par le monde, cette haute transe  
par le monde, et sur toutes grèves de ce monde, du même  
souffle proférée, la même vague proférant

Une seule et longue phrase sans césure à jamais  
inintelligible.

<sup>1</sup>Loc. cit., p. 8.

The word is an act, and poetry both act and action (pace Sartre): "Et que la poésie elle-même est action, c'est ce que tend à confesser la solitude du proscrit."<sup>1</sup>

Et le Vent avec nous comme Maître du chant:  
 "Je hâterai la sève de vos actes. Je mènerai  
 vos œuvres à maturation."  
 (Vents, IV, 5)

"Le songe est action, et l'action novatrice."<sup>2</sup> The restrictive distinction between scientific referential or denotative language and poetic emotive or connotative language is magisterially discarded. Perse would find it nonsense to consider, as Bachelard does in an extraordinary aberration, that "la vérification fait mourir les images."<sup>3</sup> The dialectic between data and language is reciprocal, self-generating: "Le mouvement, créateur du langage, et du langage lui-même tirant sa force nouvelle, de la vie tire une œuvre reliée au souffle originel."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Perse, Pour Dante, p. 15. For Sartre's view see "Qu'est-ce que la littérature" in Situations II (Paris 1948).

<sup>2</sup>Perse, ibid., p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Bachelard, La Poétique de l'espace, p. 90. Cf Etienne Souriau, La Correspondance des arts (Paris 1947), pp. 119-120.

<sup>4</sup>Perse, "Léon-Paul Fargue, poète," loc. cit., p. 23.

The word is given, as it were, independent existence as a material object, as well as being a physical quantity related to sense, and thereby to human activity. Words for Perse, as we have seen, are not merely "signes ni parures" (Amers, Chœur, 4), and he therefore refuses Sartre's limiting distinction between words for a poet and words for a speaker:

Le poète s'est retiré d'un seul coup du langage-instrument; il a choisi une fois pour toutes l'attitude poétique qui considère les mots comme des choses et non comme des signes. Car l'ambiguïté du signe implique qu'on puisse à son gré le traverser comme une vitre et poursuivre à travers lui la chose signifiée ou tourner son regard vers sa réalité et le considérer comme objet. L'homme qui parle est au delà des mots, près de l'objet; le poète est en deçà.<sup>1</sup>

Perse uses the double function of language, not language which evokes at the expense of language which designates, nor vice versa. He often praises the kind of language which Sartre denies a poet. Perse is clear about the meaninglessness for him of such a distinction and restriction: for him there is a close correspondence between the means and the object of evocation, between creativity and creation.

Il n'est plus mot pour nous que nous n'ayons créé.

(Chronique, 6)

<sup>1</sup>Sartre, op. cit., p. 64.

Une langue nouvelle de toutes parts offerte! une fraîcheur d'haleine par le monde

Comme le souffle même de l'esprit, comme la chose même proférée.

(Pluies, IV)

Et le poète aussi est avec nous, sur la chaussée des hommes de son temps,

Allant le train de notre temps, allant le train de ce grand vent.

Son occupation parmi nous: mise en clair des messages. Et la réponse en lui donnée par illumination du cœur.

Non point l'écrit, mais la chose même. Prise en son vif et dans son tout.

Conservation non des copies, mais des originaux.

(Vents, III, 6)

While words should not impede or distort our view and understanding of the world, they nonetheless provide at the same time one of the richest means of approaching it and crystallising the subtleties of our experience with it. A double (and nearly simultaneously double) focal length is required.

Esclave et maître de l'image, il [Fargue] sut aussi des mots le pouvoir créateur. Et il aima les mots à l'égal des objets, dans leur structure propre et dans leur substance propre: dans leur relief et leur saveur et leur résonance propre, parmi tout le mystère de leur incarnation--les mots portés à leur inclination première et leurs affinités secrètes, par leur aïnesse et leur jeunesse et leur élan vital--les mots pour leur franchise et surprise parfois de leur duplicité.

. . . . .  
Faisant plus que signifier ou désigner, ils se doivent aussi d'être, d'animer et d'agir, c'est-à-dire de créer, et par-là même d'incarner, d'intégrer, de représenter la chose même qu'ils évoquent, et que, s'appropriant, ils

tendent à devenir. Ecrire, c'est, par le mot, essentiellement "participer". Et la parole poétique, consonance multiple, n'est-elle pas aussi société?<sup>1</sup>

The idea linked with "la poésie pure" that "a poem should not mean/ But be"<sup>2</sup> is not enough: it must both mean and be. Perse rejects such a limitation as roundly as he rejects a purely factual cataloguing of phenomena. The heightened perception of the poet allows the interplay of sound and sense to transcend the realms of fact. He takes over where scientist and philosopher give up.<sup>3</sup> But Perse eschews the cryptic aphorisms of a Char which leave so much out as well as the lexicographic precision of a Ponge which puts so much in. For him, language is "le mouvement même de l'être," an alternating current between the world and the word:

Par la pensée analogique ou symbolique, par l'illumination lointaine de l'image médiatrice, et par le jeu

<sup>1</sup>Perse, "Léon-Paul Fargue, poète," loc. cit., pp. 24-25. Cf "Un langage strict est facteur de vérité, de liberté. . . . L'exactitude du langage, la solidité de l'ordre social vont de pair." Caillois, Babel, p. 66; see also pp. 110-119.

<sup>2</sup>Archibald MacLeish, "Ars Poetica" in Collected Poems 1917-1952, quoted by Maritain, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry, p. 260.

<sup>3</sup>See Perse, Poésie, /p. 37.

de ses correspondances, sur mille chaînes de réaction et d'associations étrangères, par la grâce enfin d'un langage où se transmet le mouvement même de l'Être, le poète s'investit d'une surréalité qui ne peut être celle de la science.<sup>1</sup>

Décisive entre toutes fut là l'urgence du langage: puissance active, animatrice, initiatrice et créatrice... De cette montée d'abîme où commande le désir, insistance divine, l'œuvre tire, durable, sa vocation première et sa fatalité. A la fois créature et créatrice d'une langue, elle garde, rebelle, contre toute prise d'intellect, sa liaison vivante avec le mouvement même de l'être, sa fortune.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly for such high purposes, it is vital that words should not become debased, that the written word should not obscure "la chose même", that the niceties of social intercourse do not hamper, nor the wordy nothings of outdated modes of writing obstruct the free growth and appreciation of language. So the rains, invoked to cleanse the world, are also called upon to purify the word:

Toute pierre lavée des signes de voirie . . . nous  
te lironz enfin, terre abluée des encres du copiste.  
.....  
Lavez, lavez . . . la souillure du langage sur les

<sup>1</sup>Perse, Poésie, [pp. 2-3].

<sup>2</sup>Id., Pour Dante, p. 12.

lèvres publiques.<sup>1</sup> . . .

O Pluies! lavez au cœur de l'homme les plus beaux dits de l'homme: les plus belles sentences, les plus belles séquences; les phrases les mieux faites, les pages les mieux nées. Lavez, lavez . . . leurs grands bonheurs d'expression.

(Pluies, VI-VII)

Only once freed of a slavery to the agreeable and foreseeable in language can we hope to recapture "la fraîcheur courant aux crêtes du langage, l'écume encore aux lèvres du poème" (Pluies, VIII), and read the "textes reçus en langage clair" (Vents, II, 6). A mediator, with the image as his tool of mediation, the poet holds the balance between world and word. Echoing Perse's "O Poète, ô bilingue, entre toutes choses bisaiguës..." Bachelard writes: "Le vrai poète est bilingue, il ne confond pas le langage de la signification et le langage poétique."<sup>2</sup> Not only does Perse not confuse them, he uses them both simultaneously.

<sup>1</sup>The two possible senses of this line help define the limits of Perse's view of language. On the one hand "les lèvres publiques" may be taken to refer to public speakers, with their propensity to prescriptive turgidity, and on the other to the general public, with its tendency to "bad language," both anti-normative ("ungrammatical") and debased by oaths etc. While showing a deep attachment to the classical roots of French, Perse rejects the excessive conservatism of the Académie as roundly as he deplores a general insensitivity to our linguistic heritage. For both reduce its value as the most complete means of communication at man's disposal. This is the purity Perse strives both to retain and to enhance: it is not static.

<sup>2</sup>Bachelard, La Poétique de la rêverie, p. 160.

For no Romantic notion of inspiration infests Perse's writings: if his texts are at times "reçus", like Valéry's occasional "vers donné", a highly conscious organising capacity is nonetheless brought into play. A firm, truly classical control is apparent in all Perse's mature poems (and how many have produced such mature juvenilia?). One could say of Perse what he writes of Claudel: "C'est l'intuition en elle-même qu'il semble suspecter, comme un risque d'équivoque ou d'imprécision --de cette imprécision qu'il hait dans la pensée, autant que l'impropriété dans le langage."<sup>1</sup>

En vain vous me frappez d'un son mélodieux  
Si le terme est impropre.

Boileau's idea is rephrased. The notion of conscious command amply applicable to Perse is seen by him in other writers.

Fargue's work shows "l'harmonieuse continuité d'une langue où l'exigence la plus classique s'exerce encore à l'invisibilité."<sup>2</sup>

Equally appropriate to Perse is what he writes of Larbaud:

Il fut homme de langage, respectueux de l'écrit et  
de tout ce qu'il consacre de la personne humaine, de

<sup>1</sup>Perse, "Silence pour Claudel," NRF, sept. 1955, 289.

<sup>2</sup>Id., "Léon-Paul Fargue, poète," loc. cit., p. 20.

l'aventure humaine elle-même. Il a cru au bienfait, à la puissance occulte du langage, et le langage fut pour lui d'éminente souveraineté, étant pour lui l'instance la plus haute et la plus haute collusion, l'intercession suprême et la suprême médiation. Il a tenu sa foi jurée dans la parole et dans l'écrit, engagé là tout son honneur et tout son bien. A la parole instigatrice, initiatrice et créatrice, à la parole révélatrice autant qu'éducatrice, il demandait assistance et libération.<sup>1</sup>

Here, then, is a real care for language, and a deep sympathy for others who care: by naming them, he honours the man "qui prend souci des accidents de phonétique, de l'altération des signes et des grandes érosions de langage, . . . celui qui donne l'hiérarchie aux grands offices du langage" (Exil, VI), "l'annaliste, sous la lampe, prêtant l'oreille à la rumeur lointaine des peuples et de langues immortelles..." (Amers, Chœur, 3), and "les vieux naturalistes français, dans leur langue très sûre et très révérencieuse" (Oiseaux, 2). He quotes Larbaud as saying: "Eh quoi! la "recherche verbale" n'est-elle pas la condition même de l'art d'écrire?"<sup>2</sup> For literature to reflect life most fully and most faithfully, attention must also be focussed on the medium. "Ce siècle court à de singulières défections littéraires, où l'œuvre

<sup>1</sup>Perse, "Larbaud ou l'honneur littéraire," NRF, sept. 1957, 399.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 390.

elle-même est éludée, l'art en lui-même suspecté, la langue bafouée."<sup>1</sup> Only recently, apart from some lone wolves of criticism,<sup>2</sup> has there been a return to the admission that "le seul engagement possible, pour l'écrivain, c'est la littérature."<sup>3</sup> According to Perse, Larbaud would have laughed heartily at the mere mention of "littérature engagée".<sup>4</sup> Once again the praise meted out to the creator of Barnabooth is applicable to himself:

Cher et libre Larbaud, également éloigné de l'alexandrinisme littéraire et des novations sans fruit; des entreprises de laboratoire sans terme ni synthèse et des violences nihilistes que rien n'illustre ni n'atteste--soyez aujourd'hui honoré pour votre probité très grande et la simplicité de votre maintien devant l'œuvre littéraire.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Perse, "Message pour Valery Larbaud," Cahiers de la Pléiade, XIII, automne 1951-printemps 1952, 13.

<sup>2</sup>E.g. Caillois: see Babel, Les Impostures de la poésie, Art poétique, etc.

<sup>3</sup>Alain Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman (Paris 1963), p. 120.

<sup>4</sup>Perse, "Message pour Valery Larbaud," loc. cit., 13.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. For a measure of the mutual esteem between Perse and Larbaud, see A. Connell, "Saint-John Perse and Valery Larbaud," French Review, Oct. 1967, 11-22. It is strange that Robbe-Grillet should be labelled "new" when he writes: "L'art

Attention to language is at the service of communication. Evoking Aristotle and the interplay of being and poetry, Perse writes:

Poésie, science de l'être! Car toute poétique est une ontologie. Et sur ce double mouvement, d'un arrachement premier, puis d'un retour, à l'être, pour la réintégration de l'unité perdue, la philosophie grecque du Stagirite avait déjà tenté toute une métaphysique de mouvement.

D'où l'exigence, en art, d'une œuvre réelle et pleine, qui ne craigne pas la notion d'"œuvre", et d'œuvre "œuvrée", dans sa totalité, impliquant d'autant plus d'assistance du souffle, et de force organique, d'élévation de ton et de vision, au-delà de l'écrit, pour la conduite finale du thème à sa libre échéance.

Telle est l'obligation filiale du poète envers la langue--créatrice...<sup>1</sup>

It is a commitment to both language and life, not using one as a stick to beat the other, nor, to use Valéry's image borrowed by Sartre, letting language disappear like a sheet of glass in front of its subject. The glass is valued for all its properties. The double movement seen here by Perse

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pour l'art n'a pas bonne presse: cela fait penser au jeu, aux jongleries, au dilettantisme. Mais la nécessité à quoi l'œuvre d'art se reconnaît n'a rien à voir avec l'utilité. C'est une nécessité tout intérieure." (Op. cit., pp. 42-43).

<sup>1</sup>Perse, Pour Dante, p. 13.

regarding language--"ce double mouvement, d'un arrachement premier, puis d'un retour . . . pour la réintégration de l'unité perdue"--is precisely that we have traced regarding Perse's whole life and works in the course of the present study.

In exile, the poet declares himself content, "me composant un pur langage sans office" (Exil, IV). But the word refined to its pure state is elusive. "Il est impossible de détacher le langage de sa destination fondamentale, qui est d'exprimer quelque chose. Aussi, jusque dans les réussites les plus exquises de l'art d'écrire, . . . est-il salutaire de ne pas oublier que le langage remplit un office banal."<sup>1</sup> Hence the hopelessness of the following gesture:

Servantes, vous serviez, et vaines, vous tendiez  
vos toiles fraîches pour l'échéance d'un mot pur,  
Sur des plaintes de pluviers s'en fut l'aube plain-  
tive, s'en fut l'hyade pluvieuse à la recherche du mot  
pur.  
(Exil, IV)

Bible in hand, Crusoe had sensed the same difficulty:

Et quelle plainte alors sur la bouche de l'âtre  
. . . remuait dans ton cœur l'obscur naissance du  
langage?  
(Images à Crusoe: "Le Livre")

<sup>1</sup>Caillois, Babel, pp. 174-175.

The horsemen in the desert in Anabase ask themselves:

Lèverons-nous le fouet sur les mots hongres du  
bonheur ?  
(VIII)

Illogical, apparently, but for Perse words have substance enough to provoke such an action: the Word was made flesh.

The physical qualities of words as well as their referential aspect must therefore be recognised by a poet before any transcendence beyond data is possible. On several occasions, Perse sees language as a weapon, a very physically realised tool which one must know how to use. The boomerang shape, or in this case the sling shape of the circumflex accent is summoned into service against the Goliath of ineffability:

Ne pesez pas les hommes de ma race. . . . L'abeille  
du langage est sur leur front.  
Et sur la lourde phrase humaine, pétrie de tant  
d'idiomes, ils sont seuls à manier la fronde de l'accent.  
(Vents, IV, 4)

Winter is described "créant ses mots de fer" and after forging its iron words asked to share their secret power: "Enseignons le mot de fer" (Vents, II, 2). Words are as solid and substantial as iron, and the iron feathers adorning the "filles les plus aigres" of Exil, III, are quills, perhaps, drawn from the wing of genius when considered in the light of this sentence

written some twenty years later: "Et l'aile acerbe du génie nous frôlera encore de sa plume de fer..."<sup>1</sup> It is tempting to play on the word "tempered" when reading Perse's letter to George Huppert<sup>2</sup> saying that words should be "bien-tempérés", but since Perse then speaks of Bach, the temptation must be resisted, despite the poet's knowledge of English.

Only purity and allegiance to purity in language, then, allows the maximum contact with the world as well as the apparently paradoxical exploration of the unknown and the ineffable. For Perse, one of the principal approaches to purity, and the subsequent revalorisation of jaded words, is through the classical Greek and Latin roots of the French language. His knowledge of both languages is considerable: early in his career he translated, but did not publish, Pindar's Victory Odes,<sup>3</sup> and even in his old age he delights in reading some Latin almost every day. He considers it as therapeutic

<sup>1</sup>Perse, Pour Dante, p. 18. Cf "la plume savante au scandale de l'aile!..." (Anabase, Chanson I), and for a fuller discussion of the line see above, pp. 40-42, 201-206.

<sup>2</sup>In Livres de France (Biblio), jan. 1959, 8.

<sup>3</sup>A facsimile of the opening of the first Pythian Ode in Perse's hand will be found in E. Noulet, Le Ton dans la poésie de Saint-John Perse (Brussels 1969), facing p. 10.

as swimming, which until recently was also a daily exercise except in the most inclement weather. Caillois's Poétique de St.-John Perse provides ample evidence of Perse's strong etymological sense, and as with the question of exactitude one can only hope to add further examples to support the conclusions he reaches. Let one stand for many. Perse has enlarged with characteristic precision on one of the most opaque passages of Exil to which reference has already been made: "les filles les plus aigres" (Exil, III):

"Aigre" est ici pris, très concrètement, au sens figuratif et presque linéaire d'une suggestion d'ordre plastique, et non moral: dans le sens, purement visuel, d'"acéré", d'aigu, d'anguleux (arrowy), comme les profils d'ailes coudées des aigles évoqués antérieurement. . . . Vous devez certainement retourner à l'image physique.<sup>1</sup>

A return from the abstract sense of the word to its more concrete, physical origins is almost invariably the movement Perse invites. In this case it is a return to the original Greek sense ἄκρος, 'pointed'. Often, in his prose writings, one finds such phrases as "au sens ancien du mot" and "dans l'acception latine du mot."

<sup>1</sup>From a letter to the present writer dated Washington, Dec. 15, 1965.

The poet counteracts the development of French towards abstraction by this method, but that is not to say that the refinement of the French language is regretted by Perse. On the contrary, it allows him scope for subtle interplay between many an abstract word and its more concrete etymon. Indeed, he has some harsh--if somewhat contradictory--things to say about English in comparison.<sup>1</sup> He reports the following discussion with Gide on the subject:

Il me dit tout l'attrait que commençait d'exercer sur lui l'étude approfondie de la langue anglaise. Je lui dénonçai, pour ma part, l'opacité d'une langue aussi concrète, la richesse excessive de son vocabulaire et sa complaisance à vouloir réincarner la chose elle-même, comme dans l'écriture idéographique, au lieu que le français, langue plus abstraite, et qui cherchait à signifier bien plus qu'à figurer, n'engageait le signe fiduciaire du mot que comme valeur d'échange monétaire. L'anglais, pour moi, en était encore au troc.<sup>2</sup>

Onomatopoeia should be used with discretion certainly, but it is obtuse to see English as enjoying little other than "transparent" words.<sup>3</sup> The identity of a word with the object it

<sup>1</sup>Cf Knodel, Saint-John Perse, pp. 90, 98.

<sup>2</sup>Perse, "Face aux lettres françaises, 1909," loc. cit., 8.

<sup>3</sup>On the question of motivation of onomatopoeias and transparent words in French see S. Ullmann, Précis de sémantique française (Berne 1952), pp. 102-131. An instructive contrast with German and comparison with English is made on pp. 130-131.

designates should never go so far as to attempt to be entire. Such an idea has been amply satirised by Swift in the scheme put forward by the Professors of the School of Languages at the Grand Academy of Lagado whereby Things replace Words, and we meet "Sages almost sinking under the Weight of their Packs."<sup>1</sup> This too in its absurd way represents a loss of purity.

While believing Perse's view of English to be inadequate and unsubtle, one must admit that no poet could be more faithful to his own language, even to the point of chauvinism, and what higher praise could a poet receive? Contrasting his mother-tongue with English, he reveals its peculiar riches:

De la langue française, au contraire, on sait l'extrême économie de moyens, et qu'au terme d'une longue évolution vers l'abstrait, elle accepte aujourd'hui comme une faveur le bénéfice de son appauvrissement matériel, poussé parfois jusqu'à l'ambiguïté ou la polyvalence, pour une fonction d'échanges et de mutations lointaines où les mots, simples signes, s'entremettent fictivement comme la monnaie dite fiduciaire.<sup>2</sup>

The proviso is expressed through the same image by Caillois:

[L'intelligence] désire, à travers les mots, atteindre

<sup>1</sup>Gulliver's Travels, Bk. III, § 5.

<sup>2</sup>"Une lettre . . . à Mr. George Huppert," loc. cit., 8.

des évidences, c'est-à-dire toucher le métal incontestable qui garantit cette abondance de papier-monnaie.<sup>1</sup>

Fidelity to one's language is perhaps the most meaningful form of patriotism, and certainly is for a poet.

Même si je n'étais pas un animal essentiellement français, une argile essentiellement française (et mon dernier souffle, comme le premier, sera chimiquement français), la langue française serait encore pour moi le seul refuge imaginable, l'asile et l'autre par excellence, le seul lieu géométrique où je puisse me tenir en ce monde pour y rien comprendre, y rien vouloir ou renoncer.<sup>2</sup>

Perse's most recently published text of any length, Pour Dante, is also one of the most revelatory for the present study. Across seven centuries, the praise which Perse offers Dante is essentially for his powers of language:

Nous te saluons, Poète, homme de terre latine, celui à qui il fut donné d'éduquer une langue, et par la langue, créatrice, de forger l'âme d'un peuple.

. . . Et nous, poètes, hommes de parole, nous invoquons d'un grand poète la parole donnée, et nous lui demandons raison. Qu'il porte encore dans le siècle le scandale du poète, et par la grâce du langage, l'altercation suprême de l'homme au plus haut lieu de l'être, sa parole!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Caillois, Babel, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup>Perse, "Fragments d'une lettre privée de Saint-John Perse à Archibald MacLeish (1942)," CP, X, 156.

<sup>3</sup>Pour Dante, p. 10.

The poet is endowed with the highest possible function, that of leading people to live more fully (and so living more fully himself) by expressing the kernel of being which he has the privilege of seeing more fully than most:

Il n'est point, sans le poète, d'aspiration plénière, ni de restitution, du souffle. Respirer avec le monde demeure sa fonction propre et médiatrice. Et telle est bien la primauté secrète du poète. Il est, au sens premier du mot, l'"ex-istant" par excellence, se situant au plus près du principe de l'être.<sup>1</sup>

The notion of the Oracle is not far away:

Dans l'ère plénière du langage s'intègre la durée d'une parole d'homme. Et l'homme de langage s'avance encore parmi nous. Il couvre du regard le temps des morts et des vivants. A l'empire du passé il joint l'empire du futur, où court son ombre prophétique... Car il y a, dans la vision du poète, à son insu, quelque chose toujours de fatidique qui court au loin rejoindre une autre infinitude: celle de l'Etre, son lieu vrai.<sup>2</sup>

Language alone is there to keep the Oracle in check, to be man's guarantee:

Honneur à Dante d'Italie! premier d'Europe et d'Occident à fonder l'homme en poésie, et la parole, en l'homme, du poète comme une caution d'humanité.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Perse, Pour Dante, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

The affinity with Perse is strongly felt: once again, as is almost inevitable in a critic who is himself a creative writer, Dante is praised for qualities one finds in large measure in Perse himself.<sup>1</sup> Beyond the fact that both were diplomats and both political exiles, however, lies the crucial fact that they were both hommes de langage:

Poésie, heure des grands, route d'exil et d'alliance, levain des peuples forts et lever d'astres chez les humbles; poésie, grandeur vraie, puissance secrète chez les hommes, et, de tous les pouvoirs, le seul peut-être qui ne corrompe point le cœur de l'homme face aux hommes...<sup>2</sup>

Only complete purity and integrity of language can match such high ideals. The illustration of Perse's care for language is all his written work; the theories suggested in his prose writings are put into practice and realised by his poetry, a living witness both to the integrity of the language and to that of the man.

Et Dante, fanatique du langage, n'a-t-il pas placé dans son Enfer, non loin des blasphémateurs, un écrivain coupable d'impiété envers sa langue maternelle?<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Perse even refers to the coincidence of their horoscopes (p. 19). The "bipolarity" attributed to Gemini (see Louis Mac-Neice, Astrology (London 1964), p. 85) corresponds, whatever one's attitude to astrology, to the basic binary ambivalence seen in every aspect of Perse's work.

<sup>2</sup>Pour Dante, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

What is fundamentally important for Perse, then, is that the full qualities of language should be respected not for a sterile playing with words for their own sake, not for "la poésie pure," not as an end, but as a means to pushing back the frontiers of man's understanding and enjoyment of life. A purity of language combined with a respect for its physical qualities on the one side and a broadly based fascination for natural phenomena on the other provide Perse with a remarkably sound platform to observe, explore, and express something of the mystery of man. "Le délice encore du mieux dire"<sup>1</sup> is "pour mieux vivre, et plus loin."<sup>2</sup>

Fidèle à son office, qui est l'approfondissement même du mystère de l'homme, la poésie moderne s'engage dans une entreprise dont la poursuite intéresse la pleine intégration de l'homme. Il n'est rien de pythique dans une telle poésie. Rien non plus de purement esthétique. . . . Se refusant à dissocier l'art de la vie, ni de l'amour la connaissance, elle est action, elle est passion, elle est puissance, et novation toujours qui déplace les bornes.<sup>3</sup>

\* \* \*

<sup>1</sup>Amers, Invocation, 4.

<sup>2</sup>Perse, in Mazars, "Une journée..."

<sup>3</sup>Perse, Poésie, [p. 37]. Cf his scorn of the aesthete in Vents, IV, 5: "Il y aura toujours assez de lait pour les gencives de l'esthète et les bulbes du narcisse."

§ 10

LANGUAGE AS IMAGERY

Linguista sum; nihil  
linguistici a me  
alienum puto.

Roman Jakobson

(Essais de linguistique  
générale, p. 27)

There are two obvious ways in which Perse reveals his attachment to language. The first shows in his technical mastery and his sensitivity to philology, the second in his extensive use of language itself as an image. Not only is language likened to things; things are also likened to language. The various manifestations of language become images in their own right, so creating the curious situation in which the tool becomes an integral part of the finished product.

Because of the conjunction of an abstract linguistic element and the concrete element with which it is associated, the total effect depends on the attraction of each element for the other. More often than not, the result is to concretise language by the association or metaphor. A simple example will serve to make this clearer. Perse mentions in Exil, VI, "le Dépôt des Phares, où gisent les fables, les lanternes." The linking of items lying together makes the lanterns somehow less real, but the major effect is to make the temptation to translate fables as 'yarns' almost irresistible, so material do the sailors' tales seem to have become. Similarly, when addressing the Etranger, Perse assimilates into terms drawn

from finance the notion of the foreign language he speaks:

tu ne franchiras point le seuil des Lloyds, où ta  
parole n'a point cours et ton or est sans titre...<sup>1</sup>

(Exil, VI)

Through the parallelism of phrasing, parole is given the value of or. By the simple insertion of a word apparently out of context, Perse both arrests our attention and indicates the importance he attaches to language. So the Prince is "vêtu de ses sentences" (Amitié du Prince, I); horsemen wonder: "lèverons-nous le fouet sur les mots hongres du bonheur?" (Anabase, VIII).

Working from this principle, one finds both condensed and extended examples, revealing Perse's delight in language and keenness of observation. Even in the early poems the interest is present, if muted. In Eloges, V, the swabbing of the deck before dawn leaves a film of water mirroring the sky, and so giving an account of it:

Le pont lavé, avant le jour, d'une eau pareille en  
songe au mélange de l'aube, fait une belle relation du  
ciel.

<sup>1</sup>For language as 'fiduciary' currency in Perse's prose, see above pp. 253-255.

For Crusoe, "le silence multipliera l'exclamation des astres solitaires" (Images à Crusocé: "La Ville"), showing a link between language and outer space which is to bear further fruit. From the most sophisticated forms of linguistic arrangements in poetry to the mere shape of a letter on a page, words are grist to the mill of imagery.

Etroite la mesure, étroite la césure, qui rompt en son milieu le corps de femme comme le mètre antique.

(Amers, Strophe, IX, 3 - 2)

This needs no explanation, but the following complex image includes an assumption of familiarity with uncial script and a purely visual reaction to illuminated capitals:

Au pur vélin rayé d'une amorce divine, vous nous direz, ô Pluies! quelle langue nouvelle sollicitait pour vous la grande onciale de feu vert.

(Pluies, IV)

Another visual image is far simpler:

l'Oiseau Anhinga . . . apposera-t-il ce soir l'absurde paraphe de son col?

(Vents, II, 4)

Here the similarity of shape between the Water-Turkey or Snake-bird's neck and the flourish added to a written word is evident.

The dimensions of time and space find echoes in linguistic imagery appropriate to their importance. The opening section of Vents, for example, ends with two illuminating paragraphs in

this connection. After linking a historical notion with the image of a tree, both the past century and the wintry tree hollow and rattling before the high winds, Perse retains the tree and switches the historical notion to the genealogical tree of language. This shift is prepared very subtly, the word désinence meaning specifically a flexional ending:

Car tout un siècle s'ébruitait dans la sécheresse  
de la paille, parmi d'étranges désinences . . .

Comme un grand arbre tressaillant dans ses crécelles  
de bois mort. . . .

. . . . .

Et ne voilà-t-il pas déjà toute ma page elle-même  
bruissante,

Comme ce grand arbre de magie sous sa pouillierie  
d'hiver: vain de son lot d'icônes, de fétiches,

Berçant dépouilles et spectres de locustes; léguaient,  
liant au vent du ciel filiales d'ailes et d'essaims, lais  
et relais du plus haut verbe --

Ha! très grand arbre du langage peuplé d'oracles, de  
maximes et murmurant murmure d'aveugle-né dans les quin-  
conces du savoir...

(Vents, I, 1)

The very word lais is brilliantly chosen and placed. As the plural of lai it may be seen as the poetic form dating from the Middle Ages. As a singular it means the same as baliveau, a staddle, or single tree chosen to be left standing when the undergrowth and other saplings are cleared from around it. To translate lais et relais as 'tide-marks' as Chisholm does<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Winds (New York, 2nd edn., 1961), p. 7.

betrays a strange insensitivity to the image-structure, which here brings the ideas of tree and language deftly together in a single word.

Space suggests another extended simile in Oiseaux, 8. The closing line of the preceding section seems to trigger off the parallel:

C'est une poésie d'action qui s'est engagée là.

Poetry and action combine in the bird, the pure epitome of both; the phrase in part 13, "Laconisme de l'aile!" expresses the relation most succinctly. After a full description of the perfect muscular adaptation for flight and of the functioning of the bird's dynamics, Perse naturally turns to the bird as poetry. The description does not share the density of texture of the poems (Oiseaux being a méditation poétique and not a fully-fledged poem), but the point is made all the more lucidly:

Dans la maturité d'un texte immense en voie toujours de formation, ils ont mûri comme des fruits, ou mieux comme des mots: à même la sève et la substance originelle. Et bien sont-ils comme des mots sous leur charge magique: noyaux de force et d'action, foyers d'éclairs et d'émissions, portant au loin l'initiative et la prémonition.

(Oiseaux, 8)

Perse's attitude to language here shows a recognition of the power of ambiguity in an individual word, a historical sense

of linguistic development, and an understanding of the widespread power of words. The apparently casual ou mieux in the above passage introduces the central simile of the section.

Sur la page blanche aux marges infinies, l'espace qu'ils mesurent n'est plus qu'incantation. Ils sont, comme dans le mètre, quantités syllabiques. Et procédant, comme les mots, de lointaine ascendance, ils perdent, comme les mots, leur sens à la limite de la félicité.

Space is a text, a Mallarméan blank page with infinite margins, and the "fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven" of the Genesis account of creation imprint themselves upon it. In the beginning, too, was the Word, but the link between bird and word is by no means restricted to Christian texts. The dove descends in other forms to other intermediaries:

A l'aventure poétique ils eurent part jadis, avec l'augure et l'aruspice. Et les voici, vocables asujettis au même enchaînement, pour l'exercice au loin d'une divination nouvelle... Au soir d'antiques civilisations, c'est un oiseau de bois, les bras en croix saisis par l'officiant, qui tient le rôle du scribe dans l'écriture médiumnique, comme aux mains du sourcier ou du géomancien.

(Oiseaux, 8)

Words, like birds, are media for divination. Where the effigy of a bird once played its part in primitive ritual, we now use words. And the suggestion that words are materialised remains. A thing may be sophisticated into a verbal formula, but that formula in turn becomes an object in itself. But a form of

mediation between man and the unknown is necessary, and so language has a basic and universal function.

Oiseaux, nés d'une inflexion première pour la plus longue intonation... Ils sont, comme les mots, portés du rythme universel; ils s'inscrivent d'eux-mêmes, et comme d'affinité, dans la plus large strophe errante que l'on ait jamais vu se dérouler au monde. (Oiseaux, 8)

\*

The immensity of space moving through the immensity of time is regularly seen by Perse in terms of language. It is almost as if he used the metaphor of language when at a loss for a comparison with the vast elements and forces of this world. For him language is in itself a cosmic force in terms of which land, sea and stars become more comprehensible.

Pour l'oiseau . . . quel privilège déjà, sur la page du ciel, d'être à soi-même l'arc et la flèche du vol! le thème et le propos! (Oiseaux, 5)

And not only for the bird, since the page of the sky, open for all to read, changes its mood as often as a narrative.

Les constellations labiles . . . changent de vocable pour les hommes d'exil. (Exil, IV)

At night the stars seem to run a paper-chase across the sky, and the poet standing alone sees them as Princes distributing leaflets like a meteor-shower scattering its particles:

Que j'aïlle seul avec les souffles de la nuit, parmi  
les Princes pamphlétaire, parmi les chutes de Biélides!...

(Anabase, V)

The very approach of night may also be seen in terms of language;  
day elides into night, a cosmic lapsus:

soir de grand erg, et très grand orbe, où les premières  
élisions du jour nous furent telles que défaillances du  
langage.

(Chronique, 1)

By day, the sky's moods are similarly recorded:

ton ciel est pareil à la colère poétique,

(Vents, II, 3)

and again, reducing from simile to metaphor:

Syntaxe de l'éclair! ô pur langage de l'exil!

(Exil, VII)

The gaze is borne on wings arching like eyelashes into the vast  
unknown:

... Pétrels, nos cils, au creux de la vision d'orage,  
épelez-vous lettre nouvelle dans les grands textes épars  
où fume l'indicible?

(Vents, IV, 4)

Petrels are sea-birds, and Perse a man of the sea, but  
land enjoys similar treatment in his language of language.  
But again, land is seen as continents, as vast spaces between  
oceans, and man stands gazing over its expanses, "interprétant  
la feuille noire et les arborescences du silence dans le plus

vastes syllabaires." Before him, he sees

Toute la terre nubile et forte, au pas de l'Etranger,  
ouvrant sa fable de grandeur aux songes et fastes d'un  
autre âge,

Et la terre à longs traits, sur ses plus longues  
laises, courant, de mer en mer, à de plus hautes écri-  
tures, dans le déroulement lointain des plus beaux textes  
de ce monde.<sup>1</sup>

(Vents, II, 1)

The starting-point of the extensive discussion of the Ursprache  
in Neiges, IV, is the terrestrial phenomenon of a sea of snow.

A complex series of ideas combine to suggest the need to find  
the source of rivers formed from melting snows, the source of  
life and that of language: those who are prepared to search,  
"remontant les fleuves vers leur source, . . . sont gagnés  
soudain de cet éclat sévère où toute langue perd ses armes."

The verbs of the following sentence would normally apply to a  
river; here they are transferred to aspects of language to  
continue the image:

remontons ce pur délice sans graphie où court  
l'antique phrase humaine.

Such a transference is not in itself unusual; it is, after all,  
part of a poet's stock-in-trade. But what is less usual is the

<sup>1</sup>The Petit Larousse gives three senses of laisse which are  
imbricated here: (a) leash, (b) shore uncovered at ebb-tide,  
(c) strophe of a chanson de geste.

linguistic imagery involved and the extension it assumes.

On another occasion other features of winter are evoked as the wind wanders "sur toute cette grande chronique d'armes par là-bas/ Et ces grandes proses hivernales" (Vents, II, 2). Winter's chroniques and proses are created from its mots de fer, an indication of the season's and of language's physical force:

Hiver, hiver, . . .  
 Enseigne-nous le mot de fer, et le silence du savoir.  
(ibid.)

Speech, here, is iron, and silence golden.

The margins of the earth and sea attract Perse's attention likewise in this as in so many other respects. "La crépitation du sel" of Exil, II, is echoed and enlarged upon in the following line from Amers:

Tu es l'exclamation du sel et la divination du sel,  
 lorsque la mer au loin s'est retirée sur ses tables  
 poreuses.  
(Strophe, IX, 3 - 2)

The miniature explosions and sputterings as the tide ebbs from the shore are not a language but ejaculations suggestive of language. On the beach again, "parmi les sables très mobiles," other feet tread on closely observed stones:

Et de la paume du pied nu sur ces macérations nocturnes  
 . . . nous suivons là ce pur langage modelé: relief  
 d'empreintes méningées, proéminences saintes aux lobes  
 de l'enfance embryonnaire... (Amers, Strophe, VI)

What lies to seaward? Ships sailing from sheltered water  
 out to sea are "tout un propos de toiles vives adonnées au  
 délice du large" (Anabase, VI). One sees, "sur la haute page  
 tendue du ciel et de la mer, ces longs convois de nefs sous  
 voiles qui doublent soudain la pointe des Caps" (Amers, Strophe,  
 III). The wind fills their sails, accompanied by the "chant  
 des hautes narrations du large" (Vents, I, 3). The poet in  
 exile watches from the shore, and sees "la fraîcheur courant  
 aux crêtes du langage, l'écume encore aux lèvres du poème"  
 (Pluies, VIII). Out to sea too go migrating birds and insects,  
 and two passages in Vents depict scattering pages as living  
 creatures. Firstly, the poet evokes "la Ville basse vers la  
 mer dans un émoi de feuilles blanches: libelles et mouettes  
 de même vol" (Vents, I, 6).<sup>1</sup> Secondly, Perse shows pages  
 scattering through the forces of history as well as those of

<sup>1</sup>To give due credit, Hugh Chisholm successfully retains  
 here the ambiguity of the French by writing of "a flutter of  
 white leaves: leaflets and sea-mews in the same flight" (op.  
cit., p. 35).

the wind when he evokes

Ces vols d'insectes par nuées qui s'en allaient se  
perdre au large comme des morceaux de textes saints, comme  
des lambeaux de prophéties errantes et des ré citations de  
généalogistes, de psalmistes...

(Vents, II, 4)

Such a line showing the migrating swarm of fragmented manuscripts  
may reasonably introduce the study of a highly original connection  
in Perse between language and the bee.<sup>1</sup>

\*

The image of the bee, its habits and attributes, recurs  
in Perse's poetry, and often it presents a puzzle which can  
in part be solved by seeing the history of the image in his  
writings. The poet's highly individual approach to symbol  
and image necessarily creates problems of interpretation and  
at times risks closing the poetry to the reader in an apparently  
private world. As this is not wilful obscurantism, some  
threads of imagery are at hand to help us through the labyrinth  
of language.

If one assembles the various references in Perse's work

<sup>1</sup>For an argument suggesting that communication between bees  
is the closest approximation to human language in the animal  
world, see Charles F. Hockett, A Course in Modern Linguistics  
(New York 1958), pp. 570-580.

to the bee, a pattern emerges showing that beyond the insect standing simply for itself, it is associated in the poet's mind with purposeful migration on the one hand and sagacity and language as functions of human intelligence on the other. The first of these is a natural extension of the bee's habit of swarming; the second derives from its remarkable organization within the hive, the strictly ordered hierarchy of its society, and the creative nature of its principal activities.<sup>1</sup>

Perse's use of the bee as an image owes little directly to the literature on the subject. His reading only serves to support his powers of observation which he uses in this case to express his fascination with language. Reference is first

<sup>1</sup>The greater credit given to the bee rather than, say, to the ant, is ultimately fortuitous: honey was the sugar of the ancients, the ambrosia of the gods in the land of Mount Hymettus, and so brought the bee community into the anthropocentric scheme. Among others, Aristotle (Historia animalium, De partibus animalium and De generatione animalium), Virgil (Georgica, IV), and Pliny the Elder (Historia naturalis, esp. Bk. XII), wrote at considerable length and in considerable detail of bees and their habits. Where their observations were less than scientific (and so to be supplemented by more recent studies, starting with Maeterlinck's La Vie des abeilles and Karl von Frisch's classic), they allowed the bee an area of mythology which it enjoyed across much of the world, e.g. the Hittite myth of Telepinus (see S. H. Hooke, Middle Eastern Mythology (Harmondsworth 1963), pp. 100-101; the bee-god Beyla in Scandinavian mythology (see H. R. Ellis Davidson, Gods and Myths of Northern Europe (Harmondsworth 1964), p. 108; the Koran, Surah 16, "The Bee" etc.

made to bees in Amitié du Prince, and they are immediately associated with the Prince's oriental wisdom:

Tel sous le signe de son front, les cils hantés  
d'ombrages immortels et la barbe poudrée d'un pollen de  
sagesse, Prince flairé d'abeilles sur sa chaise d'un bois  
violet très odorant, il veille. (II)

Swarming bees seek a shady place to settle, and the Prince, who provides the cool of a tree's shade to travellers (ibid., III), has the ombrages immortels which attract the bees. They are also present for a reason made valid by the poetry alone. The Prince's greying beard is dusted with the pollen of wisdom.

The link is continued in a later line:

Et comme celui, sur son chemin, qui trouve un arbre  
à ruches a droit à la propriété du miel, je recueillerai  
le fruit de ta sagesse. (IV)

So, towards the end of the poem, the reader is completely open to the suggested association between bees emerging in the evening and the baring of foreheads behind which dreams will be dreamed and thoughts given shape.

Les abeilles quittent les cavernes à la recherche des  
plus hauts arbres dans la lumière. Nos fronts sont mis à  
découvert. (IV)

It would be wrong to attempt to force each reference to the bee into a single mould. Each preoccupation within the

texture of a poem's total imagery will have its emphasis shifted or particular developments made because of its context. Despite the continuity of thought and style from poem to poem, each poem is clearly conceived as a separate entity and the imagery is put at the service of the meaning. So if Amitié du Prince is the expression of a confrontation of a western man with an archetypal and proverbial eastern leader, where the bee is linked with sagacity, Anabase has the insect serve other ends.

Je sais . . . les essaims du silence aux ruches de  
lumière.

(VII)

The general sense of space, with silence and the yellow light that pervades the poem, is enhanced in two ways. Firstly, just as the criquets à midi (II) heighten by contrast the effect of silence, so here does the swarm of bees. Secondly, the coupling of the aural with the visual has its synaesthesia extended into movement by the migration of the bees which is suggested. The pure quest undertaken by the leader and the poet is shared by the bees.

An additional note of purity is implied by the woman offered to the Stranger by way of hospitality.

Ouvre ma bouche dans la lumière, ainsi qu'un lieu  
de miel entre les roches, et si l'on trouve faute en moi,

que je sois congédiée.

(Anabase, IX)

This is not merely the offer of a dental inspection which one might normally reserve for an animal. It also serves to link the mouth with the wild hive, and so language with the bee. Such a connection is to be made more explicit in later poems, with variations on the theme of the honeyed tongue. "Le miel de l'euphuisme" (Pluies, VII) is certainly the most direct and commonplace, but the banal notion takes on the richest extensions through Perse's expansive technique.

In the Exil tetralogy, for instance, occur echoes of earlier usage and new applications. The poet himself, his brow wreathed in inspiration reminiscent of the Prince's wisdom, has "le front nu, lauré d'abeilles de phosphore" (Poème à l'Étrangère, III).<sup>1</sup> He stands ready to unleash his words like bees, making the surrounding silence meaningful: in exile he has found "un lieu de grâce et de merci où licencier l'essaim des grandes odes du silence" (Neiges, I). And to underline the

<sup>1</sup>The reference is to the Washington fireflies: the word "abeille" is used rather than "luciole" for its special connotations, and particularly here for the echo of Amitié du Prince.

fact that neither exile nor war dates from yesterday, again he uses the image of the swarm:

Et cette histoire n'est pas nouvelle que le Vieux  
Monde essaime à tous les siècles, comme un rouge pollen.

(Poème à l'Etrangère, III)

Small wonder then if at this stage it is considered quite legitimate to call the bee divine:

Et qui donc vous mènera, dans ce plus grand veuvage,  
à vos Eglises souterraines où la lampe est frugale, et  
l'abeille, divine ?

(Neiges, III)

There seems to be no need to read this specifically as Candlemas,<sup>1</sup> as a symbol of the resurrection of Christ,<sup>2</sup> or to recall the bee-gods of ancient mythologies. Without any disrespect, this is the word made flesh. It can of course have various manifestations, and the image, once established, allows Perse to write "Dressez, dressez . . . les hauts ruchers de l'imposture" (Pluies, V), or of "l'éclair de partout essaimant ses présages" (Amers, Strophe, IX, 4 - 2).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See Parent, Saint-John Perse..., pp. 231-232.

<sup>2</sup>See Knodel, "Neiges," PMLA, LXX, 1, 1955, 14.

<sup>3</sup>Although the latter example is arguably not connected with bees, the conjunction of the swarm with présages suggests it is.

Vents serves both to confirm the association of the bee with language and to reintroduce after the relatively static Exil tetralogy the idea of migration. Early in the poem the link is recalled when the winds "éveillaient pour nous . . . comme nymphes en nymphose parmi les rites d'abeillage . . . les écritures nouvelles" (I, 3). But nothing could be more direct than the following phrase, reminding us now of both the Prince and the poet in earlier works: "l'abeille du langage est sur leur front" (IV, 4). The notion expands into the following comparison made with the Voyageur: "comme au rucher de sa parole, parmi le peuple de ses mots, l'homme de langage aux prises avec l'embûche de son dieu" (II, 4). The poet, the homme de langage, is both worker and traveller, like the bee, and creates from raw materials in the highly developed and sophisticated organisation of the hive of words. For the bee, if not for man, the production of honey is a mere function, complex but natural. So poetry for the poet. And just as the Queen leaves the hive to migrate to form a new community, so once a poem is completed, the poet must move on to the next. If the honey is appreciated, so much the better, but this remains irrelevant to its production. The poet constantly seeks "le monde où frayait une abeille nouvelle"

(Vents, IV, 6), and greets "l'heure . . . où sur les routes méconnues l'essaim des songes vrais ou faux s'en va encore" (IV, 4).

A number of other references in Vents recall the link of the bee with migration:

/Les grandes forces du vent/ s'annexaient en cours de route . . . l'abeille sauvage du désert et les migrations d'insectes sur les mers. (I, 3)

Des essaims passent en sifflant, affranchis de la ruche. (II, 4)

The winds themselves, symbolic of both cleansing and creation, share the bee's migratory urge: "les vents tièdes essaiment" (II, 3). Even the theme of Amers is anticipated by the mention of "la teneur à son comble des grands essaims sauvages de l'amour" (I, 7).

The great epic of love and the sea pursues the pattern as before, though naturally the context enlists other notions to link the image with the sea. Thus the immensity of the ocean puts man's efforts into their due perspective, and we read of "les essaims fugaces de l'esprit sur la continuité des eaux" (Amers, Strophe, V). Just as the image was appropriated by the winds, so it is by the sea, "pressant, haussant l'essaim

des jeunes vagues" (Amers, Strophe, IX, 6 - 2), and again  
 "Nous . . . te parasiterons, ruche des dieux, ô mille et mille  
 chambres de l'écume où se consume le délit" (ibid., Chœur, 2).

But the main themes are continued. First that of migration:

(Ainsi j'ai vu un jour, entre les îles, l'ardente  
 migration d'abeilles, et qui croisait la route du navire,  
 attacher un instant à la haute mâture l'essaim farouche  
 d'une âme très nombreuse, en quête de son lieu...)

(ibid., Strophe, IX, 6 - 2)

and secondly, within a page, that of intellectual activity:

pour nous, ô face très prodigue, l'immense ruche du  
 futur, plus riche d'alvéoles que les falaises trouées  
 d'idoles du Désert.

(ibid.)

One reference in Amers reflects a literary source among  
 the classics, though so thoroughly assimilated as to escape  
 notice:

O mon amour au goût de mer, que d'autres paissent<sup>1</sup>  
 loin de mer l'églogue des vallons clos -- menthes, mélisse<sup>1</sup>  
 et mélilot, tiédeurs d'alyse et d'origan -- et l'un y  
 parle d'abeillage et l'autre y traite d'agnelage, et la  
 brebis feutrée baise la terre au bas des murs de pollen  
 noir.

(ibid., Strophe, IX, 2 - 2)

Shepherds and bee-keepers have their inland occupations, very

<sup>1</sup>Cf "pentes à mélisses" (Anabase, II).

different from those of a man of the sea, as different, one might say, as Virgil's Georgics from the Aeneid. The latter part of the third Georgic is devoted to the rearing of sheep and the fourth of course to bee-keeping. Is it then mere coincidence to find here the word églogue, the title of another of Virgil's works? Perse may well say, with Valéry, "Rien pour moi dans les Géorgiques,"<sup>1</sup> and claim the sea as his element, but a book is not rejected without its first being read. So the detailed naming of plants includes two which, while fully satisfying the demands of alliteration, also supply excellent nectar: mélisse et mélilot. The first, melissa balm, is suggested by Virgil as a means to attract a swarm to a shady place near water.<sup>2</sup> The second, melilot or sweet clover, heads the list of "des plantes dont les organes fournissent aux abeilles des sucs particulièrement riches en substances propres

<sup>1</sup>Paul Valéry, "Inspirations méditerranéennes" in Oeuvres (Bibl. de la Pléiade), I, 1090.

<sup>2</sup>Georgica, IV, 62-66:

Huc tu adsperge saporēs,  
trita melisphylla et cerinthae ignobile gramen,  
· · · · ·  
ipsae considēt medicatis sedibus, ipsae  
intima more suo sese in cunabula condent.  
(Italics added).

à donner de la cire."<sup>1</sup> Yet such elucidation seems unnecessary in a passage which is both mellifluous and moving.

"L'abeille du langage" is a recurrent image, then, with numerous applications in Perse's work. It does not occur often, and yet by gradual accretion of meaning assumes the qualities of richness and complexity peculiar to Perse. He may perhaps be pardoned for attributing the inspiration of the bee to the French language alone. A poet's mother-tongue can brook no rivals:

-- Et vous, hommes du nombre et de la masse, ne pesez pas les hommes de ma race. Ils ont vécu plus haut que vous dans les abîmes de l'opprobre.

Ils sont l'épine à votre chair; la pointe même au glaive de l'esprit. L'abeille du langage est sur leur front,

Et sur la lourde phrase humaine, pétrie de tant d'idiomes, ils sont seuls à manier la fronde de l'accent.

(Vents, IV, 4)

As Claudel wrote, "l'abeille . . . a le sentiment . . . de l'hexagone."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>H. Goelzer (ed.), Les Géorgiques (Paris 1946), p. 132.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Claudel, "La Messe là-bas" in Oeuvre poétique (Bibl. de la Pléiade), p. 524.

Perse's deep feeling for his mother-tongue made exile that much harder to bear. Between the north American continent and the hexagon of France lie some three thousand miles of ocean which for many reasons would draw and hold his attentions. In spite of the separation, he persisted in his view of the world and its history as a unity, and at the opening of Exil, III, he describes the wave of poetic inspiration running across the world both geographically and historically. However trite the phrase "wave of inspiration" may be, Perse ensures its rescue from banality by complex additions to the image pattern and by his use of words.

... Toujours il y eut cette clameur . . .

At the outset one is unsure of the sense and implications, but these are gradually revealed by association in turn with:

Cette grande chose sourde par le monde . . .

Cette chose errante par le monde . . .

la même vague . . .

ce très haut ressac au comble de l'accès . . .

la même plainte sans mesure . . .

The link is withheld but ultimately quite clear. The mutations which the rest of the imagery undergoes, weaving a developing pattern upon this loom of sea and language, trace a history of

movement and creation from suggestions of Old Testament times and Rome to the gull sweeping across the poet's field of vision, centralising and crystallising the image.

The link between the sea and the imagery of language takes on its fullest extension in Amers. If already in Vents Perse can write that the sea "m'est alliance et grâce, et circonlocution" (IV, 2), this sea which surrounds him with its language understandably speaks more clearly and subtly in the longer poem in praise of the sea.

The image lasts from the very first paragraph of Amers to the end of the Chorus. Indeed, by extending the image to that of the drama which is so important to the poem, it lasts from the first page to the very last line of all. From the start we see

La Mer en fête sur ses marches comme une ode de  
pierre: . . . la Mer elle-même notre veille, comme une  
promulgation divine.

(Invocation, I)

The sea's association at its edges with rocky shores lends it the lapidary quality of a finely chiselled ode, the ode which is the poem Amers itself. As a piece of ceremonial conceived in the Greek fashion,<sup>1</sup> it assumes the qualities of sacred ritual.

<sup>1</sup>See Perse, "Les thèmes d'Amers," NRF, avril 1959, 734-736.

After the divine promulgation has been read, and consequently the relationship between the sea, the poem, and the ritual established, Perse is free to indulge in such a passing reference as the following, where the very attention to detail indicates the completeness of the link between sea and language:

La Mer! . . . dans l'ébullition sacrée de ses  
voyelles. (Invocation, 3)

It is perhaps going too far to see in ébullition, as well as its root word bulle ('bubble') the homonym bulle ('bull', of the papal variety), but the context (and especially the word sacrée) nonetheless invites the idea, which although philologically unwarranted is poetically justifiable.

The sea shortly returns as language after a few pages:

Par grands soulèvements d'humeur et grandes intumescences du langage, par grands reliefs d'images et versants d'ombres lumineuses, courant à ses splendeurs massives d'un très beau style périodique, . . .  
La Mer mouvante et qui chemine au glissement de ses  
grands muscles errants... (ibid., 6)

The physical force of language is seen, its muscularity and even violence noted, again in all things like the sea. The "Mer vivante du plus grand texte" (Strophe, 3), now fully established as an image in the poem, may be used to express the same dialogue with inspiration which figured in Exil, III.

The Tragediennes invoke for the poet as well as for themselves the great sea-swell style of poetry that Perse has made his own:

Ah! qu'un grand style encore nous surprenne, en nos années d'usure, qui nous vienne de mer et de plus loin nous vienne, . . . et qu'un plus large souffle en nous se lève, qui nous soit comme la mer elle-même et son grand souffle d'étrangère!

(Amers, Strophe, III)

The sea is an exemplar for the poet, teaching him order and movement, rhythm and patience.

De plus grand mètre à nos frontières, il n'en est point qu'on sache. Enseigne-nous, Puissance! le vers majeur du plus grand ordre, dis-nous le ton du plus grand art, Mer exemplaire du plus grand texte! le mode majeur enseigne-nous, et la mesure enfin nous soit donnée . . .!... Au mouvement des eaux princières, qui renouera pour nous la grande phrase prise au peuple?

(ibid.)

The sea has long been an inspiration for poets, but it has not before been presented as an example of language in this way.

After a passage transparently evoking the poet himself-- "nous viendra-t-il de mer ou bien des Iles?" --another splendid conjunction of sea and language is presented:

Textuelle, la Mer  
S'ouvre nouvelle sur ses grands livres de pierre.

(ibid.)

One recalls the "ode de pierre" of the opening page, and notes the lapidary form the sea assumes as it imprints itself on the

rocks. The internal rhymes of this sentence support the rhythmic idea of waves lapping on the shore, curling over like turning pages. Here, as ever, Perse's interest is with the creation of the text and its development--the sea--rather than with the book produced--the rock. His contempt for books as dead museums<sup>1</sup> contrasts sharply with his passion for linguistic creativity as well as being oddly at variance with his concern for the material presentation of his texts.

The living language of the sea "change de dialecte à toutes portes des Empires" (Strophe, IV), a highly expressive way of indicating the ocean's changing face. But beneath the diversity lies the unity--"unité recouvrée sous la diversité" (Oiseaux, 4) --a unity shown clearly in the following passage where the image of woven cloth undergoes several transformations before appearing finally as a trame--both 'weft' and 'plot'--for the sea's ritual utterings:

... Innombrable l'image, et le mètre, prodigue.  
 . . . . .

<sup>1</sup>See Vents, I, 4 and Arthur J. Knodel, "Notes on an Illustrious Bibliophobe: Saint-John Perse," Coranto, Journal of the Friends of the Libraries, University of Southern California, IV, 1, Fall 1966, 3-15.

Le Récitant fait face encore à l'étendue des Eaux.  
Il voit, immensément, la Mer aux mille fronces

Comme la tunique infiniment plissée du dieu aux mains  
des filles de sanctuaires,

Ou, sur les pentes d'herbe pauvre, aux mains des  
filles de pêcheurs, l'ample filet de mer de la communauté.

Et maille à maille se répète l'immense trame prosodique  
--la Mer elle-même, sur sa page, comme un récitatif sacré.

(Chœur, 3)

The modulations from the puckering of the sea's face to that of a ceremonial robe, to that of a fishing-net being untangled and mended and so back to the sea with its ceremonious network of waves are both intricate and simple to follow.

Greater complexity is to be found in the final metaphor in this category occurring in Amers. Language itself contains unsatisfactory elements: the notion that words can be a barrier to communication as well, paradoxically, as being our principal and subtlest means of communication is familiar. Ultimately, Perse praises "non point l'écrit, mais la chose même, prise en son vif et dans son tout" (Vents, III, 6). So towards the end of the Chorus of Amers, poet, language and sea become utterly bound up together, so completely fused as to defy differentiation. The words have become the objects they designate, and the poet is indistinguishable from his text and from the sea in which he and it are bathed.

Nous t'invoquons enfin toi-même, hors de la strophe  
du Poète. Qu'il n'y ait plus pour nous, entre la foule  
et toi, l'éclat insoutenable du langage:

"... Ah! nous avons des mots pour toi et nous n'avions  
assez de mots,

Et voici que l'amour nous confond à l'objet même de  
ces mots,

Et mots pour nous ils ne sont plus, n'étant plus  
signes ni parures,

Mais la chose même qu'ils figurent et la chose même  
qu'ils paraient;

Ou mieux, te récitant toi-même, le récit, voici que  
nous te devenons toi-même, le récit,

Et toi-même sommes-nous, qui nous étais l'Inconciliable:  
le texte même et sa substance et son mouvement de mer,

Et la grande robe prosodique dont nous nous revêtons..."

(Chœur, 4)

\* \* \*

§ 11

POETIC TECHNIQUES

Le génie poétique suprême  
. . . est une certaine  
Grâce d'attention.

Paul Claudel

(Introduction à un poème  
sur Dante).

A passion for language is, or should be, a passion for any poet. But it is the particular application of that passion to words in practice that necessarily interests the reader or the critic: for the abstract to have meaning it must be concretised. The poet's attention to imagery involves at best an attention to the connotations and ambivalences of words as well as to their history and exact meaning.

In the course of the present study, examples of Perse's imagery and precision have been analysed in illustration of other preoccupations. They have served an end in much the same way as they serve a different end in the context of the poetry itself. We murder to dissect. Yet the process is essential to distinguish Perse from those who have taken the liberty of the vers libre as licence. "Only a bad poet could welcome free verse as a liberation from form."<sup>1</sup> In Perse, attention to detail in all fields stands at the service of the total organisation of the poem.

Examples to indicate areas of such attention will be con-

<sup>1</sup>T. S. Eliot, "The Music of Poetry" in On Poetry and Poets (London 1957), p. 37.

centrated here on one poem, Exil, which stands at the cross-roads of Perse's output and has particular significance for this study. Any other poem, indeed any page of any of the poems, would offer similar rewards to scrutiny. The conjunction of precise scientific observation and controlled transference of epithet seen in the line "L'Eté de gypse aiguise ses fers de lance dans nos plaies" (Exil, I) has already been analysed.<sup>1</sup> A similar example of separating the elements of the composite name of a natural substance occurs later in the poem:

Ainsi va toute chair au cilice du sel, le fruit de  
cendre de nos veilles, la rose naine de vos sables, et  
l'épouse nocturne avant l'aurore reconduite.

(Exil, IV)

The four opening words are more than an allusion to the title Valéry Larbaud used for his translation of Samuel Butler's The Way of all Flesh. They introduce a list exemplifying by synecdoche "le monde entier des choses" which in the natural course of events are destined to suffer. The mortification of the hair-shirt is increased by having salt rubbed in to

<sup>1</sup>See above, pp. 183-185.

make the wounds smart. The flesh of the fruit consumed while watching and waiting (perhaps for the end of exile or the return of the prodigal as in canto VII) is nothing but ash; the stunted rose on the beach knows the mortification of unfulfilment; the flesh of the courtesan--poetic inspiration<sup>1</sup>--we met earlier in the section has the bitter taste of transience about it. There is a will to suffer, a kind of masochism, a temptation to martyrdom that must be purged. Yet one correctly expects "toute chair" to be characterised by animal, vegetable and mineral. "La rose naine de vos sables" must therefore be taken not literally as a dwarf rose struggling for survival on the beach, although this makes very good sense, but as a reference to the desert rose, the "rose des sables."<sup>2</sup> It is, like arrow-head gypsum, a "macle de cristaux lenticulaires de gypse,"<sup>3</sup> which may lead one to conjecture that Perse had read some work

<sup>1</sup>After a verset, the parallel "explanatory" line is given: "Et les poèmes de la nuit avant l'aurore répudiés."

<sup>2</sup>"Rose des sables ou rose des déserts, agglomération de cristaux de gypse, jaune ou rose, qu'on rencontre dans certains déserts." (Petit Larousse, art. Rose). Montherlant's La Rose de sable was not published until 1951. The photograph (overleaf) of a sample in my possession will show more graphically than words the formation's remarkable resemblance to a rose.

<sup>3</sup>Grand Larousse Encyclopédique, art. Rose.

of petrology prior to writing Exil and been struck by the natural forms of gypsum and their variety. Such a hypothesis, even if reasonable, tells us nothing about the poem. But the particular technique used speaks volumes about Perse's approach to poetry. His imagination is linguistic. Behind the language are real phenomena closely observed and relished. The marvellous for Perse is in the actual. So many reasons for seeing Perse as a neo-classical writer utterly opposed to the flimsy fantasies that have become the fashion of an escapist age of poets.



(Photo: S. Brown)

Rien n'est beau que le vrai, le vrai seul est aimable;  
Le vrai peut quelquefois n'être pas vraisemblable.

Boileau's lines<sup>1</sup> stand as an epigraph to Caillois's chapter on Perse's "Poésie de la réalité."<sup>2</sup> Here is one poet to whom Bachelard's idea that "la vérification fait mourir les images"<sup>3</sup> clearly cannot be applied. For Perse takes poetry as an integral part of living, as indeed does Bachelard,<sup>4</sup> so from this point of view there is no insuperable barrier between words and things. Each illuminates the other. The reader of Perse's poetry is invited to be attentive to both.

Caillois's study, however, deals at length with other aspects of Perse's techniques, focussing attention on his persistent use of metagrammatism, paronomasia and multiple substitution as well as on the more familiar techniques of alliteration, repetition, internal rhyme, pararhyme and so forth.<sup>5</sup> The conclusion to which Caillois comes is inevitable:

<sup>1</sup>Epîtres, IX, 43 and Art poétique, III, 48 resp.

<sup>2</sup>Poétique de St.-John Perse, pp. 137-152.

<sup>3</sup>La Poétique de l'espace, p. 90.

<sup>4</sup>"Le bien dire est un élément du bien vivre," ibid., p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>See esp. pp. 39-66.

Le compte des syllabes, le parallélisme des formules, la distribution des sonorités, les métagrammes ou rimes accessoires contraignent l'auteur qui se sert d'une pareille prose à plus de servitudes que la métrique classique n'en imposa jamais à un versificateur. D'où la force peu commune d'un tel langage. Comme la puissance en ce domaine est toujours en proportion de la discipline, il n'est pas étrange qu'elle se révèle la plus grande là où l'écrivain a choisi de se soumettre à plus d'obligations.<sup>1</sup>

Perse's outstanding contribution to modern poetry has been his positive solution to a problem which few have even dared face, namely the presentation of a disciplined art form on a large scale free of traditional rhyme-schemes. In the process he has amply refuted a notion made fashionable and erected almost into an unalterable law since Poe first wrote at the beginning of the Poetic Principle: "I hold that a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase, 'a long poem,' is simply a flat contradiction in terms."<sup>2</sup> The unified conception of

<sup>1</sup>Caillois, Poétique..., pp. 64-65. Cf Debussy: "Il faut chercher la discipline dans la liberté et non dans les formules d'une philosophie devenue caduque et bonne pour les faibles." (Monsieur Croche, antidilettante, p. 21). Or again Cocteau: "Ces règles mystérieuses /de la poésie moderne/ sont aux vieilles règles de la versification ce que dix parties d'échec menées ensemble sont à une partie de dominos." (Le Rappel à l'ordre: "Le Secret professionnel" quoted by Maritain, Creative Intuition ..., p. 322, n. 21).

<sup>2</sup>The Complete Poetical Works and Essays on Poetry (London and New York 1888), p. 153.

Perse's longer poems is supported by the use of "jalons";<sup>1</sup> they are not "a series of lyrics"<sup>2</sup> however much one sees the attention to language appropriate to the lyric applied consistently throughout the epic length.

Equivalent to the dualism inherent in the notion of exile and its expression in the image of the threshold is a dualism of language. This may take various forms, ranging from a philosophical view of the poet's function to the ambiguity of an individual word. Perse sees the poet as a receptive and recreative Janus:

Au poète indivis d'attester parmi nous la double  
vocation de l'homme. (Poésie)

His function in respect of language as in all other matters is as mediator, the man standing at the threshold:

Et vous pouvez me dire: Où avez-vous pris cela?  
-- Textes reçus en langage clair! versions données  
sur deux versants!... Toi-même stèle et pierre d'angle!...  
Et pour des fourvoiements nouveaux, je t'appelle en litige  
sur ta chaise dièdre,  
O Poète, ô bilingue, entre toutes choses bisaiguës,

<sup>1</sup>The term is Caillois's: see op. cit., pp. 44-50.

<sup>2</sup>Poe, op. cit., p. 154. Bernard Weinberg's view of Anabase ("Saint-John Perse's Anabase", Chicago Review, XV, 3, 1962, 75-124) and Monique Parent's treatment of cantos as separate poems stem from such a view of Perse's poetry.

et toi-même litige entre toutes choses litigieuses --  
 homme assailli du dieu! homme parlant dans l'équivoque!...

(Vents, II, 6)

The very detail of duality expressed in the repeated prefixes bi- and di- underpins the delicacy of poise between the two sides of the poet's vision, one particular observation leading to analogy, the other precise expression in structured language.

From the beginning of Exil, where, from the very opening line, the sands are intimately connected with exile, one is invited to notice other expressions of ambiguity, and so of insecurity, in individual words. Thus ravissement (Exil, I) contains both its concrete and abstract meanings, both 'rape' and 'rapture'; frondes (II) can be either 'frond' or 'sling'; goût (II) is both 'foretaste' and 'aftertaste'. If a decision has to be made, and the principal meanings ('rapture', 'fronds' and 'aftertaste' respectively) retained, it is mostly a matter of intellectual convenience. The secondary meanings nonetheless leave their mark and modify one's approach to the sense. Thus the shape and movement of fronde 'sling' leave their mark on the fern fronds through which the wind is whistling. At the very end of the poem the technique is still used to undermine one's sense of security in the comforting knowledge that

one has "understood". The final verb in the poem leaves room for doubt:

Et c'est l'heure, ô Poète, de décliner ton nom, ta  
naissance et ta race.

The first sense of 'state your name' is undoubtedly uppermost, but resonances of 'decline' and 'renounce' persist.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond an area of ambiguity using modern meanings is therefore another allowing the interplay of a word's present meaning and its root sense. This etymological ambiguity works in two ways: it disconcerts in a similar way to ordinary forms of ambiguity and at the same time constitutes a notable element in the refurbishing of words. In the line

J'édis un lieu flagrant et nul comme l'ossuaire  
des saisons, (Exil, I)

both the adjectives are to be understood in the light of their Latin origins. They share the characteristics of being very close in form to their respective etymons, flagrans and nullus, and in addition of being used in legal terminology (of which

<sup>1</sup>As is the case with the final verb of La Chanson de Roland to which Poggioli somewhat arbitrarily relates this ending (see "The Poetry of Saint-John Perse," Yale French Studies, I, 2, 30.)

Perse is singularly fond). Flagrant therefore enjoys the present sense of "évident, incontestable" and the Latin sense of "burning". The meanings of nul and nullus overlap much more as "sans valeur" or "void", but the phrase nullus sum 'I am ruined' is echoed with particular poignancy by the exile on the burning, barren sands.

Puisant par seigneurie la puissance à son origine même, le poète se plaît . . . à reprendre la racine d'un mot pour en exprimer toute sa vertu.<sup>1</sup>

So Caillois, but he includes among his examples one from Exil, IV, which seems less than appropriate:

Servantes, vous serviez . . .

In this case, it seems that Perse has wanted not to highlight some etymological subtlety, since the forms have not diverged enough for the reader to need reminding of their common root, but rather sought to express the primitive and quasi-ritualistic simplicity with which the serving-women performed their tasks. Two comparative examples suggest this, drawn from works which are "primitive" in different ways, one from the Bible, the other from a modern African writer:

<sup>1</sup>Caillois, Poétique..., p. 43.

and his servants shall serve him . . .  
 The servant served us . . .<sup>1</sup>

Language should not be unnecessarily complicated (which is not to say that Perse is naïve about the technique at play here); only if what is to be expressed is obscure is there any reason for obscurity in language, and then only if it is not wilfully sought. Here the simple is simply presented, a self-evident fact in which pleasure is taken for its own sake and as symbol of nothing, "la simple chose, la simple chose que voilà, la simple chose d'être là" (Exil, V).<sup>2</sup> Later in the poem, the same technique serves different ends:

et la merveille est annoncée par ce cri: ô  
 merveille! (Exil, V)

In this case, the mystery of the wonder remains a mystery, as it must: what is ineffable by its nature defeats language. But it is recognised that even the simplest thing defies expression and is not entirely known by being named, and indeed

<sup>1</sup>Revelations, XXII, 3 and Amos Tutuola, The Palm-Wine Drinkard (London 1963), p. 68.

<sup>2</sup>Cf Oiseaux, where Braque's birds are "la nudité d'une évidence et le mystère d'une identité" (4) and "répugnent de tout leur être à cette carence qu'est le symbole" (12).

must in some respects be falsified and misinterpreted by the very nature of imagery. Yet words remain, in analogy and metaphor, the nearest approximation we have at our disposal to a comprehension of the idea.

Where the idea is obscure, the corresponding word may, quite legitimately, be rare, and one of Perse's most abstruse words occurs in Exil, V: azalaïe. In an unpublished letter written to Archibald MacLeish, he apologises for using it, gives its meaning, and says why he retained it:

Parmi ses mots concrets, un seul mot rare ou exotique, dont je m'excuse: "azalaïe", que vous ne trouveriez pas dans les dictionnaires usuels, est le nom de la grande caravane annuelle du sel aux déserts d'Afrique. J'en avais besoin pour une transposition.<sup>1</sup>

Perse's fascination with both salt and the desert no doubt led him to discover the word in the course of his reading, but for the moment it is the aspect intimated in the closing sentence of the letter that concerns us, the "transposition" to which Perse refers. Recollection of the verset in which the word

<sup>1</sup>Letter dated 9 Sept. 1941, Library of Congress, Rare Book Collection, PQ2623.E386E9. I am indebted to Professor Knodel for a copy of the letter.

occurs shows the subtlety of the metagrammatism:

Le ciel est un Sahel où va l'azalaïe en quête de  
sel gemme.

The sibilant-liquid grouping recurs four times, with varying vowels in a form of Cynghanedd.<sup>1</sup> The key words of the line --ciel, Sahel, l'azalaïe, sel--support phonically the sense of searching across vast spaces by drifting softly into the distance from sibilant to liquid. Within the rhythm of the line, the eighteen syllables breaking into three equal parts, these four words form both a counterpoint and a progression, focussing attention on the object of the quest.<sup>2</sup> The "transposition" of which Perse wrote is twofold: the sibilant of l'azalaïe is voiced, and the article provides an inversion of the basic sibilant-liquid scheme. Through detailed attention to rhythm and the physical attributes of words, Perse conveys

<sup>1</sup>"Cynghanedd, the repetitive use of consonantal sequences with variation of vowels." (Robert Graves, The White Goddess (London 1948), p. 18).

<sup>2</sup>The separated ciel and echoing Sahel of the first six-syllable group are linked in the second over three syllables: l'azala, with a slight shift of weight towards the end of the group, and further reduced to sel which is again nearer the end of the hexasyllabic group.

a sense of movement and distance even before the exact sense of the words is known.

A more extended example, and one which prepares the reader for the large-scale formulaic repetitions of Vents and Amers, may be seen at the beginning of Exil, III. The three parallel opening stanzas evoke the idea of poetic inspiration, and the ambivalent attitude of the poet towards it, in terms of a wave crossing the world to break on the shore of his exile:<sup>1</sup>

"... Toujours il y eut cette clameur, toujours il y eut cette splendeur,

Et comme un haut fait d'armes en marche par le monde, comme un dénombrement de peuples en exode, comme une fondation d'empires par tumulte prétorien, ha! comme un gonflement de lèvres sur la naissance des grands Livres,

Cette grande chose sourde par le monde et qui s'accroît soudain comme une ébriété.

"... Toujours il y eut cette clameur, toujours il y eut cette grandeur,

Cette chose errante par le monde, cette haute transe par le monde, et sur toutes grèves de ce monde, du même souffle proférée, la même vague proférant

Une seule et longue phrase sans césure à jamais inintelligible...

"... Toujours il y eut cette clameur, toujours il y eut cette fureur,

<sup>1</sup>Cf the same image used in Amers as a refrain: "Une même vague par le monde . . ." etc.

Et ce très haut ressac au comble de l'accès, toujours,  
 au faite du désir, la même mouette sur son aile, la même  
 mouette sur son aire, à tire-d'aile ralliant les stances  
 de l'exil, et sur toutes grèves de ce monde, du même  
 souffle proférée, la même plainte sans mesure

A la poursuite, sur les sables, de mon âme numide..."

Each stanza comprises an introductory formula, restated exactly but for the closing words which nonetheless rhyme both among themselves and with the repeated clameur: splendeur, grandeur, fureur. There follows in each case a longer second verset where the assimilation is first to various forms of concerted movement with references to the Bible, ancient Rome, and perhaps occupied France; then to a wave as an expression of this, and finally, an aerial reflection of the wave's relentless arc, to a gull gathering in its arching flight the cries expressive of flights of poetic fancy, of waves of inspiration. Each stanza then ends with a shorter line, of roughly the same length as the first, in which the development and effect of inspiration are traced. First it suddenly surges up to overwhelm one like drunkenness, then its nature is seen as implacable, incessant and incomprehensible in a line which has often been taken, in part erroneously, as descriptive of Perse's own poetry, and finally it pursues the unwilling writer over the sands of exile. He is unwilling not only because in the cir-

cumstances he would rather not write, knowing his profound emotions should await tranquility to be recollected in poetry, but also, in the longer view, because he is fully aware of the dangers inherent in accepting the dictates of the Muse without due modification and control by homo faber.

Within this pattern are clear verbal echoes. "Les stances de l'exil" develops "Cette chose errante par le monde, cette haute transe par le monde" not only because "stances" defines the nature of "cette chose errante" and "cette haute transe" with the supporting repetition of the nasal (errante--transe--stances) but because of the sharp opposition created by the parallel monde--monde--exil. Any sense of security into which the reader may have been lulled is forcibly shattered, and all the more so because in every other respect the echo is very precise.

The image of exile as a beach is underlined by the refrain "et sur toutes grèves de ce monde", where the poet is generalising from the particular to make his work an expression of "l'exil dans la condition humaine."<sup>1</sup> In these three stanzas the refrain

<sup>1</sup>Perse, in Mazars, "Une journée..."

occurs twice, supported on each occasion by "du même souffle proférée". Later in the poem (canto VI) the point of the phrase is to be underlined further by the expansion of et to Etranger, a forceful example of Perse's art. Other phrases occurring here also find echoes later: "la même plainte sans mesure" looks forward to "Sur des plaintes de pluviers s'en fut l'aube plaintive" (IV); "la poursuite, sur les sables, de mon âme numide" to "Je reprendrai ma course de Numide, longeant la mer inaliénable" (VII). Perse's tendency to re-use phrases, often linked with particular rhythms, not only provides a unity of thought and style in his work, but frequently helps one to understand, through his expansions and modifications, an earlier cryptic phrase.<sup>1</sup>

To show again the remarkable extent of Perse's attention to detail, one need only consider part of the third stanza of canto III:

Et ce très haut ressac au comble de l'accès, toujours,  
au faite du désir, la même mouette sur son aile, la même

<sup>1</sup>See e.g. the discussion of the difficult passage in Exil, III, "Tant de hauteur . . ." etc. (above pp. 41, 203) where phrases from Pour Dante and Amers help illuminate the sense.

mouette sur son aire, à tire-d'aile ralliant les stances  
de l'exil . . .

The basic ternary rhythms reflect the general arrangement of the three stanzas. Repetition of words of similar meaning heightens intensity, and here "très haut ressac," "comble de l'accès" and "faîte du désir" build up to an appropriate climax. Of the two elements of each of these groups, the first provides an identical meaning, and the second displays a complex progression of sound and sense. The intimate link between ressac and l'accès lies firstly in the syllabic metathesis, with the r giving way to an l (both liquid sounds, the creole pronunciation of r differing from the standard uvular variety<sup>1</sup>), and secondly in the progression of sense from a word applicable solely to the wave to one balancing between a physical connection with the crest of the wave and anticipation of the pitch of passion acknowledged in désir.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>E. Jourdain (Du français aux parlers créoles, pp. 21-27) discusses and defines the nature of the creole r which Perse uses (see e.g. Jean Schlumberger, "Rencontres," NRF, août 1967, 268-271).

<sup>2</sup>Other examples of this double method of progression through affinities of either sound or sense are studied by A. Churchman, "L'énumération chez Saint-John Perse" in Honneur..., pp. 480-488.

The following phrases continue the play on r and l. By the substitution of one for the other, a new realm of meaning may be embraced, again expanding the sense and scope:

la même mouette sur son aile, la même mouette sur son aire.

The interplay of sound further continues while the narrative thread progresses in "à tire-d'aile ralliant les stances de l'exil". Yet throughout these modulations is a ground bass murmur; the dominant letter in the stanza remains m: clameur, comble, même mouette, monde, même, mesure, âme numide, as it has from the beginning of the canto. Comme occurs five times in the first stanza; même and monde six times each altogether. The m sound, closely associated by Perse with the sea,<sup>1</sup> provides a rumbling ground swell behind the interweaving surface sounds, and so supports the sense of the central imagery.

Any poem that both means and is in such a way is remarkable; that close scrutiny is richly rewarded is an axiom with Perse. It is scarcely surprising therefore to discover his method of

<sup>1</sup>The incidence of the letter m in Amers is striking, and is readily linked by Perse with the word Mer, e.g. "En toi mouvante, nous mouvant, nous te disons Mer innommable: muable et meuble dans ses mues, immuable et même dans sa masse" (Chœur, 3).

work, both painstaking and extraordinary.<sup>1</sup> In a tiny vertical hand, quite unrecognisable from the majestic italic of his "public" script,<sup>2</sup> each page of the draft is crammed with blocks of words growing out of each other, linked by short connecting lines of words. The blocks are lists of alternatives, mostly nouns and adjectives, based on an equivalent syllable count, with a fundamental similarity of consonants such as has been discussed above. The preoccupation of the moment determines the general orientation of the vocabulary, and one "block" will often provide material for more than a single line of poetry, patterns of multiple substitution stemming from the first notation. Jotted down, often apparently at night, this stage is what Perse considers to be his real poetry, the genuine stage of poiêsis. The lengthy manipulation, and mostly reduction, of the material is considered inferior donkey-work, necessary only to satisfy the demands of editors and close friends who require a single line of written words. The creative stage is

<sup>1</sup>In August 1966, I had the privilege and pleasure of talking at some length with Monsieur Leger on the subject, and was shown a huge dossier containing the draft of a new poem with the projected title Terre! or Gaia.

<sup>2</sup>For a sample see Knodel, Saint-John Perse, p. 1, or Bosquet, Saint-John Perse, pp. 125-126.

the establishment of the blocks. For Perse, the poem is this brouillon, with its mass of alternatives and variations on themes, its whole lexicon of sounds. It shows, in a way that the printed work can only hint at, Perse's acceptance of both the richness and the limitations of words. Without being engrossed by lexicography as an end in itself, he knows that words are ultimately the only tools of his craft, and that their physical qualities can be married to their sense in appropriate proportions of music and meaning.

\* \* \*

§ 12

CONCLUSION

... Poésie, heure des grands,  
route d'exil et d'alliance...

Saint-John Perse

(Pour Dante, p. 20).

Perse is one of those "Princes de l'exil" who follow

la vocation de forceurs de limites et de briseurs de bornes des plus intenses représentants de l'espèce, ceux qui disparaissent dans les combats de reconnaissance qu'elle livre au-devant d'elle-même, aux lisières de l'inconnu, ceux qui, au bout de la condition humaine, vivent l'expérience des confins.<sup>1</sup>

From his point of vantage at the frontier, that is, at the threshold, he achieves an admirable yet inevitably fragile synthesis between the world and the word, presented through the sublimating act of poetry. He bequeaths to others the defence he has built against the sterility of loneliness and the desolation of exile, forging words and attitudes which bring not only the imposing comfort of archetypal myths but also the inspiration to explore more closely the world around us. To appreciate his poetry one must know both when to open books and, more especially, when to close them, which is far more difficult.

Mon hostilité envers la culture relève . . . de l'homéopathie: je crois qu'elle doit être portée au point extrême où, d'elle-même, elle se récuse, et, ingrate à elle-même, s'annule.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jules Monnerot, La Poésie moderne et le sacré (Paris 1945), p. 143.

<sup>2</sup>Perse, "Fragments d'une lettre . . . à Archibald MacLeish," CP, X, 155.

Perse is very obviously a man of considerable culture, including that gained from books. His poetry's normal freedom from literary allusions indicates his success in joining the ranks of "ceux-là qui, de naissance, tiennent leur connaissance au-dessus du savoir" (Amers, Invocation, 6). "Agissante toujours, sa profonde culture ne cesse d'aviver la braise du futur, et fait feu d'un présent jamais sevré de son passé. Au surplus, homme d'alliance, et que nulle solitude n'a pu distraire de son contrat social."<sup>1</sup>

Literature is after all, even when considered an end in itself and not harnessed to the service of some didactic aim whether doctrinal or doctrinaire, a form of lie. But unlike certain dictators who realise its importance for precisely the same reasons that Plato banished poets from his Republic,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Perse, "Madariaga" in Salvador de Madariaga: Liber amicorum (Bruges 1966), p. 150.

<sup>2</sup>Namely that unfettered poetry would be dangerous to his ideal state (see The Republic, Bk. III). Plato uses the word  $\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\varsigma$  'lie' for 'poetry' or 'fiction' throughout. Cf Darius: "May Ahuramazda protect this country from a (hostile) army, from famine, from the Lie! Upon this country may there not come an army, nor famine, nor the Lie!" (Quoted by Roman Ghirshman, Iran, Harmondsworth 1954, p. 154). Cf also the modern Soviet Union: "It is not a style of art that the communist dictatorship

Perse "n'attache aucune idée de défaveur au mensonge."<sup>1</sup>

Where the lie is equated with poetry, it earns the highest praise not only for being a liberating and democratic force in defiance of Plato but also in recognition that a poem is an artefact (though free of any pejorative connotations that word has acquired).

Ne blasphèment le mensonge, vraiment, que ceux  
qui ne croient pas aux signes de Dieu.<sup>2</sup>

Perse presents the lie in its positive aspect from Anabase onwards:

Mon âme est pleine de mensonge, comme la mer  
agile et forte sous la vocation de l'éloquence.

(Anabase, III)

The sea, intimately connected, as we have seen, with the nature of language and poetic creation in Perse's image bank, subsumes all apparent opposites, and actively defies normal

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fears: it is art itself, in any form forceful enough to compel the allegiance of men's minds; and they have succeeded in reducing art to insignificance." (Herbert Read, "Realism and Abstraction in Modern Art" in The Philosophy of Modern Art (London 1964), p. 96).

<sup>1</sup>Perse, quoted by Jean Schlumberger, "Rencontres," NRF, août 1967, 270.

<sup>2</sup>Le Coran, tr. M. Hamidullah (Paris 1959), Sourate 16, § 14, v. 105.

categories:

ô Mer d'ailleurs et de toujours, ô Mer promesse  
du plus long jour, et Celle qui passe toute promesse,  
étant promesse d'Etrangère; Mer innombrable du récit,  
ô Mer prolixité sans nom! . . . diversité dans le prin-  
cipe et parité de l'Etre, véracité dans le mensonge et  
trahison dans le message; toute présence et toute ab-  
sence, toute patience et tout refus--absence, présence;  
ordre et démente--licence!...

(Amers, Chœur, 3)

Understandably more powerful to show what Perse means  
by the lie is nonetheless its presentation through imagery,  
the concrete to which the poet is bound to refer for any  
exploration of the abstract. Thus in Neiges a refrain is  
repeated with minor differences: "Que nous ravisse encore la  
fraîche haleine du mensonge!..." (III). The snow is a "lie";  
it transforms the truth of the world's phenomena, whether  
natural scenery like the Great Plains of the mid-west or the  
factories by the Great Lakes, into something they are not.  
Such too is the process of poetry, espousing as intimately  
and as pervasively as the snow the data available to the poet:  
"Epouse du monde ma présence!..." Poetry and snow are equally  
hard to grasp and conserve, and each transforms and transcends  
the material it embraces. The gently but persistently falling  
snow makes even the New York skyscrapers appear to defy the

natural laws of gravity and rise like so many rockets into the night sky "dans l'oubli de leur poids" (I). It is an illusion, a lie, and at the same time a fact. As such, it has equivalents<sup>in</sup> Perse's work, observations of things so incredible that he is at pains to emphasise their truth: "grâces, grâce lui soient rendues de n'être pas un songe!" (Anabase, III). And again: "l'Oiseau Anhinga, la dinde d'eau des fables, dont l'existence n'est point fable, dont la présence m'est délice et ravissement de vivre--et c'est assez pour moi qu'il vive" (Vents, II, 4).

So in the paradoxical guise of a lie, Perse presents reality transformed into poetic truth. The process of that transformation is purely verbal: at no stage does he seek to pervert the facts. In consequence the nature of language and of poetic creation is a central preoccupation. Just as the association of the concepts of poetry and snow leads to an extended simile in which their joint sources are explored, so an obsession with the nature of the creative process lies behind all Perse's mature work. It comes to the surface only discreetly in terms of imagery, as has been shown: even this abstraction must be expressed concretely to warrant the name

poetry. The highly conscious control manifest in Perse's work, with its rigorous human as well as poetic discipline, not only distinguishes him from what Yeats called the "spawning formless fury" of most modern poets, though not of course the best, but also saved him, again humanly and poetically, from the desolation of exile. It was "sa fierté secrète de relever l'offense de l'exil" as it was Madariaga's of whom he wrote it.<sup>1</sup> "Ainsi porté par cet instinct social qui fait de lui le moins abstrait, le moins distrait des hommes à l'égard des hommes de son temps, il eût continué d'exercer, officiellement, son action stimulante. L'événement lui en a retiré les moyens. Force perdue pour l'action, force gagnée pour l'œuvre personnelle."<sup>2</sup> Through poetry, exile became exhilaration.

\*

Exile, permanently with us in various forms and to varying degrees, is only a beginning, but it is a beginning because it poses the fundamental human question.<sup>3</sup> Perse's poetry obviously

<sup>1</sup>Perse, "Madariaga," loc. cit., p. 149.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 150-151.

<sup>3</sup>Cf "Das Leben im Exil stellt nämlich die letzte Frage an

reflects his life, but is far from being self-indulgent memoirs. The geographical exile in his biography--his birth in exile from the mother-country, the loss of that paradise for France, the career chosen where travelling was inevitable, the débâcle of 1940, and the subsequent shuttling between the United States and France--is echoed in his expansive style. Behind the highly individual nature of that style one may similarly adduce a staunch and often misinterpreted independence of mind. Indicative of this are Larbaud's account of the difficulty of finding Leger in Pau,<sup>1</sup> the latter's merely tangential participation in literary coteries such as Frizeau's at Bordeaux, and his reluctance to publish, with the statement that "mon nom n'appartient pas aux lettres."<sup>2</sup> After suffering from the incomprehension his aloofness and independence of mind aroused in some of his Quai d'Orsay colleagues, he renounced

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einen jeden." (Otto von Habsburg, "Vom Sinn des Exils" in Salvador de Madariaga: Liber amicorum, p. 345).

<sup>1</sup>See G.-Jean Aubry, Valery Larbaud, sa vie et son œuvre: La jeunesse (1881-1920) (Monaco 1949), pp. 159-160.

<sup>2</sup>Perse, "Lettre sur Jacques Rivière," NRF, 139, avril 1925, 455. Cf his statement to Igor Stravinsky (Dialogues and a Diary, p. 196): "La poésie est une façon de vivre, mais je n'ai pas une carrière littéraire et je déteste même parler de la littérature."

all public affiliations with governments. He accepted the post of literary adviser at the Library of Congress because it depended on private funds; he refused to write his memoirs despite repeated and tempting offers, and likewise to reproach his detractors publicly; in Washington his advice was often sought privately but was never made official. His literary contracts are with Gallimard and the Bollingen Foundation which again depend on private revenues. The titles he has accepted as a poet invariably involve his honour as a Frenchman rather than as a writer. Thus he refused to accept nomination as "Prince des poètes," "titre auquel je n'ai point vocation,"<sup>1</sup> and for the Académie française.

If religion is "what a man does with his solitude,"<sup>2</sup> Perse's poetry is "what he has done with his exile." The point of the threshold, the moment du seuil,<sup>3</sup> is that at which the

<sup>1</sup>Perse, letter to M. Pierre Béarn, in Honneur..., p. 667.

<sup>2</sup>H. D. Lewis, "The Idea of Creation..." p. 107 (see above, p. 76).

<sup>3</sup>Janine Carrel, L'expérience du seuil..., p. 75 (see above, p. 216).

artist has the potential, given well oiled tools, to sublimate the negative and positive poles lying to either side. The here and now has not only its normal importance but that of being the one reality which allows both a reversal of the nothingness of exile and a glimpse of the surreal. The point of maximum precariousness is that of maximum possible achievement. Perse does not feign unawareness of his privileged position, and accordingly pays scrupulous attention to the materials of his poetry. Language is the means of his own fullest crystallisation and communication of that position and of what it allows him to perceive. But wanting to be known as a complete man, and not only as a littérateur with all the restrictive and pejorative overtones that word has acquired over the last hundred years, he has not sought popular praise or the support of cénacles and chapelles. Everything about him proclaims the aristocrat, the great humanist amateur, sensitive to the world about him and hypersensitive to language. "Ennemi de toute emphase et de toute complaisance, inaccessible à tout opportunisme, et tenant haut contre toute abdication ce beau libéralisme d'esprit qui lui a coûté si cher en politique,

il nous tient haute leçon d'intégrité humaine."<sup>1</sup>

An aloof attitude may be found in many people who do not write poetry. However genuine the attitude--and nothing suggests that in Perse's case it is other than deeply felt--it is not the attitude but the poetry that survives. If the attitude survives in the poetry it is a measure of the man's integrity, but not a literary criterion. It is for this reason that in Perse's case one feels drawn constantly towards an analysis of his language, involving very fully as it does prior and continuing alertness in the reader towards natural phenomena. The subtle interaction between facts and their communication is a matter of fascination both for Perse and, in consequence, for the critic. His remarkable powers of attention to both phenomena and words involve particular difficulties, some of which have been explored in the present study. The very richness is Perse's compensation for the negative pole of exile. "Il tend de tout son être à l'universalité. Et l'écart même de l'exil ne fait qu'accroître cette ouverture d'esprit. L'exil ne crée point de telles vocations,

<sup>1</sup>Perse, "Madariaga," p. 151.

mais, des hommes nés pour l'universalité, l'exil, très cruellement, semble faire sa proie d'élite."<sup>1</sup>

For some tastes, undoubtedly, he over-compensates. The demands he makes are considerable, and occasionally he cuts the threads by which he guides his reader, sometimes by making private allusions but more often by indulging his fondness for ellipsis. This, plus the closely-knit texture of his versets and the breadth of his vocabulary, does not make him easy to read. His stance is that of the aristocrat, unashamed of his inheritance however unfashionable it may be. Even the conjunction of precise observation and precise expression necessarily alienates the casual.

But his originality is far from being negative, the eccentric adoption of some unfashionable pose. It lies in the particular alliance of his observation of the world about him and the way that attention is expressed. It stands as a supremely positive achievement not only when seen against the ebb-tide of modern verse<sup>2</sup> but also when man seems bent in all

<sup>1</sup>Perse, "Madariaga," p. 149.

<sup>2</sup>Claudé called Vents "un Mont Saint-Michel démesurément accusé par le jusant." ("Un poème de Saint-John Perse," p. 614).

his activities on destruction, iconoclasm, and fruitless anarchy for their own sake. Such an attainment stems from strength of character and, in the case of Saint-John Perse the poet, from a flair for language. Both were formed in solitude, both confirmed by exile. Sheer momentum from the nadir carries one nearer the zenith. The theme of exile becomes the theme of praise.

Il y a un homme qui est professionnellement hors de tout et son domicile est de n'être pas chez lui.

Nulle tâche n'est en propre la sienne, c'est lui éternellement l'Amateur, et l'Invité partout, et le Monsieur précaire:

L'exil seul lui enseigne sa patrie.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Claudel, "Offertoire," La Messe là-bas in Oeuvre poétique (Bibl. de la Pléiade), p. 511.



## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

The map reproduced on the following page shows Pointe-à-Pitre, the capital of Grande Terre, Guadeloupe, towards the end of the eighteenth century. The Rivière Sallée [sic] divides the two main islands of the group, Grande Terre and Basse Terre. The Ilet Saint-Léger-les-Feuilles, here marked "Ilet a Feuille" (bottom left) is where Alexis Leger was born and where he lived for nearly twelve years. The map is reproduced from Henri Bangou, La Guadeloupe 1492-1848 (Aurillac 1962), pp. 248-249 where no source is given.



## APPENDIX B

The six articles reproduced here were written by Leger when a student at Bordeaux for the newspaper of his home town, Pau. They have not before been reprinted or mentioned in bibliographies on Perse. Only those dated 14 mars 1909 and 28 mars 1909 may be found at the Bibliothèque municipale at Pau. The others, for copies of which I am indebted to Professor Arthur Knodel, are in the annexe for periodicals of the Bibliothèque nationale at Versailles.

Behind some pardonable over-enthusiasm, sometimes tinged with attitudinising, one detects a very sure stance, and a preoccupation with form in art which will not desert him. Some phrases and rhythms are also familiar through his later work, as are his love of movement and his exact passion for language.

Italicisation, although sometimes idiosyncratic, has been respected, and the original note-numbers have been retained.

No. 414, dimanche 7 mars 1909

M. Paul Maufret interprète.

Les auditions de M. Paul Maufret sont d'une belle tenue.

Mais encore que j'y vois la foule bien vêtue, je ne me persuade point qu'on donne à cet artiste toute sa signification. Sans doute une foule a-t-elle besoin, pour oser admirer, de rencontrer quelque chose de plus que la simplicité. -- Pour oser, ai-je dit: aussi bien les Dictionnaires nous enseignent qu'en latin le mot: "franc" se disait "audax"...

Une exécution de M. Paul Maufret est avant tout acte de probité et, même devant une foule applaudissante peut s'écouler mystérieusement inaperçue.

Ici, nulle virtuosité qui se prenne elle-même pour fin; mieux: toute virtuosité asservie au strict dessein de l'interprétation. -- Telle est ici l'identification, et telle, peut-on dire, l'interprétation, entre l'artiste et l'œuvre étrangère, assumée et subie intégralement, que vous le serviriez mal de votre admiration, petites Madames vêtues de gris, vêtues de bleu, en n'oubliant pas la personne de cet homme qui, le premier, s'oublie. Quelque jour, peut-être, le rêve logique de M. Paul

Maufret ne sera-t-il pas d'étirer jusqu'au tabouret ce paravent qu'il exige déjà en un coin de l'estrade?...

L'initiale cruauté d'un art est, pour l'artiste, le renoncement à soi. Plus qu'une discipline, l'Art est une exactitude; et j'offre ici le sens étymologique de ce mot dans ce qu'il comporte de plus douloureuse tension, de plus intime contrainte.

L'art lucide de M. Paul Maufret s'assure en la beauté d'une épuration: dans une consciente docilité un seul souci nécessite l'interprète, celui d'être juste, à la façon dont un instrument est juste, dont une corde est juste. Et cette essentielle abnégation, après avoir exigé toute sensibilité dans la perception de l'œuvre, exige encore une intégrale restitution. Et cela est aussi beau qu'une obligation juridique, de mandat ou de dépôt...

Mais, j'y songe, tel qui n'existe pas sa partition close, peut s'étonner du prix donné ici à une vertu si hautement négative: le renoncement à soi, l'actuelle, volontaire et consciente "inexistence" derrière l'œuvre proposée, fût-elle de conception tout hostile. -- Aurons-nous donné tout le prix de cette loyauté, quand nous aurons, ensuite, affirmé une réelle personnalité chez cet artiste très digne qu'est M. Paul Maufret?... Sans doute est-ce notre droit d'auditeur, quand M. Paul Maufret sait se

refuser d'apparaître autrement que l'interprète,--en cela fort du précepte Ruskinien: "que l'Art efface pas à pas les traces mêmes de l'Art".

M. Paul Maufret fait abstraction de lui-même, et son mérite consisterait peut-être en ceci, qu'il existe.

Ces lignes sont strictement limitées à une question de forme, de mode. Et pourtant il y aurait peut-être intérêt à considérer aussi la pensée de cet artiste, épris, j'imagine, des grandes fêtes cérébrales qui naissent en Bach pour aboutir, près de deux siècles plus tard, à la Schola, par l'intermédiaire de César Franck. Aussi serons-nous curieux, plus que de tout autre, de cette quatrième et dernière audition, où, parvenant enfin au cycle contemporain, M. Paul Maufret trouvera, dans telle affinité, le droit de se livrer moins objectif.

A. L.

No. 415, dimanche 14 mars 1909

Edouard BRUNEL

"A thing of beauty is a joy  
for ever!"

(Keats. -- Endym.)

Du souvenir de nos fêtes lointaines, de la gratitude de quelques heures infiniment précieuses, nous composerons chacun notre hommage à Edouard Brunel...

Qui lui doit la beauté d'une heure (ou moins) d'exaltation, n'est pas quitte envers lui.

Qui partage avec nous le poids de cette dette, comprenne ici l'extrémité où nous devons nous tenir pour saluer Edouard Brunel; nous suive jusqu'à la partialité; se fasse complice de l'oubli où nous voulons garder certaines musiques concédées au public! Car encore y aurait-il à reconnaître ici le rôle de "Médiateur", auquel un artiste pourtant hautain n'a pu renoncer, et qui lui aura du moins valu ce titre rare: l'indistincte consécration de très vieilles gens et de très jeunes. D'autres prononceront le mot d'"Educateur", que nous refusons,

parce qu'il impliquerait plus d'initiative que n'en réclame parmi nous M. Edouard Brunel, accueillant indifféremment Classiques, Romantiques; Néo-classiques, Post-romantiques; Modernes novateurs, Modernes rétrogrades!... pourvu qu'ils soient dûment consacrés à Paris, aux deux enseignes que l'on sait. Loin de mettre à profit sa prodigieuse autorité pour violenter quelque peu le goût latent, M. Edouard Brunel semble préoccupé de composer son programme comme un menu de table d'hôte (ni plus ni moins, d'ailleurs, qu'à Paris un Chevillard: du moins avec cette excuse de ne posséder pas l'orchestre fameux légué par Lamoureux)!

Ah! plaignons vraiment l'artiste hautain que je ne sais quelles conditions asservissent ainsi (peut-être inhérentes à la composition de son orchestre, peut-être, hélas! à l'opinion qu'il a de son public).

Toute écriture semble valoir pour Edouard Brunel, pourvu qu'elle soit propre à exalter le son suivant d'irrécusables canons. Quelle est, au fond, la secrète et dernière pensée de cet artiste? Il n'appartient pas à l'étranger de s'en enquérir, mais, sans plus dépasser l'auge, de faire son choix, suivant ses propres appétences, parmi tant de joie brute largement prodiguée.

L'éclectisme où M. Brunel se contraint permet de faire en-

tendre Emmanuel Chabrier aussitôt après Vincent d'Indy... Notre grief est qu'il ne puisse choisir -- notre regret plutôt: car reprocher un si large éclectisme serait peu logique, puisque ce serait, en somme, demander de faire abstraction du public, quand on est heureux d'en faire partie.

Ce serait en outre oublier les conditions matérielles qui persistent à la base de toute fête artistique: oublier qu'avant de dire: "Concert Brunel", nous devons dire: "Concert Municipal".

Et ce serait peut-être aussi mal comprendre cette figure, d'Edouard Brunel chef d'orchestre: Avant le "Musicien", M. Edouard Brunel apparaît la Chose musicale, purement, la chose vibrante et consonnante, plus neutre, en soi, qu'une note, qu'un son ou une sonorité. Devant cette forme agissante et tourmentée, l'imaginaire avide d'ellipse qui s'assoit au parterre peut rêver un instant qu'elle soit le son même et la source du son plus que n'en est la condition. Tel est l'ascétisme rigoureux de cet artiste: Je dis qu'il est d'abord et avant tout puissance de son, et que les joies auxquelles il nous convie sont avant tout formelles. L'orchestre peut être douteux: il n'en fait que mieux connaître l'intentionnelle figure du chef, et que l'active valeur de l'"interprétation" se suffit, ici, à elle-même (au point que l'auditrice oublie souvent la pensée de l'œuvre même:

et ce dut être parfois tant mieux!)

Une exécution de M. Edouard Brunel semble une création, au sens où l'Art dramatique propose ce terme.

Quels mots employer pour éclairer ici l'idée de possession, qui se noue doublement dans cet homme, debout entre l'Auteur et nous, ordonnateur entre la pensée vive du créateur et le lourd mécanisme de l'orchestre?... Attentif, immédiat, dans une prise de conscience ininterrompue, il anime à nouveau la fête sacrée. Et il y a une beauté à regarder ce corps en proie à la musique, en souffrance de musique.

Certes! absolument noble du sacrifice de soi, le chef d'orchestre est l'"interprète" dans l'excellence, celui qui se prête sans réticence, l'"homme-lige" de l'Auteur, celui qui doublement passif et actif, agissant après avoir été agi, dit au maître, quel qu'il soit: "Je suis "vôtre", pour cette heure!" et, dans ce permanent refus de soi, livre pourtant le moyen de son corps, affiné et tendu: ses sens à posséder, son âme à modeler, après qu'il l'a faite nette...

Figure innombrable et multiple, figure polyphonique, au besoin contradictoire, et que je ne puis sommer de livrer sa loi propre dans l'instant où elle s'entremet, parce qu'elle me

renverra au Maître qui l'informe, et, qu'ayant acquitté sa fonction, elle m'échappe!

Le prix d'un organisme tel que celui d'Edouard Brunel est manifeste dans ce prodige: l'essentielle mobilité qu'il a su préserver en lui, si tard, et par quoi il peut demeurer toujours, en face d'aspirations novatrices, si curieusement compréhensif, si anormalement presque, alors que tant d'autres, à son âge, ont à jamais fourni leur cristallisation, et, par droit de génération, revendiquent une imperméable sérénité. -- Edouard Brunel est une sensibilité musicale qui ne s'est pas arrêtée, qui ne s'arrête pas. -- Et ici j'en appelle à ceux qui purent entendre, cette année, l'interprétation des Nocturnes, de Debussy, ou de l'Après-midi d'un Faune, et, par dessus tout, de cet incomparable Istar, de Vincent d'Indy, que M. Brunel a bien voulu nous redonner et qui fut l'heure véritablement précieuse de cette saison (même après les très belles auditions de Franck); que l'on songe encore, plus loin, au Schéhérazade, de Rimsky-Korsakow (8<sup>me</sup> concert): à susciter la beauté de telles œuvres nous avons vu M. Brunel s'adonner aussi loyalement, aussi intelligemment, qu'une heure plus tôt il le faisait en des œuvres de Grieg, de Saint-Saëns, voire de Weber et de Berlioz...!

Etonnante matière pour l'imagination que la diversité de vie d'un tel homme, chargé comme une proie, et comme fécondé, de cet augment divin: l'âme de cent Musiciens!... La marque même de cette face nous appartient, ~~pour~~ témoigner devant nous: face longtemps requise par ses Maîtres, par nos Maîtres, et dont chaque nerf, semble-t-il, aurait à reprendre de soi, comme les cordes mêmes de l'engin longuement tourmenté.

Que si l'un d'entre nous ne pouvait se résoudre à oublier d'éventuelles défaillances dans l'exécution de Wagner, je ne l'appellerais point seulement à d'autres souvenirs sans mélange (la Symphonie en ut mineur, de Beethoven, au 2me concert): je le presserais encore de songer à l'acte prodigieux, à l'audace inouïe [sic] qu'il a fallu chez M. Brunel (dans les conditions qui l'enchaînent, et avec cet orchestre) pour tenter sans trop d'irrespect son 9me concert (Fragments symphoniques de l'Anneau) -- de se rappeler, enfin, de quel souffle l'admirable Wagnérien tentait du moins d'animer cette exécution, dans une véhémence, encore qu'incommunicable, générosité!

Et, devant un tel don de soi, nous rêverions pieusement d'un autre cadre pour l'artiste généreux...

A. L.

No. 417, dimanche 28 mars 1909

(Epilogue au Salon de Pau)

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NOTE

sur un Tableau de Bergès

(La Moustiquaire.)

Bon peintre, reprends ta toile, roule ta toile et l'emporte!... non sans profit, mais avec ce gain très précieux: des rires--ah, combien!--et du son le plus pur!

... Et pourtant, et pourtant... il faut en convenir: la Commission d'achat de cette ville peut réserver parfois d'étranges surprises, et nous ne saurons pas quelle voix anonyme, discordante, s'élève là, tout à coup, pour savoir imposer l'intelligente beauté d'une œuvre comme celle de Hochard<sup>1</sup>, ou le

<sup>1</sup>--Sur la terrasse de Bagatelle-- œuvre habile et volontaire, d'un art très concentré, expressif, toujours d'un mouvement, essentiel: exécution sobre, vision toujours conduite et dénudée; assez loin des voies ordinaires de l'art épisodique où s'engluait toute cette écœurante exposition. (Une robe de femme, à droite, signifiait suffisamment la synthèse et le choix dans le graphique de cet artiste très intellectuel, et, au plus haut point, le don de sacrifier:--c'est d'essencier.)

mérite d'une œuvre de Suréda<sup>2</sup>.

... Et dès lors, et dès lors... cette toile de Bergès!...

-- Interrogeons-la: ce fut, nous a-t-on dit, petit scandale à Pau.

Ce copieux et liquide Salon ne comportait pas beaucoup plus de quatre figures: Hochard, Gayac<sup>3</sup>, Lépine<sup>4</sup>--et Bergès.

Au dessus de tant d'inutiles, infiniment! ce peintre, qui fit ici figure d'excessif, valait du moins comme tendance. Malgré ses fautes, qui ne sont probablement pas celles qu'on lui prête, et dont la plus grave (outre celle d'avoir du talent) fut de s'abâtardir un peu dans l'occurrence de deux peintures, de deux méthodes opposées, il nous offrait encore une œuvre de belle puissance. Faut-il la rappeler?

<sup>2</sup>--Femmes dans un cimetière algérien--petite étude de matérialisme lumineux: recherche, semble-t-il, de la solidité des couleurs; vision indiscontinue de la forme dans la couleur dilatée et mouvante, pesante presque.

<sup>3</sup>--Ernest Gayac exposait six eaux-fortes, dont un admirable "Satyre", gage d'un art elliptique qu'il conviendrait d'interroger longuement, en tout autre lieu. (Une autre planche: "Sycorax", d'une beauté au contraire complexe, livrait à l'analyse une triple signification.) -- Je ne sache pas, d'ailleurs, qu'un semblable talent, qu'une personnalité aussi distante ait soulevé autre chose que l'horreur...

<sup>4</sup>--Deux cartons (Paysages de Corrèze) atrocement placés.

Exprimée jusqu'à la satisfaction de matière, exprimée avec certitude et solidité, une chair oisive, sensuelle, est proposée ici, dans une crudité savoureuse, parmi l'immobile torpeur d'une arrière-cour espagnole: corps de femme alourdi par l'âge, et, déjà, jaunissant aux jointures.

Toujours, l'œuvre dénonce une pleine clairvoyance de son but, dans le concours asservi des moyens, dans les simplifications cursives du cadre dénué logiquement jusqu'à la figuration décorative: rôle très beau des oranges en teinte plate; cerne étroit de feuillage bas, comme un front bas de fille, et qui charge tout le sens prostré de cette toile si bien close; enfin la course vive, au long de la moustiquaire, de cette tresse de couleur crue propice, après le bleu verdâtre, à faire éclater dans sa puissance d'affirmation le corps nu d'une femme simplement pesante en sa chair grasse (toute subie, toute aimée), et qui semble occupée à prendre conscience du poids de ses deux seins, de la moiteur de son aisselle et de son ventre,--par rien d'autre distraite que par ce vain soulier de satin rose, et par ces bagues plus vaines encore à ses mains grasses!

Toute cette pâte centrale déterminée par l'épaisse conjuration des verts et des bleus.

Et cela est beau.

Une force ici impose son évidence.

Une seule erreur, avons-nous dit (et qui peut-être [sic] volontaire):

Dans ce tableau, inégalement réalisé, le corps de femme n'est pas réduit à la valeur d'un simple terme dans le rapport, mais poussé, mais traité pour lui-même, et, final, il s'accroît indûment de tout le cadre approprié. D'où rupture d'équilibre et dualité de modes: le plein et le plat, l'étude et le style, le respect du volume et les virtualités de la décoration. Le corps fut modelé en oubli d'un autre tableau, qu'est le cadre (ou bien le cadre composé au mépris du motif, cet impedimentum!) -- L'œuvre est algébriquement fausse. -- Mais je sais des voix fausses qui sont belles!... Aussi, quelque peu que signifie dans un tableau sa signification, si l'on entend par là le sujet en soi, l'anecdote, au lieu des purs moyens d'exécution (car le sujet ne doit être que prétexte au mode), nous signalerons du moins dans ce "nu" (auquel le souhait public s'efforçait ici de réduire le tableau!) ce qu'on affectionnait d'appeler, au temps jadis, "un morceau de peinture"...

Il ne s'agit ici que de réalités immédiates, d'une plasticité savante et substantielle. Car le peintre de la Moustiquaire

demeure un réaliste et un plastique, en dépit de ses simplifications logiques, de son dessein de styliser aux premiers plans.

Notre conclusion? -- Ceux-là qui, près de nous dans la salle, criaient assez fort au "mauvais goût" n'ont peut-être pas songé que la couleur d'un sang trop vif sur les lèvres peut être aussi de ce "mauvais goût", dont nous choisirions souvent de lire le Code à rebours. Ceux-là, enfin, il faut qu'ils aillent crier leurs deux mots vides de sens par toute la terre d'Espagne, par l'admirable terre puérile des "cruautés esthétiques", dernière marche de l'Occident dans le Sud violent, où la lumière flagrante renonce toute harmonie, le son toute symphonie; où la nature, pas plus que l'étal du fruitier ou la vitrine du peluquero, n'a souci de l'accord ou des complémentaires<sup>1</sup>; où le classique Ignacio Zuloaga peut peindre avec un même bonheur, et dans la même acuité de vision, la fille à jupe verte, la vieille au bas groseille ou l'étrange carnation du

<sup>1</sup>--Au demeurant, notons bien vite que l'art de M. Bergès ne laisse pas que d'être scrupuleux de sa technique, jusqu'à la superstition de ces fameuses complémentaires. Et c'est ici lieu de rappeler la leçon de cet impeccable et très savant pastel (Jardin de l'Alcazar), presque trop réalisé, qu'il exposait encore en manière de conciliation. Le seul angle inférieur droit de ce tableau, véritable clef, valait qu'on l'appelât musical.

"Nain aux Outres".

Ainsi, chez Bergès, n'apparaissent point seulement le respect et l'amour de la nature (disons l'idolatrie /sic/, pour le beau sens barbare de ce mot), mais encore l'intelligence d'un pays et d'une race.

Dans cette œuvre de peintre, nous prétendons saluer sans nul paradoxe cette qualité tout espagnole: la sonorité;--et dans ce peintre affirmatif, habile et violemment sincère jusqu'en ses artifices, dénoncer une belle crudité de vision, et le présage encore, s'il sait trouver un jour l'accord exact entre sa vision et ses moyens d'expression, d'une puissante sécurité, d'un sensualisme grave ou serein.

... Il y avait ici un peintre: Bon peintre, prends ta toile, roule ta toile et l'emporte...

A. L.

No. 426, dimanche 9 janvier 1910

D'un peintre à Pau

---

Hubert DAMELINCOURT

C'est une émotion et c'est un doute si l'on découvre, en l'admirable, périlleuse solitude de province, cet acte: un peu d'art qui s'efforce à son incubation. Et plus qu'une émotion, un doute, si cet art, la peinture, est celui qui le plus dangereusement s'abstrait d'une continuité: d'un milieu pour y croître, d'un public pour en vivre.

Hubert Damelincourt travaille seul.

\*

Infiniment peut l'artiste devancer son œuvre aussitôt qu'il a mérité son nom: sa fortune est virtuelle; tragique son sort, par ce qu'il emporte, en puissance, de naissances ou de morts. -- Ainsi d'un art irrésolu tout le charme troublant peut être dans cela qu'il n'interdit pas d'en attendre. Et c'est dans son atelier que vous irez surprendre Hubert Damelincourt: c'est-à-dire dans la spontanéité de ses études et dans l'ingénuité de ses documents intimes, dans la nudité des œuvres

où ne saurait s'immiscer nulle inquiétude d'un public trop local et où, plus immédiate, se révèle sa sensibilité de peintre, sa propriété de vision; c'est enfin dans les toiles qui sont roulées chaque année pour le Salon d'Automne ou les Indépendants --ce n'est point dans celles qui ont pu figurer, jusqu'ici au moins, aux Expositions paloises. .

\*

Une essentielle, musicale pureté, une fraîcheur mouvante et nuancée, harmonieuse toujours et lucide, encore que soucieuse, sans hiatus, du volume et du poids, de la propre saveur de la masse dans une édification de montagnes, de nuées ou de frondaisons; une franchise toujours subtile--parfois trop, et délicate--parfois trop, dans l'aveu même de la couleur et les dissociations de la clarté; enfin, une gravité un peu scrupuleuse encore, et lente, et qui appellerait trop tôt le mot de dignité, une distinction un peu compassée dans sa noblesse même, et comme une anticipation d'autorité puisée dans l'abus même de la sérénité--mais aussi une confiance, un calme dans le déploiement de ses masses et dans l'ordonnance de ses valeurs (l'ordination, dirait-on, presque), un orgueil à ne livrer rien de l'inquiétude ni du tumulte où l'œuvre a pris naissance, et par de belles exigences classiques, un sens de la sobriété, qui nous dénonce derrière l'œuvre la

tension réfléchie, circonspecte... -- Tels semblent à l'analyse la prudence et le charme de ce peintre volontaire, qui déjà aux trop faciles bonheurs de la notation, et qui loin de ruser, ne souhaitant que l'épreuve, n'attendra du passant que d'être interrogé, pressé, épié.

\*

Encore--ce peintre est si jeune--l'on ne pourrait exiger de lui que son honnêteté. Mais il n'est que de le regarder au visage pour éventer aussitôt plus angoissant débat: l'inquiétude d'être par lui-même--et studieuse, anxieuse, la poursuite de sa loi propre. Si nulle intérieure certitude n'a su encore le nécessiter, du moins peut-on dire à son éloge que sa loyauté l'a su garder de tout parti-pris de vision ou même d'exécution, et que sa sincérité littéralement répugne au procédé, exclusive à ce point de toute complaisance que la confiance aussitôt donne. Déjà la hâte précieuse et la sécurité avec lesquelles il sut, tranchant ses liens et se détournant envers soi, nous faire oublier ces premiers noms de maîtres qui terrifiaient un peu sur les catalogues, nous sont une sûre garantie de netteté sinon encore de personnalité. Plus longuement il pourrait, puisque sans risques, promener sa curiosité, et plus nombreuses rechercher ses influences, éprouver ses racines,

avant que de songer à élucider, entre toutes, sa loi: à fréquenter tels maîtres que son art, pour lui, pressent, peut-être gagnerait-il du temps, et d'être fortifié contre on ne sait plus quels scrupules encore, quelle laborieuse timidité, qui le retiennent de suivre jusqu'au bout sa plus secrète exigence: la formule décorative.

\*

Parce qu'il n'est en art de maintien que l'extrême, la sympathie qu'on peut avoir pour un si pur talent emporte aussi l'inquiétude de sa logique. Au mode franchement décoratif, qui le peut seul tout révéler, son instinct, sa pensée: tous ses liens propres vouaient ce peintre--qui s'y refuse, et doute encore de s'abandonner. Au regret suscité nous mesurons la force de l'instinct violente; à l'imperfection du triomphe, la nécessité d'une défaite. Car il suffit d'entrer chez ce peintre: un sens ornemental ou architectural, un don du style et de la composition s'efforcent là, à son insu: le choix des lignes en témoigne, et l'utilisation toujours du mouvement dans le concours d'un paysage, l'assistance parfois des nuages, impatients de décorer (tel site oloronais, comme un lâcher de nuages, et où le ciel dans un renversement de valeurs semble subir l'assaut du sol--tel paysage de Vallée d'Aspe pivotant, entrant en danse

autour d'une cape jaune de montagnard--cette œuvre enfin la mieux réalisée: un Cirque d'Anie, où la voûte d'une vague aérienne se fait complice de l'intention cyclique). Toujours l'arabesque, sous les surcharges, cherche d'instinct à se nouer; toujours, comme une phrase heureuse, attend d'être mesurée la beauté pacifique et nombreuse du sol.

\*

Vous irez chez Hubert Damelin court: aux portes de la ville... Peut-être est-ce très loin! Peut-être l'art n'est-il pas de ces choses qui transgressent l'octroi: c'est au bout de la grande rue de Jurançon que ce peintre solitaire a élevé son atelier... Peut-être est-ce vraiment très loin. Là veille un artiste, là un être courageux, et qui rit! Là un mur aveugle rompt sa porte, stricte comme celle d'un tombeau égyptien. Et n'est-ce pas bien d'un tombeau que, patient, assidu, tour à tour plein de doute et de foi, jaloux d'alimenter cette inquiétude même comme une prémisse de sa conclusion, l'artiste, courbé, s'efforce à faire éclater la pierre? Vie ou mort: l'enjeu n'est pas moindre. Un seul devoir, ô passant! faire crédit de ta présence.

... Mais quoi! un atelier à Pau! en serait-il d'autres que d'aviation! Heu! nous avons souci de bien autre toile! Et

votre porte ouvre au midi, et c'est au nord, Monsieur, que  
l'on vole aujourd'hui...

-- Sinon quelque étranger et qui passait, qui lèvera le  
marteau!

A. L.

No. 428, dimanche 23 janvier 1910

Concert Maufret

Bach, Rameau, Beethoven, Franck et d'Indy...

Pour l'artiste très sûr qui nous conviait, si simplement, à si radieux programme, notre émotion fait choix de cet éloge: le "Père Franck" eût souri!

\*

Dès l'ouverture du programme, incomparablement haute et sereine au-dessus de notre recueillement il faut aimer l'artiste de savoir instituer en Bach notre clef de voûte: géniale, une. M. Paul Maufret semble physiologiquement appelé à l'interprétation de Bach. A cette Partita en UT mineur (no 2), où nous faisons retraite comme en une cure d'équilibre, les scrupules de son jeu conféraient toute l'ascétique beauté d'une règle. Et de l'Allemande, de la Courante, du Rondeau, ou de cette sobre Sinfonia du début, on ne sait vraiment plus qu'élire, aux réserves de la mémoire. Une composition de Bach est ce refuge (ce fanum dirait-on) où notre méditation, singulièrement renouvelée, ne se lasse pas d'être ramenée pour jouir encore de sa surprise.

Et c'est le sol logique où si naturellement je vois qu'elle prend appui pour conduire, au long de la grand'route musicale, jusqu'à ce fief très pur qu'est une œuvre de Vincent d'Indy.

\*

Peut-être faut-il avoir entendu M. Paul Maufret interpréter une partita de Bach pour bien comprendre quels sont ses droits à nous faire partager, une heure plus tard, la limpide beauté d'une sonate de d'Indy. Et de cette Sonate en mi majeur on ne peut différer plus longtemps de parler. Elle fut assez mal accueillie. Quelques-uns pourtant marqueront d'un caillou blanc ce jour où il leur fut donné d'entendre, à Pau, cette grande œuvre classique, miracle d'équilibre et de santé, s'ordonnant dans une telle joie cérébrale que nous l'appellerons proprement masculine. Certes, à considérer depuis 1883 l'évolution de l'écriture pour piano seul, il semble bien que cette œuvre soit une seconde date (1908), si remarquable apparaît l'élargissement de la forme-sonate. Des murs tombent, des tissus éclatent: et tout le séculaire organisme va se réformer plus loin, sous un autre volume, mais, sans rupture ni schisme, sous les mêmes lois de constance interne et de continuité dont relève la subordination des parties. Il y a là croissance, culture logique bien plus que rénovation d'une forme

traditionnelle. L'admirateur trouve toute la secrète beauté d'une mue, et aussi, toute son infaillible économie: un gain total, unanime, semble-t-il, sans autre gain spécifique, c'est-à-dire sans autre hypertrophie, que cette magnifique utilisation de la variation, prétexte à fécondes trouvailles littérales, et décisive trouée vers l'avenir par où l'on voit, suivant un vœu lointain de Franck, l'artiste volontaire qu'est d'Indy entraîner sans violence la grande sonate classique, à jamais haussée au rang d'œuvre orchestrale.

L'admirable est, qu'ainsi élargie, la sonate chez d'Indy atteint aussitôt à éviter toute lacune, et que, sans complaisances mélodiques, cet art logique comble ainsi ses limites qu'il nous laisse encore l'impression d'une maturité à l'étroit, d'une plénitude aux termes de sa contention. Et dès lors nous ne savons que louer plus: la nouveauté de la pensée ou la sécurité classique de l'ossature.

\*

Nous ne parlerons pas de ce chef-d'œuvre immortel, trop connu, de César Franck: Prélude, Chorale et Fugue. Le maître de la structure musicale moderne, celui dont l'influence a su nous affranchir de l'impôt Wagnérien et en qui nous honorons plus particulièrement aujourd'hui le rénovateur de la musique

de piano, ne pouvait, plus qu'un ancien Scholiste, trouver interprète plus respectueux.

\*

Avec ces trois Pièces pour clavecin: l'Enharmonique, les Triolets et l'Egyptienne, Rameau, une fois de plus, fut notre surprise. Ce pur Français, dont la gloire actuellement pourrait bien prendre l'importance d'un manifeste, à plus d'un déplaira littérairement: à nul musicalement. L'Enharmonique, cette chose merveilleuse, merveilleusement mesurée par l'interprète, nous fut présentée vraiment comme une œuvre qui ne date: une œuvre attentive, incessamment expressive, où l'on découvre, non sans stupeur, les audaces de mouvement d'une écriture contemporaine, la fluidité déjà et la sensualité mouvante d'un Ravel, avec en outre la joie, pour cette spontanéité, de triompher sous la contrainte de si traditionnelle discipline, de si hautain métier, qu'il n'était pas sans intérêt d'épier ce style du moins aussitôt après Bach.

\*

Enfin, du maître de Bonn cette douloureuse Sonate en La bémol maj., l'avant-dernière: celle-là, si peu jouée, qui nous émeut pourtant comme le sourire même du grand Sourd, oui le

sourire du malade, profondément replié dans la ferveur de sa tristesse comme dans le meilleur de son bien. Une fugue lumineuse, inoubliable pour les fidèles de Beethoven, sert de conclusion à cette œuvre. Mais c'est à nuancer le chant de la première partie (Moderato cantabile), ainsi que l'Adagio, que l'excellent pianiste parut adonner tout son art, comme s'il avait à cœur de se justifier une fois pour toutes envers ceux-là qui, confondant le spontané et l'inconsidéré, ne comprendraient pas toujours la souveraine leçon d'impersonnalité que leur donne son jeu.

\*

Faut-il parler encore de l'interprète ? C'est dire aussitôt sa haute conscience artistique. Que l'un, ici, choisisse de louer la netteté du doigté (l'irréductibilité des notes entre elles et la particularité que réclame chaque son); qu'un autre plutôt le mystérieux usage des pédales, tout fait de spontanéité. -- Egalement intuitif et réfléchi, l'art de M. Paul Maufret est une respiration bien réglée, heureuse, de se libérer inconsciente après s'être imposé d'abord de n'être que volontaire. C'est un souffle bien distribué, et qu'à peine encore surprendrait-on parfois dans son application. M. Paul Maufret n'est rien moins qu'un virtuose; et quand il le deviendrait, il s'en faudrait

encore de beaucoup que nous pensions jamais le limiter à ses  
doigts. -- Des tâches mêmes, dans un tel jeu, ne pourraient  
être que savoureuses pour qui leur donne l'intérêt d'une garantie.

A. L.

No. 440, dimanche 17 avril 1910

2e Concert Maufret

... Ainsi se résout en pureté un concert Paul Maufret : son programme est l'identité musicale. -- De l'ascétisme à la saveur il peut aller sans que notre attention change de qualité.

Faut-il choisir ? Roussel tire une pleine santé de ne s'y décider point. Entre la fête proprement cérébrale et les sens, il se tient en partage aidé de la mesure qui est sa force--se tient avec propriété, avec justesse. Nous ne chercherons pas, dans la musique tout actuelle, ni dans l'œuvre même de l'auteur des Rustiques, plus sobre équation que ce Trio en mi bémol majeur pour piano, violoncelle et violon. -- Oeuvre admirable d'équilibre : lourde de sacrifices, forte du choix et de la contrainte, active, et dont le privilège est qu'avec aisance elle débouche dans la haute distinction classique. A peine un instant, dans le finale de la IIIe partie, un métier excédé de sa ruse, se livre... C'est un Musicien, et de race, qui se tire ainsi de la redoutable épreuve du Trio.

A gain plus proche et plus concret sacrifiait un Poème de Séverac : savoureux, certes, savoureux!... mais immédiat, vivant

de rencontres, et sans ambages décelant sa matière, qui est grasse et docile, simple et neuve à la fois comme la terre même. Un corps robuste et jeune, singulièrement flexible, se lève sur la glèbe; la bouche, rare, est sensuelle jusqu'à garder le goût terreux, et le mouvement de la marche s'ordonne, se divise et se renoue, parmi l'odeur, l'opacité et le mouvement même de la terre meuble. En germe, dans une trame assidue, toutes les richesses de cadence ou de modulation du Coin de cimetière au printemps.

Ravel, déjà, est un aîné dont parler brièvement. Une œuvre de Ravel semble poursuivre la beauté d'être une fuite: ici la matière entre en telle vibration qu'elle se hausse par instants à une sorte de spiritualité lumineuse, et c'est la servilité même de l'écrivain qui l'enlève alors, malgré lui, à ses limites. -- Ah oui! fugace entre tous, si mieux il n'aime, comme dans les Jeux d'eau, renoncer à servir son objet pour s'y fondre plutôt... Par là un musicien de pure lignée, mais formel, tente peut-être d'échapper à l'excessive littéralité qui le restreint. Aussi bien, contre l'habileté, tout grief tombe et toute restriction aussitôt qu'on attend plus de lui que réponse technique... Envahissant métier! redoutable volupté de formuler le son!

Respectable comme la douleur même qui s'avoue, mais d'un art indiscret, encore mal instruit de cruauté, et souvent lâche jusqu'à gêner, intolérable jusqu'au malaise dans ses complaisances mélodiques, la Sonate en Sol majeur de Lekeu ne peut être écoutée sans piété: l'élève de Franck et de d'Indy mourut à vingt-quatre ans; et nous savons un souvenir vers quoi nous retourner: cette précieuse Fantaisie pour orchestre (sur deux airs populaires angevins) qu'il nous fut donné d'entendre cette année, grâce à Edouard Brunel. Dans la Sonate pour violon et piano, notons un asservissement parfois trop littéral de la partie de piano, une sorte de parallélisme dont la résultante s'attarde presque monotone: cela précisément dont Franck semble mettre tant de soin à se garer. -- Notons surtout un abus de la phrase qui ne parvient, tout au long d'un lente, à s'écœurer de son abandon; courageuse et tenue dans la lère partie, tout au plus la voit-on, dans la 3e, qui, lassée d'elle-même, s'efforce à éluder son propre péril par un recours aux inflexions.

Et tout ce programme, comme une phrase bien construite, se nouait autour d'un mot de notre langue, autour d'une œuvre et qui domine: nous avons attendu jusqu'ici pour parler de l'Hommage à Rameau... L'œuvre est sûre, de telle intégrité dans une histoire musicale qu'elle réclame de prendre vie en elle-même;

formant un tout, se suffit; noble d'être par soi, dépasse son auteur et s'affranchit de sa naissance. Cette fois, orienté au carrefour, l'art Debussyste orgueilleusement s'élève à la rigueur classique de l'impersonnelle beauté!

Rien à dire des interprètes. -- S'ils savent ambitionner le titre, qu'ils mesurent l'éloge.

uned in

A. L.

des litté

## APPENDIX C

"Le 'représentant du Midi'" appeared in Le Feu, No. 91, nov. 1912, pp. 1210-12 with the signature SAINT-LEGER and may be found in the Fonds Doucet of the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève.

Like Leger's Pau-Gazette articles, it has not been reprinted or mentioned in bibliographies of Perse's work, but unlike them it bears little relationship to the style and tone of his known work. Thus, despite the evidence of the library catalogue, one is bound to have doubts about its authenticity. If by Alexis Leger, whose early poems appeared with the signature Saintléger Léger, it may reasonably be seen as a fleeting appearance at a literary joust; if not, his literary activities of the years 1910-1913 (until, that is, his entry to the Quai d'Orsay) have apparently left no traces.

Le Feu, No. 91, nov. 1912, pp. 1210-12

(Le Feu: Le Directeur-gérant: Emile Sicard. Cavaillon, Imprimerie Mistral. Paris, 161, rue Saint-Honoré, Place du Théâtre français. Basset et Cie Editeurs, 3, rue Dante, Paris).

Section heading: "Sur du papier cloche."

\*

le "représentant du Midi".

Les Treize s'égarent. Ils auraient besoin des cailloux du Petit Poucet; et c'est pourquoi nous nous décidons à leur jeter la pierre.

Voici, en effet, ce que nous avons lu avec stupéfaction dans un des derniers numéros de l'Intransigeant; et dans la même rubrique qui se permet de railler ou d'ironiser sur Mistral:

SILHOUETTES:

Jean Aicard.-- Le propriétaire à Saint-Raphaël de la maison du jardinier Alphonse Karr est le plus aimable des Parisiens. C'est un homme sûr, que tous ses amis aiment beaucoup. A l'Académie française, il succède à François Coppée; à Paris il représente le Midi, un Midi spirituel, et qui sait conter de belles histoires.

Le succès, au théâtre, du Père Lebonnard a mis le nom de Jean Aicard tout à fait en vedette; mais c'est dans ses poèmes (Jésus, Miette et Noré) et dans ce populaire Maurin des Maures frondeur et malin, que l'on découvre le véritable esprit de paysans de l'Estérel et l'humour malicieuse de l'écrivain.

François Coppée, à qui Jean Aicard succéda sous la Coupole, disait, alors que le poète commençait à jouer un rôle dans la littérature française que l'auteur de Miette et Noré avait empli "au pays du soleil un grand panier d'olives savoureuses".

C'est un jugement que tout le Midi a confirmé, car nul n'est plus "prophète en son pays" que Jean Aicard. Chez tous les grands commerçants, hôteliers, cafés et magasins de la région de l'Estérel, on voit à la devanture de petits écriteaux avec la mention: "Ici on trouve les œuvres complètes de Jean Aicard."

Tu parles... Jean Aicard représentant du Midi voilà qui est comique. Voilà également qui expliquerait le dédain de certain des Treize à l'égard de la contrée souleiouso. Mais Jean Aicard pour personne, ni pour les hauts ni même pour les petits lettrés provençaux ne les a jamais, et en rien, représentés. Les sociétés littéraires de Provence ou de Paris se

passent de lui, les revues ne demandent ni patronage, ni copie à ce faiseur de néologismes, qui sont des barbarismes.

S'il représentait quelque Midi ce serait le Midi des mares stagnantes et la littérature de comice agricole.

Mais, exception faite du Père Lebonnard,--qui est une pièce honnête,--ses ouvrages ne sont que des pastiches fades et vains des œuvres les plus fameuses, et comme classiques: Mireille, Jean-des-Figues, Tartarin de Tarascon.

Jean Aicard a pillé ou plutôt exploité Mistral, Paul Arène et Alphonse Daudet, et il l'a fait en faiseur, en homme qui ne voit que littérature là où il n'y a que le naturel et l'âme d'une race qui s'épanchent.

Puis il est venu à Paris débiter sa camelote il s'est poussé, par la vertu ou plutôt par l'entregent de la médiocrité, jusqu'à l'Académie.

Mais ceux du pays de l'olivier qui savent en quelles cadences réside la vérité et la beauté n'acceptent pas ce Gri-bouille dans le jardin des Dieux.

SAINT-LEGER

## APPENDIX D

Larousse Encyclopédie

The establishment of any list of rare words inevitably involves some degree of impressionistic judgement. In order to make the criteria for inclusion in the following list as objective as possible, words given in the Dictionnaire des mots rares et précieux (Paris 1965) and any words noted as abstruse by French critics of Perse have been included. As Perse said that if a word was in the Petit Larousse he felt free to use it,<sup>1</sup> any word not in that dictionary has been incorporated and marked with an asterisk.

In order to avoid undue proliferation of footnotes, the following abbreviations are given in the body of the text and refer to the books named:

- Adeline = J. Adeline, Lexique des termes d'art (Paris s.d.)  
 Caillois = Roger Caillois, Poétique de St.-J. Perse  
 DMRP = Dictionnaire des mots rares et précieux (Paris 1965)  
 Düss = R. P. Düss, Flore phanérogamique des Antilles

secte

<sup>1</sup>In Mazars, "Une journée..."

matematical

thing are

françaises (Macon 1897)

- GLE = Grand Larousse Encyclopédique
- Jourdain = Elodie Jourdain, Le Vocabulaire du parler créole de la Martinique (Paris 1956)
- Knodel = Arthur J. Knodel, Saint-John Perse
- PL = Petit Larousse (1966 printing used)
- Robert = Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française (Paris 1951-64)
- Saillet = Maurice Saillet, Saint-John Perse, poète de gloire
- SOED = Shorter Oxford English Dictionary
- \* = Not given in Petit Larousse

Within each section, the following sub-division is made:

- (a) gives general or generic terms; (b) gives particular terms;  
 (c) gives parts or details and related terms. The section headings are as follows:

1. Quadrupeds
2. Reptiles
3. Aquatic creatures
4. Insects and spiders
5. Birds
6. Anatomical and medical terms
7. Clothing and textiles

8. Trees and shrubs
9. Fruit
10. Fungi, Cacti and succulents
11. Marine plants
12. Other plants and flowers
13. Agriculture
14. Geography
15. Geology
16. Ships and shipbuilding
17. Harbours and navigation
18. Astronomy and astrology
19. Mythology, religion and philosophy
20. History and law
21. Mathematics and commerce
22. The arts (other than literature)
23. Literature
24. Linguistics

It has been thought preferable to err on the side of inclusion even where a word seemed familiar and common enough, provided it came within the accepted criteria. The list may therefore be used in conjunction with the Petit Larousse to solve problems arising from Perse's extensive vocabulary,

even where proper names are concerned. The omissions, all botanical, result from a desire to find ratification of meaning outside Perse's own writings: in each case the general sense is clear and in some instances the context gives further details.<sup>1</sup> Not a single word has been invented by Perse, but on occasion terms have been translated or transcribed directly from another language.

When deciding a category for a word, its use by Perse in context has been the deciding factor in cases of doubt: thus pélagien from maritime terminology is found in section 5, Birds, because Perse is referring to a species of sea-bird. Generalities have in all cases been listed under the section to which they most commonly refer. Sub-division (c) of each section includes epithets or other words related to the category, thus it was felt most appropriate to list psylle under Reptiles however two-legged the snake-charmer.

<sup>1</sup>This may readily be found by appropriate reference to my Word Index...

List of rare and technical words used by Saint-John Perse.

1. Quadrupeds

a. \*aumaille = "Vieux mot qui désignait jadis les bêtes à cornes. Il s'est conservé dans certaines régions, le nord de la France notamment" (DMRP, cf Caillois, p. 18).

\*azalaïe = "Très vieux mot de langage indigène désignant, dans le monde musulman, la grande caravane annuelle du trafic du sel, qui joue un rôle traditionnel, quasi rituel, entre l'Afrique du Nord et les territoires d'Afrique Centrale."<sup>1</sup>

écologie = "Science qui étudie les rapports existant entre les êtres vivants et leur milieu naturel" (DMRP).

b. \*oryx = as in English, an animal of the antelope family.

c. brehaigne = "la femelle stérile d'un animal domestique" (Caillois, p. 17, spelt here, as in DMRP: bréhaigne).

<sup>1</sup>From a letter from M. Leger to the present writer, dated 18th March 1964. The word has nothing to do with azalée as Loranquin implies (Saint-John Perse, pp. 93-94).

gabion = "hutte d'affût" (DMRP).

gravide = "Gravidité: grossesse" (DMRP).

hâvir = scorch (DMRP gives: "hâvir = dessécher, en parlant du feu qui brûle une viande à l'extérieur sans la cuire au-dedans").

hongrer = "châtrer un cheval" (DMRP, cf Caillois, p. 18).

## 2. Reptiles

b. \*serpent-devin = boa-constrictor (a surprising omission from PL).

c. psylle = "jongleur produisant des serpents apprivoisés" (Caillois, p. 18, cf DMRP).

## 3. Aquatic creatures

b. hydre = "Genre de polypiens microscopiques qui vivent dans les eaux douces" (DMRP).

c. burgau = "une nacre de belle qualité" (DMRP).

hydraire = "Se dit de polypes" (DMRP).

## 4. Insects and Spiders

b. épeire fasciée = araignée "ornée de bandes trans-

versales" (DMRP).

phasme = "Genre d'insectes orthoptères aux formes curieuses qui les font ressembler à des brindilles de bois mort" (DMRP).

vanesse = "Genre de papillons diurnes, comprenant de belles variétés" (DMRP), e.g. the Red Admiral.

c. épingle viennoise = "Notion chère aux entomologistes, qui n'emploient jamais, pour fixer insectes ou papillons dans leurs collections, qu'une épingle de métal spécial, inoxydable et souple, fabriquée seulement à Vienne, en Autriche."<sup>1</sup>

## 5. Birds

a. pélagien = "Terme d'océanographie. Qui se rapporte à la pleine mer (par opposition aux eaux côtières)" (DMRP).

pélagique = "Qui appartient à la haute mer; qui vit dans la haute mer" (DMRP).

<sup>1</sup>From a letter from M. Leger to the present writer, dated 16th December 1965.

\*procellaire = "Procellariidés: Famille d'oiseaux palmipèdes formée par les pétrels (procellaria) et les genres voisins" (DMRP).

- b. \*Ababil = The reference is to the Koran, Surah 105, "The Elephant." Perse takes ababil as a particular bird, although most translators agree on its meaning 'a flock'.

alérion = "martinet noir" (Adeline, but see section 22b below).

\*Anhinga = 'snake-bird, water-turkey' (Anhinga anhinga).

See Caillois's refutation of Saillet's contention that the bird does not exist (pp. 191-196). It figures, as does the Great Auk, in Audubon, with which Perse is familiar (see Vents, II, 1).

\*Annaô = Caribbean name (Quiscalus lugubris): see Caillois, pp. 191-194.

busaigle = "Espèce de buse" (DMRP).

effarvate = "espèce de fauvette" (Caillois, p. 18; spelt effarvatte in both DMRP and PL). 'Reed warbler'.

\*frégate-aigle = "Frégate: aigle de mer" (Robert),

the conjunction being formed from the Latin name fregata aquila (see Jourdain, p. 30).

\*guifette = "Petite sterne, au plumage gris ardoisé plus ou moins varié de blanc, qui vit sur les eaux douces, nichant en colonies dans les marais et qui a un régime en grande partie insectivore" (GLE).

harfang = "Chouette de grande taille, au plumage tirant du blanc cassé au blanc très pur, qui vit dans les régions arctiques" (DMRP).

\*huître-pie = the huître 'oyster-catcher' is also pie de mer, suggesting this conjunction of the terms.

\*Oiseau du Phas = 'pheasant, Phasian Bird' (from the Greek φασιανός όρνις from its origins around the River Phasis; see Caillois, p. 143).

\*oriole = loriot 'oriole'; see DMRP under auriol and Knodel, p. 187 (§ 3, n. 5).

pygargue = "Genre d'oiseaux rapaces comprenant de grands aigles pêcheurs. Une seule espèce française: l'aigle de mer ou orfraie" (DMRP).

rollier = "Le geai bleu" (DMRP).

stercoraire = "Oiseau palmipède de grande taille;  
 on l'appelle vulgairement mouette pillarde"  
 (DMRP). 'Skua'.

sterne = "L'hirondelle de mer" (DMRP). 'Tern'.

c. falqué = "Se dit de l'aile ou du bec de certains  
 oiseaux, recourbés en forme de faux" (DMRP).

macule, maille = Terms used by the old French naturalists  
 to designate speckles, according to Perse  
 (Oiseaux, 2).

penne = "Chacune des plumes rectrices ou rémiges des  
 oiseaux" (DMRP).

priver = 'tame' ("langage d'oiseleur").<sup>1</sup>

## 6. Anatomical and Medical terms

b. \*esquinancie = 'quinsy'.

c. \*faveux = 'powdery' (lit. 'honeycombed' from Latin;  
 see Caillois, p. 26).

ourlien = 'swollen' (to do with mumps; see Caillois  
 p. 26).

<sup>1</sup>Perse, "Face aux lettres françaises, 1909" in Hommage à André Gide, NRF, nov. 1951, 77.

7. Clothing and Textiles

b. jodhpurs = the English homonym.

lé = "Largeur d'une étoffe entre ses deux lisières"

(DMRP).

8. Trees and shrubs

a. \*Arboretum = as in English.

\*méliacée = "Famille de plantes phanérogames angio-

spermes . . . . ayant pour type le mélia,

arbres ou arbrisseaux des régions tropicales,

à bois odorant et coloré (p. ex. l'acajou)"

(Robert).

b. \*abiès = "nom scientifique du sapin" (DMRP).

\*Anibe = "Genre de lauracées" (GLE, cf Düss, p. 304).

\*arbre-à-cendre = ?

\*cocculus = "Arbrisseau grimpant des régions tropicales

de l'Asie, de l'Afrique, de l'Océanie et de

l'Amérique. (Famille des ménispermacées)"

(GLE, cf Caillois, p. 193).

cubèbe = "Arbrisseau appartenant à la famille des

pipéracées et produisant une graine poivrée

douée de propriétés médicinales" (DMRP).

\*guilandine = guilandina, liana of the pea family

(see Jourdain, p. 287 and Düss, p. 229).

\*guyane = Tree originating in Guyana (?).

hickory = as in English, "le noyer blanc d'Amérique"

(DMRP).

hièble = "Variété de sureau à tige herbacée, possédant

des propriétés médicinales analogues à celles

du sureau noir" (DMRP).

\*Juniper = the English word.

\*mucune = "Arbrisseau volubile à feuilles composées de

trois folioles, à grandes fleurs" (GLE).

\*palme pharaonne = Pharaoh palm.

\*palmiste franc = "Palmiste: (mot créole des Antilles)

Nom donné aux palmiers du genre arec (et à

certain cocotiers) dont le bourgeon terminal

(chou palmiste) formé des feuilles tendres de

la pousse nouvelle, est comestible" (Robert).

rouvre = "Espèce de chêne moins haut que le chêne

commun" (DMRP).

\*saman = "Samanea: Légumineuse arborescente de l'Amé-

rique tropicale" (GLE, cf Jourdain, p. 287).

\*siguine = 'siguina' (tropical tree, see Jourdain, p. 287).

\*Yaghé = "Yagé: Liane de la Colombie (Banisteria caapi, malpighiacées), avec laquelle les Indiens préparent une boisson spéciale provoquant une certaine excitation cérébrale, suivie de sommeil accompagné d'hallucinations, puis d'une insensibilité totale" (GLE).

c. démascler = "enlever l'écorce utile du chêne liège" (Caillois, p. 18, cf DMRP).

lais = "Jeunes baliveaux conservés pour croître en haute futaie" (DMRP). See also section 14 b below.

à grains de cacao

## 9. Fruit

b. coprah = "Nom donné à l'amande de coco, préparée pour l'extraction de l'huile" (DMRP).

icaque = "Fruit de l'icaquier . . . arbrisseau de la famille des rosacées, proche du prunier, et qui est originaire des Antilles et des régions chaudes de l'Amérique" (DMRP).

\*kako = "cacao" (Jourdain, p. 97). Not to be confused

- with "kaki": "fruit du plaqueminier" (PL).
- mangue = "Fruit du manguier" (DMRP: a surprising inclusion).
- pavie = "une variété de pêche à peau duveteuse" (Caillois, p. 18).
- silique = "Fruit composé de deux valves allongées entre lesquelles se trouvent une cloison membraneuse et les graines" (DMRP).
- c. achaine = "un fruit sec dont le péricarpe n'est pas soudé à la graine" (Caillois, p. 18; listed in PL under "akène").
- arille = "Tégument accessoire, d'étendue et de forme très diverses, qui recouvre tout ou partie de la graine dans certains fruits" (DMRP).
- bogue = "Enveloppe piquante de la châtaigne" (DMRP).
- écale = "Enveloppe coriace de certains fruits, tels que les noix. Gousse de fèves, de pois etc." (DMRP).
- pruine = "Poussière cireuse qui couvre certains fruits --raisins, prunes, etc., et qu'on appelle également fleur" (DMRP). 'Bloom'.

rocou = "Matière colorante jaune orangée extraite de l'enveloppe de la graine de rocouyer et utilisée pour la coloration de certains produits alimentaires" (DMRP).

\*ruptile = "Qui s'ouvre spontanément en se déchirant" (Robert).

#### 10. Fungi, Cacti and Succulents

a. agaric = "Nom générique des champignons à chapeau et à lamelles rayonnantes" (DMRP).

lactaire = "Nom d'un genre de champignons comestibles" (DMRP).

oponce = "Genre de cactus comprenant notamment les nopals et les figuiers de Barbarie. On les appelle vulgairement raquettes" (DMRP).

b. nopal = "Plante cactacée d'origine mexicaine, qui est une variété de raquette" (DMRP).

c. volve = "la membrane qui enveloppe le pied des champignons" (Caillois, p. 17, cf DMRP).

11. Marine Plants

b. laminaire = "Genre d'algues fucacées, très communes, à frondes aplaties et légèrement rubanées" (DMRP).

\*posidonie = "Plante aquatique, à fleurs verdâtres, dont les feuilles peuvent atteindre 50 cm de long sur 7 mm de largeur, poussant sur les fonds sous-marins. (La mer rejette de gros paquets de fibres, connus sous le nom "paille de mer" ou "pelotes de mer".)" (GLE). Perse calls it "petites algues sèches de literie" (Amers, Strophe, IX, 5 - 1).

sargasse = "Genre d'algues fucacées dans lequel on distingue la sargasse baccifère, dit aussi "raisin des tropiques""(DMRP).

12. Other Plants and Flowers

- a. \*plante solanée = Plant of the solanaceae family, which includes potato, tomato, belladonna etc.
- b. \*abutylon = "Plante des marais et des fossés, à feuilles rappelant celles du tilleul, à

petites fleurs, que l'on cultive dans les régions chaudes pour ses propriétés médicinales et pour sa fibre textile. (Famille des malvacées)" (GLE, cf Caillois, p. 143 and Düss, p. 68).

\*acalyphe = "Genre d'euphorbacées comprenant des arbrisseaux et des herbes au nombre d'environ deux cents espèces, qui habitent les régions chaudes des deux continents" (GLE, cf Jourdain, p. 268).  
Not to be confused with "acalèphe".

alysse = "La corbeille d'or, variété de plantes crucifères ornementales" (DMRP). 'Alyssum'.

\*chrisme-marine = "Nom vulgaire de plusieurs plantes qui croissent sur les côtes et dont on consomme les feuilles confites dans du vinaigre" (DMRP).  
'Samphire'.

coriandre = "Plante aromatique de la famille des ombellifères, croissant dans la région méditerranéenne. Ses graines séchées sont employées en cuisine" (DMRP).

élyme = "Sorte de graminée qui ressemble à l'orge et recherche de préférence les sols sablonneux.

On l'emploie pour fixer les dunes" (DMRP).

\*gomphrène = "Plante herbacée originaire d'Amérique et d'Australie, à fleurs rassemblées en têtes globuleuses, recherchées pour la confection des bouquets secs. (Nom usuel: immortelle)" (GLE, cf Düss, p. 35).

\*herbe-à-Madame-Lalie = ?

mélilot = "Plante papilionacée, comprenant fourrages et herbes médicinales" (DMRP).

\*Ologhi = ?

\*piléa cespiteuse = "Urticacée des pays chauds" (GLE, cf Düss, p. 162).

\*Pí-lu = ? (cf the Chinese pi-lü 'dark green').

ravenelle = "Nom vulgaire du raifort et de la giroflée des murailles" (DMRP).

sapotille = "Fruit du sapotier, arbre originaire des Antilles et donnant des espèces de pommes ovales et très sucrées" (DMRP).

scille = "liliacée à usage médicinal" (Caillois, p. 17).

c. azyme = "Qui ne contient pas de levain" (DMRP). Perse uses only the noun, "the Jewish passover cake

of unleavened bread" (SOED).

capitule = "Réunion d'un grand nombre de fleurs serrées les unes contre les autres et donnant l'illusion d'une fleur unique" (DMRP).

corymbe = "Inflorescence dans laquelle toutes les fleurs s'élèvent sensiblement au même niveau, bien que leurs pédoncules prennent naissance en différents points de la tige" (DMRP).

fronde = "Nom donné par les botanistes aux feuilles de fougères. Pousse des feuilles." (DMRP).

gruau = "Grains d'orge ou d'avoine mondés, dépouillés de leur balle corticale. Farine d'orge ou d'avoine, séchée au four. Fleur de farine de blé" (DMRP; cf 'gruel').

labié = "Qui est en forme de lèvres (en parlant de la corolle de certaines fleurs)" (DMRP).

oublie = "S'est dit, primitivement et en termes de liturgie, du pain d'autel destiné à la consécration" (DMRP).

pétiole = "Support ou queue d'une feuille" (DMRP).

thalle = "Expansion foliacée des lichens et des végétaux inférieurs" (DMRP).

13. Agriculture

- a. écobuage = "Opération qui consiste à découper en mottes la couche superficielle d'un terrain, à brûler sur place les matières organiques que renferment ces mottes et à en répandre ensuite les cendres" (DMRP). 'Denshering' or in dialect 'swaling'.
- b. emblavure = "Proprement: terre semée en blé; par extension: terre ensemencée" (DMRP).
- c. annonaire = "avis d'impôts en blé ou en ravitaillement" (Saillet, p. 120, cf Caillois, p. 197).
- bigorne = "Enclume allongée dont les deux extrémités se terminent en pointe" (DMRP).
- messier = "Garde champêtre temporaire, commis autrefois à la garde des fruits et des récoltes" (DMRP).
- (For products from wheat etc., see above, section 12 c).

14. Geography

- a. orographie = "Description du relief terrestre" (DMRP).
- b. \*caye = "écueil, rocher couvert par la mer" (Jourdain, p. 9, and cf English 'key' as in 'Key West'),

but N. B. that in creole caye = case (ibid., p. 76) meaning house (the sense used in Eloges, XVI).<sup>1</sup>

\*Jabal = "a province of mediaeval Iran" (Knodel, "Towards an understanding of Anabase," 330). It is the mountainous north-western region, Jabal meaning 'mountain' in Arabic.

lais = "Atterrissement dû aux alluvions des rivières ou de la mer" (DMRP). See also section 8 c above.

laisse = "Espace découvert par la mer à marée basse" (DMRP).

mésa = "Se dit de plateaux découpés par l'érosion et qui sont de forme tabulaire" (DMRP).

morne = "Nom donné, dans les Antilles, à de petites montagnes arrondies" (DMRP, cf Jourdain, p. 5).

\*raillère = "Nom donné, dans les Pyrénées, à certains versants abrupts et raboteux" (DMRP).

syrtes = "Bancs de sables mobiles jetés par les vents

<sup>1</sup>See my "Saint-John Perse et le parler créole" for a discussion of this and similar features (Revue des sciences humaines, forthcoming).

et les courants sur les côtes septentrionales de l'Afrique" (DMRP).

- c. accore = "Côte accore: coupée à la verticale au niveau de la mer"(DMRP, cf Caillois, p. 17).

## 15. Geology

- a. dévonien = "Qui appartient à l'une des principales périodes de formation géologique de l'ère primaire" (DMRP).

faciès = "Caractères généraux qu'offre à l'observateur un terrain ou une roche" (DMRP). Perse speaks correctly of "ce mot de facies, utilisé en géologie pour recouvrir historiquement, dans leur ensemble évolutif, tous les éléments constitutifs d'une même matière en formation" (Oiseaux, 5).

- b. ammonite = "Genre de mollusques céphalopodes fossiles dont les coquilles, enroulées comme des cornes de bélier, sont très abondantes dans les terrains secondaires" (DMRP; a surprising inclusion).

falun = "Dépôt de débris coquilliers, d'origine marine,

constituant en certaines régions des masses considérables qu'on exploite pour amender les sols" (DMRP, cf Caillois, p. 18).

latérite = "Sol de couleur généralement rouge brique, contenant une très forte proportion d'oxyde de fer et d'alumine. La latérite se forme généralement dans les climats chauds" (DMRP).

maërl = "Sable marin contenant des substances calcaires provenant de polypiers et utilisé pour l'amendement des sols" (DMRP, art. merl).

natron = "un carbonate de soude naturel qui servait aux anciens Egyptiens pour conserver les momies" (Caillois, p. 18, cf p. 197 and Saillet, pp. 120-121).

urane = "Composé d'uranium et d'oxygène qui fut longtemps considéré comme un corps simple" (DMRP).

c. métamorphique = "Se dit des roches qui ont subi une modification en profondeur de leur structure sous l'effet d'une haute température" (DMRP).

saunier = "Ouvrier qui fait le sel. Colon partiaire cultivant les marais salants. Celui qui débite, qui vend le sel" (DMRP).

16. Ships and Shipbuilding

b. amure = "Cordage fixant du côté du vent le point d'en bas d'une voile" (DMRP).

aussière = "Cordage commis avec des torons au nombre de 3 ou 4; on en fait pour les manœuvres courantes, les haubans, etc." (DMRP, art. haussière). Cf 'hawser'.

ber = "Appareil de charpente en forme de berceau servant au lancement d'un navire" (DMRP).

dalot = "Ouverture pratiquée à hauteur du pont d'un navire et permettant l'écoulement des eaux lorsque les lames embarquent par grosse mer. -- Petit canal prévu pour que s'écoulent les eaux de pluie sur les remblais et les routes" (DMRP). The word is current in the second sense in Creole (see Jourdain, p. 232).

écubier = "Chacune des ouvertures pratiquées de part et d'autre de l'étrave d'un navire pour passer les chaînes d'ancre" (DMRP).

émerillon = "Crochet rivé dans un anneau et conservant sa mobilité" (DMRP).

gui = "Vergue, dite aussi bôme, sur laquelle s'étend la ralingue de bordure de la brigantine" (DMRP).

- guibre = "Partie de charpente faisant saillie à la proue d'un navire et supportant la base du mât de beaupré" (DMRP).
- herpes = "Se disait des épaves rejetées par la mer sur le rivage" (DMRP).
- lisse = "Chacune des pièces qui lient les membrures d'un navire et déterminent la courbure de la carène" (DMRP).
- perruche = "Petite voile établie au-dessus du perroquet de fougue" (DMRP). In Pour fêter une enfance, II, this is a possible secondary meaning, given the sustained imagery of forest and ship side by side.
- ris = "Partie de la surface d'une voile qui est destinée à être repliée quand le vent est trop fort" (DMRP). Cf 'reef'.
- \*tendelet = "Tendelet: petite tente placée à l'arrière d'un canot. Tente de la poupe d'une galère" (DMRP).
- vaigrage = "Assemblage de planches qui borde intérieurement un navire" (DMRP, cf Caillois, p. 18).
- varangue = "Pièce de bois courbe qui se fixe par son

milieu sur la quille et sert de base aux allonges dont se compose le couple" (DMRP).

c. étarquer = "Hisser une voile d'une manière à en tendre le plus possible les ralingues" (DMRP, cf Caillois, p. 18).

faubert = "Balai de fil de caret employé, sur les navires, pour nettoyer les ponts" (DMRP).

vélique = "Qui appartient aux voiles" (DMRP).

#### 17. Harbours and Navigation

b. aire = "Chacune des trente-deux divisions de la rose des vents" (DMRP).

amers = "Terme de marine. Marques apparentes sur les côtes, telles que clochers, tours, rochers, propres à guider les navigateurs qui sont en vue de la terre" (DMRP).

darse = "Dans les ports de la Méditerranée: bassin" (DMRP). The word is similarly used in the West Indies (see Jourdain, p. 218).

mouillage = "Mouiller: jeter l'ancre ou les ancres d'un navire" (DMRP).

musoir = "Pointe d'une digue" (DMRP).

- c. Echelles = "Ports de commerce des pays du Levant"  
(DMRP).

Etésienne = "Vent régulier qui souffle chaque année  
en Méditerranée vers le lever de la canicule"  
(DMRP).

forain = "Se dit, en termes de marine, d'une rade  
ouverte aux vents du large" (DMRP).

#### 18. Astronomy and Astrology

- c. ascendant = "En termes d'astrologie, l'astre qui monte  
à l'horizon au moment de la naissance" (DMRP).

avers = "Le côté face d'une monnaie, d'une médaille"  
(DMRP). Perse applies it to the moon.

géomancien = "Géomancie: procédé de divination con-  
sistant à interpréter les figures formées sur  
le sol par une poignée de terre ou de cailloux  
jetée au hasard" (DMRP).

gnomon = "Aiguille ou style d'un cadran solaire. Ce  
cadran lui-même" (DMRP).

héliaque = "Se dit du lever ou du coucher d'un astre  
lorsqu'il coïncide avec le lever ou le coucher

du soleil" (DMRP).

labile = "Qui est sujet à glisser, à tomber, à faire défaut" (DMRP).

libration = "Balancement apparent de la lune autour de son axe" (DMRP).

19. Mythology, Religion and Philosophy

a. eudémonisme = "Système moral fondé sur la recherche du bonheur personnel, conçu comme mobile supérieur de toutes nos actions" (DMRP).

hédonisme = "Système qui fait du plaisir le but de la vie" (DMRP; a surprising inclusion).

latrie = "Culte de latrie, culte dû à Dieu seul" (DMRP).

b. Pâlilies = "Fêtes rustiques de Palès. Elles avaient lieu le 21 avril. On purifiait les maisons et les étables, on faisait des sacrifices; des prières demandaient la fécondité pour les troupeaux. On allumait de grands feux nocturnes" (GLE).

Sachem = "Nom donné aux vieillards ou conseillers chez les Indiens de l'Amérique du Nord" (DMRP).

- c. épacte = "Différence du nombre de jours entre l'année lunaire et l'année solaire" (DMRP, cf Caillois, p. 141).

## 20. History and Law

- b. accise = "En Angleterre, taxe frappant divers produits de consommation, notamment les boissons" (DMRP). 'Excise'.

\*adalingue = 'aetheling' ('young noble, prince' in Anglo-Saxon).

aubain = "Etranger sujet au droit d'aubaine" (DMRP).

aubaine = "Droit en vertu duquel le souverain recueillait la succession d'un étranger non naturalisé mort dans ses Etats" (DMRP).

capitation = "Taxe par tête" (DMRP).

déshérence = "Défaut d'héritiers naturels, par suite duquel une succession revient à l'Etat. -- Etat d'une succession sur laquelle peut s'exercer le droit de déshérence" (DMRP).

\*flabelle = "Flabellum: nom donné à des éventails en plumes de paon, que deux diacres agitaient autrefois pendant la célébration de la messe,

et qu'on porte encore aujourd'hui, en certaines occasions, devant le pape" (DMRP).

\*forligner = "S'écarter du droit chemin; forfaire à l'honneur" (GLE).

gabelle = "Grenier public où l'on faisait sécher et où l'on vendait le sel" (DMRP). Not to be construed in Neiges, III, as 'salt-tax'.

indiction = "Convocation à jour fixe. Particulièrement, convocation d'un concile, d'un synode. -- En termes de chronologie, révolution de 15 années; c'est un des trois cycles de la période Julienne" (DMRP, cf Caillois, p. 141).

latomies = "Anciennes carrières de marbre transformées en prisons" (DMRP).

mainmorte = "Etat des serfs qui, en vertu d'anciens droits féodaux, étaient privés de la faculté de tester et dont les biens devaient revenir au seigneur quand ils mouraient sans enfant. -- Condition de bien qui, appartenant à des communautés religieuses ou laïques, sont inaliénables et ne produisent aucun droit de mutation" (DMRP). 'Mortmain'.

morion = "Armure de tête des arquebusiers, plus légère que le casque" (DMRP).

mouvance = "Terme de féodalité. Dépendance d'un fief à l'égard d'un autre" (DMRP).

nome = "Division administrative de l'ancienne Egypte.  
-- Division territoriale de la Grèce moderne"  
(DMRP).

novation = "Changement d'une obligation ancienne en une obligation nouvelle, qui a pour effet d'éteindre la première" (DMRP).

pérégrin = "Etranger vivant à Rome" (DMRP). From Latin peregrinus which with normal morphological development gives "pèlerin".

trébuchet = "Machine de guerre qui lançait des pierres et qui était en usage au Moyen Age" (DMRP).

## 21. Mathematics and Commerce

b. abaque = "Chez les Anciens, machine à calculer analogue au boulier" (DMRP).

hexagramme = "Assemblage de six lettres ou caractères.  
-- Chacune des 64 figures divinatoires formées elles-mêmes de 2 des 8 trigrammes de Fo-Hi"

(DMRP, cf Caillois, p. 144, where it is stated to be "un motif sexuel").

menuaille = "Quantité de petite monnaie, de petits poissons" (DMRP). By extension Perse writes "menuaille de fétiches" (Vents, II, 4).

- c. fongible = "En matière de prêt et d'usufruit, se dit de choses qui, se consommant par l'usage, peuvent être remplacées par des quantités égales des mêmes choses. Les grains, les denrées, les métaux livrés au poids, la monnaie sont des choses fongibles par opposition à des objets qui, demeurant entiers après l'usage--un meuble, un bijou--se restituent en nature et sont réputés non fongibles" (DMRP).

22. The Arts (other than literature, for which see section 23)

- b. \*adobe = as in English, "an unburnt brick dried in the sun" (SOED). Cf 'daub'.

aîtres = "Les diverses parties d'une maison, leur disposition" (DMRP, listed here and in PL under êtres, the more usual spelling). "On

désignait ainsi autrefois soit le parvis enclos de murs à hauteur d'appui de certaines cathédrales, soit les terrains peu éloignés des églises, entourés de constructions et servant ordinairement de cimetières. Se dit en général des dépendances d'un édifice" (Adeline). Perse would appear to be using the word in this last sense.

alérion = "Aiglette sans bec ni ongles" (in heraldry) (DMRP). "Petits oiseaux sans pied ni bec, représentés dans l'attitude de l'aigle éployée ou au vol abaissé. En style de blason, les alérions sont des aiglettes; mais, en ornithologie, on appelle ainsi les martinets noirs" (Adeline).

antiphonaire = "Livre d'église où sont notées en plain-chant les diverses parties de l'office" (DMRP, cf Caillois, pp. 58-59).

Bayon = "Temple khmer au centre de l'enceinte d'Angkor Thom. . . . Ce temple représente la montagne cosmique, axe de l'univers" (GLE; see PL art. Angkor).

\*bibase = "une danse grecque, marche rapide autour de l'autel" (Caillois, p. 141).

bucrâne = "Motif de décoration en forme de crâne de bœuf" (DMRP).

buire = "Ancienne cruche à liqueur, généralement faite en métal précieux" (DMRP, cf Caillois, p. 18).

escarre = "Pièce d'armoiries qui a la forme d'une équerre" (DMRP).

gloriette = "Cabinet de verdure dans un parc ou un jardin" (DMRP).

larmier = "Saillie pour empêcher l'eau de couler le long d'un mur" (DMRP).

murrhin = "Ne se dit que de vases fort estimés des Anciens et qui étaient taillés dans une pierre qui était peut-être de l'agate ou de la fluorine. Ces vases atteignaient à Rome des prix très élevés" (DMRP).

\*vilenie = "Verge d'un animal" (in heraldry) (DMRP).

c. monodique = "Monodie: chant à une seule voix. -- Dans l'Antiquité: monologue dans les tragédies" (DMRP).

ouïe = "Chacune des ouvertures pratiquées dans la table supérieure d'instruments de musique tels que le violon, le violoncelle, etc." (DMRP).

terre sigillée = "une argile utilisée pour faire des vases, des bols (terre bolaire)" (DMRP).  
'Sphragide'.

### 23. Literature

b. almageste = "Ancien recueil d'observations astronomiques" (DMRP).

\*colophon = as in English, the "achevé d'imprimer".

oncial = "Se dit des lettres capitales romaines employées, aux premiers siècles de notre ère, pour les inscriptions, les titres, etc., et qui avaient primitivement un pouce de haut. Ecriture analogue, mais plus petite, employée dans les manuscrits, du IVe au VIIe siècles" (DMRP).

saga = "Tradition historique et mythologique des Scandinaves" (DMRP; a surprising inclusion).

\*scazon = "a form of iambic trimeter . . . having a spondee in the last foot" in Greek metre  
(Oxford Classical Dictionary, art. Metre, Greek).

thrène = "Chant de deuil chez les anciens Grecs" (DMRP).

c. anagogique = "Anagogie: interprétation mystique du sens littéral des Ecritures" (DMRP).

\*cryptographe = 'Code-breaker', a surprising omission.

sigle = "Se dit des lettres initiales employées comme abbréviation, sur les monuments, les médailles, les manuscrits anciens" (DMRP).

#### 24. Linguistics

a. euphuisme = "Nom donné au style précieux et maniéré qui fut à la mode dans les milieux de cour, en Angleterre, au XVIIe siècle. Par extension, purisme affecté" (DMRP).

b. \*labiale mi-sonore = 'half-voiced labial.'

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