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ELIZABETH M. McMAHON
JULES LAFORGUE: A LEGACY OF PARADOX

ABSTRACT

The two volumes of poetry, "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" (1885) and "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" (1886) by Jules Laforgue are the subject of this commentary. The study involves an examination of background, content, themes and structure.

Part One, Background, covers Laforgue's life from January 1885 to June 1886. The artistic context of his work is discussed with reference to the practices of the Parnassian poets and "decadents", Impressionism, the philosophy of the Unconscious based on the treatise by Eduard von Hartmann and the newly founded science of psychology. From these influences Laforgue is shown to establish an artistic theory of paradox, ephemerality, and the commonplace.

Part Two, Content, explains Laforgue's imagery: sun and moon symbolism; the original imagery surrounding schoolgirls, Sundays and urban life; the figures of Pierrot and Hamlet. The discussion presents each symbol as an illustration of paradox.

Part Three, Themes, analyses thematic elements: the philosophy of the Unconscious, women, love and sexuality and psychology. The paradoxes evident in Laforgue's presentation of each theme are explored: optimism and pessimism, misogyny and feminism and the conflict between appearance and reality in human psychology.

Part Four, Structure, describes Laforgue's versification as the final step in the use of conventional forms before the exploitation of free verse. The clash between the obvious importance of the formal patterns, alongside an apparent lack of concern for form, is interpreted as a further reinforcement of Laforgue's vision of paradox.

ELIZABETH MARY McMAHON

JULES LAFORGUE: A LEGACY OF
PARADOX

A CRITICAL STUDY OF "L'IMITATION DE NOTRE-DAME LA LUNE"
AND "DES FLEURS DE BONNE VOLONTE"

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

One hundred years after his death, the poet Jules Laforgue is remembered for his evocation of the world of adolescence through the depiction of Pierrot, Hamlet, processions of English school-girls and the elegant gaucherie of the heroines of "Moralités Légendaires". Like Alain-Fournier he is associated with the magic and the sufferings involved in a youthful confrontation with the world. The coexistence of melancholy and humour, joy and despair results in a paradoxical vision of life, the very characteristic which made him the avowed master of T.S.Eliot. Laforgue's presentation of life is not via tranquil correspondences with a voiceless nature, but via a paradoxical, analytical energy, which can encompass erudite philosophy and the banalities of modern, day-to-day living, the gravity of a nihilistic vision alongside an exposition of life's simple pleasures and petty annoyances.

Studies in English of Laforgue's work have concentrated on "Les Complaintes", the first collection of his poems to be published and the series of twelve poems published posthumously under the heading "Derniers Vers". These works are considered to be most representative of Laforgue's achievement and originality. The eternal appeal of children's nursery songs, or the nostalgia and pathos of a Parisian barrel organ, is poetically recreated in the rhythms of "Les Complaintes". "Derniers Vers", by contrast, offer a powerful vision of the modern world in a highly original form. Mankind is depicted in a wasteland bereft of values.

The intervening work "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" is singled out for the development of Pierrot imagery, whilst "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" is dismissed as a mere poet's notebook, preparing the ground for the great innovations of "Derniers Vers". Both volumes, however, are highly significant in Laforgue's work for it is here that Pierrot, Hamlet and the "jeunes filles" are at their most prominent, encapsulating the world of childhood and

adolescence. It is also at this stage that Laforgue is approaching the height of his poetic maturity. These poems illustrate a creative genius at the crossroads: a master of contemporary poetic usage and a prime innovator for the future evolution of poetry.

This study concentrates exclusively on "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" and "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté". The analysis is applicable to the rest of Laforgue's works, but an attempt is made to assess the achievement of Laforgue in the context of these two volumes of poetry.

Firstly biographical details are presented for the years 1885 to 1886, the period during which the two works were composed. An analysis is then made of the influences which inform Laforgue's artistic principles. Paradox is central to his aesthetic, being evident in every symbol, in every theme and in the poetic structure. A general survey is given of Laforgue's poetic material in an explanation of the ideas disguised by the paradoxical imagery. Pierrot and Hamlet are then discussed separately as powerful symbols of paradox. As Laforgue gave each character a fresh interpretation, it is essential to view them as depicted in his work in order to fully appreciate their significance.

Having determined the theory behind his work and discussed the content, three themes are studied in detail, each of which exhibits the same addiction to paradox: Laforgue's philosophy of life, his analysis of women and the feminine mystique and his exploration of psychology. In Laforgue's philosophy the pessimism of a nihilistic vision exists alongside the optimism of mystical belief. In the analysis of women, feminism and misogyny are a simultaneous presence. In his study of psychology, Laforgue explores the paradox of the human mind, the clash between intellect and sensibility, between the inner and outer man, between the metaphysical anguish of a nihilistic vision alongside an irrepressible desire to live, to love and to be loved. In the final chapter an analysis is made of Laforgue's versification,

illustrating the extent to which paradox informs his poetic technique.

"L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" and "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" are uniquely attractive in their presentation of images of eternal fascination and relevance, in the evocation of the elusive world of adolescence and childhood and in the display of Laforgue's mastery of conventional metres to translate the dislocation of values and lack of order in the modern world. The Pierrot poems of "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" and the townscapes of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" have the instant and yet lasting appeal of the masterpieces of Watteau and the Impressionists.

Whilst it is not possible to reach a full appreciation of Laforgue's achievement without considering the other major works, which display a different facet of his particular genius, the legacy of paradox which he bequeathes is present in a single volume, a single poem or a single line. Resisting the temptation to reduce life to a simplistic formula, Laforgue makes of every poem a complex condensation of experience, expressing the paradox underlying every modern assessment of the world.

PART ONE: BACKGROUND

CHAPTER ONE

THE WRITING OF "L'IMITATION DE NOTRE DAME LA LUNE" AND "DES FLEURS DE BONNE VOLONTE", 1885-1886

Laforgue's third and fourth volumes of poetry were composed during the last two years of his residence in Germany. Although we can assume that some of the verse was borrowed from an earlier period, and some was to be remodelled in later work, the poems closely reflect his life at this particular time.

Laforgue had been in Germany since November 1881 when he was appointed as *lecteur* to the Empress of Germany bringing him a salary of eight thousand francs per year, an apartment in the Prinzessinen Palace in Berlin and a personal servant. By 1885 he was well established in Germany, the details of his job being now familiar, no longer formidable tasks and he was in regular contact with at least two good friends, Théophile Ysaye, a Belgian pianist and his brother Eugène, a violinist. His life-style was appropriate to his self-confessed dandyism, from his job as *lecteur* to the use of his many hours of leisure in travelling, visiting art-galleries and museums, attending concerts, ballet, opera and parties, sight-seeing, smoking and ice-skating. The two volumes of poetry written between March 1885 and June 1886 possess the lightness of a dilettante approach to life, with occasional echoes of the pessimism which shadowed his adolescence and his early poems, but which had been buried with the disappearance of material worries, the possession of some social standing and the belief that heart-felt misery does not suit the indifferent stance of the dandy.

Laforgue's own description of his life during this period cannot be taken too literally as it is likely that he wrote only that which was acceptable for a dilettante existence. He describes himself as he wants to be seen, a cosmopolitan observer, detached from the normal concerns and pleasures of mankind.

Detachment is a valid personal existence for a young nihilist's rejection of all conventional values. On the one hand his letters reveal a hedonistic appreciation of life, a dilettante cult of art which reaches even the most mundane of pastimes such as smoking. On the other hand there is a strong sense of exile, loneliness and boredom. It is not fitting for a dandy to confess to feelings of inadequacy and a hatred of isolation when the true dandy revelled in his distance from mankind and his very inability to find a recognised niche in society apart from that of an outsider. His frustration is hidden behind the more acceptable confession of boredom. In February 1885 he wrote to the poet and literary journalist, Gustave Kahn of the *ennui* which was to dominate "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté":

Je m'ennuie à beugler....par là-dessus, des flâneries, rien à faire, l'exil loin du printemps de Paris, de la musique, les parfums de l'an dernier... et ce sacré printemps surtout qui vous donne la sensation que tout recommence, et qu'on n'en est pas encore quitte avec son insaisissable moi dans cette ritournelle des saisons. (1)

A year later he writes light-heartedly of his routine, describing his enjoyment at the company of his pianist friends and young women, especially Leah Lee, his English teacher from January 1886, whom he was to marry the following December:

Tu n'as pas idée de la vie contraire à mon passé que je mène cet hiver-ci. Je n'écris pas une ligne, je ne lis pas un livre (je fais un peu d'anglais). Je fume moins que l'an dernier, moitié moins, mais plus adéquatement. J'erre beaucoup ce que je n'avais jamais fait ici, étant toujours aux basques de pianiste.....patinage....En outre je suis un série de bals, j'observe....Et je cause longuement avec des êtres absolument inédits pour moi qui sont des jeunes filles. (2)

The two letters exemplify the combination of frustration with a fundamental satisfaction which marked his later life in Germany.

During the year before the composition of "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame La Lune" Laforgue was preoccupied with the publication of "Les Complaintes". The poems had been ready for publication in May 1883. The energy generated by the creative process was depleted as month followed month with no further sign of publication. For a year he had no inspiration for poetry, claiming to Kahn that he will resume writing only when he has seen what a published volume of his looks like and when he has been assured by Léon Vanier that "Les Complaintes" will be published that year. He did not wait, however, for in March 1885 he wrote to Charles Henry:

Je me remets à faire des vers. (3)

and a month later he wrote with enthusiasm to Kahn about his new project, enthusiasm which was to be rewarded with early publication of the new work in November 1885 only four months after the publication of "Les Complaintes":

Je me suis remballé pour les vers; figure-toi que je veux imprimer cet été (mais directement chez le renommé Trézenick par exemple) une mince plaquette, quelque chose comme contribution au culte de la lune, plusieurs piécettes à la Lune, un décameron de pierrots, et sur les succédanés de la lune pendant le jour: les perles, les phtisiques, les cygnes, la neige et les linges. Je t'apporterai ce bouquet et te graverai à la première page un dédicace lapidaire et lunaire. J'ai rattrapé cet enthousiasme d'une paperasse retrouvée où il y avait un tête-à-tête très senti avec la Dame Blanche en question une nuit de juillet dernier, de ma fenêtre, à l'Ile de Mainau sur le lac de Constance. (4)

Whilst on holiday with the Empress at l'Ile de Mainau, he had written to Charles Henry of his absorption in Hartmann's concept of the Unconscious:

Voilà, je vis au sein de l'Inconscient; il aura soin de moi. (5)

In "L'Imitation de Notre Dame la Lune" Laforgue's preoccupation with Hartmann's philosophy is translated into a fantastical universe inhabited by a Pierrot. Such irreverent treatment of the philosophy reflects Laforgue's intellectual development. He no longer upholds the philosophy as a belief "d'un humble catholique pénétré de sa foi par toutes les pores", (6) but as a literary aesthetic, the capturing of paradox and relativity in the symbol of an all-knowing yet unconscious force.

The poems were written from March to June 1885. Being composed one after the other within a relatively short period of time, gives the volume greater unity than his earlier works, concentrating simply on the subject of Pierrot and the moon. His frequent letters to Kahn throughout May 1885 point to his continued obsession with the work in spite of his moves around Germany:

Vendredi mai 1885 Berlin

Les "Lunes " marchent. (7)

Lundi mai 1885 Bade

Pour le moment je me hâte à profiter des derniers feux de mon béguin pour la lune pour achever convenablement la chose.

Ca ne grossira guère plus. Il y a dès à présent à peu près 500 vers petits et autres en 50 pièces.

Un mot au soleil pour commencer
Faune et Flore et Climat de la Lune
Nocturne
Concerto
Petites Litanies de la lune
Les Linges et Le Cygne
La Lune est stérile

Puis 4 pierrots, et 9 sérénades pittoresques.

Il y aura sans doute en outre: un salve regina des lys et un
Ave Paris Stella

Tu sais que c'est dédié à Toi et à la mémoire de la petite
Salambô prêtresse de Tanit. (8)

Later in May he claims that they are completed.

Bade mercredi mai 1885

Je suis prêt à te lire mon volume de la lune. (9)

His letters to Kahn during this period are almost as prolific as his creation of verse. He even met his friend in Strasbourg in the spring of that year and mentally associates the whole period of the composition of "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" with Kahn:

Kahn et le mois de mai, quel couple! (10)

His friendship with Kahn was to influence his decision of the following year to return to France.

July 25th brought the long awaited publication of "Les Complaintes" and Laforgue was once again preoccupied with publishing and the critics' reaction. It is now concern for the

publication of "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame La Lune" which quells the incentive to write verse, and he writes to Théophile Ysaye that he is apathetic towards the idea of creating verse:

J'entre dans une période d'apathie, c'est pourquoi je me suis payé un néologisme: je me madréporise. (11)

The publication of "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame La Lune" in November 1885 gave him fresh impetus to work at his art again. Throughout 1885 Laforgue had been adding to his projected collection of short stories writing "Hamlet ou les Suites de la Piété Filiale" during the latter half of the year. The character of Hamlet continued to haunt Laforgue through 1886. The year began with a week's holiday in the city of Hamlet, Helsingoer, where he claimed to have spent "*un horrible jour de l'an*". (12) He especially remembers the seven-hour crossing, the icy wind and the mud recalled in the poem "Gare au Bord de la Mer". "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" date from this period of intense activity and Hamlet continues to be an all-consuming interest. In April he sent Kahn "Avertissement", and in May claimed to have written thirty-five poems for this collection:

Je veux te confier un monstrueux secret. Quand je t'ai envoyé des vers, c'était les premiers et les seuls de mon prochain volume. Il n'y a pas si longtemps de ça, n'est-ce pas? Eh bien, j'ai maintenant 35 (trente-cinq) pièces (et plusieurs point courtes) de ce volume, au net. Est-ce que ça ne t'effraie pas pour moi? (13)

He confesses to an absence of originality:

Quant aux vers, ce sont mes éternels vers, tu ne le sais que trop. (14)

Kahn, meanwhile, had become director of the literary review, "La Vogue", and was prepared to print all which Laforgue could send

him. In the same month Laforgue met Edouard Dujardin, director of "La Revue Wagnerienne" and Théodor de Wyzewa, both of whom were instrumental in promoting the name of Laforgue and in publishing his works after his death. In April they promised Laforgue that they would be of use to him if he returned to settle in Paris.

By June 1886 his current collection had almost doubled and he intended to have it published by October:

Il est là, soixante pièces, un peu plus gros que "Les Complaintes". J'en relis parfois, mais je n'y touche plus. Les vers s'appelleront: "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" de Jules Laforgue (La Bonne Volonté est le héros de mon livre, c'est très absolvant). D'ailleurs il y aura une couverture blanche émail comme pour Notre Dame la Lune. C'est ma livrée. (15)

At the same time he is ready to publish "Moralités Légendaires". He is also writing "Dragées" and some criticism on art in Berlin. In mid-July "Le Concile Féerique" appeared in "La Vogue". Encouraged by critics of his works and by the friendship of Gustave Kahn, Edouard Dujardin and Théodor de Wyzewa, he decides to abandon his job in Germany and return to Paris in the hope of making a career for himself purely on the strength of his writings.

Only one month after completing "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" he no longer desires to publish it, having begun to write in the newly discovered medium of free-verse. He considered the volume as little more than a series of poetic notes which would provide a basis for future poems.

The volume is a clear reflection of the period of Laforgue's life in which it was written. Shakespeare, English women, the need to fashion his own destiny, the question of marriage and love are the principal themes throughout the poems. Laforgue's anglophilia which was characteristic of his age, had been nurtured

by time spent in Koblenz, a town "*pleine d'Anglais, fleurie de toilettes, encombrée de lawn-tennis etc.*" (16) He read Shakespeare avidly and decided to improve his command of English, thereby meeting Leah Lee. From January 1886, the month he began lessons with Leah, his letters are devoted to thoughts of marriage. The final poem of "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame La Lune" suggests that the notions of living and marrying are synonymous, both causing anxiety:

*Mais, j'ai peur de la vie
Comme d'un mariage. (17)*

Throughout the first quarter of the year, however, time in which he claimed to be doing little work, he is obsessed by the idea of marriage and the need for a feminine presence in his life:

Tout ce que je vois, - et tout ce que je puis imaginer de mieux, dans cette carrière, même à Paris me rive au coeur et par-dessus la tête l'idée d'un mariage charmant et simple. (18)

In a later letter he tries to justify his sudden preference for marriage:

Il est stupide de mener la vie qu'on mène quand comme moi on est ainsi bâti qu'on ne peut rester seul une demi-journée. L'an dernier je travaillais, cette année je ne fais rien, je ne peux pas rester 20 minutes chez moi, étant libre, sauf à sommeiller en un canapé. Je ne puis et ne pourrai jamais manger seul. Je ne puis aller seul dans un cirque, un musée, une exposition [.....] Il faut, quand j'installerai ma vie, que j'aie un chez moi et que j'y sois retenu ou appelé par un camarade. Et le camarade autant que faire devra alors en outre apporter tout une moitié de choses: être féminin. (19)

The laboured justification of his argument reveals his life-long addiction to decadent values, which interpreted marriage as a

facile acquiescence to convention, and hides an element of genuine perplexity. Laforgue wants to return to Paris, work and earn his living as a writer and live with a wife. Having been convinced of the fragility of everything, especially love, his dilemma is inevitable. The poems which he wrote during this period reflect his inner turmoil over the question of marriage, showing a development from his obsession of the earlier months. His choice is between remaining in Germany without a wife as the post forbade family commitment, thereby maintaining the financial security, or, to return to Paris with Leah to face the uncertainty of a literary career.

In "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" Laforgue transposed his preoccupations with marriage into a debate on how one should live one's life, the debate summed up by Laforgue's Hamlet as "*Un héros! Ou simplement vivre*". (20) The subject of the poet's musings is Leah who is a silent presence throughout. She is described in detail to Marie, Laforgue's sister:

C'est un petit personnage impossible à décrire. Elle est grande comme toi et comme moi, mais très maigre et très anglaise, très anglaise surtout, avec ses cheveux châtain à reflets roux [...] figure-toi une figure de bébé avec un sourire malicieux et de grands yeux (couleur goudron) toujours étonnés, et une petite avec des manières si distinguées et si délicates, mélange de timidité naturelle et de jolie franchise. (21)

Her quiet movements, her Englishness and slightness of form are echoed in the presence of Ophelia. The poems otherwise capture the atmosphere of his empty Sundays, his observations from his solitary room, the people, the townscape, the pleasure he takes in living artistically. They translate his later life in Germany in which genuine contentment existed alongside his habitual *ennui*.

In July, the month which brought the completion and abandoning of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" and the start of his

"Derniers Vers" he writes to Marie of his courtship and his intention to marry Leah. In September he tells Kahn of his plans and for once confesses to happiness, writing effusively of destiny to Théophile Ysaye whose brother had recently been married:

A quoi tient notre sort! d'émouvants (ou d'effrayants) hasards, un sourire fortuit dans un village et nous devenons shakespeariens, notre destinée se fixe... ironiquement et à pleins poumons je respire l'air fier des longs voyages...etc..

Oui, tout est hasard car n'y eût-il pas existé Adrienne il n'y avait eu une Leah, n'y eût-il pas eu de Leah, il y avait une Nine, et ainsi de suite. C'est pourquoi il nous est enjoint de nous attacher à la première que le hasard nous présente, et nous l'aimerons seule, car c'est la première et nous ne rêverons pas à une autre. La vieille maxime du sage est: "Aimes-tu deux femmes en même temps, n'en choisis aucune, car tu regretterais toujours l'autre". Cependant, c'est l'ivresse de la vie créée, continuée, l'ivresse de l'action et de la joie, l'ivresse d'avoir obéi à l'Inconscient, à la volonté du destin.

Je vais confier ces lignes à la poste (elles sont pleines de Littérature, mais n'est-ce pas ce que l'humanité a de plus vrai, de moins décevant?) et aller à la gare.

Je la verrai dans une demi-heure. Cette minute me fait palpiter le coeur, et dans quarante ans je penserai combien longue à venir fut cette minute. (22)

"Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" were gathered together by Edouard Dujardin and Félix Fénéon and were published posthumously in 1890. Twelve years later the *Mercure de France* published a volume under the title of "Les Derniers Vers de Jules Laforgue" which included "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", the twelve poems in free-verse and "Le Concile Féérique."

When Laforgue wrote "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" and "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", he was at his most self-assured, contented and even indulged in hopes for a literary future. His life at the time was not beset by the trauma and hardship which marked his childhood, adolescence and early twenties, or the fatal illness from which he suffered from only a month after his marriage when he arrived in his longed-for Paris, to his death eight months later. The confidence and fundamental happiness of this period created the richness of analysis and comment, the highly imaginative writing in "L'Imitation de Notre Dame la Lune" and "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" and led ultimately to the great artistic innovations of the "Derniers Vers".

CHAPTER TWO

AESTHETIC IDEAS

(1) A Vision of Paradox

The period during which Laforgue wrote "L'Imitation de Notre Dame La Lune" and "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" was marked by the conflicting sentiments of intense loneliness and a fundamental satisfaction with life. This was of particular significance in the formulation of a personal literary aesthetic. His experience convinced him of an inherent contradiction in life which led to dissatisfaction on the one hand and content on the other, or in more exacerbated terms, a powerful attack of Baudelaire's Spleen or an enriching sense of the Ideal. Paradox was at the core of existence. In the creation of his own principle for art Laforgue sought to recreate his understanding of the paradoxical nature of life.

The poetry of "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame La Lune" and that in "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" differ radically in subject and structure. The former is a fantasy world unified by the symbols of Pierrot and the moon, whilst "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" presents imagery of commonplace items and events in a series of incomplete pictures and the volume as a whole remains open-ended with no apparent unity or conclusion.

In pictorial terms "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame La Lune" could be described as a Surrealistic fantasy. Laforgue creates a landscape akin to those of Delvaux or Magritte, the scene being unreal, but the objects or human figures are painted with fidelity. Pierrot, the lunar landscape, the stifling redness of the sun have vivid clear outlines which for all their strangeness are complete. In contrast "Des Fleurs de Bonne volonté" are poetic studies in Impressionism. The lack of absolute coherence

in the pictures reflects the disappearance of clear outlines by artists of the age. Just as the lines which surround a bunch of flowers were to the Impressionists a creation of the intellect, so to Laforgue was a coherent presentation of images. In an Impressionistic manner Laforgue captures transient reality. A pot plant is a momentary vision bringing fleeting half-formed sensations of comfort, a well-ordered household, beauty of nature, contentment or simply banality; we do not study its exact shape, its precise location, the nuances of colour of the flowers.

In "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune", Laforgue's overwhelming sense of paradox is translated in the paradoxical nature of the symbolism, whilst in "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" paradox is translated by a perpetual swing of visions appearing and fading, the eternal inconclusiveness of thoughts and feelings, the movement from affirmation to negation. The two volumes share a philosophy dominated by paradox.

(ii) The Background to an Aesthetic

The originality of Laforgue lies in his manipulation of some of the principal aesthetic theories of his time together with an exploration of fields outside art to find material from which he could ultimately create his own aesthetic principle. The idea of paradox in any field informed his aesthetic for it is only in paradox that he could see his own vision of reality translated. Within the literary world he drew upon the example of Baudelaire whose own obsession with paradox had been explored in "Les Fleurs du Mal". Paradox moreover was present in the conflicting aims of the major schools of art of the time, accepted in retrospect as Symbolism and Naturalism. The pursuit of the visionary and mysteriously suggestive existed alongside a concern for absolute factual documentation. Hartmann's "Philosophy of the Unconscious" and the study of psychology provided further fuel for a paradoxical vision, each reinforcing the sense of ambiguity, irony and the irresolvable duality of life.

Such an overpowering presence of paradox would forbid a presentation of anything substantial; "Le semblable, c'est le contraire" of Pierrot's world is the principle underlying all experience in Laforgue's vision of reality. Nothing is as it seems. Precariousness dominates thought, event, and object as it is impossible to fully appreciate the specific nature of any poetic statement. This led to a preference for forms of art which reflected instability and fragmentation. Decadent art emphasized disunity; Symbolist art sought to evoke rather than state coherently and the art of the Impressionists rejected the notion of stability in favour of presenting pictures of insubstantial, transitory reality.

a) The Literary Inheritance

In the field of poetry the predecessors of those writing at the time of Laforgue were Baudelaire, who can stand alone by the far-reaching nature of his influence, and the Parnassian poets. The Parnassian aesthetic had long been accepted as the norm in poetry, by which stage an inevitable reaction was developing. Laforgue shares with the Parnassian poets a deep interest in philosophy, his pessimism being akin to that of Mme. Ackermann and Leconte de Lisle, but like his contemporaries he reacted against established art in the search for originality. It is from Baudelaire that poets take their lead. Beside the Parnassians, the modernity of his approach to art is thrown into relief. He expressed the sensibility of modern man, a city dweller entrenched in material values. Whilst the Parnassians often chose to site their works in remote unfamiliar locations, he chose the townscape of modern urbanised man as a background to his work. He believed that the successful artist was one who showed the heroism in the ordinariness of modern life, so he depicted the Paris of the suburbs, the fogs and rains, the hospitals and brothels and the low, seamier side of life.

Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud and Laforgue generally selected a modern setting for their images like Baudelaire, but they reacted against the exoticism underlying much of Baudelaire's work, which is as inaccessible in terms of ordinary human experience as the remote settings of some of the Parnassians. Commonplace, banal items and events became material for poetry. Verlaine transposed the sumptuous world of "Les Fleurs du Mal" into the insubstantial and delicate world of "Poèmes Saturniens". For Mallarmé the most mundane material could be fashioned into art; a fan, a steamer, a walk, a few minutes in a station. He transferred Baudelaire's doctrine of synaesthesia, the endless associations and hidden links underlying every experience, from a sensory plane to an intellectual one. The "correspondances" he envisaged were primarily intellectual. Any aspect of experience, therefore, could be a catalyst for art by the range of mental associations it evoked. Rimbaud and Laforgue went even further in elevating the commonplace to an art form. Rimbaud dedicates a poem to nit-pickers and speaks of dirty washing water and latrines. In Laforgue's work a crowd rushing in the rain, dubious plumbing systems, soiled linen, preoccupation with the weather or concern about one's next meal are shown to be worthy material for poetry.

Such practices showed a forceful rejection of Taine's narrowly exclusive ideal in art and his notion of an artistic hierarchy in which that which was most stable was considered to be the best material for art. His most ideal art-form was the Greek nude, stylised perfection at a distance from reality. He reinforced the Positivist belief in the possibility of reducing all subjects to a scientific framework and the conviction that in art as in society there was an immovable order.

During his time in Paris Laforgue had attended the lectures of Taine at the "Ecole des Beaux Arts". He forceably disapproved of Taine's principle of hierarchy:

...lequel aboutit au beau classique, à ce nu grec où la noblesse morale achève la perfection physique, et demeure insuffisant, par conséquent, devant ce qui n'est pas l'inspiration hellénique ou Renaissance... (1).. que devient votre idéal devant les merveilles des arts chinois et japonais? devant les tapis persans? (2)

He proposed that the artistic ladder should be kicked aside:

M. Taine pose un principe qui assigne à chaque oeuvre un rang dans l'échelle. Encore une fois un tapis est une oeuvre, une partie de notes est une oeuvre, un griffonage de Rembrandt ou de Degas sont des oeuvres. Vous voyez qu'il n'y a plus qu'à tirer l'échelle. (3)

In reaction to Taine, Laforgue praises with enthusiasm the least stable form of aesthetic expression, dress, which Taine considered highly superficial as being merely indicative of fashion:

...ce dehors m'importe à moi, peintre, autant que votre dedans, psychologue. Puis, ce dehors, ce décor, même en notre temps submergé, paralysé par la confection, c'est la physionomie, le geste, le beau, l'intéressant de mes personnages... On peut l'ôter en un tour du main? ...Je vois des gens habillés avec d'infinies nuances selon le rang, la pose, le caractère individuel, l'heure, l'occupation. La toilette qu'on ôte en un tour de main est aussi précieux que celle qu'on se greffe, la coupe de la barbe, des cheveux; le soin des ongles et des pieds, la toilette de la peau, la toilette du geste, les manières, l'allure sont une toilette aussi. (4)

The dress of Pierrot is described in detail, every item having philosophical or artistic significance. This concentration on commonplace details and events reveals a common link between the poets and the Naturalists. Both were under the influence of

the growing interest in the newly recognised science of sociology in which the observation and recording of human activity were of prime importance. There is hardly a letter of Laforgue in which he does not lay claim to the activity of observing humankind as part of a programme of work:

... non en lisant des livres et en fouillant les vieux Musées, mais en cherchant à voir clair dans la nature en regardant...comme un homme préhistorique, l'eau du Rhin, les ciels, les prairies, les foules et les rues. J'ai plus étudié dans les rues, les appartements, les théâtres, etc. de Paris que dans ses bibliothèques (5)

Naturalism chose concrete description, however, whilst the poets conveyed their message through evocative suggestion in appreciation of Baudelaire's idea of beauty being not that which states as that which conjures up. Positivism, the philosophy which fuelled the work of the Naturalist writers, affirmed the possibility of a complete interpretation of the universe. Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Verlaine were dissatisfied with such a belief. Everywhere they saw enigma and mystery. The Symbolist aesthetic with which poets of this period are associated to greater and lesser degrees was founded on the rejection of concrete, coherent description and the notion of stability in art as advocated by Taine, in favour of suggestive, abstract, vague or ephemeral images.

b) Impressionism

The most familiar guardians of the ephemeral to a modern mind are not so much the poets as the painters of the time grouped together under the heading of Impressionists. Laforgue's own familiarity with their work as a result of an extended study and search to define their aesthetic, left its influence in his poetry to the extent that of the major poets he most approaches the painters in the principles underlying his art.

Laforgue shares with the Impressionists the view that as there is no Heaven nor Utopia to hope for, life could be lived only for itself and should be presented in art as such. Art should concentrate on the life and phenomena that we can see around us. From a conceptual approach to art based on ideas of what we see, the Impressionists moved to a perceptual one based on actual visual experience totally rejecting canons for artistic expression. Mankind was to be viewed afresh freed from the corrupting influence of the intellect, which calls upon art to mould itself into an acceptable shape, a shape reflecting moral or aesthetic values.

The pictures Laforgue paints in a *quasi* Impressionistic manner complement his philosophy of life. His pessimism while reminiscent of earlier poets belongs more especially to a later age when nihilism and anarchy were upheld as values. Decadence rewrote the rules of art to conform to an ambiguous and anarchical view of life. Any rules underlying art were deduced after the work was written, not superimposed on the artistic creation as absolute criteria according to which the artist must work, hence the exploitation of the ordinary as opposed to the limited range of subjects traditionally considered to be worthy of art. The depiction of the reality of peasant life, scenes from industrialisation, the painting of ignoble weather by the Impressionists, was symptomatic of this trend.

During the very period of Laforgue's poetic orientation he was involved in a sustained study of Impressionism and while working as a secretary to Charles Ephrussi his office was decorated with paintings by Manet and Morisot. He describes his fascination with the Impressionistic evocation of life, the combination of tiny details to create a synthesis of impressions:

...tout est obtenu par milles touches menues dansantes en tout sens comme des pailles de couleurs...en concurrence vitale

pour l'impression d'ensemble. Plus de mélodie isolée, tout est une symphonie qui est la vie vivante et vibrante. (6)

He saw in their rejection of traditional aesthetic values a parallel to his own rejection of Taine. He especially liked Manet for the painter's vitality and total lack of concern for solid forms. The Impressionists as a body sought to capture transient reality rather than a transformation of that reality to conform to a view of art established *a priori*:

..l'impressionniste est un peintre..qui..oublant les tableaux amassés par les siècles dans les musées, oubliant l'éducation...à force de vivre et de voir franchement et primitivement ...est parvenu à se refaire un oeil naturel...à peindre naïvement. (7)

c) The Influence of Hartmann

It is outside the world of art and literature where Laforgue finds the means of shaping the artistic ideas with which he synthesised into an original personal aesthetic. In Hartmann's treatise on the Unconscious Laforgue discovers an original view on the source or determining factor behind art and a new field of enquiry for aesthetic ideas.

There were two schools of thought on the nature of all art. Taine, in accordance with physiological and psychological studies which claimed that man's actions were determined by heredity and environment, believed that the particular nature of art created by a particular individual was determined by family, class, country and age. Art was not separate from the laws which governed all other activities of mankind. In contrast the Romantic tradition had emphasised the importance of inspiration as the source of all art, a force present within an artistic individual which promoted and fashioned the art which was created. Art issued from the

mystery of the soul inspired by God, or by the artist's particular muse, modelled spontaneously like emotions and dreams.

Laforgue was dissatisfied with both views on the source of art. In Taine he objected to the insensitivity towards the element in good art which makes it unique, to the uniqueness of the individual contribution. Taine subjugated art to the laws of science, just as positivism negated the significance of the individual compared with society or country. The Romantic tradition had to be rejected with equal force at a time when science had proved the high improbability of the existence of a soul.

Hartmann's treatise provided Laforgue with the possibility of reconciling the two views of art, the determinist and the idealist. The intensive study of the philosopher's work led to a belief in a metaphysical abstract principle, termed the Unconscious which had a rational foundation and which did not, therefore, contradict the laws of science. An acceptable substitute was found for the Romantic soul. Laforgue can now speak of artistic inspiration being derived from some non-material force:

(L'Inconscient)...force transcendente qui pousse Beethoven à chanter, Delacroix à chercher des tons, Baudelaire à fouiller sa langue, Hugo à être énorme. (8)

The paradoxical nature of the Unconscious as both mystical and scientific complemented Laforgue's paradoxical vision of reality. His own description of this metaphysical principle is of a universal law of perpetual evolution, a notion recreated in the antics of Pierrot and in the ambiguous conclusions of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté":

Une loi à la fois contingente et absolue, qui gouverne toute chose, car au-dessus de la réalité changeante de phénomènes se

développe un idéal ou une loi qui est un devenir en perpétuelle évolution. (9)

Laforgue consciously adopted the Unconscious as the means towards a new aesthetic, for by doing so he cast aside the notion of an artistic hierarchy. This enabled works which were not large scale, catalogued and acknowledged as Taine would have it, to be valued as art, including the insignificant world of fabric, ornaments, even political creeds:

L'infaillible Inconscient... Je me suis amusé à en déduire une esthétique avec laquelle je noie et les déterministes et platoniciens et les hégéliens purs, et l'Idéal de M. Taine.... pour moi à part je m'amuse à lui soumettre les choses les plus incohérentes d'art, tissus d'Orient, le dessin d'ornement, les nocturnes de Whistler, et l'apostolat socialiste. Quel ange gardien! (10)

d) The Influence of Psychology

Hartmann's notion of the Unconscious provided an example of paradox on which Laforgue could base a principle for art. His interest in psychology nurtured an even greater conviction of an irresolvable dualism in life.

In a letter to Charles Henry, Laforgue links psychology with his poetic preoccupations:

Je songe à une poésie qui serait de la psychologie dans une forme de rêve avec des fleurs, du vent, d'inexplicables symphonies avec une phrase (un sujet) mélodique dont le dessin reparait de temps en temps. (11)

Like the Impressionists he forgoes the idea of a single theme and prefers instead a synthesis of experience. The combination of science and the less easily definable areas of experience, such as

dreams and the subconscious as found in psychological analysis, is an ideal medium in which to explore paradox. The clash of science and imagination could readily translate an ironic view of life, one which saw the multiple orientation of the mind, the irreducible complexity of experience and the impossibility of a conclusive assessment of reality, but which would nevertheless attempt to observe and record facts. The subjects of Laforgue's poetry combine factual observation, the seasons, town scenes, and people with an exploration of more elusive aspects of experience in dream, memory, nostalgia and the psychical process.

The infiltration of positivism into the general philosophical outlook resulted in a godless age absorbed in the worship of science: the value to universal progress of industrial advance, the value to society of sociological improvements and the value to the individual of understanding and interpreting the psyche. Every ethic was now in the hands of rational man, quantified and categorised in a scientifically acceptable formula.

Laforgue could not accept science as an exclusive judge any more than he could accept the gods of the religions. His own scientific and philosophical study led him to nihilism. There were no grounds, therefore, on which to accept science more than any other arbiter of human experience.

Death, decay and instability mark his scientific exploration of the universe, but his nihilistic conclusions are rendered uneasy by the fact that the individual wants to keep his life and must, however irrationally, see value therein. Science which leads to nihilism exists alongside an irrational, unscientific celebration of life. His work is at once scientific and anti-scientific.

The interest in those areas of experience which do not lend themselves to a scientific summary was characteristic of the Symbolists. Dream, nostalgia and the memories evoked by flowers,

smells, the seasons belong to a world which cannot be subject to invariable scientific law. The ambivalence and mystery therein is found in any study of the mind so by selecting psychology as a subject for exploration in poetry Laforgue colours each poetic statement with the same sense of ambiguity and inconclusiveness.

The fragmentation of the personality occasioned by psychological analysis is reflected in a decadent or Impressionistic view of art. Just as Impressionistic painting is composed of thousands of strokes of colour which understate outlines of forms for the sake of capturing nuances within a particular form, a decadent literary work would give the same emphasis to detail. Bourget's description of the decadent style suggests that fragmentation dominates:

(Le style décadent) celui où l'unité du livre se décompose pour laisser la place à l'indépendance du mot. (12)

Composition becomes decomposition in the clash of science and imagination. The precarious balance of a scientific nihilism and a hedonistic and irrational love of life is translated by irony. Morissette outlines the resulting aesthetic:

C'est cette constante conscience, si l'on peut dire de l'Inconscient intérieur, au fond de l'esprit, en contraste avec des sentiments intimes de la vie humaine et des valeurs personnelles, qui aboutit à sa vue demi-scientifique, demi-humaniste, dont le résultat est l'ironie... Cette sorte d'ironie est inévitable lorsque des valeurs chères à l'esprit humain contrastent avec les aspects de ces valeurs dans le monde froid et abstrait de la loi physique. C'est précisément cette double conscience qui donne l'atmosphère typique de l'ironie de Laforgue. (13)

(iii) An Aesthetic of Irony, Ephemerality and the Commonplace

Laforgue describes in the opening poem of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" how he indulges his instinct to enjoy life by practising the evasion of literary pursuits, but is simultaneously haunted by the call to heed reality:

*Alors j'ai fait d' la littérature
Mais le Démon de^{la} Vérité
Sifflotait tout l' temps à mes côtés
«Pauvre! as-tu fini tes écritures...»(14)*

He is not alone in his obsessive return to the idea of an unresolved duality in himself and in life. The title of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" was a direct tribute to Baudelaire's "Les Fleurs du Mal". Bourget in his "Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine" had described Baudelaire as the most perfect example of the psychological state of his age. Just as Baudelaire describes himself as a Héautontimorouménos Laforgue describes himself as Galathée and Pygmalion, one who "kills" her lover turning him into a river and one who breathes spring life into what is cold and dead. Laforgue was very much a pupil of Baudelaire in his intransigent addiction to the notion of duality. Love of life and apathy for life come together in a discord sharing his mentor's subjection to irony:

*Ne suis-je pas un faux accord
Dans la divine symphonie,
Grâce à la vorace ironie
Qui me secoue et qui me mord?(15)*

The originality of Laforgue lies in his refusal to take himself or life seriously. He applies a rule of flippancy to everything in order to create a further paradox; melancholy which is tinged with humour:

Ce sont en effet surtout les saletés de la vie qui doivent mettre une mélancolie humoristique dans nos vers. (16)

Laforgue chooses the mundane subject of misunderstandings between lovers, focusses our attention on such trivial objects as a broken necklace, a shell collection, the particular pose of himself whilst reading, the frustration of damp tobacco. Just as Pierrot was subject to endless hesitations and interior debate characteristic of impressionable men of the time, out of his fantastical disguise the hero/poet of "Des Fleurs de Bonne volonté" shows himself obsessed with the trivia of daily living, making an art form out of neurotic obsession; appearance, home comforts, food, a childish pride in possessions. Unlike Baudelaire, Laforgue does not portray perversity or the bizarre nature of low life, (though, in accordance with the modish decadent practice which sought to shock comfortable bourgeois opinion, there are elements of violence and immorality suggested in some earlier poems). He accepted the decadent view that a portrayal of anarchy was the only valid subject for art. At this stage in his work, however, his view of the underlying anarchy of life was not that of a revolutionary. It is a vision of life stripped of the order which he saw as being imposed by the intellect. Laforgue can claim, therefore, that the reality of a living creature interests him more than an artistic arrangement of individuality into some notion of absolute heroism:

Moi, créature éphémère, un éphémère m'intéresse plus qu'un héros absolu. (17)

The anarchy of his vision concerns life's formlessness, its elusiveness, its unpredictability and lawless structure and it is this which he singles out as the principle of his art:

....enfin son principe même (de l'art) est l'anarchie même de la vie: laissez faire, laissez passer; ne sachons que nous enivrer

des paradis sans fonds de nos sens et fleurir sincèrement nos rêves sur l'heure qui est à nous. (18)

Laforgue's aesthetic is bound up in the idea of instability, the formlessness of commonplace concerns and an irresolvable ambiguity. On the one hand he adopts every possible form of detachment. He is detached from sentiment, so he forbids any emotion or instinct to materialise. He is detached from ideas, so philosophical theorising is reduced to irrelevance. He is detached from humanity and any notion of God so leaving himself emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually isolated, the culmination of every possible form of solitude. In this the irony of his work is pierced through with human fragility. The humour on the surface hides intense sadness and despair. He makes a powerful nihilistic statement in his repeated affirmation of the inherent pointlessness of all earthly activity and the dominating presence of isolation and death. On the other hand the lyrical voice cannot be silenced. Like the Impressionists Laforgue captures the beauty of the commonplace in an ever changing light, the fluctuation of sense impressions unconsciously buried in the minds of all. He finds beauty and interest in the frivolity of a dehumanised, symbolic fantasy world or in the most commonplace of objects and events.

Laforgue's poetry translates the continual shift of consciousness, the impossibility of summarising any aspect of experience with sound conclusions, the presence of doubt within any assertion. Grand theorising exists alongside the common-sense voice of popular wisdom in which the first rule is to smile; philosophy in all its seriousness stands beside a sensitivity to the beauty of banalities; erudition is reduced to an empty jingle. It is this double-sided vision which makes for the ever present irony of Laforgue's poetry, the continually restated clash of opposites, the ever invading presence of paradox.

PART TWO: CONTENT

CHAPTER THREE

LAFORGUE'S POETIC UNIVERSE: A STUDY OF THE SYMBOLISM

Much of the impact of Laforgue's poetry lies in the originality of the symbolism. "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" focusses on Pierrot and and reinterprets the image of the moon. In "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" Laforgue creates symbols which are uniquely his own based around the images of Sundays, girls and nature. The two volumes of poetry outline a personal philosophy in a decadent pictorial form. In decadent fashion familiar images are given a new rendering and original images are created.

Laforgue, in common with all religious temperaments, believed in a notion of absolute purity, the ideal of Christian, or Buddhist, asceticism. This belief in purity remains in spite of his nihilism and is an essential element in "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" and to a lesser extent in "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", where it takes a shared place alongside the mundane concerns of day-to-day living. The idea of purity underlies the symbolism, each symbol suggesting the purity of the ideal or its corresponding corruption.

Laforgue debates the competing claims of idealism and nihilism, but the field of enquiry differs from volume to volume. "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" presents a theoretical debate of mind versus body, idealism versus compromise. In "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" the debate is transferred to a more easily recognisable human level. This progression in itself is significant. Theorising and its association with the intellect and the higher spheres is brought down to earth, there to lose its esotericism. The symbolism of the two volumes varies accordingly. In "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune", it is drawn from the cosmos, a fantasy world of empty skies, planets, pierrots and other-worldly creatures, whilst in "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", the familiar, commonplace and mundane dominate.

L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune

The title of the volume is modelled on the "The Imitation of Christ" by Thomas à Kempis, which outlines in detail the behaviour necessary for one who aims to lead his life in conformity with the pattern set by Jesus Christ. In the chapter "The Monastic Life", Thomas à Kempis advises that Christian living demands the adoption of an outsider's role, quoting St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians *"If you wish to live as you ought and progress steadily, you must conduct yourself as an exile wandering on the earth. You must become a fool for Christ's sake"*. (1) Pierrot, the hero of the work, is indeed a fool in the eyes of the world by his clown-like disguise and his seriousness in relation to spiritual matters. He conducts himself as an exile denying himself all normal physical contact. Pierrot is possessed by the notion of the ideal symbolised in Our Lady under the cold unfeeling guise of the moon, a transposition of the newly established Catholic doctrine on the physical purity of Christ's mother, Mary.

(1) Our Lady and The Moon

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception became law in 1854. In 1858 Our Lady of Lourdes is believed to have declared her name to Bernadette as the Immaculate Conception. By 1862 the Bishop of Tarbes recognised the authenticity of Bernadette's vision. Laforgue was sufficiently influenced by the Marian fervour in his childhood diocese to dedicate a volume of poetry to the picturesque ideas behind the new-found doctrine. The goddess presiding over Pierrot's conscience is Our Lady, the virgin-mother, symbol of purity, of an earthly woman untainted by the forces of sexuality, the queen of sorrow, the mother of an ideal.

The choice of the moon as an associative symbol is not original. Our Lady is depicted in Apocalypse as a woman suspended in the cosmos, with twelve stars around her head. Furthermore its

association with Pierrot was commonplace and was therefore an obvious choice for Laforgue's particular fantasy.

The moon by tradition possesses a rich symbolism. As the opposite pole of the sun it represents suspension of life, the subjugation of the flesh, the triumph of silence and the awakening of the intellect. It is a male principle as a representation of the mind rather than the body. Conversely, however, it is a female principle through the association with menstruation and through the classical depiction of Diana, the nature goddess of fertility, wild animals and virginity and her Greek equivalent Artemis, both of whom are present in Laforgue's fantasy, under the guise of the moon. Diana though queen of fertility also represented virginity in her role as the opposite of immoral Janus, the sun-god. Like the Virgin Mary she symbolises virginal maternity. Artemis further complicates the symbol by her manly characteristics which caused the moon to be considered as bisexual or androgynous, a synthesis of male and female also to be found in Pierrot. This confusion alongside the cold, visual impact of the moon endowed the symbol with an enigmatic, mocking character.

Such a symbol readily suited the prevailing mood of decadence which chose to attack any accepted assessment of reality. The rejection of the sun where nature triumphs and the allegiance to the impassive moon is a statement against the Romantic worship of nature and of passion. Laforgue moreover makes the Parnassians a target of satire. The moon symbolises the ideal, but Laforgue's landscape suggests its inaccessibility and unreality. He thereby satirises a central theme of Parnassian poetry, the distance which separates man from the ideal.

Interest in the moon was not an unfamiliar presence in poetry of the period. Many poets could be placed amongst those "*qui viennent au monde avec un rayon de lune dans le cerveau*", (2) like Tannucio in Elen by Villiers de l'Isle Adam. The moon was friend of the poet, enemy to the pulse of material existence which

Laforgue and other poets affected to despise so much by their exacerbated attachment to evasion. Baudelaire's poetry is impregnated with sun imagery, but Laforgue's most favoured poems concern the moon:

Tous ces jours-ci je suis dans une crise de ré-amour pour Baudelaire... j'ai relié le mien dans une doublure funèbre de vieil habit. Et je l'emporte partout.....j'adore Tristesses de la Lune, La Lune Offensée etc. (3)

Here the moon is the accomplice to the superior, misunderstood mind of the poet, the companion of his sleepless nights. (4) Sully Prudhomme speaks of the milky way in similar terms as the mirror of souls, the associate of sorrow, of languishing virgins, prayer and solitude and all those forsaken by life. (5) Bourget wrote of the night as the comforter of the lonely, the friend of love and of prayer. (6) In Verlaine's poem "Clair de Lune" we see how the other-worldliness of the moon becomes an appropriate medium in which to echo the worlds of dream and nostalgia and to evoke rather than describe. In the light of the moon things exist less intensely, so life is muted and transposed to a minor key, escaping from reality to the charm of a Watteau landscape, peopled by musicians and dancers in a disguise akin to that of Pierrot.

*Votre âme est un paysage choisi
Que vont charmant masques et bergamasques,
Jouant de luth, et dansant, et quasi
Tristes sous leurs déguisements fantasques.*

*Tout en chantant sur le mode mineur
L'amour vainqueur et la vie opportune,
Ils n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur
Et leur chanson se mêle au clair de lune,*

*Au calme clair de lune triste et beau,
Qui fait rêver les oiseaux dans les arbres
Et sangloter d'extase les jets d'eau,
Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres. (7)*

Evasion into art was a central theme in poetry of the period, being the sole option of the poet when feeling imprisoned by the baseness and meaninglessness of life. The moon with its power to generate a sense of other-worldliness, by its power to reinstate the importance of mystery and ambiguity was readily chosen as a symbol of that evasion.

(ii) A Surrealistic Fantasy

It was while spending the spring and summer at L'Ile de Mainau that Laforgue became artistically bewitched by the moon and began to write "L'Imitation". The epigraph depicts the moon as seen above Lake Constance:

*Ah! quel juillet nous avons hiverné,
Per amica silentia lunae!*

Out of the traditional imagery of the moon, Laforgue creates a vast symbolic landscape to translate a personal vision of the world. It appears surrealistic in the strange perspectives he conjures up; the absolute fixity of the moon, the melancholy of dusk, the mystery of the submarine world, the sense of the infinite. The scene is set firmly in a fantasy world where a pale Pierrot sits in contemplation beneath an even paler moon.

In contrast with this unreal setting are the pictures of mankind, but the symbolism by which they are presented only serves to reinforce the fantastical nature of Laforgue's vision. This does not reduce the power of the imagery within a normal, non-fantastical context for the symbols translate his belief in the inherent anarchy underlying all experience, the impossibility of

stillness and absolute truth, the essential ambiguity present in every earthly transaction.

The volume opens with a lengthy preamble to the sun before dedicating all further poems to the moon. The sun symbolises the material world and though it is only addressed once, its presence remains throughout the volume as the opposite pole of the moon, the enemy of Pierrot's asceticism.

(iii) The Sun

(a) Landscape and Atmosphere

The landscape of the sun is dominated by sex and procreation from the inhabitants and plants to the stones on its surface:

... pas un caillou qui ne rêve un ménage,

*Tout vient d'un seul impératif catégorique,
L'Amour, l'amour qui rêve, ascétise et fo rnique... (8)*

The terrain is abundantly fertile relentlessly generating new potential to reproduce:

*Elle meurt!
On sait que tu dois ressuciter le troisième
Jour, sinon en personne, du moins
Dans l'odeur, les verdure, les eaux des beaux mois. (9)*

Birth is a central image, but not as a poetic event, rather in pictures suggestive of bloody deliveries:

Les drames de L'Apothéose Ombilicale (10)

*Faut pas nous mettre sur le bras
Un cri des Limbes Prolifères? (11)*

...La fleur des sanglantes chimies. (12)

The body is presented as if under scrutiny of a surgical operation by the frequent use of medical terminology in bizarre combinations:

*crâne glacé... les calvities de nos incurables
bureaucraties... épigastre... encéphale (13)*

protubérances maternelles (14)

moelles épinières (15)

The shedding of blood implied by such investigations and by Laforgue's fantastical vision of sexual relationships which lead to gruesome deaths in a symbolic abattoir, backs broken or cauterised in pools of coagulated blood, colours the landscape in a vivid red:

*Or voici: nos deux Cris, abaissant leurs visières
Passent mutuellement après quiproquos
Aux chers peignes du cru leurs moelles épinières
D'où lèvent débusqués tous les archets locaux
.....
Comme le moindre appel: c'est pour nous seuls! rallie
Les louables efforts menés à l'abattoir! (16)*

*Cautérise et coagule
En virgules
Ses lagunes de cerises (17)*

With the heat of the sun and this flowing of blood the atmosphere is stifling. In the poem "Les Lingés, le Cygne" the image of soiled linen reinforces the sense of cloying, suffocating heat:

*Ce sont les linges, les linges,
Hôpitaux consacrés aux cruors et aux fanges;
Ce sont les langes, les langes,
Où l'on voudrait, ah! redorloter ses méninges! (18)*

The image suggests smothering, shrouding, disease and unsuccessful attempts to wipe away the traces of human decay. Absorbed within this claustrophobic atmosphere is a fever of sexual activity symbolised by the wind:

*Et le Vent qui beugle, apocalyptique Bête
S'abattant sur des toits aux habitants pourris. (19)*

(b) The Inhabitants

The male inhabitants of the sun are either of dubious reputation or unattractive, ignoble characters. There are balding pedantic civil servants:

*Crâne glacé, raillie les calvities
De nos incurables bureaucraties (20)*

There are ageing, unrefined characters:

*Soleil, soudard plaqué d'ordres et de crachats
Planteur mal élevé... (21)*

and there are men of dishonest practices, debauched and pretentious:

Bellâtre, Maquignon, Ruffian, Rastaquouère (22)

The overpowering presence of the female has no particular character, but is simply an extension of the nature of the Earth, a planet totally in the grips of the urge to procreate:

Os sonore et très nul comme suc médullaire (23)

Her overpowering physical presence precludes any possibility of the spiritual as implied by Pierrot's assertion.

*Tu fournis la matière brute,
Je me charge de l'oeuvre d'art.* (24)

(c) Lifestyle

All inhabitants are caught up in the sins of gluttony and lust, living amidst the noise and empty fervour of mass celebrations:

*Continue à fournir tes couchants avinés
Les lendemains vomis des fêtes nationales,
A styler tes saisons à nous bien déchaîner
Les drames de l'Apothéose Ombilicale!* (25)

There is no place for love. The only form of non-sexual, social interaction, is banal, sentimental dialogue which offers a poor attempt at the sublimation of love:

*Elle disait, de son air vain fondamental:
« Je t'aime pour toi seul! ».* (26)

There is no possibility of genuine idealism. Any earthly ideal is enveloped in the mediocrity of the inhabitants. The idealism surrounding woman is erased by the emphasis on her physical presence and bodily functions:

Absolus, drapés de layettes. (27)

Other ideals include food symbolised in the image of the Earth as a large pan of broth, thick, wholesome and totally lacking in the refinement of *haute cuisine*:

Et toi là-bas, pot-au-feu, pauvre Terre! (28)

home comforts

*Cherchez la pâtée et la niche
Et les douceurs d'un traversin. (29)*

and social conformity.

*...on l'a unie
Avec un monsieur
Ce qu'il y a de mieux
Mais pauvre en génie. (30)*

All scruples are cast aside for the purpose of making a socially acceptable statement.

Factory chimneys and canals fill the background and together with the hospitals and roof-tops suggest a city or industrial landscape untouched by architectural beauty. The familiarity of such images is distorted by the surrealist mood. Here is a planet of suffocating heat with rivers of blood, engulfed in a whirlwind of mindless sexual activity, the factory chimneys reinforcing the overpowering presence of sex. The hospital roofs suggest the eternal presence of illness. Life is a machine of disease and pollution.

(iv) The Moon

For every feature found on the sun, there is an equivalent on the equally surreal lunar landscape. The contrasting nature of life on the sun throws into relief the lunar imagery.

(a) Atmosphere and Landscape

While the sun equals life and the urge to procreate, the moon equals death, the wish to die and sterility. In contrast with the vivid red on the sun's surface, the colours of the moon are pastel shades, simply a spectre of colour. Pierrot as a lunar inhabitant will live off the blue and state a preference for the colours of mourning and death:

Bref, le violet gros deuil est ma couleur locale. (31)

The body which is robustly present on the sun is now ailing. The whiteness of Pierrot is a symptom of anaemia. He suffers from insomnia and has poor nerves:

*Lune bénie
Des insomnies (32)*

J'ai des nerfs encor sensibles au son des cloches. (33)

The moon is a parasitic tumour, a pill or poison which will stem the tide of life:

Voilà le Néant dans sa pâle gangue (34)

O pilule des léthargies finales (35)

*.....le lotus
Qui constipe les plus larges polygamies,
Tout net, de l'excrément logique des foetus. (36)*

Freed from the corruption of life, sterility prevails and the atmosphere is refreshingly still and silent after the stifling heat, the noise and feverish activity on the sun:

*Ton atmosphère est fixe, et tu rêves, figée
En climats de silence (37)*

Une place plus fraîche à l'oreille des fièvres (38)

*Comme la lune est lointainement pleine
De silencieuse infinité claire
Pas le moindre écho des gens de la terre (39)*

The landscape of the moon shows death's triumph over life with its deserts, precipitous mountains of pearl, gulfs of ivory and chalk plateaux which in their whiteness, and in their composition which relies on dead creatures and infertility, symbolise chastity and sterility. The surfaces are hard and angular with an abundance of coral reefs and fossils to advertise the fate of all life. There are forests of church candles and cacti in the shape of pyramids displaying symbolic reverence for the dead. Even the architecture is a monument to death with sarcophogae, cromlechs and pyramids.

(b) Inhabitants

Whilst the principal inhabitant of the sun is the earth mother, a sexual reproductive machine, on the moon the Virgin Mary reigns supreme. Here is a mother who reflects the purity of the ideal. She is woman desexed as the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception and blessed is the fruit of her womb to Pierrot who dreams of being that fruit. Water images dominate the lunar landscape as if the moon were transformed into a uterus. The water offers protection from life:

*Astre lavé par d'inouïs déluges,
Qu'un de tes chastes rayons fébrifuges,*

*Ce soir, pour inonder mes draps, dévie,
Que je m'y lave les mains de la vie! (40)*

and the security of being cradled blind against the world outside absorbed in the peace of sleep:

.....des lacs où dort Gomorrhe (41)

.....embaumant mers et continents,
Etangs aveugles, lacs ophtalmiques, fontaines
De Léthé... (42)

It grants peace of mind by its power to bestow purity, washing away all sins:

Lune, consomme mon baptême. (43)

Oh! monter, perdu, m'étancher à même
Ta vasque de béatifiants baptêmes (44)

The other inhabitants of the moon have none of the ordinariness of their earthly cousins. They are not touched by the coarseness of the sun's male characters nor the baseness of its women. Aestheticism reigns in the mystic union of that which by tradition represents the most noble aspect of each sex, intellect and beauty. The ^{Mona Lisa} ~~Joconde~~, Endymion and Ophelia bring together beauty and an intellectual appreciation of beauty by belonging to the respective worlds of art, mythology and literature. Icarus symbolises the rising of the mind to higher spheres and Lohengrin the quest for goodness. Pure beauty is present in the noble birds: swans, peacocks and turtle doves. Nymphs, mermaids and pierrots belong to the world of fantasy, untainted by earthly links, as are the many orphans. Other fantastical creatures include wrinkled toads perched on mountain tops, pure white polar bears ambling with their arms outstretched in a cruciform and dolphins, the most intelligent member of the animal kingdom, with geysers of mercury, an element which symbolises intellectual contemplation.

The sun represents the healthy norm in the triumph of nature. In contrast to the natural activity of the sun, the moon displays the occult side of nature, the mystery of death, the suggestion of sexual relationships which cannot yield a natural end-product as implied by the reference to Artemis and Gomorrah, and the suspicion of devil worship in which the moon acts as an evil eye:

Jettatura

Des baccarats (45)

(c) Lifestyle

The other-worldliness of any life on the moon and the affiliation with death and mystery is clearly evident in the cult of philosophy and of religion. The language of the planet is as esoteric as the inhabitants, being littered with philosophical jargon. The number of words for the absolute implies a wealth of knowledge and an academic understanding of subtle differences of meaning:

*L'Inconcevable; l'Absolu; L'Idéal; L'Infini; L'Inconscient;
l'Enfin*

The Christian church figures in the cathedral rose windows, altars, baptismal fonts, chalices and sacred hosts, all of which show an allegiance to religious practices: the worship of a god, prayerful invocations and the purification offered by sacramental rites. The moon, however, does not belong to a particular church in spite of being placed under the auspices of the Virgin Mary. Rather there is a communion of many gods and religions: Mecca, the holy city of Islam; Deva the Hindu god; Paphos an island of worship for the Greeks; and Paris, the holy city of art, temple of all aesthetes.

All residents practise the asceticism of a monastery. They indulge in endless prayers, contemplations, and meditation in the

ethereal air in a permanent state of semi-somnolence to alienate further the pulse of life. They are cut off from society, being too pure for involvement in the mainstream of life. They live in an atmosphere of silence to allow space for thought and prayer and to prevent disturbance of sensitive nerves. There is suspicion and distrust of the body, the pierrots being dressed in long flowing priestly robes to hide their physical shape and they only fall in love with beauty that is dressed and lifeless. Their ascetic practices even include the food, which in contrast to the rich pâté, brioches and thick broth associated with the sun is made up of monk-like foods of rice, boiled eggs and an apt concession to colour and flavour in mandarins. The colour orange was chosen by Buddha because it was formerly worn by condemned criminals, those forsaken by the material world.

Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté

In the next volume of poetry the fixity of the moon is transposed to the unchanging monotonous familiarity of a suburban landscape. We see night and day and the changes in nature brought about by the seasons, only in the context of an urbanised townscape. All open-air scenes, the buildings and the people are rooted in town life. The countryside and peasant life hardly figure. The reason for this omission is that they would not have the same immediacy and familiarity to Laforgue as urbanised landscapes, nor indeed to post-industrial man. The continual rejection of Pissarro's paintings of peasant life in the provinces alongside the acceptance of Monet's paintings of his stylised Japanese garden is indicative of this trend. The stylisation of town life was in fashion. In Laforgue's poetry, the picture of nature and of social intercourse is superimposed on to familiar scenes: the star-scattered night, the full moon, the moaning wind all make their appearance above roof-tops and chimneys; the mid-day sun shines above an elegantly landscaped park; a fine evening provides a canvas for a civilised meeting of lovers; apricot

flowers, bluebells, peacocks and other birds are simply sights for tourists.

The title of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" is a tribute to Baudelaire's "Les Fleurs du Mal". Laforgue translates Baudelaire's picture of conflict between good and evil into recognisable pictures of man, facing simple life dilemmas yet displaying all the anxiety of a literary hero on a field of battle. In this volume abstract theorising is left behind. The "Bonne Volonté" of the title is the human will engaged in an attempt to resolve the conflict in real terms between an all-pervading pessimism and the love of life.

There are three pictures united by the shared presence of ambiguity. Firstly there is the external world reduced to the confines of a town. Secondly the poet as a spectator depicts humankind, standing outside the pulse of their lives and simply observing. Thirdly there is the poet representing on the one hand a sensitive dreamer at odds with an unsympathetic world, on the other the psyche of the modern man as it copes with the familiar processes of living.

(1) The External World

The self-projection into a well-loved understanding nature of the Romantics, or a Parnassian detailed description of natural phenomena, do not figure in Laforgue's presentation of the external world. He sees nature as a hostile force which wills the death of individuality. Concern for a detailed pictorial presentation is alien to the wish to create atmosphere or suggest philosophical mood as opposed to coherent definition. The picture is therefore a fragmented whole providing an apt background to nihilistic discussion.

The weather is dominated by rain, wind and overcast skies. Any appearance of the sun or a fine evening is fleeting. This may

seem contrary to the demands of realism, but for one who spent his childhood and adolescence in the sunshine of Montevideo and Southern France, this impression of a North European climate is a true evocation. The overriding presence of rain and cloud partakes in the revolt against the unwritten laws of what is acceptable in art. Such ignoble weather would rarely find a place in Classical or Romantic landscapes while the artists of Laforgue's time frequently depicted rain, snow and cloudy skies.

The town scenes in the two volumes are much more varied, the whole social organism being reflected in the buildings Laforgue selects to fill in the background. At the top of the scale are cathedrals, churches and convents, symbols of mankind's aspiration to an ideal, but for Laforgue examples of man bringing the ideal down to his level. Other buildings displaying man's proud fashioning of the material world are the schools and libraries, the factories, shops and the market square, the hospitals and railway stations. Such establishments figured highly in the Positivist vision of the universe. Through education, man would be totally enlightened and freed of the doubts, superstitions and ambiguities which had hitherto absorbed the world. The same optimism is reflected in the factories, hospitals and railway-stations symbols of the triumph of science. Completing the picture are the less noble establishments, the brothels, places where men can acceptably usurp the social structure and the abattoirs where man can harness the products of nature for his pleasures at table.

More evocative sights are the fair ground, ice rink, and a port, but any suggestion of evasion or romanticism is dampened by the presence of mud in the river, the industry associated with the canal, the ugly scaffolding and the derelict land.

The sounds of church bells, vespers or the barrel organs of street buskers are muted by the continual presence of the wind and rain, giving rise to an overall plaintive mood. A dog barks, a

train departs and a lavender seller sings of her wares. Such scenes offset the philosophical speculation and the seemingly overpowering nihilistic stance suggested by the imagery.

The transition from the safety of theorising to living is conveyed in the destructive treatment of the queen of "L'Imitation", the moon, which has now lost its heroic status:

..... - *Vois, la Lune-même (cette amie)*
Salive et larmoie en purulente ophtalmie... (46)

The liquefaction of an image which was once characterised by hard angularity shows a final loss of faith in the possibility of idealism. The analogy moon, water, womb has disappeared, for no protection can be offered in one displaying such weakness and apparent disease. Beauty, heroism and sensitivity are insidiously drained of substance. In seeking the ideal, mankind will find that all paths lead to the same absence of solidity, security and meaning as was present at the beginning of the search:

...*mille touristes des yeux las rôdent*
Tremblants, mais le coeur harnaché d'après méthodes!
Et l'on va. Et les uns connaissent des sentiers
Qu'embaument de trois mois les fleurs d'abricotiers;
Et les autres, des parcs.....
Et d'autres, les joncs des mares....
Et d'autres, les prés brûlés où l'on rampe; et d'autres,
La Boue où, semble-t-il, Tout! avec nous se vautre!.. (47)

Man is caught up in a cycle of recurring disappointment and rejection. The mud offers no foothold or solid embankment from which to escape. The cycle begins and ends in insecurity which he is powerless to break:

-Le ciel pleut sans but, sans que rien l'émeuve
Il pleut, il pleut bergère sur le fleuve...

*-La pluie continue à mouiller le fleuve
Le ciel pleut sans but, sans que rien l'émeuve. (48)*

Agitation, liquefaction and noise dominate the scene with visions of mud, rain and wind. The wind infiltrates any attempt by man to build solid forms as protection against the elements:

L'Ame du vent gargouille au fond des cheminées (49)

This malevolent force holds mankind in its grip bleeding mankind to death indiscriminately:

*Ah! saignons, tandis qu'elles déballent
Leurs serres de beauté, pétale par pétale!
Les vignes de nos nerfs bourdonnent d'alcools noirs,
O soeurs, ensanglantons la Terre ce pressoir
Sans Planteur de Justice. (50)*

We are reminded of the all-pervading pessimism of Hamlet's world weary speech:

*How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't ah fie!'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. (51)*

Laforgue gives the speech a decadent rendering in a powerful image of man struggling to save himself and his means of sustenance from the elements, but is confronted with contagious disease and a nature in ruins:

*Oh!oh! le temps se gâte
L'orage n'est pas loin,
Voilà que l'on se hâte
De rentrer les foins!...*

L'abcès perce!
Vl'à l'averse!
O grabuges
Des déluges!...

Oh! cett' Nature
En déconfiture!... (52)

(11) **Mankind**

Against this background is a picture of humanity oblivious to the malevolence of nature. It is a scene which repulses in its seemingly blind acceptance of fate and yet attracts in its freedom from the overpowering consciousness of nihilism.

The women outnumber the men. There are schoolgirls, wives, mothers, widows, prostitutes and washerwomen filling the scene. A male passer-by makes a rare appearance, suggesting the stability and security of facile idealism, as he dreams of the pâté and brandy he will have for lunch. An array of clothes pass before our eyes: blue velvet, a pink dress, a button-hole and ragged clothes. People appear with a role to play or a purpose in mind establishing a pose or interacting with others. They walk nonchalantly, their hands in their pockets; they shrug shoulders like the dilettante Pierrot or shake hands. There are processions of schoolgirls, family groups, married couples, flirting lovers, men talking pompously and women asserting their presence, their hands on their hips.

We catch sight of the eternal daily preoccupations of mankind: the search for personal comfort, food and entertainment, holidays, examinations and work. The pleasures are many and varied including conjugal bliss, illicit love, smoking, mass celebrations, holidays, walks in the park, evenings on the beach, ice-skating, dances, social contact, knitting, piano-playing, writing letters, reading and the casino. For food and drink there

are brioche, pâté, wine, brandy and morning coffee. The blacker side of life is examinations and work, the paying of taxes, sleepless nights, hangovers, nightmares and damp tobacco.

An intimacy with the people of Laforgue's world is established as we observe mankind involved in its daily routine, with scenes and objects which are so familiar, yet striking for being found in poetry. We enter bathrooms with dubious plumbing systems, experience the sensation of goose pimples after stepping out of a hot bath; we enter bedrooms with eiderdowns, sheets, dressing gowns and bedside tables; we see piles of dirty washing, babies' nappies and handkerchiefs; there are drawn curtains, gaslit windows, a fuschia and geranium, scrap books of souvenirs, a shell collection, a bunch of carnations and a sentimental engraving. Other signs of comfort are a pet cat, piano-playing, children's toys, smelling salts and a pocket mirror. There are comfortless rooms too, with poor furnishings, dripping water and banging doors.

We also see behind the closed doors of the hospitals, hotels, convents and ballrooms: the distinctive head-dress of nurses, the endless washing, the prescribed medicine; inside the ballrooms are candleabres, an orchestra, dancing and eyes meeting across the room; we see smart embossed leather seats in hotels and dusty beams inside convents.

In the midst of all such scenes are the great events and mysteries of mankind: birth, adolescence, adulthood, sexual union, parenthood, illness and death with the human attempt to idealise each stage with baptism, confession, communion, marriage, Holy Orders, the sacrament of the sick and of the dead.

When considered as a whole there is an element of genuine interest and appreciation in studying mankind. Banalities are shown to have a certain charm for reflecting mankind at their most human. Both charm and repulsion, however, are always understated.

They are conveyed only when the picture is considered as a whole or through the ambiguity of the imagery. The thirteen poems entitled "Dimanches" illustrate this ambiguity. It is around this title that a complex imagery is built equating Sunday with mankind on the one hand and, on the other, with the mental, physical and spiritual state of the poet.

In the picture of humanity Sunday equals total comfort. Man is freed from weekly concerns and is granted divine permission to indulge his senses: taste and smell in good food, touch in the warmth and cosiness of a comfortable family room, hearing and sight on well-dressed girls showing off their pianistic dexterity in front of approving relatives. Mankind is shown to have a comfortable idealism in the belief that an ideal way of life is realisable simply by following the precepts of the Christian Churches. Their ideal is celebrated with bell-ringing, psalms and hymns and a gathering of friends. Such practices guarantee respectability and social recognition.

The picture is attractive in the charm of young bourgeois girls, the refinement suggested by their piano-playing, the warmth and sense of belonging in a church congregation or family, the mental, physical and spiritual repose. It is also, however, a picture of unreflecting gentility. There is too great an ease in the acceptance of an established code, in the unquestioning certainty. Idealism is equated with a respectable family home, a song filled church whilst metaphysical problems on the meaning of life, the quest for goodness and the rejection of facile solutions are ignored. Instead of rising to an ideal, man has brought the ideal to a human level:

O Dimanches bannis

De l'Infini

Dimanches citoyens

Bien quotidiens

*De cette école à vieux cancans, la vieille Europe,
Où l'on tourne, s'en tricotant des amours myopes...*

*Oh! tout Lois sans appel,
Je sais, ce Ciel
Et non un brave toit de famille, un bon dôme
Où s'en viennent mourir, très-appréciés, nos psaumes!*

*C'est fort beau comme fond
A certains fronts,
Des Lois! et pas de plus bleue matière à diplômes... (53)*

The ideal is wrapped up in Sunday rituals especially good food. Habitual Sunday practices are as mechanical as a soulless piano performance and it is a betrayal of truth to glorify such banality:

*...Avec tous ces passants cuvant en équilibre
Leurs cognacs d'Absolu, leurs pâtés d'Intrinsèque!... (54)*

*Oh! ce piano, ce cher piano,
Qui jamais, jamais ne s'arrête
Oh! ce piano qui geint là-haut
Et qui s'entête sur ma tête!*

*Ohé jeune fille au piano!
Je sais que vous n'avez point d'âme!
Puis pas donner dans le panneau
De la nostalgie de vos gammes... (55)*

From Sunday rituals to all human intercourse, mankind acts as an automaton, simply maintaining appearances and unperturbed about sincerity:

*Et l'on se salue, et l'on feint...
Et l'on s'instruit dans des écoles,*

*Et l'on s'évade, et l'on racole
De vénales et tristes filles;
Et l'on geint
En vers, en prose, au lieu de se tendre la main. (56)*

(iii) The Poet

The third picture is the poet himself as he attempts to come to terms with the world in the face of an overwhelming awareness of hostility and futility. On the one hand he represents the individual whose sensitive nature places him at odds with an unsympathetic world, a brother to the Romantic poet who believed himself to share the same incompatibility with mediocre reality. On the other, he symbolises the modern man, conscious that he has lost the heroic potential of his ancestors and has become a powerless victim of the system.

The pattern of ideas in the poems is not unusual. A young man senses his lack of place in the world. He is charmed by young women and considers the possibility of living out a life of love. Marriage appears as the socially acceptable option for doing so. The girl, however, becomes a woman, one of the species which the poet has always associated with the unthinking material world, so disillusion sets in and the poet falls into depression. Art becomes the sole redeeming factor of his life.

(a) Neurosis and Youth

The imagery surrounding the figure of the poet emphasises his youth and consequent vulnerability. From the beginning of the volume he draws attention to his orphaned state and his lack of experience of the world at large, an easy prey in the hands of aggressive nature:

*Mon père (un dur par timidité)
Est mort avec un profil sévère;*

*J'avais presque pas connu ma mère
Et donc vers vingt ans je suis resté. (57)*

Je suis trop jeune...ou trop agonisant .. (58)

.....mon sort est bien vert. (59)

Mon sort est orphelin..... (60)

His physical presence is only hinted at in reference to the tiny components which make up the body, atoms, cells and nerves, giving the impression of a highly sensitive nervous system which is on the point of breakdown. He is clearly a child of his time "un *névropathe, enfant d'un siècle trop brillant*". (61) This fragile vessel is under torture from outside and inside:

*Oyez, au physique comme au moral
Ne suis qu'une colonie de cellules (62)*

Ohé, mes petits sens hybrides! (63)

*.....le cru, quotidien, et trop voyant Présent!
...qui vous met au pied du mur
... me bat la charge et mine mes organes! (64)*

*Le moindre orgu' de Barbari
(Le pauvre!) m'empoigne aux entrailles! (65)*

*Et je bats mon rappel! et j'ulule en détresse,
Devant ce Moi, tonneau d'Ixion des Danaïdes. (66)*

The crude, mechanistic nature of the outside world together with the continual self-analysis, necessitated by the immediate need to come to terms with that world to avoid depressing isolation, has made him old before his time and irremediably weakened his body. He is permanently imprisoned in vulnerability:

.....*mon grand coeur de Paris*
Me revenait, chantant, «Oh! pas encor guéri!...» (67)

Oui, dilapidé ma jeunesse...
A regalviniser le fond si enfantin
De nos immémoriales liturgies (68)

....*Moi, dos voué sous l'A quoi Bon? (69)*

.....*Je m'exile en ma gondole*
(si frêle!) aux mouettes, aux orages (70)

A highly sensitive nervous system, the inexperience and consequent vulnerability of youth, a body drained of health emphasise the poet's fragility and the fragility of every mortal man in the face of an apparently all-powerful, immortal nature. All imagery denoting nature and the elements, the Barbary organ and the present which forbids any deliberation on the past or future has a weightiness and a persistent aggressivity which contrasts with the smallness of man. The distance between the two proclaims the enormous difficulty in attaining happiness.

(b) *Jeunes Filles*

All hope is not lost, however, for in the "*jeune fille*," the poet sees a figure who, while belonging to the mechanistic world symbolised by Sunday and piano-playing, shares his smallness and vulnerability, hence providing a possible bridge towards reconciliation with reality.

The vision of the girls has an insubstantiality as they are defined simply by their clothes.

Je regarde passer des tas de robes blanches! (71)

In spite of their fragility they are subject to the same aggressive force symbolised in the church bells and winter weather and become pitiful figures in a hostile environment:

*Les Vêpres carillonnent sur la ville,
Les berges sont désertes, sans idylles.*

*Passe un pensionnat (ô pauvres chairs!)
Plusieurs ont déjà leurs manchons d'hiver.*

*Une qui n'a ni manchon, ni fourrures
Fait, tout en gris, une pauvre figure.*

*Et la voilà qui s'échappe des rangs
Et court ô mon dieu, qu'est^{ce} qu'il lui prend?*

*Et elle va se jeter dans le fleuve
Pas un batelier, pas un chien Terr' Neuve (72)*

Not surprisingly this was the most favoured poem of Alain Fournier, the champion of adolescence of a later age. All adolescents are sympathetically portrayed as victims of the system.

*.....chair de pêche, âme en rougeurs!
Chair de victime aux Pubertés (73)*

Martyrs mutuels! de frère à soeur, sans Père (74)

The poet calls upon them and upon all young people to see in him a kindred spirit, born as they are into slavery:

Jeunes gens! que je vous serv' d'Ilote (75)

The joy of finding a possible link with the world leads to fantasies on his potential happiness:

*Oh! c'est pas seulement la chair,
Et c'est pas plus seulement l'âme,
C'est l'Esprit édénique et fier
D'être un peu l'Homme avec la Femme. (76)*

The escape route from isolation is found in an image which looks to the idealism of Eden. The vagueness of the idea suggests that it is simply a dream, unrealisable outside art.

He indulges in erotic fantasy, but again does not know how to make that fantasy real. He dreams and wishes for the perfect environment.

*Vers les libellules
D'un crêpe si blanc des baisers
Qui frémissent de se poser,
Venus de si loin, sur leurs bouts cicatrisés
Ces seins, déjà fondants, ondulent
D'un air somnambule...*

*Oh! que d'une haleine,
Il monte, séchant vos crachats,
Au Saint-Graal des blancs pachas,
Et n'en revienne qu'avec un plan de rachat
Pour sa petite soeur humaine
Qui fait tant de peine... (77)*

The title "Petites Misères d'Hiver" presupposes the impossibility of the perfect formula, so the only option is mutual consolation:

*Tu te pâmes, moi je me vautre
Consolons nous les uns les autres. (78)*

(c) **Marriage**

In a mood of acquiescing to compromise marriage looms as a possibility, being firmly rooted in reality, yet bringing an alliance with the attractive girls. It is an option, however, which only allows endurance of life, not enjoyment.

Passants, m'indusez point en beautés d'aventure.

Mon Destin n'en saurait avoir cure;

Je ne peux plus m'occuper que des Jeunes Filles,

Avec ou sans parfum de famille.

Vaisseaux brûlés! et à l'horizon, nul divorce!

C'est ça qui vous donne de la force

O mon seul débouché! - O mon vatout nubile!

A nous nos deux vies! Voilà notre île. (79)

Ah! non, laissons, on n'y peut rien.

Suivons-les comme de bons chiens

Couvrons de baisers leurs visages

Du moment, faisons bon ménage

Avec leurs bleus, leurs noirs mirages

Cueillons-en, puis chantons: merci c'est bien, fort bien. (80)

As he cannot find happiness in idealism he makes an alliance with reason. Marriage is as alluringly attractive as the girls:

Mariage, ô dansante bouée

Peinte d'azur, de lait doux, de rose (81)

but only to one who has nothing else:

..un pauvre, un pâle, un piètre individu (82)

Fantasy and dream are temporarily absorbed by reality:

*Cueillons sans espoirs et sans drames,
La chair vieillit après les roses;
Oh! parcourons le plus de gammes!
Car il n'y a pas autre chose. (83)*

(d) *"Stabilité, ton nom est femme"*

The final blow to his reverie is the surfacing awareness that he is deceived in believing that the *jeune fille* shares his vulnerability and insecurity. The girl will become a woman who, according to the poet's philosophy is controlled by the fixed rationale behind nature as a whole. Her appearance and function have all the weight of familiarity and eternity, whilst mere man is a servant to her needs.

*Si mon Air vous dit quelque chose
Vous auriez tort de vous gêner
Je ne fais pas à la pose;
Je suis la Femme, on me connaît.*

*Nos armes ne sont pas égales,
Pour que je vous tende la main,
Vous n'êtes que de naïfs mâles
Je suis l'Eternel Féminin! (84)*

Woman and nature unite as a single powerful enemy.

*Et la Nature est une épouse
Qui nous carambole d'extases,
Et puis nous occit peu courtoise
Dès qu'on se permet une pause. (85)*

(e) Spleen

The poet moves from a sense of alienation to hopeful reverie which disintegrates into reluctant resignation and returns finally to the same sense of incompatibility with life and of hopelessness. This cycle of disappointment creates a claustrophobic world symbolised in a Laforguian Sunday.

*C'est l'automne, l'automne, l'automne...
Le grand vent et toute sa séquelle!
Rideaux tirés, clôture annuelle! (86)*

Sunday is characterised by an overpowering sense of imprisonment in contrast to the visions of Eden, the isle of Cythera and of the freedom-giving boats of his short-lived optimism. The outside world is reduced to the dimensions of a parish.

Oh! J'ai tant pleuré, dimanche, en mon paroissien! (87)

As the day of inaction and of closed shops everyone is shut indoors.

*Fuir? où aller, par ce printemps?
Dehors, dimanche rien à faire...
Et rien à fair' non plus dedans
Oh! rien à faire sur la Terre. (88)*

The poet is imprisoned in the impossibility of resolving his perpetual analysis of himself and the world. His mind is crowded out with movement allowing no opportunity for mental ease. We are reminded of the nightmarish description of spleen by Baudelaire when a nest of spiders take over his brain:

*J'ai mille oiseaux de mer d'un gris pâle,
Qui nichent au haut de ma belle âme,*

*Ils en emplissent les tristes salles
De rythmes pris aux plus fines lames...*

*Or ils salissent tout de charognes,
Et aussi de coraux, de coquilles;
Puis volent en ronds fous et se cognent
A mes probes lambris de famille.... (89)*

The perpetual drip from a gutter and the banging of a shutter with the suggestion of a poor dwelling in need of repair torture his solitude. He is not only shut in, but engulfed in a hell of mental agitation.

*Va, et les gouttières de l'ennui!
Ca goutte, goutte sur ma nuque...
Ca claque, claque à petit bruit
Oh! ça claquera jusque...jusque?... (90)*

Mankind offers no consolation only torturing his solitude even more by the tolling of bells.

*Les nasillardes cloches des dimanches
A l'étranger
Me font que j'ai de la vache enragée. (91)*

The persistent bells, the dampness of wintry weather and the suggestion of the unavoidable winter illnesses reinforce the sense of imprisonment and torture.

*Je m'ennuie, natal! je m'ennuie,
Sans cause bien appréciable;
Que bloqué par les boues, les dimanches, les pluies,
En d'humides tabacs ne valant pas le diable. (92)*

The hero speaks of a complete mental blockage concerning anything to do with sentiment. At this stage he silences the

voice of instinct, the call to be charmed and to seek out the pleasurable aspects of life. In speaking of love, therefore, the lover is depicted by her eyes alone. The eyes replace the whole body. The poet captures the anxiety of being stared at and uncomfortably reduced, emptied of significance in a purely visual assessment:

*Et c'est ma destinée incurable et dernière
D'épier un battement à Moi! de tes paupières(93)*

*.....elle viendrait à Moi! les yeux bien fous!
Et elle me suivrait avec cet air partout! (94)*

*Et ces autels bâtis de nos terreurs de cieux
Sont des comptoirs où tu nous marchandes tes yeux(95)*

Laforgue previews the eyes which torture Alfred Prufock in a later age:

*And I have known the eyes already, known them all-
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin(96)*

The mental agitation and claustrophobia are the product of indecision over whether he should proclaim a philosophy of nihilism and risk missing out on life or simply follow the crowd, sacrificing his strong sense of uniqueness. Symbols of indecision abound. The poet is a weathercock, blown, in all directions with no possibility of standing still:

*..... je vivotte, vivotte
Bonne girouette aux trent'six saisons,
Trop nombreux pour dire oui ou non... (97)*

The poet sets out to catch a train and deliberately misses it, he writes a letter then tears it up, he refuses to embark on a boat, then calls it back once it has left the port and it is too late:

....le bateau parti, j'ulule: Oh! recommence(98)

*J'aurai passé ma vie à faillir m'embarquer
Dans de bien funestes histoires,
Pour l'amour de mon coeur de Gloire!
- Oh! qu'ils sont chers les trains manqués
Où j'ai passé ma vie à faillir m'embarquer.*

Mon coeur est vieux d'un tas de lettres déchirées. (99)

Marriage could bring comfort to his solitude whilst individualism destroys any notion of love's possibility. Once again the dilemma is unresolved. The pendulum motion of his thoughts is summed up in the image of a swing.

*Chair de l'autre sexe! Élément non-moi!
Chair vive de vingt ans poussés loin de ma bouche...
Je me prouve qu'elle est! - puis ne sait qu'en croire
Et je revois mes chemins de Damas
Au bout desquels c'était encore les balançoires
Provisoires...
Et je me récuse et je me débats!
Fou d'un art à nous deux! et fou de célibats(100)*

(f) Evasion into art

An expression of genuine anguish is too close to a romantic effusion from the heart, so the only option for a decadent hero, if he is not to appear like a weak effeminate Romantic, is to reject nature and reality and turn to artifice. Reality is banal, but art can embellish it to an acceptable even admirable degree. Art thereby becomes an acceptable pastime and a means of elevating

all the poet's thoughts and actions, however commonplace the content, to something of value.

Finding reality unattractive the poet had turned to art at an early age, a move sanctioned by the code of superior decadent individuals, dandyism. He refuses to listen to "Le Démon de la Vérité" and dispassionately indulges his love of art:

*Noble et lent, vais me remettre
A la culture des Belles-Lettres. (101)*

Only books can modify the mediocrity of the world and mankind's unthinking acceptance of supposed norms.

*- Il faut répéter ces choses! Il faut qu'on tette
Ces choses! Jusqu'à ce que la Terre se mette*

*-Voyant enfin que Tout vivotte sans Témoin,
A vivre aussi pour Elle, et dans son petit coin!*

*-Et c'est bien dans ce sens, moi qu'au lieu de me taire.
Je persiste à narrer mes petites affaires. (102)*

At times he finds the mission too great a task:

*Je suis si exténué d'art
Me répéter oh! mal de tête (103)*

This does not prevent him from leaving the answer to the last question of the volume in the hands of art:

*(Oh! pourrions-nous pas, par nos phrases,
Si bien lui retourner les choses,
Que cette marâtre jalouse
N'ait plus sur nos rentes de prise? (104)*

Ultimately he dedicates his ephemeral life to equally ephemeral art:

*«Acceptez je vous prie,
«O Chimère fugace
«Au moins la dédicace
«De ma vague vie?... (105)*

With such musings he escapes reality and avoids action.

Art and the *jeunes filles* represent escapism, and compared with the hostile picture of nature and reality, possess an insubstantial quality. They offer mere pastimes from which it is questionable that anything of value can be gained and a temporary respite from the pain of existence.

Conclusion

Laforgue's earliest collection of poems reproduces the eloquence and erudition of the Parnassians. In "Les Complaintes" he moves away from rhetoric, satirising such pomposity and self-consciousness in poetry by the merciless rhythms of children's songs. In "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame La Lune" and "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", philosophy is presented via the symbolism, the ambiguity of which leaves a permanent sense of inconclusiveness. In this respect Laforgue presents life's richness and complexity without subjecting it to intellectual compartmentalisation.

The absolute notions of purity and earthly corruption are dissolved as Laforgue comes to terms with reality. The picture of mankind as unthinking automatons, the overriding presence of hostility and aggression in the view of nature and the disillusion with love implies a strong commitment to the fashionable pessimistic philosophy of the age. Simultaneously, however, artistic beauty is captured in visions of local girls, in the pouring rain, in the earnestness of town life, in the whole range

of human interaction. Life for once is seen as an adventure to be savoured and is not as unattractive as Laforgue would have it appear.

The combination of commonplace imagery with the more obscure symbolism of "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" results in a fragile universe which is neither wholly surrealistic, nor wholly a slice of life. The two worlds co-exist awkwardly when considered as a whole. In this way Laforgue captures on the one hand the ambiguous nature of the imaginative world of the individual, the elusiveness of dream, the unlimited freedom of personal fantasising, the irreducible complexity of the unconscious mind. On the other hand he presents a series of familiar scenes and objects, examples from everyone's actual experience of life, the physical as opposed to mental or spiritual make-up of experience. In this way Laforgue presents a masterly evocation of life in a synthesis of everyone's conscious and subconscious contact with reality.

CHAPTER FOUR

PIERROT AND HAMLET

(i) Decadent Self-Portraiture

The egocentricity which dominates decadent thought and practice demanded exploration of the ego and self-revelation above all else. The individual sought to display his own uniqueness, his superiority and separation from common humanity. Personal revelation, however, could not be the obvious guiding principle of creative work. The characteristic confessions of Romanticism were no longer fashionable and had to be flouted in accordance with the decadent rejection of accepted art and values. To resolve this conflict Laforgue hides his decadent egocentricity behind the double mask of a well-known theatrical character, Pierrot and a great hero of literature, Hamlet.

Pierrot and Hamlet are given a fresh interpretation invested with Laforgue's own personality, preoccupations and situation. Laforgue and those close to him readily acknowledged the element of self-portraiture in his creations. In a letter to Gustave Kahn he wrote: *"Avant d'être dilettante et Pierrot, j'ai séjourné dans le cosmique"*. (1) After his death his brother Emile described the story "Hamlet" as a portrait of Laforgue himself:

"Pour le connaître vous n'avez qu'à lire son Hamlet. Il est là tout entier. C'est lui qu'il a peint. La ressemblance est frappante." (2)

Laforgue's unique interpretation of Pierrot is his most memorable creation. In the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a proliferation of Pierrot literature, but Laforgue's Pierrot above all others captures our interest, and retains a freshness which has allowed it to live on whilst others have faded into obscurity. Similarly, his reinterpretation of "Hamlet" has the

universal relevance of Shakespeare's rendering. One hundred years after its composition, the words of Hamlet are peculiarly modern and relevant, as outlined by a French actor who took on the character of Laforgue's Hamlet in a solitary one hour performance:

Un an avant sa mort de tuberculose, Laforgue en 1886 a 26 ans et il se cache derrière le masque d'Hamlet pour crier au monde son désarroi, la désespérance, son pessimisme décadent, mais aussi sa révolte contre la Bêtise, la cruauté, la lâcheté politique, sociale, humaine et même sexuelle de ses contemporains. Aujourd'hui, cent ans plus tard n'est-ce pas le même cri que chacun de nous a envie de hurler devant la perte de toutes les valeurs et l'effondrement de l'occident?(3)

Laforgue's Pierrot and Hamlet are victims of the spiritual malaise characteristic of their creator and of the age. They provide an outlet for an expression of sentimental and metaphysical pessimism, allowing Laforgue to "unpack his heart in words" without sounding too laboured. This was the chief weakness of "le Sanglot de la Terre", where an adolescent bewilderment with the world is conveyed in effusive philosophical agonising. A clown and literary hero, however, possess liberties which a poet does not have, being free to indulge in self-pity, to confess sins openly, and to exit from the scene once matters become complicated. Laforgue is able to become a Narcissus figure, a genuine dandy, without being accused of excessive vanity, or of cultivating a Romantic confessional spirit.

(ii) The Evolution of Pierrot and Hamlet Symbolism

a) Pierrot

The modern image of Pierrot as a sad, dreamy doll, shy, self-deprecating and other-worldly, has eroded the richness of symbolism which enabled the nineteenth-century Pierrot to sustain a varied and complex identity. The proliferation of pierrots in

popular posters and cards has resurrected his eternal appeal, emphasising the dreamy melancholia. The Pierrot of the late twentieth century is that summed up by Tournier:

Comme la lune, comme la chouette, Pierrot était timide, silencieux, fidèle et secret. Il préférait l'hiver à l'été, la solitude à la société, et plutôt que de parler - ce qui lui coûtait et dont il s'acquittait mal - il aimait mieux écrire, ce qu'il faisait à la chandelle, avec une immense plume, adressant à Colombine de longues lettres qu'il ne lui envoyait pas, persuadé qu'elle ne les lirait pas. (4)

Pierrot originated from the Italian "Commedia dell'arte" in which he was characterised by immense stupidity and clumsiness. The figure was popularised in France during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Popular songs associated Pierrot with the moon and he eventually became confused by the painters of the "Fêtes Galantes" with Gilles, a naive fair ground figure, now passed on to posterity in Watteau's painting of that name.

During the nineteenth century the extensive interest in the clown-figure in literary circles, made Pierrot a recognizable type, not only in the popular tradition of circuses, but in the more esoteric creations of the world of art. This interest was largely propagated by the presentation of Pierrot at the "Théâtre des Funambules" where the figure was subject to a variety of interpretations. From 1819 Gaspard Deburau acted the part of Pierrot. He was praised by such leading writers of the time as Balzac, Nerval, and Georges Sand. The character became a fixed type. He wore a white calicot shirt with long wide sleeves and a black skull cap. Gaspard portrayed him as a representative of the suffering people, a dark, misanthropic figure whose closeness to the underworld of circus life was underlined when the actor was found guilty of murder. Pierrot is no longer simply a personification of naïvety but is thoroughly worldly-wise. His son, Charles, possessed none of the brutal vitality of his father

and adopted an aristocratic and neurotic profile. Pierrot's clothes became more refined and his role more abstract as he chose to throw into relief the competing claims of life and art. He became a representative of the misunderstood artist who felt acutely the pain of existence. The melancholic clown-like disguise hid an element of mystery and cunning. This element of mystery allowed writers to project different states of mind in the character of Pierrot rendering him a highly malleable figure. Legrand took over from Charles and sentimentalized the role becoming the tearful and inadequate adolescent akin to Tournier's Pierrot.

As a result of such interpretations, Pierrot was associated with the popular and farcical tradition of circus-life with its taste for brashness and vulgarity, the other-worldly art of Watteau, a strong element of eighteenth century "sensiblerie" and the aristocratic sophistication of a "fin-de-siècle" dandy.

Laforgue had long displayed an interest in clowns. The circus features in one of his earliest works "Stephane Vassilieu". Stephane runs away from school in the hope of securing a role as a clown in a travelling circus. Like Stephane, Laforgue identifies with a clown. In a letter to Sanda Mahali he speaks of his affinity for the figure:

Les clowns me paraissent arriver à la vraie sagesse. J'aurais dû être clown, j'ai manqué ma destinée. (5)

He wrote enthusiastically to his sister of his new-found style of writing:

Je possède ma langue d'une façon plus clownesque. (6)

Other letters from Berlin tell of his frequent visits to circuses.

Current Pierrot literature stimulated his interest in the figure. His admiration for Verlaine led to the reading of "Fêtes Galantes" wherein Pierrot is a phantom, reminding the world of lost happiness and lost innocence like Watteau's Gilles. His favourite poems of Baudelaire concern the moon, the conventional background of Pierrot.

Laforgue's development of Pierrot symbolism is one of the many contemporary works in which the clown is given a decadent rendering, a satire on conventional Pierrot symbolism closely associated with the cult of dandyism and Schopenhauerian pessimism. In Gautier's "Pierrot Posthume" the otherworldliness of the symbolism is satirised with a Pierrot who is simultaneously dead and alive. In Huysman's "Pierrot Sceptique" the symbolism takes a diabolical turn with Pierrot dressed as a murderer in black.

In Laforgue's works Pierrot first appears in "Pierrot Fumiste", an unfinished play written in 1881. He is the hero in three of "Les Complaintes" and in "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" Pierrot is a central figure throughout. The sophistication of nineteenth century dandyism and the nostalgia and sense of a paradise lost evoked by Watteau's Gilles unite in the Pierrot of "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" after which he loses his other-worldliness and becomes a thoroughly human Hamlet.

b) Hamlet

Shakespeare's play enjoyed considerable renown during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Initially the play was measured according to the rules of Aristotle and was therefore considered structurally unsound, but interest eventually turned to the hero himself. The attitude was coloured by the ethos of the age of enlightenment. Hamlet's inability to act or behave reasonably made him "sensible" in the fullest eighteenth century sense. Gradually sympathy marked the interpretation of the hero.

Hamlet became the luckless victim of fate, the sensitive individual caught up in the instability of metaphysical doubt, the artist and dreamer longing for an absolute only to be met by earthly corruption, so sinking into melancholy and inertia. Hamlet became the ancestor of René, the literary representative of nineteenth century man.

Later in the century critics replaced a historical or scientific approach for the subjectivism of the Romantics. Taine's assessment marks the determinism and psychological approach of his method. Hamlet is now diagnosed as a victim of late nineteenth century neurosis, a nervous machine governed by a temperament subject to hallucinations, carried by passions, and lacking self-control. The positivist interpretation of the play saw Hamlet as a weak character by the preponderance of speech and thought over action in his behaviour. Decadent consciousness would readily reinterpret both assessments for its own purposes. Neurosis would now be considered not as a weakness, but a sign of greatness. Excessive philosophizing and inaction are admirable. If Hamlet was to be a hero in an age of decadence he was necessarily a neurotic nihilist believing only in his own superiority, the very rendering of the character that we find in Laforgue.

The aspects of Shakespeare's Hamlet which Laforgue chose to transpose in his own work are the youth of the hero, the philosophical agonising, the nobility of character, and the movement towards greater maturity. Shakespeare's Hamlet is initially the greater character for he is suffering as a result of his father's murder and the untimely marriage of his mother. The Hamlet of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" has no apparent justification for his sick mind. It is true that his mother and father are dead leaving him an orphan to contend with the demons and examinations of the world, but this is not a situation as extraordinary as the hero he emulates. In the story, the closeness to the plot of Shakespeare is greater. Hamlet seeks

revenge for the death of his father by modelling his step-father in clay. Hamlet's dilatoriness is mirrored in the ease by which he forgets to turn the needles to speed up his father's death. "To be or not to be" is translated as "*Un héros ou simplement vivre*" (?), making his preoccupations potentially heroic. The poet/hero of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", however, has transposed the dilemmas of the hero to the commonplace indecision over marriage. Will the happiness of achievement be greater for conforming to social demands and settling down, or by making a more individualistic statement in the choice of celibacy, asserting his personal strength in not needing a companion, and thereby possessing the greatness associated with the choice of a celibate life?

Such a transposition of the plot echoes decadent practice. Heroism becomes anti-heroism. A hero can no longer be intrinsically great. The heroism to which he aspires is an inglorious state, unworthy of any absolute interpretation. The attack on accepted values extended to views of greatness. Laforgue's Hamlet is great in a decadent sense. The crusade he pursues is the only one available in an age of decadence. He aspires to personal enrichment; he remains uncommitted to society; he is fully human in his failure and indecision. In a world where absolutes have disappeared, the only choice is to live spontaneously following the dictates of a moment, hence the impossibility of an absolute resolution of any dilemma.

c) Pierrot and Hamlet as role-models

Hamlet is forced into greatness by his imprisonment in literature. He is great for the sake of humanity rather than for himself in order to realise a concept of idealism and heroism. Likewise the clown exists for the sake of others. As an eternal victim of circumstances, yet eternally resilient, he acts for the amusement of humanity with his farcical antics, and for moral improvement with his paradoxical, critical observation of society.

As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, the original Imitation by Thomas à Kempis, emphasised the virtue of the clown's role, by recalling St. Paul's exhortation to become a fool for Christ's sake. (8) Pierrot lives for others rather than for himself. He becomes a Christ-like figure by experiencing greater suffering in shouldering the woes of common humanity. While aware that circumstances fall far from the ideal, he remains optimistic forever ready to cause laughter through his tears. In clinging to some concept of the absolute he reaches heroic status, for thereby he can save mankind from total mediocrity.

The philosophy of Schopenhauer and Hartmann would do little to temper the heroism evident in clown symbolism or in the melancholic individual who is unable to partake in conventionally heroic action. From the philosophers Laforgue had learnt that as an intellectual, his life would be inevitably difficult, but he could find consolation in the thought that the more acutely he felt the pain of existence, the nearer he would be to genius. Artistic alienation could be readily symbolised in the suffering figure of the clown or of Hamlet. If merit was found in being an outsider, heroism would entail success in remaining so, refusing to converse with common humanity except on one's own terms. The fear of losing touch with an absolute and hence losing heroic status, and the supreme value given to celibacy and of general dissociation from common humanity, would find a fashionable outlet in the cult of dandyism. Pierrot and Hamlet are classic dandies of the age and therefore intrinsically heroic. Laforgue in his creations shares Baudelaire's opinion of the dandy as a figure illustrating "*le dernier éclat d'héroïsme dans les décadences*". (9)

(iii) Laforgue's Interpretations

Laforgue's characterisation of Pierrot and Hamlet completes the process of analysis devoted to the characters throughout a century in which they held such a prominent position in art. They not only provide a disguise for the author, but they show a writer

in touch with his times, aware of literary fashions and with a full understanding of the ethos of his age. They illustrate, moreover, Laforgue's artistic preoccupations as powerful symbols. Each character reinforces Laforgue's vision of paradox. They are, therefore, much more than modish literary exercises, as they provide in themselves a résumé of the most interesting aspects of Laforgue's achievement.

a) Pierrot

Pierrot Fumiste

In "Pierrot Fumiste" the plot is simple, reflecting the simplicity of action in all of Laforgue's poetry, emphasis being given to psychological behaviour. Pierrot gets married, but decides immediately against consummation of the marriage. After two months his mother-in-law takes out a court case against him demanding separation. He finally takes advantage of his position as a husband, only to leave immediately afterwards, never to return.

Pierrot concedes to marriage only as an idealised Platonic union. Sexuality breaks up what is conceived as an ideal and Pierrot escapes from its disturbing presence. Two themes of Laforgue's poetry are first met in this play. Sexuality is a force to be feared and it stands in opposition to love.

Grojanowski outlines the themes in his introduction to the play:

"Pierrot Fumiste" apparait remarquablement représentatif d'une préoccupation fondamentale qui s'y trouve explicitée en clair. Le personnage extériorise la permanence d'un conflit: la femme et l'amour l'attirent, alors que la sexualité l'effraye. Son comportement résulte du jeu de force antagoniste: fascination et répulsion-fascination pour une Colombinette de rêve, la jeune fille chaste et pure, répulsion pour la femme de chair dont la

nature sensuelle s'avoue dans le désir et dans l'attente de la consommation. (10)

The dialectic nature of the play establishes the contradictory nature of Pierrot as he is later developed in "Les Complaintes" and "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune":

Fascination et répulsion, poursuite et dérobade, attente et fuite, définissent un comportement qui mène à l'angélisme..... Pour Laforgue, en matière de passion, on ne saurait trouver de salut dans la conquête mais dans la quête ou dans la fuite. (11)

Les Complaintes

In "Les Complaintes" the Pierrot poems are grouped together under the headings of "Complainte de Lord Pierrot", "Autre Complainte de Lord Pierrot" and "Complainte des Noces de Pierrot". The titles show Pierrot's affinity with the English aristocracy, the stereotyped habits of whom were absorbed into "fin-de-siècle" dandyism. Women, love and sexuality figure prominently as in "Pierrot Fumiste", but a further dimension is added as the idea of costume is developed. Dressing up not only applies to appearance, but to attitude, behaviour and language.

*Au clair de la lune,
Mon ami Pierrot
Filons, en costume
Présider là haut!
Ma cervelle est morte.
Que le Christ l'emporte!
Béons à la lune,
La bouche en zéro. (12)*

"Filons en costume" encompasses every aspect of his life. Nothing can be interpreted as a pure statement, for every utterance hides other meanings, which are ambiguous or even

contradictory. The underlying principle of dialectic continues, therefore in the opposition between appearance and reality. Like a circus clown Pierrot reveals truths via comedy, and the comedy of truth, tragedy being absorbed by comedy and *vice versa*.

A vigorously anti-intellectual stance is established by a parody of the famous Pierrot folk-song. He has no love of intellectualism so he adopts a stance which the world can only call idiotic. The poem moves from generalisation to self-revelation, from universal to particular, resulting in a pendulum motion in the flow of the poem. This is further complicated by a series of clashes in tone, form and content: religious invocation follows a child's song, philosophical reflection follows self-eulogy and erotic fantasy, the lyricism of sixteenth century love poetry clashes with a suggestion of frenzied sexual activity. The voice of reason is a presence amidst agonising, dreams and world-weariness.

The words of the song outline the state towards which Pierrot aspires. He desires to be emptied of consciousness, of reason and to give himself over to chance. The facets of his own personality intervene in his quest, the belief in his superiority, his association with art, his addiction to love. He is drawn by the latter only to meet with disillusion and proof of the intrinsic failure of any love affair. He reasserts his own importance, but the eulogy is a weak echo of the opening confidence, a bright lamp has become a dulled Chinese lantern.

*J'ai le coeur chaste et vrai comme une bonne lampe;
Oui, je suis en taille-douce, comme une estampe. (13)*

*-J'ai le coeur triste comme un lampion forain...
Bah! j'irai passer la nuit dans le premier train; (14)*

Pierrot attempts to escape the rational world, giving himself over to spontaneity. The failure is revealed as he abdicates

responsibility for the decision by taking the next train which comes, leaving the scene reverberating with a rhyming couplet which empties of meaning on repetition becoming a jingle.

*Sûr d'aller, ma vie entière,
Malheureux comme les pierres. (Bis) (15)*

He is weary of dream, yet he defies the call to be reasonable by handing himself over to chance. While this is an assertion of freedom, it is contradicted by a mechanistic assessment of the universe. Pierrot has a role which he attempts to adopt, thus expressing his freedom, but he appears to be trapped like a puppet. As a symbol of man's condition we see man forced into passivity, while simultaneously reasserting his free will. In a single poem the complexity of Pierrot as a symbol is realised.

In the next poem Pierrot reasserts his freedom. Paradoxically, however, it is only by acting out of character, adopting a particular stance that he achieves freedom and control and escapes the strings of determinism. It is in his nature to have difficulty adopting a particular stance and viewing the world solely from that point. In this poem, he is proud, arrogant, superior and detached and totally in control. The frustration present in the first *complainte* has disappeared and we are shown Pierrot coming to grips with a hostile world, by meeting it on its own terms. He asserts his independence of social conditioning and exhibits pride in his unique position of being able to control his own destiny. He wallows in the fantasy that there will always be women to love him though denying their importance to him. The poem is a powerful nihilistic statement.

*Celle qui doit me mettre au courant de la Femme!
Nous lui dirons d'abord, de mon air le moins froid:
«La somme des angles d'un triangle, chère âme,
«Est égale à deux droits.»*

*Et si ce cri lui part: « Dieu de Dieu! que je t'aime!
_ «Dieu reconnaîtra les siens.» Ou piquée au vif:
_ «Mes claviers ont du coeur, tu seras mon seul thème.»
Moi: «Tout est relatif.»*

*De tous ses yeux, alors! se sentant trop banale:
«Ah! tu ne m'aimes pas; tant d'autres sont jaloux!»
Et moi, d'un oeil qui vers l'Inconscient s'emballe:
«Merci, pas mal; et vous?»*

*-«Jouons au plus fidèle! _ «A quoi bon, ô Nature!
-«Autant à qui perd gagne!» Alors autre couplet;
-«Ah ! tu te lasserai le premier, j'en suis sûre...»
- «Après vous s'il vous plaît»*

*Enfin, si, par un soir, elle meurt dans mes livres,
Douce; feignant de n'en pas croire encor mes yeux,
J'aurai un: «Ah ça, mais, nous avons de Quoi vivre!
«C'était donc sérieux?» (16)*

Love is no more than a mathematical equation: all ideals are doomed by the dominance of relativity. The emptiness and calculation of social intercourse make communication impossible. Fundamental human concern for others is denied existence by total self-centredness. Pierrot cultivates the cold science of egoism, deliberate misunderstanding, and is enveloped in the science of relativity. In so doing he asserts his freedom from external stimuli unlike the rest of mankind who remain automatons in their blind acceptance of normal procedures. Such procedures only have a place in the lives of common humanity. Pierrot will not condescend to their level. In a disdainful dismissal of all the values mankind holds dear, he professes to abdicate from the mechanistic universe and can therefore lay claim to the highest superiority.

The triumph of freedom continues in the next Pierrot poem. He has entered the scene as an anti-intellectual. He now becomes increasingly anti-bourgeois as the mouthpiece of decadent antagonism. The poem is so exaggerated in its metaphors that it degenerates into a modish literary exercise. Pierrot pursues excess in a matter-of-fact attitude to rape. He descends from his lofty pinnacle of detachment and actually becomes involved. In true decadent fashion Laforgue distorts the familiar conception of the figure, who would not be expected to indulge in physical relationships with a woman. She was traditionally conceived by Pierrot as a remote, untouchable figure. Here, religious and erotic vocabulary come together in a violent evocation of sexual intercourse. Pierrot attempts to destroy the mystique surrounding woman by considering her in a purely physiological light, but fails, leaving the scene on a note of uneasy sentimentality. The sense of failure hints at a desire for affection and a relationship on a plane apart from the violence present in this poem. Such failure casts doubt yet again on his freedom.

These three poems concerning Pierrot clearly illustrate the malleability and the complexity of the image. Pierrot is at once the eternal *ingénu* who is forever dreaming, the sophisticated intellectual affecting complete control over his destiny, and a Don Juan figure confident of his virility and his social, mental and spiritual superiority. Pierrot, however, is none of these figures in themselves. He rather adopts the roles, his participation in life being limited to performing. Pierrot is continually making choices, continually searching for means with which to pass his time, whilst always asserting that any choice he makes is only a toy. His surrounding world, therefore, is one of hesitancy and procrastination, for to be positive in any choice would be to ape mankind and to condemn himself to some form of commitment. The position is highly unstable and Laforgue's poetic universe takes on the fragmentary nature of the hero, his pallor, the vagueness of his *raison d'être*, his deathlike passivity and the ambiguity of his smile.

L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune

In "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune", Pierrot occupies centre stage as the mouthpiece of a pervasive nihilistic philosophy. A goddess of sterility, silence and immobility encapsulates Pierrot's gestures. Pierrot can only play with time until he is swallowed back into a void.

Up to this point Laforgue wrote as if the nihilistic stance was self-justifying. The philosophy of Schopenhauer taught Laforgue that the artist and the intellectual were superior beings and that those who dissociated themselves from the normal concerns of life were closer to heroism. "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" begins on the realisation that philosophical detachment is as empty of meaning and as ridiculous as the amorous sighs of Pierrot's Colombines. The debate of love versus sexuality of "Pierrot Fumiste" and "Les Complaintes" is transposed to a debate between heroism and compromise, aestheticism and convention. Behind the debate is a powerful nihilistic statement symbolised by the lunar landscape. Laforgue's imaginative universe has become more abstract, even more claustrophobic, as in realising the full significance of the nihilist stance, he speaks of the impossibility of reaching optimistic conclusions. It is a world where the only supporting structure is a void.

The hero appears dressed in the familiar long white robes and black skull cap, the pale face, the blank impassive eyes and small dainty mouth. This is no commonplace Pierrot, however, but one well versed in the science of the dandy, that of clothes. In true dandy fashion dress does not offer an end in itself, but suggests a correspondence with his inner thoughts. Pierrot advertises his noble preoccupation with eternal questions by wearing an Egyptian scarab, a symbol of the cyclical processes of nature, and a dandelion in his buttonhole. Pierrot is known for his attachment to absolutes, so here he feeds on the blue, but by way of an apology, his earthly connections are underlined when we learn that

rice, mandarins and hard-boiled eggs also form a part of his staple diet.

The preciousness of the image is evident in the clinical assessment of his appearance which draws attention to the specific shape of his face, his mouth and nose, with descriptions coined in learned classical terms recalling and satirising the pretentiousness of scientific jargon. Having considered appearance and diet, he continues with a medical assessment. An internal examination reveals a tattoo on the heart. If anything is close to the heart of Pierrot, it is his relentless fatalism and his obsession with sexuality. "Faut mourir frères" is tattooed to his heart, a motto described as the cry of the Bacchantes revealing a view of life dominated by sexuality and death. The next move is inevitably the appearance of woman on the scene in the guise of a dead virgin. Mindful of his rightful role, Pierrot follows the procession, gliding along with his neck held upright like a beautiful candle, a conveyance of his dutiful respect. As with everything else, dealings with woman are wearisome tasks. He reluctantly complies with a role imposed upon him, exhibiting the most refined of manners. His characteristic polish even reaches his education, his breadth of knowledge ranging from ancient history to modern sociology.

To complete the picture of Pierrot, Laforgue moves from job-description to use of leisure time. Pierrot strolls in the park falling in love only with those statues who wear clothes, illustrating his allegiance once again to dandy law and his stand against Taine whose concept of hierarchy in art was headed by the Greek nude. Taine believed clothes to be a superficial aspect of art, indicative only of changes in fashion.

When conversing with women Pierrot gives the impression of being elsewhere. He earnestly asks for nothing; he half-heartedly swears his love. While powerful in his misogynistic theorising he suddenly becomes a timid outcast, unique for his purity and his

consequent need for protection. Contradiction is the essence of his character.

Pierrot may appear to uphold the principles of his sermons, but in his world it is not unusual for issues, like the roles he adopts, to be temporarily laid aside. Any absolute only exists part-time. In the following Pierrot poem, "On a des principes" noble sentiments and resolutions are ignored, allowing the attractiveness of woman to have the last word. Pierrot initially ridicules the habit of lovers of idealising love, considering their own experience as unique and believing in the absolute rightness of their particular relationship. He is then mollified as he muses that there is perhaps more to woman than he cares to admit. His Colombine is so vague a character that she could be any woman. After her death there will always be others of equal value to turn to. Woman, therefore, is not so much a lucid choice as yet another means of passing time, of the same status as the train at the end of the first Pierrot poem in "Les Complaintes". Pierrot is lucid in his cool dismissal of woman and yet an automaton who will take whatever comes.

The paradoxical nature of Pierrot's character is by now clearly evident. He is allowed so much, but is never given the chance to truly materialise. His presence on the scene is simultaneously an absence and so he never appears as a concrete entity. Any assertion is a negation and Pierrot is leaving the scene before truly appearing, continually receding into the void. Powerful and weak, lucid and mechanical, logical and incoherent, his childlike face becomes in no time the face of death. On the one hand he expresses a deterministic view of life with all must die forever in the forefront of his mind and his ready acceptance of whatever life offers, acting on reflex. On the other hand, however, he illustrates the triumph of lucidity and freedom of choice. He will not allow anything to impose itself on him, never committing himself, and acting life rather than living it. In so

doing he seems to live on the periphery of existence, becoming a personification of the threshold of free-will.

For Pierrot, everything that is done, said and thought is ironically translated into its opposite. He epitomises his own theorising "*le semblable, c'est le contraire*". (17) In the paradoxical complexity of Laforgue's creation, the anarchical nature of life itself is captured, the continual transition and movement, the unreliability of appearances, the total absence of stability. Laforgue's pessimism is redeemed by his belief in the relative value of art. His treatment of the Pierrot figure ultimately provides him with his own literary aesthetic, the trapping of the anarchical nature of life. Pierrot reproduces the random flow of ideas, images and actions to recreate life's anarchy, in place of the structure and logic of normal expression.

Our awareness of the complex image of Laforgue's Pierrot is an almost intangible vision, a spectral figure. The lunar backcloth which presides over his entrances and exits comes close to representing the Symbolist concept of beauty which forbade any movement which might displace its rigid geometry of silence and sterility. Laforgue goes one step further than the Symbolists. The Symbolists in their denial of the value of the material world would create artistic arrangements as proof of something beyond, a universe of mystical correspondences. Laforgue's equivalent is filled with a void, thereby illustrating the full implication of the nihilistic stance. Love, philosophy and art itself have no absolute value. Laforgue shows a world trapped within the boundaries of materialism. In the last two Pierrot poems, Pierrot shows what this means for the individual before finding refuge behind his fantastical disguise.

A sense of personal alienation dominates the two poems. Pierrot imagines a scene in which communication and mutual understanding are impossible. It is a world wherein men and women are kept apart by society's denial of all forces of love, save

those which conform to a social norm. Pierrot of the earlier poems was able to luxuriate in the knowledge that no matter how he treated woman, there would always be several who would love him. "Scène courte mais typique" demonstrates the dilemma an ostensibly sincere yet inexperienced man faces in human relationships. He admits to needing companionship as a remedy to his solitude, but finds himself tormented by the notion of the feminine *mystique*, and confused by the social graces surrounding courtship which seem to complicate what would otherwise be a simple recognition of a biological and social law. His strong sense of male superiority, fed by a misogynistic age, the assumed delicacy of his soul and his acute sensitivity, seem incompatible with a declaration of dependence of woman, yet, solitude looms as a cold option. The woman he courts leaves without acknowledging him and the commonplace problem of communication between the sexes is left unresolved.

From his earliest appearance in Laforgue's poetry Pierrot is obsessed by woman, an obsession only matched by his pursuit of philosophy. Pierrot has just allowed the attractiveness of woman to have the last word. He knows that his philosophical meanderings are no more noble than her utterances idealising love. His thoughts now concentrate on woman alone and, in a final flourish, he offers an assessment of his views in "Locutions de Pierrots" before being whirled back into the cosmos.

We are placed once again in the climate of sixteenth century love poetry as features of the landscape are transposed to woman's face. Her eyes are marshes, her lashes are reeds. We are dealing with mythological women and the great beauties of art, those women who epitomize the feminine *mystique*. Pierrot analyses the idea of woman, continually questioning her role rather than engaging in actual relationships. Woman has now taken on the characteristics of the girl-friend of the conventional pierrot, a remote, inaccessible goddess figure. Pierrot recovers wit enough to remember his allegiance to decadent ideas; while man looks to the

soul, woman provides no more than a body. Her creative power is limited to matters of a physical nature.

As Pierrot's mind is adorned with theories concerning the most inexplicable of world problems, he claims that the only way he can become involved with woman is to consider her against a background of daily routine tasks. Genuine involvement with woman has consisted either of the violence of "Complainte des nocces", or the banality of the relationship described in this poem. Neither is satisfactory and boredom sets in. It is time to turn back into himself once more. Courtship has lost its appeal, love being only another reflexion of the instability of the universe.

Pierrot is tired of his indecision, of his position as an outcast, and tired of reasoning. He longs for a golden age which for him would be one far removed from his fiercely mechanical view of the universe, far from the conventions of politeness and, perhaps above all, far from endless formulation in words. A sense of desperate loneliness is hidden in the humour of the mock medical terminology in the description of the death of a fellow Pierrot, the result of an attack of "chronique orphanisme". The gods have deserted mankind. Absolutes have disappeared and if there are any left, they are "drapés de layettes", banal and unideal. The idea of a happy couple is an illusion incompatible with an intellectual sensibility, being more akin to the background of a sentimental engraving. Robbed of the possibility of choice, Pierrot must let life take its own course. While aware that he must continue to explore the countryside and like Pan see the loss of one virgin or of one absolute, simply as a signal to seek out another, he knows it is a foregone conclusion that like everyman, he has no control.

At the inevitable failure of all relationships, he loses his role on Earth and is whirled off into the cosmos. He now lives on the moon condemned to encircle craters for eternity. For all the agonizing the image has suddenly faded away. Pierrot was never

meant to exist. He was a mere figment of the imagination, a mere legend.

b) Hamlet

Hamlet takes over at the point where Pierrot is whirled off into the cosmos. He is the kindred spirit of the vanished Pierrot. Just as Ophelia was present in the world of Pierrot, as "Ophélines en folie", Cythera, the land of Gilles and Pierrot, appears in this volume of verse. Although Pierrot has disappeared from the scene Hamlet resurrects the memory of the clown in his own appearance. Like Pierrot he does not have a strong physical presence. He is unimposing and not obviously heroic. He wears one of Pierrot's emblems "*une bague à scarabée égyptien*" (18) advertising the fact that he too is preoccupied with eternal questions and the cyclical processes of nature. He shares a love of dandyism with the clown: "*Hamlet en dandy, un pouce passé dans sa ceinture de cuir brut*" (19) and a belief that woman is an all strong physical presence empty of art.

On one occasion Hamlet appears in the guise of Pierrot as if he was a ghost resurrected from the bygone world of "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune", but this final reference to Pierrot shows to what extent the artificiality of the symbol has been reduced to a more recognisable human type. In "La Mélancolie de Pierrot" we are in the world of the reasoning conscience and the points of reference are familiar. The pierrot of "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" lived in a claustrophobic world, the direct result of his self-centredness. In this poem the hero has realised that he must give up his detachment and his egocentricity and seek to adapt himself to his surroundings. Contact with reality must come before escapist aestheticism and fantasy. In the conflicting claims of art and life, of heroism and compromise, the latter must win to avoid paralysing solitude. The hero agrees to adopt the role dictated by society in his dealings with woman. He promises life-long devotion offering himself as a brother, asking only that

woman may be rid of the apparent religious barriers surrounding her, just as he divests himself of his mask. He is tired of analysis and wants to live.

Laforgue was clearly familiar with the text of "Hamlet" and was sufficiently aware of the fashionable interest in the text to include quotes in his works from Letourneur's translation of 1882. One of the first recorded examples of such poems (17.7.1880) is dedicated to Hamlet, prince of Denmark and has allusions to the Poor Yorick scene. A poem written the following month quotes Hamlet's malaise with the world under the title of "Au lieu de songer à se créer une position". The poem juxtaposes the expedience of finding employment with the dilatoriness and dream addiction of youth, a principal theme of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté".

The character of Hamlet haunted Laforgue. The story "Hamlet ou Les Suites de la Piété Filiale" had been written for five months, when he began "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" but Hamlet continues to be the hero of poems written throughout the year. "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" have ten epigraphs from Shakespeare's "Hamlet" and open with a poem written at Elseneur where he spent "*un horrible jour de l'an*" (20) in 1886. The tone of the story is restated in the poems.

Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté

"Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" open with Ophelia's lamentation: "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!" Laforgue provides Hamlet with a reply not found in Shakespeare's play: "*Had I but time! O, I could tell you, - But let it be*". (21) Hamlet is introduced as the eternal procrastinator, noble, yet suffering under the burden of mental unease. He dwells on the possibility of communicating with Ophelia, the representative of everywoman, but does not translate his thoughts into action.

The plot of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" is dependent on mental rather than physical action, as it is held together by the turmoils of Hamlet's mind. The dilemma of the hero is two-fold. For Hamlet success in life and achievement of heroic status demands success in love and in a form of employment. The outside world is ready to impose its own criteria, but the hero cannot accept facile conformism, at least not until every possible option has been explored. The exploration of possibilities leads to a greater maturity and realism. Laforgue, like Baudelaire, sees Hamlet as a representative of the adolescent, vanished from us at life's beginning, who struggles in the pain of appearing.

The opening poem emphasises Hamlet's youth and recalls the early poem dedicated to Shakespeare's hero "Au lieu de songer à se créer une position". There is the same opposition outlined between adulthood and adolescence. In Laforgue's mind Hamlet clearly represented the struggle of the unworldly and inexperienced adolescent. Pierrot shares with Hamlet the dilemmas of adolescence, but while Laforgue's Pierrot remains rooted in the world of youth, Hamlet completes the growing-up process. Together they make poetry out of unglamorous adolescence. Laforgue's short story "Les Amours de la Quinzième Année" describes the despair and soul-searching of a fifteen year old in love. While the story is relatively insignificant in Laforgue's works, it preludes the theme of later works. Adolescence is a central concern, as Grojnowski outlines in the introduction to the story:

Dans l'oeuvre de Laforgue on ne saurait négliger tout ce qui touche à la quinzième année: l'adolescence révèle une problématique dont procèdent les Pierrot ou les Hamlet, qui sont autant de jeunes gens roués à l'échec amoureux. (22)

All quotations from Hamlet centre around the character of Ophelia, the object of Hamlet's love. She is the target of advice from Hamlet, Polonius and Laertes. Polonius represents the unreflecting gentility of the outside world and the social

standing gained by a secure job and mature years. He stands in opposition to youth through the blind certainty of his opinions, through the pride with which he upholds the empty precepts of bourgeois morality and by his freedom from burdens imposed by the adult world. Though disdained it is he who reminds Hamlet of "Le Démon de la Vérité " and "La Peur des examens sans merci". It is he who classifies Hamlet as mad and encourages Ophelia to do likewise. He is, therefore, both feared and despised.

The presence of Ophelia is ambiguous for she does not speak or act in her own right. She is given advice and acts her role as a dutiful daughter, a concerned if somewhat puzzled lover and a submissive sister. Her appearance is not limited to Shakespeares quotations. Ophelia is "La Femme mûre ou jeune fille" of the second poem entitled "Esthétique". She is the girl who commits suicide achieving the greatness of Shakespeare's heroine. She is the girl on horseback, the girl playing the piano or dutifully attending Mass every Sunday. Like Pierrot's Colombine she is silent only appearing as men would have her appear.

Laforgue includes those words of Hamlet which can be interpreted as totally misogynistic, but the obvious awareness of other possible interpretations results in ambiguity. Hamlet criticises Ophelia on several accounts, not as an individual, but as every woman. All noble sentiment in woman is fleeting:

*T'is brief my Lord
As Woman's love (23)*

In this poem the potential optimism is squashed by the epigraph. Instability dominates the images of the poem as it does the preoccupations of Hamlet. He is overcome by the permanence of instability. While woman's love is instable, she herself reflects the stability of worldly corruption, a position which Hamlet avoids by his lack of commitment to the world. "*Stabilité, ton*

nam est femine" (24) claims the Hamlet of the story, a sentiment echoed in "Esthétique":

*Nous jouissons
Elle demeure. (25)*

The corruption inherent in woman lies in sexuality and artifice. Rather than allow expression of sexuality Hamlet suggests the imprisonment of monastery walls:

To a nunnery, go. (26)

Hamlet even sides with Polonius against Ophelia as he advises him to paternalistically watch over his daughter to guard her from freedom, for fear that she might end up falling victim to her sexuality:

*Hamlet: Have you a daughter?
Polonius: I have, my lord.
Hamlet: Let her not walk i' the sun;
conception is a blessing; but not as your
daughter may conceive. (27)*

Like Polonius, Ophelia misjudges Hamlet. The volume opens with her assessment of Hamlet's behaviour as that of an "o'erthrown mind". She again passes judgement, puzzled at the merriness of Hamlet's behaviour, not seeing his joking as a facade for inner turmoil. The implication of limited intelligence is reinforced when she is shown not to understand Hamlet's sexual innuendoes:

*Hamlet: Lady, shall I lie in your lap?
Ophelia: No, my lord.
Hamlet: I mean, my head in your lap?
Ophelia: Ay, my lord.
Hamlet: Do you think I meant country matters?*



Ophelia: I think nothing my lord.

Hamlet: That's a fair thought to lie between maid's legs.

Ophelia: What is, my lord?

Hamlet: Nothing. (28)

A further suggestion of Hamlet's madness brings the accusation of her predetermined role in life, the enslaving of men:

Ophelia: You are keen, my lord, you are keen

Hamlet: It would cost you a groaning to take off my edge.

Ophelia: Still better and worse.

Hamlet: So you must take your husbands. (29)

ô petite âme brave,

ô chair fière et si droite!

C'est moi que je convoite

D'être votre esclave. (30)

The poetry surrounding the figure of the *jeune fille* which permeates the volume is considered as sham, the artifice of all females in pursuing their predetermined role:

I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another; you jig you amble and you lisp, and nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to; I'll no more on't; it hath made me mad. To a nunnery, go. (31)

The call to a nunnery appears for a third time:

Get thee to a nunnery; why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things, that it were better, my mother had not borne

me, I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious; with more offences at my beck, than I have thoughts to put them in ... to a nunnery. (32)

The dialectic nature of Pierrot's preoccupations and longings is continued in Hamlet's behaviour. The world is both frightening and attractive, love is both sought after and despised; sexuality is feared and yet remains a compulsive presence in the mind of the hero; the "settling down" entailed by marriage and a job appears mundane and yet appealing for the security it would bring and the relief from paralysing solitude. The attraction of love and security is continually denied, while remaining a powerful presence. Hamlet is trying to be what he is not. He is aspiring to the heroism of decadence, while inwardly longing for something more human. The final quotation from Shakespeare in this volume of poems illustrates the ambiguity of Hamlet's situation. It is a further attack by man on woman, but this time by Laertes, the morally upright man, a social worker in the story. He suggests that even the most virtuous of women are intrinsically weak.

*The chariest maid is prodigal enough
If she unmask her beauty to the moon. (33)*

The poet/hero attempts to yield to a particular woman, praising a chosen one. He appears to side with Laertes as the prospect of failure recurs. The insistence of instability intruding into any love affair is quietened as is Laertes' voice, hence the absolute nature of his misogyny is thrown into doubt:

*Va, ce n'est plus l'odeur de tes fourrures.
Va, vos moindres clins d'yeux sont des parjures.
Tais-toi, avec vous autres rien ne dure.*

*Tais-toi, tais-toi,
On n'aime qu'une fois. (34)*

Quotations from "Hamlet" open the "Derniers Vers". Ophelia speaks again of Hamlet's strange behaviour, Polonius assesses him unhesitatingly, whilst Hamlet restates the call to a nunnery, the evasion from the world, from sexuality and from love. The mood at the end of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", however, suggests a less uncompromising stance. If Hamlet of the story is the same character as the poet/hero of the poems, it is clear that the hero makes a stand against such absolute misogyny. He realises that his attitude is dominated by a worldly assessment as represented by the misogynistic comments of Polonius and Laertes.

This character development is certainly found in Shakespeare's play. If we are to believe Emile in his claim that Hamlet is Laforgue, the idea of change becomes increasingly credible in spite of the irresolution of the volume as a whole. It is possible to see in Hamlet of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" a character development which reflects the changed circumstances of Laforgue's life. At the beginning of 1886 he was all set for another year in Germany. By the autumn, when the later poems in the volume were written, as implied by the autumnal titles, Laforgue had decided to return to Paris to live with his English wife.

In Shakespeare there is a movement from depression and from world-weariness to composure: a movement to greater maturity. Throughout the play, Hamlet has too great a reliance on reason and too great a belief in untrammelled free will. At the end he does not surrender personal responsibility, but he realises that man is not a totally free agent. He submits to providence while remaining prepared for what it may offer.

*There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will. (35)*

When Hamlet comments on Yorick's skull it is the last comment on the discrepancy between appearance and reality. He comes to accept reality for what it is.

*There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow.
If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come,
it will be now. if it be not now, yet it will come.
The readiness is all. (36)*

Readiness means submitting to providence and being in a state of preparation. Laforgue's sensitivity to this aspect of "Hamlet" is revealed in "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" and in his story "Hamlet". While each are part of a personal search and involved in the finding of the self, they have a relevance which extends outside decadent egocentricity. At the end of the story and the poems Hamlet realises that he has been looking at life too narrowly, too egocentrically, too naively. He realises that his own notion of women and freedom of choice is tainted by the conventional banalities of the world:

.....Et moi qui croyais connaître la Femme! la Femme et la Liberté! et les salissais de banalités a priori! (37)

The desire for absolute final answers belongs to adolescence or to the unreflecting assessment of the world as found in the philosophy of Polonius, with his ready organisation of life into compact and immobile compartments. Like Ophelia, Polonius interprets Hamlet's behaviour as madness, finding no other reasonable explanation and certainly not seeing the problem as being in the world and not in Hamlet. Hamlet does not fit into Polonius's view of what is right and proper in a young man. Hamlet's greatness comes in the realisation that absolute guiding principles are irrelevant as he comes to accept life for what it is, ambiguous, unpredictable, and impossible to subject to any single formula.

Whilst Pierrot is swallowed back into the void, Hamlet continues with his questioning in "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", dying only in the story. Both symbolise heroism and mediocrity. The ineffectualness of Pierrot and lack of macho-assurance are reproduced in the endless meanderings of Hamlet's thoughts and his inability to act. "My little Hamlet" (38) says Ophelia, reinforcing his smallness as do the final words of the story:

Un Hamlet de moins; la race n'en est pas perdue, qu'on se le dise! (39)

The death of heroism is no great misfortune. Like Pierrot, paradox is the essence of his character.

Conclusion

Pierrot and Hamlet have served a multiplicity of purposes. Pierrot is the mouthpiece of a pervasive nihilistic philosophy; he is the embodiment of the Unconscious; he captures paradox thereby becoming one of the most effective symbols of life; he captures the psychological mechanism in all its elusiveness; he offers a disguise for the author himself. The richness of the image is further reinforced by his close association with religious, historical, literary, and mythological figures: Christ, Narcissus, Watteau's Gilles, the dandy and the androgyne. Hamlet defantasises Pierrot, transposing a symbol into human experience. He is both hero and mere man. The presence of the two characters in Laforgue's work provide a masterly, ironic analysis of philosophical, social and aesthetic matters in a highly original and captivating form.

PART THREE: THEMES

CHAPTER FIVE

LAFORGUE AND HARTMANN'S PHILOSOPHY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

(1) Laforgue and Philosophy

Laforgue had been an orthodox Catholic child and a convinced Buddhist as an adolescent. His eventual loss of faith plunged him into spiritual anguish. He could never accept atheism wholeheartedly and during the years spent in Paris he read Schopenhauer and Hartmann with the enthusiasm of a new-found faith. His interest in philosophy led to the reading of the philosophical poets among the Parnassians such as Sully Prudhomme, Leconte de Lisle and Cazalis all of whom were the principal antecedents to the serious side of his poetry. It was Mme. Ackermann, however, who among the Parnassian poets exerted the greatest influence on his eventual philosophical development. Her poetry presented a pessimistic view of the world redeemed by a vague and sentimentally founded belief in a divine power. The incomprehensibility of the laws of the universe were sufficient proof that a divine element existed within them.

Hartmann and to a lesser extent Schopenhauer, reinforced these beliefs and provided a theoretical structure for a personal philosophy. Schopenhauer confirmed heart-felt notions on the misery of existence and the consequent rejection of Positivist optimism concerning scientific, social and individual progress. In Schopenhauer he found a system of thought based on withdrawal from the world and in which heroism depended on introspective contemplative zeal rather than brave physical action on behalf of society. "Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung" published in 1818 enjoyed enormous popularity amid enlightened circles from 1870. In Schopenhauer's search for a fundamental principle he reveals an abstract entity with the term Will. Will is a blind, impersonal force of which the sole aim is the perpetuation of life. Even

when an individual is overcome by the banality of existence and decides to withdraw, Will enforces the struggle to surmount the misery irrespective of the individual's concerns. It operates in every aspect of human endeavour leaving a trail of misery and chaos as personal wishes are frustrated in the interests of the world at large.

There are two ways of thwarting the activity of the Will, both of which would have obvious appeal for Laforgue: firstly the cult of art which takes the individual away from the pleasures and pains derived from the working of the Will to a state of complete mental objectivity and aesthetic delight; secondly, the practice of Buddhist contemplation, the renunciation of the flesh and thereby the ultimate extinction of the human race with all its misery.

Laforgue was undoubtedly lonely in Paris and voiced pessimistic ideas in "Le Sanglot de la Terre" with a fearful earnestness. In his letters of the period he claims to have practised Buddhist renunciation advocated by Schopenhauer as much out of economic necessity as a proof that he had raised his mind above the working of the Will. Art, moreover, was his principle consolation during this period, the means towards meeting people and of avoiding excessive introspection.

Laforgue was sufficiently interested in Schopenhauer to desire to read more in the same vein. Hartmann's "Philosophie des Unbewußten" was published in Germany in 1869. By 1877 it was published in French translation. When Laforgue read it, it was in its ninth edition. Hartmann's work was entirely suited to Laforgue during this particular stage of his intellectual development. The overall tone of the work is scientific, hence dispelling any notions of being an emotional response to pessimism as in the poetry of Ackermann. Hartmann adopts an amoral, anti-established religion stance acceptable to Laforgue's non-committed intellectual position. In the hierarchy of Hartmann's values the

cult of philosophy and art stand at the summit of importance, of obvious appeal to one who was now indulging hopes of making a name in these particular fields. The greatest sympathy and admiration in the work is for the well-educated sensitive individual who feels acutely the pain of existence, but hides personal misery behind a mask of indifference epitomised in the fashionable trend of dandyism. The dandy practice of elevating the routines of daily living to an art form was especially attractive to Laforgue. It gave him a sense of identity in his rootless situation in Paris, separated from his family and alienated from society at large by not having a recognised job. The discovery of a serious work in which superior behaviour and attitude were condoned on a scientific basis would again reduce the sense of being an outsider. A further central concern of the work is the preoccupation with love alongside a continually restated misogyny. Laforgue's seemingly luckless experiences with girls during his teens and the reading of Schopenhauer had alienated him from women. Hartmann and the dandy code offered a rational basis for misogyny, welcome to one seeking to find points of reference in the society in which he lived.

All such characteristics are also found in the work of Schopenhauer, a more renowned thinker than Hartmann. It is clear, however, why Hartmann's work should become an all-consuming interest for Laforgue. Just as Mme. Ackermann had disclosed some notion of comfort in the vague belief in a divine power inhabiting the incomprehensibility of universal law, Hartmann provides likewise an optimistic solution to a pessimistic problem. Laforgue had not fully recovered from losing the security of religious faith. Hartmann offers a basis for mystical belief without offending a need for scientific justification.

Laforgue did not escape Hartmann's influence even though in his last poems the Unconscious is not mentioned. The influence of the philosopher is two-fold: firstly Hartmann provided a new world to translate into poetry; ideas on psychology and neurology, a

context in which to explore mystical feelings, a framework for a personal vision of the Universe; secondly, the idea of the Unconscious as the source of artistic genius is developed into a highly original aesthetic.

(ii) Contemporary Pessimism

The highs and lows of Romanticism did not proceed from a concept of life or of the world. The point of departure was the suffering of the self, an artistic sense of separation from common humanity. The poems of Alfred de Vigny exemplify the pessimism of Romanticism. He opposed his sufferings to the apparent happiness of the outside world, asserting his distance from the mediocrity of the masses and his consequent superiority. Suffering is not general, simply the burden and the prerogative of genius.

The pessimism of a later age reared on the sciences did not make suffering the privilege of a few, but a law of life, based on the conflict between the banality of existence and the all-powerful will of mankind to go on living. Hartmann and Schopenhauer claimed that all happiness was illusory, merely dulling the pain of existence and deluding mankind into propagating the human race, thereby extending eternally the misery of life. The most man could expect from any conventional view of happiness was relief from pain, indifference to pain, or an unsatisfactory fleeting experience of pleasure.

The philosophers outline three conventional views of happiness: happiness is attainable in man's earthly life depending on how he chooses to live it; happiness will be found in after-life as in the Christian Heaven; happiness will be found in some future age as a result of industrial advance and social progress.

The first is dismissed on the grounds that the value of such blessings as health, youth and riches is only realised in their absence. We are either in a state of indifference or of

suffering. Belief in love as an ideal, moreover, belongs to the unscientific age of Romanticism. An enlightened age sees love as no more than an unconscious subjection to instinct.

The idea of happiness in an after-life was alien to an age fed on materialism. Loss of faith was endemic at a time when the universities were strongholds of anti-clerical, scientific thought dictated by the rationalism of positivists. Studies in physiology and psychology showed that mind and body were so intimately linked that man could not possibly have a soul. Scepticism had become a virtual commonplace of French thought and literature. Religion had faded to a nostalgic memory wreathed in sentiment, of which the only value was as a tool for political stability, and a barrier against moral indifference.

The final hope for happiness lay in the future, but this was disproved by contemporary theories concerning nature and heredity, conclusions drawn from the experiments of the new social sciences. The view of nature had changed from that of an attentive and responsive witness as perceived by the Romantics to an unfeeling pitiless mechanism. Man was subject to the merciless necessities of a physical, physiological and social determinism. The individual was enslaved within the laws of heredity, the species within the laws of evolution and the man of genius was reduced to the level of the majority, a concept reinforced by the growth of democracy. The defects of an individual or of a society are handed on perpetually through succeeding generations, as described in Zola's Rougon-Macquart novels. Any notion of progress or improvement, therefore, is a fanciful invention.

Given such a state of affairs, the inevitable frustration of any effort towards happiness, the denial of spirituality and love, the impossibility of escaping a role pre-determined by our ancestors, Schopenhauer advocated race suicide via the renunciation of the flesh. Hartmann's conclusions are more esoteric. He believed that by the practice of his philosophy

mankind would become so enlightened that the activity of Schopenhauer's Will will be thwarted, leaving mankind to attain a glorious nirvana. By means which are not always rational Hartmann's optimistic resolution of pessimism is established.

(iii) Hartmann's Thesis

Hartmann's work developed as a reaction to positivism, the exclusive emphasis on the sciences of the material world as means of attaining truth. Hartmann believed that no full understanding of the universe could be achieved if metaphysics were ignored. His scientific studies are conveyed in metaphysical language. This was a common practice at a time when religious terminology was borrowed to colour ethical doctrines with the mystery of the infinite.

Hartmann attacks the bastion of positivism from the psychological vantage point, pursuing a line of enquiry that the mind is more than rational:

Our measurements of the rich territory of the Me are far too small, or too narrow when we omit the immense realm of the Unconscious, this real interior Africa in every sense. (1)

The human mind is shown to have a dual function, a view anticipating Freud's research into the fundamental distinction between psychic and conscious. Cerebral consciousness exists alongside some other non-rational will or force termed the Unconscious. Modern psychology uses the term unconscious to designate the submerged part of the human mind. For Hartmann the Unconscious is not only that which is unconsciously present in the human mind, but also a force governing the world possessing divine power and understanding. The concept has a biological as well as psychological dimension in that it is that force of energy which obliges individuals to conform to the higher ends of the species, even despite themselves as when they are controlled by instinct.

The concept of the Unconscious is established from conclusions to biological experiments and from a study of instinct as manifested in human sexuality. In the initial experiment a decapitated frog seeks out the dark revealing an action which is clearly independent of the brain. Some force akin to instinct is present within the living creature proving that cerebral consciousness is not the only form of consciousness.

The subsequent analysis which Hartmann makes of love had considerable merit and originality in its assertion of the essential role played by sexual elements in the origin and development of an emotion. Classical psychology had tended to approach the subject from a too exclusively affective or moral standpoint.

Hartmann shows how the rational mind is totally subjugated in the formation of close human relationships. A power is at work within an individual of which he remains unconscious and which forces its will irrespective of the individual's attempts to do otherwise.

The process begins with a longing for companionship which leads to the concentration on a particular individual and the desire to make the relationship lasting, implicitly by marriage and parental love. Love is shown as a force which drives a person to concentrate exclusively on another individual. The intense longing associated with love is an unconscious awareness of the incomprehensibility of the force behind love.

This incomprehensible force is the Unconscious which maps out and wills the various stages of love. Firstly, longing develops to annihilate the limitations of individuality and merge oneself with the loved one. This in social terms is the establishment of an intended long-term heterosexual relationship. Secondly, the will of the Unconscious is procreation, so children are born. The individual consciously denies that the child was the prime aim of

the ardent longing, given the prosaic nature of family life. The denial leads temporarily to disillusion with love, but the pull of the senses which are controlled by the Unconscious, protect the infinite longing from missing its unconscious purpose when doubts do arise, and the individual continually yields.

The Unconscious also thinks ahead ensuring not only that procreation takes place, but that the human race is perfected by causing complementary individuals to love each other. Hence, the attraction of large breasts and wide calves to every man according to Hartmann, with the unconscious suggestion of healthy offspring and abundant nutrition. (Laforgue, both by genuine preference and affected decadence, will escape this wile of the Unconscious by his "*goût dépravé pour les maigreurs*". (2) He eventually marries a woman suffering from consumption. He will nevertheless accept Hartmann's conclusions.) The force of love suggests union with an ideal rather than procreation. Once aware that this is an illusion, there is an uncomfortable feeling that one is doing something absurd by yielding, yet the process goes on. Love will always triumph purely because of its derivation from the Unconscious over which man has no control.

Hartmann thus establishes the high probability of the existence of a metaphysical, abstract entity. This is the optimistic side to his findings. He has helped surmount the introversion of the self in an enclosed world with the discovery of a higher impersonal reality. He has achieved a reconciliation between idealism and science. Mystical feelings have been given a rational foundation and belief in a god of sorts is scientifically acceptable. The Unconscious is a supernatural power governing the universe, a notion rejected by the materialists and now reestablished by the voice of reason and science:

Voilà le grand point reconquis, l'Idéal au-dessus des hommes et des œuvres, expliquant le génie comme d'essence divine,

pressenti par les Platoniciens et repoussé par les parfums de l'Evolution. (3)

(iv) The Philosophy of the Unconscious

The Unconscious is a combination of biology, psychology and metaphysics and unlike all other gods is based on a rational foundation. As an unconscious force it makes of mankind the product of a blind natural force, simply the result of fortuitous necessity. The gods of theism are said to be invented as the result of an irrational revulsion at such a theory, hence God was furnished with the sum of all conceivable perfections, including the highest perfection in the human mind: a clear consciousness. Although Hartmann's god is an unconscious force, it has absolute clairvoyance, omniscience in theological language. This is proved by the impression of absolute certainty and self-assurance found in all instinctive actions and especially by the unconscious creative impulse with its tremendous foresight in ensuring that all reproductive organs are formed before they are put into use.

The articles of faith for a follower of the Unconscious are determinism; anti-materialism; a belief in the prime value of art and philosophy; misogyny; and cult of indifference.

Determinism is the fundamental tenet of the philosophy so there are few commandments relating to conduct. The Unconscious will not allow the exercise of free-will as it pursues its programme regardless of the individual, whether it is dealing with a mindless automaton as Hartmann would see most of the human race, or a superior being who had discovered the nature of the god governing the universe. By adopting the "religion" one need not change one's attitude. One may indulge in all the hedonistic pleasures abhorred as vain illusions as long as it is realised that they are illusions and not absolutes.

An apostle of the Unconscious is in some measure a mystic and therefore rejects the stand of the materialist. For Hartmann even established religions are machines of materialism. Alongside the State and Society, the churches make up the materialistic structure of mankind. The church is merely the scaffolding of the spiritual evolution of humanity. The idea of religious belief, however, is not disdained in so far as it aims to produce a certain degree of mystical feeling in the individual. Religion seeks to make a union between consciousness and mystical feeling complete, by contemplating the nature of mysticism, excluding from the mind all conscious elements. The final stage of contemplation is total absorption, Hindu gymnosophy, attained by the annihilation of individual consciousness and by allowing oneself to be lost in the essence of mystical feeling. The endeavour is after identification with the absolute. In this way one is most likely to reach a state of union with the Unconscious. Symbolism is an aid towards the experience of mystical feeling, but while conventional religious practice demands a literal belief in such symbols, the mystic sees the idea behind the symbols. The attack on positivism is a reaction, in some measure, to the dogmatic dismissal of the mysterious and the spiritual in human life and a consequent belief in the prime value of mysticism:

Without mysticism in the minds of the German people.... German poetry and philosophy would have been inundated by the drifting sand of French materialism. (4)

An emphasis on spirituality leads inevitably to a high opinion of philosophy and art, since, according to Hartmann they exist on a plain outside materialistic concerns and they seek a harmonious interpretation of experience, akin to the harmonious logic of the Unconscious.

Philosophy may be taken as the most fruitful representative of the spiritual horizon of a section of time. (5)

Occupation with the arts is so necessary a counterpoise to the rationalist education of our times. (6)

Art will provide the compensation for a lot which feels the pains of life more than average, the lot of the superior individual who shares with a few others the capacity for ecstatic rapture over art. Pursuit of philosophy and art is a highly commendable activity for a disciple of the Unconscious.

Hartmann's study of human instinct in the field of sexuality places great emphasis on the difference in the sexes. Women are the inferior sex to a disciple of the Unconscious, a victim of moods and unenlightened, whose intellect has not reached a level of sufficient independence to enable her to mentally surmount the workings of the Unconscious. Women mechanically, unquestioningly, and unconsciously yield to the forces of the Unconscious like the most ignorant or most uneducated of men. A disciple of the Unconscious, however, places himself at the opposite pole. He attempts to reject biological laws and hold himself aloof, enclosing himself in a world of his own making via artistic creation. Life is disdained whilst art and anything which is distant from life is held in high esteem. Any worldly action causes suffering so one must anaesthetise oneself against life and retreat into unconsciousness.

Women do have their purpose, however, even for Hartmann and therefore need to be shielded by men to keep them where the philosophy demands. The most perfect woman for Hartmann is "*one on whose bosom, man estranged from the Unconscious may refresh himself and can again acquire respect for the deepest and purest spring of all, the Unconscious will*". (7) Woman's blind communion with the Unconscious can be instrumental in helping man to spiritual knowledge.

This state of semi-dependence of man on woman, however, is only temporary. Society is an evolving mechanism progressing

towards a golden age where there is total communion with the Unconscious. This is the Heaven of Hartmann's philosophy, one towards which an individual may strive by the cult of certain beliefs, but which will not be attained until some future date in the evolution of humanity. He shared this view with Schopenhauer who saw the age as decadent, but at least progressing towards absorption in mystical feeling and independence from the world. This does not counteract the belief that happiness is unattainable, as the future nirvana will not offer happiness but an absolute negative. The individual will be so absorbed in unconsciousness that mind and senses will be dead to the material world. For Hartmann the nineteenth century had reached a transitional stage when women were still good and necessary for men, so long as one remained indifferent to the illusion of love. The golden age is for the future, so by this reckoning Hartmann sanctions all dealings with women, the sole command being that while physically involved, remain mentally indifferent.

While criticising the extreme rationality of nineteenth century Positivism, Hartmann attacks women for their lack of reason and for their relationship with the Unconscious which in a man would be admirable. This conflict is not resolved rationally in Hartmann's work, only emotionally. He yields in his treatise to the very kind of emotional, irrational response he affects to disdain, a weakness in the argument later realised by Laforgue when he comes to believe that conventional ideas of woman are founded entirely on a male interpretation.

(v) Hartmann transcribed into poetry

Laforgue's attitude towards Hartmann's philosophy evolved from a genuinely held belief to an intellectual and artistic amusement which led ultimately to the development of a personal aesthetic. His poetry is at its most agonising in "Le Sanglot de la Terre", and closest to Hartmann in "Les Complaintes". In the next two volumes, his philosophy is more subtle and detached. The

pages of Hartmann continue to be reproduced but they are treated with the same nihilistic irreverence as that applied to all other theories and activities. Hartmann's rationally founded optimism is forgotten and replaced by a virulent nihilism.

In "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" Laforgue pursues to its logical conclusion Hartmann's hope for a conquest of the will to live, and the glorious union with a lost order in a future nirvana. He creates a landscape of the glorious age. Instead of a pure, ethereal world we are presented with an absurd picture of a sterile lunar landscape void of vegetation and peopled only by nymphs and Pierrots, the sole true disciples of the Unconscious. The superior race to which Hartmann relegated all artists and thinking people including himself is made up of absurd fantastical creatures who pursue in all earnestness but with absolute bewilderment the necessary code of conduct and belief demanded by Hartmann's philosophy.

After treating Hartmann with irreverence the next volume abandons the idea of a philosophical formula, so satirically portrayed in "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune". Pessimism dominates "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", but an element of humanism begins to be voiced. Philosophical theorising is forgotten and there is a suggestion of a triumph, however inglorious, of the will to live, a phenomenon alien to Hartmann's work.

The hero of "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" represents humanity scarcely comprehending the role demanded of itself by the Unconscious. Demands are coloured by ambiguity and paradox. It is above all in sexual relationships that most confusion lies.

On the one hand the hedonistic libations of the world at large are uncompromisingly attacked and sexual activity is considered to be obscene and ridiculous:

*Soleil! soudard plaqué d'ordres et de crachats,
Planteur mal élevé, sachez que les Vestales
A qui la Lune, en son équivoque oeil-de-chat
Est la rosace de l'Unique Cathédrale.*

*Continue à fournir de couchants avinés,
Les lendemains vomis des fêtes nationales
A styler tes saisons à nous bien déchaîner
Les drames de L'Aphothéose Umbilicale. (8)*

Art offers the only true means to salvation:

L'Art est tout, du droit divin de L'Inconscience. (9)

On the other hand the call is for cooperation in life's pleasures as if Pierrot is condemned to perform on the sun, not the moon:

*Cherchez la pâtée et la niche
Et les douceurs d'un traversin. (10)*

A second contradiction is in the attitude towards women. Hartmann's ambiguous treatment of woman is hauled unaltered into the verse. Woman is instrumental in fostering the illusions by which man is continually foiled. In the guise of the ideal she generates love. This leads to mental chaos as the idea of love clashes with a rationalist education.

*Ah! madame, ce n'est vraiment pas bien.
Quand on n'est pas la Joconde,
D'en adopter le maintien
Pour induire en spleens tout bleus le pauv'monde! (11)*

Such behaviour is both criticised and accepted as Pierrot realises that deceit is sanctioned by the Unconscious and misogyny a necessary prerequisite for a stand against materialism. Woman

necessarily provides a physical machine so that men can concern themselves with art and other non-worldly pursuits:

*Tu fournis la matière brute,
Je me charge de l'oeuvre d'art. (12)*

A third contradiction lies in the deterministic nature of the demands of the Unconscious. Pierrot appears to be without choice, yet he has the power either to indulge in worldly pleasures or to pray devoutly to the moon, practising contemplative zeal and world renunciation. Bewilderment exists simultaneously with proud self-assurance:

*Je m'agite aussi! mais l'Inconscient me mène;
Or, il sait ce qu'il fait, je n'ai rien à y voir. (13)*

L'Art de tout est l'ainsi-soit-il;

*Et que chers frères, le beau rôle
Est de vivre de but en blanc
Et, dût-on se battre les flancs,
De hausser à tout les épaules. (14)*

By such ambiguities Laforgue translates the essential paradox behind the pessimism of Hartmann and of Schopenhauer. Man is subject to the pains and miseries of existence and is simultaneously governed by an irrepressible will to perpetuate life. The will to live marks the way to life's pleasures. The overpowering sense of the inherent misery of life leads to asceticism and the death wish, both of which hold Pierrot in their grip. Man appears to own the possibility of choice, but is subject to an uncompromising law of pre destination.

The reduction of such a paradox into a philosophical formula is no longer accepted by Laforgue. The idea of the Unconscious is central to "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune", but the philosophy

as a whole is a target of ridicule. The extensive use of absurd medical vocabulary such as "*épigastre; cautérise et coagule; encéphales*", (15) ridicules the pompous display of knowledge of Hartmann's biological experiments. The ridicule continues in reference to all the trappings of conventional religions. Hartmann was at pains to distinguish his theory from all other *quasi* religious formulations. Laforgue uses symbols and rites from established churches to illustrate the discipleship of the Unconscious philosophy, such as baptism, requiem, Buddhist meditation, priests, choir-boys and the communion service. In this he implies that just as conventional religious symbolism is often based on superstition and sacerdotal formalism, so can Hartmann's philosophy be seen as the product of vain reasoning and a mere desire for a formula:

*Et toi, là-bas, pot au feu, pauvre Terre!
Avec tes essais de mettre en rubriques
Tes reflets perdus du Grand Dynamique,
Tu fais un métier ah! bien sédentaire! (16)*

In the following work, the influence of Hartmann's philosophy as a stepping stone to nihilism is all the more evident. In "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" it is realised that the sighs after an ideal are of no greater value than the adolescent sighs of the conventional Pierrot for Colombine. Pessimism is the dominant philosophical stance in the very volume which is supposedly an acquiescence to reality.

In "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" the following premises are continually restated: life is void of meaning, to equate love with the ideal is an illusion, happiness is impossible, all human effort is doomed to failure, we have no option, but to give into fatalistic submission, keep busy and let our life pursue its course. Nihilism pervades these poems which are not lightened by the fantastical world of the Pierrot.

The volume begins with a wry dismissal of the possibility of values in life. Man can do no more than the weathercock which turns with the wind, simply floating through life with no serious commitment:

*C'est pourquoi je vivotte, vivotte,
Bonne girouette aux trent'six saisons,
Trop nombreux pour dire oui ou non...
- Jeunes gens! que je vous serv' d'Ilote! (17)*

Laforgue appeals to youth, the possession of which is one of the conventional criteria for satisfaction and happiness in life. In a world of decadence even the young are nihilists for the Earth appears to be totally void of justice and values:

*... la Terre, ce pressoir
Sans Planteur de Justice! (18)*

so all mankind can do is forget about idealism, philosophical and metaphysical speculation and simply obey social demands:

Oh! file ton rouet, et prie et reste honnête. (19)

Happiness is unattainable. If it exists, it is only in the past or the future and more often than not even the past and future have nothing to offer:

O rêve ou jamais plus... (20)

*Et puis, le vent s'est tant surmené l'autre nuit!
Et demain est si loin! et ça souffre aujourd'hui! (21)*

Nature is in a state of putrefication. In an effort to find happiness man sets off on holiday and is met with ugliness: the sad cry of peacocks, the sob of the reeds, meadows alive with crawling creatures, and mud wherein mankind wallows. Man himself

is depicted in stark neurological and physiological terms and is therefore subject to the same mechanistic laws as nature:

*Oyez, au physique comme au moral,
Ne suis qu'une colonie de cellules
De raccroc; et ce sieur que j'intitule
Moi, n'est, dit-on, qu'un polypler fatal! (22)*

There are two apparent ways out, via love or via philosophical or spiritual idealism, but love is too bound up with the base material existence and in attempting to seek some element of spontaneity in relationships communication is denied. Man is condemned to a life of total isolation:

*Se serrer la main sans affaires!
Selon les coeurs, selon les corps!
Trop tard. Des faibles et des forts
Dans la curée de durs louis d'or...
Pauvre Terre!
Histoire Humaine: -histoire d'un célibataire... (23)*

Philosophical and spiritual idealism will be no more successful than love in offering a way out. Sunday, the day on which man's thoughts turn to the ideal is overshadowed by the weight of life's banality. The established religions are only another part of the material rat race. Instead of man rising to the ideal, he brings the ideal down to his level.

*O Dimanches bannis
De l'Infini

Dimanches citoyens
Bien quotidiens. (24)*

God has deserted the heavens and in His place are very earthly concerns:

*Et laissez-nous en paix, morts aux mondes meilleurs,
Paître dans notre coin, et fo rniquer, et rire!... (25)*

The survey of the options available to man shows that life offers no opportunity for the realisation of any ideal making fatalism inevitable:

*Le Rêve
C'est bon.
Quand on
L'achève*

*En vérité, la Vie est bien brève,
Le Rêve bien long*

*Que faire
Alors
Du corps
Qu'on gère?*

*Ceci
Cela
Par-ci
Par-là.. (26)*

Deadening *ennui* at the sum total of all such revelations, gives rise to a tortured joyless existence from which there is no escape:

*Va et les gouttières de l'ennui!
Ça goutte, goutte sur ma nuque. (27)*

The final poem sums up the material world, the only recognisable one:

La nature est une épouse

Qui nous carambole d'Extase
Et puis nous occit. (28)

"L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" began with a confident attack on materialism. The subsequent volume closes with an affirmation of a materialist view of the world emptied of the ideal. It is the world depicted in Laforgue's last poems, the absurdity of existence prolonged without reason in spite of the misery and destruction it brings, the illusoriness of love which chains the individual to the will of the species, the superiority of the void.

From a blind acceptance of Hartmann's philosophy Laforgue makes it a target of satire, rejecting totally any notion of mysticism for nihilism. The conflict between the banality of life and the will to live remains, but Laforgue is no longer going to base any formula on this. In "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" pessimism is lightened by satirical images and a fantasy world. In "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" the presence of homely, commonplace images and observations leaves a lasting impression of the triumph of the will to live. There is an element of humanism and humour, alien to the laboured rationalism and mysticism of Hartmann's work.

(vi) The Unconscious as a Symbol of Paradox

Laforgue's ultimate rejection of Hartmann's work as a personal philosophy did not bring an end to the influence of the philosopher. Laforgue was initially attracted by the element of optimism in Hartmann's work, the distance of art, psychology and philosophy from the material world, the sanctioning of mystical belief, the characteristic freedom of the latter from the laws of nature and the mystery therein. It is this aspect of Hartmann's work which remains with Laforgue throughout his life. His own understanding of the idea of the Unconscious is translated into a literary aesthetic. The Unconscious is a scientific and yet

mystical reality, a paradoxical phenomenon. The nature of the Unconscious as a symbol of variety, paradox, incoherence and ephemerality is the nature of Laforgue's art.

Laforgue creates the impression of spontaneity in his work. The symbols he invents or embellishes condense spontaneity and paradox into single images. The Unconscious reflects the multiplicity of life while remaining a single absolute phenomenon. Like an artist of his age Laforgue presents an accumulation of verbal splashes of colour thus translating movement in space, in time and in the mind, the sense of perceiving, realising, living. He chooses in his art to capture the anarchical nature of life, life as it is experienced outside poetry, yet with poetry's immediacy of vision.

Laforgue's perception reinterprets Hartmann's dual notion of the Unconscious to create a new field of enquiry in poetry: on the one hand, the unconscious mind, on the other, the fundamental anarchy which lies behind a study of mankind however one may attempt to categorise. This essential truth together with the apparent lawlessness of the unconscious mind, enables Laforgue to free himself from the need to comment, intrude or order, and thereby to produce an impression of freedom and spontaneity in his art.

Hartmann's "Philosophie der Unbewußten" was a major influence on Laforgue as a thinker, but ultimately exerted its lasting influence on Laforgue as an artist. In all which Laforgue read, Hartmann's philosophy had the greatest single impact on his personal and artistic evolution. Though Laforgue's faith in the philosophy is lost it is still the single most overwhelming influence in his life and his work. That Laforgue could create such an original aesthetic out of a now out-dated tome, which displays the pompous late-nineteenth century pride in sophisticated scientific exploration, is more than proof of his own particular genius.

CHAPTER SIX

WOMEN, LOVE AND SEXUALITY

Women are of prime importance in the work of Laforgue as they are central to his psychological analysis and his philosophical outlook. *Voilà à quoi on passe sa vie - la femme, la légende féminine, (1)* he wrote in "Feuilles Volantes". Laforgue's symbolic universe focusses on the question of gender and sexuality. Images of bourgeois girls are a constant presence; the moon symbolism has sexual connotations; Pierrot is half male, half female; nature is envisaged as an immense machine of reproduction.

Apart from being a commonplace theme in poetry, Laforgue's apparent obsession with women and love is not surprising given the age of Laforgue when he wrote the poetry, and the literary and philosophical background to his work. The poetry was all written before his marriage to Leah Lea. As he had not embarked on an attempt at a permanent relationship the question of what the future may hold was a natural preoccupation. While unattached he continually analyses the concept of woman basing his conclusions on ideas taken from his reading and experience.

Laforgue was writing in an age marked by a general decrease in religious belief and by the spread of materialism and nihilism into popular thought. The resulting absence of values led to a belief that love provided the sole means of proving oneself, the sole sounding board for an ego disappointed at the absence of other possible forms of heroism. Love was seen as the pivot of life, so any attempt to discuss life became a discussion of love.

Si votre religion veut la vie, elle doit avant tout prendre son centre, sa clef et sa lumière dans ce qui est l'essence de la vie, de sa continuation -- etc.: l'amour des sexes. (2)

Such an attitude led to the rise of the psychological novel in which the human heart is portrayed struggling amidst amorous entanglements. During his early years of writing in Paris, Laforgue looked to Paul Bourget, a principle writer of the genre for guidance. Most of Bourget's fictional works are sorrowful confessions of juvenile passion. He probes surgically into the human heart and psychology. This confirmed Laforgue's natural impulse to analyse the passions of the eternal masculine and feminine.

(1) Laforgue's Experience of Women

The principal women in the life of Laforgue are his mother; his sister, Marie; Marguerite, the love of his adolescence; Sanda Mahali his penfriend during his early years in Germany, and Leah Lea, a teacher of English, who became his wife in December 1886.

Laforgue was born in Montevideo and lived there with his family for six years. During that time, his mother had given birth five times. He then moved to France with his older brother, Emile, boarding at school and spending the holidays with a cousin. When Laforgue was fifteen, his whole family came to settle permanently in France, by which time there were eleven children. His mother died in childbirth two years later.

Laforgue's early life, therefore, was marked by the absence of his mother. The nature of her life and her death gave Laforgue a deeply entrenched fear of pregnancy and childbirth. Even ten years later, just before his own death, he wrote to his sister Marie stating a continued fear of pregnancy.

Tu es effrayante avec ces maternités successives! Il me semble que si Leah était dans cet état, je vivrais dans des angoisses continuées. (3)

Other letters to Marie suggest a close brotherly affection and esteem. He not only speaks to her of personal difficulties, financial or emotional, which he would never disclose to his literary friends, but he relates in detail his new ideas in literature with an openness not always found in the rest of his correspondence.

A similar brotherly relationship is implied in his letters to Sanda Mahali. As with Marie he writes to her as one who is aware of current trends in literature. He corrects her poetry, talks to her of literary ideas, complains of loneliness and boredom, and writes of his preference in women.

Je me mets à la fenêtre et je vois sortir toute la colonie anglaise de Coblenz, entre autres un pensionnat de young ladies en toilettes exquises, tout plissées et bouillonnées, adorablement maigres et plates et je me prends à rêver de flirtation sur des plages mondaines le long de la mer retentissante. (4)

He tells her of the passion aroused by another woman when he was only fifteen. Marguerite, the love of his adolescence was worshipped from afar. Her subsequent marriage gave rise to a sense of disappointment in all women. His virginal goddess had become a mere woman, yielding to the call of convention.

..j'ai aimé enfin de la passion sublime qu'on a au collège et qui fait pleurer des larmes de la plus belle eau, sans littérature. (5)

While expressing his nostalgia for Paris, he later speaks of his indifference to whether he goes there or not for a short

holiday, hinting at his indifference to the possibility of seeing her. There are no expressions of love recorded. She is an ear for his sadness and boredom, his literary ideas, and a means of cheering him up.

...causons, désennuyons-nous par notre chanson. (6)

In a single letter to an unnamed woman Laforgue describes his position in the relationship as that of an artist, not a potential lover. His apparent lack of passion has obviously been misinterpreted as a sign that he is afraid of women. He has been accused of being a Joseph, one who rejects a woman's advances out of delicacy.

Je ne suis pas un Joseph! Je suis un artiste! un poète français, un troubadour! A votre service comme tel. (7)

To men-friends he expresses decadent attitudes regarding women, disclosing a distaste for natural processes which he believes women to represent. Any vision of women is accompanied by a meditation on their reproductive function.

Il y en a d'adorables. Je passe des heures à les regarder, je fais des rêves. Mais bientôt je songe qu'elles ont, ces anges! pantalons et organes génitaux - c'est là d'ailleurs la grande tristesse de ma vie. (8)

When Charles Henry urges Laforgue to fall in love to expiate his spleen, Laforgue proclaims an inability to do so:

Vous me dites: aimez. Je ne puis pas. Du coeur, je ne puis plus, et cela ne serait pas de l'amour. De la tête, oui. Mais ce ne serait pas de l'amour non plus, et la femme qui m'inspire un amour de tête, où est-elle! (9)

Later he claims that woman does not rouse the least interest in him.

..la femme ne m'excite ni le coeur, ni la tête, ni les sens - peut-être les sens, mais cinq minutes toutes les deux semaines à peu près. Mais pour ma part, je ne me suis jamais dit: Voilà une femme, désirable, faisons-lui la cour. Si j'avais des idées sur une femme, ce serait pour la posséder, pas pour autre chose. Et posséder une femme me tourmente si rarement et si peu, que je n'irai jamais dresser des batteries, faire un siège, épier des sourires etc. (10)

Four years later, however, he has not only fallen in love but he readily pleads the case for marriage, thus rejecting all the decadent ideas hitherto held.

Je suis ainsi piétrement aimanté. Et pour voyager idem. Il faut, quand j'installerai ma vie, que j'aie un chez moi et que j'y sois retenu ou rappelé (après errer) par un camarade. Et le camarade autant que faire devra alors en outre apporter tout une moitié de choses: être féminin.....Là est pour mon pur être la santé et la littérature. (11)

(ii) The Misogynistic Inheritance

(a) Aristotle's Theory of Gender

of Aristotelian analysis on the question of gender continued to be upheld throughout the century:

Le mâle représente la forme spécifique; la femelle, la matière. Elle est passive en tant que femelle, tandis que le mâle est actif. (12)

Laforgue was sufficiently versed in Aristotle to paraphrase him in "Salomé" from "Moralités Légendaires", speaking of man as "l'Essentiel actif" and woman as "les passifs naturels". Women are grouped collectively, for they possessed no individuality according to Aristotle and represented as a whole a passive unquestioning submission to natural forces. They are controlled by physical processes which deny any possibility of spiritual aspiration. The unpredictability and waywardness of nature is reflected in the character of all women. Man, by contrast, stands in the singular as a statement of his individuality. He is the decision-maker, the owner of free will, who transcends matter by intellect and spirituality. Man looks beyond the material world to a concept of the divine. His moral progress is dependent on transcending the sphere of the senses and bodily passion in a triumph of reason, the whole being a struggle to transcend the feminine.

(b) The Prejudices of Schopenhauer and Hartmann

The misogyny of Laforgue and of his age was nurtured by the works of German philosophers. His earliest work, "Tessa", is a short play based on the ideas of Schopenhauer. Happiness is dependent on celibacy:

Si tu veux vivre heureux reste célibataire... L'ascète sauve de la vie des générations entières. (13)

The charm of womankind is a conspiracy to trap man into propagating the species;

*Et là-bas cet essaim de joyeuses fillettes
Qui s'en vont trottinant et proprettes
C'est un vrai complot quoi! (14)*

Young men in ignorance of their pre-determined function seek woman out seeing in her the realisation of the ideal. They will eventually be confronted by the true nature of women.

*La femme est un être ou mieux un animal
Qui si tu veux n'a pas le sens moral
Qui connaît seulement son amour et sa haine. (15)*

For Schopenhauer, love simply served the purpose of ensuring procreation. He believed that the human race would not continue if love was a matter of pure reflection and for this reason it is enveloped in illusion. Woman is responsible for the creation of the lie.

L'amour c'est l'ennemi... le génie de l'espèce n'est qu'un industriel qui ne veut que produire... les femmes sont les complices de ce génie perfide de l'espèce. Elles ont accompli une chose merveilleuse quand elles ont spiritualisé l'amour... elles se sont adressées à l'intelligence de l'homme et tout ce qu'il y a de spirituel dans l'organisation féminine, elles l'ont consacré à ce jeu qu'elles appellent l'amour. (16)

It is not only women's cult of love which is contemptible but their very nature. She is the unaesthetic sex, the intermediate stage between child and man, incapable of purely objective interest in anything. Her nature is to regard everything as a means of winning a man and interest in anything else is only simulated. Dissimulation is the fundamental failing of the female character, rising from a lack of reasonableness and reflection. France is attacked for the influential position granted to women from the age of Louis XIII onwards. This according to Schopenhauer was responsible for the gradual corruption of court and government which led to the first revolution. The granting of any notion of esteem to woman is a fundamental defect of society. Abstinence from all association with woman is the supreme virtue.

Like Schopenhauer, Hartmann stresses the illusory nature of love. Love will never admit that sexual satisfaction is its aim so there is no question that sexual union can ever be sought openly and consciously; it is quite simply incompatible with man's ideals. If, however, sexual intercourse is recognised by the consciousness as the sole aim of love, love ceases to be a healthy process, for from that moment, consciousness also perceives the absurdity of the impulse. Once a human being who has believed himself to have overcome the illusion is again caught by consuming passion, love will shape itself in his consciousness as a threatening demonic power.

(c) The Idealism of the Romantic Movement

The Romantic Movement by contrast, was characterised by a glorification of love and of women. There was a strong reaction against the emphasis on the prime importance of reason and the essentially analytical function assigned to the mind by the eighteenth century. Literature began to reassert the rights of imagination and sensibility, the latter being considered an essentially female characteristic. Effeminacy was to become not only acceptable, but was positively cultivated.

The legacy of the Romantic Movement as regards women, however, was a further statement of misogyny rising paradoxically from the worship of woman. The quest for an absolute was translated into a love of love, which became an obsession with beauty of form and of soul and a need for a mystic communion held at a distance from banal reality. At the same time there was a fear of love, a fear of failure and, afraid of seeing women truly come into existence, the Romantic age emptied her of reality, making of her a plastic object, perfect and intemporal. Once the goddess of the imagination, however, became a human being, the only refuge for the Romantic lover was misogyny for in this way his dream remained intact.

The work of Michelet, "La Femme", enjoyed considerable popularity throughout the century. His glowing description of women in "La Femme" as "ange de paix et de civilisation", "dieu de bonté", "une religion" was a further restatement of Romantic ideas. Women, seen only in the context of the bourgeoisie or aristocracy, represented the triumph of sensibility and the purity of being untainted by the real world through their confinement to the home. His pleading for the female cause is only apparent as it depended once again on women being ideal rather than real human beings. Like the Romantics he emptied her of reality.

The Romantic concept of women is illustrated in the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites. Here women are presented as aesthetic pin-ups, objects to be gazed at. They are silent, enigmatic figures. This view is paralleled in Laforgue's portrayal of the "jeune fille". The fact that she is not provided with a voice gives her presence a certain mystery and unreality. She is an almost supernatural creature living in a radiant celestial atmosphere which isolates her from the vulgarity of the world.

(d) Decadence and Androgyny

The influence of Rousseau in the first half of the nineteenth century led to the equation of nature with virtue and civilisation with corruption. Decadent thinkers accepted that nature was good and civilisation bad, but would enthusiastically prefer the corruption of the artificial.

The ideal feminine physique of the age was a slight, androgynous individual, whose obviously female characteristics were reduced to the minimum. The androgyne represents the ideal combination of love, feeling and matter with intelligence and spirit.

*Vous avez donc sculpté l'Androgyne céleste,
Qu'idolâtres rivaux nous adorons en vain. (17)*

Laforgue's attachment to the contemporary fashion in women is evident not only in the heroines of "Moralités Légendaires", who are slight androgynous figures, but in his continually restated preference for English women.

*Vous savez au'il y a trois sexes: l'homme, la femme,
l'Anglaise. (18)*

The stereotype of an English woman was of an androgynous figure, tall, thin and flat chested. Her appearance disguised her reproductive function. Laforgue was later to marry a woman who matched his preconceived ideal of womanly beauty. Like the heroines of "Moralités Légendaires", Leah is tall and slim. She is moreover consumptive. By Laforgue's choice of a wife, he shows himself to be separate from attractions which influence other men's choices, as outlined by Hartmann, whose ideal in women was a healthy reproductive machine with large breasts, large calves, wide hips and supremely strong. (19)

In Huysman's "A Rebours", recognised as the handbook of decadence, the first girlfriend of Des Esseintes is a circus acrobat, like the lover of Laforgue's Stéphane Vassilieu. She becomes defeminised and, in contemplating her, Des Esseintes senses that his masculinity is draining away. The inversion of the roles excites the curiosity of Des Esseintes.

A mesure qu'il admirait sa souplesse et sa force, il voyait un artificiel changement de sexe se produire en elle; ses singeries gracieuses, ses mièvreries de femelle s'effaçaient de plus en plus, tandis que se développaient, à leur place, les charmes agiles et puissants d'un mâle... Alors de même qu'un robuste gaillard s'éprend d'une fille grêle, cette clownesse doit aimer, par tendance, une créature faible, ployée, pareille

à moi, sans souffle se dit Des Esseintes, à se regarder, à laisser agir l'esprit de comparaison, il en vint à éprouver de son côté l'impression que lui-même se féminisait, et il envia décidément la possession de cette femme.....Elle réunit les deux aspects - actif et passif.. (20)

Employing the very terms of Aristotle, the decadent age saw a possible reconciliation of the sexual conflict in the androgyne. The heroines of "Moralités Légendaires" and Pierrot have an androgynous physique. The dandy is a further example. He cultivates effeminacy by searching for elegance and by the desire to place himself in the gaze of another. He is not, however, homosexual. Rather he desires to reach a fusion in a single being, active and passive, male and female, mind and spirit.

C'est à la façon et un peu par les moyens des femmes qu'il domine.....Le dandy a quelque chose d'antinaturel, d'androgyne, par où il peut séduire infiniment. (21)

By making an ideal of androgyny the dandy is able to maintain his misogyny even whilst actually involved with women on the grounds that they are ideals rather than real people. He can justify his stand against women whilst actively admiring stereotyped female habits by reproducing them in his own behaviour.

(iii) The Dawning of Feminism

Age-old ideas concerning women began to be questioned by men working in a variety of fields. Rémy de Gourmont describes the role of women as the essential aspect of social organisation, the very opposite of Aristotle's definition. Man's role by comparison was subsidiary. More important as an attack on the misogyny of the age was the work of the neurologist Charcot and the historian Quinet. The philosophy of

the age was to believe itself free from superstition and ignorance simply by its support for scientific growth. In spite of this, Charcot's conclusions regarding women were not readily accepted because they questioned theories which had been held for centuries. Charcot first established neurology as an independent discipline in the faculty of medicine. At the time hysteria was regarded primarily as a female disorder. The mediaeval notion of women as the deceivers of Adam lingered through the late nineteenth century into the suffragette era. Charcot occupied the "Chair of Nervous Diseases" and proved that hysteria was equally common in men and women. The placing of men and women in a position of equality by an increasingly renowned scientist was a significant attack on the notion of male superiority.

The historian, Edgar Quinet, drew attention to the gross inequalities in the treatment of men and women, a novel idea for an age which accepted such inequalities as entirely normal. The recognition of a problem is a significant if only initial step towards a solution. He claimed that women do not fare as well as females of other species in the range of choice offered to them in a world governed by men:

Les femmes sont moins consultées dans leurs préférences que les femelles de la plupart des animaux en liberté...l'homme épouse une situation, la personne n'existe pas. Elle n'est pour rien dans le choix. (22)

(iv) Laforgue's Analysis

It is clear that during the period when Jules Laforgue was writing there was a strong imbalance against women. Misogyny or at least a lack of feminist feeling, therefore, was inevitable. The value of his analysis of women lies in its exploration of a variety of viewpoints which range from that of a child or adolescent to that of a priest, views which continue to be

upheld by the modern world. In every case the attitude is based on ideas established before the reality of women as a partner has been experienced.

The adolescent draws largely on his knowledge of women via the relationship of a mother or sister; the priest who chooses a life of celibacy has the same level of experience of women, but is influenced in addition by a long established theory of women upheld by his elected church. His view is modelled on a theory rather than on reality. In a Judaeo-Christian culture, virginity is the most prized state of womanhood closely followed by motherhood, though birth itself is regarded as unclean. The Virgin Mary with her Immaculate Conception, symbolises the priestly ideal. The view of the German philosophers out of which grew the misogyny of the dandy and which is akin to the strong moral stance of puritanism is again based on theory. They may have had a wide experience of women, as wives, lovers, or prostitutes, but their attitude is dictated by a view of life which condemns natural instincts, and which sees woman as primarily a machine of nature unredeemed by spiritual concerns. Women as a whole are therefore assigned to a position of inferiority. This is irrespective of their opinions of particular women, their mothers, sisters or lovers of the moment.

This illogical stand is exemplified in Baudelaire's approach to the women question. He advocated a code of living which demanded dissociation from women due to his belief in their close affiliation with nature. Woman could only be admired as an artificial cipher emptied of reality. He was nevertheless irresolutely drawn to the company of real women and his conflicts with his women friends attach him to the norm of needing or desiring the opposite sex in spite of the dictates of any theory.

"L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" and all poetry written up to this stage explores theories of women. The theoretical viewpoint continues in later works, but there is an attempt to see the person behind the mythologies and social prejudices. Laforgue's initial analysis is doomed to failure for it is an attempt to reconcile an idealistic view of woman with the reality, when in order to remain intact, ideals by their very nature must never be realised. At the time when he writes "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" and "Moralités Légendaires" his analysis starts on the realisation that men have set up a myth of woman, then blamed her for not living up to something she never claimed to be. Laforgue does not free himself from the myths, the decadent ideal of androgyny being ever present, but he does show that the myths obstruct our view and destroy spontaneity. Alongside a repeated theory of misogyny he makes several pleas for equality, which though not progressive by today's standards are the most feminist statement possible by a man, given the limited vision of his age.

(a) The Child and Adolescent

The absence of a mother figure characterises Laforgue's analysis of women. Even in a later work such as "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" he claims "*J'ai presque pas connu ma mère*" and as a result of this "*vers vingt ans je suis resté*". (23) The "jeunes filles" whom he admires from afar, live in a world separate from their parents. The suicide one Sunday is of an orphaned girl. Pierrot is an orphan as are the heroines of "Moralités Légendaires". Laforgue not only lost the assurance of a mother's presence in the way common to all adolescents simply on becoming adults and being caught up in the demand to be independent and strong, but he had hardly known her during his lifetime and suffered her death at a relatively young age. Inevitably he seeks a comforter in woman in whose arms he may re-enter a childhood of which he feels deprived, blotting out his anguish in her:

*Je voudrais être enfant, avoir ma mère encore
Oui celle dont on est le pauvre aimé, l'idole,
Celle qui toujours prête ice-bas nous console!...
Maman, maman! comme à présent loin de tous,
Je mettrais follement mon front dans les genoux
Et je resterais là, sans dire une parole,
A pleurer jusqu'au soir, tant ce serait trop doux. (24)*

He looks to woman for unthreatening maternal love. A mother is not considered as a woman. In the eyes of the child or adolescent she represents love which demands no return. Laforgue claimed that all poets are adolescents in their expectation of women. They all have an exacerbated juvenile expectancy of love. There, young men traditionally find justification for their existence and the expiation of spleen. It is maternal love, however, which they hope to find.

*Nous, poètes, restons des enfants de quinze ans,
toujours pubères, ayant besoin d'être adorés de la femme, comme
toute jeune fille pubère attend d'être adorée d'un homme. Et
comme les jeunes gens de quinze ans savent que les jeunes filles
sont toutes à cette attente, en sont pleines et ivres et
bornées, savent qu'il n'y a rien là pour eux puisqu'ils sont
ivres de la même attente égoïste, il s'adressent à des femmes de
trente ans, plus maternelles, plus soeurs qui les aimeront comme
les hommes faits aiment les vierges. (25)*

Adolescent love is also characterised by a negligence of reality and total unrestraint, as he indicated to Sanda Mahali in the description of the passion he felt for Marguerite. Marriage can have no part in this kind of love because it is the very inaccessibility of the woman which nourishes his passion.

(b) Women and Asceticism

From an adolescent view of womankind, the next logical step is to attach oneself to adult theories involving the idealisation of women. These were plentiful after nearly a century of Romantic literature and amidst the cult of disillusion with reality characteristic of decadence. The age was disappointed at the outcome of the Franco-Prussian war, the failure of the Empire and the prosaic nature of life under the Third Republic, dominated as it was by a pompous pride in science and a rejection of any element of romanticism. The idealisation of any aspect of life was a form of escapism necessary to an age overpowered by pessimism.

The Catholic Church offered one such programme of spiritual idealism. The official encouragement of agnosticism and anti-clericalism generated a reaction. The Church's association with mysticism was an antidote to the positivist's exclusive interest in scientific fact. Even in a decadent literary tradition, therefore, the Church, or at least the idealism it represented, began to assume an importance as a literary topic. A principal feature of further development of poetry in the early twentieth century is the pleading of the case for Catholicism. Orthodox Catholicism was growing in appeal. Writers admired by Laforgue such as Paul Bourget and Huysmans eventually adopted Catholicism, and in the case of the latter became a Benedictine abbot, the result of a life-long concern for ascetic values.

The cult of dandyism likewise was concerned with idealism in practice and belief. It offered a modern version of stoicism demanding a rigorous self-discipline and a rejection of compromise.

The church and dandyism both share the practice of viewing woman in two quite separate categories. On the one hand, there are women in general, the women of a congregation or the unnamed

female faces seen in the street. In "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" they are present in the many references to reproduction and in sentimental conversations with Pierrot. Their lives are governed by the need to procreate, hence their cult of love. Pierrot shows how such women idealise love and particularise an emotion which is general.

*Elle disait, de son air vain fondamental:
«Je t'aime pour toi seul!» - Oh! là, là, grêle histoire;
Oui, comme l'art! Du calme, ô salaire illusoire
Du capitaliste l'Idéal! (26)*

On the other hand, there is idealised woman, Our Lady and the heroines of literature and mythology and, unlike the first group she is characterised by infertility. She is either sterile as a result of her early death like Ophelia, or subject to an eternal virginity like Our Lady, or her sexuality prevents reproduction like Artemis of the moon whose manly characteristics were suggestive of lesbianism. Generalised woman represents life and fertility, ideal woman sterility and death.

To counteract the preponderance of studies of commonplace emotions between men and women as found in the psychological novel, there developed an interest in exploring the psychology of those devoted to ascetic practices, whether religious or artistic. Two significant works were Zola's "La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret" and Huysmans' "A Rebours", which respectively view women and the world from the stance of priest and dandy. Zola explores a psychological change in the mind of a priest through involvement with an idealised woman and an earthly woman. In "A Rebours" the central character, Des Esseintes, cuts himself off from the world in favour of a silent, monk-like existence. Even when in contact with the world his preference in women is for a figure in whom conventional womanliness is understated and one who makes him feel less of a man. The change in sexual roles implied an unnatural love. "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune"

similarly studies a character who by his choice of lifestyle is set apart from the norm and who either worships or disdains women depending on whether they are ideal or real. Pierrot practises spiritual idealism as a priest and as a dandy.

Pierrot as a Priest

The connection with the priesthood is evident in the very title of "L'Imitation de Notre Dame la Lune", modelled as it is on "The Imitation of Christ". The latter is directed at a temperament which aims at ascetic excellence. Laforgue's decadent rendering of the work places his priests under the ordinance of the Virgin Mary. Although Laforgue lost his Catholic faith, the idea of the Virgin Mary clearly impressed itself upon him. As a symbol she brought together the child's love of a mother with the idealist's love of purity.

The language and symbolism of the Catholic Church permeates the poetry. Many poems are litanies, meditations and invocations. It is above all, however, in the symbolism of Our Lady and the moon that the analogy is most apparent. Pierrot is living in a decadent world, but his idea of women closely resembles ideas which continue to be upheld today by the Church. As an institution it encourages worship of a female figure in the Virgin Mary whilst refusing women a voice in the hierarchy of the church and denying its Priests the possibility of a physical relationship with women in the demand for celibacy.

Pierrot's association with Our Lady is a decadent translation of a priestly devotion to the Virgin Mary. Zola's Abbé Mouret shows how readily Pierrot's views can be those of a priest. Like Pierrot he speaks of lilies, whiteness, snow, milk and virginity, all of which reflect his obsession with the purity he sees as personified in Our Lady:

Tout ce qu'il y a de blanc, les aurores, la neige des sommets inaccessibles, le lis à peine éclos, le lait des plantes respectées du soleil, les sourires des vierges, les âmes des enfants morts au berceau pleurent sur vos pieds blancs. (27)

He sees in the Virgin Mary the possibility for a satisfying love without sexuality:

Etre vierge, s'aimer vierge, garder au milieu des baisers les plus doux sa blancheur vierge. (28)

Mouret is warned, however, that his devotion to Our Lady is dangerous and by the end of the novel he has moved his allegiance from a female figure to the figure of the cross, allowing himself to be totally absorbed in masculinity. To reject woman is to reject life and he subsequently shares with Pierrot the Schopenhauerian admiration for sterility.

Je veux être une chose, une pierre blanche à vos pieds... je nie la vie... la mort de l'espèce est préférable à l'abomination continue qui la propage. (29)

Que pour des amours blancs, lunaires et distraits...

.....

Pour jamais tant tout ça stagne en un miroir mort! (30)

Idealistic love demands a communion with death. It is at the opposite pole of the fertility which woman represents.

Pierrot as a Dandy

The unnaturalness of such a stance is equally characteristic of decadence. The cult of dandyism was one of the most striking features of decadence, Baudelaire being the most notable advocate. He asserted that misogyny was a

necessary attribute of the dandy on the grounds that women were an extension of despised nature:

La femme est le contraire du Dandy. Donc elle doit faire horreur...La femme est naturelle, c'est à dire abominable. Aussi est-elle vulgaire, c'est à dire le contraire du dandy. (31)

The dandy displays an aristocratic disdain for bourgeois concerns, a mystical view of nature as bestial, an artistic horror of banality which led to a cult of beauty envisaged only in the context of anti-bourgeois, anti-nature, anti-commonplace phenomena. Pierrot's addiction to the unnatural is reflected in his obsession with sterility and his absolute coldness and detachment in relationships with women. He is totally controlled and aims to make an artistic statement rather than a sincere attempt at communication. Like a Priest he has the same mistrust of the flesh and therefore of women and normal sexual expression, and there is the same desire to set oneself apart from common humanity by ascetic living. The differences lie in the dandy's claim to embrace perversity wholeheartedly. However perverse the theories of the church may appear to the non-initiated, the Priests themselves would never lay claim to unnatural practices. In contrast dandiism enthusiastically proclaimed a love of the bizarre, and weird. The choice of the moon as a symbol makes of Our Lady a pagan goddess subject to sexual disorders. She is a woman desexed, sterile, virgin and mother of an Immaculate Conception.

The shedding of blood implied by the language of Holy Communion is transposed to associations with violence, blood and women. Ophelia is one of the goddesses of "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" and she is depicted in pools of blood as proof of the absence of pregnancy and suggestive of death. Like Our Lady, her virginity dominates. The fertility of an Earth mother is entirely alien to the ideal of a dandy, for whom love

can only be erotic or aesthetic pleasure, never procreation and never envisaged within the normal context of family life.

*Et rien ne fait de l'ombre, et ne se désagrège;
Ne naît, ni ne mûrit; tout vit d'un Sortilège
Sans foyer qui n'induit guère à se mettre en frais. (32)*

Pierrot's attitude to women and to love is a reflection of his dilettante approach to life as a whole. He looks at life without committing himself to any part of it. Women, therefore, are treated frivolously. They have no individuality. They simply conform to a programme which dictates that they should be exclusively preoccupied with love and reproduction and yet to feign ignorance and innocence. Woman is so insignificant that on her death Pierrot remains unmoved, knowing that she will be reborn in the rest of nature. She is simply another figure in a skirt.

*Mais voici qu'un beau soir, infortunée à point,
Elle meurt! - Oh! là, là; bon, changement de thème!
On sait que tu dois ressusciter le troisième
Jour, sinon en personne, du moins*

*Dans l'odeur, les verdure, les eaux des beaux mois!
Et tu iras, levant encor bien plus de dupes
Vers le Zaimph de la Joconde, vers la Jupe! (33)*

Pierrot remains detached from women because enforced physical solitude is essential to enable him to cultivate himself and make a better *objet d'art* of himself. In contrast the ordinary man has a horror of solitude.

Il veut être deux. L'homme de génie veut être un, donc solitaire. La gloire, c'est rester un, et se prostituer d'une manière particulière. (34)

The Failure of Idealism

The programme of misogyny of the Priest or Dandy dominates "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune", but there is an element of unease in the stance adopted and the subsequent evolution of Laforgue's poetry suggests that idealism is not satisfactory. Pierrot's perplexity is based on the conflict between an ideal of woman and the reality.

*Ah! madame, ce n'est vraiment pas bien
Quand on n'est pas la Joconde
D'en adopter le maintien
Pour induire en spleens tout bleus le pauv' monde. (35)*

He feels trapped by the image of the "femme fatale", the awe-inspiring, demonic woman whose sole aim is to torment men rather than drawing inspiration from her as prospective art. He is irrevocably wounded by the mythologies which accompany any consideration of women:

*Mais aussi, vrai, vous me blessâtes aux antennes
De l'âme, avec les mensonges de votre traîne,
Et votre tas de complications mondaines.*

*Je voyais que vos yeux me lançaient sur des pistes,
Je songeais, oui, divins ces yeux! Mais rien n'existe
Derrière! son âme est affaire d'oculiste. (36)*

In this respect he rejects a fundamental tenet of dandyism. Baudelaire enthusiastically praised those women who cultivated artificiality for it was a denial of their naturalness:

*La femme est bien dans son droit et même elle accomplit une
espèce de devoir en s'appliquant à paraître magique et
surnaturelle. (37)*

Laforgue fails even further as a dandy by the very nature of his idealism. Baudelaire had advised all dandies to avoid Romantic idealism:

Règle sommaire et générale en amour, gardez-vous de la lune et des étoiles; gardez-vous de la Vénus de Milo, des lacs, des guitares, des échelles de cordes et de tous romans. (38)

The dandy's association with the seamier side of life, readily advertised by Baudelaire has no place in Laforgue's work. The prostitute is conspicuous by her absence in his analysis of women. Women are either symbols or middle class. In an age when prostitution was rampant, Laforgue adopts the stance of a Victorian moralist, refusing to acknowledge its existence. He shows that he is not entirely free of the delicacy of his adolescent idealism. He cannot, therefore, create an ideal which is based on reality like Baudelaire who, in a stand against bourgeois sensibilities, glorifies in his elevation of the "unnatural" prostitute or lesbian. Laforgue simply sees all real women as false ideals, who turn love into empty sentiment, beauty into banality:

*Absolus, drapés de layettes,
Aux lunes de miel l'Hymette,
Nous avions par trop l'air vignette! (39)*

He attacks women for not being what they themselves never claimed to be, but as yet he does not realise the lack of logic in his attack.

Baudelaire cultivated scepticism to the extent that it became an instrument of aesthetic pleasure. It was irrelevant, therefore, whether the scepticism was genuinely felt or not. Abbé Mouret found an answer to his false idealism by creating a new ideal in the figure of the dead Christ. By its association with death it is able to remain intact as an ideal. For

Laforgue a sterile programme of behaviour only succeeds in quelling his anguish, not controlling his hyper-romantic sensibility. This leads to the promise which closes the volume.

*.....ayez pitié de ma misère
Que je vous sois à tout un être bienvenu
Et que je sois absous pour mon âme sincère... (40)*

Laforgue appears more human in his confession of an inability to live in accordance with an ascetic principle. His frustration stems from the fact that as a nihilist he is incapable of believing in anything beyond human relationships, hence the obsessive cult of love, and yet he considers them inadequate to satisfy human desires. The analysis of women in "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" revolves around the theme of flight while simultaneously pointing to the impossibility of such flight, the need for idealism and love and the inevitable failure of each one. In the next volume of poetry Laforgue attempts to view women and the world with less concern for absolutes and a greater consideration of reality.

(c) Confrontation with Reality

"Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" are an attempt to reconcile an ascetic view of life and of women with reality. They translate a struggle to compromise idealism with the least possible cost to his personal integrity. Idealism was never wholly satisfactory as implied by the perplexity of Pierrot who is unable to embrace the sterility of a code of living wholeheartedly. It was, however, feasible to some extent, as long as Laforgue was content to deal with life and women as an outsider, to be a dilettante not only in theory, but in practice. As long as his relationships with women were imaginary or short-lived he is able to cultivate the misogyny of an ascetic with enthusiasm.

By January 1885, however, he can no longer make detached theoretical comments about women, yet they are his constant thought:

J'ai le coeur vide de tout le vide de la province, et alors, comme tu sais, c'est la question féminine qui s'installe, plus insoluble que la question d'Orient. Je ne puis la résoudre ici et en à compte sur l'infini que par deux ou trois contemplations platoniques, et de hasardeux dérivatifs physiologiques. Tout cela pour dire que je m'embête inexprimablement. (41)

"L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" reproduces his thoughts on the subject at this time, platonic love versus animality, as Laforgue would have it. A year later, however, he meets Leah Lea and begins to ponder the possibility of marriage. In doing so he acts against the demands of his philosophy, the practical considerations of a secure job and salary and the growing fashion of couples living together outside marriage, as illustrated in "En Ménage" by Huysmans.

This change in circumstances is reflected in a corresponding change in his analysis of women. It is no longer a question of ideal womanhood versus the reality, but rather he attempts to see the reality behind the mythologies.

"Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" is a personal diary of the poet as he grapples with the idea of marriage. The laboured nature of Laforgue's dilemma over marriage is the result of his early addiction to the theories of German pessimism which saw only one possible option for all men of genius, celibacy. To marry or become involved with woman on anything other than a superficial level entailed a rejection of the entire philosophy on which he based his vision of life, hence "*J'ai peur de la vie comme d'un mariage*". (42) By choosing marriage, he loses the programme for a life-style and is left floundering, divested of

all possible values. "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" is a search to discover what is left. His mind demands a retention of nihilism, whilst his sensibility rejects the sterility of the philosophy and the enforced solitude it demands.

Two voices co-exist each one tempered by the presence of the other. On the one hand, there is the apostle of Schopenhauer, Hartmann and Baudelaire, caught up in the struggle to live according to the values they advocate; the resistance to marriage as a bourgeois institution; the disdain of sentimentality and naturalness; the practice of remaining aloof from common humanity especially women. On the other hand, there is one who quite simply wishes to be married and enter a social norm, publicly advertising a wish to reject independence and share his life with a woman.

The discussion of women now combines ideas which are familiar in Laforgue's work with a new perspective. He continues to make women and love an object of derision by treating them frivolously or with rage and passion. A new and rather unexpected note is struck in the apology for marriage which is a *leitmotiv* of the work. He offers a defence of marriage which is in fact an apology for choosing life as opposed to the sterility of a programme for living. He is helped in this attempt by an exploration of the idea of brotherly and sisterly love. Love which gave companionship without sex approached the ideal and brought with it no concession to love's "natural" expression in procreation. The most modern of his ideas is a fresh statement on idealism and women. Now that a woman is viewed as a prospective wife, the true nature of women needs to be studied more seriously. Women emerge as greater realists than men and as he is now concerned for realism, they become an attractive option.

Woman as the Enemy

The poet has abandoned his cult of idealism and is left with the women so despised by Pierrot, "langes à cicatriser", "le petit mammifère usuel", "la matière brute". He is nevertheless obsessed with love of a woman who exists outside art. As he is suffering in the hands of love he seeks to destroy it by a reassertion of the misogynistic stance of dandyism and nihilism.

Women are either treated frivolously, or with the cold objectivity of a dandy. They have destroyed the ideal by their characteristic disrespect for the soul. They can as readily give up their soul as their name:

*Mais chair de pêche, âme en rougeurs!
Chair de victime aux Pubertés,
Âmes prêtes, d'un voyageur
Qui passe, prêtes à dater!*

*Et Protées valseurs sans vergogne!
Changeant de nom, de rôle, (d'âme!)(43)*

The love which they cultivate reflects their own emptiness and volatility, thus suppressing any association with spiritual idealism:

*Le mal m'est trop! tant que l'Amour
S'échange par le temps qui court
Simple et sans foi comme un bonjour,
Des jamais franches
A celles dont le Sort vient le poing sur la hanche
Et que s'éteint
La Rosace du Temple..... (44)*

To further justify his misogynistic position the poet quotes Hamlet adding the weight of a great work of literature to his argument. The dominant theme of Hamlet's presence in the work is his disillusion with women:

T'is brief...As woman's love (45)

To a nunnery go (46)

God has given you one name and you make yourselves another (47)

Given such a weight of evidence against women, the idea of acquiescing to a normal form of social existence as exemplified in marriage seems impossible to contemplate. Such an association would mark the death of his independence and the triumph of bourgeois practices over his spiritual idealism. Woman, therefore, looms as an insufferable enemy as she uses all her wiles to trap a man into marriage, thereby enforcing the death of his soul. All marriages in Laforgue's works lead to death in some form. In "Pierrot Fumiste" consummation of his marriage brings the end of his relationship and the end of his love. Pierrot leaves his wife, never to return. In "Nuit d'août" a short story published in "Feuilles Volantes", death follows sexual possession within a marriage. In "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" and "Moralités Légendaires" the period during which marriage was Laforgue's constant thought, marriage always exists alongside references to death:

Cette Villa-Nuptiale sent la fosse-commune. (48)

claims Lohengrin, before consummation of his marriage after which he is assumed into Heaven as a swan. He echoes Hamlet:

Une jeune fille, c'est aussi promptement enterré que marié. (49)

and the women of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" destroy the temple rose window by their frenzy for a marriage certificate:

*Ces sexes livrés à la grosse
Courir, en valsant, vers la Fosse
Commune de Modernes Noces. (50)*

An element of entrenched fear of women and of the fertility which they are seen to symbolise is present in the repeated analogy of women and death:

*La Femme?
- J'en sors,
La mort
Dans l'âme.. (51)*

Women were regularly depicted as soulless by his age, so the image is a commonplace decadent thought. The association of birth and death looks back to the life of his own mother and his professed fear of childbirth. The event of birth conjures up associations of the blood of the female and of the dying. It draws attention to the animal in man, apparently negating the presence of a soul.

The anxiety surrounding a manifestation of female sexuality is conveyed to the whole idea of love. The women of Laforgue's dreams of love are figures beset by madness. Love is alien to a scientific rational conception of life, so it is depicted as a form of neurosis by the insanity of the woman's eyes:

*Ainsi, elle viendrait à Moi! les yeux bien fous!
Et elle me suivrait avec cet air partout! (52)*

Mais ces yeux plus on va se fardent de mystère (53)

Et que ses yeux, perdus, m'en suivent! (54)

The hero of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" is captivated by the insane stare of the woman. If he yields to this madness his soul will die. Woman becomes the all-powerful, demonic Mother Nature who imprisons man, then leaves him with emptiness and disillusion:

*Et la Nature est une épouse
Qui nous carambole d'extases,
Et puis, nous occit, peu courtoise,
Dès qu'on se permet une pause. (55)*

Fraternal Love and Nascent Feminism

In spite of his attempts to take arms against woman and especially marriage, Laforgue cannot escape the nagging call to enter a social norm. Other decadent writers saw the alluring attraction of marriage and claimed that the only option was the cloister or marriage itself.

*Je vois en face ce couple ouvrier, jeune bien portant, et
je les envie. Ils sont dans la norme, dans la vie mariée et
gais. Mais moi! toujours en dehors.....C'est la solitude à
jamais. Parler à qui? les femmes, tous ratés...Non rien, rien.
Si je ne vais pas au cloître, j'aurai tout raté. (56)*

Pierrot had shown the inadequacy of the monastic life. Laforgue now seeks to reconcile the voice of pessimism and dandyism with the wish for companionship.

The misogyny which Laforgue has upheld to this stage was undoubtedly a fashionable programme of belief and therefore cannot always be taken literally. It is poured into his work with sufficient enthusiasm and regularity, however, to be considered as more than just a theory. Laforgue can only arrive at being able to speak up for women and for marriage by analysing a love which goes beyond adolescent idealism or simple

physical attraction, "les contemplations platoniques et de hasardeux dérivatifs physiologiques" as found in "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune". He begins his analysis by studying fraternal love. This reflects a desire for companionship with a nihilistic disinclination to accept the normal forms of social existence.

*Ah! c'est pas sa chair qui m'est tout,
Et suis pas qu'un grand coeur pour elle;
Non, c'est d'aller faire les fous
Dans des histoires fraternelles! (57)*

A relationship is imagined in which men and women are equal. This contrasts with the imbalance characterising all previous relationships with women; to Our lady, Diana, or the ~~Mona Lisa~~ ~~Isabelle~~, the poet is a subordinate. To all real women the poet is a master. By creating a new more realisable ideal the poet can begin to acquiesce to the normality of marriage.

Judging by the long letters of Laforgue to his sister Marie, she clearly figured among his closest friends and the brother, sister relationship was ideal. It has been shown that letters to other women display a similar kind of brotherly affection, even to Leah he claims to have written "en bons amis". (58) Laforgue was successful in finding friends who retained an interest in his affairs in spite of the geographical distance separating them. Letters to Charles Henry and Gustave Kahn suggest a mutual affection and esteem.

The idea of friendship and fraternal love with a woman who is not a family relation is uncomplicated by a consideration of "L'Eternel Féminin". The woman's sex is taken for granted and does not dominate their relationship enabling honest companionship to become possible. Laforgue is ultimately able to plead the case for marriage because he realises that his

obsessions with ideal women, and scruples over the reality of womanhood are naïve.

In "Moralités Légendaires" the heroines are desexed and belittled by the men they meet by being treated as sisters, angels, and companions. It is the females, however, who have the heroic status in these works, and we are made to sympathise with their view of existence, to reject the male assumption of superiority and their cult of idealism manifested in scruples over the reality of human heterosexual relationships.

The heroines have boyish figures and by reducing their obviously female characteristics Laforgue is underrating womanliness. It is equally true, however, that he is attacking an equivalent display of macho virility and the spiritual aspirations considered unique to men by the age. When Andromède smiles at Persée's boy-scout attempts to play the hero, we share her amusement. Elsa discusses anatomy on her wedding night much to the horror of the delicate sensibilities of Lohengrin. Beside her self-assurance, Lohengrin's scruples are made to appear ridiculous. The Syrinx takes up a stand against Romantic idealism attacking the unnecessary complications which men of sensibility see fit to introduce into their relationships with women:

Voyez, les hommes ne peuvent jamais être clairs devant la femme! Ils devraient faire leur déclaration en bon français. (59)

These women have a greater presence than the women in the street who are the target of the poet's disdain and mistrust. They are not silent like the "jeunes filles". They are not absorbed in the search for a husband; Salomé in particular disdains marriage contrary to expectations. They do not feign ignorance or deny the physical aspect of their nature.

Association with such individuals seems ideal. Their androgyny of appearance makes them sufficiently decadent to waylay any accusation of selling off a dandy integrity to mediocrity, yet, they have a greater reality than "la légende Féminine", Our Lady, Ophelia, ~~Jeane~~ *Mona Lisa*, for they are depicted as body and soul.

An apology for marriage is now possible as women are shown to be not as unattractive as his pessimism and dandyism would have them appear. He continues to temper his new-found enthusiasm for marriage by depicting it as a necessity in a colourless world. It is not good in itself, simply a colourful buoy on the sea of life, allowing a safe crossing:

*Mariage, ô dansante bouée
Peinte d'azur, de lait doux, de rose,
Mon âme de corsaire morose,
Va, ne sera jamais renflouée!...*

Elle est la chose

Des coups de vent, des pluies, et des nuées... (60)

There is sufficient conviction to silence in part the voices of his past.

Laforgue as a misogynist and Laforgue as a nascent feminist is present in the heroines of "Des Fleurs de Bonne volonté"; the ephemeral "jeunes filles" who share the lot of the poet in a world without justice and the androgynous heroines of "Moralités Légendaires". By admiring figures whose womanliness is understated he can continue to disdain womanhood in the absolute which for Laforgue meant a machine for procreation:

L'étalon (critérium) du véritable (unique) amour est le degré d'illusion où nous jette l'être aimé sur la réalité de fins de tout amour; le degré de perfection dans la duperie - l'aveuglement.

Moins on voit, plus on oublie la femelle. (61)

This is less a rejection of genuine womanliness as of the stereotypes of woman. He retains the society's chauvinism by his need to create a new ideal, a slim, intelligent, woman whose self-assurance is her strength, but she is at least more real than the Romantic "femme fatale" or the idealistic virgin of the Immaculate Conception watching over the Catholic Church. On realising that the "jeunes filles" share his suffering:

*O Soeurs, ensanglotons la Terre, ce pressoir
Sans Planteur de Justice! (62)*

he discovers the subordinate position bestowed on women as a whole:

Pourquoi la Femme aime-t-elle ceux qui souffrent - Ça lui rappelle-t-il sa condition d'esclave. (63)

The social structure was such that marriage was the only means whereby a woman could rise in the society of the late nineteenth century, her social position being defined by her husband. Even to a working mother for whom there would be no relief from drudgery marriage was better than being in domestic service or being a shirt-maker. Women had more to lose by not being married. Laforgue begins to draw attention to the gross inequalities of the social structure.

*La concurrence vitale est terrible. L'homme a mille armes
- la femme une seule, son sexe. (64)*

Like Quinet he claims that the reality of a woman is not taken into consideration by male-dominated society. Even by marrying and thereby taking on the social responsibility of a woman, man chooses a situation of his own invention rather than a person

and hence destroys the possibility of truth and spontaneity in a relationship.

Nous disons humains, et qu'on est tous frères! Non, la femme n'est pas notre frère; par la paresse et la corruption nous en avons fait un être à part, inconnu, n'ayant d'autre arme que son sexe. (65)

Laforgue calls for the destruction of the myths surrounding women:

*Sans souci de serments, de bagues
Suçons le peu qu'elles nous donnent,
Notre respect peut être vague,
Leurs yeux sont hauts et monotones.*

*Cueillons sans espoirs et sans drames,
La chair vieillit après les roses;
Oh! parcourons le plus de gammes!
Car il n'y a pas autre chose. (66)*

*Cueillez la fleur de mes visages,
Buvez ma bouche et non ma voix,
Et n'en cherchez pas davantage...
Nul n'y vit clair; pas même moi. (67)*

The creation of a new myth of an androgynous figure symbolises the Post-Revolutionary ideal of absolute social equality. Laforgue goes beyond the symbol to an actual plea for absolute equality:

La femme est un être vaillant, travailleur, un associé etc... Nous ne devrions nous occuper d'elle autrement que de nos frères, qu'à certains moments, une 1/2 heure, parce qu'elle a un autre sexe, - pas avant, pas après - travail, association - Eh bien non, comme on l'a laissée dans l'esclavage, la paresse,

sans autre occupation et arme que son sexe, elle l'a hypertrophié, et est devenue le Féminin, toilettes, bijoux, faux-derrières ou plates tuniques grecques, romans, drames, décolletages, nus, paquets de lettres parfumées, lunes de miel, nous l'avons laissée s'hypertrophier, elle est un monde pour nous, nous ne la voyons qu'en amour, et comme la nature de cet amour est de durer à peine une 1/2 heure, il a fallu pour remplir les vides et joindre les deux bouts qu'elle se fit une humanité à part, chaque an, chaque saison une nouvelle mode, un nouvel art de séduction, et des variétés d'amour. tête, coeur, chair, platoniques, amours mûres, etc., etc...

Eh bien tout ça est faux et n'a pas de fin et conduit à l'extinction des nerfs. Nous supportons tout le travail de la planète depuis l'histoire. Ce travail nécessairement est stupide et boîte, parce que la femme ne prend pas part. Avec la Femme nous avons jusqu'ici joué à la poupée - eh bien voilà trop longtemps que ça dure

C'est la femme qui sauvera le monde. C'est elle qui dissipera de son sourire terrestre les vapeurs électriques de fin d'été du Pessimisme. L'homme est mort, vive la Femme! (68)

(v) A Legacy of Paradox

The sentiments Laforgue expresses are later paralleled in Beauvoir's seminal work on the female condition:

Si (la femme) apparaît à l'homme comme un être tellement «physique», c'est que sa condition l'incite à attacher une extrême importance à son animalité... Sa frivolité a la même cause que son «matérialisme sordide». Elle donne de l'importance aux petites choses faute d'avoir accès aux grandes... Enfin, si elle est «terre à terre», «pot-au-feu», bassement utilitaire, c'est qu'on lui propose de consacrer son

existence à préparer des aliments et nettoyer des déjections: ce n'est pas de là qu'elle peut tirer le sens de la grandeur... On enferme la femme dans une cuisine ou dans un boudoir, et on s'étonne que son horizon soit borné; on lui coupe les ailes, et on déplore qu'elle ne sache pas voler. Qu'on lui ouvre l'avenir, elle ne sera plus obligée de s'installer dans le présent. (69)

As in every other aspect of Laforgue's work, his analysis of women is characterised by paradox. Beauvoir justifiably places him amongst those who perpetuate the injustices relating to the female condition by quoting his mental subjection of women to earthiness. The sentiments expressed in "Feuilles Volantes", however, and the image of women which emerges from behind the dandy pose in "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", illustrates a mentality which not only grasps fundamental truths on the injustice of woman's condition, but which makes an earnest plea for change. The plea is in part founded on his own inability to adopt a conventional man's role, but the reasons for change which he outlines are impersonal and universally applicable. Laforgue's analysis reflects the theories of gender which characterised his age from Romanticism, decadence, asceticism to the dawning of feminism. In this respect he shows an awareness of the female condition from the male and female viewpoint and displays a sound understanding of the psychology of his age. The contradiction present in being both misogynist and feminist looks ahead of his time, when ambiguity marks every assessment not only of the female condition, but of all human experience.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PSYCHOLOGY

In the latter half of the nineteenth century France was the leading European country in psychological studies. Foremost was Jean Martin Charcot who exerted a considerable influence on Freud as professor of neurology and director of the Salpêtrière. Laforgue's interest in psychology stemmed from the general interest in a science which was then a relative novelty, and was reinforced by his intensive study of Hartmann's "Philosophie Des Unbewußten", then a pioneering work in the field of psychology. The subject was of specific interest to Laforgue for two reasons. Though a science, the laws of psychology were only tentative and could not deny uncertainty or mystery. In this respect it stood in opposition to the fashionable positivist stance which Laforgue could not accept. Secondly, the study of psychology in Hartmann ultimately led the way to the belief in a metaphysical absolute, termed the unconscious, which resolved the conflict between mystical longings and the desire for scientific justification.

The interest in psychology was also characteristic of the age of decadence when neurosis was fashionable. Schopenhauer and Hartmann had taught the age that neurosis and genius were inseparable. The genius was made to suffer on behalf of the insensitive majority, through his strong sense of the pain of existence. To feel neurotic made the individual believe he possessed some element of genius, so neurosis became a cult. Laforgue himself recognised this in the description of his contemporaries in "Le Miracle des Roses":

*Ce sont des névropathes, enfants d'un siècle trop
brillant; on en a mis partout. (1)*

In Bourget's assessment of the period in "Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine" he claims that the Adolphes of the period were stripped of the ability to act and became imprisoned in the domain of pure thought:

Tous les événements de la vie furent pour eux matière à une dissection. (2)

They practised psychological analysis on themselves. Whilst the Romantic simply cursed and endured existence, the decadent thinker was an amateur psychologist who attempted to discern the reason for his malaise. They concluded that it was the clash of life's mediocrity with their superior and sensitive natures. This led to the cult of dandyism. A mask of elegance, fastidiousness and absolute self-control hid an affected inability to come to terms with life, distancing the individual from the mediocrity of the masses.

For Laforgue the adoption of a mask was a genuine need, but it could be more comfortably explained to decadent friends as a manifestation of the current trend. When Lindenlaub met Laforgue in Germany he was struck by the conscious adoption of a mask:

I have never met a being more completely lost than Laforgue during his first days in Germany, or one filled with a more intense phobia for creatures and for things... That impenetrable mask, that calm and level voice hid an almost morbid state of timidity and uncertainty... I wonder by what extraordinary effort of will he managed from one day to another, to go about his duties, to keep up the appearances of court life, to get dressed, remember his hours of work, make an entrance, utter a greeting, to speak - answer, that is to say - without anyone noticing in the least his palpitating distress. (3)

The duality of personality as revealed in the attempt by the individual to seem at ease in a given situation, whilst feeling totally displaced is a major theme in Laforgue's poetry. Man's psychology is shown to be a divided mechanism, in which one part is revealed in external behaviour, the other in the exploration and revelation of the soul. The Romantic heroes and poets made an art of exposing their soul, but a later age saw such confessions as a sign of weakness. When all values had become nostalgic memories, the sole remaining value was the worth of the individual. This could only be measured by the confident adoption of a mask which disguised the fragility of the soul. When Laforgue claimed "*Je le trouve stupide de faire la grosse voix*", (4) it was a conscious effort to silence the emotional and spiritual anguish of the soul and replace it with an artificial nonchalance.

Laforgue envisages all thought processes within the two broad categories of intellect and sentiment, each bearing the influence of the other, neither being mutually exclusive. There is the strong face presented to the world by the reasoning intellect and the elusive inner man, the unfulfilled hopes and dreams, the unvoiced petty anxieties and an ever present sense of vulnerability.

The confident assertion of the visible social behaviour of the outer man, guided by the science of dress and the rituals of social intercourse, is exemplified by Pierrot. This is balanced by the hero of "*Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté*", whose lack of self-assurance and the vagueness of his *raison d'être* reflects the ambiguity in the mental processes of the inner man. "*L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune*" explores the psychology of the dandy, who represents all those who strive to live in accordance with a strict code of conduct. "*Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté*", by contrast, explores the unsophisticated psychology of ordinary man for whom the dandy image is just another of the many role-models to emulate.

The Psychology of the Dandy

Pierrot is the classic dandy. His behaviour illustrates an attempt to deny the divide between the inner and outer man by an obsessive cult of appearance and a refusal to allow the inner man to emerge even in moments of solitude. The dandy is obsessed with self-image which along with art is the only value. His cult of the self was not so much a narcissistic streak, though there is undoubtedly a strong element of this in his psychology, rather an attempt to make himself and his life into an art form. He aimed to be what he loved, a character worthy of a place in literature with all the unity, coherence and artistic beauty of such a character. He lives life, therefore, as if confronted by a permanent mirror in which he can see himself perform. Baudelaire outlines the dandy code in "Mon Coeur Mis à Nu". He explains why the dandy had to be a constant spectator of his behaviour:

Le dandy doit aspirer à être sublime sans interruption; il doit vivre et dormir devant son miroir. Cela ne veut pas dire qu'il passe son temps à s'adoriser, mais qu'il doit être héroïque sans interruption. (5)

The escapism from life into art arises from a strong sense of the absurdity and mediocrity of existence. The dandy is a critic of society and of existence. He rejects all established codes and practices being anti-money, anti-work, anti-progress and all those elements which are considered as valuable in a bourgeois view of life. His values are idleness and any kind of anti-social behaviour which place him at a distance from the norm. He rejects the conventional notion that nature is beautiful, hiding the animal in himself by elegant clothing, disdaining passion and spontaneity. He rejects sex which is in accordance with social, biological or moral laws choosing erotic pleasure for its own sake.

The dandy is aware of the existence of an inner life as found in emotions, dreams, and memories all of which are characterised by difficulty of definition and instability. To reveal his inner life, however, is to open the door to vulnerability, for he knows he cannot be master of such elusive areas of experience. The Romantic writer made an art of his vulnerability, but a later age condemned such personal confessions as unworthy of art. For a dandy in an age of decadence the existence of an inner life had to be denied.

(1) Life as a Stage

In this volume of poetry, the study of the mind is restricted to that which is evident in the external behaviour of an individual. Pierrot illustrates the outer man divorced from his inner soul. His adherence to the code of dandyism is total. Refinement of dress and manner and a sophisticated use of language are the distinguishing characteristics which mark him apart from the norm. He is dressed in a long loose white robe and a black skull cap and adds touches of art and elegance in a button-hole flower, a ring and make-up. Deportment and speech are marked by an excessive refinement. All actions have the solemnity and sense of occasion of sacred ceremonies. He is at once a choir-boy, a respectful mute at a funeral and a priest.

Language is of prime importance as indicated by the titles of the poems, some of which contain linguistic terms or indicate a stylised presentation of speech: litanies; divagations; locutions; dialogues. Others suggest an uttered phrase rather than a conventional title: *On a des principes*; *La lune est stérile*; *Un mot au soleil pour commencer*; *Avis, je vous prie*.

The dandy role is taken so seriously that all of life is transposed to the stage. Pierrot dresses up, enters on stage, performs, then exits until the next scene in which he is called upon to play. His speech is limited to grand rhetoric,

soliloquies, theatrical dialogues, all of which are closer to a prepared speech than to spontaneous expression. His actions are enclosed within scenes. He simply appears and disappears. Like a puppet, his inner life is dead.

We are continually reminded that Pierrot's life is a role in some artistic reproduction:

*Quand trépassé une vierge,
Ils suivent son convoi,
Tenant leur cou tout droit
Comme on porte un beau cierge.*

Rôle très fatigant,.....(6)

Pierrot sings, cartwheels, makes up his face and moves with stylised gestures, continually putting on an act:

*Ces dandys de la Lune
S'imposent, en effet,
De chanter «s'il vous plaît?»
De la blonde à la brune.(6)*

*Croyez qu'il font la bête
Afin d'avoir des seins
.....
Ecarquillant le cou
Et feignant de comprendre..(7)*

*Maquillés d'abandon, les manches
En saule, ils leur font des serments,
Pour être vrai trop véhéments!
Puis, tumult^uent en giges blanches..(8)*

*Ils disent, d'un oeil faisandé,
Les manches très sacerdotales ... (9)*

When a disruption happens in the flow of the plot in which he is performing he can easily adapt and take on a new role.

Elle meurt! - Oh! là, là; bon, changement de thème! (10)

Like a dandy Pierrot believes that he is the sole person of importance in the universe. The exterior world is irrelevant save where it relates to him. He always occupies a central position on the stage. Other characters are mere sounding-boards for his philosophy or a mere backcloth for the revelation of his ego. Soliloquy is his chief means of communication and in any dialogue it is he who anticipates or composes responses. These either remain unvoiced or are given a brief hearing only to be swallowed up in the presence of Pierrot.

All of life is transposed into an artistic game for Pierrot. His dealings with the outside world are figurative. He addresses the earth from a super-terrestrial vantage point or he converses with his own notion of everywoman. Even nihilistic thoughts are subject to an artistic transposition:

*Penser qu'on vivra jamais dans cet astre
Parfois me flanque un coup dans l'épigastre. (11)*

The terminology is humorous in its irrelevant precision. He delights in making a work of art of any experience:

*Ça nous ferait un scapulaire
Dont le contact anti-solaire,

Par exemple aux pieds de la femme,
Ah! nous serait tout un programme! (12)*

(ii) The Dandy Alone

Even when alone Pierrot does not lose sight of the need to be artistic. He meanders around his thoughts making performances of them. He plays with images looking at every possible artistic connotation. He pretends to lull himself into a state of prayerful contemplation, but his pretence is evident in his choice of words where frivolity clashes with the reverential tones:

Lune bénie

Des insomnies

Madone et miss

Diane - Artémis(13)

The result is a sense of absolute control and detachment. Trivia and solemnity co-exist and he is meticulous in maintaining the balance.

In his thoughts Pierrot pictures a setting which might suit his dandy disposition, the strangeness of which is a further artistic transformation of reality. Whiteness and sterility dominate the cold, hard angularity of the landscape. Bears amble towards the honey of divine silence and toads act as vigilantes on the mountain peaks. He identifies with the strange creatures of this land with a casual greeting. Just as he transposes himself to the world of theatre, in solitude he sees himself in a picture, outside life.

(iii) The Dandy in the World

To be a good actor the dandy has to play his part with confidence. When Pierrot is confronted by the real world, therefore, his behaviour is characterised by cynicism, arrogance, self-assurance and insulting language. The real world is thereby prevented from having a hold on his psychology. He knows his only

weapons are speech and gestures. These, he exploits to the full, for to go beyond that would take the dealings off-stage, too dangerous a position for the eternal actor, whose concerns are restricted to externals. The mood and expressions of the opening poem of the volume are typical of his dealings with the world. Firm assurance of the mediocrity of everything and everyone outside himself leads to an assumption of superiority and sanctions unrefined vocabulary.

*Soleil! soudard, plaqué d'ordres et de crachats,
Planteur mal élevé, sache que les Vestales
A qui la Lune, en son équivoque oeil-de-chat,
Est la rosace de l'Unique Cathédrale(14)*

The dandy of "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" vents his anger on the material world and like a skilful politician he mentally visualises all those on his side. With the resulting feeling of power he can resume his attack on the opposition with the basest of definitions:

*Continue à fournir de couchants avinés
Les lendemains vomis des fêtes nationales,
A styler tes saisons, à nous bien déchaîner
Les drames de l'Apothéose Ombilicale!(15)*

He knows he can afford to be patronising and sarcastic with the mental assurance of his assumed supporters. He can readily sustain a mock reverential bow at his "enemy" with tremendous theatrical panache and by sophisticated manipulation of language his attack is all the more virulent.

*Pour aujourd'hui, vieux beau, nous nous contenterons
De mettre sous le nez de Ta Badauderie
Le mot dont l'Homme t'a marqué au front;
Tu ne t'en étais jamais douté, je parie?*

- *Sache qu'on va disant d'une belle phrase, os
Sonore mais très-nul comme suc médullaire,
De tout boniment creux enfin: c'est du pathos,
C'est du PHOEBUS! - Ah! pas besoin de commentaires. (16)*

Pierrot proudly displays his widely informed mind with references to the Bible, Greek and Roman mythology, French theological history, carefully chosen imagery, scientific terminology and foreign languages. He is even versed in the more esoteric areas of knowledge such as sociology and anthropology:

*Ecole des cromlechs
Et des tuyaux d'usines. (17)*

(iv) The Dandy and Women

Not surprisingly, for fear of tainting the art of his existence, Pierrot does not confront the real world again except in its women. Just as he does not expect an earthly materialist to challenge him in his condemnation of the world, his liaisons with women are dependent on not allowing a real woman to emerge. The women with whom he flirts are all "jeunes filles" characterised by the gullibility and frailty of naïve adolescence; they will readily remain in silence, submit to Pierrot's disguised demands, they are married off and live happily ever after, or they conveniently die:

*Car on l'a unie
Avec un monsieur... (18)*

*Mais voici un beau soir, infortunée a point,
Elle meurt! (19)*

He can easily act the macho with one so young and compliant. He may be accused of cowardice, but he firmly believes that he is

above all moral codes and anticipating this criticism, he justifies his behaviour by reminding the world of his sinlessness:

*Allez, ne jetez pas la pierre
Aux blancs parias, aux purs pierrots! (20)*

The belief in his superiority is total. Unlike the hero of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", he does not partake in the wishful thinking of heroism for such dreams are too human and do not in any case reach the pinnacle of distinction of his own character:

*Je ne suis point "ce gaillard-là" ni Le Superbe!
Mais mon âme, qu'un cri un peu cru exacerbe,
Est au fond distingué et franche comme une herbe. (21)*

*C'est un coeur plein de dandysme
Lunaire, en un drôle de corps. (22)*

(v) The Triumph of Appearances

The rules Pierrot formulates for himself relate exclusively to the outer man. Appearances must be maintained at all times. He pays regular visits to the barber's, and always dresses in the correct "uniform". Such correctness extends to his diet. He carefully singles out a few foods, not to earnestly preach of their wholesomeness or indeed hedonistic unhealthiness, simply to illustrate that he is playing with food in the way he plays with life. Its presence is a monotonous necessity, but one can at least be refined about the process in choosing correctly:

*Ils vont, se sustentant d'azur!
Et parfois aussi de légumes,
De riz plus blanc que leur costume,
De mandarines et d'oeufs durs. (23)*

He can never appear too earnest or too sceptical for that would topple the delicate balance of detachment and control and categorise him as potentially human.

Appearances are shown to clash with reality in the character of Pierrot, but it is the former which holds sway. His large eyes suggest innocence and wonder at the world when his whole life is dedicated to calculation; his gestures on the one hand, imply tremendous elegance, sophistication and artistic beauty, on the other, a mechanical self-imposed discipline akin to the stiff upper lip taught by English public schools and the army and yet he is no more than a clown; he acts as a ruthless Don Juan, a puppet, an indifferent play-boy or a missionary preacher.

The final poem is a bridge between the two volumes of poetry. We are promised greater humanity in a rejection of the dandy's self-obsession:

*Oh! j'ai été frappé de CETTE VIE À MOI,
L'autre dimanche, m'en allant par une plaine!
Oh! laissez-moi seulement reprendre haleine,
Et vous aurez un livre de bonne foi.*

*En attendant, ayez pitié de ma misère!
Que je vous sois à tous un être bienvenu!
Et que je sois absous pour mon âme sincère,
Comme le fut Phryné pour son sincère nu. (24)*

The decadent obsession with the ego to the exclusion of all else now becomes a struggle for reconciliation with the world.

The Psychology of Ordinary Man

The lie behind appearances is studied in the next volume. Every statement is shaded in multiple meaning. The many possibilities of interpretation negate what is initially apparent. Pierrot has the coherence and unity of a literary character, so sought after by the dandy. The hero of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", proves that this aspiration is in vain. He is a fragmented individual existing not in the narrow world of art, but rooted in the world with the resultant characteristics of shallowness and mediocrity on the one hand, and on the other the richness and fulness of humanity.

In "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", the poet/hero of the work has moods and opinions which cover the whole spectrum of the human mind. He is both introvert and extrovert. As an introvert he is indecisive, anxious, nostalgic, self-conscious to an extreme, humble, resigned or depressed. He lives a life of loneliness, longing for companionship and suffers from a strong sense of incompatibility arising from an excessively sensitive nature. His naivety and love of art fill him with awe for the heroes and heroines of old. As an extrovert he is proud and confidently indifferent to everything and everyone outside himself. He can even be violent in his carefully disguised intention for rape. He is a superior exhibitionist master of his art, his mind, his body and soul.

(1) A Scientific Analysis

The presentation of the individual in "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", is in the manner of a sociological or psychological study with an exposition and assessment of facts.

The tone of a social scientific study is established in the first poem in the volume as the hero gives an outline of his circumstances. His father is remembered as a strict

disciplinarian who is now dead. His mother was barely an acquaintance. The sense of loss dominates his mind. He sees himself as being orphaned with no human links. The strictness of his father has given him a feeling of intimidation in relation to the world and generated a sense of revolt. He sees the need for escape and chooses imagination and art, but the realities of life will not support escapism. The need to earn a living cannot be satisfied by his scribblings, so he is left in a position of unease.

*Mon père (un dur par timidité)
Est mort avec un profil sévère;
J'avais presque pas connu ma mère,
Et donc vers vingt ans je suis resté.*

*Alors j'ai fait d' la littérature;
Mais le Démon de la Vérité
Sifflotait tout l' temps à mes côtés :
«Pauvre! as-tu fini tes écritures...» (25)*

His character is thus shown to reflect psychological conditioning and sociological circumstances.

(ii) The Psychology of Adolescence

The psychologist would sum up his mind as that of an adolescent. There is the familiar tension between the adult world which advocates a secure job and the settling down entailed by marriage, and the desires of youth, whose inexperience of life allows dream and imagination to dominate future plans. The reference to examinations in a later poem sums up the frustration at a sense of imprisonment by external laws over which there is no control. Examinations are seen as trials imposed by the adult world on youth with the sole purpose of generating anxiety and enforcing submission.

*La peur des examens sans merci
Et si je ne sors pas de là. (26)*

The relative resilience and optimism of youth can exploit the two safety nets which offer relief from the tensions of adolescence: dream and the cult of a self-image which sets one apart from the norm. A disdain for the world and its values is adopted and cultivated in behaviour, manner, appearance and mental preoccupations which continually seek to deny the call to conform.

The recorded experiences are rooted in the world of adolescence. Youthful anguish concerning philosophy concentrates on mundane dilemmas such as what to do with one's life, how to find an identity, and various emotional crises concerning love and the opposite sex. The poet claims to be a spokesman for youth:

- Jeunes gens! que je vous serv' d'Ilote! (27)

(iii) The Dreamer in Everyman

There is, however, an intimacy with the reader conveyed in the frequent asides, the implication being that we are all dreamers, we are all frustrated by the world's demands and so like an adolescent we seek escapism.

Daydreams dominate the content of this volume of poetry. The dreams have the familiarity of the average person's mental world. There are sentimental reveries, erotic fantasies, and scenes of personal heroism.

After an introduction coined in sociological terms he gives his imagination free reign in "Figurez-vous un peu", the very title of which calls upon our imaginations rather than for an appreciation of science. The earnestness of a sentimental reverie receives utterance in declamatory Alexandrines, to be intoned as a prolonged sigh:

*Ah! Qu'une d'Elle-même, un beau soir sût venir,
Ne voyant que boire à Mes Lèvres! où mourir... (28)*

He translates the longing for uniqueness by referring to himself and the imagined loved one with capital letters. There is the familiar death wish should his love remain unrequited. The earnestness of the sigh is then trivialised as common sense reminds him that the affair is as mundane as a mathematical equation:

.....un, deux! ni plus ni moins!

The melodramatic finale destroys the desire to go on with the dream as the longing dissolves into a cliché:

*Ainsi elle viendrait à Moi! les yeux bien fous!
Et elle me suivrait avec cet air partout!*

The dream cannot be sustained with the realisation that this is a too familiar story, an ending which would force Pierrot to return to the moon.

The pattern of a day-dream in the mind of an individual is translated in the development of the poem; a sigh followed by imagined situations leading to the total fulfilment of the dream after which there is no mental energy left. Reason intrudes to criticise the weakness of indulging in dream. It is implied that the longing has been expiated. Spent mental energy has taken away the longing, to be replaced by relative peace, not by some sense of sublimation.

The content of dream is largely determined by the self-image of the individual. The hero of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", wants above all to be considered an artistic figure. In common with artists of any age the poet cultivates unashamedly the code of dandiism. His belief is that a refined appearance will suggest

to the world a refined sensibility, which to a nineteenth-century decadent is the only possible form of heroism for their age.

There is a familiar interest in clothes:

*Partout à toute heure, le thème
De leurs toilettes, de leurs airs,
Des soirs de plage aux bals d'hiver, (29)*

He cultivates an air of impenetrability, unlike the Romantic who readily gives in to emotional effusion. Passionate self-expression does not conform to the classical or decadent notion of decorum.

*Et l'on geint
En vers, en prose. Au lieu de se tendre la main.*

*Quoi? vais-je prendre un air géant,
Et faire appeler le Néant?
Non, non; ce n'est pas bienséant
Je me promène
Parmi les sommités des colonies humaines
Du bout du doigt
Je feuillette les versions de l'Unique Loi
Et je vivotte, et m'inocule
Les grands airs gris du crépuscule,
Et j'en garule! et j'en garule! (30)*

His love of art enables him to see in nature the possibility of indulgence in a pathetic fallacy:

*Quand reviendra l'automne,
Cette saison si triste,
Je vais m'la passer bonne,
Au point de vue artiste. (31)*

The only suitable form of employment of time is literature,
travel, philosophy and idleness:

Je fais la cour à ma destinée

*Je la prends par la douceur, en sage
Tout aux arts, au bon coeur, aux voyages..*

*Et vais m'arlequinant des défroques
Des plus grands penseurs de chaque époque...*

*Et saigne en jurant que je me blinde
Des rites végétatifs de L'Inde...*

*Et suis digne, allez, d'un mausolée
En pleine future Galilée(32)*

*Adieu. Noble et lent, vais me remettre
À la culture des Belles-Lettres. (33)*

*Je vague depuis le matin,
En proie à des loisirs coupables(34)*

It improves his image to confess to physical ailments, such as
insomnia and headaches, for these suggest a delicate physique and
a highly active mind:

*Je suis si exténué d'art!
Me répéter, oh! mal de tête!.. (35)*

*Oui, sous ces airs supérieurs,
Le coeur me piaffe de génie
En labyrinthes d'insomnie!.. (36)*

To satisfy the poet's image of himself, it is not enough to
be a dandy, for the greatness of his character must be apparent to

the masses. The cult of dandyism may bring him admiration in decadent circles, but not among common humanity. The paradox of the dandy persona is revealed as he feels the need to play to the masses while hating them. He sees himself as a superior individual worthy of respect by identifying with a young Christian Priest, a Buddhist monk, and a missionary preaching his own form of the good news. It is especially Hamlet, however, who provides the most attractive role model. He justifies endless personal confession in his love of the soliloquy, he waylays the potential accusation of being an effusive Romantic obsessed with his own feelings and he can generate the same sympathy as that of "a noble mind o'erthrown".

He imagines himself with a priestly air suffering in his lonely presbytery:

*Peut-être un peu mon natif air d'apôtre,
Empêcheur de danser en rond sur cette
Scandaleuse planète. (37)*

*Je pleure dans les coins; je n'ai plus goût à rien;
Oh! j'ai tant pleuré, dimanche, en mon paroissien! (38)*

he sees himself as a solitary hermit:

*Ne serai-je qu'un monomane
Dissolu
Par ces travaux de décadent et de reclus? (39)*

he is a crusader in the United States with all the glamour that such a position would bring:

*Oh là-bas, m'y scalper de mon cerveau d'Europe!
Piaffer, redevenir une vierge antilope,
Sans littérature, un gars de proie, citoyen
Du hasard et sifflant l'argot californien! (40)*

In another dream he takes on the role of a missionary proclaiming by his poetry the futility of the world and advertising the relentless mechanical forces which hold it within their grip:

*Martyrs mutuels! de frère à soeur, sans Père!
Comment ne voit-on pas que c'est là notre terre?*

*Et qu'il n'y a que ça! que le reste est impôts
Dont nous n'avons pas même à chercher l'à-propos! (41)*

He finds a further heroic role as a sufferer for all mankind. He curses this, but he has at least a role of importance, cherished child victim of mankind's sins:

*Je suis la Gondole enfant chérie
Qui arrive à la fin de la fête
Pour je ne sais quoi, par bouderie,
(Un soir trop beau me monte à la tête!)*

*_ Et puis, j'attends sous une arche noire...
Mais nul ne vient; les lampions s'éteignent;
Et je maudis la nuit et la gloire
Et ce cœur qui veut qu'on me dédaigne! (42)*

All adopted roles are the product of a longing for heroism:

*.....- «Ah! mourir mais me tordre
«Dans l'orbe d'un exécutant de premier ordre!» (43)*

.....vouloir faire l'ange.... (44)

The need to live up to his adopted role models influences his dreams which are conditioned by how a dandy, a hero of the wild west or a decadently virtuous priest would act in a given situation.

There is the typical combination of moods in "Le Vrai de la Chose" wherein fantasy and realism exist side by side. There is no resignation to emotional longing, but an attempt to reasonably summarise his predicament, that of wanting friendship or love while desiring to maintain his integrity as an individual with a strong sense of his own uniqueness:

*Ah! c'est pas sa chair qui m'est tout,
Et suis pas qu'un grand coeur pour elle;
Non, c'est d'aller faire les fous
Dans des histoires fraternelles! (45)*

The dream is complicated by banal snippets of conversation between lovers. Love and friendship degenerate into a series of well-known formulae. The poem concludes, however, with a return of the same sincere wish; forget uniqueness, forget the cynical assessment of any relationship and simply hope for a possible realisation of the dream: .

*Oh! vous m'entendez bien!
Oh! vous savez comme on y vient;
Oh! vous savez parfaitement qu'il y a moyen,
Et comme on s'y attelle.*

*Oh! c'est pas seulement sa chair,
Et c'est pas plus seulement l'âme;
C'est l'esprit édénique et fier
D'être un peu l'Homme avec la Femme.*

Adolescent reverie is given a hearing, but is simultaneously squashed by an awareness of the absurdity of such aspiration. Other dreams are allowed to exist because they do not interfere with the delicate sensibility of the dandy. Situations are imagined where the hero plays the macho. He displays cold indifference, hard-heartedness, even violence towards the women of his dreams. For the dandy, sexual frustration is an inconvenience

which cannot be replaced by escapism into sentiment. Dreams of rape or sex without any sense of responsibility are sanctioned for they indicate an exemption from normal moral laws and improve the self-image of the individual at the audacity in infringing conventional rules of right and wrong.

*Ma chair, ô soeur, a bien mal à son âme.
Oh! ton piano
Me recommence! et ton coeur s'y ânonne
En ritournelles si infâmes,
Et ta chair, sur quoi j'ai des droits! s'y pâme...*

*Que je te les tordrais avec plaisir,
Ce coeur, ce corps!
Et te dirais leur fait! et puis encore
La manière de s'en servir!
Si tu voulais ensuite m'approfondir... (46)*

Towards the end of the volume the dreams exist less in the realm of wishful thinking as in that of hopeful possibilities. The poet imagines an interior of his own with the presence of a particular woman rather than some generalised idea of woman. The poet is no longer swimming in a void, but has found a real person on whom to concentrate his thoughts and wishes. He is now far from the vague adolescent reveries, the erotic fantasy, the desire for heroism; rather he thinks simply of the conventional happiness of a home^{and} a wife:

*Ailleurs, loin de ce savant siècle batailleur...
C'est là que je m' créerai un petit intérieur,
Avec Une dont, comme de Moi, Tout n'a que faire. (47)*

C'est l'Ile; Eden entouré d'eau de tous côtés!...

*.....et c'est là que, très-seul,
Je fleuris, doux lys de la zone des linceuls,*

Avec ma mie! (48)

The adoption of Hamlet as a persona has given credence to an outpouring of such personal feelings and dilemmas. As with Hamlet introspection has dominated his mental world. He is sufficiently aware however of the element of ridicule in such preoccupations especially in an age of decadence. Anticipating criticism he parodies and trivialises his behaviour:

*Ohé mes petits sens hybrides!
Et je bats mon rappel! et j'ulule en détresse,
Devant ce Moi, tonneau d'Ixion de Danaïdes. (49)*

His implied exaggerated reaction is comical in its irrelevance and childishness.

The sincerity of the volume of poems is especially evident in such self-parody. It is also apparent in his simple confession of the desire for companionship and the desire forbidden to the dandy for highly conventional marriage. Behind all the dreams lies a genuine sadness. The recurring presence of death and decay and the seemingly inevitable failure of all love and dreams suggests an underlying pessimism which is not conquered by the many poses.

(iv) Spleen

A scene is imagined where a young woman commits suicide. Detachment is feigned in the tragi-comic references; there is no one from the new world to rescue her, the new land of heroes. There is a sense that this is a pity not so much because she would not have died, but because it would have made a good story. The return of the opening gloomy image of the poem, however, concludes the poem on a depressing note:

*Le ciel pleut sans but, sans que rien l'émeuve,
Il pleut, il pleut, bergère! sur le fleuve...*

.....
*La pluie continue à mouiller le fleuve,
Le ciel pleut sans but, sans que rien l'émeuve. (50)*

Life is pictured as void of heroism and the individual laments the loss of his own heroic potential. The failure of so many dreams and the introspection caused by solitude lead to an overpowering sense of claustrophobia. To escape the enclosure of his being he forces himself into mechanical predictable behaviour simply maintaining appearances.

*En vérité ô mes ans, que faire
De ce riche corps?*

*Ceci
Cela
Par-ci
Par-là*

En vérité, en vérité voilà. (51)

Only time can provide a pattern to life:

*Je ne tiens que des mois, des journées et des heures...
Dès que je dis qui! tout feint l'en-exil...
Je cause de fidèles demeures,
On me trouve bien subtil;
Oui ou non, est-il
D'autres buts que les mois, les journées et les heures? (52)*

Conclusion

In spite of the apparent cloud of depression which is never far from the mind, the poet/hero delights in finding experiences worth celebrating even if they stay in the world of dream. A pessimistic appraisal of reality lies alongside a celebration of

life. Pleasure is seen in standing back from the thought processes and watching them in motion. Laforgue chooses in his poetry to recreate the mechanism of the human mind. He reproduces the flow of thoughts as they pass through consciousness. An idea surfaces, but he does not follow it to a reasoned logical conclusion thereby reflecting the spontaneity of thought processes and relative lack of order. He shows the thought appearing then receding as it is enveloped in another thought. The mind is shown to be in constant movement. No single voice dominates. Man's psychology proves that there are no single absolute answers apart from complexity, ambiguity, movement and paradox.

Laforgue's study of psychology has resulted in an admirable assessment of the human mind. He shows the mind in action as ideas and moods continually evolve. Mental stillness is only found in the fantastical figure of Pierrot as he remains suspended in a void. Even for Pierrot, however, peace is only temporary, as the cycle of stage performances continue and "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" becomes "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" wherein assertions and doubts simultaneously take centre stage.

In Pierrot, Laforgue creates a mind paralysed within the confines of a code of living. Pierrot is an artistic cipher unable to truly exist in the world. His difficulty in acquiescing to life leaves an ambiguous sense that it is not that we cannot see reality in the picture of Pierrot, but that what we see is reality. Man is a puppet, manipulated without opposition by meaningless rituals. His inner life is dead.

In the later volume, "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" Laforgue is less pessimistic. He shows that to be fully human depends on resignation to the fact that very little in life has the coherence and beauty of artistic creation. The real human mind inevitably partakes of man's mediocrity as well as his potential greatness, the unfulfilled dreams and fantasies, the turmoils and facile

acceptance of conformism for fear of isolation and the heroism involved in rejecting total escapism.

The hero of "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" is more truly human than Pierrot with an ever present inner life which clashes with the rituals he feels forced to perform in the world. The interaction of the outer and inner man shows no pattern other than formlessness, ambiguity and eternal contradiction. In a further assertion of paradox, Laforgue captures the greatness, elusiveness and complexity of the psychical processes of the human mind.

PART FOUR: STRUCTURE

CHAPTER EIGHT

VERSIFICATION: THE RELAXATION OF CONVENTIONAL FORMS

Studies of Laforgue's technical achievement have tended to concentrate on the innovations in "Les Complaintes" and the "Derniers Vers". The former showed a break from the heavy rhetorical style of "Le Sanglot de la Terre" where alexandrines are used almost exclusively, appropriate to the gravity of the content. The introduction of children's rhymes, neologisms, rare verse forms and the breaking of the rules of rhyme in "Les Complaintes" placed Laforgue in line with decadent trends. Traditional fixed poetic frameworks were dislocated in the attempt to revitalise poetry. In Laforgue's last poems he is seen as a precursor of twentieth century free verse composition. The intervening works "L'Imitation De Notre-Dame La Lune" and "Des Fleurs De Bonne Volonté" are dismissed from a technical consideration as mere notebooks of the poet, practice sessions for the "Derniers Vers". Both volumes, however, were composed at a time when Laforgue was confident in his poetic technique. In these two volumes he abandons experimentation and innovation for the sake of it and works on his craft as master of his methods.

(i) The Poetic Context

(a) Lyricism versus Form

The technical preoccupations of the nineteenth century poets spring from two differing concerns. On the one hand, poets aimed at lyricism, the display of language as an art form with musical and descriptive qualities, where the harmony of sound and sense is the most important consideration. On the other hand, poets explored the possibilities of language arranged in particular forms. The success of the poem depended on the plastic qualities

of the poem, the manipulation of metre, rhyme and rhythm. Technical considerations dominated the creative process.

While all good poetry essentially encompasses both areas of interest, there were times throughout the century when one would hold precedence. Broadly speaking, early Romanticism translated the lyrical impulse, the desire to renew the tools of poetry, moving away from the rigid formulae of the eighteenth century with the triumph of spontaneity, emotional honesty, the voice of inspiration as opposed to industrious, technical creativity. The Parnassians reacted against Romantic effusiveness, the low priority given to coherence and rationality and the apparent excessive emphasis on emotion and spirituality. Attention was turned from pure lyricism to poetic structure. Poetry must obey certain rules albeit of a different nature to their eighteenth century precedents. Form was paramount and must not be sacrificed to content. The Parnassians aimed to replace personal lyricism by more reflective, philosophical, historical or descriptive elements, always with impeccable form, coherence and absolute logic.

The intellectual climate of the "Parnasse" was the immediate inheritance of poets writing at the time of Laforgue. Positivism was the nation's public philosophy, faith in science to achieve objective truth. Its corollary was the rejection of religious faith and the spiritual obsessions of the Romantics. Poetry was to be the ennobling science of language applied to the hardships of life:

Tu m'as donné la boue, et j'en ai fait de l'or. (1)

This line from Baudelaire's "Ébauche d'un ^{Épilogue} _λ" sums up a fundamental aim of poets of the "Parnasse" in their poetic activity.

Gautier, the accepted voice of this school of poetry emphasizes the workmanship involved in poetry, opposing the desire to make poetry appear as a spontaneous verbal effusion issuing from

the soul of the poet. Referring to his collection "Emaux et Camées" he calls for restraint and a subject which is subordinate to form:

Ce titre exprime le dessein de traiter sous forme restreinte, de petits sujets, tantôt sur plaque d'or ou de cuivre avec les vives couleurs de l'émail, tantôt avec la roue du graveur de pierres fines... (2)

He describes his own reworking of each poem, and the need for absolute precision:

L'alexandrin était trop vaste pour ses modestes ambitions et l'auteur n'employa que le vers de huit pieds qu'il refondit et cisela avec tout le soin dont il était capable. Cette forme, non pas nouvelle (fut) renouvelée par les soins de rythme, la richesse de la rime et la précision que peut obtenir tout ouvrier patient... (3)

Inevitably the next generation of poets reacted against accepted practices. Lyricism returned to a position of importance in the work of the decadents and Symbolists. The poets now rejected the strong anti-lyrical tendencies of some of the Parnassians and their overt concern for form. They shared with the Romantics the desire to revitalise the poetic tool. Paradoxically it was poetic form which would become a major revitalising element. The disruption of conventional prosody by the introduction of new metres and unusual syntax, the exploitation of root meanings of words and the musical qualities of language, the disregard, even denigration of absolute coherence and formal precision, all contributed to investing language with fresh potential. It could be said that this period of poetry brought together the poetic ideals of previous artistic movements, allowing both lyricism and concern for form to preside together.

The poets most associated with the period in which Laforgue was writing were Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Verlaine. Mallarmé chose to retain conventional poetic frameworks throughout his career. He sought originality in the revelation of the hitherto hidden powers of language via suggestion, symbol, peculiarities of word-order and syntax. He shared with Baudelaire a belief in the visionary powers of poetry. Poetry held the key to an ideal, to beauty and to knowledge. Rimbaud likewise assigned high powers to poetry as the vehicle towards some element of ultimate truth. Like Mallarmé and Baudelaire he chose to write primarily in conventional forms. He experimented successfully with the "impair", but ultimately abandoned verse finding it too limiting, and chose instead prose poetry.

(b) Verlaine and Laforgue

Verlaine and Laforgue stand together in their scepticism regarding the visionary powers assigned to language:

Je le trouve stupide de faire la grosse voix. (4)

Prends l'éloquence et tords lui son cou! (5)

For these poets poetry was not a means to knowledge. Poetry existed in its own right, as Gautier professed in his theory of art for art's own sake. This led to a concern for form:

La vie est grossière mais quand il s'agit de poésie soyons distingués comme des œillets...Disons tout, tout mais disons des choses d'une façon raffinée. (6)

Concern for form, however, was not to override the demands of mood or lyricism. Verlaine concentrated on the musical and evocative powers of words arranged in recognisable metres. Conventional forms were adapted and new forms created for enhancing the overall lyrical effect:

*De la Musique avant toute chose,
Et pour cela préfère l'impair
Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air
Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose. (7)*

He generally maintained that free verse was not a possibility for the French language. In the "Art Poétique", a manifesto for the Symbolists, accepted as such by all save Verlaine himself, he appears to attack rhyme, but his real aim is to demand that it should not be master as it is in some poetry of Banville and Hugo:

*O qui dira les torts de la Rime?
Quel enfant sourd ou quel nègre fou
Nous a forgé ce bijou d'un sou
Qui sonne creux et faux sous la lime?(8)*

...la rime n'est pas condamnable, mais seulement l'abus qu'on en fait. Notre langue peu accentuée ne saurait admettre le vers blanc....Rimez faiblement, assonez si vous voulez, mais rimez ou assonez, pas de vers français sans cela. (9)

Verlaine is most appreciated for the unparalleled musicality of his verse and his success in the evocation of mood. Laforgue's poetic development shared much with Verlaine. He emphasises the musical and artistic powers of poetry while affirming the importance of industry and of certain poetic conventions:

Une poésie n'est pas un sentiment que l'on communique tel que conçu avant la plume. Avouons le petit bonheur de la rime, et les déviations occasionnées par les trouvailles, la symphonie imprévue vient escorter le motif; tout comme un peintre est amené là - à ce gris perle à propos de bottes, à ce géranium...tel le musicien avec ses harmonies qui ont l'air parasites. (10)

Laforgue, however, ultimately advanced in a different direction with the relatively free verse of his last poems. It was

Laforgue among these major poets who made the furthest leap in the area of form towards the twentieth century. This reveals much about his intentions as a poet. Mood, musicality and the evocative power of the symbol have their place in his poetry, but structural concerns dominate his aesthetic. By liberating form in a particular way he succeeded in creating a new voice for poetry.

Laforgue adopted the essential characteristics of the Symbolist movement; the tyranny of prosody in conventional forms is cast aside, as is plastic descriptive narrative poetry in favour of unfettered rhythms governed by the poet's individual consciousness. The subject matter is full of reverie, shades of meaning and pure sensation akin to the immediacy of vision of Impressionism;

*Car nous voulons la Nuance encor,
Pas la couleur, rien que la nuance!
Oh! la nuance seule fiance
Le rêve au rêve et la flûte au cor! (11)*

Laforgue was to display his greatest formal originality in "Derniers Vers", but "L'Imitation de Notre Dame la Lune" and "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" can stand with Verlaine's "Sagesse" as the best poetry which most characterised the ideals of the period.

In a study of Laforgue's verse form it is significant to note that structural innovations dominate critical comment. Laforgue's poetic techniques led to the most damning criticism of having irreparably damaged French language and of producing total nonsense in verse:

Chez un écrivain, les défauts de l'âme se révèlent dans la forme, ... celui-là (Laforgue) est un des écrivains les plus détestables d'un siècle qui n'en manque pas. Il pousse l'impureté jusqu'au talent, ... il a rendu à la langue française d'exécrables services. (12)

(Jules Laforgue)...outré les défauts de Verlaine et Mallarmé arrivant à la cacophonie et au galimatias le plus complet. (13)

Critics draw attention to his failed observance of conventional rules and his originality:

M. Laforgue quand il rime, ne rime la plupart de temps que pour l'oreille et ne s'offusque aucunement que les masculins riment avec les plurielles. Je constate, je n'apprécie pas. (14)

Le métier du vers... est un pêle-mêle de rythmes et de rimes inédits. (15)

...ses vers bizarrement rimés où les pluriels baisent le singulier. (16)

The view of Laforgue as an important technical innovator whose achievement had repercussions not only in national prosody, but on an international level, is the lasting impression:

French free verse dates only from 1886...1886 was the watershed year, the year in which "La Vogue" published Laforgue's translation of some Whitman poems and some of his own free verse. (17)

The form in which I began to write in 1908 or 1909 was directly drawn from the study of Laforgue together with the study of Elizabethan drama. (18)

Le service qu'a rendu Laforgue à la poésie, ça été de la délivrer de toutes les règles traditionnelles. (19)

Such criticism points to an obvious rejection of traditional prosody alongside a paramount concern for form. The paradoxical nature of his poetic preoccupations is illustrated in his description of two other poets of the period:

(Verlaine) quel vrai poète... c'est bien celui dont je me rapproche le plus...négligence absolue de la forme. (20)

Corbière ne s'occupe ni de la strophe ni des rimes et jamais de rythmes et je m'en suis préoccupé au point d'en apporter de nouvelles et de nouveaux. (21)

Laforgue's affinity with Verlaine is clearly apparent in the formal similarities of their poetry especially in the variety of metres which they choose to employ. The verse of "L'Imitation de Notre Dame la Lune" and "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" is liberated in the sense that metric variety is not only found from poem to poem, but from verse to verse and from line to line, including metres of one to thirteen syllables. Stanza length is varied as is the number of verses per poem. Rich rhymes are rare. There is frequent use of enjambement and the few repeated patterns are rarely consecutive, so the sense of a previously used pattern passes unnoticed.

Such features can be found in Verlaine's "Sagesse". Here Verlaine's "vers libéré" is extremely pliable, adapted to all the exigencies of a wealth of moods: grave serenity, religious exaltation, the consoling balm of the still voice of calm and prostrate devotion. The mood of Laforgue's poetry covers a different emotional spectrum ranging from cool indifference, arrogant passion, consuming boredom, a dilettante openness to all life offers, mock philosophic gravity and understated optimism. The wide spectrum of feeling and thought is admirably translated by the new-found liberated verse.

During the period of ferment of decadent poetry the breaking of long-standing poetic codes would have been self-conscious, a deliberately contrived stand against convention. In "Les Complaintes" rules were broken for the sake of it. In the ensuing volumes, Laforgue progresses to a statement of the value of rule dismissal. The rejection of a code is now unimportant. It is the

effect of such disregard which concerns the poet. In Laforgue's poetry we find translated the rhythms of conversation, narrative, songs and prayers and the rhythms of daily life, such as routine, crowd movement, a solitary stroll, a clock ticking and the unpredictability of events. The variety of metre aided by punctuation is of prime importance in the communication of Laforgue's particular view of the world.

(ii) The Poetry

(a) The Alexandrine

The alexandrine is the most commonly used metre in the two volumes. The metre lends itself to the exposition of philosophical thoughts and, as a complete contrast, the rhythms of prose and conversation. The inherent flexibility of the alexandrine belies the need for free verse. It has been described as the most free of all verse-forms:

Au fond, le moule le plus "libre", celui qui permet sans dommage la plus grande variété dans l'arrangement des mesures, c'est par exemple bien la séquence d'alexandrins qui le fournit. (22)

Laforgue exploits the potential of this metre to produce a wide range of rhythms and tonalities. "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" is opened in grand style with a summary of Laforgue's personal philosophy. The opening poem is full of invocations and exaggerated declamatory language:

*Soleil! soudard plaqué d'ordres et de crachats,
Planteur mal élevé, sache que les Vestales
À qui la Lune, en son équivoque œil de chat,
Est la rosace de l'unique Cathédrale,*

*Sache que les Pierrots, phalènes des dolmens
Et des nymphéas blancs des lacs où dort Gomorrhe,
Et tous les bienheureux qui patûrent l'Eden
Toujours printanier des renoncements - t'abhorrent. (23)*

In contrast "Climat, Faune et Flore de la Lune" has a slow soporific rhythm appropriate to the description of a sterile lunar landscape:

*Ton atmosphère est fixe, et tu rêves, figée
En climats de silence, écho de l'hypogée
D'un ciel atone où nul image ne s'endort
Par des vents chuchotant tout au plus qu'on est mort? (24)*

Other poems in alexandrines reproduce the rhythms of conversation. The relatively long line prevents rhyme from being too insistently present. The conversational tone is especially evident when enjambement and displaced stresses are found:

*Je songeais: oui, divins ces yeux! mais rien n'existe
Derrière! Son âme est affaire d'occuliste. (25)*

and is further reinforced by frequent use of familiar conjunctions, which are generally superfluous in poetry, but a regular presence in prose and conversation:

Mais aussi...eh bien?...mais voyons...

The rhythms of routine are translated by the alexandrines. The sense of inevitable regularity, the dull monotony, the state of semi-wakefulness which seems to be robotically programmed, are reproduced in the long drawn out lines with their inherent weightiness:

*Et combien l'homme avec ces relatifs «Je t'aime»
 Est trop anthropomorphe au-delà de lui-même
 Et ne sais que vivotter comm' ça des bonjours
 Aux bonsoirs tout en s'arrangeant avec l'Amour
 - Ah je vous disais donc, et cent fois plus qu'une
 Que j'avais le coeur mal, le coeur bien à la lune. (26)*

The classical evenness of the last two lines with the caesura at the hemistich is a rare feature and is therefore all the more striking as a rhythmic translation of the inescapable mundaneness of routine.

Out of the the fifty-six poems in "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", the alexandrine is only used throughout in five. It becomes a useful instrument for a monologue, an internal dialogue or a prolonged reverie. On the one hand its power to echo the rhythms of conversation is shown in poems where a point is argued as if a second speaker was present:

*- Mais ces yeux, plus on va, se fardent de mystère!
 - Eh bien, travaillons à les ramener sur Terre!

 - Ah! la chasteté n'est en fleur qu'en souvenir!
 - Mais ceux qui l'ont cueillie en renaissent martyrs! (27)*

or where a confrontation with another is imagined:

*Je t'aime! comprend-on? Pour moi tu n'es pas comme
 Les Autres; jusqu'ici c'était des messieurs, (28)*

On the other hand the long line has a weightiness which can translate a prolonged rêverie or the sighs of a monologue, both of which are appropriate to the character of Hamlet:

*Oh! qu'il sont beaux les feux de paille! qu'ils sont fous
 Les albums! et non incassables, mais joujoux!.... (29)*

*NOTRE PERE QUI ETES AUX CIEUX (Oh! là haut,
Infini qui êtes donc si inconcevable!)
DONNEZ-NOUS NOTRE PAIN QUOTIDIEN... - Oh! plutôt,
Laissez-nous nous asseoir un peu à Votre Table!... (30)*

The use of capital letters out of their regular context, and the use of brackets and inverted commas draws attention away from the conventionality of the metre. This was a particular feature of poetry of the period. In "L'après midi d'un faune" Mallarmé displays the inherent suppleness of the alexandrine as a tool for translating prolonged rêverie, sexual desire, commonplace annoyance and philosophical and lyrical meanderings. He dislocates the line by physical displacement of words, by frequent enjambement, long pauses within a line dictated by punctuation; he makes use of capitals to create an element of counterpoint in a poem rich with interweaving themes; the line is disjointed as exclamations from the rhetorical "Que non!", to the casual "Tant pis" and the dilettante "Mais bast" cut the flow of the metre. While similarities are evident it is less common to find in Laforgue the conscious exploitation of verbal musicality in the way it is found in Mallarmé, Verlaine or Baudelaire. Mallarmé breaks up the line by internal rhymes, and the echoes of assonance and alliteration:

Si clair

*Leur incarnat léger, qu'il voltige dans l'air
Assoupi de sommeils touffus.*

Non, mais l'âme

*De paroles vacante et ce corps alourdi
Tard succombent au fier silence de midi:
Sans plus il faut dormir en l'oubli du blasphème,
Sur le sable altéré gisant et comme j'aime
Ouvrir ma bouche à l'astre efficace des vins!*

Couple, adieu; je vais voir l'ombre que tu devins. (31)

Such lines illustrate the freedom which the alexandrine allows and proved to poets such as Mallarmé that free verse was unnecessary. Laforgue, however, is less interested in pure sound and the sensuous possibilities of language than are his contemporaries. It is perhaps for this very reason that it is he who makes the step in the direction of free verse. Musicality can be achieved within the confines of conventional metres and by breaking them he shows that he wants to say something more. The subject matter of Laforgue's poetry is essentially the commonplace, the routines of everyday living, the conversations and rituals, the hopes, dreams and sighs of humanity in all their ordinariness. By rejecting the absolute hold which conventional forms had on the French language he was making a stand against any concept of absolute beauty including the exploitation of pure poetic musicality. Just as the ordinary mortal is more interesting than the Greek nude, so "ordinary" language has a higher status than the traditional alexandrine.

(b) The Octosyllabic Line

The weight of the alexandrine provides a contrast to the lighter more flippant rhythm of the shorter lined poems, the octosyllabic metre being the most frequently used. This metre stands apart from the alexandrine for owing to the greater proximity of rhyme, it is at once less prosaic and less rhetorical, and it therefore lends itself with difficulty to reproducing the rhythms of conversation. The octosyllabic poems in the two volumes number amongst the most lyrical creations. From a technical viewpoint they are not the most original, but they provide many of Laforgue's most memorable strophes and couplets.

In describing the octosyllabic line Clive Scott points to its volatile nature which leads to a sense of instability:

The octosyllable is perhaps the most mercurial and mobile of lines...Brevity looks for accent...recitational considerations interfere more continuously with the rhythmic structure of this line than with any other and this characteristic resulting from the line's instability, reinforces that instability. (32)

While instability is one characteristic of the octosyllable, a sense of cohesion can be generated by the potential to produce a lilting rise and fall. The occurrence of the caesura at half-way point reinforces a sense of extreme regularity. This is especially striking in Laforgue's poetry wherein an overall irregularity dominates. Such poems contribute a simple lyricism as single melodies without hesitations, rhythmic jolts or conversational pauses. Couplets and strophes can be appreciated out of context simply for their musicality:

*Cherchez la pâtée et la niche
Et les douceurs d'un traversin. (33)*

*Certes, l'Absolu perd ses droits,
Là où le Vrai consiste à vivre. (34)*

*Et la Nature est une épouse
Qui nous carambole d'extases,
Et puis nous occit, peu courtoise,
Dès qu'on se permet une pause. (35)*

The cohesiveness of the rhythm is further reinforced in "Notre Petite Compagne" by repetition of the final verse, enclosing the poem in a full circle:

*Si mon Air vous dit quelque chose
Vous auriez tort de vous gêner;
Je ne la fais pas à la pose:
Je suis la Femme on me connaît. (36)*

The sense of aptness of the metre, however, is thrown into doubt when it comes to resemble a jingle or nursery rhyme:

*Oh! ce piano, ce cher piano,
Qui jamais, jamais ne s'arrête,
Oh ce piano qui geint là-haut
Et qui s'entête sur ma tête! (37)*

Rhyme is obstrusively present. The metre calls out for rhyme to hold it together as the natural flow of the syntax is interrupted by the shortness of the line. The simultaneous interruption of the flow with the close proximity of rhyme, forcing the poem to hold together destabilises the line. Scott outlines this inherent uneven character of the metre:

In the octosyllable the prosodic structure constantly outruns the syntax and leaves the reader in a pretty constant state of vivid anticipation so that such lines strike one as being inherently nervous. (38)

The metre is perhaps the best adapted to the union of precision and incompleteness advocated by Verlaine. Poets of the period clearly exploited this unstable nature of the line as is seen by the subject-matter of poems in octosyllabic metre. In Rimbaud's "Bal des Pendus" the nervous quality of the line contributes to the sinister image:

*Au gibet noir, manchot aimable,
Dansent, dansent les paladins,
Les maigres paladins du diable,
Les squelettes de Saladins. (39)*

In "Première Soirée" the same tense quality of the line is used to translate sexual anticipation:

- Elle était fort déshabillée
Et de grands arbres indiscrets
Aux vitres jetaient leur feuillée
Malinement, tout près, tout près. (40)

In "Quelle soie aux baumes de temps" Mallarmé reinforces the image of silk, the chimera, the insubstantiality of reflections and of the poetic ideal by the unstable nature of octosyllabic metre:

Quelle soie aux baumes de temps
Où la Chimère s'exténue
Vaut la torse et native nue
Que, hors de ton miroir, tu tends! (41)

Verlaine frequently uses octosyllabic metre in "Sagesse" to convey a sense of suffering, mental struggle, frustration or claustrophobia, further reinforcing the instability of the line by rejecting the more common quatrain for tercets:

J'avais peiné comme Sisyphe
Et comme Hercule travaillé
Contre la chair qui se rebiffe.

J'avais lutté, j'avais baillé
Des coups à trancher les montagnes,
Et comme Achille ferrailé. (42)

In Laforgue's examples there is a sense of the inevitable return of indifference and the claustrophobic meanderings of loneliness, both of which encompass movement and stagnation, ideally translated by the octosyllabic metre.

The use of this metre illustrates the value of certain conventional formulae. The potential lyricism is exploited to the full. The strophic groupings of the octosyllabic verse in "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" are varied, having two, four or

five lines. In "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté", apart from one six-lined strophe (XXXIV) the octosyllabic lines are grouped in verses of four lines which occur increasingly towards the end of the volume (XLII, XLIII, XLVI, LI, LII, LVI). There is therefore a move towards a single conventional pattern. It is as though Laforgue's proclaimed acquiescence to reality previewed at the end of "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" with "Je vous offre un livre de bonne foi", and suggested in the title of this volume, is paralleled in an acquiescence to poetic regularity. This, however, is only one of the many voices. Other poems will suggest otherwise. To cultivate a single metre would clash with the picture Laforgue aims to present.

(c) Regular Short Metres

Decadent experimentation is especially evident in metres of less than eight syllables. Such short metres tend to be found in poems of irregular metres alongside longer lines. Those poems which are composed entirely of short metres have metres of six or four syllables. The effect of these short metres is two-fold; one is to create an incantatory, hypnotic rhythm, the other is a sense of cohesion and completion. The regularity of the rhythm and the more frequent appearance of rhyming words, unify the individual poem. This releases the reader from the unease and bewilderment generated by the less regular poems and those which are more prosaic, where casualness clashes with rhetoric.

There are three poems which share the same metre of four syllable rhyming couplets, "Litanies des premiers quartiers de la Lune", "Litanies des derniers quartiers de la Lune" and "Petites Misères de Mai". The rhythms of a church litany are reproduced with the characteristic soporific, hypnotic effect:

Lune bénie

Des insomnies

Blanc médaillon
Des Endymions (43)

Eucharistie
De l'Arcadie

Qui fais de l'oeil
Aux coeurs en deuil. (44)

On dit l'Express
Pour Bénarès!

La Basilique
Des gens cosmiques. (45)

The reader is entranced, then released in the final resolution of the chant:

Léthé lotos
Exaudi nos! (43)

Et retour louche
-Ah! tu découches. (44)

Sois l'édredon
Du Grand Pardon. (45)

In "Dimanches" a similar litany reproduces the rhythm of a dialogue between a priest and his congregation in tercets. The invocation of goddesses is the voice of the priest while the laudatory comments and epithets are the quieter response of the congregation:

Parcival, Parcival!
Etendard virginal
Sur les remparts du mal

Salamambo, Salamambo!
Lune au chaste halo
Qui laves nos tombeaux (46)

The movement of these incantatory poems is circular beginning with a position of indifference, then finding enough earnestness to voice a prayer from the thoughts which drift into the mind, then a return to the starting position. This circular movement is particularly pronounced in "Le Brave, Brave Automne" where the final verse is repeated to mark the return to the position of indifference:

Quand reviendra l'automne,
Cette saison si triste,
Je vais m' la passer bonne,
Au point de vue artiste. (47)

The movement is summed up in the title of the poem "Rouages" which stands alone as a one line, one strophe, one syllable poem.

The poems in verse of six syllable lines are structurally similar to alexandrines with a regular *caesura* at the hemistich, but rhyme and the expected pause at the end of each line generates a strict poetic evenness. The verse is highly concentrated as thoughts and images are contained within small, complete units:

Le coeur blanc tatoué
De sentences lunaires,
Ils ont «Faut mourir, frères!»
Pour mot-d'ordre - Evohé

Quand trépassent une vierge
Ils suivent son convoi;
Tenant leur cou tout droit
Comme on porte un beau cierge. (48)

Scott's description of the six-syllable line suggests that it is an ideal tool for the Symbolists through its potential to embody insubstantial phenomena.

The six-syllable measure is a coming to rest, an excellent device of closure, that is its relaxed inorganic structure ... may positively release a word and the polysyllable in particular, into its own mobile and undefined inner rhythms, into its own uncharted depths; the hexasyllabic measure is good at embodying the haunting quality of half-grasped phenomena or the sense of being overwhelmed, unable to organise and thus withstand, the alien forces at work. (49)

The examples quoted illustrate the metre as a device of closure, the priestly chant reproducing a series of cadences. The strangeness of the Pierrot images, the vagueness of a commitment to indifference, the intangible sadness of the return of autumn are all reinforced by the insubstantiality of the metre. Verlaine embodies sadness in this metre, adding to the sense of half-grasped phenomena by a question:

*Pourquoi triste, ô mon âme
Triste jusqu'à la mort,
Quand l'effort te réclame,
Quand le suprême effort
Est là qui te réclame? (50)*

(d) The "Impair"

The "Impair" advocated by Verlaine for its ability to translate hesitation and half-grasped phenomena is not a dominant presence in Laforgue's poems. There are four poems composed uniquely of nine syllable lines. The frequent presence of the letter 'e' with its double function as a sound or a non-sound likens the line to the more conventional ten or eight syllable line. It shares with the latter the same unstable quality by the

imposition of the relatively short metre on normal syntax and the potential towards lyricism:

*Ah! la Lune, la Lune m'obsède...
Croyez-vous qu'il y ait un remède? (51)*

*Mon père (un dur par timidité)
Est mort avec un profil sévère;
J'avais presque pas connu ma mère
Et donc vers vingt ans je suis resté. (52)*

*Adieu, Noble et lent, vais me remettre
A la culture des Belles-Lettres. (53)*

*Je suis la Gondole enfant chérie
Qui arrive à la fin de la fête,
Pour je ne sais quoi, par bouderie,
(Un soir trop beau me monte à la tête!) (54)*

There is one poem in which the "Impair" is used to special effect in five line stanzas with the metre 7,3,7,7,7. "Stérilités" is perhaps the most sound conscious poem of the two volumes. The alliteration of [l], the sibilant consonants [s] [f] and [z] generates a sense of liquification and the absence of solidity, a sense reinforced by the apparent incompleteness of the seven syllable metre and the five line stanza:

*Cautérise et coagule
En virgules
Ses lagunes des cerises
Des félines Ophélie
Orphelines en folie. (55)*

(e) Combined Metres

In "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" out of twenty-two poems five have a varied metre, whilst in "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" there are as many as thirty-three. This is the most original feature of Laforgue's poetry. Other poets of the period tended to choose a single metre for each poem. Verlaine approaches Laforgue to some extent in his use of alternating metres, which is essentially a decadent characteristic. Poem seven from part three of "Sagesse" is an example of a highly original verse form. Five-syllable lines stand beside lines of thirteen syllables, followed by a five line stanza of nine syllable lines. It is a perfect example of Verlaine's evocative art:

*Je ne sais pourquoi
Mon esprit amer
D'une aile inquiète et folle vole sur la mer.
Tout ce qui m'est cher,
D'une aile d'effroi
Mon amour le couve au ras des flots. Pourquoi, pourquoi?*

*Mouette à l'essor mélancolique,
Elle suit la vague, ma pensée,
A tous les vents du ciel balancée,
Et biaisant quand la marée oblique,
Mouette à l'essor mélancolique. (56)*

It is in this poem that Verlaine most approaches Laforgue in the exploitation of metric possibilities, but such varied metre is not common in Verlaine. Other examples are restricted to alternating alexandrines and six-syllable lines, or eight and four syllable lines also found in the poetry of Rimbaud. In Laforgue's poetry varied metre is a primary presence which illustrates Laforgue's particular contribution to the further liberation of verse. The irreverent treatment of metre in combinations such as 10,7,7,10; 7,6,9,9,12,4 is a display of indifference to

conventional prosody, but more importantly creates an ideal medium for tracing the uneven life of the psyche, the continual and elusive movement of the mind and the emotions.

In "Pierrots" each verse is composed of three alexandrines and a truncated fourth line of nine syllables. The shortened line brings each verse to an abrupt cadence causing a rhythmic jolt at the end of each verse, save the third where enjambement absorbs the nine syllable line into the alexandrine of the next verse:

Elle disait de son air vain fondamental:

*«Je t'aime pour toi seul!» - Oh! là là grêle histoire;
Oui, comme l'art! Du calme, ô salaire illusoire
Du capitaliste l'Idéal!*

.....

*Mais voici qu'un beau soir, infortunée à point,
Elle meurt! - Oh! là là; bon, changement de thème!
On sait que tu dois ressusciter le troisième
Jour, sinon en personne, du moins*

Dans l'odeur.... (57)

"Locutions des Pierrots" opens with three strophes with the line lengths of 10,7,7,10 syllables. The shorter second line slows the verse down and forces a pause, the mirror image 7,10 encapsulates the thought and gives a sense of completeness. The syllabic variation counterpoints the rhyme scheme, hence losing something of its conclusiveness. The resultant nervous quality of the metre adds to the element of mystery and frustration of the subject matter:

*Les mares de vos yeux aux joncs de cils,
Ô vaillante oisive femme,
Quand donc me renverront - ils
La Lune-levante de ma belle âme?*

.....

*Ah! madame, ce n'est vraiment pas bien,
Quand on n'est pas la Joconde
D'en adopter le maintien
Pour indire en spleems tout bleus le pauv' monde! (58)*

The rhythms of internal dialogue are translated into verse, the pauses to allow time to ponder a point, the questions without answers, the dismissal of one train of thought before concentrating on another in the next unit of verse. To conform to the strict rhythms of conventional prosody would contradict the subject matter of the poetry.

The final poem in "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" has the most varied range of metres:

Verse 1: 8,10,8,10 with a rhyming scheme of aabb
Verse 2: 7,6,9,9,12,4
Verse 3: 6,6,6,6
Verse 4: alexandrines
Verse 5: alexandrines

The repetition in the first verse and the evenness generated by the rhyme has the predictability and song-like rhythm of a nursery rhyme:

*Hélas! des Lunes, des Lunes,
Sur un petit air en bonne fortune...
Hélas! de choses en choses
Sur la criarde corde des virtuoses!... (59)*

This song-like rhythm is displaced by the confusion in the second verse which, though held together by rhyming couplets and less obtrusively by the imagery, agitation and incoherence dominate with exclamation marks, successions of dots, a question mark filling the gaps left by the missing syllables:

*Hélas! agacer d'un lys
La violette d'Isis!...
Hélas! m'esquinter, sans trêve, encore,
Mon encéphale anomaliflore
En floraisons de chair par guirlandes d'ennuis!...
O Mort, et puis?*

A sense of unease is consolidated in the hesitating six-syllabic quatrain:

*Mais! j'ai peur de la vie
Comme d'un mariage!
Oh! vrai, je n'ai pas l'âge
Pour ce beau mariage!...*

The tonal shifts are resolved in two regular verses of alexandrines. As these two verses follow such an incongruous combination of metres, the resolution is purposefully unsatisfactory, proving that acquiescence to traditional poetic form is affected.

Combined metres within a poem dominate "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté". Regular octosyllabic poems present single melodies whilst the combining of metres juxtaposes and interweaves a variety of melodies. In "Mettons le doigt sur la plaie" alexandrines are dismissed to give the final note to a stanza of four syllable lines. The lightness of the final verse contrasts with the length and weightiness of the previous four verses.

*O coeur aride
Mais sempiternelle
O ma citerne
Des Danaïdes! (60)*

The weight of *ennui* spoken of in four previous quatrains of alexandrines is concentrated in the images of a verbal square translating the sense of claustrophobia and imprisonment.

In "Aquarelle" Laforgue blends depths of tonal colour with each change of metre. The poem opens with the light regular rhythm of a children's rhyme with a shortened final line as a predictable cadence:

*Oh! oh! le temps se gâte,
L'orage n'est pas loin,
Voilà que l'on se hâte
De rentrer les foins!... (61)*

The pace is quickened by a tri-syllabic verse translating the acceleration in approach of the coming storm:

*L'abscès perce!
Vi' à l'averse!
Ô grabuges
Des déluges!...*

Two couplets with irregular metres of 5,3 and 4,5 aided by alliteration suggest the movement of the crowd hurriedly escaping the rain and annoyance with the weather:

*Oh! cett' Nature
En déconfiture

Oh! ces rimbambelles
D'ombrelles!*

The final verse with two couplets sharing a metre of 4,3,4,3 and unified by the rhyme *abba* brings a note of stillness. The changes of metre have resulted in a complex picture of lightheartedness, annoyance, detachment, movement and stillness.

(f) "Contrapuntal" Metres

The insertion of a different metre or a shorter stanza in a poem that has an otherwise recognisable pattern leads to interesting effects. "L'Eternel Quiproquo" is such a poem where the dominant pattern is a stanza of four trisyllable lines. This is interrupted by 2 couplets of 6 syllables and a shortened stanza of only three lines. The interruptions provide a stopping point in the flow of the poem. The scene is set then the ensuing rhythm translates the urgency of sexual arousal. The absence of full-stops results in a natural acceleration as verse runs into verse, then satisfaction is assumed as the pattern is interrupted once again and there is a return to the words in the opening verse. The final three line stanza brings the poem to a predictable cadence, the fourth line being excluded suggesting that further comment or completion is unnecessary.

In "Le Vrai de la Chose" the pattern of metres sets up a tonal counterpoint of poetic lyricism and conversation:

*Ah! c'est pas sa chair qui m'est tout
Et suis pas qu'un grand coeur pour elle;
Non, c'est d'aller faire les fous
Dans des histoires fraternelles!*

*Oh! vous m'entendez bien!
Oh! vous savez comme on y vient;
Oh! vous savez parfaitement qu'il y a moyen,
Et comme on s'y attelle. (62)*

There is a similar counterpoint in "L'Aurore Promise" wherein ideas are flippantly played with in quatrains of four syllable lines, then resolved into a decisive couplets of alexandrines.

*Vois, les Steppes stellaires`
Se dissolvent à l'aube...
La Lune est la dernière
A s'effacer, badaude.*

*Oh! que les cieux sont loin, et tout! Rien ne prévaut!
Contre cet infini; c'est toujours trop nouveau!... (63)*

Poems XI, XIII, and XXXIII share the same pattern of two metres alternating one with the other. In "Dimanches" a couplet of six and four syllables alternates with a couplet of alexandrines. Such a pattern leads to lengthening the shorter lines by pausing and slow intonation in order to balance with the long alexandrines. There is an alternation of a slow thoughtful rhythm with the quicker more confident rhythm of resolution:

*ô Dimanches bannis
De l'Infini
Au-délà du microscope et du télescope.
Seuil nuptial où la chair s'affale en syncope... (64)*

"Avant-Dernier Mot" alternates questions with unrelated statements. Stanzas of four lines each of two syllables are interwoven with couplets of 9 and 5 syllables. A somnolent rhythm is established as the shorter lines match the weight of the longer lines of the couplets. Verses 1,3 and 5 share a pattern which includes punctuation as well as metre:

'=syllable

' ' ?
- ' '
' '
' ' ...

This strict regularity is broken in the fourth stanza of this metre where the question comes at the end:

' '
' '
' '
' ' ?

The "rimes riches" of the last four line stanza fall back into the monotony of repeated patterns creating a circle familiar in Laforgue's poetry:

Ceci
Cela
Par-ci
Par-là... (65)

As a whole a spiral pattern is formed, a pattern which reinforces the meanderings of the heart and mind. There are two distinct melodies, one in the realm of feeling, the other that of intellect, which are closely interwoven to create a poem wherein the products of mind and emotion are simultaneously presented. The result is a highly condensed poem.

In "Fifre" the alternating metres reinforce the shifts in content from an expression of noble sentiment to implied ignobility. One melody is a gracious praise of beauty, a humble entreaty and it speaks of literature and authenticity. The second metre comes to the point more bluntly:

*Pour un coeur authentique,
Me ferais des blessures!
Et ma Littérature
Fermerait boutique.*

*Oh! qui me ravira!
C'est alors qu'on verra*

Si je suis ingrat! (66)

The pendulum motion of alternating metres is nowhere more apparent than in "Signalement". Here alexandrines are found amidst decasyllabic, trisyllabic and six syllable lines. Several longer lines divide evenly into groups of five syllables and six syllables so the alternation is not only from verse to verse, but within a line as the intonation rises to the caesura at half way point, then drops to the end of the line. We find translated the rhythms of decision and indecision, emotion and intellect. The poem then resolves into an unexpected final verse, upsetting the pattern with its octosyllabic lines and final incomplete five syllable line, suggesting that the interminable rhythm will not be resolved into a cadence:

*Chair de l'Autre Sexe! Elément non-moi!
Chair, vive de vingt ans poussés loin de ma bouche!*

.....

*Je me prouve qu'Elle est! - et puis ne sais qu'en croire
Et je revois mes chemins de Damas
Au bout desquels c'était encor les balançoires
Provisoires...
Et je me récuise, et je me débats!
Fou d'un art à nous deux! et fou de célibats.....*

*Oui, sous ces airs supérieurs,
Le coeur me piaffe de génie
En labyrinthes d'insomnie!...
Et puis, et puis, c'est bien ailleurs,
Que je communique... (67)*

(g) Punctuation

Whilst it is the metric patterns which exert the strongest influence on the rhythms of Laforgue's poetry, the extensive use of punctuation further modifies the rhythm. Laforgue's verse is littered with exclamation marks, question marks, dashes, successions of dots and brackets. The poetic lay-out is complicated by the extensive punctuation, which is reminiscent of the letters of adolescents, a simple tool of expressing irony, feigned shock, assumptions about hidden meanings. In this respect Laforgue again extracts poetry from the world of adolescence.

The exclamation mark is the most frequently used and is found not only at the end of a line, but within lines in unexpected places. Its insertion demands a pause or jolts the rhythmic flow. We are forced to stop and ponder over strangely expressed ideas or are bewildered by a jerky rhythm:

*Continue à fournir des couchants avinés
Les lendemains vomis des fêtes nationales
A styler tes saisons, à nous bien déchaîner
Les drames de l'Apothéose Umbilicale! (68)*

*Sois l'Ambulance
De nos croyances!
Sois l'édredon
Du Grand Pardon! (69)*

*Il me faut vos yeux! Dès que je perds leur étoile.
Le mal des calmes plats s'engouffre dans ma voile,
Le frisson de Vae Soli! gargouille en mes moelles.... (70)*

*Hélas! c'est vrai que mon cerveau
S'est vu, des soirs, trois hémisphères (71)*

Chut! Oh! ce soir comme elle est près (72)

The element of surprise generated by the exclamation mark in its intrusion on a regular rhythm contributes to the mocking tone of the poems. At times, however, genuine feeling is expressed in an exhortation to the poet himself or to the familiar subject of his thoughts, woman:

*Vends-moi donc une bonne fois
La raison d'être de Ton Sexe! (73)*

*Et retour louche
Ah! tu découches! (74)*

The sense of exasperation and annoyance is intensified by the habitual exclamation mark, as we are left with a silence, as loaded with meaning as the poem itself. This is especially evident when an exclamation mark cuts into a stanza and carries all the weight of the final line:

*Car ses épaules
Sont ma console
Mon Acropole! (75)*

The expected fourth line is omitted, the implication being that a worded conclusion is not necessary or not possible.

Laforgue's poetic world is dominated by endless philosophical argument alongside a belief that no ultimate answers will be found

or at least an unwillingness to commit himself to any conclusion. It is not surprising, therefore, that unanswered questions abound in the poetry as do strings of dots indicating an incomplete line:

En t'offrant le miroir de mes et caetera... (76)

Histoire Humaine: - histoire d'un célibataire.... (77)

*- Mais, c'est pas les lois qui fait le bonheur, hein,
l'Homme? (78)*

The only other poet who makes use of punctuation to the extent that Laforgue does is Corbière, the one poet with whom Laforgue refused to be compared. The critic's comparison of Laforgue with Corbière, however, is not entirely unfounded. Corbière exhibited skill and obvious enjoyment in the acrobatics of rhythm and language. Like Laforgue he saw himself as a dandy, a dilettante who hid his tears over the harshness of life behind an empty laugh, the very characteristics Laforgue gave himself in the figure of Pierrot. Corbière's description of himself could equally well apply to Laforgue: paradox is the essence of his being and his art:

*Poète en dépit de ses vers;
Artiste sans art - à l'envers;
Philosophe - à tort, à travers.
Un drôle sérieux. (79)*

The most obvious technical practice which they share, however, is the use of punctuation to serve more than its syntactical purpose. Mallarmé and Apollinaire were to eliminate its use almost entirely from poetry. In Laforgue and Corbière punctuation is exploited to its limits.

Italics, dashes and dots, exclamation and question marks, characterise the work of this other ironic poet:

Je ne connais pas mon semblable;
Moi, je suis ce que je me fais.
- *le Moi humain est haïssable...*
- Je ne m'aime ni ne me hais.

- Allons! la vie est une fille
Qui m'a pris à son bon plaisir...
Le mien, c'est: la mettre en guenille,
La prostituer sans désir.

- Des dieux?... - par hasard j'ai pu naître;
Peut-être en est-il - par hasard...
Ceux-là, s'ils veulent me connaître,
Me trouveront bien quelque part. (80)

The abundant punctuation demands constant pauses from the reader. Poems are left suspended so that their effect depends incongruously on the silences occasioned by the punctuation. They are not only words and their arrangement, but all that is left revolving in the mind at the poem's conclusion. Laforgue and Corbière implicate the reader in the construction and ultimate purpose of the poem.

Parallel to the bewilderment generated by the gaps in the poetry, the silences also lead to an intimacy and mutual understanding with the reader, as the necessity to conclude, or fill in the details is dismissed. This intimacy is especially apparent where brackets are used as though the poet steps out of his creation and confides in the reader:

*D'ailleurs, de mœurs très-fines,
Et toujours fort corrects,
(Ecole des cromlechs
Et des tuyaux d'usines) (81)*

*(Oh pourrions-nous pas, par nos phrases,
Si bien lui retourner les choses,
Que cette marâtre jalouse
N'ait plus sur nos rentes de prise?) (82)*

The reader is forced into an intimacy with the poet which he does not fully understand. Once again the poem becomes more than the immediate arrangement of words, but is contained in the mind of the reader. Psychological shifts dominate, a highly modern characteristic.

(iii) Poetic Achievement

Irregularity, variety and apparent inconclusiveness are the chief structural characteristics of Laforgue's poetry, even though conventional poetic frameworks are not totally rejected with the presence of strophic units, rhyme and familiar metric patterns. There is the cult of structural order alongside disorder. Mallarmé in 1891 spoke of the differing preoccupations of the Parnassians and the poets of the end of the century, and claimed that emphasis on some element of tradition in form can complement the attempt to revitalise poetic structure by liberating verse forms.

Les Parnassiens, amoureux du vers très strict, beau par lui-même, n'ont pas vu qu'il n'y avait là qu'un effort complétant le leur; effort qui avait en même temps cet avantage de créer une sorte d'interrègne du grand vers har assé et qui demandait grâce. Car il faut qu'on sache que les essais des derniers venus ne tendent pas à supprimer le grand vers; ils tendent à mettre plus d'air dans le poème, à créer une sorte de fluidité, de mobilité entre les vers de grand jet, qui leur manquait un peu, jusqu'ici.... Si d'un côté les Parnassiens ont été en effet, les absolus serviteurs du vers, y sacrifiant jusqu'à leur personnalité, les jeunes gens ont tiré directement leur instinct des musiques, comme s'il n'y avait rien eu auparavant; mais ils ne font

qu'espacer le raidissement, la construction parnassienne, et selon moi, les deux efforts peuvent se compléter. (83)

This assesses the achievement of Laforgue in "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" and "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" and of Verlaine in "Sagesse". They achieved the best union of form and anti-form, metric variety within relatively conventional frameworks.

The paradoxical nature of Laforgue's poetry is summed up by Durry as the coexistence of music, an understandable formal arrangement of sound, and its opposite, haphazard combinations of sound which escape definition:

Il est très rare qu'un poème ait une unité musicale. Son vers est un instrument de musique et d'anti-musique. Il s'accorde et se désaccorde.....La musique n'y est pas avant toute chose, mais avant toute chose la presque simultanéité de la musique et de son contraire. (84)

The ambiguity in the structure of Laforgue's verse-form reinforces the pictorial impression of a world in which harmony is absent. Any adherence to a particular code would clash with the overall lack of certainties. The repeated use of exclamation marks, question marks and the succession of dots harbours meanings which are left unsaid. This reveals a shady area of consciousness which half grasps notions and does not worry about the absence of total comprehension.

The formal and psychological shifts from line to line, verse to verse and poem to poem make movement ever present and reinforce the sense of inconclusiveness brought about by the unanswered questions and the thoughts left buried. A circular motion is often evident as expectation is raised, the idea begins to register with the recognition of a familiar pattern, then logic is baffled by a

change of metre, yet another succession of dots or an exclamation mark.

The continual movement of the mind and emotions is translated into a fluency of form which contributes to the vague outline of Laforgue's poetic world; the absence of stillness, the lack of precision, the multiplicity of possibilities, the contradictions and the realm of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious with their barely definable characteristics.

Laforgue's compositions liberate poetry from set formulae. No longer will a conventional poetic framework provide a vehicle of expression but rather the emotion, scene, thought or idea to be expressed dictates the form. Théodor de Wyzewa sums up this achievement:

...Une seule chose restait à conquérir, la liberté de la forme. Faire une poésie qui exprimait les émotions, c'était le but... il fallait une forme qui ne fût plus inspirée d'avance, qui ne pût se mouler sur les émotions à exprimer, au lieu de les mouler sur soi. (85)

Form is of paramount importance in the work of Laforgue. He makes use of conventional formulae exploiting their potential for lyrical, rhetorical and prosaic effects and by combining effects from poem to poem and within a poem he achieves originality. The changes in metric patterns give rise to tonal and psychological shifts; punctuation introduces further complexity as enforced silences ring with meaning. Movement is ever present and every poetic moment is rich in meanings with endless associations.

Both volumes therefore merit a discussion beyond content. "L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune" is not only important in its interesting development of the Pierrot image and "Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté" is far more than a poet's notebook. Both volumes contain a range of ideas, thoughts, feelings and moods

interestingly and originally expressed in orchestrated chords rather than single melodies, producing highly complex, and highly condensed poetry. Poetic anarchy exists alongside order to give a more complete picture of the true nature of reality, to capture the all-pervading presence of paradox.

NOTES

The following abbreviations for Laforgue's works have been used:

ST *Le Sanglot de la Terre*

C *Les Complaintes*

INDL *L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune*

FBV *Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté*

Collected in two volumes: *Poésie/Gallimard*, edited by Pascal Pia, 1979,

ML *Moralités Légendaires*

Folio/Gallimard, edited by Pascal Pia, 1977

MP *Mélanges Posthumes*

Mercure de France, Paris, 1903

FV *Feuilles Volantes*

Le Sycomore, Paris, 1981

OC *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol.1, edited by Grojnowski, *L'Age de l'homme*, Lausanne, 1986

Laforgue's correspondence is classified as follows:-

OC, IV, *Lettres I (1881-1882)*, Mercure de France, Paris,
1925, édition Aubry

OC, V, *Lettres II (1883-1887)*, Mercure de France, Paris,
1925, édition Aubry

Letters to Gustave Kahn from "Lettres à un ami", (1880-1886),
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number

eg. Letter X etc.

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- (2) Letter XXXV
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- (4) Letter XXI
- (5) OC, V, p.96
- (6) Letter X
- (7) Letter XXIII
- (8) Letter XXIV
- (9) Letter XXV
- (10) OC. V, p.120
- (11) *ibid.*, p.122
- (12) Letter XXXII
- (13) Letter XXXIX
- (14) Letter XLI
- (15) Letter XLVI
- (16) Letter XXVII

- (17) INDL, p.67
- (18) Letter XXXVI
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