

Durham E-Theses

French poetry and contemporary reality c. 1870 - 1887

Lawrence J. Watson

How to cite:

Watson, Lawrence J. (1976) French poetry and contemporary reality c. 1870 - 1887. Doctoral thesis, Durham University.

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a <https://etheses.durham.ac.uk/id/eprint/8021/> is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full Durham E-Theses policy](#) for further details.

FRENCH POETRY
AND
CONTEMPORARY REALITY

c. 1870 - 1887

A study of the thematic and stylistic
implications of the poetic treatment of
the modern and the ephemeral

LAWRENCE J. WATSON

Thesis submitted in the University of Durham
for the degree of Doctor of philosophy
December 1976

VOLUME ONE

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author.
No quotation from it should be published without
his prior written consent and information derived
from it should be acknowledged.

ABSTRACT

French poetry of the second half of the nineteenth century differed from earlier poetry in both the scope and subtlety of its treatment of contemporary reality. This poetic practice was based on a body of aesthetic and other philosophical thinking as well as a general awareness of the distinctive qualities of the new age. Modernist poets like Barbier, Du Camp and some of the Romantics had concentrated their efforts on the straightforward description or discussion of modern phenomena, events or social conditions in much the same way as some contemporary painters. Many poets felt a deep antipathy towards the modern age; some such as Leconte de Lisle avoided it in their work almost completely, but others contrasted it with a primitivist vision and the resulting tension is one of the dynamic aspects of their poetry. After 1870 this is particularly striking in the case of Rimbaud.

A major new approach to the treatment of contemporary reality in art had been found in the aesthetic theory and poetic practice of Baudelaire which was of the utmost influence upon the succeeding generation. In Baudelaire's work was perhaps the first indication of a realisation of the aesthetic value not merely of generally modern but of specifically transitory phenomena. This may be seen as lying at the base of the perspectives, themes and language of the most important poetry produced in France in the years 1870-1887 with the near total exception of the work of Mallarmé.

In that period poets progressed from the realistic treatment of modernity to the creation of a radical new flexible poetic language to evoke a relativist, individual and utterly modern conception of the most fleeting and elusive experiences and phenomena of mind, emotion and sensation. One important ingredient in the new poetic language was the spontaneous and affective element of ordinary speech, the value of which had been partly appreciated through the cénacle performances.

The transition from superficial modernism to impressionism and then to a synthesis of external reality and emotion was closely matched and possibly encouraged by developments in painting.

PREFACE

My thanks are particularly due to my supervisor Dr. E. J. Kearns whose faith in the value of the work undertaken in this thesis has never wavered.

The Thesis as it is now prepared is a revision of the Treatment of Contemporary Reality in Nineteenth Century French Poetry, subsequently accepted for publication with modifications, as a series of essays. The advice of Professor C. A. Hackett in the work of revision has been invaluable. Eventually I came to share his view that the form of the original version was not entirely suited to presentation as a doctoral thesis. I was also pleased to have the opportunity to follow Professor Hackett's advice that, given the importance (in both senses of the French word) of my subject, what was needed was not an abridgement but a concentration of scope with more space given to analysis and discussion of examples. It is hoped that the new thematic design of the thesis has facilitated such discussion. The whole of the central body of the thesis has been completely rewritten. Suggestions received indirectly from Professor C. Chadwick have also been most helpful: most of the material originally included on Mallarmé has now been deleted as have those parts of the discussions of the rôle of the cénacles and of poetic primitivism that were only peripheral to my main argument (the remaining sections on these topics have been extensively rewritten); the section on the role of the novel has been replaced by a few pertinent remarks in the introduction; the section on Baudelaire has been condensed to a quarter of its former length; no attempt is now made, beyond a few lines in the conclusion, to examine the impact of poetic developments in the years 1870-1887 upon the subsequent period. The bibliographical appendix of periodicals relevant to the subject of this thesis has been replaced by a section of the bibliography proper listing only those periodicals consulted in the writing of the thesis.

This revision is, therefore, only 25,000 words shorter than the original version but much more finely focused and, it is hoped, clearly structured.

Nevertheless I should like to thank my examiners for reading a doctoral thesis of a length more commonly associated with French doctorats d'état than with most produced in line with the regulations of British universities. I hope I have not added further justification to the old Greek proverb 'big book, bad book'. I have taken the view that the true importance of my subject lay in its comprehensive implications and have sought to do it justice. The constraints of publishers make undertakings of this size almost impossible today and I have therefore taken advantage of the patience of my examiners and an understanding that the doctoral thesis is an opportunity for putting out boats to sail, and not necessarily the definitive form of a particular idea.

This thesis has been produced in what were at times extremely difficult circumstances; the original draft of the version first submitted was largely completed in late 1971. Although it has been possible, to a limited extent, to bring it up to date since, only a small number of references to works published since 1971-1972 have been included, usually in footnotes. At a late stage it was not feasible to make use of some important works at all such as Luc Badesco's La Génération poétique de 1860 (the 1100 dense pages of which have made me feel more comfortable about my own demands on the reader's concentration) and P. Stephan's Paul Verlaine and the decadence which, more than once, provides a vindication of points I had raised in the first submitted version of this thesis; most particularly by examining many of the minor poems and periodicals that I had seen as vital to an understanding of the major poetry of 1870-1887, and even treating, albeit fleetingly, the notions of modernism and impressionism in poetry.

December 1976

ADDENDA AND CORRIGENDA

p.260: Note 51a:

The attitude of those factions of Parisian society who put their stomachs before their country was satirised in poems and articles of the period such as Emile Dereux's 'Paris pour un bifteck':

Vive la Paix! La France est aux enchères...

Allons, Brébant, tourne ta casserole,

Pour un bifteck on va rendre Paris.

(Bibl. Arsenal, 14388).

The Goncourts' Journal provides confirmation of this. The restaurateur Brébant made himself a reputation for his skill at providing high quality cuisine despite the rigours and shortages of the siege. Renan and Paul de Saint-Victor, as well as the Goncourts, were among those combining literary and gastronomic interests who frequented his restaurant.

GENERAL CONTENTS

Introduction.....	p. vii

PART ONE THE BACKGROUND

Chapter One:	The Example of Baudelaire.....	p. 1
Chapter Two:	The Modernist Milieux.....	p. 41

PART TWO THE POETIC TREATMENT OF CONTEMPORARY REALITY IN THE 1870s AND 1880s

Chapter One:	New Perspectives.....	p. 90
Chapter Two:	Contemporary Subjects.....	p. 213
Chapter Three:	The Impact of Contemporary Speech.....	p. 582
Chapter Four:	Une Langue inventée.....	p. 649

PART THREE LAFORGUE - A CASE HISTORY

Chapter One:	The Situation of Laforgue.....	p. 749
Chapter Two:	Laforgue's Intellectual and Artistic Environment	p. 752
Chapter Three:	The Subject-Matter of Laforgue's Poetry.....	p. 792
Chapter Four:	Laforgue's Poetic Language.....	p. 824

Conclusion.....	p. 882

Bibliography

Index

FULL CONTENTS OF

VOLUME ONE

Introduction p. vii

PART ONE: THE BACKGROUND

Chapter One: The Example of Baudelaire: Modernity
and Immediacy in Theory and Practice p. 1

Chapter Two: The Modernist Milieux p. 41

(a) The Cénacles p. 41

(b) The Major Poets: some Relationships
and Influences p. 67

PART TWO: THE POETIC TREATMENT OF CONTEMPORARY REALITY
IN THE 1870s AND 1880s

Chapter One: New Perspectives p. 90

(a) The Poet Isolated from Modern Society p. 90

(b) Decadent Modernity and Paradise Lost p. 110

(c) Modernity and Culture: Spontaneity,
Tradition and Cultural Allusion p. 162

Chapter Two: Contemporary Subjects p. 213

(a) Contemporary Events, Politics and Society p. 214

(b) Contemporary Thought and the Rise of Science p. 304

(c) The Industrial Age and the Idea of Progress p. 341

(d) Speed and Travel p. 365

(e) The Modern City p. 410

CONTINUED IN VOLUME TWO

INTRODUCTION

The object of this study is two-fold. First, it is intended to demonstrate that the links between French poetry and the age in which it was produced, in the period 1870-1887, are much closer than is customarily supposed. There has been a widespread tendency to equate this period in French poetry almost exclusively with the rise of Symbolism - a term which, rightly or wrongly, conjures up verse inspired by elusive philosophical entities, dream, fantasy or myth. (1) Above all it is associated with escape from everyday reality in the modern age and, as a frequent consequence, hermeticism. The main reason for such an interpretation of the poetry of these two decades is, without doubt, the greatness of Mallarmé; his rejection of contemporary reality was largely uncompromising. Yet he was not representative of the poetry of the period - not even the great poetry. His work is an outstanding

- (1) Is it not possible that a picture which takes account of such a small area of the intellectual, artistic and material environment and interests of nineteenth-century French poets could be usefully altered or supplemented? So much French poetry of the second half of the nineteenth century is relatively neglected - Corbière, Laforgue and even Verlaine are considered as secondary figures and Rimbaud's superb verse poetry is passed over as a prelude to the Illuminations - that one suspects that hermeticism and metaphysical exploration have become regarded too exclusively as the qualities which characterise the best poetry of the period.

Of the more recent attempts at a definition of Symbolism perhaps the most useful has been Professor Chadwick's differentiation of transcendental and human Symbolism. It is true that some of the poetry discussed in this thesis could be regarded as part of the latter category, particularly in the section devoted to poetic synthesis. However, as Professor Chadwick has himself suggested, by and large both types of Symbolism are still characterised by a dissatisfaction with reality as the object of artistic activity:

Symbolism can, then, be finally said to be an attempt to penetrate beyond reality to a world of ideas, either the ideas within the poet, including his emotions, or the Ideas in the Platonic sense that constitute a perfect supernatural world towards which man aspires.

(Symbolism, p. 6.)

example of isolated originality of the highest order. In the late 1880s and the 1890s its principles were watered down by a cluster of minor disciples often relying on the relatively easy options of fantasy and legend as the substance of their own verse. None of the other great poets of the years 1870-1887 (Verlaine, Rimbaud, Corbière and Laforgue) were Mallarmé's disciples, nor even remotely Mallarméan in their poetic practice. It is the present writer's contention that it is impossible to arrive at a just appreciation or even an adequate exegetical understanding of this quartet of poets without seeing the important relationships between their work and contemporary reality. Perhaps too often poetry of this period has been examined through what are more properly the methods of metaphysics or psychiatry (2). It is hoped that this study will show, beyond doubt, that much of the best poetry finds its perspectives, its themes and distinctive features of its language in a less ethereal realm than is often supposed - the modern, changing world. Such a view necessitates a re-examination (or in some cases, a first examination) of a substantial body of minor poetry produced both by the poetae minores, and in less consequential moments by the major poets themselves, which may throw light upon the motives for, and the manner of, the treatment of contemporary reality in other poems of greater quality. This re-examination indicates clearly that the treatment of contemporary reality was a central preoccupation of many poets in these years.

Second, it is suggested that a careful consideration of this relationship between poetry and contemporary reality will provide evidence for a new approach to the evolution of poetry in French in the generation extending from the publication of Les Fleurs du Mal to Laforgue's Derniers Vers. It is a generalisation - but a fairly accurate one - that this evolution has usually been seen as a developing self-conscious attempt to regard poetry as mystery or even religion, a means of attaining something close to absolute truth. This study does not challenge such a pattern; it seeks to

(2) Rimbaud's poetry, in particular, has even been treated as a branch of occult science.

complement it with another. (With which, we believe, the usually accepted pattern is sometimes confused.) We make no apology for the scant attention given to the 'mystical' chain of development having as its main starting-point Baudelaire's 'Correspondances' sonnet, and Mallarmé as its leading representative in the period under scrutiny. This has received and continues to receive admirable critical attention. The complementary pattern suggested here is based on a growing concern not with metaphysics but with transitory reality, with 'capturing' and formulating experiences of such a reality. This, too, has its main springboard in Baudelaire's work - but in this instance it is the poet's identification of modernity and its equation with 'le transitoire' that is of key importance. Although there are anticipations and intuitions in Baudelaire's work of almost all that was to follow the most important advances in the proposed pattern took place between 1870 and 1887, which is why that period has been selected for examination. These advances are concerned with the creation, in response to new thematic material, of a poetic language capable, when called upon, of formulating the most elusive and discursively inexpressible facets of the human experience of external reality in an epoch which was itself characterised by change, impermanence and movement. (3)

- (3) Têodor de Wyzewa writing in 1886, could speak in exaggerated terms of the discovery of the new poetic language as the birth of poetry itself as opposed to mere verse which had for so long unworthily taken upon itself the title of poetry. Such a view is not distant from that, often expressed in British schools, that there had been no true lyric poetry in France after Villon until Les Fleurs du Mal:

La littérature a produit un art symphonique, la Poésie, évoquant l'émotion par l'agencement musical des rythmes et des syllabes.

Ainsi entendue, la Poésie fut très postérieure à la forme du vers - qu'elle n'implique pas nécessairement - et aux écrivains qu'on nomme les poètes. Le vers avait été, d'abord, un appareil mnémonique ...

Dois-je dire que ni Corneille, ni Molière, ni la plupart des écrivains en vers de notre siècle ne furent vraiment des poètes?

Une convention les forçait à déformer leurs pensées pour les soumettre à un rythme fixe ... Dois-je dire encore que je n'attribue point à la poésie les pensées dites poétiques, toute pensée me paraissant plus facile à exprimer en prose? ...

x

This second aspect of our argument is more contentious than the first but the one develops naturally from the other. Although there is room for debate on our theory of poetic evolution, we are convinced that doubts on particular points would not invalidate the overall pattern suggested. Moreover, they would not affect at all the first part of our argument which we hope we have proved beyond dispute.

The double object of our study corresponds, *closely*, to two interrelated responses by the poets to contemporary reality. The first was a psycho-social response usually reflecting anxiety and uncertainty (but sometimes also excitement) in the face of a world in the process of rapid transformation and, more often than not, expressing rebelliousness and dissatisfaction. This is seen primarily in the choice and manner of treatment of themes relating to contemporary reality. The second response was æsthetic and was concerned with the renovation of French poetry through experiments aimed at the creation of a more fluid, flexible, spontaneous and psychologically and sensorially authentic poetic medium. Obviously it is not always possible nor desirable to separate these two responses. On the one hand, for instance, the challenge to the traditional poetic language was itself, frequently, an act of rebellion associated with more general anti-establishment attitudes. On the other hand, the selection of particular themes was often dictated by aesthetic rather than psycho-social motives. This is especially true of subjects whose intrinsic transitoriness presented a challenge to the poet.

The subject of this thesis has not hitherto received extensive or coherent attention from scholars working in the field of late nineteenth-century French literature. One reason for this neglect (the importance of Mallarmé) has already been suggested; other possible reasons will be discussed below. Of course an examination of the poetic treatment of all types of modern and ephemeral phenomena, even in a fairly short

period, would be an undertaking too vast for a doctoral thesis (or a single book of any kind) and thus the present study is confined (except where a certain amount of overlap is both inevitable and desirable) to one of the two main variants of ephemeral experience, that which emanates from the ever-moving temporal context in which the poet is situated or in other words the external reality which is contemporary to him. The other main source of such experience - the inner workings of the poet's mind, elusive emotions, spontaneously suggested images and so on - will have to be left to other scholars better equipped than the present writer. Jean-Pierre Richard has already made several important contributions to the study of this problem.

* * * * *

The related concepts of the modern and ephemeral were basic to the nineteenth-century world-picture and have long been given the place they deserve by historians of ideas and of art. That they will eventually be so treated by historians of French poetry, whether or not in anything like the form essayed in this thesis, is almost certain. One reason for the delay is probably a misunderstanding of what constitutes 'universal' significance in art and literature. The argument runs as follows: if the sole function of an artist's work is the recreation of transitory sensation then that work is scarcely worth the attention of the serious researcher; indeed it may not be art at all. Such was the opinion of critics hostile to pictorial Impressionism in the 1870s and 1880s and such has been the opinion of critics unsympathetic to the poetry of (among others) Verlaine (for instance Benda) or of Rimbaud (amongst more recent critics one thinks particularly of Gutmann). On the other hand, critics who have admitted, or been forced to admit, the greatness of an artist like Monet have sometimes done so on the grounds that he was really seeking after 'universals' and succeeded in formulating them, that he was not interested in the instantaneous for its own sake at all. Either way the argument is equally fallacious. There is no real conflict

between the treatment of ephemeral subjects and the quest for universals; after close on one hundred and thirty years to digest Baudelaire's wise words on this very question in the Salon de 1846 one would have hoped for an end to this particular error. Almost all art is concerned with universals and late nineteenth-century art and literature in France was no exception; but the experiences it tried to pin down, to crystallise for eternity, were ever more evanescent and fleeting. Experiences were valued for the quality of transitoriness but they were given universal significance by their formulation in art. It is manifestly nonsensical to say, for instance, that Monet was not interested in the special qualities of particular moments in the Rouen cathedral paintings - the whole reason for painting the series was an interest in the temporal fragment. (4)

- (4) The example of Monet prompts us to indicate that occasionally in this thesis, notably in Part Two, Chapter Four, parallels will be made between developments in poetry and those of painting in the same period; in one or two instances even the possibility of the direct influence of painting will be suggested. It is perhaps as well to state in general terms the extent to which such parallels are held in the present study to be useful - or even sensible.

Any comparison of one art-form with another is fraught with danger. Croce's Aesthetic suggests that any talk of parallels between the arts is inappropriate except in a very general way: 'I singoli fatti espressivi sono altrettanti individui, l'uno non ragguagliabile con l'altro se non genericamente'. (B. Croce, Estetica come scienza dell'espressione ..., p. 78. Compare P. Francastel, Peinture et Société, p. 133: 'La conciliation est facile sur le plan des idées vagues'.) On the other hand many scholars and critics have been convinced that such comparisons are valid. Mario Praz has recently written that 'a glance at an old tradition dating back as far as Homer's description of Achilles's shield will easily convince us that poetry and painting have constantly proceeded hand in hand, in a sisterly emulation of aims and means of expression'. (M. Praz, Mnemosyne, p. 5.) Praz's not inconsiderable contribution to the discipline of comparative studies is the emphasis he places on a 'time-spirit' which is to be seen at a particular period manifesting itself in a variety of ways in the different arts. (Mnemosyne, p. 55: 'The reasons why one should not speak of a 'time-spirit' determining and permeating all art seem to be of the same order as those brought forward against the possibility of a bumble-bee's flying: the volume and weight of the insect, the smallness of its wing surface, rule out the possibility; still, the bumble-bee flies'.) In the case of the nineteenth century Werner Hoffman has seen such common ground as there is to lie in the increasing use of reference to modern life, to mundane reality, whether for representational or symbolic purposes. (In Die Kunst des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts. Referred to in Praz, Mnemosyne, p. 178.) Certainly the attempt to show general tendencies at work in the arts of a given period is more profitable than

Scepticism concerning the useful discussion of relationships between the arts is perhaps one symptom of a widespread attitude in critical writing on French poetry of the period under discussion, which helps to explain

(4) cont ...

the method adopted by Professor Hatzfeld (in Literature through art) who seems to regard the comparison between literary extracts and particular works of art as an extension of explication de texte. On reflection one is not sure whether the methods he adopts or the comparisons he chooses to make are more to blame for the limited usefulness of his work. Comparisons between particular works of art in different genres are not, of course, always inappropriate, but the choice must be careful and judicious. The present writer's sympathies certainly lie with the 'time-spirit' approach to comparative studies.

Comparisons between the different arts are not the fundamental absurdity that some hostile critics have claimed. It is obvious, for example, that by virtue of being located in time and space, different arts may reflect certain common intentions such as symmetry or asymmetry or whether and how the various elements in a work are connected with one another or articulated. Similarly one may consider the balance between 'meaning' or 'message' and the material means of expression of a work. The colours in a painting may have a varying degree of closeness to the real objects which may have been the painting's starting-point. In a poem the sound patterns or verbal 'music' may stand in a similar relationship to the ideas which may be its basic inspiration in discursive terms.

Our ambition, in for instance some sections of Part Two, Chapter Four, is the modest one of drawing a general parallel between poetry and painting in the second half of the nineteenth century in France through which we hope to show more clearly the picture of the development of poetry in terms of the treatment of contemporary reality. It will be clear from various remarks that we consider the poets to have been directly influenced, on occasion, by work in the plastic arts.

further the neglect of the subject of this thesis. It is difficult to define this attitude precisely but it may be summarised as a reluctance to discuss poetry in its wider context. The more naïve brands of pre-war Marxist criticism in which every work of art was seen to have a detailed relationship with social conditions, and in which the artist was little more than an instrument in the hands of determinist forces, were bound to produce a reaction. It now seems to the present writer that this reaction has gone too far. Under the influence, particularly, of Structuralism (5), poems are often treated as individual, insulated phenomena or even self-sufficient organisms to be dissected. Curiously, this technique has gone hand in hand with an increasing tendency to read into (and out of) particular poems opinions as to the psychological complexion of the poet. Often these are based on little more than the preconceptions of the exegete (6). It is our contention that relationships between poetry and the age in which it was produced, even in works as difficult as some of Rimbaud's Illuminations, are often a more constructive guide to exegesis than the largely personal interpretations involved in many examples of the 'psychological' approach. For this reason it is perhaps timely to examine French poetry of the period 1870-1887 in its total context.

* * * * *

-
- (5) Ironically, itself largely the product of thinkers of Marxist sympathies.
- (6) Of course, properly founded psychological criticism such as Professor Hackett's exegesis of Rimbaud's 'Les Effarés' can be of immense value.

Contemporary reality, in the form of the modern and the ephemeral which were often intimately associated, was an increasingly important source of inspiration in French literature and art throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed this interest is one of the most distinctive features of the age. In particular despite such obvious interest in modernism as that revealed in the 'Querelle des anciens et des modernes' in the seventeenth century and by Diderot's praise of Greuze and Chardin in the eighteenth century, we believe that the degree of enthusiasm shown by poets for contemporary reality as a source of inspiration during the second half of the nineteenth century is unparalleled in the history of French literature. (7)

Before considering this further it will, we hope, be helpful to give a working definition of the term contemporary reality (and its particular manifestations in the modern and the ephemeral) as it is used in this thesis.

By 'contemporary' we mean, of course, 'at the same time as' or, from the point of view of the writers we shall be discussing, 'belonging to the present'. In our use the 'present' varies in duration from a single moment

- (7) Marcel Raymond made a very brief but hitherto unique examination of modernity in French poetry before Baudelaire in his article 'Le sens de la modernité chez Baudelaire'; he was even guiltier of the sin of omission than the present writer and claimed that Baudelaire was entirely original in this respect. He cited the Chansons de Geste and Arthurian Romance from the Middle Ages but made no mention of Villon and the other medieval poets of contemporary reality such as Hélinand and Rutebeuf. Similarly whilst he was right in asserting that 'l'humanisme de la Renaissance et du XVII^e siècle instaure une idée rétrospective de la beauté', he omitted any reference to the exceptions to this generalisation. His remarks on the Romantics and modernity are well worth noting:

Le désir sauveur, l'espoir d'un bien qui soit à tous raniment leur coeur; ils s'attribuent la mission de donner de nouvelles raisons d'exister à une humanité régénérée. Mais prenons garde que cet optimisme se rapporte à l'avenir; des rêves l'entretiennent, ou, dans le cas le plus favorable, une volonté d'action sociale, de révolution morale. En conséquence, on ne parlera qu'avec les plus grandes réserves d'une acceptation par le poète de l'actuel et des conditions de vie réelles ...

(art. cit., pp. 600-01)

to something much longer. equivalent to the 'present age'. Thus a poet may recount something which happened in his childhood and still be describing the present as opposed to a past age or a hypothetical future. In this instance 'contemporary reality' frequently becomes synonymous with 'everyday reality'. As we shall suggest, perhaps the principal mechanism in the transition from modernism to impressionism is the compression in duration of the concept of the present; the contemporary becomes the instantaneous, the modern becomes the ephemeral. In attempting to give a very brief definition of the term 'reality' as we shall be using it we do not intend to become involved in a morass of epistemological problems, of which an adequate discussion would fill a library. We have a great deal of sympathy for Dr. Johnson who attempted to disprove the idealistic philosophy by 'striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, saying 'I refute it thus'. (8) Thus we realise that our terminology and the assumptions that lie behind it are a source of constant dispute among philosophers. (9) However, perhaps one should be no more deterred by the difficulties of definition than the poets were themselves. In any event, since the term Symbolism has proved notoriously difficult of definition and yet has permitted the construction of the usual schéma, this would not appear to be a major stumbling block. The most obvious problem in the use of the term 'reality' is that it can mean so much; it is arguable that in some philosophical systems (10) 'reality' is a synonym of 'everything'. It

(8) Boswell, Life of Johnson, quoted by R. J. North in his introduction to Sartre, Les Mouches, (Harrap, 1963), p. 13.

(9) Bertrand Russell's hopes that Of Human Knowledge would provide a universally accepted solution have proved groundless.

(10) For instance 'Naturalism' as it was defined by C. S. Lewis in Miracles.

is not the intention of this thesis to suggest that all poetry, or even all good poetry is poetry of reality or, more particularly, of contemporary reality. (11) Much of the greatest and best-loved poetry of France and the rest of the world belongs to genres which have little or nothing to do with contemporary reality. Our limited working definition of the term reality as it is used in this thesis is basically that which is external to the poet, or, more precisely, that which does not exist wholly in his thought or imagination but is derived from or influenced by sense-data and the contemporary world around him. Thus a large quantity of pure lyrical poetry (12) cannot be considered to be poetry of contemporary reality as we wish to define ^{it} nor, perhaps more obviously, can most fantastic poetry, religious poetry, historical poetry, dramatic poetry or epic.

The poetry of contemporary reality is thus firstly different in kind from other poetry but it is possible to think of the term, on occasion, as implying a difference in quality. For the Oxford English Dictionary opposes what is 'real' not only to what is 'nominal', 'supposed', 'abstract' and 'ideal' but to what is 'insincere', 'hypocritical', 'affected' and 'artificial'. Thus the term 'reality' may be extended so that it comes to

- (11) The problems of allowing too comprehensive an interpretation of one's terms are well illustrated by P. Matvejevitch's La Poésie de Circonstance which really does amount to a study of poetry about everything.
- (12) Most love poetry lies outside the scope of this thesis, for although the beloved is a contemporary external phenomenon the actual subject of some of the finest love poetry is the poet's idealisations of the beloved and the examination of his own emotions almost independently of the world outside. Baudelaire's love poetry is an extreme case where the physical reality of the beloved becomes merely the starting-point of the poet's imaginary voyages to exotic climes. Although, as we shall see, love poetry could be 'renovated' by putting it in a deliberately modern setting.

mean not simply that which is external to the poet but that which 'affects' him or forms part of his life and experience. In this sense we use the term reality much in the same way as it is used in such common expressions as 'It was only then that poverty became a reality for him'. It is on these grounds that we have been able to distinguish between, for example, occasional poetry written at the invitation of a society to commemorate a particular event (the drilling of the first artesian well in France) or person (Abraham Lincoln), and poetry which reflects the genuine involvement of the poet with a contemporary event or phenomenon (for instance Verlaine and the modern industrial city in 'Charleroi' or Rimbaud and everyday pleasure in 'Au Cabaret-Vert'). The former kind of poetry is not discussed in this thesis.

Linda Nochlin, whose book appeared after the initial draft of this thesis was written, has summed up the various attitudes artists who claim to treat contemporary reality may in fact hold:

Generally speaking, there are three ways of being contemporary open to artists and writers. In the first place, one may attempt to express the ideals, achievements and aspirations of one's own times in the symbolic or allegorical rhetoric of traditional art or literature. In the second place, one might insist that contemporaneity implied an actual confrontation with a serious unidealized embodiment of the concrete experiences, events, customs and appearances characteristic of one's own epoch, whether this be with a spirit of moral urgency or of phenomenological indifference to the social and human values involved. Finally, one can conceive of being artistically of one's times as actually implying being in advance of them, an outlook which has conditioned the hermetic conception of contemporaneity prevailing within our avant-gardes at least since the beginning of this century. (13)

It is to the second group that the best poets of contemporary reality usually belong.

(13) Realism, pp. 105-106.

The modern is that which forms part of the collective experience of a society and which is usually held by that society to distinguish it from what has gone before.

As far as art and literature are concerned, however, it is also possible for certain themes and motifs to be considered modern simply because they are a continuing aspect of life so ordinary that they have previously been regarded as inappropriate for artistic treatment. In this sense even Vigny's 'mouchoir' was shockingly modern. In such instances one is concerned not so much with the chronological modernity of the theme or subject but with the modernity of register resulting from its treatment. Naturally the modern is a perpetually evolving concept (an evolution which seems to have accelerated in the twentieth century where the modern is often identified with the merely fashionable), in itself a reminder of the passage of time and of the ephemeral nature of a particular world-picture, of human achievement and of existence itself. The equation of the modern with the ephemeral by writers such as Baudelaire and Laforgue is therefore logically sound.

Our thesis is not primarily intended to provide an analytical catalogue (along the lines of, for example, Pierre Jourda's excellent study of exoticism in French literature) of various phenomena peculiar to the period under discussion as they occur in poetry - scientific and technological discoveries, historical events and references to contemporary public figures - but rather the study of the expression of contemporary reality in a much wider sense, this expression stemming from the awareness of living in a distinctive age worth writing about in itself, and from the conviction that everyday life was a subject as fit for poetry as a Golden Age in the past (to which it was often contrasted) or an idealised future. Our thesis is a study of this expression of a new-found interest in transitory and elusive aspects of

life as opposed to the static or 'universal' aspects so essential a part of classical art.

The poet of contemporary reality is thus fascinated by modernity, with all its associations of speed and impermanence, by everyday life with its passing delights and sorrows, by the necessarily transitory experiences of sensation and by the workings of the total consciousness as it grapples with mercurial and changing reality.

The principal aspects of contemporary reality which fascinated the poets of 1870 - 1887 were its ordinariness (to be contrasted with the occasional pomposity of earlier poetry and with rules and tradition generally), its transitoriness (which contrasted with the stability and order of classical art aspiring to permanence through non-particularisation of theme and language), its newness (which provided an escape from well-worn motifs and clichés) and its relevance (which offered the hope of a reunion between poetry and society).

We must now return to the question of the general nineteenth-century preoccupation with the modern and ephemeral against which the specific interests of the poets of 1870 - 1887 are to be seen. Relevant works and pronouncements by both artists and writers punctuated the entire century from Romanticism onwards.

Despite Marcel Raymond's caution, noted above, it is inside the Romantic movement that one finds the first serious theories of modernism in the nineteenth century. Émile Deschamps claimed that it was the duty of writers to be of their own times 'avant tout et en tout'. This concept is linked with Hugo's demand (largely unheeded in his own work) that writers should utilise common speech and ordinary language. Two factors should be borne in mind in attempting to explain why the Romantics

should have propounded any ideas on modernism. The first is their social concern manifest in the thinking of the Saint-Simonists and reflected even in the work of a 'throne and altar' man like Balzac. The second, which lies at the base of much of the thinking of the nineteenth century is a relativist attitude towards history apparent in Deschamps's Préface des études françaises et étrangères of 1828 and of course, in Comte's law of the three stages. As far as the poetry of the early part of the century was concerned, although Hugo may have later exaggerated the degree of innovation in his language, he had shown a remarkably precocious interest in subjects drawn from modernity as early as 1819 in the competition piece 'Discours sur les avantages de l'enseignement mutuel' which includes allusions to the newly invented steamship as well as to experiments with balloons. (14)

The work of Balzac and Stendhal was extremely important in the development of literary modernism. Whilst Hugo had been proclaiming the mixing of the sublime and the grotesque in a single work of art as a daring and necessary innovation, the two novelists had achieved a revolution of more durable consequence. They introduced into their work, not usually it has to be admitted as the main characters - though Balzac occasionally did - random individuals from daily life who were the product of their immediate historical circumstances and environment. They made these characters the subject of serious and even tragic presentation and were thus responsible for one of the first major breaks with the classical rule of distinct levels of style. Previously the ordinary had only been

-
- (14) Despite the poet's awareness of the new world that was developing around him the poem falls within the tradition of eighteenth-century descriptive, encyclopaedic verse and is somewhat reminiscent of Delille's 'Le Navire' in its excessive use of periphrasis. To some extent this dichotomy between the acute awareness of contemporary reality, even to the point of using it as poetic subject-matter, and the failure to treat it in a truly original way, was to remain a feature of Hugo's poetry throughout his career.

introduced into literature as either almost grotesquely comic or in the context of pleas for the moral superiority of the simple life; hardly ever for its own sake. They thus prepared the way for a relativist literature reflecting the changing reality of modern life.

Balzac's influence on Baudelaire has already been noted by other scholars. Even after 1870 his treatment of modern urban life continued to inspire both novelists and poets. Bourget in particular looked back to Balzac as one of his two mentors; the other being Baudelaire. This was beneficial in causing Bourget to seek truly modern poetry and thus to encourage (more by declaration than by his own poetic practice) the poetic treatment of contemporary reality in the 1870s and 1880s (15).

Stendhal, however exceptional his heroes, set their progress and trials squarely in 'la marche ordinaire du dix-neuvième siècle', the period of bourgeois triumph with which he felt little sympathy but of which he felt bound to be a faithful and careful observer (16). To this extent he anticipated both Flaubert and some of the poets of contemporary reality who treated their own times despite feeling something close to loathing for them. Stendhal's contribution extended to theoretical as well as fictional writing. Racine et Shakespeare appeared four years before the Préface de Cromwell and is in some ways a good deal more profound though it too was excessively tendentious in its dismissal of classicism; Romanticism is described as the literary expression of the modern conception of the beautiful as 'L'art de présenter aux peuples les oeuvres littéraires qui, dans l'état actuel de leurs habitudes et de leurs croyances, sont susceptibles de leur donner le plus de plaisir possible. Le classicisme, au contraire, leur présente la civilisation

(15) But it also had the unfortunate result of making him concentrate on the few thousand people of 'real importance' at a given epoch - 'le culte de la vie mondaine'. Such an exercise was truly the prerogative of a novelist and it finished Bourget as a poet.

(16) c.f. J. Atherton, Stendhal, pp. 69-83.

qui donnait le plus de plaisir possible à leurs arrière-grand-pères' (17)

The second Racine et Shakespeare of 1825 reaffirmed with even greater clarity Stendhal's basic tenet: that the writer should be the interpreter of his times by creating something new, that beauty is relative, evolving from one century to another. Classicism was the Romanticism of the seventeenth century just as Romanticism will one day be considered to be classical. If the arts are to be vital they must evolve like the concept of beauty. One form of this Stendhalian relativism is to be seen in his novels, in the importance attached to the individual's perception and interpretation of reality. It was this individualism which, more than anything else, accounted for the revival of interest in Stendhal in the period in which the major poets discussed in Parts Two and Three of this thesis were writing. This new appreciation was not always free of misunderstanding :

Son esprit d'analyse, sa lucidité favorisent la faculté de dédoublement et, indirectement, le pessimisme, qu'il eût récuse. Mais les oeuvres de Bourget, de Barrès et de bien d'autres ne se conçoivent pas sans sa présence. Son Journal est édité, puis la Vie d'Henri Brulard, les Souvenirs d'égotisme. Les années 1880 sont celles de l'observation psychologique, du retour sur soi. Adolphe, Joseph Delorme, Volupté, Amiel font partie du bien commun de l'époque.

(18)

Returning to the poets of the Romantic period Musset appears as a surprising advocate of the turning towards contemporary reality for inspiration. He seems to be the first French poet to mention the railway :

Tout est bien balayé sur vos chemins de fer,
Tout est grand, tout est beau, mais on meurt dans votre air
(Rolla, 4th part, 1833)

These lines were published barely a year after the introduction of the first locomotive in France (on the Saint-Étienne to Lyon line).

(17) Racine et Shakespeare, Oeuvres Complètes, XXXVII, p.39.

(18) Pouilliat, Le Romantisme, III, pp. 145 - 46.

Musset was obviously aware of the changing life around him. It is a pity he did not see fit to make it more often the material of poetry. His failure to do so is in marked contrast to the plea for poetry reflecting modern times made in Un mot sur l'art moderne (19) in 1833: 'Où voit-on un peintre, un poète occupé de ce qui se passe, non pas à Venise, ou à Cadix, mais à Paris, à droite et à gauche?' In practice he seems to have considered that as the only true reality the poet could know was himself, then the analysis of the moi and total sincerity would be the best basis for 'modern' poetry. That his conception of modernism, was, to say the least, imprecise, may be gathered from the examples of modernist poets he upholds: Byron, Shakespeare and Juvenal. Of these perhaps only the last can be so considered without any reserves. On the other hand, Musset anticipated much modern criticism in seeing Vigny, Hugo and Lamartine as continuations of classicism and not really the creators of modern or modernist poetry. (20) Moreover, the vagueness of Musset's idea of modernism is doubtless to be attributed to his aesthetically sound fear of didacticism: 'Si la littérature veut exister, il faut qu'elle rompe en visière à la politique. Autrement, toutes deux se ressembleront et la réalité vaudra toujours mieux que l'apparence.'

(21)

Of the Romantic poets and theorists Sainte-Beuve was the staunchest advocate of modernism; his dictum 'il faut être de son temps' is an exact echo of the words of Daumier and other artist treating modern times. Moreover, parts of the poetry in Joseph Delorme are the earliest consistent attempt in nineteenth-century verse to evoke modern everyday reality (22).

(19) Quoted in Ph. Van Tieghem, Musset, pp. 124-25.

(20) Ibid., pp. 125-33

(21) Article in the third Revue fantaisiste of 1831; quoted *ibid.*, p. 122.

(22) See Part Two, Chapter Two, (f) for a note on Sainte-Beuve's importance as a precursor of the poetry of 1870 - 1887.

Considering the highly successful treatment of contemporary reality in the novels of Balzac and Stendhal one may wonder what dissatisfaction could remain to make Champfleury and his followers feel that the creation of a Realist school of novel writing was necessary. It is tempting to make comparisons between Realism and Symbolism; both were of lasting value only as labels to be attached to writers who, properly speaking, did not belong to the movements. Even the language of their manifestos is similar. Basically, the motivation behind the Realist movement was not aesthetic at all, it was concerned with a social programme based on the ideas of Saint-Simon and contemporary writers like Proudhon. The heroes of Stendhal and Balzac it was argued, had been too extraordinary. For Realism to lead to an effective social programme it would have to portray people and society as they really were. In practice this amounted to a concentration on the humdrum life of the workers and the lower middle classes. The didactic nature of Realism eventually led to Baudelaire's disaffection with the movement.

The important consequence of Realism was that it seems to have helped to cause the two most important mid-century figures in French literature, Flaubert and Baudelaire, to turn to contemporary reality as the material for major works of art almost as a tour de force which would highlight the superficiality of the Realist approach - 'pour embêter les Réalistes' as Flaubert himself put it. Flaubert wrote Madame Bovary to show that the use of a truly ordinary modern subject need present no obstacle to the creation of a great work of art, even when that subject was seen by the author to have the repulsive grey colour of a wood-louse (23).

Although it has become fashionable to see in Flaubert a writer who was uniquely concerned with universal even classical values in art (24) the

(23) E. and J. de Goncourt, Journal, IV, pp. 166 - 67.

(24) c.f. E. Caramaschi, 'Le sens de l'actuel chez Flaubert' : 'Flaubert ignore le goût de la "modernité"... l'intérêt passionné pour l'instant éphémère... (il) ... est résolument tourné vers les valeurs du classicisme'. (art.cit., p. 211).

truth is that one of his inclinations was towards the recreation of the 'feel' of everyday reality; in a letter to Louise Colet in 1852 he wrote of his desire to analyse reality, to create in his reader an almost physical awareness of the humble reality he was evoking (25). A year later he again wrote to Louise Colet in terms particularly pertinent to poetry after 1870 :

Autrefois on croyait que la canne à sucre seule donnait le sucre. On en tire à peu près de tout maintenant; il en est de même de la poésie. Extrayons - la de n'importe quoi, car elle gît en tout et partout...

(26)

Yet he freely admitted to a feeling of disgust for contemporary reality, at least of the kind depicted in Madame Bovary :

Croyez-vous donc que cette ignoble réalité dont la reproduction vous dégoûte ne me fasse autant qu'à vous sauter le coeur? Si vous me connaissiez davantage, vous sauriez que j'ai la vie ordinaire en exécution... Mais esthétiquement, j'ai voulu cette fois, et rien que cette fois, la pratiquer à fond. Aussi, ai-je pris la chose d'une manière héroïque, j'entends minutieuse, en acceptant tout, en disant tout, en peignant tout, expression ambitieuse .

(27)

Flaubert's heroism, perhaps even greater than Mallarmé's, for it went against his own tastes as well as barring the easy road to success, may be regarded in the same way as Baudelaire's endeavour in Les Fleurs du Mal , at least in its consequences. Madame Bovary is one of the most outstanding examples of the attainments of the highest artistic ideals through a recognition of the aesthetic potential of the treatment of contemporary reality. Certain stylistic characteristics of Flaubert's work are also to be matched in poetry after 1870. As Professor Ullmann has pointed out, by using free indirect speech 'the author is not committed to an exact reproduction of words or thoughts; yet he is able to dispense with explicit subordination and to retain the emotive and expressive features

(25) Flaubert, Correspondance, II, p.345.

(26) Ibid., III, p.138.

(27) Ibid., IV, p.125.

and the very inflexions of the spoken language' (28). Flaubert's ability to introduce the rhythms of everyday speech into his so carefully pondered style provides a clear indication that such an introduction is not detrimental to the pursuit of formal perfection. Examples in Madame Bovary abound :

Voilà ce qu'on ne voudrait jamais croire! on allait rire, au contraire, clabauder! (29)

La part de la barque n'excéda point mille écus. Elle avait donc menti, la bonne dame! (30)

Il le trouvait bien un peu gringalet, et ce n'était pas là un gendre comme il l'eût souhaité. (31)

Flaubert thus anticipated the use of everyday speech outside dialogue that was to be a feature of some of the best poetry of contemporary reality after 1870.

Baudelaire's contribution to both the theory and practice of a poetry derived from the modern and ephemeral was so influential upon the poets after 1870 that it is examined separately in the first part of our thesis. For the moment, however, it is important to note that in the treatment of modernity he hoped for a reconciliation of artist and public through art based on a shared experience. He also identified the modern with the fugace and the transitoire thus anticipating the next generation of artists and writers. His erstwhile companion Courbet had also stressed the contemporaneity if not the fugacity he felt necessary in any kind of realist art (32). Du Camp, a much lesser figure, was nevertheless responsible for instigating a whole debate on the place of modernism in art and poetry in the preface to his Chants modernes of 1855. (33)

(28) S. Ullmann, Style in the French Novel, p.117.

(29) Madame Bovary, p.255.

(30) Ibid., p.25.

(31) Ibid., p.32.

(32) See below, pp. 660-61.

(33) See below, pp. 342-48.

Among the next generation, Monet pursued Baudelaire's and Courbet's point by several times speaking of 'l'impression naïve et moderne' as the intention of his work. He thus combined the notions of the transitory moment and modernity and saw their exploitation as a means of expressing the artist's personal genius as naïveté. The basic ideas of pictorial Impressionism were being formed as early as the 1860s; something of this ferment of ideas is to be seen in the work of the Goncourt brothers who were not only important as chroniclers but as practitioners and theorists of literature inspired by the modern and the ephemeral.

Like Flaubert, and Balzac before him, they stressed the relationship between literature and the natural sciences : 'Le roman s'est imposé les études et les devoirs de la science...' (34). In the preface to Germinie Lacerteux of 1864 they stated that this clinical observation - mostly of working-class life - would be the first stage in a process of stirring the social conscience. Their aims were thus the same as the Realists' but their methods were to be more scientific, their picture more honest. Soon, however, their work became less didactic and more concerned with aesthetic questions. With Manette Salomon of 1867 the accurate account of French aristocratic life in the years 1840 to 1865 is less important than the advocacy of modernism and the treatment of transitory reality and the reflection of discussions in the embryonic period of Impressionism :

Aussi ont-ils pu retracer, avec une remarquable justesse, l'évolution de la peinture française depuis l'échec de la révolution romantique jusqu'à la naissance de l'impressionisme ... Mais les Goncourt ont fait mieux que cela; ils nous ont pas seulement restitué ce qui était, au moment où ils composaient leur livre, le passé immédiat de la peinture française-ils ont de plus prévu ce qui était encore en gestation. Ils nous ont présenté dans Manette Salomon des tendances, qui, encore indécises dans les cervelles des peintres, allaient... se préciser pour donner la magnifique floraison de l'impressionisme (35).

(34) E. and J. Goncourt, Préfaces et Manifestes littéraires, p.22.

(35) F. Fosca, Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, p.225.

After Jules's death in 1870, Edmond continued to write in praise of modern art. Particularly influential were his support for Impressionism and his studies of Japanese painting. A further extension of the programme implicit in Germinie Lacerteux was the move away from lower social strata to 'les milieux d'éducation et de distinction' in Les Frères Zemganno of 1879. Novels like Germinie Lacerteux and Zola's L'Assommoir were held to have been necessary to arouse the public's consciousness of failings in contemporary literature. Now Edmond felt justified in giving a more comprehensive picture of society and of modern life. A similar attitude is to be perceived in the writings of Huysmans and Zola around this time. In 1877, in a series of articles in the Belgian review L'Actualité, Huysmans had agreed that Naturalism was not just concerned with what was base, vicious or ugly, but with all subjects. In 1884 Zola likewise spoke of the universality of Naturalism in a letter to Georges Renard.

The uncompromising modernism of the Goncourts' novels was rendered even more interesting by their development of a style which can only accurately be described as impressionistic. One of the most striking devices employed by the brothers was the 'style substantif'. This was particularly successful in the description of painting in Manette Salomon. Professor Ullmann has written revealingly on the following passage from Renée Mauperin :

L'obscurité venait. Toute la pièce s'assombrissait.
Couchée sur sa chaise longue. Renée disparaissait
dans la vague blancheur de son peignoir. Il arrivait
un instant où l'on ne distinguait plus rien, et où la
chambre se mêlait au ciel.

(36)

(36) op. cit., p.334, quoted by Ullmann, Style in the French Novel, pp. 122 - 23.

This description is impressionistic in two different ways. It detaches the quality of whiteness from the object, sets it up as an independent substance, and thereby focuses attention on the white colour rather than the dressing-gown. This colour will take precedence over the objects to which it belongs, in the same way as it does in the impressionist style of painting... But the passage is also impressionistic in a different sense; it reproduces the actual sequence of events in the observer's mind, the psychological order of sense-impressions as they reach our eye and our consciousness. In the dusk which is descending on the room, all that one sees at first is a patch of misty whiteness; only closer inspection, or on reflection, is the whiteness connected with an object, Renee's dressing-gown. The progression of speech in time enables it to reproduce the sequence of impressions in their impact on the mind.

(37)

In his preface to the Journal written in 1872 Edmond claimed that he and his brother had sought to represent 'l'ondoyante humanité dans sa vérité momentanée' and that they had preferred 'la phrase et l'expression qui émoussaient et académisaient le moins le vif de nos sensations (38). This was a consequence of their belief that the age was characterised by hyper-sensitivity, of the refinement of, and obsession with, ephemeral sensation in a changing and hectic environment.

Zola was likewise undeniably committed to modernism. Industrial and urban settings are to be found in some of his finest novels including Germinal and Le Ventre de Paris. Yet his picture of modern life is rarely less than sombre and to this extent may be considered unrepresentative of his age in its totality. Despite moments of perspicacity in his critical writings, his treatment of contemporary reality - which at its best has an epic grandeur-too infrequently went beyond description or the harrowing exposition of social injustice to an attempt to evoke the most transitory - and thereby authentic - aspects of reality. Nevertheless as early as 1865 he had spoken of a link between the new literature and

(37) Ullmann, op. cit., p. 123.

(38) Préfaces et Manifestes littéraires, p. 172 and p. 174.

the speed and anxiety of modern life (39): He was one of the earliest and most influential supporters of Impressionism and Pre-Impressionism, particularly of the work of Manet. However, his enthusiasm cooled when the Impressionists failed to produce a pictorial equivalent of Naturalism. Suggestions that an improvement in Zola's eye-sight was the reason for his desertion of the Impressionist cause are to be viewed with suspicion(40). It was simply a question of the Impressionists going further than Zola wanted in the evocation of contemporary reality. For him the purpose of their painting should have been solely the description of modern life and society and not the evocation of even more ephemeral aspects of contemporary reality. Nevertheless his dictum 'Une oeuvre d'art est un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament'(41) is an indication of his potential ability to appreciate the basis of impressionistic and synthetic works of art. Nor should one forget Zola's awareness of impressionistic style:

Je n'ai pas seulement soutenu les impressionnistes.
Je les ai traduits en littérature, par les touches, notes,
colorations, par la palette de beaucoup de mes descriptions.

(42)

Zola's pronouncements as well as his work are interesting in their historical context even if superficial in retrospect. In 1864 in the article 'Du Progrès dans les Sciences et dans la Poésie' (43) he spoke of the need for poetry to evolve with humanity. In 1868 in 'L'Événement illustré' (44) he attacked the Parnassians for attempting to breath new life into old mythological subjects when the nineteenth century offered such a fine store of subjects. In 'Les Poètes contemporains' written in the late 1870s (45) his hero is Coppée. He thought that Verlaine might have rivalled him but apparently that poet has disappeared from the scene. Richepin, Bouchor and Bourget are a promising group. He admires Sully Prudhomme as the poet of progress and science he had called for in 1864.

(39) In 'La Littérature et la gymnastique', Oeuvres Complètes, X, p.56.

(40) Such a suggestion was made by Lilian Furst in 'Zola's art criticism'.

(41) Mes Haines, Oeuvres Complètes, X, p.38.

(42) H. Hertz, 'Zola, témoin de la vérité', L'Europe, November-December, 1952, p.32.

(43) Journal populaire de Lille, Oeuvres Complètes, X, p.314.

(44) 20 April 1868 in the article 'Nos poètes', Oeuvres Complètes, X, p.742.

(45) Oeuvres Complètes, XII, pp. 371 - 388.

too,
Zola was an innovator

in the use of familiar and popular speech in literature. One of his critics' most constant cries was that he had debased French literature by using the language of the gutter (46).

Zola's disciple Huysmans, was of great importance as an advocate of modernity in general terms, as a novelist, as an apologist of Impressionism, and as a link between painters and poets. As early as 1867 he had written an essay on contemporary landscape painters (47). In his first book Le Drageoir aux épices (1875), a collection of prose poems, one finds many impressionistic descriptions of the districts of Paris. Thus Huysmans' inclinations were already clear before he came under the spell of Zola 1875-76. His brochure Emile Zola et 'L'Assommoir' (1877) is remarkable for its claim that Naturalism was not just interested in vice, or the sordid aspects of life. The movement saw fit to treat any and every aspect of contemporary life. In the late 1870s Huysmans was producing, regularly, prose poems and articles on modern painters. His novel Les Soeurs Vatar (1878) consisted almost entirely of descriptive passages. He devoted all his skill to the evocation of the sights, sounds and smells of the Montrouge district, the atmosphere of a music-hall in the Rue de la Gaîté, a railway siding behind the Rue Vandamme, a workshop, a fairground and a 'bal de barrière'.

became

His novel En Ménage (1881)/one of Laforgue's 'bibles' and despite its failings is probably the best of his 'naturalist' novels. It is especially noteworthy for the correlation made between mood and aspects of modernity. The latter became objective correlatives of the feelings of the writer. It was this aspect of the novelist's work which appealed most to Laforgue.

A rebours was hailed as the great expression of the spirit of decadence.

(46) In fact Zola's contribution in this field is rather limited - and the language he created is frequently something of a hybrid. Nevertheless the attention given to this aspect of his work assured its influence on the young poets.

(47) See R. Baldick, The Life of J.-K. Huysmans.

Despite Des Esseintes's misanthropy the novel nevertheless contains many evocations of contemporary life. Many of the more 'claustrophobic' sections of the novel are devoted to an analysis of sense experiences. Like the Goncourts he saw hypersensitivity and obsession with sensation as modern phenomena.

In the very important critical essays gathered in 'L'Art Moderne' (1883) Huysmans saw the Impressionists as painters of modern life. This did not prevent him from appreciating them as landscape painters and their success in evolving such transitory phenomena as the play of light. He understood the connection between modernism and Impressionism.

The most important advocate of the treatment of the modern and ephemeral in poetry and art in the period 1870 - 1887 was Laforgue whose definition of the modern as the ephemeral and of Impressionism as a specifically modernist art — form are of crucial interest to the present study. However, we would also see Rimbaud as a protagonist of modernism, not sharing the commonly accepted view that the injunction to be modern at the end of Une Saison en Enfer is wholly ironic. (48)

It is interesting to note the continuing vigour of modernism at the end of our period, well illustrated by Félicien Champsaur's preface to Dinah Samuel written for the 1889 edition. Champsaur called the preface to his celebrated roman à clefs 'Le Modernisme' :

Je n'ai pas d'autre ambition, d'autre fièvre que d'une oeuvre où on sente battre, intarissablement, la vie contemporaine... Le modernisme, c'est en littérature, comme en peinture... le reflet d'un siècle, l'âme d'un temps...
Le poète nouveau devra laisser de côté ce magasin de vieilles inspirations, en voici d'autres, les chemins de fer, le télégraphe, la lumière électrique, le téléphone
... s'il a une âme ornée et neuve, ce poète fera sortir le beau moderne...

(49)

(48) See below, pp. 107 - 108.

(49) F. Champsaur, preface to Dinah Samuel, pp. xxi - xxiii.

The rather old-fashioned plea for modernism of this kind was reiterated as a reaction against the mythological subjects of the Symbolists who are the models for his characters.

Against such a background perhaps one should interpret such pronouncements as Rollinat's introductory poem to Les Névroses, 'Memento quia pulvis es', as more than just another avatar of a theme popular with the Romantics and indeed already firmly ensconced in European lyric poetry since classical antiquity. This reinterpretation is all the more justified in view of the poet's preoccupation in Les Névroses with the febrile pace of modern life and the hypersensitivity of those that live it:

Crachant au monde qu'il effleure
Sa bourdonnante vanité,
L'homme est un moucheron d'une heure
Qui veut pomper l'éternité.
C'est un corps jouisseur qui souffre,
Un esprit ailé qui se tord:
C'est le brin d'herbe au bord du gouffre,
Avant la mort ...

* * * * *

How original was the treatment of contemporary reality, prompted by this widespread interest, as a poetic genre ?

The year 1870 was marked by the publication of a kind of manifesto in Eugène Manuel's 'avertissement' to his Poèmes Populaires. (50)

Il est permis d'affirmer que la poésie, comme le théâtre, a une tâche à remplir; qu'elle doit, de plus en plus, dans ses peintures, être de son temps, s'associer à cette recherche ardente des problèmes de la vie moderne, et ne pas craindre de se hasarder plus avant et plus bas dans l'expression des idées, des passions et des souffrances qui agitent la société démocratique.

(50) op. cit., p. iii.

Manuel's ideas and his terminology seem, in the light of subsequent developments, naïve in the extreme, yet his statement has importance as one of the most coherent pleas for modernism in poetry after Baudelaire's enthusiastic exhortations which had, so far, been largely ignored and Du Camp's proposals which had been ill-conceived from the start. (51)

Eugène Manuel tempered his claims for the originality of his approach to poetry with the remark 'Nouvelle c'est beaucoup dire'. Indeed with him we must acknowledge the fact that many examples of the treatment of contemporary reality in French poetry are to be found before the middle of the nineteenth century. However we also feel justified in supporting him in his claim that in most cases such treatment was the work only of 'une inspiration passagère'.

It is significant that for the majority of such examples one has to look back in the history of French poetry beyond the firm establishment of classicism in the seventeenth century. The Middle Ages in France brought forth a rich collection of poems of contemporary reality. Erich Auerbach speaking of realism in literature as a departure from the classical doctrine of differentiated levels of literary style saw this period as the first flowering of a treatment of contemporary reality to be repeated, in a different fashion, only in the nineteenth century:

- (51) Manuel, moreover, was an influential and respected figure in the world of literature and education. Despite his naïveté, Manuel nevertheless encourages poets along the path of 'popularism' which, he says, 'peut devenir définitivement une des grandes voies de la poésie contemporaine' (ibid., p. iv). If 'popular' poetry was not in itself to become a great genre, it remains true that the admission of popularisms into poetry in the form of both subject and language, and particularly the latter, marks an important stage in the development of the poetry of contemporary reality.

The barriers which the romanticists and the contemporary realists tore down had been erected only toward the end of the sixteenth century and during the seventeenth by the advocates of a rigorous imitation of antique literature. Before that time, both during the Middle Ages and on through the Renaissance, a serious realism had existed. It had been possible in literature as well as in the visual arts to represent the most everyday phenomena of reality in a serious and significant context. The doctrine of the levels of style had no absolute validity. However different medieval and modern realism may be they are at one in this basic attitude. And it had long been clear to me how this medieval conception of art had evolved, and when and how the first break with the classical theory had come about. It was the story of Christ, with its ruthless mixture of everyday reality and the highest and most sublime tragedy, which had conquered the classical rule of styles. (52)

At the close of the Middle Ages one of France's greatest lyric poets, François Villon, was writing works which reflect very well the atmosphere of his time and the violent tenor of his immediate milieu. Critics have, with good reason, seen affinities between the work and life of Villon and the works and lives of several poets of the late nineteenth century, notably Verlaine, Rimbaud, Corbière, and Laforgue. Verlaine and Rimbaud were also in conflict with the law and established society. Rimbaud's sudden disappearance from literature is as dramatic as Villon's. Verlaine and Rimbaud also share Villon's welcoming attitude towards 'improper' subjects and language. Corbière and Laforgue have Villon's ironic humour and like him make use of the technique of introducing cultural allusions into poetry that is otherwise thoroughly 'contemporary'. There is a similarity of attitude towards the treatment of contemporary reality and genuine experience in the work of all five poets.

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries contemporary reality remained an important source of inspiration. It is an indication

both of the importance of the poetry of contemporary reality in this period and of the great dearth of such poetry afterwards that critics in the 1870s had to look back to this time in an attempt to explain the poetry of Jean Richepin. Only one poet writing more recently than the seventeenth century was considered to be a possible predecessor; this was Baudelaire whom Louis Veuillot, despite his hostility to La Chanson des Gueux, found time to list, along with Mathurin Régnier and François Villon as pioneer in the writing of this kind of poetry. (53) Jules Lemaître also noted the influence of Rabelais, Théophile de Viau, Cyrano de Bergerac and Saint-Amant. (54)

* * * * *

-
- (53) Mélanges, XIII, p. 419 (being Vol. XXXIX of the Oeuvres Complètes).
 (54) Les Contemporains, third series, p. 313.

The reasons for the unparalleled fascination with contemporary reality in art and literature, and poetry in particular, lie largely in the peculiarly distinctive nature of the nineteenth century itself. This particular zeitgeist was derived from dramatic changes in both the intellectual and material environment of nineteenth-century French poets.

Two partly contradictory tendencies may be seen in the political and social history of the period 1789-1900. The first is a tendency towards political cataclysm evident in a whole series of revolutions, counter-revolutions and coups d'état. The prelude to some of them was a wave of enthusiasm and idealism among a large number of intellectuals. The sequel was the bitter disillusionment of the same group. This was particularly true of 1848 and 1870.

The second tendency was a steadily increasing interest in the fruits of capitalism. This crass materialism, which characterises most of the period under discussion, was a kind of insurance and an escape from a changing world. Many poets and artists rejected it entirely. Some accepted its manifestations as subject-matter for art though they loathed it as a philosophy of life. Some accepted it wholeheartedly.

It was precisely during this period when France was trying to come to terms with the disappearance of the old political order and the creation of a new industrial society that science was giving Man cause to feel more and more insignificant in the face of an enormous and complex universe. It is easy to think of the Copernican revolution as introducing a new picture of the universe that was to remain largely unaltered until such innovations as spectrum analysis (55). This is far from being the case. The story of eighteenth and nineteenth-century astronomy is one of steadily improving instruments and ever bulkier tabulations of the heavenly bodies. The old

(55) The foundations of which had been laid by Kirchoff and Bunsen but not exploited until much more recently.

vision of Bruno that every star might be a sun with its solar system became generally accepted in scientific circles. More than this, the theory was put forward in the nineteenth century that the Milky Way might be just one of a vast number of galaxies. (56) It was becoming increasingly difficult to have a cosy picture of the universe; the great calculations of Laplace, which had finished publication in the 1820s, may have been directed at establishing the 'definite stability' of the universe as it now is, but they dazzled by their sheer immensity. If anything they contributed towards the general feeling about the enormity of creation. During the period the most important single event connected with astronomy, from the point of view of the historian of ideas in France, was the publication, in 1862, of Camille Flammarion's La Pluralité des mondes habités which had run to no less than twenty-five popular editions by 1876. This was one of the most successful works of scientific popularisation of the century. It seems highly probable that Laforgue had read Flammarion and that much of his early verse is influenced by this reading. Whatever the case, the influence of ideas of this kind on Laforgue, Sully-Prudhomme, Leconte de Lisle and others is certain :

Songez! depuis des fôts sans fin d'éternités,
Cet azur qui toujours en tous les sens recule,
De troupeaux de soleils à tout jamais pullule,
Chacun d'eux conduisant des mondes habités.....

(57)

-
- (56) A greater variety of stellar structures than had ever been imagined was being revealed and such things as 'twin-stars' could be examined in some detail. On a level much more easily appreciated by the public at large were the discoveries of Uranus by Herschel in 1781 and of Neptune by Galle in 1846.
- (57) Laforgue, 'Farce éphémère'. Another factor which contributed towards the new world-picture was the revival of interest in the works of Pascal : 'Que l'homme, étant revenu à soi, considère ce qu'il est au prix de ce qui est; qu'il se regarde comme égaré dans ce canton détourné de la nature; et que, de ce petit cachot où il se trouve logé, j'entends l'univers, il apprenne estimer la terre, les royaumes, les villes, et soi même à son juste prix. Qu'est-ce qu'un homme dans l'infini?' (Les Pensées, Ed. Chevalier, p.48) For the question of other sources of Laforgue's cosmology see P. Reboul, 'La Genèse du ciel laforguien.'

As a corollary of the picture of an enormous universe was the feeling that the world was getting smaller, as in a sense it was: the first transatlantic cable was completed in 1858 and even the far-off British colonies in the South Seas were issuing postage stamps.

The steady development of telescopes was matched by similar progress in microscopes; the advances in this field led not, of course, to a sense of awe at the enormity of things but to wonder at the complexity and peculiarity of previously familiar phenomena.

Linked with the new view of the cosmos outlined above was what has been described many times as the key idea of the nineteenth century - evolutionary theory (58). Lanson remarked that his generation was obsessed with Darwinism. (59) The results of the obsession were far-reaching. In an evolving world what justification could there be for believing that an institution (such as monarchy) or a particular tradition in art (such as the Renaissance attitude to the human body or metrical convention) has any intrinsic right to durability? Art and the artist should evolve also. It is ⁱⁿ the nineteenth century that one first encounters the terms 'évolution artistique' and 'évolution littéraire'. (60) The attitudes expressed by artists towards the evolutionary vision of the world - a vision reinforced by the political and material development of the nineteenth century - could be summarised broadly in terms of either pessimistic escapism (61) or of an optimistic belief in progress (62), or finally, of a wholehearted acceptance of the present and of the modern. (63) Needless to say one finds that many of the

(58) John C. Greene has brilliantly traced the development of evolutionary thought from the seventeenth century up to the discoveries of Darwin in The Death of Adam. He makes it clear that the theories of Darwin, Lyell and Spencer were but the culmination of centuries of growing awareness of the evolutionary process. Their findings were the confirmation, in particular, of the intuition of many other nineteenth-century thinkers such as Lamarck whose ideas were extremely influential in France.

(59) Histoire de la littérature française, p. 1091.

(60) Note the title of Huret's famous Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire of 1891. Two years earlier Vielé-Griffin in the preface to Joies had stated that 'L'art ne s'apprend pas seulement, il se recrée sans cesse: il ne vit pas que de tradition, mais d'évolution'. Moréas had spoken of the evolution of art and literature in his manifesto of 18 September 1886.

(61) Reflected in the interest in the philosophies of the East and German idealism, in 'l'art pour l'art' and exoticism.

(62) Evident in the positivist philosophies of Comte and, later, Spencer and in the poetry of progress.

(63) Reflected in the occasional joie de vivre of poets and artists like Rimbaud, Verlaine, Monet and Renoir.

poets oscillate from one category to another. One may note especially that some of the greatest writers of the period are those who regret bourgeois progressive materialism as a way of life but treat it in their works as a way of highlighting its pettiness, at the same time asserting the ability of art to transmute any subject. (64)

Science, through its implementation in industrial technology, had very visible manifestations in concrete reality as well as in the realm of ideas in the nineteenth century. The period after 1840 was one of rapid urbanisation and the development of communications. The massive conurbations that resulted from the Industrial Revolution gave rise to completely new ways of life and landscapes. Modern town life in all its complexity ranging from the virtual subsistence-level existence in ad hoc workers' housing estates to the uniquely modern atmosphere of suburbia was a completely new phenomenon on this scale. Anatole France in La Vie en fleur claimed that Paris changed more during Haussmann's reconstruction than in the entire period dating from the regency of Anne of Austria! (65) Yet despite urbanisation and reconstruction, the life of the modern city seemed to leave artists stunned; it was almost wholly untreated by poets and painters until Baudelaire and Impressionism respectively. Raymond Cogniat has written suggestively of the relationship between the speed of modern life and the development of Impressionist art. (66) The locomotive was the symbol par excellence of the new pace of living seen as a supreme example of the transitory in the modern. (67)

The industrial revolution presented two aspects to the artists of the nineteenth century as indeed it may still do today. One was unpleasant : the

(64) Flaubert considered the 'raw material' of Madame Bovary to be the ugly and dull grey colour of a wood louse. He also, on occasion, decided on scholarly escapism in Salammbô, Hérodiade and Saint Julien.

(65) Oeuvres, XXIII, p.321-322.

(66) Monet and his world, pp.59-61.

(67) See below, pp. 367-68.

deseccration of the countryside, the exploitation of the working classes, the throwing up of filthy overcrowded cities. It was this aspect which was to inspire Verhaeren in Les Villes tentaculaires and which lay at the root of the Parnassian rejection of contemporary reality. (68) The other aspect was the bustle and exhilaration of the new life which could cause Baudelaire to speak of 'l'héroïsme de la vie moderne' and even the usually gloomy Darwin to become an optimistic believer in progress. (69)

Beyond the more general effects of industrialisation there were, of course, more specific influences on art and poetry. In poetry the description of the new phenomena necessitated a new approach to vocabulary if the clumsiest periphrases were to be avoided. (Unfortunately on occasion they were not, as in the case of Vigny's 'La Maison du Berger'). The poet also had available a whole new source of imagery. In painting the artist was given fresh subjects and an otherwise 'traditional' landscape was given a totally different atmosphere when the vertical line in the painting was stressed not by a tree or the column of a ruined temple but by a distant factory chimney. (70)

The influence of contemporary science and technology on nineteenth-century art may, in conclusion, be seen to have exerted itself in two ways. First it altered the world-picture itself both on the level of ideas and on the level of the concrete reality surrounding the artist. Second, it altered the attitude towards the interpretation of reality. Although Seurat with his search for a formula for 'optical painting' based on the repeated, systematic observation of colour and light, came closer to the deductive methods of the natural sciences than did the Realists or the Impressionists, nevertheless the

(68) c.f. Gilbert Highet, The Classical Tradition, pp. 437-38.

(69) c.f. the passage in his diary relating to his impressions of Sydney, quoted in Greene, The Death of Adam, p.326.

(70) e.g. Seurat's Banlieue of 1882.

latter movements if not strictly scientific in their methods, were to an extent scientific in their attitudes towards nature and reality. In making truth - in the sense of experienced reality - the aim of art their outlook was akin to the scientific attitude itself. Thus Zola was able to talk, in his salon review of 1866 and in his long study of Manet of the following year, in terms of the all-pervading effect of the scientific revolution. (71)

A consideration of the scientific and technological background to the nineteenth century in France contributes towards the picture of the prevailing intellectual climate. This was, in intellectual circles, an age of unbelief; Christianity seemed bankrupt. The Church of Rome had by the eighteenth century lost most of the enthusiasm of the Counter-Reformation and, except by an ever closer alliance with the political establishment, seemed unable to cope with the attack of the rationalists. Little effort was made to re-examine Christian thinking in terms of the new world-picture. The hierarchy of the Church (Protestant as well as Catholic) often failed to take the right side in the struggle for social justice. As an institution the Church tended to remain aloof from the development of modern society except in so far as the latter was a threat to privilege. Of course there was no fundamental reason why Christianity should not have provided a more alluring social programme than positivism or a more valid mode of mysticism and contemplation than idealist philosophies. (72)

The ~~apparent~~ moral bankruptcy of the Church in France, so vividly portrayed in Le Rouge et le Noir, seemed to invalidate Christianity itself. Moreover the apparent failure of the Church 'to keep pace' with modern life could make it seem as though the very excitement and commotion of the latter disproved Christianity :

(71) Oeuvres Complètes, XII, p.798, p.807 and pp. 828-32

(72) Christianity was able to do both things in France after the decline of scientism to the extent that militant lay Catholicism has been described as the most progressive single trend in France since 1945. (See J. Ardagh, The New France , pp. 563-79).

avec, le samedi soir, le tumulte des cloches de Notre-Dame dans les deux tours sonores; le tapage du Boul 'Mich' couvre la voix des cloches, c'est très philo. Ça symbolise la fin du christianisme. Ceci a tué cela. Ceci = les trompes des tramways; cela = la voix des cloches tristes.

(73)

Professor Chisholm in Toward Hérodiade set out an explanation of the evolution of nineteenth-century French poetry almost entirely in terms of the influence of various 'mystical' philosophies including occultism. His book is a valuable source for any investigation of this kind but one may question whether this exclusively philosophical approach leads to complete accuracy.

All of the idealist-pessimistic philosophies, whether they be direct importations from the East or of the family of the westernised Buddhism of Schopenhauer, entail a certain distaste for contemporary life and an awareness of the purposelessness of existence - at least as it affects Man; all of them offer 'compensation' in the form of an escape into contemplation (Schopenhauer) or an escape into art (Leconte de Lisle's interpretation of Indian philosophy or Laforgue's adaptation of Hartmann's theory of the Unconscious). This may mean an outright idealist vision of the universe (such as Villiers de l'Isle Adam's) in which case art is all that is left.

That the appeal of this kind of philosophy would not be universal in any country where the opium poppy does not grow is fairly obvious and it is easy to understand how positivism with its roots in the Cartesian tradition of France would prove to be a very successful alternative. Comte's philosophy is little other than a theoretical corollary of scientific progress. Comte saw the nineteenth century as the time when the third of his celebrated stages of human development would begin to be reached. This is the stage at which Man abandons metaphysics and theology and seeks to explain phenomena by scientific method observation and experiment. Belief in progress and the acceptance of modernity were justified by his philosophy. Of particular interest

(73) Laforgue, Lettres à un ami, p.18.

for the effect of positivism on literature was the place given to the social sciences in Comte's hierarchy of the sciences. In fact his criterion for deciding whether the third stage has been reached in Western European civilisation is the application of scientific method to the study of society and morals. Henceforth society at large becomes a respectable and necessary field of study for the scientist and writer. Some aspects of Comte's ideas were taken to their logical conclusion in the field of art criticism by Taine. It is against the latter's determinism which reduced art to sequences of cause and effect, that the Symbolists were to rebel. Though positivism would result in extreme and occasionally unfortunate approaches to literature, first in the school of Champfleury and later in the worst of Zola's Naturalism, it without doubt also helped to create a generally interested attitude towards contemporary reality and to form the kind of intellectual atmosphere in which Baudelaire could write Le Spleen de Paris, Flaubert Madame Bovary, the Impressionists vividly depict modern life on canvas, and the poets of contemporary reality of 1870 - 1887 write their masterpieces.

* * * * *

We consider the period 1870 - 1887 to be the most significant phase in the writing of poetry in response to the milieu discussed above. Within it is contained the careers of Rimbaud, Corbière and Laforgue as well as the best of Verlaine. In these years stylistic innovation in the poetic treatment of the modern and the ephemeral came to match thematic originality; the foundations were laid for much of the best in French poetry since.

* * * * *

The first part of this study is concerned with the background to the poetic treatment of the modern and the ephemeral in the period 1870 - 1887. This will involve, in particular, an examination of two questions which have often been considered in relation to Symbolism. The first is the influence and example of Baudelaire's poetic theory and practice to which constant

reference was made by poets and critics after 1870. We hope to have demonstrated that Baudelaire is a precursor of the poetry of modernity and immediacy at least as much as of the metaphysical aspirations which partly characterise some Symbolist poetry. It is astonishing that no full-length study of Baudelaire's modernism exists when the concept of modernity occurs so regularly in his work. This is to be contrasted to the position with regard to Baudelaire as a 'pre-Symbolist'. Here scholarly activity has been intense - Pommier has even devoted an excellent book (*La Mystique de Baudelaire*) to the exegesis of the single sonnet 'Correspondances'. We have argued that Baudelaire's modernism is related to his mysticism to the extent that he believed that reality, however ordinary, could be a window to the world beyond. The position regarding the milieux in which the young poets of the 1870s and 1880s moved is not completely dissimilar. A description of the cénacles has long been seen as an obligatory part of histories of the Symbolist period and yet the relationship between the cénacles and Symbolist poetry is tenuous to say the least. We have shown, we believe for the first time, that the rôle of the cénacles was important for the development of the major poetry of the period but that this importance may only be perceived by an understanding of the influence of the cénacles upon the poetic treatment of the modern and the ephemeral and, more especially, upon the development of a new poetic register. Thus conceived and revalued the rôle of the cénacles would justify the numerous references to it in literary histories of the period. It puts an end to the almost embarrassing gulf between the kind of poetry recited at the cénacles and the Symbolism to which it is usually evoked as a necessary background. The discussion of the cénacles leads to more precise remarks on the network of relationships and influences involving the major poets whose work is examined in this thesis.

Part Two consists of a detailed discussion of the impact of contemporary reality upon the perspectives, subjects and language of the poets of the 1870s and 1880s. Particular attention has been paid to the work of Rimbaud not only because his poetry is of the highest order but because we believe

that such attention will provide proof of the value of the application of our ideas on the importance of the modern and the ephemeral in poetry of this period even to some of the most difficult problems of exegesis. As far as the new perspectives of the progressive poets of the second half of the nineteenth century are concerned we have seen the first of these as an isolation from society as a whole; this in turn helped to engender the whole concept of modernity as decadence and the resulting tension between awareness of the characteristics (by no means always rejected by the poet) of the modern age and primitivist nostalgia; it is also against this backdrop of alienation that one must view much of the battle waged by the poets against the traditions and rules of the literary establishment. Their favourite weapons included spontaneous forms and ironic humour. Their high regard for 'spontaneous' lyricism created a major problem for the poets. They were all, in varying degree, intellectuals, the product of an age of multifarious learning. They were able to reconcile this with their quest for spontaneity through the technique of cultural allusion (usually ironic) which enabled them to reveal their learning and to treat contemporary culture in their poetry without appearing to compromise with the academic establishment. In the following chapter we have selected those subject areas within contemporary reality which we believe were most important to the poets we are discussing; the treatment of these may be seen to have a direct influence upon the evolution of the language of poetry in the late nineteenth century. An awareness of the poets' interest in such subjects may be of considerable assistance in exegesis. The question of the relationship between the treatment of contemporary reality and poetic language is dealt with in the remaining two chapters of Part Two. The most obvious relationship, but no less important or poetically fruitful for that, is the impact of various forms of contemporary speech upon the poetic register— with a consequent extension and variety of tone. An examination of these changes leads naturally to a more general analysis of the evolution of poetic language in the direction of

styles better suited for the formulation of ephemeral experience than those available before about 1870. In particular this will be seen to have involved the development of impressionistic form in the notation of elusive experiences derived from an age characterised by speed, change and an unprecedented interest in the world of evanescent sensation. Even within poetic impressionism itself there were elements which were likely to lead to reference to ideas, emotions and even spiritual intuition as well as to mere sense-data. There were, indeed, reactions which led specifically to the incorporation of objective correlatives drawn from contemporary reality into a poetic synthesis taking account of these other factors and of the desire to achieve satisfying artistic harmonies - and not just richness and accuracy of notation.

The final part of the thesis provides an example of the trends examined thematically in Part Two but in this instance seen through the career and a work of a single poet, Jules Laforgue. It thus resolves the difficult problem, particularly acute in a study of the kind undertaken in this thesis of striking a balance between the elucidation in general terms, of themes and tendencies on the one hand and the individuality of poets on the other (74). Although it was Rimbaud who furnished more examples than any other poet for the discussion in Part Two his career was too brief and its circumstances too obscure or controversial for us to use it as a detailed case-history of the developments we wish to establish. Laforgue on the contrary, may be seen as ideally representative of both the main points of our study - the closeness of poetry to contemporary reality and the evolution, in terms of modernism, impressionism and synthesis, of an original and admirably serviceable poetic language based on the treatment of contemporary reality. In particular it is possible to see, rather precisely, how such an evolution may be related in the case of Laforgue (and by extension other poets) to various aspects of the intellectual and artistic environment.

(74) From the 'architectural' point of view this device may be compared to a book like Professor Knight's excellent Racine et la Grèce in which, despite the title, the study of Racine is really a concluding point of focus to a general study of the impact of Greek antiquity upon seventeenth-century France.

CHAPTER ONETHE EXAMPLE OF BAUDELAIRE: Modernity
and Immediacy in Theory and Practice

Even though the work of Baudelaire belongs to an earlier period than that to which this thesis is making special reference it is necessary to **con-**
sider in some detail the aesthetic ideas and poetry of the author of Les Fleurs du Mal. To a large extent the poetic practice of the generation after 1870 has its roots in the work of Baudelaire and may be seen as an extension and a development of it. The aesthetic principles which underlie the poetry of 1870-1887 are mostly those formulated and put into practice by Baudelaire. Almost all literary historians concerned with the period, whatever axe they have to grind, have reckoned his example and influence to be crucial to the development of French poetry during the last thirty years or so of the nineteenth century(1). Marcel Raymond has summarised the now orthodox critical judgement of Baudelaire's double influence: 'On s'accorde aujourd'hui à considérer les Fleurs du Mal comme une des sources vives, la principale sans doute, du mouvement poétique contemporain. Une première filière, celle des artistes, conduirait de Baudelaire à Mallarmé, puis à Valéry; une autre filière, celle des voyants, de Baudelaire à Rimbaud, puis aux derniers venus des chercheurs d'aventures'(2). It is also possible to see in Baudelaire the apostle of a third branch of modern poetry which is not necessarily attached to the ideal of poetic workmanship nor to any conception of metaphysical exploration but which may partake of either or both these ideals; this third branch is that which is being examined in this thesis - poetry which attempts to formulate human experience when confronted with the transitory phenomena of contemporary reality.

(1) It is interesting to note, for instance, that there are more references to Baudelaire in A.G. Lehmann's The Symbolist Aesthetic in France than to any other writer, with the exception of Mallarmé, even though the book deals specifically with the period 1885-1895.

(2) M. Raymond, De Baudelaire au Surréalisme, p.11.

If modern criticism has tended to accord to Baudelaire the pre-eminence in the revolution that took place in the poetry of nineteenth-century France it is also true to say that it was only from about 1870 onwards that a number of poets, artists and critics began fully to appreciate his importance. Until then (and even to some extent afterwards) even his admirers seem to have been as much fascinated by his cultivated 'satanism' as aware of his achievement as a poet, critic and aesthetic thinker. In this sense it is not unjust to say that Baudelaire 'belonged' to the generation of 1870-1900 at least in his capacity as patron saint. This was more especially the case since the edition of Les Fleurs du Mal which definitively made Baudelaire's reputation, did not appear until 1868 with the celebrated 'Notice' by Gautier. The concern of this chapter is with Baudelaire's aesthetic ideas and poetic practice in their relation to the role of contemporary reality in art and poetry and the more immediate influences of these ideas.

(i) The Universal and the Particular

In an important letter to Hugo, written on 7 December 1859, Baudelaire talks of the genesis of 'Le Cygne': 'Ce qui était important pour moi, c'était de dire vite tout ce qu'un accident, une image peut contenir de suggestions et comment la vue d'un animal souffrant pousse l'esprit vers tous les êtres que nous aimons, qui sont absents et qui souffrent...' (3). The poet leaves no doubt as to the value to be found in particular aspects of everyday reality in chance encounters and 'faits divers' as the first link in a chain of suggestions and related images, thoughts and experiences which would lend any resulting poetry universal value. As the adverb 'vite' indicates, Baudelaire was not so preoccupied with the ultimate universality of his poetry as to neglect or fail to appreciate the powerful impression made on him by a particular experience and his immediate reaction to it, nor to underestimate the poetic potential of this immediacy; but this aspect of his thinking and art will be discussed at greater length very shortly(4).

(3) Correspondance Générale, VI, p. 82.

(4) In the selection devoted to 'naïveté', spontaneity and immediacy.

This notion of a balance struck between the particular and the universal, or rather of the attainment of the universal through the particular, lies at the very hub of Baudelaire's aesthetics and his poetic practice. This attitude was expressed in remarkable fashion in the Salon de 1846:

Toutes les beautés contiennent, comme tous les phénomènes possibles, quelque chose d'éternel et quelque chose de transitoire, d'absolu et de particulier. La beauté absolue et éternelle n'existe pas, ou plutôt elle n'est qu'une abstraction écrémée à la surface des beautés diverses. L'élément particulier de chaque beauté vient des passions, et comme nous avons nos passions particulières, nous avons notre beauté. (5)

There is no doubt, as the rest of the article from which this quotation is extracted shows, that Baudelaire had in mind the particular aspects of a specifically contemporary reality, for it is here that he preaches the gospel of modernism and exhorts artists to perceive and depict 'l'héroïsme de la vie moderne' (6), to emulate Balzac who had created characters to match those of the Iliad(7) and who had grasped 'le côté épique'(8) of the society in which he lived. The emphasis, in the passage quoted, on 'passions particulières' might seem to suggest that Baudelaire sees the artist's individual personality as the true subject of art, but a slightly different and more accurate interpretation is that he realistically and willingly accepts that the artist must perceive the particular aspects of reality through his own particular temperament and that this personal involvement or sincerity is a necessary precondition of authentic artistic activity. (The life of his own times is more likely to involve the exercising of the artist's passions than most other sources of inspiration but, in the case of Baudelaire's own poetry, many other fruitful sources must nevertheless be taken into reckoning as well as that of contemporary reality.)

Certainly one aspect of 'particularity' as far as Baudelaire's own work is concerned is his basic sincerity; his personal involvement in the contemporary reality reflected in his own work is almost beyond question. Valéry was one of

(5) Baudelaire, Oeuvres Complètes, Éd. de la Pléiade, p.950; hereafter referred to in this chapter as simply O.C.

(6) Ibid., p.949.

(7) Ibid., p.952.

(8) Ibid., p.949.

the rare questioners; he saw Baudelaire's originality of subject and tone in Les Fleurs du Mal as the deliberate product of an attempt to do something which had not already been done by Lamartine, Musset, Vigny or Hugo. Marcel Raymond rightly accuses Valéry, who, it seems clear, intended no criticism of Baudelaire, for whom he held the highest admiration, of being 'toujours porté à voir chez autrui préméditation et calcul'(9). Baudelaire himself wrote of 'la franchise absolue, moyen d'originalité'(10), and at another time confessed that 'dans ce livre atroce (Les Fleurs du Mal), j'ai mis tout mon coeur, toute ma tendresse, toute ma religion (travestie), toute ma haine. Il est vrai que j'écrirai le contraire, que je jurerais mes grands dieux que c'est un livre d'art pur . . .'(11). Admittedly, Jean Prévost has written that sincerity is more or less irrelevant to poetry: 'La sincérité n'est en poésie ni une qualité ni un défaut . . . Emphase, balourdises, fatuité, jérémiades sont aussi des formes de sincérité - les formes qui ne réussissent pas, qui ne sont pas contagieuses pour le lecteur.' Yet he himself saw in Baudelaire's ability, or rather compulsion, to identify himself as completely as possible with his subject one of the most outstanding qualities of the poet's work(12).

If Baudelaire believed that the artist should seek universal beauty through his personal interpretation of the particular, he also considered that in a given period these personal interpretations must to some extent coincide and that the very concept of modernity depends on what might be termed somewhat prosaically a common pool of 'passions', or what Mario Praz was to call in another context 'time-spirit'(13). As an artist belongs to his own times and is therefore to an extent moulded by them there is no basic conflict between Baudelaire's insistence that the artist reflects his individual temperament and that he ought to reflect modernity(14). The importance of the aesthetic ideas expressed in Le Salon

(9) M. Raymond, op.cit., p.19.

(10) Fusees, IV, O.C., p.1250.

(11) Letter to Ancelle of 18 February 1866. Correspondance Générale, V, p.279.

(12) Jean Prévost, Baudelaire, p.161 and p.169. ? ?

(13) Mario Praz, Mnemosyne, p.55. The lectures, of which the book is a compilation, were delivered in English, not in Italian; 'time spirit' is presumably an anglicised form of the German Zeitgeist.

(14) This chapter was written before the publication of D.J. Mossop's Pure Poetry which contains an admirable summary of Baudelaire's aesthetic in 1846 on p.72. Here individualism is described as the basis of the poet's theory to which two further principles are successfully linked: modernity and harmony.

de 1846 is the rejection of the concept attributed to Aristotle that poetry should deal with universal truths rather than concern itself with particular reference - a concept encouraged by seventeenth-century French classicism(15). Baudelaire's view is implicitly that lofty and distinguished subjects are not necessary to poetry and that universal beauty may be attained through the particularities of contemporary reality.

There is good reason to suppose that, whilst never losing sight of the balance between the universal and the particular, Baudelaire placed more emphasis on universality after his 'discovery' of Poe in 1852(16). Indeed, some comments such as the following taken from the essay on Banville, published in the Revue fantaisiste in August 1861, suggest that he had relegated the particular to a very lowly position in his aesthetic scheme of things: 'Ensuite nous observons que tout mode lyrique de notre âme nous contraint à considérer les choses non pas sous leur aspect particulier, exceptionnel, mais dans les traits principaux, généraux, universels'(17). But this volte-face is no more than apparent, for, whilst it is true that Baudelaire did come to attach more importance to the universality and thereby the autonomy of art after the political disillusionment of the years 1848-52, this was not at the expense of the particular. The realisation that the writing of Le Peintre de la vie moderne(18), the inclusion of

(15) c.f. Aristotle, Poetics, IX: 'Poetry is something more philosophical and more worthy of serious attention than history; for while poetry is concerned with universal truths, history treats of particular facts.' It should be pointed out, however, that Aristotle's intention here is gently to refute Plato's contention that poetry was dangerously distant from truth. The sage of Stag^{ira} considers that although poetry deals with imitation and has the power to excite emotion it can and does overcome these 'handicaps' and despite them relates universal truths. The admirers of Aristotle in the Renaissance and the seventeenth century seem to have been unaware of such subtleties; they were anxious to find rules and precepts.

(16) In all probability Baudelaire knew of Poe's work at least as early as 1847, but he does not seem to have been closely acquainted with the American's aesthetic ideas until 1852.

(17) O.C., p.736.

(18) November 1859 to February 1860 would seem to have been the probable period of composition.

Les Tableaux Parisiens in Les Fleurs du Mal (19), and the composition of the prose poems of Le Spleen de Paris (20) are all more or less contemporary with the essay on Banville is enough to refute such an interpretation. A much more reasonable view is that Baudelaire is rightly emphasising the fact that the particular merely provides raw material for the artist who has then to transmute it into a synthesis or expressive harmony. The very next sentence of the passage quoted from the essay on Banville reads: 'L'âme lyrique fait des enjambées vastes comme des synthèses . . .' (21). Similarly in a passage from the Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe of 1857 (cited by Baudelaire himself in his study of Gautier of 1859) the poet seemingly contradicts the view that all subject-matter is suitable for poetry; this is in order to stress the harmonising function of poetry:

Ce qui exaspère surtout l'homme de goût dans le spectacle du vice, c'est sa difformité, sa disproportion. Le vice porte atteinte au juste et au vrai, révolte l'intellect et la conscience; mais comme outrage à l'harmonie, comme dissonance, il blessera plus particulièrement de certains esprits poétiques; et je ne crois pas qu'il soit scandalisant de considérer toute infraction à la morale, au beau moral, comme une espèce de faute contre le rythme et la prosodie universels. (22)

Vice represents a challenge to the artist, who has to introduce harmony where there was none before. The possibility that Baudelaire found the ugly or the vicious as intrinsically unsuitable subject-matter is precluded, obviously, by the thematic content of Les Fleurs du Mal. It seems that Baudelaire's faith in the transmuting power of art and poetry, already present in the idea of expressive harmony proposed in Le Salon de 1846, did not weaken with the passing of the years. In Le Salon de 1859 he affirms that 'la poésie lyrique ennoblit tout' (23) and in the study of Gautier he makes the point even more forcefully: 'C'est un des privilèges prodigieux de l'art que l'horrible, artistement exprimé, devienne beauté . . .' (24). The consequences of this faith are of immense importance for

(19) In the edition of 1861.

(20) c.1855-1865.

(21) O.C., p.736.

(22) Ibid., p.685.

(23) Ibid., p.1087.

(24) Ibid., p.695.

the branch of poetry examined in this thesis; Baudelaire's sound aesthetic theory provided him with a solid base from which to attempt the evocation and formulation in poetry of his experiences of contemporary reality hitherto largely despised as a source of inspiration by poets. All subjects and themes, and not just 'l'horrible' but the everyday and the mundane too, became grist for the poet's mill(25).

Baudelaire challenged the idea inherited by France from classical antiquity in the seventeenth century, and upheld even more rigorously and to the detriment of poetry in the eighteenth century, that there was a standard in beauty which depended very much on the subject chosen by the artist; certain subjects being considered taboo. For his part he denied that absolute beauty existed in the sense hitherto adopted and introduced a notion of relativism into the concept of beauty that is connected with the general mood of historical relativism in the Romantic period to which reference has already been made(26). This notion of relativism is inextricably bound up with his modernism. One of the attractions of modernist art is the relative value we find in it by virtue of being ourselves participants in modern life: 'Le plaisir que nous retirons de la représentation du présent tient non-seulement à la beauté dont il peut être revêtu, mais aussi à sa qualité essentielle de présent'(27). Furthermore this modernity is even connected with the ideal of artistic harmony as a later passage from Le Peintre de la vie moderne makes clear:

Il s'agit . . . de dégager de la mode ce qu'elle peut contenir de poétique dans l'historique, de tirer l'éternel du transitoire. Si nous jetons un coup d'oeil sur nos expositions de tableaux modernes, nous sommes frappés de la tendance générale des artistes à habiller tous les sujets de costumes anciens . . . la modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre est l'éternel et l'immuable. Il y a eu une modernité pour chaque peintre ancien; la plupart des beaux portraits qui nous restent des temps antérieurs sont revêtus des costumes de leur époque.

(25) Poulet has spoken of Baudelaire's awareness of two 'piles' of material out of which a poet may create a new world, these being the objects constituting external reality and the objects accumulated and stored in the memory. See Poulet, Études sur le temps humain, p.350

(26) In the introduction.

(27) O.C., p.1153.

ils sont parfaitement harmonieux . . . Cet élément transitoire, fugitif . . . vous n'avez pas le droit de le mépriser ou de vous en passer. En le supprimant, vous tombez forcément dans le vide d'une beauté abstraite et indéfinissable . . .' (28)

+++++

Baudelaire's insistence on the sincere involvement of the artist with the transitory experiences of modern life is one of the major characteristics of his poetry and thought. C.A. Hackett has seen Baudelaire's achievement as the transition from the Romantics' concern with 'le ciel de l'art'(29) to Man himself or what Baudelaire termed the 'ciel intérieur' or 'ciel du crâne', and this in practice meant the man of his own time: 'He was interested in every aspect of an urban age (above all manifested in the life of Paris), with its dynamic transient elements and its landscapes of man-made artificial objects; and he observed men and women not as unreal figures moving in an idealized or imaginary world but as human beings related to this new environment'(30). It is not an exaggeration to say that the most significant manifestation of the particular as far as Baudelaire was concerned was modernity.

(ii) Modernity

It cannot be stressed too strongly that Baudelaire's conception of the modern is far removed from that held by most of his predecessors and contemporaries. His debt to these other pioneers of modernism does not extend much beyond the idea of historical relativism, which nevertheless did provide him with the essential notion of modernity as something distinctive.

Although he was sufficiently acquainted with the author of Les Chants modernes to have dedicated to him 'Le Voyage' (and to have borrowed money from him!) there is an unbridgeable gulf between Baudelaire's ideas and those of Du Camp(31). Even the dedication is perhaps tinged with malice, for in February

(28) O.C., pp.1163-64.

(29) C.A. Hackett, An Anthology of Modern French Poetry, p.xxii. The expression is Hugo's.

(30) Idem.

(31) We are indebted to Y. Abé's article 'Baudelaire et Maxime du Camp.'

1859 Baudelaire wrote to Asselineau informing him that he had written 'un long poème dédié à du Camp (sic), qui est à faire frémir la nature, et surtout les amateurs du progrès' (32). The remark in Le Salon de 1859 to the effect that 'l'industrie faisant irruption dans l'art en devient la plus mortelle ennemie' (33) and the famous definition of civilization in Mon coeur mis à nu (34) are in marked contrast to Du Camp's declaration of 1855: 'On a dit: La science et l'industrie tueront l'art? On a eu tort; elles l'aideront . . . C'est à lui à prendre sa place, à marcher en tête le premier . . . et à guider valeureusement ses deux soeurs éternelles' (35).

The optimism and acquiescence (in the industrial revolution and all that it stood for) of Weustenraad, Du Camp and the Hugolian heralds of progress never seems to have tempted Baudelaire, but his attitude towards the other widely-held view (36) - an awareness of the need for protest, greater social justice and even revolution - is not so clear cut.

It has been customary and correct to consider the mature Baudelaire, at least, as a largely apolitical being whose flirtation with revolution was brief and disillusioning (37). Though this picture is reliable as far as it goes, it leads

(32) Letter of 20 February, Correspondance Générale, II, p.274.

(33) O.C., p.1035

(34) Mon coeur mis à nu, XXXII, O.C., p.1291: 'Théorie de la vraie civilisation. Elle n'est pas dans le gaz, ni dans la vapeur, ni dans les tables tournantes, elle est dans la diminution des traces du péché originel'. For a further discussion of progress and particularly the question of links between material and artistic progress c.f. O.C., pp.958-60. Given Baudelaire's dismissal of 'tables tournantes' A.W. Raitt's reference to such experiments in his portrayal of the background to the writing of 'Correspondances' does not seem entirely appropriate. (c.f. Raitt, Life and Letters in France; The Nineteenth Century, p.83.)

(35) Du Camp, Les Chants modernes, pp.28-29.

(36) Represented, for instance, by Barbier and Dupont.

(37) Surely, though, not as brief as Enid Starkie would have us believe: she finds it difficult to see Baudelaire actively concerned in political thinking after October 1848 and suggests that in all probability he had adopted conservative views between February and June of that year. See her Baudelaire, pp.216-21. For our opinion see below.

all too easily to the assumption that he was really a conformist and that efforts to read into his life and work any desire to 'épater le bourgeois' are but the product of wishful thinking on the part of left-wing commentators. Yet the picture of Baudelaire the model citizen is even more of an oversimplification than that of the bourgeois-baiter. It is more accurate to say that there was a certain rebelliousness in his character which dates at least from his adolescence and may, in all probability, be traced as far back as his mother's second marriage; this tendency was never to leave him. His rebelliousness underwent a series of metamorphoses but, despite its variability, it remains of considerable importance for the understanding of Baudelaire's attitude to modernity.

On his return from the poetically beneficial journey to the Indies, the first of the metamorphoses referred to occurred. In possession of his inheritance he abandoned the sordid and scruffy form of protest against the adult bourgeois world which he had occasionally joined as a student and began a much more exclusive and expensive form of rebellion, that of the elegant dandy. The period of his life in the Latin Quarter, the voyage to the East and dandyism (38) has been adequately covered in the biographies. It is

(38) 1839-44. Nowhere is this period better evoked than in Starkie, op. cit., pp. 56-140.

worth remarking on two tendencies in this period which were to endure, the first his delight in shocking all those who upheld the established code of bourgeois morality(39) and the second a love of the luxurious and artificial which was coupled with a corresponding disregard for nature(40).

The praise of the artificial and the desire to shock were features of the decadent movement of which Baudelaire along with Gautier may be considered the founder in France. A.E. Carter has convincingly demonstrated that Baudelaire was the first to combine the three terms: artificial, decadent and modern(41). Modernity appealed to him because it was artificial(42); it was an age in which Man had finally moulded nature to his own image; and it was, in Baudelaire's opinion, decadent, for in his time moral corruption had reached new heights (or depths) and the conflict between good and evil was all the more compelling as a poetic subject. From the literary point of view Baudelaire arrived at the conclusion that the literature of the decadent age is distinguished by careful artistry, mystic tendencies, and exceptional and even morbid subjects(43). All these were to be features of his own work and his most 'exceptional' subjects were drawn from modern, decadent life itself.

- (39) It is a great temptation to list some of these remarks, which range from threats to a hapless young lady that he would suspend her from his ceiling in order to kiss her feet to the expression of a gastronomic penchant for the brains of young children, but they are too numerous and already well-documented.
- (40) In this context it may not be inappropriate to quote the poet's comparison between a woman and a dandy: 'La femme est le contraire du dandy. Donc elle doit faire horreur. La femme a faim et elle veut manger. Soif, et elle veut boire. Elle est en rut et elle veut être foutue. Le beau mérite! La femme est naturelle c'est-à-dire abominable. Aussi est-elle toujours vulgaire, c'est-à-dire le contraire du dandy.' (Mon coeur mis à nu, III, O.C., p.1272). Contempt for women was part of Baudelaire's satanic stock-in-trade; in practice he was usually kind and courteous. Baudelaire's view of nature is, of course, more complex than a straightforward dismissal; see F.W. Leakey, Baudelaire and Nature.
- (41) See A.E. Carter, The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, pp.8-13.
- (42) D.J. Mossop in Baudelaire's Tragic Hero(p.192) has discussed this tendency in relation to 'Rêve parisien' which 'brings out to the full the poet's love for a purely mineral beauty. It brings out also his love of the artificial as added purity of owing more to art than to Nature and accords with Baudelaire's condemnation of the natural in his long essay on Constantin Guys to whom the poem is addressed.'
- (43) A.E. Carter, op.cit., p.125.

In 1844 the rebel underwent another metamorphosis. The appointment by his family of the 'conseil judiciaire' to regulate his finances not only put a check on his spending, and thereby considerably straitened his material circumstances, but was a crushing blow to his pride. Without this event the anti-bourgeois pranks of the preceding years might have remained just that. As it was, his former bravado was now converted into a very real resentment of the status quo which he saw epitomised by his stepfather. Significantly it was precisely at this time that Baudelaire became involved in the Bohemia of socialists and would-be revolutionaries that was centred on the Hôtel Merciol, the Café Tabourey and the Café Momus. It is from this period that his friendship with Dupont, Champfleury and Courbet dates. Baudelaire's depressing personal circumstances had thrown him into the revolutionary camp. This development had an important influence on his understanding of modernism. First, his contact with the Realists, for all their lack of subtlety, was not unconnected with the modernist manifestoes included in his Salon reviews of 1845 and 1846, the more so as these men, like another of his heroes, Balzac, were all opposed to the materialistic ethic of Louis-Philippe's reign which he had now come to despise. Second, for the first time in his life he came into personal contact with real material deprivation and his interest in the urban poor of Paris may be seen to have its roots in this experience(44). Both the company he was keeping and his own deep-seated resentment made it inevitable that Baudelaire should have become involved in the revolutionary activities of February and June 1848(45). In Mon coeur mis à nu the poet was to speak of his

(44) c.f. Starkie, Baudelaire, pp.201-02.

(45) There is little controversy over Baudelaire's participation in the February rising but some dispute over the extent of involvement in the June Days. Enid Starkie sees Baudelaire as, at the very most, being 'dragged in' to the troubles by his friends (op.cit., p.219) but this does not fit the evidence from Levassasseur which she cites nor the opinion of other critics, e.g. D. Higgins, in his article 'Pierre Dupont, A chansonnier of the 1848 Revolution', who tells us that Dupont 'helped to save Baudelaire from the consequences of his ultra-revolutionary behaviour in the Journées de Juin'; and M. Ruff who holds that Baudelaire actively participated not only in the February and June uprisings but also in the street fighting at the time of the December coup d'état of 1851. See Ruff's article 'La Filiation de Baudelaire à Rimbaud', p.197.

'ivresse en 1848' as 'goût de la vengeance' and 'plaisir naturel de la démolition'(46). Certainly this view of his former extremism tallies with his alleged incitement of the rebels to kill his stepfather, who was then director of the École Polytechnique. Some biographers, and notably Enid Starkie, have considered that his revolutionary fervour and socialist idealism had disappeared after February 1848 and that even by June he had grown conservative in his views. This assessment not only seems to contradict some of the historical evidence, which is admittedly confused, but more important it contradicts Baudelaire's fury at the coup d'état of 1851(47) and, most crucial of all, makes it difficult to account for the 'didactic' period in his aesthetic thinking. In fact, in the years immediately following the 1848 Revolution, it would not be unfair to say that Baudelaire arrived at a new conception of modernism in terms of 'engagement'. If he had really abandoned his ideas of social reform by the spring of 1848 it is extremely difficult to explain why his most obviously humanitarian critical work should have been produced between August 1851 and February 1852!(48) The essay on Dupont which appeared in the summer of 1851(49) contained an attack on the art for art's sake movement(50) and declares the author's preference for 'le poète qui se met en communication permanente avec les hommes de son temps'. He attacks the ethic of wealth as exemplified by the régime of Louis-Philippe and speaks contemptuously of the bourgeoisie(51). The art of a didactic, humanitarian poet like Dupont is seen as a challenge to the elitist, ^{'imaginary'} literature which had gone before:

Disparaissez donc, ombres fallacieuses de René, d'Obermann et de Werther; fuyez dans les brouillards du vide, monstrueuses créations de la paresse et de la solitude; comme les pourceaux dans le lac de Genezareth, allez vous replonger dans les forêts enchantées d'où vous tirèrent les fées ennemies, moutons attaqués de vertigo romantique. Le génie de l'action ne vous laisse plus de place parmi nous. (52)

(46) O.C., p.1274.

(47) 'Ma fureur au coup d'État. Combien j'ai essuyé de coups de fusil. Encore un Bonaparte! Quelle honte!' (Mon coeur mis à nu, loc.cit.)

(48) Including Pierre Dupont and L'École Polytechnique.

(49) Published originally as the twentieth part of the Chants et Chansons of Dupont, probably in late August 1851.

(50) O.C., pp.605-06.

(51) Ibid, pp.606-07. More precisely Baudelaire attacks the way of life which sets money-making above all else.

(52) Ibid, p.613.

It is noteworthy that here, in contrast to the essay later devoted to him, Auguste Barbier's humanitarian mission is seen as more than compensating for his technical inadequacies. Baudelaire goes so far as to claim that after Barbier 'l'art fut désormais inséparable de la morale et de l'utilité' (53). There is no doubt that his preoccupation with Barbier stems from his own ambivalent attitude towards 'engagement' and from his awareness of his debt to the poet of Lazare (54).

The next metamorphosis of the rebel occurred in 1852. Sickened by the coup d'état of 1851, and perhaps upset that there seemed to be no public for his poetry, Baudelaire reversed the views he had recently adopted. From the over-emphasis on the particular which was an inherent part of social didacticism he turned to a correct stress on the universal value of artistic harmony. Poe's influence was decisive in bringing about this change. After 1852 Baudelaire's rebellion became spiritual and aesthetic. Having more or less abandoned hopes of large-scale public success (though he was to foster the ambition of being elected to the Academy) he developed a reasonably solid faith in his conception of poetry characterised by daring and unconventional themes which would be transmuted into artistic harmonies; these would themselves be the reflection of a higher spiritual order. If anything he made even fewer concessions to bourgeois taste than before.

+++++

Admiration of material progress played little part in the poet's notion of modernity beyond his preference for the artificial but his basically rebellious attitude on the other hand accounted for a great deal. His treatment of modern life was in marked contrast to the classical bric-à-brac so beloved of the reading public and even to many of the now acceptable Romantic themes. His interest in vice and depravity was a challenge to accepted standards of morality. His acquaintance with the misery of the Parisian poor was to have a lasting effect on the subjects of his poems even though his humanitarianism was not free

(53) O.C., p.606.

(54) c.f. our remarks on pp.355-56.

from ambiguity. Many of his poems devoid of any apparently important subject and written in a non-declamatory style were a direct challenge to prevailing taste(55). Not least important, his rebellious attitude gave him the strength of character to pursue his aesthetic insights, in which his concept of modernity played a major part, in the face of material failure.

+++++

Baudelaire's interest in modernity spans his entire career, highlighting some of his earliest published works (the Salons of 1845 and 1846) and some of the last (Les Tableaux Parisiens and Le Peintre de la vie moderne). Although he was indebted to many other writers, including Barbier, Gautier, the Realists and Balzac(56), his conception of modernity was in many ways highly original. At no time does he seem to have considered the straightforward depiction of events, people or settings. To the pictorial or descriptive methods, which could lead to results as static and monumental as those of preceding ages, he preferred the evocation of the 'texture' of contemporary reality, of the transitory and fugitive aspects of modernity.

In Le Salon de 1846 Baudelaire spoke of the 'quelque chose d'éternel et quelque chose de transitoire' of which all beauty is composed. In Quelques caricaturistes français we likewise read of Daumier's 'art . . . fugace' in which that artist attempts to pin down 'la mobilité même de la vie' which is present in the subjects he takes from the contemporary scene(57). In the letter to

(55) Baudelaire's challenge even before 1852 seems to have been directed against the taste of the bourgeoisie, for which up to a point they were not to blame, rather than against the bourgeoisie as a socio-economic force; c.f. Le Bazar Bonne-Nouvelle (O.C., p.873): 'Nous avons entendu maintes fois de jeunes artistes se plaindre du bourgeois, et le représenter comme l'ennemi de toute chose grande et belle. Il y a une chose mille fois plus dangereuse que le bourgeois, c'est l'artiste bourgeois qui a été créé pour s'interposer entre le public et le génie; il les cache l'un à l'autre.' This tallies with the famous exhortation which opens the Salon de 1846. Both passages however, and especially the latter, may not be entirely devoid of irony.

(56) Baudelaire's similarity with Balzac lies, amongst other things, in the mingling of Catholicism and Swedenborgian mysticism, the appreciation of the aesthetic value of modernity and the technique of ironic contrast.

(57) O.C., p.1006.

Arsène Houssaye which prefaces Le Spleen de Paris, the dream of a prose that would be sufficiently flexible to reflect the vicissitudes of the artist's consciousness is specifically related to modern urban life: 'C'est surtout de la fréquentation des villes énormes, c'est du croisement de leurs innombrables rapports que naît cet idéal obsédant'(58). In Le Peintre de la vie moderne modernity is defined as 'cet élément transitoire, fugitif . . .'(59). Although this stress on 'le transitoire' could have been made by any writer on art at any time it was much more likely to have been made at this time because of historical circumstances. Claude Pichois, in the introduction to the catalogue of the Baudelaire exhibition held at the Petit Palais from 1968 to 1969, expressed the view that Baudelaire's place in history was very fortunate in a sense. He lived in the Paris which after Haussmann's rebuilding programme became less and less familiar(60). He felt that he was living in an age of transition; the beauty of Paris was for him enhanced by the sense of impending change. M. Raymond has remarked that in Baudelaire's case 'le sentiment de la modernité' is connected with 'la conscience du vieillissement de la civilisation'(61).

In a period of urban expansion Baudelaire became the poet of the crowd (an essentially shifting and changing phenomenon), the very position he had seen Guys holding in the realm of painting. Whereas the Romantics had grasped the notion of change on a theoretical basis Baudelaire made actual use of images - especially images drawn from Paris 'avec ses rues, ses monuments, ses pavés marqués par des révoltes récentes, ses maisons de plaisir, ses asiles pour la méditation et le rêve. . . le linceul par excellence de 'l'animal dépravé', l'homme'(62).

Baudelaire's perception of the transitory element in contemporary reality reflects an appreciation of the role of spontaneity and immediacy in art which is the subject of the next section of this chapter.

(58) O.C., p.229.

(59) Ibid, p.1163; see above, pp.7-8.

(60) Claude Pichois, 'Baudelaire parmi nous', Petit Palais Exhibition Catalogue, pp. xiii-xiv.

(61) 'Le Sens de la modernité chez Baudelaire', p.601. (See Bibliography).

(62) Idem.

Before closing these remarks on the place of modernity in Baudelaire's aesthetics it should be noted that there is another aspect of his modernism which is superficially less original than the emphasis on transitory experience, and that is the Romantic, indeed almost classical, conception of modern life as epic. This conception is clear enough in the Salon reviews of 1845 and 1846 in references to 'l'héroïsme' and 'le côté épique de la vie moderne' and in allusions to the towering creations of Balzac - mostly personifications of villainy. But if the struggle between wickedness and virtue was a commonplace in the novel and drama it was Baudelaire's achievement to see its potential for poetry and painting, especially in the relatively colourless context of modern life. Like the modern Danish composer Carl Nielsen, who wrote of a type of beauty as being like the blue sparks which glitter when a sword strikes a stone, Baudelaire grasped the aesthetic possibilities of this struggle (63). Still more important is his spiritual interpretation of this conflict, which is possibly one reason why modernity continued to fascinate him even after the crisis of 1852. This conflict was reflected in a dichotomy in the personality of the individual: 'Il y a dans tout homme, à toute heure, deux postulations simultanées, l'une vers Dieu, l'autre vers Satan' (64). For Baudelaire contemporary reality was the theatre in which the great cosmic battle was being fought out before his very eyes between the 'deux principes qui ont choisi le cœur humain pour principal champ de bataille, c'est-à-dire de la chair avec l'esprit, de l'enfer avec le ciel, de Satan avec Dieu.' (65). This notion of contemporary Paris as a spiritual battleground is one of the two ways in which Baudelaire's metaphysical concern encouraged him to treat contemporary reality; the other, already mentioned, is the belief that phenomena in the 'real' world can be made to give valuable insights into metaphysical reality. Baudelaire found it necessary and, indeed perhaps logical, that the material world should have a spiritual extension for 'ce qui est créé par l'esprit est plus vivant que la matière' (66). His position is close to that of Balzac; onto a basically Catholic attitude (67) he superimposed the unorthodox (68) though ancient doctrine of 'correspondances', itself largely derived, initially at least, from his reading of Balzac (69).

(63) See Carl Nielsen, Living Music, pp.54-58, for a discussion of conflict in art. Nielsen refers to struggle as it is found in life and nature and reflected in works of art; he does not have in mind, in this instance, the idea of the artist's mastery of difficult material. This much is clear from the programme notes to the fourth symphony.

(64) O.C., p.1277.

(65) O.C., p.1223.

(66) O.C., p.1247.

(67) It is doubtful that the notion of Catholicism as a guarantee of social order and justice was as important to Baudelaire as to Balzac though in Fusees is found the cryptic entry: 'Le trône et l'autel, maxime révolutionnaire'. (O.C., p.1248.) Baudelaire's attitude seems to have been more spiritual than Balzac's; in particular he seems to have seen in Catholicism an explanation of and a remedy for sin.

(68) Not altogether unorthodox, however, if one considers the almost Platonic vision of St. Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians 13 v.12: 'For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I have been known.'

(69) c.f. Prévost, Baudelaire, p.41.

(iii) Naïveté, Spontaneity and Immediacy

Baudelaire's concept of modernity is related to another of his key ideas, that of the 'naïveté' of the artist. By naïveté he seems to have meant the special quality of individuality which characterises the work of artists, their own special way of looking at the world. Through his own temperament (70), through his 'passions particulières', the artist arrives at the type of relative

(69) continued.

Opinions have varied as to how real was Baudelaire's belief in the metaphysical ramifications of the theory of 'correspondances' and related questions. One view is that the theory had only an aesthetic value for him; his pronouncements of doubt about the existence of God, and his blasphemies, have been used as evidence for such an interpretation but mostly by non-believers. Doubt, even frequent and monumental doubt, is part of the experience of many religious men. The weight of evidence is that for much of the time Baudelaire did believe in the metaphysical reality which he took into account in framing his aesthetic theory. D.J. Mossop has recently supported this view in his Pure Poetry, p.103. L.J. Austin started categorically: 'Nul doute que la poésie de Baudelaire ne porte de ce principe que la terre et ses spectacles sont une correspondance du Ciel . . . l'homme et la Nature ont une origine commune dans l'unité divine'. Austin, L'Univers poétique de Baudelaire, p.91. Baudelaire himself considered that every lyric poet 'en vertu de sa nature, opère fatalement un retour vers l'Eden perdu . . .'. O.C., p.737. which could be defined as this original state of communion with the divine.

A.E. Lehmann has discussed the way in which Baudelaire's metaphysical concepts affected his attitude to symbols:

For Baudelaire the term 'Symbol' is almost entirely . . . bound up with a theosophical view of the universe. All things whatever . . . are symbols, or at least potential symbols; and they are symbols, if not of God, then at least of a transcendental reality to which the artist has special access. Symbols are phenomena; anything present to any of the senses . . . The poet is not so much an inventor as a man discovering combinations which by their miraculous force compel the view that they are evidence of the overriding order and unity of all created things. Lehmann, The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, p.260-61.

The consequences for Baudelaire's attitude to the treatment of contemporary reality are obvious. It is at least as valuable a source as any other in the formulation of the synthesis through which metaphysical truth may be glimpsed since 'all experience of the outside world is symbolic, therefore aesthetically valuable'. Ibid, p.265.

- (70) c.f. Zola's dictum that a work of art was 'un coin de la création: vu à travers un tempérament'. (Mes Haines, O.C., X, p.38.) Baudelaire's use of 'naïveté' is etymologically sound. In Mallarmé 'naïf' is a synonym of 'natif'.

beauty which suits him best; a great artist allows his temperament to be the determining factor in the selection of subject-matter and ignores other considerations. This ability to make a judicious choice of subject through the free exercise of the artist's individuality, which will in turn be reflected in the work of art itself, is the hallmark of the great artist and of the possessor of naïveté. It has already been suggested that it was the notion of a degree of similarity between the 'passions particulières' of different artists (and presumably of art-lovers) at a given epoch which made the idea of artistic modernity as a fairly coherent entity possible (71). In Le Peintre de la vie moderne Baudelaire suggests that the present has inherent qualities which enable a work of art in which it is reflected to evoke an especially sympathetic response and, moreover, which help to guarantee artistic harmony (72). The artist who allows his naïveté to determine his subject ensures a correlation between his own idea of relative beauty and the particular qualities of a subject and this correlation is more likely to exist than not where the subject is drawn from modern life, for it is there that the artist's truest experience is rooted (73). Of Baudelaire's own ability to make this correlation Jean Prévost remarked that, compared with Hugo, Lamartine, Vigny, Musset or Mallarmé, 'il est bien plus qu'eux dominé et emporté tout d'abord par son sujet; il commence bien plus qu'eux par s'identifier avec son sujet' (74). Prévost discerned in the earlier drafts of Baudelaire's works an effort to evoke the special qualities of a subject at the expense of artistic 'finish';

son premier texte est moins beau, moins pur de forme, mais en même temps plus particulier, plus proche, même par ses défauts, du modèle que le poète se propose . . . Il semble . . . que le poète lorsqu'il a subi des impressions vives - agréables ou non - se donne pour première tâche de rendre exactement cette impression, de l'évoquer par des vers qui en soient, non pas une description, mais un équivalent sentimental. (75)

(71) See pp. 3-5.

(72) O.C., pp.1152-53 and p.1163.

(73) That is not to say that other areas of experience are not of great significance. Both Baudelaire and his idol Delacroix were immensely inspired by works of art and indeed works with no clearly discernible relationship to modern life. Yet it is interesting to note that despite Delacroix's predilection for historical and literary motifs Baudelaire still saw in his work the spirit of his own times.

(74) Prévost, Baudelaire, p.89.

(75) Ibid, p.88; 'équivalent sentimental' is what Suzanne Langer would call 'symbol'.

There is a definite link in Baudelaire's critical writings and in his own poetic practice between the idea of the artist's sincere personal and direct experience of reality and the idea that the spontaneous and immediate expression of this experience might be aesthetically advantageous, at least at a certain stage in the development of a work of art. That is why the object (or one of the objects) in 'Le Cygne' 'c'était de dire vite tout ce qu'un accident . . . peut contenir de suggestions' (76), why Daumier's art is of necessity 'fugace' and why Baudelaire perceived that the 'élément transitoire, fugitif' of modernity could only at the artist's peril be left out of a work of art (77).

Naïveté in Baudelaire's terminology is more than a mere synonym of genius; it implies a special understanding of the nature of genius - the freshness of vision which enables a great artist to formulate the immediate impression made on his sensibility by the particular aspect of a subject before the intellect has remoulded it according to preconceived and 'academic' notions (78). Prévost was of course right to say that Baudelaire's 'mimétisme' (79) led him not to description but to formulation of 'un équivalent sentimental' for it was not the intellectual and discursive transposition of experience which constitutes description that interested the poet but the impact of experience upon his total sensibility. All this is very far from saying that the intellect played a minor role in Baudelaire's ideas or practice; if anything the reverse is true. What Baudelaire did reject, up to a point, were 'intellectualised' conceptions and 'non-aesthetic' ideas as subject-matter for poetry and art: he attacked those who held that poetry should express scientific or political ideas and those who in general considered that ideas were paramount in poetry (80). A.G. Lehmann has written of Baudelaire's realisation that 'a subject, a theme, are not simply colourless objects of intellectual apprehension

(76) The italics are ours.

(77) O.C., p.1164.

(78) In a very recent article which discusses naïveté in an entirely different context Priscilla P. Clark has offered some interesting definitions. We are reminded that Littré 'equates the naïf with sincerity, candour and simplicity, an individual governed by feeling rather than reason . . . ' "qui retrace simplement la vérité, qui obéit à ses sentiments, qui dit sa pensée sans détour", while naïveté denotes that which is natural, lacking in artifice. Spontaneity of word and deed reflect the naïf's innate sincerity'. ("L'Ingénu": The uses and limitations of naïveté', p.278.) One might also compare Du Bellay's realisation that languages possessed a quality which was lost in translation and which he called 'le naïf' or, in other words, that naturalness which eluded the rational process of translating. (La Défense et Illustration de la Langue Francoise, p.36.)

(79) Baudelaire, p.89.

(80) 'Il en est de la condition de moralité imposée aux œuvres d'art comme de cette autre condition non moins ridicule que quelques-uns veulent leur faire subir, à savoir d'emprimer des pensées ou des idées tirées d'un monde étranger à l'art, des idées scientifiques, des idées politiques, etc. . . . Tel est le point des esprits faux, ou du moins des esprits qui, n'étant pas absolument poétiques, veulent raisonner poésie.' (O.C., p.715.)

to be judged by the standards of some non-aesthetic science (e.g. ethics); on the contrary, there enters into every such apprehension a factor of emotion, a factor entirely independent of any extraneous criteria, standing on its own merits, valued for itself' (81).

In the essay on the Exposition Universelle de 1855 Baudelaire suggested the tyrannical power of the 'œil académique' with which artistic education and tradition had invested his contemporaries, and he appears to have seen the ability to abandon intellectual and academic preconceptions as one of the highest qualities of the artist and art-lover alike. Jean de la Falaise, for instance, is praised for the 'naïveté d'impressions toute fraîche' of his Contes normandes (82). The poet realised that true art could not be reduced to intellectual terms, could not be analysed, that 'relativement au rêve pur, à l'impression non analysée, l'art défini, l'art positif est un blasphème' (83).

Nowhere is the value of spontaneity and immediacy as clearly expressed as in the essay on Guys. The reader is asked to compare the insatiable curiosity of Guys with that of a convalescent who, having just returned from the grip of death, 'aspire avec délices tous les germes et tous les effluves de la vie . . .' (84).

One of the advantages of naïveté, of a childlike perception of the world, which is compared to that of the convalescent is a rich sensual curiosity and appreciation. Baudelaire considered that it was 'à cette curiosité profonde et joyeuse qu'il faut attribuer l'œil fixe et animale extatique des enfants devant le nouveau quel qu'il soit, visage ou paysage, lumière, dorure, couleurs, étoffes chatoyantes . . .' (85). The examples he selects in this instance are themselves an indication of his own sensual appreciation. Of his poetry L.J. Austin has written that Baudelaire 'a très consciemment exploité . . . plus qu'aucun de ses prédécesseurs français, le monde des sensations' (86). The place of sensation in Baudelaire's poetry is one of the topics discussed in Part Two Chapter 2(g).

(81) A.G. Lehmann, The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, pp.31-32

(82) O.C., p.595.

(83) This is commonly called an aesthetic of 'suggestion'.

(84) Ibid., p.1158

(85) Ibid., p.1159

(86) L.J. Austin, L'Univers poétique de Baudelaire, p.193

Tes principes sauvés et tes lois conspuées,
 Tes monuments hautains où s'accrochent les brumes,
 Tes domes de métal qu'enflamme le soleil,
 Tes reines de théâtre aux voix enchanteresses,
 Tes tocsins, tes canons, orchestre assourdissant,
 Tes magiques pavés dressés en forteresses,

Tes petits orateurs, aux enflures baroques,
 Prêchant l'amour, et puis tes égouts pleins de sang,
 S'engouffrant dans l'Enfer comme des Orénoques,

Tes anges, tes bouffons neufs aux vieilles défroques.

Anges revêtus d'or, de pourpre et d'hyacinthe,
 O vous, soyez témoins que j'ai fait mon devoir
 Comme un parfait chimiste et comme une âme sainte.

Car j'ai de chaque chose extrait la quintessence,

Tu m'a donné ta boue et j'en ai fait de l'or. (87)

Few aspects of the Paris of his day are left untouched by the poet. The urban landscape is evoked as never before (88), with its bustling pavements (89), its traffic (90), its hospitals (91), its barracks (92), its riverside bookstalls (93), its building sites (94) and its new gaslit nocturnal appearance (95). Almost all sectors of the population, including the most disreputable, also find a place: the well-dressed bourgeois (96), the women of Paris dressed in the fashion of the day (97), prostitutes (98), criminals (99), the old (100), the blind (101), beggars (102), the ordinary workers (103). Even the animals of the city are included among its inhabitants (104). Many forms of amusement and escapism are also evoked: drinking in taverns (105), the theatre (106), the cabaret-concert (107),

(87) O.C., pp.179-80.

(88) In 'Paysage', 'Rêve parisien' etc. The poems cited in footnotes 16 to 42 are, as here, offered as examples. No attempt has been made to provide an exhaustive list.

(89) 'Les Foules'.

(90) 'Un Plaisant' and 'A une Heure du Matin'.

(91) 'L'Idéal' and 'Le Soleil'.

(92) 'Le Crépuscule du matin'.

(93) 'Le Squelette laboureur'.

(94) 'Le Cygne'.

(95) 'L'Amour du mensonge'.

(96) 'Un Plaisant'.

(97) 'A une Malabaraise' and 'Une Passante'.

(98) 'Le Crépuscule du soir', 'Le Jeu' and 'Une Martyre'.

(99) 'Le Vin de l'assassin' and 'Le Crépuscule du soir'.

(100) 'Les Petites Vieilles' and 'Les Sept Vieillards'.

(101) 'Les Aveugles'.

(102) 'A Une Mendiante rousse'.

(103) 'Le Crépuscule du matin' and 'Le Mauvais Vitrier'.

(104) Cats in 'Spleen', LXXV, 'Confession' etc., the menagerie in 'Le Cygne'.

(105) 'Le Tonneau de la Haine' and 'Le Vin du Chiffonniers'.

(106) 'Le Crépuscule du soir'.

(107) 'L'Amour du mensonge'.

brassband concerts (108), the opera (109), the ball (110), restaurants (111), right down to the humble habit of pipe-smoking (112).

It would not be altogether fair to claim that Baudelaire concentrated almost exclusively on the seamier side of life, sexual depravity for instance (113), for even the most mundane subjects found their way into his poetry. What could be more devoid of the alluring appeal of the beautiful or the vicious and yet so typical of modern life as its paperasses - bills, receipts and other papers (114)? There are even suggestions of a certain longing for the happiness to be found in ordinary domestic life such as the family evening meal (115). Baudelaire's main contribution to the poetry of contemporary reality is his comprehensive evocation of modern urban life which in some ways has never been surpassed. His contribution is more subtle than this, however, for he also brought into his poetry an awareness of the transitory realities of 'la vie sensationnelle'. Sometimes he refers to the life of the senses only to illustrate his theories of synaesthesia and 'correspondances' but he also seems to have been fascinated by sensation for its own sake and to have seen its importance in the poetry of contemporary reality.

One of Baudelaire's most striking achievements as a poet is the blending of aural and visual sensations, above all, into an impressionistic vista of modern urban life. Taste and touch play their part but are most frequently found in images; smell too is not omitted from such vistas but is more normally restricted to a triangle of liturgical, sexual and exotic. There are several such attempts to recreate the total life of the city in Baudelaire's poetry, some of the most outstanding being 'Les Petites Vieilles', 'Le Crépuscule du soir' and 'Le Crépuscule du matin'. This last poem is a remarkable evocation of the sights and sounds of Paris as it wakes to another day. The opening two lines set the scene perfectly with the bugle sounding reveille in the barracks

-
- (108) 'Les Petites Vieilles'.
 - (109) 'A propos d'un importun qui se disait son ami'.
 - (110) 'Danse macabre'.
 - (111) 'Le Crépuscule du soir'.
 - (112) 'L'Albatros' and 'La Pipe'.
 - (113) 'Une martyre' and 'Femmes damnées: Delphine et Hippolyte'.
 - (114) 'Spleen', LXXVI.
 - (115) 'Je n'ai pas oublié . . .' and 'Le Crépuscule du soir'.

and the lamps flickering in the morning wind. This is a time of transition, when the artificial light of the lamp wages war with the natural light of day. The abnormal or unwholesome activities of the night give way to the working day. The 'femmes de plaisir' indulge in their 'sommeil stupide' whilst Paris 'en se frottant les yeux, empoignait ses outils, vieillard laborieux'. As in all combats there are victims and this hour is the lowest ebb for the weak and the suffering, when 'les douleurs des femmes en gésine' grow worse and when 'les agonisants dans le fond des hospices poussaient leur dernier râle'. 'Le Crépuscule du matin' is a miniature epic in conformity with the plea uttered in the Salon de 1846. The setting of the epic is superbly created through aural and visual sensations:

La diane chantait dans les cours des casernes . . .
L'air est plein du frisson des choses qui s'enfuient . . .

Comme un sanglot coupé par un sang écumeux
Le chant du coq au loin déchirait l'air brumeux . . .

Et les agonisants dans le fond des hospices,
Poussaient leur dernier râle en hoquets inégaux . . .

Et le vent du matin soufflait sur les lanternes . . .

La lampe sur le jour fait une tache rouge . . .

Les maisons ça et là commençaient à fumer . . .

Les pauvresses, traînant leurs seins maigres et froids,
Soufflaient sur leurs tisons et soufflaient sur les doigts . . .

L'aurore grelottante en robe rose et verte
S'avavançait lentement sur la Seine déserte . . .

+++++

Baudelaire anticipated in his own fashion the tension between the modern and the primitive which is a feature of the work of the poets writing after 1870. The contrast between modern Paris and classical or exotic beauty is found not only between poems (116) but within individual poems. In 'J'aime le souvenir de ces époques nues' modern civilisation and modern women are compared unfavourably with the splendid and innocent beauty of prehistory. The poet also expresses his dissatisfaction with the women of his day in 'L'Idéal'. In 'A une Malabaraise' the luxuriance of the tropics

(116) Particularly between 'exotic' poems like 'La Chevelure' and most of the poems in the Tableaux Parisiens.

is contrasted with 'nos sales brouillards'. In each of these examples, as in other poems, the contrast is made to the detriment of modernity even though Baudelaire admits to the existence of 'inventions de nos muses tardives' (117) and to the appeal of Gavarni's 'troupeau gazouillant de beautés d'hôpital' (118). More significant perhaps is the kind of contrast made between the antique and the modern in 'Le Cygne' where no value judgement is implied. The modern and the classical are juxtaposed on a basis of equality. The motive behind such a contrast is aesthetic, the desire to open up an unexplored source of associations and to prove the validity of both traditional and modern subjects. In a poem like 'Le Cygne' a parallel system of tonal contrasts (119) to match the thematic contrasts is also found.

This poem has more than once been referred to as the archetypal Baudelairean creation. It is indeed perhaps the best illustration of the poet's complex attitude towards theme and subject-matter. In this single poem the reader finds a substantial picture of modern Paris, a detailed reference to Vergil's Aeneid (and incidentally to Racine's Andromaque) which provides one of the threads of the poem and demonstrates Baudelaire's love of the myths and literature of classical antiquity, a symbol of exile in the form of the swan, an expression of revolt (stanza seven) and, finally, exotic colouring (stanzas eleven and thirteen).

To an avowed modernist Baudelaire's extensive use of a classical source and the constant reference not only to incidents from the Aeneid but also to proper names ('Andromaque, Simois, Pyrrhus, Hector, Helenus') may have seemed an unnecessary intrusion upon a scene drawn from modern life. This attitude may be further encouraged by another reference to Latin literature in stanza eleven (Ovid's Metamorphoses, I 84-85). Yet, whilst it is true enough that Baudelaire was proud of his classical learning and enjoyed demonstrating his prowess in this field, this may be viewed as another way of attacking the values of pseudo-classicism. We learn from the 'Projets de Préface' that the poet had at one stage intended to indicate his debt to Vergil for 'tout le morceau d'Andromaque' and his motive for using the passage at all seems principally that he found it eminently fitting. An important factor to be borne in mind is his great familiarity with Latin literature (and particularly the works of Ovid and Vergil). This means that among the thought patterns aroused by a particular aspect of reality reminiscences of classical literature are as likely as most. Conversely, Baudelaire's constant pre-occupation with literature and art might well mean that some thought about one of the latter

(117) 'J'aime le souvenir . . .'.

(118) 'L'Idéal'.

(119) That is to say between different registers of language.

might bring to his notice an aspect of reality which would then be developed in his mind along with the original literary/artistic idea. It would be rash therefore to dismiss the references in this poem as mere bric-a-brac or as demonstration of the poet's erudition.

Our hypothetical modernist might also have objected to the use and development of the swan symbol in the poem. Is it not as obvious and therefore as reprehensible as the albatross in the poem of that name? In fact is it not even more regrettable as a result of the incongruity with the Parisian setting? Most readers would not accept the validity of these objections and there are several reasons for refusing to do so. The treatment of the swan symbol is not as banal as that of the white bird in 'L'Albatros'. The explanation of the symbol is not made in the same 'x equals y' manner, but rather the swan is made but one example of several forms of exile and one stage in a chain reaction which begins with the poet's meditation upon the fate of Andromache, or perhaps more correctly with the realisation that his own position while regarding the Seine was not unlike that of Andromache standing by the substitute Simois with which she tries to comfort herself. Baudelaire himself seems to indicate in the poem that the pattern of thought began with the picture of Andromache but it is more than likely that the chain goes back one more stage as has just been suggested. The swan symbol is not made to bear the weight of an entire poem, as is the case with the albatross, nor is the exposition as straightforward. More important still is the trouble the poet takes to incorporate the swan into the Parisian setting by giving it a plausible 'raison d'être': 'La s'étalait jadis une ménagerie . . . un cygne s'était évadé de sa cage.' Herein lies the source of the possible charge of incongruity. The swan symbol was unnecessary to begin with but to attempt to place it in the Parisian setting is positively foolish. So the accusation might run, but how justified is it? The charge may be countered by remarking that the poet treats the swan's involvement with its immediate physical environment in such a concrete way that the reader is unable to think of the swan as a purely allegorical intrusion:

. . . ses pieds palmés frottant le pavé sec
Sur le sol raboteux trainait son blanc plumage . . .
Baignait nerveusement ses ailes dans la poudre.

Such descriptive phrases help minimise the risk of incongruity. Crépet and Blin in their splendid critical edition of Les Fleurs du Mal (120) point out that during March 1846, the very month in which Baudelaire was contributing to it, the following item appeared in the Corsaire-Satan: 'Avant hier, quatre cygnes

(120) Les Fleurs du Mal, ed. J. Crépet and G. Blin, p.449.

sauvages sont venus s'abattre sur le grand bassin des Tuileries et ils sont restés à prendre leurs ébats jusqu'au moment où on a ouvert le robinet du grand jet d'eau . . . ' Of course this may just be coincidence, but it seems almost certain that Baudelaire knew of this incident. The poet's letter to Hugo which accompanied the poem seems to support this view with its references to 'un accident' - a random but actual occurrence (121). Moreover it is worth recalling that the Carrousel where the poem is set is extremely near to the Tuileries.

Thus the charge of thematic incongruity is probably without foundation. Needless to say there is a deliberate contrast between the swan and its setting but this could exist, and indeed almost certainly did exist, in reality.

Just as allusions to classical literature and the introduction of the symbol of the swan are not automatically opposed to the aesthetic of contemporary reality in poetry, the evocations of the exotic in 'Le Cygne' are also not of necessity to be regarded as an unwelcome or unfitting intrusion into a poem of modern life. The eleventh stanza of the poem is in fact one of the most patently modern, the only true exotic reference being the third line. This is again a perfectly legitimate contrast. Africa is described somewhat preciously as 'superbe' but the adjective has value in as much as it suggests the natural pride and upright bearing of the negress (122) if she too were still in her rightful environment like the cocoa palms. The poet certainly cannot be accused of finding a *recherche* contrast here, for few things were so much part of his personal life as the fascination with Jeanne Duval's part-African origins. Only in the last two lines is there a gradual departure from contemporary reality into a world of *rêverie* with exotic colouring lent by the third line of the last stanza, but the poet has seen much to ponder and this meditation comes as a natural consequence.

In 'Le Cygne' Baudelaire was probably still very aware of the novelty of modernity and of the effect of contemporary reality on his thought patterns. If there is anything in this poem which seems 'old-fashioned' when compared to the work of later poets, then it is the rather obvious references to the workings of the poet's mind in stanzas eight and nine:

Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie
N'a bougé. Palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs,
Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie,
Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs.

Aussi devant ce Louvre une image m'opprime:
Je pense à mon grand cygne, avec ses gestes fous . . .

(121) See O.C., p p. 1537-38.

(122) Compare 'La belle Dorothee' where the same idea is expressed.

It seems somewhat paradoxical that the poet who is so sure of the value of the transitory as an ingredient in poetry as to include in a masterpiece a reference to the alterations taking place around the Louvre should feel obliged to state explicitly that 'tout devient pour moi allegorie'. However, Baudelaire's rather self-conscious awareness of the novelty of his aesthetic does not detract from the poetic advance which its implementation constituted.

The motives for the poet's intricate blending of classical themes with the most specifically contemporary aspects of reality are various: the desire to prove that modern subjects are as potentially archetypal as those of classical literature and to show incidentally that the classics are still alive (123); the wish to produce an unprecedented variety of tone, a contrast between the elevated classical stanzas and the anti-poetical, colloquial parts of the poem, demonstrating that poetry can and should be the expression of all levels of experience; finally the attempt (perhaps not entirely deliberate) to write a poem about the writing of poetry, about the workings of the creative consciousness (124). The various stages of the creative imagination as conceived by Baudelaire are all illustrated in this poem and their functions described. The point of departure is contemporary reality, which is quickly linked with remembered reality and literary associations. This leads to analogies - 'tout pour moi devient allegorie'. The thread of Andromache's exile and particularly the return to it at the end of the poem represent partly an analogy with artistic experience but also the desire to order all the poet's experiences of reality, and the analogies they prompt, into a work of art.

+++++

Albert Cassagne realised that according to the traditional rules of French prosody Baudelaire's verse seemed ungainly or flat-footed (125).

The attempt to capture the 'rhythm' of his subject or of the thoughts and feelings stimulated by a subject is characteristic of the aspect of his poetry which unfavourable critics have labelled 'prosaïsme'. Although they were guilty of incomprehension in assessing the value of Baudelaire's 'prosaïsme', the realisation that it is present in his work offers an insight into the originality of Les Fleurs du Mal. One of the few commentators on Baudelaire to have understood this element in the poet's work was Jules Laforgue, who spoke in terms of Baudelaire's 'Yankee' accent, by which he meant his un-French attitude to the

(123) It is interesting, and in a sense amusing, to compare the use made by modern poets like Léo Ferré of allusions to Baudelaire with the allusions made by Baudelaire to the classics.

(124) Baudelaire would thus have anticipated one of the preoccupations of modern literature of which a celebrated example is, of course, Gide's Les Faux Monnayeurs.

(125) In Versification et métrique de Baudelaire, p.23. Cassagne is here dealing with rhyme, which, together with inversion, he saw as Baudelaire's main areas of weakness.

language of poetry, his tendency to deflate traditional rhetoric.

An immediate, and not unjustified, reaction to Laforgue's claim is one of incredulity. Rimbaud made the celebrated criticism of Baudelaire that his poetry suffered because his milieu was too artistic, by which he probably meant that his knowledge of artistic propriety made him think too much about rules, in fact made him too rhetorical, too 'French'. Then there is Laforgue's own poetry full to the brim with innovations; how can he speak of Baudelaire's 'Yankee' manner when he has the example of his own work to put it surely in the shade? Finally there is Baudelaire's obvious leaning towards rhetoric, his love of classical mythology and literature, and the marked incongruity that is sometimes to be found between his subject and his language of which an example is to be found in the very first line of the opening poem of what the reader expects to be the most 'modern' section of Les Fleurs du Mal - the Tableaux Parisiens: 'Je veux, pour composer chastement mes élogues . . .' Such a reaction seems to be justified by even the most cursory perusal of Baudelaire's poetry.

Nevertheless, a more careful consideration of the young poet's judgement leaves one with the feeling that in this instance Laforgue has been a good deal more perceptive than perhaps the majority of subsequent critics. The traditional values of French poetic language are the rule in Les Fleurs du Mal but never before had there been so many exceptions in the work of any poet. Moreover, these exceptions are careful, deliberate and challenging. In this light the first line of 'Paysage' quoted above is seen to be heavily tinged with irony (one of Baudelaire's favourite weapons and one which in the form of ironic contrast he shares with Balzac) and to constitute a parody of pastoral poetry. Despite Baudelaire's belief in the elevated importance of the poet and the poetic function he has a disarming way of abandoning the role of 'mage': 'le premier, il se raconta sur un mode modeste de confessionnal et ne prit pas l'air inspiré' is how Laforgue puts it (126). The latter had also grasped the intimate link between Baudelaire's revolutionary attitude towards his poetic manner and towards subject-matter of which he gives a vivid summary (127). His notes are, throughout, all the more convincing because he substantiates his argument with examples as well as expounding it with skill and wit:

Il a le premier trouvé après toutes les hardiesses du romantisme ces comparaisons crues, qui soudain dans l'harmonie d'une période mettent en passant le pied dans le plat: comparaisons palpables, trop premier plan, en un mot américaines, semble-t-il: palissandre, too déconcertant et ravigottant:

'La nuit s'épaississait ainsi . . . qu'une cloison!'

D'autres exemples foisonnent. (128)

(126) Mélanges posthumes, p.111.

(127) Ibid., pp.111-12.

(128) Ibid., p.113.

Laforgue does not overstate his case, for he admits that these liberties are taken 'dans l'harmonie d'une période' - but they are all the more effective for that; and furthermore he goes on to say 'Il est toujours courtois avec le laid. Il se tient bien.' (Indeed we find nothing comparable to Rimbaudian scatology, though when it comes to eroticism 'Les Promesses d'un visage' is only slightly more refined than 'L'Idole' and both derive much of their success from their superficial adherence to the proprieties of poetry.) Laforgue pays no attention to the occasional violence and overt eroticism of the older poet's work but overall his judgement is fair.

Laforgue also understood how Baudelaire antagonised some of his readers by making them feel that his poems had no real subject at all; a deliberately provocative device on the part of the poet:

Faire des poésies détachées, courtes, sans sujet appréciable . . .
qui font dire au bourgeois qui vient de lire 'Et après?' (129)

This device is matched by Baudelaire's tendency to select anti-climactic endings for many of his poems:

Aux captifs, aux vaincus! . . . à bien d'autres encor! ('Le Cygne')
Et la Haine est vouée à ce sort lamentable
De ne pouvoir jamais s'endormir sous la table. ('Le Tonneau de la Haine')
Returning again to Laforgue's notes we find the following entry: 'Baudelaire, chat, hindou, yankee, épiscopal, alchimiste' (130). Each one of these classifications is the product of true insight, but it is the term 'yankee' which is of particular interest in the present context; it is explained in the following way:

Ses 'très-' devant un adjectif; ses paysages cassants - et ce vers 'Mon esprit tu te meus avec agilité' que les initiés détaillent d'une voix métallique; sa haine de l'éloquence et des confidences poétiques;

'Le plaisir vaporeux fuira vers l'horizon
Ainsi que . . .'

Quoi? Avant lui Hugo, Gautier, etc. . . aurait fait une comparaison française, oratoire; lui la fait yankee, sans parti-pris, tout en restant aérien:

'Ainsi qu'une sylphide au fond de la coulisse'

On voit les fils de fer et les trucs. (131)

Otokar Lévy has considered Baudelaire's poetry to be filled with prosaic or even vulgar images (132). Certainly it is easy to add to the examples given by Laforgue; the following are selected more or less at random:

(129) Ibid., p.116.

(130) Ibid., p.118.

(131) Ibid., pp.118-19.

(132) O.Lévy, Baudelaire, Son esthétique et sa technique littéraire, p.412.

Et les vagues terreurs de ces affreuses nuits
Qui compriment le cœur comme un papier qu'on froisse . . . (133)

La Haine est un ivrogne au fond d'une taverne,
Qui sent toujours la soif naître de la liqueur
Et se multiplier comme l'hydre de Lerne . . . (134)

Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle . . . (135)

Le soleil s'est couvert d'un crêpe . . . (136)

Ta gorge triomphante est une belle armoire . . . (137)

Oui, ces gens harcelés de chagrins de ménage . . .
Vomissement confus de l'énorme Paris . . . (138)

The essential mechanism in all these examples is contrast, usually that of the modern and commonplace with the classical and learned. The conventional rhetorical devices (139) and the classical allusions are just as important to such contrasts as modernity. When juxtaposed with modernity they lead to a jolting effect which has the advantage of surprise and rivets the reader's thoughts and imagination on the subject of the poem. Such contrasts may also be regarded as symptomatic of Baudelaire's appreciation of irony as a literary device (140) and as a quality of his own life:

Ne suis-je pas un faux accord
Dans la divine symphonie,
Grâce à la vorace Ironie
Qui me secoue et qui me mord?
Elle est dans ma voix, la criarde! (141)

There is a fundamental irony underlying his work, based on the contradiction between his Romantic and mystical aspirations, not to mention his love of beauty, and the crass and even sordid nature of his material environment; an irony expressed most obviously in 'L'Albatros' and 'La Chambre double' and which characterises the situation of poets in nineteenth-century France.

Impropriety is not confined to contrasting images in Baudelaire's poetry. As regards vocabulary he does not hesitate to use vulgar or 'unpoetic' words, though the vulgarity of his vocabulary is to be seen in relation to the accepted standard of the day, for compared to the excesses of later poets it is positively decorous. Amongst 'improper' words and phrases used by Baudelaire are: 'suer',

(133) 'Réversibilité'.

(134) 'Le Tonneau de la Haine'.

(135) 'Spleen', LXXVIII.

(136) 'Le Possédé'.

(137) 'Le Beau Navire'.

(138) 'Le Vin des Chiffonniers'.

(139) Even Valéry spoke of these devices as 'incontestable faiblesse' and 'ineptie'. See Valéry, Oeuvres Complètes, I, Éd. de la Pléiade, p.610.

(140) See Fusées, XI: 'Deux qualités littéraires fondamentales: surnaturalisme et ironie'.

(141) 'L'Héautontimoroumenos'.

'puer', 'puanteur', 'riboter', 'rechigner', 'glapir', 'se tortiller',
 'se pavaner', 's'empêtrer', 'se prendre aux cheveux', 'ordure', 'charogne',
 'imbécile', 'courbettes', 'savates', 'rabougri', 'vomissement', 'catin',
 'brûle-gueule', 'chloroses', 'omnibus', 'comme qui dirait', 'sentant sa bourse
 à sec' and 'faire épanouir la rate du vulgaire'.

Modernity and ordinariness were, thus, qualities of
 Baudelaire's poetic language as well as his thematic
 material.

+++++

(v) The influence of the Baudelairean aesthetic on poets

It seems that as early as 1845 Baudelaire's modernist aesthetic must have had a considerable audience, for Banville informs us of the striking effect the Salon de 1845 made on its publication (142). In 1859 Albert Glatigny dedicated his L'Impossible to Baudelaire and Asselineau states (143) that Baudelaire became influential at the time of the second edition of Les Fleurs du Mal (i.e. 1861). So from about 1860 onwards there was a select if not always comprehending audience for Baudelaire's work and ideas. In 1862 Emmanuel Des Essarts published his collection Poésies Parisiennes which has the following two quotations on the title page:

'L'Idéal des chose vivantes'

Philoxène Boyer

'Il y a une beauté et un héroïsme modernes'

Charles Beaudelaire (sic)

It is worth pausing for a while to examine this collection, as the title and quotation from Baudelaire might suggest that it is one of the early products of the poetry of contemporary reality, and indeed there is little doubt that Des Essarts intended it as such (144). The briefest of glimpses through the volume suffices to show that, whatever Des Essarts' intentions, the poems conform very

(142) See Jonathan Mayne's introduction, p.x, to Baudelaire, The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays.

(143) Asselineau, Charles Baudelaire. Sa Vie et son Œuvre, pp.171-72.

(144) c.f. Mallarmé in his review of the collection in Le Papillon: 'le lyrisme de la réalité, telle est l'intention des Poésies Parisiennes'. (Œuvres Complètes, Ed. de la Pléiade, p.249.)

exactly to the accepted and usual standards of the day regarding subject-matter. There are in fact scarcely any attempts to evoke the Parisian scene. Paris, like some contemporary personalities, is occasionally mentioned by name but the poet goes no further than that. A couple of exceptions, 'L'Idylle sur le quai' and 'Soupers' where the poet shows some inkling of the evocation of the atmosphere of modern life, mark the limit of his originality (145). This collection helps, by contrast, to show just how refreshingly (or shockingly) original even some of the minor 'realist' poetry of the 1870s must have seemed to contemporary readers. Strangely enough, Mallarmé in his review of the collection in Le Papillon in January 1862 seems not only to have found 'modernism' in the poems but to have approved of the intention, all of which would suggest that he too, for a time, accepted with some enthusiasm the place given to contemporary reality in the Baudelairean aesthetic (146).

In the following years there is continuing evidence of the admiration the young poets felt for Baudelaire. In 1863 Albert Mérat wrote a sonnet entitled simply 'A Charles Baudelaire' (147). In 1865 Mallarmé himself published a lyrical and somewhat mystical appreciation of Baudelaire as the second part of his Symphonie littéraire (148). In January 1866, prompted by Verlaine's articles in L'Art to which we shall shortly be referring, Sainte-Beuve tried to persuade Baudelaire to return from Belgium to Paris where he would be hailed as an authority and an oracle (149). Henri Cantel's Le Mal et le Beau, published in November 1866, was dedicated to Baudelaire. Much more evidence could be accumulated to show that an intellectual 'network' existed sufficient in size (if deficient in true appreciation) to transmit knowledge of the Baudelairean aesthetic (usually as it was expressed through the poetry) to the generation of 1870-1900.

Pierre Reboul has said that 'Le passe-partout de ces dix années (1870-1880) est sans doute le mot "modernité" inventé par Baudelaire' (150). His influence

(145) op.cit., p.34 and p.51.

(146) Mallarmé says that Des Essarts 'a senti que toute époque peut être lyrisée, et a compris qu'on pouvait chercher l'idéal hors de l'antiquité, du moyen âge, de la Renaissance ou du siècle Pompadour, dans la consciencieuse étude de son âme et dans la franche observation de son temps'. (Oeuvres Complètes, p.252.)

(147) Published anonymously in the collection Avril Mai Juin, p.65.

(148) Oeuvres Complètes, pp.263-64.

(149) Sainte-Beuve, Correspondance, tome II, pp.48-49.

(150) P. Reboul, Laforge, p.17.

on Richepin is clear enough (151) and this was also responsible for leading Bourget to become a key figure in the dissemination of the idea of modernism and its concomitant decadence. He saw in Baudelaire the origin of the major tendencies of the epoch: the probing analysis of the darkest corners of the human personality, the obsession with sensation, the intensity of life. The title of Goudeau's Fleurs du bitume is an indication of the extent of Baudelaire's influence among the figures most closely connected with the oénacles as were the numerous imitations of Baudelaire which appeared in publications like Le Chat Noir and the even more ephemeral L'Hydropathe. Rollinat also acknowledged his debt to Baudelaire, principally through his emulation of that vein of Baudelaire's poetry which is concerned with physical decay and corruption but also through his references - less frequent than is often supposed - to modern and everyday reality. In 1881 Barbey d'Aurevilly counted Rollinat as a disciple of Baudelaire (152). Jules Lemaitre in his article of 1879, 'Le mouvement poétique en France', assessed that Lamartine, Musset and Hugo were the three great French poets of the nineteenth century but conceded that Baudelaire's poetry with its attachment to 'la psychologie bigame' (153) was exerting a considerable if regrettable influence over many young poets. In 1882 Verhaeren wrote admiringly that: 'Baudelaire est reconnu comme poète essentiellement actuel, ayant mieux que personne traduit l'âme de son temps.' (154). In 1883 Edmond de Goncourt wrote in his Journal of 'les futurs normaliens qui appartiennent à About et à Sarcey, et les autres sur lesquels Baudelaire et moi serions les deux auteurs qui ont le plus d'action'. (155)

(151) In for instance the poem addressed to the memory of Adrien de Juvigny in La Chanson des Gueux:

Tu l'aimais, ton Paris, charogne parfumée,
 Pleine tout à la fois d'essences et de vers,
 Pourriture aux odeurs subtiles, aux tons verts,
 Où poussent les poisons mêlés avec les roses,
 Où rôde le troupeau ténébreux des névroses,
 Musique où l'on entend sangloter des grelots
 Et tintinnabuler le hoquet des sanglots;
 Gai carnaval hanté de visions farouches;
 Alcôve où les baisers qui se collent aux bouches,
 Voraces, font des trous comme le vitriol;
 Absinthe à l'opium, délicieux alcool
 Dont tu bus en gourmand la plus atroce lie,
 Et dont tu te grisas jusques à la folie.

op.cit., p p. 269-70.

(152) A.E. Carter, Baudelaire et la critique française, p.50.

(153) Art.cit., p.121.

(154) Quoted in A.E. Carter, Baudelaire et la critique française, p.56.

(155) Ibid., p.58.

His influence extended quite clearly to the four great poets of contemporary reality of the period 1870-1887 - Corbière, Laforgue, Rimbaud and Verlaine - ^{who} can all to some extent be regarded as his disciples.

Although Corbière pokes fun at Baudelaire (156), the latter's influence is one of the few that seem to have any importance in a discussion of Les Amours Jaunes. Naturally this is particularly true of the Parisian poems in the collection. 'Paris nocturne' seems to be offered as a tribute to the older poet.

Laforgue's admiration for, and understanding of Baudelaire are well documented. His correspondence contains many references to Baudelaire and to the high esteem he had for Les Fleurs du Mal. The influence is also reflected in Laforgue's poetry: 'L'Hiver qui vient' is partially a re-writing of 'Chant d'automne'. Most important of all, Laforgue wrote some fine notes on Baudelaire in which he praises his mentor's use of modern subject-matter, his adoption of a quiet, uninspired tone and his contribution to the deflating of traditional rhetoric. In this latter respect Laforgue appears as one of the most perspicacious of Baudelaire's critics.

Verlaine's debt to the poet of Les Fleurs du Mal is obvious and he makes many references both direct and indirect to him. One of the earliest and most interesting shows that Verlaine had grasped the power of Baudelaire's modernist poetry to convey an almost physiological awareness of the feeling of modern life:

La profonde originalité de Charles Baudelaire, c'est, à mon avis, de représenter puissamment et essentiellement l'homme moderne; et par ce mot, l'homme moderne, je ne veux pas . . . désigner l'homme moral, politique et social. Je n'entends ici que l'homme physique moderne, tel que l'ont fait les raffinements d'une civilisation excessive, l'homme moderne, avec ses sens aiguisés et vibrants, son esprit douloureusement subtil, son cerveau saturé de tabac, son sang brûlé d'alcool . . . (157)

Verlaine's poetry often deals with modern and everyday reality and with the spontaneous workings of the consciousness, though he did not pursue this as far as Rimbaud.

Rimbaud's admiration for Baudelaire, whom he saw as 'un vrai dieu', is well-known. One aspect of the older poet's influence is to be seen in his use of modern, everyday subjects and in the exclamation (not altogether unambiguous) in Une Saison en Enfer: 'Il faut être absolument moderne' (158). In broad

(156) c.f. the conclusion of 'Un jeune qui s'en va.'

(157) Article in L'Art 16 and 20 November and 23 December 1865.

(158) Rimbaud, Oeuvres Complètes, Éd. de la Pléiade, p.116.

terms the young poet adopted his elder's approach to images and analogies and probably appreciated that what was in question was the use of spontaneous images or the product of the non-intellectual consciousness. He certainly seems to have been more tempted by sensual and rational 'dérèglement' than Baudelaire (159). This is what he means when he considers that the circle Baudelaire frequented was 'trop artiste' (160). It is possible to see actual borrowings of themes, phrases and verse patterns from Baudelaire in Rimbaud's poetry (161).

One of the most frequently presented chains in the development of modern French poetry is that which extends from Baudelaire to Mallarmé and eventually to Valéry. Whilst it is true that all three are linked by an admiration for Poe and the credo of poetic workmanship (incidentally one may wonder why Gautier, Banville and above all Heredia are not normally mentioned in the 'craftsmanship chain') there are also radical differences. Mallarmé is the only major poet of the period 1870-1887 who largely ignores the poetry of contemporary reality and one explanation certainly lies in the differences between his aesthetic and Baudelaire's. A.G. Lehmann, with considerable audacity, has challenged the filiation between Baudelaire and Mallarmé, ascribing it to tradition rather than to fact (162). According to him, notions such as the integrity of the artist and the need for hard work and careful craftsmanship could have been learnt equally well from a poet like Banville. There are major differences between the Mallarmean and Baudelairean aesthetics. Whereas Baudelaire had seen the inspired artist glimpsing into metaphysical existence through his understanding of the symbolic nature of reality: 'Mallarmé...gives an account of poetry in which the poet is permanently sited in a non-phenomenal world' (163). Moreover Baudelaire's metaphysical world and Mallarmé's non-phenomenal world are 'not in any sense the same' (164). The presence of material reality is crucial to Baudelaire's aesthetic, whereas Mallarmé would ideally like to see it absent from his own poetry. Only in his earlier writings and in a handful of the poems can Mallarmé be said to have implemented the more distinctive elements of the Baudelairean aesthetic with the exception of the idea of synthesis which is

(159) See Part Two, Chapter Four.

(160) Ibid., p.253. Compare Rimbaud's remark on the subconscious origin of poetry: 'Car JE est un autre... j'assiste à l'éclosion de ma pensée...' (Rimbaud, O.C., Pléiade, p.250.)

(161) See M. Ruff, 'La Filiation de Baudelaire à Rimbaud', pp. 193-94.

(162) Lehmann, The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, p. 60.

(163) Idem.

(164) Idem.

possibly even more essential to his work and thought than to Baudelaire's.

(vi) Originality and Importance of the Baudelairean Aesthetic

It is not in the details of Baudelaire's aesthetic of contemporary reality that one finds its true originality but in the broad sweep and power of its conception. Diderot had anticipated Baudelaire in advocating the treatment of modern life and in appreciating the value of 'le naïf' in artistic creation (165). Baudelaire may well have borrowed his idea of universal beauty and relative beauty from Cousin, who used very similar terms in his famous Cours de philosophie (166). Hugo had spoken of the necessity of dealing with modern life as early as the 1820s in prefaces to the Odes and Odes et Ballades (167), just as he was to insist on the viability of all subject-matter in the preface to Les Orientales (168). Ideas on relative beauty and modernity were also to be

- (165) Diderot's favourable attitude towards modern subjects is particularly of note in his writing on Greuze and Chardin though it is interesting to remark that in the former instance he succumbs to the temptation of 'moral' art avoided by Baudelaire even during the period 1848-51. (c.f. Diderot, Oeuvres esthétiques, p.524.) Diderot several times referred to the concept of the naïf and nowhere more interestingly than in one of the Pensées détachées sur la peinture:

Pour dire ce que je sens, il faut que je fasse un mot, ou du moins que j'étende l'acception d'un mot déjà fait; c'est naïf. Outre la simplicité qu'il exprimait, il y faut joindre l'innocence, la vérité et l'originalité d'une enfance heureuse qui n'a point été contrainte; et alors le naïf sera essentiel à toute production des beaux-arts; le naïf se discernera dans tous les points d'une toile de Raphaël; le naïf sera tout voisin du sublime; le naïf se retrouvera dans tout ce qui sera très beau; dans une attitude, dans un mouvement, dans une draperie, dans une expression. C'est la chose, mais la chose pure, sans la moindre altération. L'art n'y est plus.

(Oeuvres esthétiques, p.824.)

The connection between naïveté and childhood to be made by Baudelaire is already found in this passage, though there is a difference between the two writers in the emphasis placed on the role of the subject: for Diderot the naïf is a guarantee of good imitation (c.f. Oeuvres esthétiques, p.825.), for Baudelaire the part played by the passions, by the individual temperament is of greater importance.

For a discussion of Diderot's concept of the naïf see H. Mølbjerg, Aspects de l'esthétique de Diderot, pp.177-82. A valuable comparison of the modernism of Diderot and of Baudelaire is made by Gita May in Diderot et Baudelaire, pp.137-40.

- (166) For instance on p.278: 'Pour qu'une théorie des beaux-arts soit possible, il faut qu'il y ait quelque chose d'absolu dans la beauté . . . il existe alors un élément individuel et un élément universel.' The honour of having introduced the idea of relative beauty into French literature and thought should probably be accorded to Madame de Staël of whose critical works this concept was a basic theme.
- (167) See Oeuvres Complètes de Victor Hugo, Poésie, I, p.6 and p.12. Hugo in these prefaces is more concerned with style than with subject-matter, with the combination of liberty and order as opposed to mere regularity. The modernity suggested by Hugo is little more than the socially utilitarian form of Romanticism: 'tout écrivain . . . doit avoir pour objet principal d'être utile', (p.6).
- (168) Oeuvres Complètes de Victor Hugo, Ed. Hetzel et Quantin, Poésie, II, pp.3-4

found in Stendhal's work. Nor should it be forgotten that Boileau, in the heyday of French classicism told poets to take the ugly as a legitimate subject for poetry:

Il n'est point de serpent, ni de monstre odieux,
Qui, par l'art imité, ne puisse plaire aux yeux:
D'un pinceau délicat l'artifice agréable
Du plus affreux objet fait un objet aimable. (169)

What distinguishes Baudelaire's aesthetic from most previous thinking which may seem to have a bearing on it is first the emphasis on everyday reality. To return to Boileau for a moment, it is clear that he was recommending the use of 'style' to cope with a subject which may be ugly, but is not commonplace. This has always been a feature of literature and it was very important in the Greek and Latin sources of seventeenth-century French literature. There is a vast difference between this kind of subject which makes it easy for the poet to use rhetoric and the commonplace subject which Baudelaire advocated: ' . . . la profondeur de la vie se révèle tout entière dans le spectacle, si ordinaire qu'il soit, qu'on a sous les yeux . . . '(170). A second distinguishing feature is the interest in the world of sensation and the non-intellectual consciousness. A third difference is the coherence of his aesthetic which results both from his faith in the power of the artist to attain to absolute beauty by incorporating relative beauty into artistic harmonies and from his belief that reality offered a key to a spiritual world which could be glimpsed in the scheme of relationships established in a work of art. Finally, and perhaps most important of all, Baudelaire, unlike Hugo for instance, consistently put his aesthetic ideas into practice, thereby setting an example far more influential than any precept. For the generation after 1870 this example was of the utmost importance; Baudelaire had shown that the treatment of contemporary reality in its diverse forms was not incompatible with high artistic achievement nor even metaphysical ambitions, but that if anything it facilitated them. He had indicated a method of treating contemporary reality in poetry which transcended Realism, imitation and description. His aesthetic became the starting-point of the experiments of the poets after 1870; their ideas may largely be considered as products or variants of it. Their major contribution was to lie in the discovery and utilisation of even more appropriate techniques for the formulation of the experiences and themes revealed by Baudelaire. Even allowing for Baudelaire's relatively conservative technique, his own poetry contains some of the finest examples of the treatment of contemporary reality.

(169) L'Art Poétique, III, 1-4.

(170) O.C., p.1257.

His originality as a poet of contemporary reality is perhaps most readily grasped by considering what his poetry is not, by looking at the other attitudes to reality in mid-nineteenth-century French literature against which Baudelaire reacted. For the most part he avoided the picturesque description found in one branch of Romanticism; he also avoided another of the Romantic approaches to reality - the social realism of didactic intention. Nor did the plastic description of reality practised by the Parnasse, and to some extent by Hugo, greatly attract him. For him, as for his beloved Delacroix, the external world was a dictionary of elements to be digested and transformed by the artist.

On the other hand he largely avoided the temptation of intangibility and abstraction. Reality is almost always present in his poetry and is the basis of the evocation of mood, of self-exploration and of mystical insights. Earlier attempts to introduce modern everyday subjects and/or a language closer to everyday speech into French poetry seem flat-footed in comparison. From them is usually missing that reflection back from the subject into the personal emotions and experience of the poet and also any extension into mysticism. Reality is never presented by Baudelaire as plain description, nor is modernity or popularity of language ever offered as catch-penny novelty. Baudelaire's awareness of the spontaneous workings of the consciousness and of the value of sensual experience led him to give unprecedented prominence to sense-impressions, which he saw as suggestive first of other sensations but also of feelings, moods, ideas and even spiritual truths. In addition, in common with much of the poetry after 1870, his work derives a good deal of its emotive and moral significance from the contrast between an alluring modernity and a hypothetical state of innocence associated in turn with the primitive past, with the exotic, with childhood and with a state of spiritual grace.

CHAPTER

Two

THE MODERNIST MILIEUX(a) The Cénacles

The emulation of Baudelaire was only one (though perhaps the most important) of the activities of the groups of young poets which were to have fruitful consequences for the poetic treatment of contemporary reality. A study of the cénacles reveals several other important factors.

Few histories of French poetry in the late nineteenth century omit to mention the role of groups such as the 'Hydropathes' and the Zutistes' in the development of the poetic revolution usually equated with Symbolism. Such inclusion seems to have been thought obligatory because of the importance attached to these movements by those who belonged to them or by their contemporaries and because of the wealth of documentary evidence and amusing anecdote which has survived as raw material for the researcher. Basically two approaches have so far been adopted by literary historians in their investigation of the cénacles of 1870-1887 and later; the first is the superficial reference en passant to their existence in studies devoted to the work of individual poets of the period or in studies of Symbolism (1); the second is the study of these gatherings in great biographical detail in near isolation from their wider context (2). The validity of both these methods is not to be denied. On the one hand it may well be inappropriate to make more than a passing reference to the cénacles in a study of a specific poet and on the other the necessity for detailed and documented research is obvious - it is a prerequisite for evaluation like that undertaken by the present writer. A third approach, which has as yet been scarcely tried, is that which seeks to see how the cénacles may aid an understanding of the development of French poetry in the period. It is with suggestions for such an approach that the present section is concerned.

The only links normally stated to exist between the cénacles and the astonishing advances in French poetry after 1870 are that these groupings provided an essential testing ground and forum for poetic innovation, that they gave a sense of identity and joint endeavour to young poets, that by bringing so many writers of the younger generation together in a disrespectful atmosphere they encouraged the schism with tradition and also between poetry and society. All this is true. Moreover the somewhat embarrassing

(1) e.g. Kenneth Cornell, The Symbolist Movement.

(2) e.g. R. de Casteras, Avant le Chat-Noir, Les Hydropathes.

silence of the critics when it comes to pointing precise connections between groups like the 'Hydropathes' and the new poetry is easily forgivable. An

examination of these groups seems to indicate a bewildering confusion and eclecticism of taste and membership. Ernest Raynaud indicates this by the very title of his La Mée Symboliste and substantiates the impression by his text which is a meandering, though fascinating, collection of reminiscences from which emerges no clear idea of a poetic programme or of an historical development. Even as meticulous a chronicler as Kenneth Cornell restricts himself to the brief comment that the various cénacles 'though sometimes frivolous and eccentric... are not without importance in literary evolution. The 'Hirsutes', the 'Zutistes', and later the meetings of the 'Chat noir' and 'Soirées de La Plume', with their tendency to make fun of what was established and traditional, were useful for the gestation of new ideas and forms.' (3)

It is probable that this state of affairs is, like the awkwardness experienced by critics in fitting major poets like Corbière and Laforgue and minor poets like Bourget into their scheme of things (4), to be attributed to that vision of poetic development in late nineteenth-century France in which Symbolism is the culmination of a steady progression. It is indeed difficult to explain the connection between the ribald and thoroughly unserious performances at the gatherings of the 'Hydropathes' or the contents of the Album Zutique and the refined declarations of Moreas or the exquisite and ethereal poetry of the Symbolist generation of 1886 onwards. That is because there is no really significant connection. On the other hand it is possible to see very clear connections between the cénacles and the treatment of contemporary reality in the period and therefore with the work of most of the major poets writing after 1870 - with the almost total exception of Mallarmé.

Despite their seeming eclecticism there were important common factors between the various groups: the bringing together of poets and progressive artists providing an opportunity for the former to learn about the place of contemporary reality in the painting associated with the Impressionist movement, the interest (usually satirical though not always) in actualités, the use of all registers of speech (with a predilection for popular and therefore affective language), the frequent use of song-forms. All these aspects were common to the cénacles as was an interest in more traditional poetry. Thus it was that the ironic juxtapositions of the very modern with the traditional, of lyricism and biting humour, of standard poetic vocabulary with argot and popular speech, of deadly serious content with light, playful and seemingly incongruous forms, which were to become so typical of Laforgue

(3) The Symbolist Movement, p.15.

(4) Cornell describes Bourget as 'a poet who is difficult to ally with any movement'. (Ibid., p.23). Throughout his references Cornell incorrectly entitles Bourget's second volume Adel.

and much of French poetry and chanson in the twentieth century, were already 'accidentally' present in the sequence of items performed in the programmes presented at gatherings like the 'Hydropathes' or at the 'Chat noir'. Of course the more advanced of the items presented already contained within themselves some at least of these juxtapositions.

The briefest examination reveals the marked orientation of the cénacles towards contemporary reality and the other tendencies *connected with them*. Chronologically the first grouping that merits attention for a study of the development of poetry after 1870 was not a cénacle at all but the gatherings at the salon over which presided Nina de Villard (5) and which took place over a period of fifteen years from 1868 onwards. Her salon has rightly been described as the forerunner and prototype of the 'Chat noir' (6) though it is arguable that its importance far exceeds that of its progeny. The poetic movement associated with Parnassianism and Mallarmean Symbolism, with its use of myth and with its attachment to Idealism, drew strength from these meetings which were attended by Leconte de Lisle, Heredia, Dierx, Mallarmé and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam; the latter in his position as Nina's mother's escort. As well as the direct interests of these poets the work of Wagner was a popular topic of conversation and the composer himself a visitor to the salon. ^{Yet} of greater importance than this grouping as regards the activities at the salon and the general complexion of the membership was the supervision exercised by that committed modernist Charles Cros, the lover of Nina, which resulted in the attendance of Coppée (who was also welcome as one of the Parnassian circle), Méral, Rollinat, Valade, Richepin, Nouveau, Verlaine, temporarily accompanied by Rimbaud, as well as several of the most celebrated painters of the Impressionist movement including two of the greatest 'peintres de la vie moderne': Degas and Manet. Thus both the interests and the membership of the salon could be divided according to the two main currents in French poetry in the period. Of the two there is no doubt that the poetry of contemporary reality was predominant in discussions and performances. This tendency was in all probability encouraged by the presence of men from the field of political thought like Valles and Rochefort. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the regular meeting of innovators of technique in both poetry and the plastic arts, a large proportion of whom were engaged in producing work deriving its inspiration from contemporary reality (7).

Beginning also before 1870, at a date not known, were the dinners of the 'Vilains Bonshommes' at which Blemont, Valade and Charles Cros seem to have been the most regular participants, the first named forming those connections which were to enable him to produce the Renaissance. A number of the modernist poets who frequented Nina's salon were also to be seen. It appears that the 'Vilains Bonshommes' had compiled a forerunner of the Album zutique, a

(5) The spelling 'Villars' is incorrect.

(6) H. Sutton, Jean Richepin, pp. 46-49.

(7) Charles de Sivry's researches into popular song may also have been influential in affecting a change in the poetic register.

collection of satirical verse and parody, that had probably been burnt by July 1871. The dinners seem to have continued intermittently until at least November 1873 and thus for four years, and possibly longer, provided another opportunity for the recital and discussion of poetry dealing with events and personalities of the day and utilising humour and popular speech.

Sometimes confused with the 'Vilains Bonshommes' was the group of poets, responsible for the Album zutique itself, active in the years 1871-72. The authors of the album were a loosely-knit group meeting at the Hotel des Etrangers under the leadership, it seems, of Charles Cros's brother Antoine. Numbered in the group were Cabaner, Carjat, Richepin, Valade, Ponchon, Charles Cros and of course Rimbaud and Verlaine. The names themselves are sufficient evidence of the satirical and modernistic nature of the activities of the 'Cercle zutique'. The album is a useful document in ascertaining the nature of the tremendous literary output of the ephemeral cénacles of these years most of which has been lost, either because it was not written down at all or because, like the Album zutique, it existed in manuscript only. The following contribution by Rimbaud is not untypical as regards subject:

Les soirs d'été, sous l'oeil ardent des devantures,
Quand la sève frémit sous les grilles obscures
Irradiant au pied des grêles marronniers,
Hors de ces groupes noirs, joyeux ou casaniers,
Suceurs du brûle-gueule ou baiseurs du cigare,
Dans le kiosque mi-pierre étroit ou je m'égare,
- Tandis qu'en haut rougeoit une annonce d'Ibled, -
Je songe que l'hiver figera le Filet
D'eau propre qui bruit, apaisant l'onde humaine,
- Et que l'âpre aquilon n'épargne aucune veine. (8)

The poem is, however, of a much higher quality than many from other contributors to the album. The basic intention of parodying Coppée, which is successfully fulfilled, is subordinated to the young poet's personal evocation of a decidedly urban summer evening; the setting is not only urban but ultra-modern, as the reference to an advertisement for a well-known brand of chocolate testifies. The contrast between the modernity of subject and traditional poetic vocabulary - 'l'âpre aquilon' - is a feature of Coppée's work but one due to his unwillingness to find a new style to match his new subjects. Here the contrast is deliberately exaggerated and provides a source of humour. It may also, consciously or unconsciously, reflect something more significant than an attempt at humorous parody. Remnants of time-honoured poetic language are shown to be as inappropriate to modern life as the trees

(8) Rimbaud, Oeuvres Complètes, p.214.

are incongruous in an urban setting. The style of pastoral poetry has been overtaken by events just like nature itself. Further there is a possibility that 'la sève frémit sous les grilles' is an image not only of nature suppressed in modern life but of human nature, primitive sensuality, likewise driven below the surface by the rules of modern society. This possibility is heightened by a comparison of this poem with that other evocation of a summer evening in 'A la Musique' in which a contrast between the uninhibited passion of the narrator and the restrained and hypocritical behaviour of the bourgeoisie is clearly made. Even in such light-hearted undertakings as the Album zutique one finds, therefore, pieces epitomising some of the finest qualities of the poetry of contemporary reality after 1870: the evocation of atmosphere, the humorous mixing of registers of language which may be a vehicle for expressing aesthetic or even moral insights, the extension of poetic vocabulary and the tension between the primitive and the modern.

In 1874 another group formed itself under the title 'les Vivants'. Reference is sometimes made to this group in such a way as to suggest that it was as extensive in size as such gatherings as the 'Hydropathes'. In fact, at first, its only members were Bouchor, Bourget and Richepin though later it attracted four new recruits: Ponchon, Rollinat, Vicaire and the ubiquitous Charles Cros. Despite the very small number of 'full' members the group showed a talent for public relations and was of considerable influence. From the start the avowed aim of the 'Vivants' was the portrayal in poetry of modern life; they chose their title **as a direct challenge to the Parnassian 'Impassibles'**. Richepin found a welcome for his views in the pages of Blémond's Renaissance artistique et littéraire to which, in 1874, he contributed an article condemning the state of French poetry and particularly the refusal of the Parnassians to come to terms with the life around them. Out of the activities of the 'Vivants' was to come a number of important volumes including Richepin's La Chanson des Gueux and Bourget's Edel with its preface exhorting poets to modernism. Such work was also the starting-point, or one of them, of Laforgue who greatly admired Bourget. The importance, and the shortcomings, of the 'Vivants's' contribution to the development of French poetry have not been overlooked by one or two perspicacious critics. Paul Fort and Louis Mandin remarked on the value of pioneering poetry that was

more popular in tone, that reflected the noise and bustle of modern streets but they also criticised the 'Vivants' for failing to replace the outworn technique of the Parnassians and thereby match their innovations in subject-matter(9). Kahn also attributed their ultimate failure to their over-reliance on rhetoric and their lack of daring whilst appreciating their general intention(10).

In 1875 and 1876, at the instigation of Nina de Villard and Charles Cros, several poets collaborated in the production of the Di~~g~~ains réalistes. Nina's original idea seems to have been the production of a collective volume along the lines of the Album zutique but which would be carefully assembled and eventually published. Once again one of the intentions was to be parody and the principal victim Coppée. Richepin, Rollinat, Nouveau, Frémine, Antoine Cros and others enthusiastically threw themselves into the task. Spice was added to the enterprise by the rejection of items sent by Nina and by Charles Cros for inclusion in the Parnasse contemporain. For a time the idea of revenge inclined the authors to the title Le Montparnasse contemporain for the collection in preparation, but eventually the simpler title was decided on, indicating, perhaps, that the volume was meant as something more than a literary joke; Charles Cros, at least, thought his contribution important enough to include it in the definitive 1879 edition of Le Coffret de santal.

Around the time of the composition of the Di~~g~~ains réalistes can be situated the beginnings of the cénacle system normally associated with the years immediately preceding Symbolism and continuing for some time afterwards, that is to say regular meetings at a café or restaurant with facilities for recital and performance - though as we have seen the ground was already well prepared. The first cabaret of this kind of any importance was the 'Sherry Gobbler'(11), which

(9) Histoire de la Poésie française depuis 1850, p.50.

(10) La Revue blanche, September-December 1901, p.13.

(11) This would appear to be the most reliable spelling.

enjoyed its hour of fame in the Quartier Latin from 1875 until 1878. Although frequented by Mallarmé and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam its membership was very largely given over to poets treating modern life in their works including Rollinat, Bouchor, Bourget, Coppée, Goudeau, Richepin, Nouveau, Gill and thoroughgoing satirists like Sapeck, Ponchon and Cohl. André Gill's activity at this time was of considerable importance; he has been described as the master of the whole 'bohème' of the years 1875-1885. He was famous as a caricaturist and it is this aspect of his work which has guaranteed the survival of his name. However his literary output was also well-known in his life-time and is not without interest for the researcher. As well as writing a play in collaboration with Richepin he recited poetry in the cafés and published these in volume form, in 1879, in La Muse à Bibi. His satirical and modernist poems are by no means the least successful of the period; of even more crucial importance are his attempts to match in verse developments in the plastic arts, a tendency of which 'Impressionnisme' is the most obvious example. Not only did such a poem indicate an attempt at 'transposition d'art', but, through its obvious debt to Gill's friend Verlaine it provides an instance of the early realisation that Verlaine's intention in some of the poetry of the 1870s was explicitly and precisely impressionistic - an example as yet unused by literary historians, presumably because of the relative inaccessibility of Gill's poetry. Early in the history of the cénacles of pre-Symbolism Gill's work and influence was orientated towards the association of modernism with new modes of poetic expression partly drawn from the example of contemporary painters. The 'Sherry Gobbler' meetings were a great success; the 'Vivants', who had previously met at an estaminet in the rue des Boulangers now made it their headquarters; many new arrivals made their way to the gatherings, one of whom was Kahn. The possibility of the influence of the spontaneity of the items performed there on Kahn's contribution to the development of free verse is intriguing.

In 1878 Goudeau with the ready support of the other habitués of the 'Sherry Gobbler' had the excellent idea of uniting the various groups then existing into one large cénacle calling itself 'les Hydropathes'. Thus the most famous and the

largest of all the pre-Symbolist groupings had, like all the other associations so far examined, a convinced modernist as its leader and driving force. Goudeau in his autobiographical Dix ans de bohème specifically mentioned the importance of modernist poets at the meetings of the 'Hydropathes'(12). The most typical items performed at the Friday evening gatherings were poems recited by Charles Cros, Gill, Rollinat, Frémine and Valade. Paul Marrot would recount his 'tableaux de vie' and Jean Floux and Félicien Champsaur their 'très parisiens' collections of verse. Lorin was widely appreciated for his compelling performance of the items later collected in Paris-Rose. Rodenbach gave regular readings from Les Tristesses. Many caricaturists and painters also attended the gatherings displaying their work and sometimes embarking on joint ventures with the poets(13). Of at least as much significance for the development of French poetry as the works performed or shown by individual artists were the many songs sung in chorus (drinking songs, political satire, traditional songs) all of them characterised by popular song-forms, refrains and frequent humour. The attendance at the 'Hydropathe' gatherings was very large, usually between one hundred and fifty and three hundred. Even established critics of the ilk of Francisque Sarcey and Jules Claretie were so impressed by the vitality, enthusiasm and originality of the performances that they saw in the 'Hydropathes' a symptom of the renewal of French literature. The membership of the 'Hydropathes' was impressive qualitatively as well as quantitatively, including Allais, Coquelin (the celebrated performer of monologues and especially of Cros's 'Hareng saur'), Copée, Gill, Mac Nab, Maupassant, Monselet, Moréas, Rodenbach, Sapeck, Tailhade, Vicaire, Verlaine, Bouchor, Richepin, Kahn, Ajalbert, Forain, Bourget, Henri de Régnier, Vielé-Griffin, Blémond, Cros, Goudeau, Valade, Rollinat, Raynaud, Nouveau, Lorin and Laforgue. The presence of so many poets involved in the development of free verse in France is of great interest; the apparently light-hearted challenge to accepted rules may

(12) op.cit., p.156.

(13) Paris-Rose was an unusual example of such 'collaboration'. The illustrator Cabriol was none other than Lorin himself.

well have contributed to the most important innovation in French prosody for several centuries.

The 'Hydropathes' set the pattern for all the other gatherings that were to follow their disappearance in 1880: the 'Hirsutes' (September 1881 - April 1883) which was virtually a continuation of the lamented 'Hydropathes' eventually dominated by Goudeau; the celebrated gatherings at the 'Chat noir' founded in 1881 by Salis and producing its own broadsheet Le Chat noir; 'Nous Autres' (in existence in September 1883) which was soon taken by its leader the poet-painter Auriol to join the gatherings at the 'Chat Noir'; 'Les Jeunes' (c.1882-1883) a band of lesser known youngsters; 'les Zutistes' of 1883 so named out of Cros's nostalgia for the 'Cercle zutique' with much the same membership as the gatherings already listed; finally the 'Jemenfoutistes', again of almost identical complexion. All these groupings, and others not mentioned, were marked by the same taste for contemporary reality and by the popular and satirical form of the works recited at their meetings.

It may not be inappropriate at this point to give examples of the kind of poetry performed at these gatherings limiting ourselves to the work of poets for whom space has not been found in the chapters which follow. It should be stressed, however, that the major poets of the period did also produce poetry arising out of the life of the literary groups and sometimes aimed specifically at their fellow members. Even Mallarmé may be considered in this light⁽¹⁴⁾ in his production of the Invitation à la soirée d'inauguration de la 'Revue Indépendante':

La Revue avec bruit qu'on nomme
INDEPENDANTE sous peu pend
Une crémaillère d'or comme
Le gaz de son local pimpant.

Caressé par la réussite
Et regards d'extase amincis,
Edouard Dujardin sollicite
Qu'après neuf heures le vingt-six

Novembre, par l'ombre endossée
D'un habit à crachats divers
Vous honoriez, onze, Chaussée
D'Antin, son magasin de vers.

(14) Jean Ajalbert discussed the group surrounding the Revue Indépendante and Mallarmé's participation in it in his Mémoires en Vrac, p.189.

C'est entre messieurs, sans compagne,
Y trouvant du blanc de poulet
Et l'on s'attend même au champagne
Si d'autre rire ne coulait. (15)

The task of unearthing and evaluating poetry performed at the various gatherings is more difficult than might at first be supposed. Some of the most celebrated performers like Sapeck have left no collection. Yet in March 1880 Alphonse Allais wrote an article claiming that Sapeck was one of the greatest initiators of the new movement of anti-bourgeois satire among the young writers, describing him as 'l'illustre Sapeck, le grand maître du Fumisme, le beau rieur infatigable qui a osé jeter au nez des bourgeois de la rive gauche le premier éclat de rire que l'on ait endendu depuis la guerre. Vive Sapeck.' (16) One is left to imagine what the work of Sapeck and a host of others was like. Other poets who have left collections have sometimes omitted from these the material they wrote for these performances, or at least they have omitted them from the collections of their mature years (17). Other poets only collected their work much later, giving grounds for speculation that much may have been altered or even forgotten. (18) Even poetry published more or less at the time of performance, or noted and later recorded by those present at the gatherings, is difficult to evaluate in the absence of performing skills such as timing, tone of voice, impersonation or even ventriloquism (19) not to mention musical accompaniment and the possibilities of impromptu

(15) Written 1886. Mallarmé, Oeuvres Complètes, pp.180-81. An amended version was written in 1887 when the inauguration was postponed until March of that year.

(16) L'Hydropathe, 15th March 1880.

(17) Bouchor's later collections, for instance, with their profound religious and philosophical preoccupations seem worlds apart from the light-hearted Chansons joyeuses of 1874.

(18) Raoul Ponchon, perhaps the greatest performer of all at the gatherings of the 1870s and 1880s, only published his work in collected form in the 1920s.

(19) Sapeck seems to have possessed all these practical skills which went a long way towards compensating for his small output of original material.

variations. Nevertheless it remains interesting to look at a representative selection of this poetry both here, briefly, and at greater length in the second part of this thesis in the discussion of the work of poets like Rollinat, Gill, Gaudéau, Cros and Valade - all mainstays of the cénacles.

The poetry of Henri Chantavoine was typical of a certain vein of satire at the gatherings; it was written, performed and published at the height of the activity of the 'Hydropathes'. A poem like 'Jean Hiroux' (20) is a remarkable combination of the form of satire associated with classicism and a thoroughly modern setting:

Le front bas, oeil éteint et le geste hideux,
Cicerone interlope à la porte des gares,
Ramasseur breveté de vieux bouts de cigares,
Il fait tous les métiers louches et hasardeux.

Aigri par la misère et rongé par la haine,
Il va, rôdeur sinistre et ténébreux, glissant
Aujourd'hui dans la boue et demain dans le sang,
Epouvante et rebut de la famille humaine.

Refusant du travail et demandant du pain,
Comme un loup en maraude il poursuit son chemin,
Prêt à mordre et montrant ses mâchoires hardies;

Et quand l'émeute gronde au sein des carrefours,
On entend sa voix rauque, et l'on revoit toujours
Son oeil rouge, embrasé de lueurs d'incendies.

The poem is also interesting as an example of a combination of political and social sedition with poetic conservatism exemplified by the sonnet form. This combination was not uncommon among the poets of the cénacles, indeed to a very great extent it was the major poets, like Laforgue, and not the minor figures who felt that the light-hearted, spontaneous and popular forms could be used for the expression of serious subjects.

Félix Décori was another popular performer at the gatherings whose poetry, published in Le Chat Noir in 1882, represents many of the tendencies to be found at them: satire, humour, sentiment and modernity. Two stanzas from 'Les Vieux Fiacres' provide a ready example:

(20) Satires contemporaines, 1880.

Anémiques maigreurs des coussins tressautants
 Qui perdez par cent trous le crin de vos entrailles,
 Grincements enroués des plaintives ferrailles,
 Ambulants soubresauts de débris cahotants....

Alors, souillés, flétris, superbes de hideurs,
 Cabussés et meurtris aux anciennes bagarres.
 Vous attendez la nuit pour glisser près des gares
 Et Paris, trop ingrat, vous nomme maraudeurs. (21)

The disappearance of the old coaches was a decidedly contemporary theme and the poet's vocabulary is adventurously specific and occasionally popular, e.g. 'bagarres', avoiding the periphrasis still prevalent amongst his contemporaries. However, the word order is very conventional but this does not detract from the overall verve of the piece.

The sentimental note present in the Décori poem, and in the ~~work~~ of Paul Marrot, could occasionally spill over into a rather sugary eulogy of honest graft, as was the case with Jean Floux's 'La Maison Neuve' (22). The same tendency is to be seen in the poetry of Edmond Haraucourt, notably in the celebrated 'Le Cheval de Fiacre':

Le jour, la nuit, partout, glissant sur le verglas,
 Suant sous le soleil, ruisselant dans l'averse,
 Tendant avec effort son nez que le vent gerce,
 Trottant sa vie, il souffle, éternellement las.

Sa crinière aux poils durs qui tombe en rideaux plats
 Tape son long cou sec que la fatigue berce;
 Sa peau, sous le harnais battant, s'use et se perce;
 Son mors tinte, et le suit comme son propre glas.

Ouvrant ses grands yeux ronds, doux comme sa pensée,
 Il court, en ruminant dans sa tête baissée
 L'oubli de la douleur et le pardon du mal.

Et la foule, devant ce héros qu'on assomme,
 Passe sans regarder le sublime animal
 Dont nous ferions un saint si Dieu l'avait fait homme! (23)

Utterly conventional in form and in vocabulary, and in this latter respect inferior to the Décori poem, 'Le Cheval de Fiacre' is an example of the large body of poetry of the time which was modern in the starting-point of its subject but which happily utilised existing poetic devices employed by poets who were

(21) Quoted in R. de Casteras, Avant le Chat-Noir, Les Hydropathes, pp.103-04.

(22) See Part Two, Chapter Four.

(23) L'Ame nue, 1885.

not ^{greatly} concerned with the special problems raised by treating contemporary reality. This particular poem fits very well into the stream of sub-Parnassian poetry, substituting a horse for Leconte de Lisle's elephants.

Two other forms of sentimentality or nostalgia were commonplace among both the performers and the audience at gatherings like the 'Hydropathes'; the first was nostalgia for the provincial homes many of them had left behind, the second the regret that the gaiety of the bohemian life was only a temporary haven from the demands of society with which they would probably eventually have to come to terms. Both these forms are found in the work of Charles Frémine, one of the leading lights of the 'Hydropathes' and of earlier groups such as that responsible for the Dixains réalistes. As well as a poet of provincial nostalgia he was considered to be 'un excellent peintre des modernites parisiennes'. (24) Occasionally his poems point a contrast between Paris and the provinces, normally to the detriment of the former; thus 'Chanson de Printemps' begins with two and a half stanzas describing the modern Paris from which he wishes he could depart for the country:

Loin des trottoirs fleuris d'ombrelles,
Loin des quais, loin des boulevards,
Loin des cafés pleins de querelles,
Loin des salons pleins de bavards;

Loin des petits ormes étiques
Avec leur rond de fer aux pieds,
Loin des jardins, loins des boutiques,
Loin des bourgeois, loin des troupiers;

Loin des moellons et loin des marbres,
Loin du bitume et des pavés,
Je veux m'en aller... (25)

The themes of drunkenness and prostitution, popular with Baudelaire and the Naturalists, also recurred in the poetry of the cénacles; in the case of Frémine these help to colour the picture of decadent Paris, for which, however, a certain fondness is evident in the concern for plastic detail:

(24) Quoted in R. de Casteras, Avant le Chat-Noir, Les Hydropathes, p.119.

(25) Idem.

Une fille - l'amour me raille -
 M'accroche et me dit sans façon,
 D'une voix que le vice éraillé;
 'Viens-tu chez moi, joli garçon?'

Deux ivrognes épileptiques
 Me bousculent dans le ruisseau
 Et les feux rouges des boutiques
 Font du sang dans les flaques d'eau...(26)

Frémine's definitive poetic situation was that of the singer of the joys of provincial life, where the contrast with urban life is only implicit(27).

The most celebrated example of Frémine's other type of 'nostalgic' poetry - the sentimental vision of his and his companions' bohemian existence - is, appropriately enough, 'Vieille bohème':

Las enfin de tirer la queue
 A tous les diables du quartier,
 Loin des recors, pour la banlieue,
 Hier ai fui mon gargotier.

Demain! Qui sait? Ce soir? Qu'importe!
 L'hôtelier qui m'a fait crédit
 Gardera la clef de ma porte,
 Puis, en route! tout sera dit....

- Pourtant, je suis loin d'être triste;
 Les hommes graves en riront,
 Mais seuls de grands rêves d'artiste
 Jettent de l'ombre sur mon front! (28)

This was a particularly popular theme among the poets of the cénacles; indeed the commonest representation of modernity in their work was made through their

(26) Ibid., pp. 123-24, 'A celui qui m'a fait poser'.

(27) Notably in the collection Chansons d'été.

(28) Quoted in R. de Casteras, Avant le Chat-Noir, Les Hydropathes, pp. 44-45.

evocation of the artists' quarters of Paris and the life they led there.

René Ponsard's 'Le Moulin de la Galette' (29) was one of a number of poems on a locality made famous by paintings of the same period. Eugène Torquet's Ballade de la joyeuse Bohème' (30) reiterated Frémine's enthusiasm. In January 1882 the popularity of such poems was marked by the beginning of a series of Sonnets - Montmartre in Le Chat Noir including poems such as Raymond de Cazba's 'La Modèle', Adolphe Vautier's 'Crépuscule' and the anonymous 'L'Ambulant' which was a Richepinesque description of a street musician.

Fortunately, the cénacle poets were not always content to repeat the poetic clichés and the time-worn vocabulary of their forbears. Particularly successful is the combination of modernist themes and elements of contemporary everyday speech. This is to be found in Vautier's 'Crépuscule', so reminiscent of Corbière in its use of slang:

C'est l'heure où, chez les mastroquets,
Plus culottés que les vieux bouges,
Des consommateurs aux nez rouges
Étrangent de verts perroquets. (31)

Another device in the quest for modernity this time clearly akin to Laforgue, is the mixture of modernist theme, with slang (e.g. 'pékin', 'sergot', 'tripot' and 'cocotte') and with medical and technical terminology seen in Miguel Fernandez's 'Nocturnités' (32), a product, from a slightly later period, of the group around Bajou:

29) Le Chat Noir, 18 March 1882.

30) Ibid., 14 January 1882.

31) Ibid., 25 February 1882. 'Etrangler' means to swig down glasses in rapid succession; 'perroquet' was a mixture of pastis and absinthe or possibly pastis and crème de menthe.

32) Le Décadent, 22 May 1886.

Le soir à la clarté des becs fuligineux
 La cité réfulgeant dans l'ébène de l'ombre
 Se vêt d'astres gazeux, couvre de sa pénombre
 Les pékins absinthés au teint rubigineux.

A minuit, le sergot d'un oeil calamiteux
 Guette, molosse adroit, le tripot bas et sombre,
 Traîne sa nullité, zéro dans un vain nombre,
 Réfléctant sur les murs son profil malingreux.

La cocotte éreintée, aux farineux de plâtre,
 Le visage appâli par un reflet blêmâtre,
 Balade effrontément ses airs cataractifs.

Parfois dans les lointains, un bourgeois soligrade,
 Flâneur vespéral terminant sa promenade,
 Sternute au vent du soir des dégouts olfactifs.

A further point of interest in this poem is the careful (though not particularly evocative) notation of sense-impressions which not only helps give it the cachet of decadence but is a reminder, in its use of technical terms of light and colour, of widespread poetic reflections in this period of painterly preoccupations: 'fuligineux', 'réfulgeant', 'pénombre', 'réfléctant', 'appâli', 'blêmâtre' and rubigineux'.

Those elements already seen in the poetry recited at the cénacles - modernity and largely satirical humour with an admixture of sentiment - were to become the qualities most readily associated with the chansonniers and cabaret poets so much a feature of popular cultural life in France from the Belle Époque to the present day. Léon Xanrof produced the first of his successful volumes of verse to be sung to his own music in 1887: Rive gauche. This plaquette was subtitled Chansons d'Étudiants which is an accurate indication of its content; the title would serve equally well for many of the poems produced and performed in the cénacles. The collection contains fourteen songs, all eminently performable and making good use of humorous and popular speech as well as technical terms (like 'myopie') and modern references ('absinthe').

The first three stanzas

of 'Filles de brasseries' are typical both of the collection and of the very substantial part played by the carpe diem reaction to contemporary reality, discussed ~~later~~ in this ~~thesis~~; in the gatherings:

Y a des filles en brasserie
 Qui n'sont pas fraîches du tout,
 Fraîches du tout;
 Ell's vous serv'nt un' cochonnerie,
 En vous app'lant: 'mon petit chou'.

(Refrain)
 C'est pas là qu' j'irai fair' la vie
 Quand j'aurai cent sous.
 C'est pas là qu' j'irai fair' la vie
 Quand j'aurai cent sous.

Y en a peu qui soient jolies,
 Qui soient bêt's y en a beaucoup,
 Y en a beaucoup.
 Pour ell's on fait des folies,
 Faut pas discuter du goût.

Comm' l'absinthe on falsifie
 Leur teint blém', leurs cheveux roux,
 Leurs cheveux roux,
 Il faut être atteint d'myopie
 Pour d'mander un rendezvous. (33)

Xanrof's great success at the 'Chat Noir', the 'Cercle de la Presse', the 'Bon Bock', 'La Marmite' and many other establishments was more or less contemporary with that of the cabaret performer immortalised by Toulouse-Lautrec: Aristide Bruant.

There is a surprisingly melancholy and reflective air about much of Bruant's work allied with a very fine feeling for the atmosphere of contemporary reality; these qualities are evident in 'Fantaisie Triste':

I'bruinait... L'temps était gris,
 On n'voyait pas l'ciel... L'atmosphère,
 Semblant suer au-d'ssus d'Paris,
 Tombait en bué' su' la terre.

I'soufflait quéqu'chose... on n'sait d'ou;
 C'était ni du vent, ni d'la bise,
 Ça glissait entre l'col et l'cou
 Et ça glaçait sous not' chemise.

Nous marchions d'avant nous, dans l'brouillard,
 On distinguait des gens maussades.
 Nous, nous suivions un corbillard.
 Emportant l'un d'nos camarades.

Bon Dieu! qu'ça faisait froid dans l'dos!
 Et pis c'est qu'on n'allait pas vite;
 La moell' se figeait dans les os,
 Ça puait l'rhume et la bronchite... .

(34)

Although Bruant's first volume did not appear until 1889 many of his songs had already become well known through his performances at the 'Chat Noir' and elsewhere. Francois Coppée in particular lavished praise upon Bruant which incidentally shows the sympathy the often lampooned poet of Les Humbles felt for the enterprises of the young poets at the cénacles: 'Je le tiens pour un descendant, en ligne directe et légitime, de notre Villon. Rien de livresque, rien d'artificiel dans ses vers, d'un jet si naturel, d'un accent si populaire.' (35)

Léon Guichard has seen parallels between Bruant's work and the poetry of Laforgue (36).

The tendency to write poetry intended for performance or, at the very least, having some of the qualities of popular song combined with a feel for modernity and everyday life had been evident in the work of the earliest cénacle poets of the period after 1870, notably Bouchor and Ponchon:

(34) From the two-volume collection Dans la Rue.

(35) Quoted in Walch, Anthologie des poètes français contemporains, II, p. 510.

(36) Jules Laforgue et ses poésies, p. 136.

J'allai donc de mon pas rapide,
Interviewer, pour mon journal,
Flammarion, notre intrepide
Astronome national.

L'heure me semblait opportune.
C'était le soir. Je le trouvai
En train de farfouiller la Lune
De son télescope éprouvé...

(37)

Other examples are Ponchon's 'Chanson' (38) and Bouchor's 'Choeur
de buveurs en hiver' (39)

(37) Ponchon, 'La Fête du soleil', La Muse au cabaret, p. 261.

(38) Ibid., p. 13.

(39) Les Chansons joyeuses, pp. 159-60.

and 'Beuverie flamande' (40).

A feature of both the chansons and the other poetry produced in the cenacles was a pre-Laforguian use of irony to deflate in particular, the serious treatment of love inherited from Romanticism. Thus in Georges Rall's 'Paroles d'amour' (41) the poet's beautiful blonde mistress accepts love whilst reading the newspaper:

Voyons, dépêche-toi que je tourne la page!

Henri Second produced two highly amusing poems in the same vein.

In 'Amour platonique' (42) an innocent newcomer to Paris declares his love for an apparently refined girl who replies '...Je veux bien./ Mais, mon petit, ça ne fait rien,/ Tu me devras cent sous quand même!'

'Sonner à l'ail et au patchouli: une prostituée' (43) is notable for a pun in the final stanza:

Tous les boutons de son corsage
Par les doigts du vice arraches
Oux émigré sur son visage.

On other occasions the theme of love is renovated by a reference to images drawn from everyday life. Guy-Valvor's 'Raquettes et volants' (44) is built around the symbol of two girls as yet unaware of love, playing badminton and blissfully ignorant that one day they will be like rackets and their tormented lovers like shuttlecocks.

(40) Ibid., pp. 163-64.

(41) Nouvelle Rive Gauche, 8-15 December 1882.

(42) Le Chat Noir, 15 July 1882.

(43) Ibid., 10th June 1882.

(44) Lutèce, 7-14 September 1883.

One of the familiar figures at the 'Chat Noir' who is most often mentioned in studies of the Symbolist period, usually to her disadvantage, is Marie Krysinska; her fragile grasp on immortality depends entirely on the claims made by both herself and her admirers that her work was instrumental in the development of free verse. Modern serious criticism has tended to treat these claims with profound scepticism, not hesitating to pass the most scathing judgements of her poetry which has been described as totally without poetic value, being nothing other than prose given the typographical trimmings of verse. Yet the Polish-born poetess did enjoy her hour of glory in the cenacles which were assiduously attended by many of the pioneers of free verse in France, her innovations were there for all to read, in 1882-83, in the Saturday broadsheet Le Chat Noir and in La Vie Moderne. Moreover these innovations came close on the heels of all the experiments made in relatively spontaneous and popular forms of verse by the performers at the gatherings. It may well be that the time has not yet come for dispensing with the once obligatory references to Krysinska in the manuals of nineteenth-century French poetry. An interesting feature of Krysinska's work, as of that of many of her confrères, was the acknowledgement it made to contemporary developments in the plastic arts. This is evident in the titles of some of her poems, e.g. 'Symphonie en gris', 'Nature morte', 'Marine sombre' and 'Soir en mer', in her concentration on plastic and atmospheric effects, and in the dedication of her poems to some of the leading progressive artists of the day. To dismiss Marie Krysinska's early experiments as prose set out in verse is not altogether justified. A typical poem of 1882 is 'Symphonie en gris' which has features not normally associated with prose - even poetic prose - notably assonance:

Plus d'ardentes lueurs sur le ciel alourdi,
 Qui semble tristement rêver.
 Les arbres, sans mouvement,
 Mettent dans le loin une dentelle grise. -
 Sur le ciel qui semble tristement rêver,
 Plus d'ardentes lueurs. -

Dans l'air gris flottent les apaisements,
 Les résignations et les inquiétudes.
 Du sol consterné monte une rumeur étrange, surhumaine,
 Cabalistique langage entendu seulement.
 Des âmes attentives.
 Les apaisements, les résignations, et les inquiétudes
 Flottent dans l'air gris... .

(45)

Her later work is closer to normally accepted definitions of vers libéré though here it has been admitted that she had the examples of Kahn, Vielé-Griffin and Laforgue available to her; one of the best of these poems is 'Marine claire' (46).

This necessarily brief examination of the cénacles is sufficient nevertheless,

(45) Rythmes pittoresques; 'Symphonie en gris' was written in November 1882.

(46) Joies errantes, published 1894.

it is hoped, to show the extent to which the type of work performed at the gatherings like the 'Zutistes' and so on may be related to the development of the major poetry of the period 1870-1887; the relationship varies from a very general feature like the treatment of contemporary subjects to things much more precise like the development of free verse as a vehicle for formulating the most transient experiences of the consciousness.

The reasons for a serious consideration of the cénacles are several and a less rigid adherence to the accepted schema of French poetic evolution in the period would probably have caused them to be listed before now. The cénacles were important because their preoccupation with modern subjects entailed a departure from abstract rhetoric and from the descriptive and historical interests of the Parnasse. The Juvenalian tradition of satire, which Gilbert Highet has said was most strikingly revived in nineteenth-century France(47), was continued by the anti-establishment gatherings after 1870. To some extent in both the treatment of modern subjects and in their perpetuation of the satirical tradition the cénacle poets were the imitators of Hugo(48) but their achievement was to find an alternative form to the Hugolian tirade used to such effect in Les Châtiments. This innovation largely lay in their humorous treatment of their subjects - which is not to say that Hugo was incapable of biting humour but that this was more consistently their vein than his. In part this innovation may be linked with the apparent lack of seriousness and commitment among many of the younger poets after 1870. This attitude of disillusionment with intellectual activity of an obvious kind and a corresponding fondness for the simple pleasures of living also affected the subject-matter of the cénacle poets by concentrating their attention upon the life of sensation, upon the more immediate aspects of reality and upon the humble experiences of everyday living. Satire, humour, contemporary and ordinary subjects, non-intellectual

(47) G. Highet, Juvénal the Satirist, pp.226-29 and 336-38.

(48) For a discussion of Hugo and the satirical tradition see A. Collignon, 'Victor Hugo et Juvénal', and P. Stapfer, Victor Hugo et la grande poésie satirique en France.

experiences and spontaneous feelings all required, for their fullest expression, some change in the structure and language of poetry. From the structural point of view a suitable medium was already available in the form of popular song. The spread of sociétés chantantes utilising the features of popular song had begun as early as the period immediately after Beranger's success, so that by 1845 there were no less than four hundred and eighty such goguettes in the Paris area. This vogue had never quite died out and in the 1870s young writers on the left bank saw in it a means of gaining an audience for their work without the necessity of publication. It is in the 1870s that the true beginning of cabarets of poètes récitants may safely be placed. The encasement of a topical satirical reference in the form of a popular song led inevitably to an ironic effect as did the juxtaposition of popular speech and slang with serious subjects generally. It is not surprising that Kahn informs us of Laforgue's enthusiasm for the cabaret recitations and for the ballades and complaintes of Allais, Rollinat, Goudeau and others(49).

The poetry of the cénacles was marked, not surprisingly, by an extension of vocabulary mostly in the areas of popular and everyday speech but also in the field of technical terms; this latter development is doubtless related to the fact that a high proportion of the poets and audiences at the gatherings were students of law, philosophy and medicine. Thus one may see the origins of what is one of the most striking aspects of Laforgue's poetry the mixing of at least three registers of language: the traditionally poetic, everyday speech and technical terminology. This mixture is already to be found in a poem like Décori's 'Les Vieux Fiacres' with its traditional poetic antithesis: 'superbes de hideurs', with its use of technical terms: 'anémiques'. Similar examples could be elicited from the work of a number of the cénacle poets. In another poem already cited, Frémine's 'A celui qui m'a fait poser', one reads of 'ivrognes épileptiques'. As to the popularisation of poetic vocabulary and tone undertaken by the cabaret poets of the 1870s and later, some caution and clarification is necessary. It may be argued, with considerable justification that Richepin's Gueux and poems like

(49) See Kahn's article 'Jules Laforgue' in Les Nouvelles Littéraires, December 1928.

Verlaine's 'Faut hurler avec les loups' (50) are imitations of popular speech making little advance on similar endeavours by Molière (51). The same may be said of most of the cénacle poetry; the basic conservatism of much of this verse is evident in its word order replete with unnatural inversions and other devices aimed at maintaining the correct syllable count and bringing the rhyme word to the end of the line. There is a big difference between the introduction of popular vocabulary and the comprehension and assimilation of the rhythms of ordinary speech which is a feature of the work of most of the major poets writing after 1870 and which more than almost anything else lends their poetry the feel of the contemporary world. Nevertheless this development is connected with the popularisation of poetic language; moreover the sheer quantity of poetry after 1870 using popular vocabulary is a symptom of the widespread dissatisfaction with the existing poetic medium as a vehicle for the treatment of contemporary reality. The poetic recitals at the gatherings were liberally interspersed with prose items and comedy; this fact together with the greater spontaneity of the verse itself may well have led to gradual discovery of free verse by Marie Kryszewska and other habitués of the cénacles.

Another reason for the serious study of the cénacles is, as we have already suggested, that they represent a clear instance of the interrelation of poetry and the plastic arts, a phenomenon of such importance in this period.

The influence of gatherings like the 'Hydropathes' and the 'Zutistes' and the earlier groups on both minor and major poets after 1870 is very marked. It is of course evident in the works of Cros, Goudeau, Richepin, Rollinat and others who wrote largely for cénacle audiences, initially at least. But it is also clear in Rimbaud's contribution to the Album zutique and in the conversational tone and irony of much of his verse as well as the more obvious attempts to provoke the bourgeois reader (who was in reality extremely hypothetical). It is

(50) Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes, p.295.

(51) See, for example, the language attributed to the peasants in Don Juan.

present in the song-like form and superficial lightness of poems like Verlaine's 'O triste, triste était mon âme' (52) as well as the biting satire of the later collections. It is arguably discernible in the popular style and bitter gaiety of poems like Corbière's 'Bohème de chic' and in his attachment to satire (53). In his case, however, there is little biographical information to support arguments in favour of actual influence and one may be confronted with nothing other than a striking parallel. The influence of the cénacles is, on the other hand, undeniable in the case of the Laforgue of the 'Complainte de l'oubli des morts' and other poems modelled exactly on popular cabaret forms.

(52) Romances sans paroles ('Ariettes oubliées', VII).

(53) e.g. 'A un Juvenal de lait'.

b) The Major Poets : Some Relationships and Influences

The scope of the remarks that follow is very modest and little claim is made to original scholarship. Nevertheless, it is felt that the giving of such a context is essential. It pursues some of the questions already raised in this thesis and anticipates later discussion, particularly in Part Two, Chapter Four, on the subject of poetic impressionism. Three of the four poets to whom we are paying special attention are treated now. The fourth, Laforgue, is perhaps the most interesting of all to study from this point of view and so his position is examined at length in Part Three, Chapter Two, where the format of the case history has allowed more comprehensive treatment.

(i) Verlaine

On the subject of Verlaine's relationships with other writers and artists, two areas are of particular importance for our purposes: his friendship with Rimbaud and his contact with the Impressionist painters and their circle. In speaking of Verlaine's contact with Impressionism, one is in good company; a number of critics have gone so far as to talk of the poet's 'impressionism', admittedly placing a variety of emphases on the term, among them Martino, Adam, Robichez, Borel, Nadal, Osmond, Praz, Zimmermann. The use of this borrowing from the terminology of painting is more than the reflection of the whim of critics or of their desire to find a word to define the 'vagueness' which is characteristic of so much of Verlaine's best poetry. The analogy goes much further than that, as some of the critics we have mentioned have hastened to point out.

J. Robichez has spoken of (54) 'les liaisons étroites qui unissent les Paysages belges et les Aquarelles aux intentions et aux procédés

(54) Oeuvres Poétiques (Garnier edition), p. 144.

des peintres impressionnistes, personnellement connus de Verlaine'.

Antoine Adam quotes from Nadal's book (which contains by far the most extensive study of Verlaine's impressionism to date) a reference to the similarity between Verlaine's poetic technique of the 1870s with what in painting was to become universally labelled as impressionism. Adam maintains that there is more involved than a resemblance of technique. The claim is made that, as a result of his friendship with figures connected with the movement, Verlaine became familiar with the æsthetic ambitions of the painters and, more or less deliberately, set about adopting their ideas and discoveries to the art of poetry. This suggestion, if confirmed, would certainly substantiate our own view that Impressionist painting may have helped Verlaine and Rimbaud in the eventual discovery of their most effective and original means of poetic expression. (55)

Antoine Adam also remarks that the poet's contact with the painters took place precisely during the period of the formulation of the ideas and techniques essential to Impressionism, in the years 1869-74. Verlaine had in fact made the acquaintance of Manet at Nina de Callias's salon. During the painting, by Fantin-Latour, of the portrait of the editors of Blémont's Renaissance, Verlaine was naturally in the company of this associate of the Impressionists. From Fantin-Latour, from Manet, from Forain, who was a great friend of Verlaine as well as of Rimbaud at this time, and from André Gill, Verlaine learned about and appreciated the theories and practice of Impressionism. The importance of Gill in this context should not be overlooked as it has been hitherto - his work provided an interesting bridge between pictorial and poetic impressionism, and what is more, his poetry appears to show the influence of discussions with Verlaine. His poem 'Impressionnisme' (and others) demonstrates a link between Verlaine's poetry and pictorial Impressionism as early as the mid-1870s (56).

(55) A. Adam, Verlaine, p. 113.

(56) See Part Two, Chapter Four.

An examination of Verlaine's correspondence from the period of his first stay in England certainly indicate his familiarity with the work of the Impressionist painters. Perhaps of special importance is the fact that it is in these letters that Verlaine reveals his new 'vocation' as a modernist. This partial æsthetic volte-face on the part of the creator of the Parnassian poems included in Poèmes Saturniens and the nostalgic evocation of the eighteenth century in Fêtes Galantes is more readily explained if one thinks in terms of the revelation of Impressionism.

After a visit to the National Gallery the poet complains: 'Nulle modernité, je mets à mille piques Monticelli au-dessus de Turner et Biard au-dessus de Hogarth.' (57) This remark demonstrates Verlaine's desire for modernism in art, and would even suggest that his enthusiasm had momentarily warped his æsthetic judgement! A perusal of the permanent French Gallery in London gives rise to a comment that shows Verlaine's knowledge of the young painters who were creating the great pictorial revolution: 'Rien de neuf, ici, si ce n'est la présence entr'autres tableaux français (Manet, Monet, Herpignies, Renoir, etc.) du Coin de table de Fantin.' (58)

Time and time again, the letters of this period show a passion for the bustle and excitement of modern life. In one particularly interesting passage, he contrasts modern London with the sites of the traditional Classical and Romantic bric-a-brac:

grâce à l'inouïe circulation des voitures, cabs, omnibus (infects, par parenthèse) tramways, chemins de fer incessants sur des ponts de fonte splendides, de grandeur lourde, passants incroyablement brutaux, criards (les canards doivent être d'origine anglaise), l'aspect des rues est, sinon parisien (ô blasphème!) du moins, très distrayant ... Au résumé, très inattendu, tout ça et cent fois plus amusant que les Italies, Espagnes, et autres bords du Rhin. (59)

(57) Correspondance de Paul Verlaine Messein, 1922-29, tom I p. 63.

(58) Ibid, p.84.

(59) Ibid, p. 43.

The emphasis on the 'amusant' would seem to suggest that the poet's main concern is now with the pleasure of real life. Devotion to the treasures and traditions of the past is a dusty intellectual pursuit, far better for the man and for the artist that he should enter fully into contemporary reality and endow his works with a sense of 'joie de vivre'.

Verlaine (together with Rimbaud) sometimes seems to have set about covering almost every square foot of London in his efforts to gather data from contemporary life. The descriptive passages in his letters are the only substantial material to survive from all this labour but he had intended that they should form the basis of a work entitled Croquis londoniens. Underwood (60) comments on this period:

Oui ce paysage londonien est complètement à son goût. Comme le temps, 'l'immense tourbillon de boue' de la Tamise est 'superbe', 'quelque chose comme un gigantesque goguenau débordant'. Le 24 septembre déjà, Londres est 'très bien', malgré sa laideur, sa platitude l'absence des monuments, car il y a toujours les 'interminables docks' qui suffisent d'ailleurs à sa 'poétique de plus en plus moderniste'. (61)

To some extent the events of the years 1870-71 had hastened Verlaine's transition to modernism by driving him from the Parnassian camp entirely. Leconte de Lisle and his faithful followers were anti-communards. Méral, Valade, Lepelletier, Blémont were pro-Commune, or at least against the atrocious treatment of the communards. The 'Vilains Bonshommes' dinners were started again and these were attended by the latter quartet as well as by newcomers, Jean Aicard, Ernest d'Hervilly and Pierre Elzéar. In April 1872, Blémont and other members of the group founded La Renaissance artistique et littéraire. It was to this group that Verlaine now attached himself, his old mentor, Leconte de Lisle, henceforth spoke of him only to express surprise that he had not yet been shot ! 'La vie' became the

(60) V. P. Underwood, Verlaine et l'Angleterre, p. 74.

(61) The Verlaine quotations are from Correspondance, tom. I, p.42 & p. 46 .

watchword of the new group tired of the 'artifice' and 'inhumanity' of Parnassianism. In a similar spirit Bourget and his friends were soon to form the 'Vivants' as we have already seen. A. Adam has said of this group of poets and writers to which Verlaine was intimately linked:

La poésie, à leurs yeux, doit exprimer la vie moderne, saisie dans ses aspects pittoresques ou captée à sa source, dans l'âme contemporaine, inquiète, nerveuse, déchirée entre les aspirations vers l'idéal et les attirances de la chair. (62)

a statement which points both their closeness to the Impressionist painters, who were familiar to this group, and to Baudelaire. This same common ground between Baudelaire and the Impressionists is found in Gill's poetry.

Verlaine's greatest work, the Romances sans paroles, was written during this period from early 1872 to early 1873 when his contacts with these writers and artists imbued with modernism were closest. These were also of course the years of his relationship with Rimbaud which we must now discuss.

Whilst we would agree with A. E. Carter when he said: 'The advent of Rimbaud was the central point of Verlaine's life ... without it he would never have written Romances sans paroles and Sagesse' (63), we cannot agree with those who hold that all that is great in the older poet's work can be attributed to the direct influence of Rimbaud. As we shall have cause to remark up to a point, Verlaine influenced Rimbaud's poetry and we would maintain that the rôle of Rimbaud was primarily to liberate Verlaine's genius and not to instil his own poetic ideas and practice in his companion in any detailed sense. It was thus that Verlaine had insisted on dedicating Romances sans paroles to Rimbaud 'parce que ces vers ont été faits, lui étant là et m'ayant poussé beaucoup à les faire.' (64) Likewise Rimbaud realised the liberating function he

(62) A. Adam, Verlaine, pp. 107-108.
(63) A. E. Carter, Verlaine, A Study in Parallels, p. 67.
(64) Oeuvres Complètes de Paul Verlaine Le Club du Meilleur Livre, tom.I p. 1039.

performed and in the famous letter written after Verlaine had left him stranded in London proclaimed: 'Avec moi seul tu peux être libre.' (65)

Antoine Blondin whilst referring to some of the ways in which Rimbaud may have influenced Verlaine's poetry wisely sets limits on this influence reminding us that some of the poet's 'innovations' in Romances sans paroles were already implicit in poetry written before he had met Rimbaud, and that the very title of the collection demonstrates a continuity with his earlier work:

Chansons ténues, A poor young shepherd, Street I, et chansons à peine murmurées toutes les Ariettes oubliées. On a beaucoup parlé à ce propos de l'influence de Rimbaud. On a rappelé son goût pour ce qu'il appelait les 'refrains niais', pour les ariettes de Favart, qu'il fit connaître à Verlaine, pour les rythmes impairs de Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, que les deux poètes lurent ensemble à Londres. Mais une influence n'est jamais peut-être unilatérale, et, ce souffle ailé, c'était celui déjà de la Chanson d'automne, dans les Poèmes saturniens. Le titre même des Romances sans paroles n'a pas, certes, été choisi sans dessein; emprunté à Mendelssohn, il l'est aussi à un vers d'A Clymène, dans les Fêtes galantes. (66)

Whatever conclusion one reaches on the extent of influence it is noteworthy that Verlaine became less adventurous when he lost his young companion. If Rimbaud did not actively encourage such fresh concepts as poetic impressionism (whether or not we associate that term with contemporary painting) in the mind of Verlaine (and it seems most likely that he did) it is certain that his presence was sufficient to give Verlaine confidence to take his own æsthetic insight to its logical conclusion. The Paysages belges are the most concentrated and consistent example of the poet's impressionistic poetry of contemporary reality and they were written as a result of what was probably the most carefree and exciting phase of his relationship with Rimbaud.

There is a third influence that must be borne in mind in any discussion of Verlaine and particularly of his treatment of contemporary reality and that is the influence of Baudelaire already referred to. This

(65) qu. in A. E. Carter, op. cit., p. 113.

(66) In 'Livres de poche' edition of La Bonne Chanson, Romances sans paroles and Sagesse, p. 178.

antedated the influence of both the modernist-impressionist circles of the 1870s and of Rimbaud. In fact, according to Verlaine himself, Baudelaire was the very first influence on his literary career: 'Mes premières lectures ou pour parler plus nettement, ma première, toute première lecture fut ... Les Fleurs du Mal, 1^{ère} édition, qu'un pion avait laissé traîner sur sa chaise et que je confisquai sans scrupule.'

(67) Of the poems he wrote in the years 1858-1862 probably the most interesting are those which show a clear affinity with the work of Baudelaire: 'Aspirations', 'La Mort', 'Fadaises', 'Un soir d'octobre', and 'Nocturne parisien'. Verlaine's interest in his great precursor went beyond reading his poetry for he also familiarised himself with the essays of literary and artistic criticism. (68) There is good reason to think that Baudelaire's was the most enduring of all the influences undergone by Verlaine, for a year before he died, he told an interviewer that whatever was most profound in his work, he owed to Baudelaire. (69) The article on Baudelaire written by Verlaine in 1865, (70) to which reference has already been made, would usefully bear re-examination here. It is particularly worth remarking that Verlaine singles out for special praise both his precursor's exploration of the realm of sensation in poems like 'Le Balcon' and 'Harmonie du Soir' (71) and his use of the contemporary urban scene:

... quel thème poétique, quel monde de comparaisons,
d'images et de correspondances ! Quelle source intarissable
de descriptions et de rêveries ! C'est ce qu'a compris
Baudelaire, génie parisien s'il en fut ... (72)

These were two of the themes which were to characterise Romances sans

(67) qu. in A. E. Carter, op. cit., p. 20.

(68) c.f. A. E. Carter, op. cit., p. 21.

(69) Publ. in L'Eclair 11th January 1896.

(70) In L'Art December 1865.

(71) c.f. A. E. Carter, op. cit., p. 29.

(72) qu. Ibid., p. 30.

paroles. Alternating feelings of fascination and repulsion at the life of the senses and of the world around him were to mark Verlaine's life as well as his work just as they had Baudelaire's.

It is clear that the most significant relationships in Verlaine's career either directly led him to, or encouraged him, in his belief in the poetic value of contemporary reality and this, of course, was to have a profound effect on both the subject-matter and the language of his poetry.

(ii) Rimbaud

Rimbaud is one of the most striking individualists in the history of literature; to attempt to see in his work the effect of the various literary influences of the 1870s would be considered blasphemous by many. There is a good deal of justification for rejecting, in his case, the usual notions of 'influence' and 'intellectual environment'. It is known that the young poet heaped scorn upon the members of the various literary cénacles he frequented in Paris, feeling that their ideas on poetry were hopelessly antiquated and misguided. Laforgue could be forgiven for his well-known remark: 'Rimbaud, fleur hâtive et absolue sans avant ni après.' (73) Despite this, it is doubtless true that the concept of Rimbaud as a unique and totally original phenomenon is often too rigidly accepted.

What were the possible influences on the poet? Since C. A. Hackett wrote his article on the subject (74) there can be little doubt that Verlaine's influence was decisive. It cannot be denied that in the long term Rimbaud was to give more than he received, but nevertheless it was Verlaine who first inspired Rimbaud to make bold innovations in his treatment of the alexandrine and also to embrace modern everyday

(73) Mélanges posthumes, p. 129.

(74) In Studies in Modern French Literature presented to P. Mansell Jones, pp. 163-180.

subjects in his poetry, e.g. 'Au Cabaret-Vert' and 'La Maline'. C. F. MacIntyre (75) suggested that Verlaine's poem 'L'Auberge' was one product of his wanderings with Rimbaud in Belgium, and was possibly inspired by the two Rimbaud poems referred to above. However, 'L'Auberge' was, in fact, first published in January 1868 in Le Hanneton. Such errors are easily made but they have contributed towards the idea that the exchanges between the two poets were entirely in one direction.

Through Verlaine, Rimbaud also became familiar with ^{the} nascent Impressionist movement, sitting daily with Verlaine for the celebrated Fantin-Latour group portrait. He also eagerly accompanied the older poet on his visits to the work of the young French painters on exhibition in London during their stay there. The remark made by Rimbaud to Verlaine on a visit to the Louvre to the effect that it was a pity that the Commune had not burned the whole collection has been misinterpreted as an indication that Rimbaud was totally careless of painting. (76) (We can be certain from 'Chant de guerre parisien' that Rimbaud knew the work of Corot). In fact, it should be regarded simply as evidence that he resented the 'accepted' forms in painting just as much as in poetry. There is a tendency here to forget just how traditional the contents of the Louvre was in the 1870s. The evidence available suggests that Rimbaud may have appreciated the new generation

(75) In Paul Verlaine. Selected Poems, p. 222. The error is corrected in Hackett's article.

(76) The remark is recorded in Lepelletier Paul Verlaine, p. 253. According to Richepin, Rimbaud's actual criticism was as follows: 'ça ? les hautes productions de l'art ? Dessin plat, couleur fade ... Et la vie ? Non, la vie n'y est pas ! banal et idiot.' qu. in Pierre Arnoult, Rimbaud p. 167.

of painters in France and even possibly the pre-Raphaelites in England.

(77) Of particular interest is the young poet's friendship with Forain.

It seems that for a certain period the artist was as close to Rimbaud as

(77) 'Ophélie' may well have been inspired by Millais's painting, well known in France since the exhibition of 1855. See also de Graaf's article 'Arthur Rimbaud a-t-il connu Oliver Madox Brown ?' The only substantial evidence we have with regard to Impressionism is Rimbaud's interest in their work in London

... his friendship with Forain, and the Fantin-Latour sittings. However, the subjects of some of his poems have a great deal in common with pictorial Impressionism as does the treatment of such subjects e.g. 'Au Cabaret-Vert'. Considerable prestige was lent to the argument that at the very least there is a close parallel between Rimbaud's poetry and Impressionist painting by Suzanne Bernard in her article 'Rimbaud, Proust et les Impressionnistes'. The art of ~~the~~ the Illuminations is seen as that of 'un peintre qui, regardant un paysage sous un angle insolite, décrirait les objets tels qu'ils lui apparaissent et non tels qu'il les sait être ...' (art. cit. p.258). Rimbaud's collection is characterised by the abandonment of rational links, relationships and demarcations; reality is approached with near total immediacy and subjectivism. Indeed, it is suggested that there is more in question than mere parallelism: 'il n'est pas possible que par Forain, par Fantin ou par les autres artistes qu'ils fréquentaient, Rimbaud et Verlaine n'aient pas été mis au courant des techniques propres à un groupement qui commençait à faire parler de lui ...' (art. cit. p.260). One is reminded that although Impressionism did not receive its baptism until 1874, it had existed since the Grenouillère paintings of 1869, that Fantin-Latour was a member of Monet's circle, and had already, in 1870, executed his Atelier aux Batignolles, that Émile Blémont, another of Rimbaud's friends, was an admirer and defender of Monet. The influence of the Impressionists would help explain not only the 'physiological subjectivity' of the Illuminations but also what Suzanne Bernard calls Rimbaud's 'colorisme':

Quand on lit les quolibets de journalistes vers 1874, à propos des "campagnes violettes des fleurs rouges, des rivières noires, des femmes jaunes ou vertes" représentées sur les tableaux Impressionnistes, on comprend combien il a fallu que notre vision de monde soit transformée par l'Impressionnisme pour que nous reconstruions sans étonnement, dans les Illuminations, une 'ombre violette', ou un 'sable rose et orange' lavé par un 'ciel vineux', ou encore la boue 'noire et rouge' des grandes villes (évidemment à cause des reflets rougeoyants des lampes sur la boue, la nuit). Je ne puis lire le paragraphe suivant sans que surgisse à mes yeux un tableau impressionniste, où la matière est traversée, transformée par la lumière:

A la lisière de la forêt - les fleurs de rêve tintent, éclatent, éclairent - la fille à lèvres d'orange, les genoux croisés dans le clair déluge qui sourd des prés, nudité qu'ombrent, traversent et habillent les arcs-en-ciel, la flore, la mer.

(art. cit. p.261, The Rimbaud quotation is from 'Enfance', I)

anyone including Verlaine. For a while they shared the same apartment in the Rue Campagne-Première. The two would study the paintings in the Louvre together, and Forain executed several portraits of Rimbaud. The poet cannot have failed to note the artist's interest in always conveying what he was to call 'le sens général de l'actualité'. Later the two continued to correspond, though little of this correspondence has survived. At one stage Forain acted as go-between for Verlaine and Rimbaud in order to deceive the former's wife, and he became one of the earliest disseminators of Rimbaud's work. Moreover, there can be little doubt that the two discussed literary matters. Forain's attempts at writing prose poems, of which two - 'La Danse des pantins' and 'Parisianismes-Dames du comptoir' - were published in La Renaissance artistique et littéraire in August in November 1873, would suggest the promptings of Rimbaud. (78) Another painter in touch with contemporary developments, whom Rimbaud was to know well in London, was Félix Régamey

An interesting acquaintance of this period who was connected with the Impressionist movement was Cabaner who was to become a champion of the young painters as he also was of the works of François Villon. This musician who loved painting and poetry also tried his hand at writing the latter. Rimbaud met Cabaner through Charles de Sivry and Charles Cros with whom he lived in the October of 1871. It also seems likely that the painter and caricaturist Michel de l'Hay joined the trio in this period. (79)

In Verlaine, Forain and Cabaner, Rimbaud had encountered three men able to appreciate the value of contemporary reality in both painting and poetry, and in Cros and Sivry, two men aware of the value of the humour and simplicity of the popular song form. It is surely probable

(78) At the end of 1873, Forain distributed some copies of Une Saison en Enfer and in 1874 entrusted a series of manuscripts that Rimbaud had given him to Bertrand Millanvoe. For much of the information given above, we are indebted to D. A. de Graaf's article 'Autour de Rimbaud'. (L. Vaillat's En écoutant Forain also provides useful information; v. especially pp.101-3 & p.111).

(79) v. D. A. de Graaf 'Autour de Rimbaud', Revue des Sciences Humaines, 1956, p.311 et seq.

that these contacts stimulated, or at least confirmed, the young poet's interest in these fields. Moreover, it seems that Rimbaud came to know the poets who, at this time, were formulating ideas on modernism. If we are to believe Jean Richepin's 'souvenirs inédits' of Rimbaud and Nouveau, he, Raoul Ponchon and the painter, Jolibois, were introduced to Rimbaud by Forain and for a while shared the same accommodation as 'camarades de bohème'. Bourget and Richepin were certainly amongst the earliest admirers of Rimbaud. (Richepin thought that Bourget was the first purchaser of Les Illuminations). Conversely, it appears that Rimbaud maintained a somewhat surprising interest in the work of Richepin, for, in 1891, he recommended some of the latter's prose passages to his sister at Roche. (80) Rimbaud was also, for a time, on good terms with Léon Valade, himself associated with the Impressionists, and one of the few established poets to admire and encourage the young poet.

One writer whose importance for an understanding of Rimbaud's poetry has been underestimated is Jules Verne. His influence is perhaps most discernible in 'Le Bateau ivre' but on a more general level, it contributed to Rimbaud's fascination with the achievements of modern technology and his hope that these might make possible real progress for mankind.

Before ending this ~~consideration of~~ some of the possible personal influences on Rimbaud, it would perhaps be useful to clarify a possibly misleading statement in the edition in the Pléiade series of Rimbaud's complete works. (81) The confusion concerns the Album Zutique; the editor talk of Rimbaud's association with the 'Cercle Zutique' and rightly discusses his contribution to the album as a product of this association. The 'Cercle Zutique' should not be confused with the 'Zutistes'

(80) This information is mostly to be found in Revue de France 1st January 1927, pp. 119-43.

(81) 'Pléiade' O.C. p.1051, (1972 edition).

who did not come into existence until 1883 when the cénacle of that name was founded by Charles Cros. In fact the latter who had been concerned in the production of the album decided on the name for nostalgic reasons. (82)

In general terms Rimbaud has much in common with the two significant movements in the poetry of the 1870s, the modernist-impressionist movement and the Parnassian-Primitivist movement. In a way it is surprising to find this revolutionary adolescent having anything in common with the Parnassians, but a glance through 'Soleil et Chair' and 'Ophélie' suffices to show that such a view is well justified. Of course it would be foolish to suggest that Rimbaud was essentially a Parnassian but it is clear that he passed through a Parnassian phase and that the primitivist ingredient of Parnassianism remained a dominating feature in his work throughout his brief poetic career. Moreover, Parnassianism becomes one of the objects of ironic cultural allusion in his poetry.

(82) Several books on the cénacles of the 1880s make this quite clear e.g. Ernest Raynaud's La Mêlée symboliste.

(iii) Corbière

Corbière is in the remarkable position of having been more unjustly served by posterity than even Laforgue, though fortunately the situation seems to be in the process of being remedied. (83)

One reason for this neglect, which has been far more comprehensive in France than in the Anglo-Saxon countries, is that the Breton poet appears an even more isolated 'fleur hâtive' than Rimbaud did to Laforgue. He has been dismissed as a 'minor poet (with) ... a note of originality ...

(83) One may still regret that Corbière shares his 'Pléiade' volume with Gros who, for all his merits, is not a poet of the same magnitude as Corbière. The impression is still thereby given of Corbière the minor poet; the more so as Gros's work appears first in the volume.

(whose) ... love and knowledge of the sea is a genuine if not very deep vein of inspiration'. (84) In retrospect his work in fact appears as an organic part of the development discussed in this thesis away from traditional poetic rhetoric to a poetry capable of formulating the complex and elusive phenomena of experienced reality. To this development his contribution was outstanding even if largely unheeded. Yet one cannot talk of reactions and developments unless one presumes a knowledge on the part of Corbière of the state of French poetry in the 1860s and 1870s and the tradition it largely perpetuated; this knowledge critics, until 1960 (and the publication of Sonnenfeld's study) rarely attributed to him.

Paradoxically, although until recent years the great bulk of the critical work in Corbière studies has been biographical, little information illuminating the evolution of his aesthetic ideas has been unearthed, few useful reminiscences by his contemporaries, hardly any correspondence except that dating from his childhood, practically no other documentation. It is, indeed, unlikely that any further significant discoveries will be made. One is largely limited to evidence within his poetry in discussing influences the poet may have undergone and his reaction to the poetic tradition. Some might argue that this is not altogether a disadvantage.

Let us consider the little evidence there is of his direct contact with the writers and artists who were coming to an understanding of the value of contemporary reality in art. Until the spring of 1872, when Corbière went to join 'Marcelle' in the capital, his life had been spent far removed from the Parisian world of letters; his only long absence from

(84) Charvet, A literary history of France, v. p. 83. The writer ungenerously concludes 'Corbière could perhaps have become a great poet of the sea or of Brittany ...'(!).

Brittany had been his trip to Italy in 1869. Moreover, there is no evidence that he corresponded with anyone in Paris or subscribed to any literary or artistic periodicals. His certain contacts with the artistic and literary milieu of Paris before 1872 may be reduced to two. The first such contact was via Gabriel de La Landelle, the maritime poet and novelist, whose name is usually evoked in connection with his influence on Corbière's sea poems, as it will also be by us. However, this friend of the family, whom Corbière saw regularly at Morlaix and Roscoff after 1868, was active in the literary and scientific world of Paris. A close collaborator of Nadar, the friend and photographer of Baudelaire, he was especially interested in two manifestations of human progress - air travel and the creation of a universal language. In 1863 he and Nadar had coined the word 'aviation'. What Corbière may have learnt from La Landelle one cannot say; certainly there is no evidence in his work of the poetry of progress which this contact might have been thought to have inspired. On the other hand he may have been encouraged in the treatment of modern life in his poetry, particularly through any discussions about Baudelaire. The second contact was of longer duration but scarcely less elusive for the researcher. Every summer from 1863 onwards a group of Parisian painters came to stay at the pension Le Gad in Roscoff where Corbière had all his meals. With them he struck up a friendship that was to last until his death. Several things should be noted about these nine painters: the first is that they were all landscapists and/or genre painters and thus representatives to some extent of the treatment of contemporary reality in art; second, as a consequence of their interest they excluded themselves from the most profitable and respectable fields of painting - the portrait and the history picture; third, as all this may indicate, they were

rebels against tradition (and incidentally admirers of Baudelaire):

Dans la fréquentation des peintres montmartrois ...
Tristan avait trouvé quelque stimulant pour sa "contre-offensive", On citait La Charogne, on chantait des obscénités, on jouait les matamores en gilets rouges. (85);

fourth, they all belonged to the artistic milieu of Montmartre and seem to have been well aware of the latest developments: Corbière's references to Manet and Courbet (86) must surely be a result of his association with these painters (an explanation based solely on his reading of Baudelaire (87) does little to clarify why these should be the only modern painters he names - on the basis of a reading of Baudelaire he would have been far more likely to have mentioned Delacroix, Ingres or many other painters living or dead); finally, Corbière seems to have found in these painters his first audience and admirers for his talents, both as a caricaturist in the mould of Daumier, and as a poet (88). Thus, in conclusion, one may say that this second contact resulted in Corbière deciding on his form of anti-traditional, humorous and realistic poetry for which he found both a stimulus and an encouraging response. (89)

In 1872 he came to live in Paris but his movements and associations there remain as tantalising as before. One of his painter friends, Lafenestre, found him a room in Montmartre. A few weeks later he moved to accommodation in the ninth arrondissement but kept in close touch with the painters and their circle. He is generally supposed not to have attended the literary cafés but

(85) J. Rousselot, Tristan Corbière, p. 71.

(86) Oeuvres Complètes Ed. de la Pléiade hereafter referred to as O.C., p. 777. (Idylle coupée).

(87) Such a suggestion was made by P.-O. Walzer in his introduction to O.C., p. 672. Incidentally Walzer's remarks contain a slight oversight when he suggests that only four artists - Callot, Raphael, Manet and Courbet - are named by Corbière (idem.); Rembrandt is also named: O.C., p. 717 and p. 777.

(88) Ibid., p. 672 and Rousselot, Tristan Corbière, p. 72.

(89) The painters concerned were Bouquet, Besnard (not the famous Paul-Albert Besnard), Lafenestre, Dufour, Brenner, Degesne, Jacque, Noir and Hamon. Some acquired a degree of fame in their lifetime, notably Dufour, Lafenestre, Hamon and Jacque. The latter was the last surviving member of the Barbizon school.

there is no real evidence either way. He was certainly an habitué of the studios and of the artistic cafés. In the summer he returned to Brittany with 'Marcelle' and Rodolphe and then followed them back to Paris in the autumn. Yet in 1873 this exiled Breton with apparently no literary connections did some surprising things. He decided to publish his poems which duly appeared in August after short and almost expert negotiations and supervision. Before this publication, and after, he successfully offered some of his poems to the review La Vie Parisienne. In 1874 he was again successful with two prose pieces in the same review. Without the assistance of some friends in the literary world commonsense would incline one to the view that all this would have been well-nigh impossible. Moreover there is the evidence of the review of Les Amours Jaunes in Blémont's Renaissance - a remarkably favourable review. A book produced in such inauspicious circumstances as Corbière's poems (including the fact that it came out in the 'dead' month of August) would normally have passed completely unnoticed - as indeed, at first, it did! The review appeared only some months later. One may imagine a situation where Corbière had made the acquaintance of the group of progressive artists and writers centred on the Renaissance who encouraged him to publish, and also found him the opening in the Vie Parisienne. When it looked as though his volume had been passed over in monumental silence Blémont took it upon himself to right the situation. This extremely tenuous hypothesis is supported by the vague claims of the former members of the 'Vivants' group, after Verlaine had 'discovered' Corbière in 1884, that they had known of his work since 1873. The influence of Corbière upon one member of the group, Richepin, is now generally

accepted. (90) Thus there is a possibility that Corbière's modernistic poems of Paris were written with the encouragement of the poets connected with 'Le Vivants' who at that very time were advocating the poetic depiction of modern life.

Corbière's connections with the Parisian world of art and letters were few, but the little that we know of them indicates that they were not of a kind to discourage him from treating contemporary reality in his poetry, in fact just the reverse. (91)

What may one learn from an examination of Corbière's poetry itself? Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the poet vis-a-vis his craft is an apparently disarming modesty. He speaks of his lack of artistic endeavour. But a moment's reflection makes the reader realise that these declarations are part of an attack on established literary values. 'Décourageux' traces perfectly the shift from apparent modesty to an attack on such values and something close to the glorification of self:

Ce fut un vrai poète: il n'avait pas de chant ...
Peintre: il aimait son art - Il oublia de peindre ...
Ô vous tous qui gâchez, maçons de la pensée! ... (92)

(90) See O.C., p. 688 and A Sonnenfeld, L'Oeuvre poétique de Tristan Corbière, Chapter Eleven. Bourget would seem to have known little about Corbière or he would surely have enabled Laforgue to arrive at a new style long before 1883 when the latter unconsciously adopted something akin to Corbière's manner in Les Amours Jaunes of which he was almost certainly unaware.

(91) The 'traditional' view of Corbière's isolation was expressed forcefully by Émile Henriot in Poètes français de Lamartine à Valéry:

'Corbière est en dehors de tout. Il ne ressemble à personne; il ne faisait partie d'aucun cénacle, d'aucun groupe; il n'avait pas d'amis littéraires, et ayant vécu toute sa courte vie en Bretagne, de l'existence du marin, le bref passage qu'il fit avant de mourir, à Paris, ne l'a mêlé en rien aux milieux des lettres de son temps ...' (op.cit., pp. 236-37).

This leaves too many things unexplained: Corbière's knowledge of Baudelaire, of Courbet and of Manet; his familiarity with the art of printing and his success in getting material published; the favourable review in the Renaissance.

(92) O.C., p. 766.

The whole of established literature is bundled up for disposal in the third sonnet of 'Paris' and in the conclusion of 'Un Jeune qui s'en va': (93)

Poète - Après? ... Il faut la chose:
Le Parnasse en escalier,
Les Dégoutés, et la Chlorose,
Les Bedeaux, les Fous à lier ...

L'Incompris couche avec sa pose,
Sous le zinc d'un mancenillier;
Le Naïf "voudrait que la rose,
Dondé! fût encore au rosier!"

"La rose au rosier, Dondaine!"
On a le pied fait à sa chaîne.
"La rose au rosier" ... - Trop tard! -
"La rose au rosier" ... - Nature!
On est essayeur, pédicure,
Ou quelque'autre chose dans l'art! (94)

- Décès: Rolla: - l'Académie -
Murger, Baudelaire: - hôpital, -
Lamartine: - en perdant la vie
De sa fille, en strophes pas mal ...

Doux bedeau, pleureuse en lèveite,
Harmonieux tronc des moissonnés,
Inventeur de la larme écrite,
Lacrymatoire d'abonnés! ...

Moreau - j'oubliais - Hégésippe,
Créateur de l'art-hôpital ...
Depuis, j'ai la phtisie en grippe;
Ce n'est plus même original.

- Escousse encore: mort en extase
De lui; mort phtisique d'orgueil.
- Gilbert: phtisie et paraphrase
Rentrée, en se pleurant à l'oeil.

- Un autre incompris: Lacenaire,
Faisant des vers en amateur
Dans le goût anti-poitrinaire,
Avec Sanson pour éditeur.

- Lord Byron, gentleman-vampire,
Hystérique du ténébreux;
Anglais sec, cassé par son rire,
Son noble rire de lèpreux.

(93) Where even Baudelaire is not spared!

(94) O.C., pp. 706-07.

- Hugo: l'Homme apocalyptique,
l'Homme-Ceci-tûra-cela,
Meurt, gardenational épique;
Il n'en reste qu'un - celui-là!

... Puis un tas d'amants de la lune,
Guère plus morts qu'ils n'ont vécu,
Et changeant de fosse commune
Sans un discours, sans un écu! (95)

Corbière's 'debt' to Baudelaire is very considerable. Most obviously it is to be seen in his poetry of Paris: 'Paris diurne' and 'Paris nocturne' were so clearly derived from 'Le Crépuscule du Matin' and 'Le Crépuscule du Soir' that Corbière did not include them in the 1873 edition of Les Amours Jaunes. However he did include one poem which is a deliberate parody of one of Baudelaire's most celebrated pieces; 'Bonne fortune et fortune' is based on 'A une Passante'. Corbière's poem is a vision of total banality (or almost) in contrast with Baudelaire's lyricised version of

(95) Ibid., p. 731.

his encounter. Corbière saves his punchline until the end. The reader knows that Baudelaire's poem ended with a mysterious exchange of glances and wonders if Corbière has been so lucky; but, no. Instead of holding out her hand in love the passer-by hands him two sous - her smile must have been a smile of pity:

Moi, je fais mon trottoir, quand la nature est belle,
Pour la passante qui, d'un petit air vainqueur,
Voudra bien crocheter, du bout de son ombrelle,
Un clin de ma prunelle ou la peau de mon coeur ...

Et je me crois content - pas trop! - mais il faut vivre:
Pour promener un peu sa faim, le gueux s'enivre ...

Un beau jour - quel métier! - je faisais, comme ça,
Ma croisière. - Métier! ... - Enfin, Elle passa
- Elle qui? - La Passante! Elle, avec son ombrelle!
Vrai valet de bourreau, je la frôlai ... - mais Elle

Me regarda tout bas, souriant en dessous,
Et ... me tendit sa main, et

M'a donné deux sous. (96)

It is interesting to remark that the sting of the parody is not directed at Baudelaire but at Corbière himself whose foolish romantic hopes end in typical rejection and ridicule. The theme of love and women constitutes, in fact, another area of similarity between the two poets. The impossibility of true communion in love is the subject of part of 'Fleur d'art' (97) as it was of Baudelaire's 'Duellum'. In both poets the desire for vengeance for betrayal in love leads to sadism: in 'Elizir d'Amor' (98) and, for example, in Baudelaire's 'L'Héautontimorouménos'. Woman is associated with a sense of sin and presented as a tempting serpent in Corbière's 'Vendetta' (99) and in Baudelaire's 'Le Revenant'. (100) In addition both poets have a common feeling of isolation and claustrophobia

(96) O.C., p. 727.

(97) Ibid., p. 738.

(98) Ibid., p. 750.

(99) Ibid., p. 752.

(100) There are other similarities in the treatment of women. Both poets use animal metaphors to evoke female sensuality - Baudelaire, cats ('Le Chat'), Corbière, a horse (A la Douce Amie).

expressed in 'Le Poète contumace' (100) and in such poems by Baudelaire as 'Spleen'. Both poets are aware of the never-ending progress of time which is dragging them to their death, as one sees in Corbière's 'Heures' (102) and in Baudelaire's 'L'Horloge'.

Even from the brief remarks above it will be quite obvious that Corbière was far from being the isolated phenomenon he has sometimes been claimed to be. He was aware of both tradition and innovation in French poetry, and even, to a small degree, in the arts. The poetic tradition represented a standard against which he reacted with all his strength but it incidentally became a not insignificant part of the substance of his poetry in the form of parody and cultural allusion. From the positive influences of his poetry he acquired a willingness to treat contemporary reality and his own personal experience of life, unafraid that he would be a victim of the pitfalls of Romantic sentimentality.

(101) O.C., p. 743, lines ninety-one to ninety-four.

(102) Ibid., p. 753.

PART TWO

Chapter One

NEW PERSPECTIVES(a) The Poet Isolated from Modern Society

Reference has already been made to the importance of rebellion against, and divorce from, respectable bourgeois society as influences and motives in Baudelaire's treatment of contemporary reality. It has been seen how this rebellion received its catalyst in the poet's contact with the semi-autonomous society of the Bohemia of the political, literary and artistic intelligentsia. In the last chapter it was shown that the young poets after 1870 increasingly organised themselves into groups with provocative titles representing a self-contained world, the joys of which they celebrated in their verse whilst expressing concern that one day they would be forced to come to terms with society at large. These are instances of a widespread tendency.

There are at least two, very good, reasons for examining the phenomenon of the poet's separation from society in late nineteenth-century France in the context of the present study. The first is simply that this separation, however he construed it, was one of the most striking of his experiences of contemporary reality. The second is that it led to particular attitudes towards the treatment of contemporary reality generally in poetry. Of course the phenomenon was not peculiar to the late nineteenth century nor to poetry. French writers and artists of originality seem to have expected this ostracism as part of their condition since the Romantic period when it was already a recurrent theme. Paradoxically, however, the Romantics still fairly frequently held the belief (shown, for example, by their association with the utopian thinkers of the period) that they might yet be socially relevant and that popularity could be combined with genuine excellence and devotion to the highest qualities of art. Hugo maintained a kind of balance between artistic integrity and the quest for popular success throughout his career but this obliged him to change horses with disturbing frequency. At the nineteenth century progressed such compromise became

increasingly unusual; indeed Hugo seems for a considerable time to have been the only master among the poets of this special talent. By the end of the period under special scrutiny in the present study popular success was considered per se to be an indication that a work of poetry was second rate. The young poets of the 1870s and 1880s had, in the view of one commentator, been united by their 'amour désintéressé des lettres et la haine de la littérature vénale.....tout talent préconisé par la foule, fut-il réel, leur était suspect... Pour accentuer leur mépris de toute speculation commerciale, ils s'efforçaient de se rendre inaccessibles au public....'(1).

One may perhaps detect three moments of crisis in the strained relationship between poet and public each having repercussions in France for the rest of the nineteenth century. The first, coming early in the century, could be interpreted as a direct result of the fall of the ancien régime. The poet ceased to have an accepted place in the system of patronage or, more accurately, the aristocracy (and their imitators from the wealthier bourgeoisie) were replaced as patrons by a new ascendant bourgeoisie of bluntly materialistic ambitions deeply sceptical, after the political vicissitudes and rhetoric of three decades, of 'ideals' or all things unpractical in politics, art and almost anything else. The poets compromised in this situation oscillated between a bitter nostalgia for a primitive role as seer and respected guide within ancient societies and a real hope that the materialistic bourgeois age might provide a new place for the poet and a new set of themes for poetry. Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Laforgue, among others, were all, at times, to be genuinely excited by the prospect of a new public for poetry and a new age in which they might play a part. (Of course, poets might take up a wide range of positions between these extremes, including satirical reference to contemporary society or the eulogy of everyday pleasures to the exclusion of concern for larger questions. Something of the variety of these attitudes will be seen in this and the next chapter). The Romantics faced this first crisis with considerable resilience either by providing

(1) E. Raynaud, 'Chronique littéraire', Le Décadent, 15-31 January 1888.

their own brand of escapism from the tedium and ugliness of everyday existence in the industrial age, or, conversely, by allying themselves with the technological revolution as heralds of material and social progress. Hugo proved that it was not impossible to have a foot in both camps.

The second crisis, occurring in the 1840s, made both positions taken up by the Romantics virtually untenable. The first aspect of the crisis, clearly marked in 1843, was a shift in public taste. The second aspect was the disillusionment consequent upon the events of 1848-52. The death-knell of Romanticism proper was sounded by the striking failure of Les Burgraves in 1843. The taste was no longer for medieval castles, Ossianic reveries, extraordinary passions and fantastic plots. The gulf between Romantic literature and a civilisation created by and for a materialistic bourgeois society had widened to the point where contact was only infrequently possible. Never, before the middle of the nineteenth century, had poets felt so remote from the society in which they lived, or so neglected. The large number of explicit references to be found in French poetry from Romanticism onwards to the role of the poet as seer, prophet, mystic or metaphysical superman is symptomatic of this situation and of the failure of the 1848 Revolution in which many writers had directly involved themselves. The excessively grandiose claims of the poets are a reaction to their treatment in a materialistic society. As A. W. Raitt remarks in his excellent book on Villiers de l'Isle-Adam:

L'abîme qui s'ouvrait entre le bourgeois et l'artiste est un des phénomènes les plus frappants de l'histoire culturelle du siècle dernier. (2)

The poets did not always seek compensation for this 'abîme' in declaring themselves superior beings content to look for absolute truth (or a similar ideal) in their ivory tower (3) but sometimes turned to the attack.

As early as 1835 it had been Vigny's intention in writing Chatterton to demonstrate this gulf between poet and public. The idea is re-echoed in Baudelaire's 'L'Albatros' and Gautier's 'L'Oiseau Captif' (4). The neglect

(2) Villiers de l'Isle Adam, p.166.

(3) Which was almost exactly what Mallarmé did, in his case to the greater glory of poetry.

(4) Poésies, (Athlone Press), p.64.

by the bourgeoisie and their malevolence, shown by their readiness to use the weapon of legal prosecution in the cases of Baudelaire, Flaubert, Mendès, Richepian and many others, were countered by abuse and irony. This is perhaps the major origin of the ironic realist literature of the period. It is in this context that one must see the creation of fictional characters (already anticipated by Vigny's John Bell and Stendhal's Monsieur de Rênal) such as Flaubert's Homais, Verlaine's Monsieur Prudhomme and Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's Tribulat Bonhomet and also appreciate the provocative tone of Baudelaire's 'Au lecteur' and the violence of Rimbaud's 'Orgie parisienne' and Lautréamont's 'Les Chants de Maldoror'. Although one of Baudelaire's motives for writing poetry about contemporary society was probably to show that any material could be made into great art, he was sometimes no more objective than Flaubert who made the same claim. Both share with Leconte de Lisle and numerous others a highly emotional antipathy towards the complacent society evident in Baudelaire's sadistic poetry (5) and hardly disguised by artistic intention in Flaubert's 'Bouvard et Pécuchet' (6).

Some aspects of the literary climate after 1848 are well illustrated by the ideas and poetry of Leconte de Lisle, one of the poets most gravely disillusioned by involvement in politics. Of his own times he accepted gladly only the methods developed by scientists and used these in the poetic re-discovery of the past. The rejection of contemporary materialist society is implicit in his whole work but only becomes a motive for direct satire in a small number of poems such as 'Les Montreurs' and 'Aux Modernes'. The main characteristics of Leconte de Lisle's work, at least as far as his intentions are concerned, are already apparent in his first collection the 'Poèmes Antiques'

(5) e.g. 'A celle qui est trop gaie'.

(6) It may be said that the works we have mentioned are part of a long tradition going back to Villon, or even Juvenal and Aristophanes. This is true and it is also noteworthy that satire is one genre which has always by its very nature made extensive reference to contemporary reality - which is one reason why the three writers we have just named are sometimes difficult to read; we no longer grasp the significance of all the allusions they make. Just as the satirical and witty works of Guys, Gavarni and Daumier are acknowledged to have set an example of contemporaneity that was followed by the painters associated with Impressionism, so the literary satirical tradition is related to the poetry of contemporary reality.

of 1852. In the preface to this volume the poet informs the reader that the poems are intended as scientific studies; his poetry is not aimed at a popular audience but instead sets out to be 'archaïque et savant'. Such considerations as popularity are irrelevant for poetry is 'la langue sacrée' not something to be offered lightly to the vulgar masses or the 'plèbe carnassière' as he was to call them in 'Des Montreurs'. One scarcely needs to remark on the affinities between the creole poet's views on the exclusiveness of poetry and the sacerdotal role of the poet and the ideas of Mallarmé. (7) Leconte de Lisle considers modern poetry to be decadent; the Romantics have ruined French poetry by the constant repetition of their personal problems and emotions: 'il y a dans l'aveu public des angoisses du coeur et de ses voluptés non moins amères une vanité et une profanation gratuites'. He also attacks those who have used poetry for political or social purposes (8) and those who merely seek to win acclaim. Poetry had been betrayed and the poet had lost the role he enjoyed in ancient times of 'l'éducateur du genre humain' (9). He concludes that poetry and science must again become one by which he means that poetry must become more scholarly and austere and that poetry should be recognised as the highest science for it gives Man knowledge of beauty and of his relationship with nature. (10).

-
- (7) This attitude begins with Romanticism but was more likely to have been acquired by Mallarmé from the Parnassians than from the Romantics.
- (8) A 'misguided' aesthetic which he himself shared before 1848. Like Baudelaire his vehemence would indicate a desire to purge himself of his former illusions and naïveté.
- (9) That this aesthetic position is governed to some extent by personal embitterment is suggested by the fact that it was precisely the position of teacher of the people that he had so ardently desired before 1848. He maintains his hope that poets may fulfil that function in society but the way he saw them performing that rôle was greatly changed. From educating the people through telling them of a new form of society Leconte de Lisle has moved to the revelation of beauty itself, through art, as the only worthwhile form of education - an ideal better insulated from the vagaries of history and politics.
- (10) In retrospect one is forced to the conclusion that the poet's main motive in concentrating on the scholarly recreation of the past was an intellectual and artistic escapism. The escapist desire is clearly expressed in the preface to the Poèmes et Poésies of 1855 written in the face of Du Camp's campaigning: 'Plût aux dieux, en effet, que je me fusse retiré au fond des antres de Samothrace ou des sanctuaires de l'Inde.' Leconte de Lisle had always loved the Greek myths and had once seen them as the symbols of republican and socialist ideals but after 1848 his interest in them became entirely that of the primitivist, scientist and impassive poet.

This preface was certainly one of the factors instrumental in provoking the campaign headed by Du Camp. In turn Leconte de Lisle used the preface to the Poèmes et Poesies of 1855 to reply to Du Camp. This preface is a reaffirmation in even stronger terms of the ideas of 1852. The poet admits that he loathes modern civilisation, that he finds the idea of referring to modern technological inventions in poetry both boring and repugnant:

Les hymnes et les odes inspirées par la vapeur et la télégraphie électrique m'émouvant médiocrement et toutes ces périphrases didactiques n'ayant rien de commun avec l'art, me démontreraient plutôt que les poètes deviennent d'heure en heure plus inutiles aux sociétés modernes!

With possible exaggeration he maintains that the only creation of post-classical literature or civilisation that can be held to match those of antiquity is the figure of the Virgin Mary which, for him, provided a new kind of purity, grace and goodness.

Leconte de Lisle maintained this extreme position until his death in 1894. Some of his attitudes were of great importance in the period 1870-1887 when much of his work was produced and when Parnassianism was still highly influential upon even very original poets such as Rimbaud and Mallarmé. A deep loathing for contemporary society, materialist and philistine, and the desire to escape into a hypothetical past golden age of universal harmony or into a world of primitive simplicity where sensual pleasure was not made an object of guilt by hypocritical moral codes were features of some of the best poetry after 1870. All these were also aspects of Leconte de Lisle's work. Yet his realisation and acceptance of the poet's separation from contemporary society was not without ambiguity. The reluctance to dispense with the discoveries of science is found again in Rimbaud and in Laforgue where they are not only a source of thematic material but also a reason for some optimism. (Indeed Leconte de Lisle himself did not completely abandon a tenuous hope in the future as the vision in 'Gain' of a future Eden made by man clearly shows). Laforgue's aesthetics is based very largely upon the idea of evolution, which had been treated several times by Leconte de Lisle, and upon science's revelation that neither the world nor our perception of it were stable and unchanging. Moreover, careful notation of sensual experience in some of Le-

conte de Lisle's best poetry (11) may be held to have anticipated the fascination shown by some of the poets after 1870 for the impressionistic vision of life which was in part a product of work by scientists like Helmholtz. Indeed, critics at the time went so far as to associate Parnassianism with Impressionist painting (12).

If one of Leconte de Lisle's reactions to society's alienation from the poet was to escape from contemporary reality there was another, outlined above, which had fruitful consequences for the poetic treatment of contemporary reality. Leconte de Lisle derived real consolation for his failure in the realm of practical social action and for the many shortcomings of late nineteenth century French society in the thought that the world was subject to perpetual change and in the poetic evocation of this transitoriness. A predictable extension of this attitude was his belief, in late life, in the doctrine of Maya according to which the world of our perception may be merely illusory.

Leconte de Lisle's attitude to contemporary reality was far from being entirely negative. Yet his refusal to treat modern life directly, except in a few instances, makes it easier to see him as a precursor of Mallarmé and of the 'escapist' poetry of the 1880s and 1890s (rather than the poetry of Corbière, Verlaine, Rimbaud and Laforgue which took account of the many facets of contemporary reality) and may be directly contrasted with Baudelaire's attitude to modernity. (13). Furthermore his bitter response to the established society of his times did not extend to an assault on the conventions of French prosody and poetic language except in the use of a large and erudite vocabulary calculated to protect 'la langue sacrée' from the attention of unworthy readers. This meant that the task of finding a poetic language capable of formulating transitory experience had to be left to younger poets.

The cumulative process of the separation of poet and society accelerated

(11) See below, pp. 549-51.

(12) See below, p. 581.

(13) Leconte de Lisle's rejection of his own times was such that the incongruity of his being seen on an omnibus was a source of considerable amusement to Laforgue.

again after 1870 (14). This third crisis although partly the product of historical events may also be related to the nature of the French public's literary taste but, perhaps most of all, to the highly original nature of poetic developments in the period.

A recurrence of post-revolutionary disillusionment occurred amongst the generation of poets born around 1850 as a result of the events of the Commune, which in themselves had been more disgusting than those of 1848-52, but to this was added the shame of defeat and loss of national pride. Young intellectuals were less likely than ever to heed the claims of authority of any kind or of political idealism. Poets in France from about the late 1860s seem to have been more acutely aware than ever that their art did not correspond to the taste of the age. The whole future of poetry was put into doubt by the phenomenal success of the popular novel just as in our own day the novel, in its turn, has been threatened by cinema and television. Figures such as Alphonse Karr, Paul de Kock, Soulie, Sue, and then Zola and, most of all, the banal Ohnet, the best-selling French novelist of the nineteenth century, come close to monopolising the book buying market.

The appearance of the French poetic milieu after 1870 is of an almost aggressively introspective community intent upon experiment in which it would be difficult for even the remaining poetry-reading public to share. To this extent poets behaved very much as the artistic community at large. The Impressionists were attacked so savagely because their work seemed to represent the encroachment of anarchistic lunacy into art (15). Terrified of a repetition of the events of the Commune the ruling classes clung more tightly to the ideals of order, family life and the respectable career. Any deviation from this pattern, in whatever sphere, was highly suspect. Only after the best part of a decade did a freer and less sombre attitude begin to make itself apparent. For a time there was a return among the bourgeoisie to an old

-
- (14) c.f. J. Lethève on art generally: 'Le divorce qui date du Romantisme, entre l'artiste et le public, aborde vers 1860 une phase aiguë qui s'aggraverà après 1870. Il dure encore de nos jours mais le public ne s'en étonne plus guère...' (*Impressionnistes et Symbolistes devant la presse*, p.12).
- (15) *Le Bien public* of 25 June 1874 described Manet's *Le Chemin de fer* as 'un tableau indéchiffrable'. *La Presse* on 29 April of the same year had spoken of the first Impressionist exhibition as the 'exposition des révoltes'.

prejudice which looked upon the writing of poetry, in itself, as a scarcely respectable -- indeed almost subversive -- occupation. This is certainly connected with the readiness of young poets to adopt noms de plume. (16)

Not all of the inaccessibility of French poetry after 1870 is to be attributed to the conscious desire to spurn the general public and to produce work for a tiny cultural elite, although it was almost certainly one of Mallarmé's objectives. More important than this were purely aesthetic motives. The common pursuit of the great poets of the period was the creation of a new poetic language necessary to formulate the experience of exploring the more elusive aspects of external reality or of the human consciousness (or sometimes, in the case of Mallarmé, to give form to difficult abstract concepts). This led them, at times to a kind of poetry completely at odds with the French tradition of discursive clarity, which had been held to be necessary in verse as well as prose, which was bound to puzzle and antagonise the average reader.

* * * * *

The realisation of the poet's isolation is clearly expressed in the work of the poets after 1870. In Richépin's La Chanson des Gueux it takes the form of a violent reproach:

Le bourgeois digère, gavage,
Des trois repas et son bien-être,
Et rit de voir sur le pave
Les poètes trainer la guêtre..... (17)

The following remarks from the preface to the same collection, by implication, refer to the poets who share their condition as well as to the 'Gueux' themselves:

La poésie brutale de ces aventuriers, de ces hardis,
de ces enfants en révolte à qui la société presque
toujours fut marâtre, et qui ne trouvant pas de lait
à la mamelle de la mauvaise nourrice, mordent à même
la chair pour calmer leur faim.

The picture of society's neglect of the poet and of the latter's refuge in the bohemian life occurs again and again in the work of minor poets like Ponchon,

(16) Of Paul Duval, Philippe Jullian writes in a book which has just appeared: 'Le marmot ne devient Jean Lorrain qu'à vingt ans, pour ne pas compromettre ce nom en l'imprimant sur un recueil poétique'.

Jean Lorrain ou le Satiricon de 1900, p.16.

(17) La Chanson des Gueux, 1902 edition, p.230.

Bouchor, Gros, Reinard, Tailhade, Gill and Goudeau. In particular there is much half-humorous reference to the two fates to which a frighteningly large number of poets succumbed in the period: alcoholism and insanity:

Plus loin, une bouteille
 Très vieille,
 Dont on a bu le cognac
 Sur le pavé qui glisse,
 Esquisse
 Une marche ad hoc ad hac..
 Le spleen diabolique
 Réplique:
 C'est un frère mirilton,
 L'âne d'un très chouette
 Poète,
 Qu'on emporte à Charenton. (18)

The vision of the poet as the material victim of society's indifference or exploitation did have a factual basis in the lives of a number of poets of the period. One of the most striking instances is, of course, that of Villiers de l'Isle Adam who was forced to coach boxing and work as a sparring partner to earn enough to eat. Remy de Gourmont long ago considered that it was rejection by materialist bourgeois society that made Villiers 'l'exorciste du réel et le portier de l'idéal' (19). Villiers found the perfect symbol for the bourgeois's treatment of talented artists when he describes Tribulat Bonhomet deriving pleasure from wringing the necks of swans to hear their death song - 'qu'il est doux d'encourager les artistes!' (20). The idea that posthumous appreciation might be the most that a poet could hope for lay behind the celebrated joke in Lutece (E. Norès 'Place aux jeunes', 14-21 June 1885) in which it was suggested that young poets going to fight the Arabs on their military service should deposit their manuscripts in a special collecting box to take advantage of their possible death in finding publishers. Norès had in mind the recent example of Bobillot but it is worth remembering that in the Romantic period more than one young poet had committed suicide in order to draw attention to his work. Verlaine gave a clear statement of this situation in Parnassian terms, in the Poemes Saturniens:

(18) Goudeau, 'Sur la route de Charenton', Les Fleurs du bitume, p.147

(19) Le Livre des Masques, p.91.

(20) Le Tueur de Cygnes, quoted in C.Dedeyan, Le Nouveau Mal du Siècle, p.333.

Tous beaux, tous purs, avec des rayons dans les yeux,
 Et sous leur front le rêve inachevé des Dieux!
 Le monde, que troublait leur parole profonde,
 Les exile. A leur tour ils exilent le monde!
 C'est qu'ils ont à la fin compris qu'il ne faut plus
 Mêler leur note pure aux cris irrésolus
 Que va poussant la foule obscène et violente,
 Et que l'isolement sied à leur marche lente. (21)

Verlaine's condition was to prove to be exceptionally difficult since after his implication in the Commune and then the homosexual affair with Rimbaud he was shunned even by most of his fellow poets:

Confrères mal, frères de moi,
 Qui m'enterriez presque jadis
 Sous tout ce silence - pourquoi? -
 Depuis l'affreux soixante-dix,....

 C'est ce qu'on appelle la Gloire
 - Avec le droit à la famine,
 A la grande Misère noire
 Et presque jusqu'à la vermine -
 C'est ce qu'on appelle la Gloire! (22)

It was almost inevitable that Rimbaud, too, should have shared the opinion of his Parnassian mentors that contemporary bourgeois society was alien to the poet, something to be viewed from the outside more often than not with contempt. Rimbaud's response to the idea that a true understanding of beauty, nature and the significance of the universe could only be achieved by a departure from prevailing conventions was, however, far more radical than anything the Parnassians would ever have contemplated. For it entailed an attack on all preconceptions, including the moral, mental and sensorial habits formed by the poet himself in order to achieve the tabula rasa necessary as a precondition for voyance:

Vous revoilà professeur. On se doit à la Société,
 m'avez-vous dit: vous faites partie des corps enseignants :
 vous roulez dans la bonne ornière..... je m'encrapule le plus
 possible. Pourquoi? Je veux être poète, et je travaille à
 me rendre Voyant..... Il s'agit d'arriver à l'inconnu par le
 dérèglement de tous les sens. Les souffrances sont énormes,
 mais il faut être fort, être né poète, et je me suis reconnu
 poète. (23)

The adventure described in Une Saison en Enfer (and for that matter anticipated in 'Le Bateau ivre') is one of a deliberate and self-conscious exacerbation of

(21) Oeuvres Posthumes Complètes, p.60.

(22) Ibid., pp.901-02.

(23) Oeuvres Complètes, pp.248-49.

the already existing alienation of the poet from society at large. The sufferings were indeed enormous - so much so that a desire to return to the fold, almost a mood of repentance, ensued.

In Corbière's case, as in Verlaine's, there were special reasons why separation from society should be more complete. His isolation was that of the unsightly invalid unable to do the two things he most wanted: to receive the love of a woman and to lead the vigorous life of a Breton sailor.

Corbière felt himself to be a déplacé:

Il ne naquit par aucun bout,
Fut toujours poussé vent-de-bout,
Et fut un arlequin-ragout,
Mélange adulateur de tout. (24)

This was not entirely the result of personal circumstances for he recognised the materialism of his age as a more general obstacle to his integration into society:

Plate époque rapée,
Où chacun a du bien;
Où, cuistre sans épée,
Le vaurien ne vaut rien! (25)

Paris epitomised for him the impermanence, artificiality and materialism of this period of urban expansion:

Il vint aussi là - fourmilière,
Bazar où rien n'est en pierre,
Où le soleil manque de ton. (26)

The theme of the artist as martyr, as victim of society's neglect is also clearly expressed by Corbière:

- Oui, camarade, il faut qu'on sue
Après son harnais et son art!...
Après les ailes : le brancard!
Vivre notre métier - ça tue... (27)

It is all the more acute since he was only too aware of his own impending death to which there is more than one humorous reference in his work:

Et je laisse la vie
Pleuvoir sans me mouiller,
En attendant l'envie
De me faire empailler. (28)

(24) Oeuvres Complètes, p.710.

(25) Ibid., p.714.

(26) Ibid., p.705.

(27) Ibid., p.779. Typically this poem uses such imagery humorously, in connection with the rejection of a painting rather than an actual death.

(28) Ibid., p.715.

In Laforgue's poetry the poet is shown to be separated from his contemporaries by his realisation of the enormity and absurdity of the universe and of the certainty of death of which they seem unaware:

La plupart vit et meurt sans soupçonner l'histoire
Du globe, sa misère en l'éternelle gloire,
Sa future agonie au soleil moribond.

Vertiges d'univers, cieux à jamais en fête!
Rien, ils n'auront rien su. Combien même s'en vont
Sans avoir seulement visité leur planète. (29)

Les cafés se vidaient, un bal, par intervalle,
M'envoyait un poignant et sautillant accord.

Chaque jour est un pas! C'est vrai, pourtant! Folie!
Et nous allons sans voir, gaspillant notre vie,
Nous rapprochant toujours cependant du grand trou!

Et nous 'tuons le temps!' et si dans cette foule
J'avais alors hurlé : chaque jour qui s'écoule
Est un pas vers la Mort! on m'eût pris pour un fou. (30)

To this realisation was added the poet's general confusion at his role in life and, in particular, his obsession with the difficulties of the male-female relationship - a mentality admirably symbolised in the figure of Pierrot. To a considerable extent it is therefore fair to say that his isolation from society sprang from his own emotional and philosophical problems rather than from society's neglect:

Chacun trime, rit, flâne ou pleure, vit enfin!
Seul, j'erre à travers tout, la levre appesantie
Comme d'une nausée immense de la vie. (31)

Yet, as in the case of Corbière, society is not left blameless in its relationship to artists:

On les voit chaque jour.....
.....bohèmes loqueteux,
Peintres crottés, ratés, rêveurs humanitaires
Aux coffres secoués de râles caverneux,
Dans leur immense amour oubliant leurs misères. (32)

The way to avoid material deprivation is to abandon flights of fantasy and to conform to the established pattern of bourgeois ambition which is evident

(29) Poésies Complètes, p.335.

(30) Ibid., p.451.

(31) Ibid., p.406.

(32) Ibid., p.387.

even in literary convention:

Vains espoirs! Sur la terre d'exil
Il faut ramper, ainsi que la limace au fil
D'argent! Ramper! toujours ramper! Voir des notaires
Et des grammairiens, Coppée et des rosières! (33)

For, as the poet imagines his father writing:

Le temps, c'est de l'argent.....
.....vous êtes dans l'âge où l'on devrait chercher
Une position.... (34)

In Mallarmé's reaction to the idea of the poet's isolation lies the key to his uniqueness. Early in his career his response was commonplace enough. In 'A un poète immoral' the healthy unconventionality of the bohemian life of a poet is contrasted with the hypocrisy and corrupt ambition of the bourgeois that would seek to judge him:

Plus d'un dans sa vertu ridée
Se drape et t'appelle immoral,
Toi, qui n'as pas même l'idée
D'un prospectus électoral!

Laisse chanter, ô cher bohème,
Leur chanson à tous ces pervers
Si pervers que pas un d'eux n'aime
Et que pas un ne fait de vers!

Tu ne rêves pas pour ta prose
De ruban rouge où pend la croix,
Et préfères la gance rose
D'un corset délacé, je crois? (35)

On a much more serious level 'Le Guignon' is a moving tribute to the suffering of the victims of indifference and insult epitomised, one suspects, by the fate of Nerval:

Quand en face tous leur ont craché les dédains,
Nuls et la barbe à mots bas priant le tonnerre,
Ces héros excédés de malaises badins

Vont ridiculement se pendre au réverbère.

Mallarmé's definitive response to the situation was, however, unparalleled in the work of the other major poets after 1870: a near total aesthetic escapism undiluted by satirical references to contemporary society, by expression of a desire 'to belong' or by moments of optimism generated by an admiration for progress. His position was even more extreme than that of Leconte de Lisle.

(33) Poesies Complètes, p.335.

(34) Ibid., p.316.

(35) Oeuvres Complètes, pp.19-20.

(36) Oeuvres Complètes, p.30.

The separation from society was to be almost complete, for he wished poetry to be safe from the vagaries of reality itself, from what he called 'le hasard'. His mature poetry was to be written for a tiny elite allowed access to the mysteries only by dint of hard work - and then not always. It would be concerned with making carefully wrought synthetic formulations of the great fundamental abstract concepts of being and non-being, of the absolute and the void. The very exceptional deviations from this attitude will be dealt with in the appropriate places in this study. One suspects that it is Mallarmé's greatness combined with the thoroughness of his self-insulation from the society of his time that has led to the assumption that the major tendency in French poetry between Baudelaire and Verhaeren was an unambiguous rejection of external reality. (37)

The truth is that although the minor poets and Verlaine, Rimbaud, Corbière, and Laforgue accepted, welcomed, and even sometimes widened, the gulf between themselves and society, this was far from being their only reaction.

* * * * *

Very often the state of affairs was a cause for genuine regret by the poets. They wished or even sought to become a part of the society by whom they had been ostracised. This was expressed in banal fashion by Verlaine:

Je renonce à la poésie!
Je vais être riche demain.
A d'autres je passe la main :
Qui veut, qui veut m'être un Sosie?

Bel emploi, j'en prends à témoin
Les bonnes heures de balade
Où, rimant quelque ballade,
Je passais mes nuits tard et loin.

Sous la lune lucide et claire
Les ponts luisaient insidieux,
L'eau baignait de flots gracieux
Paris gai comme un cimetière.

Je renonce à tout ce bonheur
Et je lègue aux jeunes ma lyre!
Enfants, héritez mon délire,
Moi j'hérite un sac suborneur.

For all its banality 'Reve' is nearer the truth than its slightly ironic pendant 'Réveil' where the poet decides after all to keep to his vocation.

(37) Such an assumption appears to have been made by Michaud, Cornell and Edmund Wilson, among others.

(38) Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes, pp. 960-61.

Of course Verlaine had little practical choice by the time he was writing the Invectives than to live off his reputation as a poet. Yet there was always an element of the petit-bourgeois manque in his character as is shown by the oft-repeated attempts at reconciliation with his wife and his habit of living en ménage with the broken down prostitutes who were his companions in the last part of his life. Baudelaire had already demonstrated a similar trait by seeking election to the Académie and in his perpetual efforts to please his mother.

Rimbaud's personal season in hell ended with the desire to return to reality, to his 'roots', as a way of safeguarding his sanity:

Moi! moi qui me suis dit mage ou ange, dispense de
toute morale, je suis rendu au sol, avec un devoir à
chercher, et la réalité rugueuse à étendre! Paysan! (39)

The burden of isolation in the search for 'le Verbe' had proved too great for 'le grand maudit', 'le grand malade'.

Corbière appears to have been afflicted with the notion that he might have fallen between two stools - that he had left his native Brittany where he could not share the life of the sailors only to find that he was even more out of place in the literary Bohemia of Paris, and had widened the gap between himself and his fellow Bretons to whom nevertheless he felt bound to return:

Les femmes avaient su - sans doute par les buses -
Qu'il vivait en concubinage avec des Muses!...
Un hérétique enfin... Quelque Parisien
De Paris ou d'ailleurs. - Hélas! on n'en sait rien....
Il avait posé là, seul et cherchant sa place
Pour mourir seul ou pour vivre par contumace....

Faisant, d'un a-peu-près d'artiste,
Un philosophe d'à peu près,
Raleur de soleil ou de frais,
En dehors de l'humaine piste. (40)

Laforgue was well aware of the pain that his voracious reading and unceasing meditation on life had caused him by separating him from the simple unquestioning happiness enjoyed by his fellows and by himself in his childhood:

O souvenirs, chantez! tout mon orgueil s'enfuit,
Et je me sens repris de ma grande amertume.

Ah! ces voix dans la nuit chantant Noël! Noël!
 M'apportent de la nef qui, là-bas, s'illumine,
 Un si tendre, un si doux reproche maternel
 Que mon coeur trop gonfle creve dans ma poitrine...

Et j'écoute longtemps les cloches, dans la nuit....
 Je suis le paria de la famille humaine,
 A qui le vent apporte en son sale réduit
 La poignante rumeur d'une fête lointaine. (41)

The poet envies the life led by nuns and, by extension, by contented bourgeois housewives in his home town of Tarbes 'douce de vingt mille âmes à peine':

Dans la prière, le ménage, les travaux couture;
 Et que cela suffise... (42)

In his personal life, as well as in his poetry, Laforgue did eventually resolve the problem with which he was preoccupied throughout his short career - the problem of the relationship between man and woman. He accepted, at last, that marital domesticity - of which he was deeply suspicious fearing that it was a biological trap - for all its boring moments and conventionality had compensating advantages:

Que toutes sont créatures, et que tout est routine!

Eh bien, pour aimer ce qu'il y a d'histoires
 Derrière ces beaux yeux d'orpheline héroïne,
 O Nature, donne-moi la force et le courage
 De me croire en âge,
 O Nature, relève-moi le front!
 Puisque, tôt ou tard, nous mourrons.... (43)

In the case of most of the poets, this sense of neglect on a personal level did lead to occasional efforts to bridge the gulf between poetry and society. Mallarmé's position was, however, uncompromising. Yet he did experience regret - even anguish - at the thought that his life and energies may have been wasted. He could not be sure that his struggle against reality, against contingency and impermanence had achieved anything. Such seems to be the meaning of his last great work: 'Un coup de dés n'abolira jamais le hasard'.

* * * * *

How far is one justified in seeing a positive, if intermittent, desire on the part of some of the major poets after 1870 to reunite poetry and society? Baudelaire had already anticipated such a desire in his not altogether ironic reference to the bourgeois public and the need for them to assert their own

(41) Poésies Complètes, p.327.

(42) Ibid., p.311.

(43) Ibid., p.312.

taste in the introduction to the Salon de 1845 and, more seriously, in his whole concept of modernity in art as an essential factor corresponding to the taste of a given age. (44)

Rimbaud's attitude towards a rapprochement between art and society is more ambiguous than Baudelaire's. Yet there are fairly clear indications in his work of a degree of optimism based upon the ideas of modernity and progress. One of the most striking instances is 'Adieu' (Une Saison en Enfer), where the poet's abandonment of his former ambitions (J'ai ^{eu} ~~arée~~ toutes les fêtes, tous les triomphes, tous les drames¹) stems from his recognition of them as the self-indulgence and flights of fancy of an artist: 'Une belle gloire d'artiste et de conteur emportée!' By implication 'artist' is here a pejorative term with the connotation of separation from society and reality. (45) He had believed himself not to be bound by the same code as his fellows: 'mage ou ange, dispensé de toute morale'. Rimbaud's response is two-fold. The first, as we have already noted, is a realisation of his peasant origins as a source of stability. The second is to look to a constructive future in which he would be the poet of the age of progress:

Il faut être absolument moderne.

In language reminiscent of the Fourierism he probably acquired from the Parnassians, Rimbaud sees the new era as one of universal effort and love leading to the creation of cities which will be the urban age's version of terrestrial paradise:

...Recevons tous les influx de vigueur et de tendresse
Et à l'aurore, armées d'une ardente patience, nous entrerons
aux splendides villes. (46)

This was not a volte face; it had been Rimbaud's intention all along to participate in the writing of the poetry which would not only reflect the progress towards the age of harmony but even help to hasten its advance:

(44) See above, pp. 4-5.

(45) Rimbaud is almost making the same accusation against himself as he once made against Baudelaire in the letter to Demeny of 15 May 1871 though there the 'milieu trop artiste' is regarded more as an obstacle to originality of form.

(46) These futuristic cities were, of course, to become an important theme in the Illuminations. See below, pp. 452-69.

Le poète.... sentait vraiment un malincheur de progrès;

Cet avenir sera matérialiste, vous le voyez.....

L'art éternel aurait ses fonctions, comme les poètes sont citoyens. La Poésie ne rythmera plus l'action; elle sera en avant. (47)

The idea of universal love which had been present in his earliest poems was doubtless given a temporal focus in the Commune. It is noteworthy that in the same letter to Demeny, Rimbaud enclosed 'Le Chant de Guerre Parisien' and that only two days earlier he had written to Izambard of his concern for the workers being killed in Paris.

One aspect of Rimbaud's torment which eventually drove him to self-imposed exile, was the elusiveness of his dream of socially relevant poetry which would yet plumb the depths of mystical truth. Laforgue's contribution to rapprochement was of a different and more practical kind much closer to Baudelaire's suggestion in Le Peintre de la vie moderne noted above since it was more concerned with the question of the public's appreciation of art. Time and again in the Mélanges Posthumes and in his correspondence Laforgue states his conviction that it is 'museum' art, the conventions codified by a misguided elite, that have created the gulf between artist and society. His solution is modernism. This will make art relevant and alive for the artist's contemporaries. Modernist polychrome sculpture, Impressionist painting, Baudelaire's 'Americanisms' are among aspects of modernist art which he selects for special mention.

One of the functions of the modernism recommended by Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Laforgue is thus to narrow the gulf between the poet and society but it was equally a means through which the establishment could be attacked either by the device of employing modern subject and language which they knew would be held to be improper in poetry, or by the direct criticism of contemporary society. There is not really a contradiction here for a common feature in the ideas of all three poets is that of the separation of society at large from artists of true originality by the intervention of the literary and artistic establishment

best on insalubrious erroneous conceptions of taste and appreciation in the public which, thus, is a perfectly legitimate target. What Rimbaud looks back to with particular nostalgia is the role of the poet in ancient Greece who was in direct contact with his society and was its teacher and priest involving himself in all its affairs, celebrating its times of joy and distress. There was a time when the poet and, for that matter, man generally had a clearly defined role vis-a-vis nature, the gods and their fellows. This was a time of spontaneity and simplicity of life and was to be contrasted with the strictures and hypocrisy of bourgeois morality in the modern world, with the doubt, self-questioning, anxiety and sense of isolation of nineteenth-century man. This contrast was to prove to be one of the most striking and original aspects of the poetic response to contemporary reality in the second half of the century and is the subject of the next section.

(b)

Decadent Modernity and Paradise Lost

The idea of decadence is by definition a form of modernism since the concept rests on a differentiation of one's own age from those that have gone before. The distinctive qualities of one's own age that are identified as contributing to decadence are usually, but not necessarily, regarded as being detrimental to that age. Something of the relationship between modernism and decadence and the ambiguity which attaches to the latter term is to be seen in the work of Gautier.

One of Gautier's many roles that has been relatively neglected by literary historians is that of 'founder' of nineteenth-century literary 'decadence' in France (48). The 'Notice' on Baudelaire for the 1868 edition of Les Fleurs du Mal has long been recognised as an important definition of decadence. What has not always been recognised is that this famous preface is not just the tribute of a loyal friend to the poet, with whom it is sometimes claimed he had fundamentally little in common, but a statement of ideas which had preoccupied him for over thirty years and may be seen in his own poems, novels and critical articles during that period. It is obvious that Gautier's admiration for Baudelaire is based on a sharing of attitudes not merely the product of affection. One of the main ideas of the 'Notice' and also of decadence in general is the identification of the modern with the artificial. A. E. Carter(49) has said that the decadent movement 'united two fundamentally opposed ideas: a hatred of modern civilisation and a love of the refinements modern civilisation made possible.' Jules Lemaitre's explanation of 'baudelairisme' in 1887(50) in terms of this paradox is seen by Carter as being equally applicable to Gautier:

On maudit le 'Progrès', on déteste la civilisation industrielle
de ce siècle . . . Et en même temps, on jouit du pittoresque

(48) A role he probably shares with Baudelaire; c.f. pp. 2 and 11.

(49) In The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, p.6.

(50) In his article 'Baudelaire', Journal des Débats, 4 July 1887. Discussed by Carter, op.cit., p.6.

special que cette civilisation a mis dans la vie humaine et des ressources qu'elle apporte à l'art de développer la sensibilité.

In the poem 'Paris' (51) we read that the city has a 'soleil terne et mort', it is shrouded in unwholesome fog. In Fortunio (52) we are told that its streets are 'boueuses et infectes' and that it smells of 'l'atmosphère de gaz hydrogène et de mélasse de la civilisation moderne'. Yet in 1833 Gautier felt able to say, with deliberate exaggeration:

Je n'ai vu la mer que dans les marines de Vernet; je ne connais d'autres montagnes que Montmartre. Je n'ai jamais vu se lever le soleil . . . Je suis un Parisien complet . . . Les arbres des Tuileries et des boulevards sont mes forêts; la Seine, mon Océan . . . Je ne trouve pas le soleil de beaucoup supérieur au gaz . . . Je déteste la campagne: toujours des arbres, de la terre, du gazon! . . . (53)

Gautier's decadence is intimately linked to his contribution to modernism.

Not only did his paradoxical attitudes lead him to write poems like 'La Mansarde' and 'Paris' but even to formulate a modernist aesthetic:

Nous acceptons la civilisation telle qu'elle est, avec ses chemins de fer . . . ses machines, ses tuyaux de cheminée . . . Le monde antique peut être balance par un monde nouveau tout resplendissant d'acier et de gaz, aussi beau dans son activité que l'autre dans sa reverie sereine. (54)

It is quite clear that the picture of Gautier the Romantic turned neo-classicist leaves out a very important element of his work and ideas; this element, decadent modernism, was influential upon younger writers in its own right.

* * * * *

(51) Dated 1831. Premières poésies, I, pp.108-10.

(52) op.cit., pp.156-57. In this remarkable novel, published in 1837, the hero may be seen as a prototype of Huysmans's Des Esseintes for he leads a totally artificial life, enclosed in a windowless house with a glass-roofed courtyard of tropical plants and devices to simulate a variety of climates.

(53) Preface to Les Jeunes-France, vii-ix.

(54) The remark dates from 1848. Souvenirs de théâtre, d'art et de critique, pp.202-03.

There were three interrelated conceptions of decadence as the term is applied to France in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The first, which towards the end of the century was surprisingly widespread, was that of a genuine and profoundly regrettable decline in moral and cultural values accompanied, in the view of some, by physical and psychological degeneration. This view was made to seem all the more convincing by reference to the sciences. The scientific study of history it was claimed, provided evidence of certain recurring symptoms visible upon the decline and death of civilisations. These symptoms were present in late nineteenth-century France: loss of self-assurance, the absence of a guiding faith or ideal, disrespect for authority, corruption in high places (the Panama affair was an outstanding instance), reliance on less civilised but more virile peoples for defence (here the recruitment of North African troops and the Franco-Russian alliance were obvious 'evidence'), an unrelenting taste for luxury, moral laxity, fascination with perversion and decline in physical robustness, coupled with an increase in nervous diseases. A particular parallel was drawn between France after 1870 and the late Roman Empire under threat from warlike northern tribes. To this catalogue of misfortunes was frequently added an alleged demolition of the idea of standards and good taste in art to be replaced by the eccentric experimentation of individuals or small extremist groups. Such opinions, and there were many more like them, were commonplace in the periodicals and newspapers of the time as well as in books, some of which will be mentioned in a moment. There was another kind of support for this view of decadence drawn this time from evolutionary science which is also to be found in some of these publications. This was even more pessimistic in its implications since it related not only to France but to the whole of Western civilisation and potentially to the entire human species. Darwinism and transformism had both shown that species disappeared. One circumstance in which this occurred was when what had previously been an attribute became exaggerated to the point

of being a handicap. According to this view Man was approaching the fate of the sabre-toothed tiger, for the qualities of mental alertness, intelligence and sensorial awareness which had enabled his survival were now overdeveloped; hypersensitivity was turning into neurosis.

The second conception of decadence was largely a confirmation of the first but it involved a different reaction to the so-called evidence. There were those who, rather than seeing the state of affairs as a cause for regret or fear, accepted it and even welcomed it. For them it would be an age when the individual triumphed over the monolithic establishment. It is more than coincidence that the 'decadent' period in France was contemporary with the rise of political anarchism. A love of the artificial, indulgence in luxury and sexual freedom, for instance, could be regarded as the fruits of a new-found moral freedom as well as symptoms of decline.

Closely connected with the above was the third conception of decadence - the most restricted yet the one with which posterity is most familiar - as a literary (and artistic) school.

Decadence as a literary movement should not be confused with, or rather limited to, the activities of Anatole Baju around 1886 - 1888. In this respect Noël Richard's Le Mouvement Décadent is a misnomer and a disappointment. Baju was an opportunist of relatively little importance who began to publicise Decadence at a time when, ironically, the movement was already virtually extinct. Conversely A.E. Carter who rightly traces the long history of Decadence in France from the end of the eighteenth century in his The Idea of Decadence in French Literature pays insufficient attention to the period after 1870, with the exception of Huysmans. Carter sees the idea of Decadence as the reverse of the coin which has on its face the image of the noble savage; it is an acceptance of the artificiality of modern life, the rejection of nature and an awareness of the characteristics peculiar to contemporary Man. In other words Decadence is, ipso facto, a form of modernism which is always conscious of the primitivist alternative. The principal sources of Decadence in the

nineteenth century were Baudelaire and Gautier. In their work one finds all that one would expect: the repudiation of nature, 'satanism', praise of the artificial, the cultivation of art and a love-hate relationship with contemporary reality. Much of this was to be carried over not only into the Decadent movement after 1870 but into Symbolism. Mallarmé was fascinated by artifacts and Svend Johansen was right in a sense when he wrote 'les symbolistes ne sont pas des poètes de la nature' (55).

It is possible to identify a Decadent movement in France which is neither as precise as that little short-lived and slightly anachronistic group centred around Baju nor as vague and elusive as the great current lasting for a century or more which is described by Carter; this movement spans the decade or so running from the early 1870s to the mid 1880s. Why should the idea of Decadence have become so attractive in this period and why should the term itself have gained currency?

The defeat of France in the war with Prussia and the events of the Commune were doubtless responsible for creating the climate in which Decadence could flourish: 'Au lendemain de 1870, après une défaite qui pouvait jeter des doutes sur l'avenir de notre pays, cette ... idée de décadence devait trouver un terrain favorable.' (56) In particular the failure of the Commune and the right-wing government of the early 1870s combined to produce a frustration among young intellectuals which showed itself in the expression of 'decadent' attitudes. Revolutionary socialism, anti-clericalism and demands for sexual freedom - 'le droit à la passion intégrale' - were widespread but could not be brought openly into the political arena. It was in groups given over to the discussion of such views 'qu'apparaît l'état d'esprit' 'décadent' '...' (57). The first stirrings of the movement were, therefore, political and philosophical rather than literary. The figures associated with Decadence, with the exception of Baju, in fact adopted Naturalism as the principal expression of their attitude.

(55) S. Johansen, Le Symbolisme, p.94.

(56) J. Lethève, Impressionnistes et Symbolistes devant la presse, p.172.

(57) P. Martino, Parnasse et Symbolisme, p.143.

The Naturalists, too, believed in the decadence of modern society; in the name of positivist accuracy they depicted society as they saw it, which involved a rejection of public and religious standards of morality. They described in detail the workings of human instinct, and, in particular, they reduced what traditional literature had called love to mere sexual instinct. (58) Thus there was an intellectual rebellion with few outlets awaiting a label to give it a sense of identity and purpose, a label which would provide for the identification of literature expressing these attitudes of challenge to authority and accepted standards.

There were several sources of the term decadent, all of which combined in the span of a few years to ensure that it would become the label required.

One neglected source lies in writings on the disaster of 1870-71: E. Baudry's

La Fin du monde latin, A. Dalichoux's 1871: Les Premières Phases d'une décadence, J. Patenôtre's La France dégénérée and of course Renan's La Réforme intellectuelle et morale. In 1876 the term began to take on specifically

literary connotations when Bourget wrote in La Vie littéraire:

Amusante, soit, - originale, profonde, délicate, soit, encore, - la poésie de ces temps-ci n'en est pas moins une poésie de décadence... Nous acceptons sans humilité comme sans orgueil ce terrible mot de décadence... (59)

Bourget saw literary decadence as a consequence of boredom with the 'siècles classiques': it was a quest for originality. In the Essais de psychologie contemporaine (60) he pursued this theme and, in particular, saw Baudelaire's poetry as a product of the decadent spirit. In fact Bourget was merely restating and developing what Gautier had said in 1868 in his essay on the development of modern French poetry - published significantly in 1874 in his Histoire du romantisme - and in his long preface to Les Fleurs du Mal. In the latter Gautier compared Baudelaire to the poets of the Latin decadence and thus

(58) P. Martino, Parnasse et Symbolisme, pp.144-45.

(59) April 1876.

(60) Published in La Nouvelle Revue in 1881-83, and in book form in 1883-85. Rod said of the essays that they had been 'un signe très caractéristique de l'état de l'esprit de la jeune génération et un des livres qui ont exercé le plus d'action sur elle...' (quoted in R. Pouillart, Le Romantisme, III, p.139).

revived memories of Nisard's attacks on the Romantics in 1834 in his Poètes latins de la décadence where he accused Hugo and his followers of being degenerate writers set on ruining literary standards in France the way Statius and Lucan had corrupted those of Rome (61). The literary identity of Decadence became even clearer with the publication of Verlaine's 'Langueur' in Le Chat Noir in 1883 with its celebrated opening stanza:

Je suis l'Empire à la fin de la décadence,
Qui regarde passer les grands Barbares blancs
En composant des acrostiches indolents
D'un style d'or où la langueur du soleil danse.

with the same poet's essays on the Poètes maudits, with Barrès's discussion of the influence of Baudelaire (62), with Rollinat's Les Névroses in 1883 but perhaps most of all with the publication of A rebours in 1884. As late as 1889 Valéry was to describe the latter work as 'ma bible et mon livre de chevet' (63). Decadence as a literary movement thus crystallised in the years 1883-84 though the ground had already been carefully prepared. Indeed Decadence was now a coherent enough phenomenon to invite attack from the establishment and good-natured parody from within its own ranks. Paul Bourde's 'Les Décadents' of 1885 (64) was an attack which caused the young writers to rally together. The delightful parodies in Les Délivrescences d'Adore Floupette, also of 1885, invited such criticism - they were taken as genuine by many journalists - and also served as a rallying point; they made the young writers aware of themselves and of their common interest of experimental writing: they also made the public aware of a new poetic phenomenon.

What were the characteristics of decadent literature? It was held by both its practitioners and its critics to be concerned with the turbulent worlds of sensation and the more elusive and confused mental experiences. It was far removed from the healthy balanced world of classicism and was forever seeking new sensations to stir the reader; it had a predilection for the morbid, the

(61) G. Highet, The Classical Tradition, p.441.

(62) In Les Taches d'encre, November and December 1884.

(63) Quoted in Pouillart, Le Romantisme, III, p.141.

(64) Article in Le Temps, 6 August 1885.

melancholy and for instability. Taine, who was regarded by Remacle in his reply to Huret's Enquête as one of the founders of decadence, saw contemporary taste in the following terms:

Rassasié et dispersé comme il est, (l'homme contemporain) demande à l'art des sensations imprévues et fortes, des effets nouveaux de couleurs, de physionomies et de sites, des accents à tout prix qui le troublent, le piquent ou l'amuse, bref un style qui tourne à la manière, au parti pris et à l'excès. (65)

Bourget's description of Baudelaire highlights the 'morbid' aspect of that poet's work:

Sa saison aimée est la fin de l'automne, quand un charme de mélancolie semble ensorceler le ciel qui se brouille et le coeur qui se crispe. Ses heures de délices sont les heures du soir, quand le ciel se colore, comme dans les fonds de tableaux de Vinci, des nuances d'un rose mort et d'un vert presque évaporé. La beauté de la femme ne lui plaît que précoce et presque macabre de maigreur, avec une élégance de squelette apparue sous la chair adolescente, ou bien tardive et dans le déclin d'une maturité ravagée. (66)

Literary Decadence may be considered as a reaction against modern French bourgeois society - and particularly its prudence - in several ways. First, it took to extremes facets of that very society, notably the artificiality made possible by modern technology (67). Second, it incorporated an awareness of and a fascination with an allegedly new sensibility: highly nervous, frenetic, obsessed with sensation and minimising the power of rationalism and 'le bon sens'. To this extent it was a reaction, like much poetry of the late nineteenth century, against the French analytical tradition soon to be more vigorously supported than ever by Lanson and others. This reaction was, however,

(65) Quoted in Pouilliant, op.cit., p. 138.

(66) Essais de psychologie contemporaine, I, p. 24.

(67) c.f. A rebours or, earlier, Gautier's Fortunio.

always too self-conscious to be a return to a healthy spontaneity. It had its origin in a small introspective world of littérateurs, conscious of the schism between art and the mass of the public:

Peu nous importe que les foules ne nous comprennent pas.
L'écrivain soucieux de son art, doit faire abstraction
de leur existence. C'est à elles de s'élever vers lui,
non à lui de s'abaisser vers elles, (68)

Third, it was imbued with a sense of modernity and rejected both the solid order of classicism and the now respectable Romantic return to nature; their subject was modern Man as he really was, or so they claimed. Fourth, the decadents' fascination with the morbid, the macabre and the supernatural - as exemplified in the work of Baudelaire, Rollinat and Barbey d'Aurevilly - was an affront to accepted taste (as was their occasional sexual licence). Finally, it presented a reaction against all established literary values. For this reason it was customary on the part of critics in the established press to call all poets who did not follow tradition decadent. Mallarmé was often dubbed a decadent even by friends and admirers. Decadent had become a compliment much the same as Impressionist had a decade earlier. The most obvious manifestation of the decadents' rebellion was their attitude to language. Indeed it may be claimed that their only originality lay in this field, though it did not extend much beyond the invention of neologisms. These were so abundant that Paul Adam and Félix Fénéon, under the pseudonym Jacques Plowert, produced in 1888 their Petit Glossaire pour servir à l'intelligence des auteurs décadents et symbolistes which contained, in the continuing spirit of self-parody some examples from their own works !

(68) Baju in Le Décadent, 16 October 1886.

It will not have escaped the reader's attention that we have not yet named the members of the 'decadent school' of poetry. The membership of the movement is a subject of some controversy; almost every book gives a different list; Noël Richard declined to commit himself, seeing little point in producing another list (69). Yet it does clarify matters to think of who actually belonged to the movement, indeed there is something strange about discussing a literary movement as though it could exist independently of individuals. The present writer would include Rollinat, Lorrain, Roinard, the Laforgue of some of the Complaintes, Tailhade as well as Verlaine and Rodenbach on occasion among the poets and Huysmans and Barbey d'Aurevilly among the writers of prose. For contemporary critics the whole of Mallarmé, Verlaine, Laforgue and the little Rimbaud they knew was 'decadent' because that word had become a synonym for incomprehensible! In the hands of more recent critics the term has been used to dispose of poets like Mikhaël (and even Laforgue and Verlaine) whose work resisted most the epithet Symbolist.

It was the encroachment of Moréas's Symbolism which galvanised Bajou into his sponsorship of Decadence. Symbolism may well have seemed too much concerned with art and form - a narrowing down of the very broad 'programme' of Decadence which involved philosophy, politics and psychology as well as literature - for many of the adherents of the earlier movement. Bajou's pronouncements are so contradictory as to baffle the modern researcher but one argument he did use to distinguish the 'décadents' from the 'symbolistes' was that the former had been concerned to recreate society along socialist lines linked with progress and science, whereas he defines a Symbolist as a man who 'sacrifierait volontiers à ses jouissances tout le reste de l'Humanité'. (70)

(69) Ibid., p. 13.

(70) A. Bajou, L'Anarchie Littéraire, pp. 9 - 11.

There is more than a grain of truth in this picture of Symbolism as a movement cut off from contemporary reality. Bajou also spoke of decadent poetry as 'une poésie vibrante et sonore ou l'on sent passer comme des frissons de vie'; the role of sensation in such poetry is alluded to (71).

Decadence was a reaction against stodgy bourgeois values in literature and life generally; it was all along closely allied with political movements such as anarchism and revolutionary socialism. Its contribution to literature was perhaps not as great. The decadents appreciated modernity and sensation as 'subjects' but, with one or two exceptions, did not treat them with the subtlety of Baudelaire, Rimbaud or Verlaine. On the other hand without the decadent ferment it is doubtful whether Rimbaud, Verlaine, Corbière, Laforgue or even Mallarmé and Baudelaire would have so quickly found recognition. The influence of the poet of Les Fleurs du Mal upon the poets after 1870 was in large measure due to his cultivation by the decadents.

It is instructive to look at the actual work of some of those poets who were considered to be decadent in their lifetime (and to whom posterity has attached the same label) and to consider the place of contemporary reality in their work.

Maurice Rollinat enjoyed considerable fame and even notoriety in the early 1880s for his performances, to his own piano accompaniment, of his poetry at the Chat Noir. The poetry on which his fame rested was contained in Les Névroses published in 1883. In this collection he revealed himself as a decadent par excellence; the poems are largely made up of morbid fantasies owing a great debt to the satanic elements of Les Fleurs du Mal which are exaggerated almost beyond the reader's

(71) Ibid., p. 13.

endurance. The poet's principal aim is the exposition of his frenetic psychological life seen as a product of an age of neurosis and hypersensibility. In addition the section Les Luxures is in keeping with the decadent taste for eroticism.

Critics at the time, and Rollinat himself, were struck by the modernity of the collection. Yet there is surprisingly little reference to external contemporary reality in the poems; instead they rely heavily on fantastic and imaginary thematic material involving recurring images of death, putrefaction and serpents. The words 'mystère', 'mystique' and 'étrange' are used in profusion in the evocation of these fantastic landscapes where strange music is being played; the latter is not only mentioned in the verse but would have been supplied by Rollinat on the piano. Once one accepts the unreal quality of the subjects described the method of description is surprisingly plastic, even Parnassian (72). Some of the verse reads rather clumsily, for instance in 'Mystère', and one may well imagine that the success of such a poem depended on Rollinat's inimitable performance. On what grounds was the collection held to be a reflection of modernity? It seems that neurosis itself was considered to be a modern phenomenon. 'Balzac' describes that novelist as the great prose poet of modern life primarily because of his interest in neurosis :

Balzac est parmi nous le grand poète en prose,
Et jamais nul esprit sondeur du gouffre humain,
N'a fouillé plus avant la moderne névrose,
Ni gravé dans l'Art pur un plus âpre chemin.

(73)

(72) See, for example, 'La Créole'.

(73) 'Balzac'.

There are, nevertheless, reflections of external contemporary reality in the collection. 'La Belle Fromagère' begins as though it may have its origin in the poet's real experience :

Par la rue enfiévrante où mes pas inquiets
Se traînent au soleil comme au gaz, je voyais
Derrière une affreuse vitrine
Où s'étalaient du beurre et des fromages gras,
Une superbe enfant dont j'admirais les bras
Et la plantureuse poitrine...

But the rest of the poem provides a marvelous opportunity for him to evoke the odours - mostly unpleasant - of the cheeses; this, one may suspect, was the real raison d'être of the poem, the chance for a decadent tour de force in descriptive writing. 'La Marchande d'écrevisses' is, on the other hand, more clearly derived from the poet's experience of external reality :

Aux portes des cafés où s'attablent les vices,
Elle va tous les soirs offrant des écrevisses
Sur un petit clayon tapissé de persil.
Elle a l'oeil en amande orné d'un grand sourcil
Et des cheveux frisés blonds comme de la paille.
Or, ses lèvres en fleur qu'un sourire entre-baille,
Tentent les carabins qui fument sur les bancs,
Et comme elle a des seins droits, et que, peu tombants,
Ses jupons laissent voir sa jambe ronde et saine,
Chacun d'eux lui chuchote un compliment obscène.

'Les Becs de gaz' is a decidedly Baudelairean vision of night in the city :

Les becs de gaz des mauvais coins
Éclairent les filous en loques
Et ceux qui, pleins de soliloques,
S'en vont jaunes comme des coings.

Complices des rôdeurs chafouins
Guettant le Monsieur à breloques,
Les becs de gaz des mauvais coins
Éclairent les filous en loques.

Et coups de couteaux, coups de poings,
Coups de sifflets, cris équivoques,
Spectres hideux, mouchards baroques,
Tout ce mystère a pour témoins
Les becs de gaz des mauvais coins.

In Les Névroses Rollinat in most respects brought few profound innovations to the language of poetry. He uses some of the low terms found in Baudelaire more frequently than the poet of Les Fleurs du Mal; in fact his style is perhaps best described as sub-Baudelairean. An exception to this is his use of technical terms which may have influenced Laforgue and is the one aspect of his work which makes it indubitably modern. This is discussed in Part Two, Chapter Three.

Like Rollinat, Georges Rodenbach exerted considerable influence over the young poets of the 1880s. His introspective melancholy was one of the moods associated first with Decadence and then with Symbolism; in certain of his poems, perhaps particularly in Le Règne du Silence, there are clear reminiscences of Mallarmean imagery.

Rodenbach's most influential work was probably the first, Les Tristesses of 1879. An atmosphere of gloom prevails throughout much of the collection; otherwise the poet relates the anxieties and sadness associated with late adolescence. The collection was well received by Rodenbach's young contemporaries who saw in it a reflection of their own inability to come to terms with adult life or to find solace in bourgeois materialism or an age of scientific progress. Despite the introspective nature of the collection it is firmly rooted in contemporary reality, in which it finds objective correlatives, just as the later collections, and especially his finest work La Jeunesse blanche, were usually to be. The tone of Les Tristesses is set by the opening poem, 'Naissance du poète', in which the poet is seen as a born outsider who has constantly to pacify 'la plainte intérieure'. In this early work, as in his later poetry, Rodenbach's strength lay in the evocation of the atmosphere of everyday reality and the correlation between the latter and the emotions of the poet.

In 'Les Absentes' the poet contrasts childhood happiness with the death of two sisters as he indulges in nostalgia whilst walking along the streets to the faubourgs; the recollection of everyday events is not dissimilar from Coppée (the poem also contains a very hackneyed complaint to God) :

Dans le jardin étroit nous nous roulions sur l'herbe
Avec le vieux griffon que son collier gênait;
Et nous formions un groupe adorable et superbe
Sous le grand soleil d'or qui nous illuminait.

Et quand nous rentrions dans la maison, la mère
Grondait d'avoir sali le propre tablier.
Mais pas fort... et bientôt s'apaisait sa colère
Car nos tendres baisers lui faisaient oublier!...

Elle aimait de nous voir coquets, et les dimanches,
Pour aller aux concerts, les petites mettaient
Des robes en tissu léger, à courtes manches,
Et des chapeaux de paille où des rubans flottaient...

(74)

The melancholy of the collection is largely derived from the contrast between nostalgia for the happiness of childhood and the present reality around the poet which is also evoked :

Le faubourg est bruyant par où je dois passer.
Au fond des cabarets on s'apprête à danser,
Et les orgues déjà préludent aux quadrilles;
Les écoliers, rentrés de classe, jouent aux billes,
Et les femmes, qui sont sur des chaises de bois,
Allaient leurs enfants en épluchant des noix...

(75)

In this kind of straightforward evocation of reality Rodenbach is a precursor of Jammes.

Les Tristesses is marred for the modern reader by its uninhibited sentimentality. The poet's promise was fulfilled in La Jeunesse blanche, of 1886, from which this failing has been largely eliminated and where the poet excels in the evocation of the atmosphere of contemporary reality,

(74) Les Tristesses, p.12.

(75) Ibid., p.51.

a quality he has in common with his compatriot Verhaeren. 'Dimanches'

is a representative example :

Morne l'après-midi des dimanches, l'hiver,
Dans l'assoupissement des villes de province,
Où quelque girouette inconsolable grince
Seule, au sommet des toits, comme un oiseau de fer!

Il flotte dans le vent on ne sait quelle angoisse!
De très rares passants s'en vont sur les trottoirs:
Prêtres, femmes du peuple en grands capuchons noirs,
Béguines revenant des saluts de paroisse.

Des visages de femme ennuyés sont collés
Aux carreaux, contemplant le vide et le silence,
Et quelques maigres fleurs, dans une somnolence,
Achèvent de mourir sur les châssis voilés.

Et par l'écartement des rideaux des fenêtres,
Dans les salons des grands hôtels patriciens
On peut voir, sur des fonds gobelins anciens,
Dans de vieux cadres d'or, les portraits des ancêtres,

En fraise de dentelle, en pourpoint de velours,
Avec leur blason peint dans un coin de la toile,
Qui regardent au loin s'allumer une étoile
Et la ville dormir dans des silences lourds.

Et tous ces vieux hôtels sont vides et sont ternes,
Le moyen âge mort se réfugie en eux;
C'est ainsi que, le soir, le soleil lumineux
Se réfugie aussi dans les tristes lanternes.

O lanternes, gardant le souvenir du feu,
Le souvenir de la lumière disparue,
Si tristes dans le vide et le deuil de la rue
Qu'elles semblent brûler pour le convoi d'un Dieu!

Et voici que soudain les cloches agitées
Ébranlent le Beffroi debout dans son orgueil,
Et leurs sons, lourds d'airain, sur la ville au cercueil
Descendent lentement comme des pelletées!

The modernistic intention of Jean Lorrain's Modernités of 1885 is clear enough from its title. The collection consists of six sections - Les Montreurs, Modernité, Fleurs de boue, Modernités, Eternité and Le Crépuscule - as well as many sub-sections. Fleurs de boue is an obvious reference to Baudelaire and Goudeau; they, together with Rollinat, seem to among the strongest influences on the collection. There is a tendency to indulge in

the kind of language associated with Decadence, the piling up of words for strangeness of effect and the use of an exaggerated form of allegorical writing (in, for example, 'A la Fange') or the longwinded simile or metaphor. 'La Voix d'or' stands as a good example of this kind of style *modernised by the use of technical and particularised vocabulary:*

Le fifre s'exaspère et 'Zim-Boum', la cymbale
Tonitruue et voilà qu'au milieu des hoquets,
Des cris, des beuglements, au halo des quinquets,
La divine apparaît.

Sa traîne triomphale
Est d'un satin si blême et sa chair idéale
Si frêle, qu'au milieu des énormes bouquets,
Outrageusement blancs des Grelotteux coquets,
On dirait un rayon de lune.

Sidérale
La divine s'avance et givrée, en mica
Elle parle et soudain sa voix d'harmonica
Tinte fausse et voilà qu'au-dessous de la foule
La neige en flocons blancs tombe lente: en éclats
De verre sa voix craque et le public s'écoule,
S'éloignant lentement de l'actrice Verglas.

(76)

The title poem of the section Modernité deals with prostitution and vice in a language very similar to that of 'La Voix d'or' though it incorporates a traditionally rhetorical refrain addressed to modernity :

Modernité, Modernité!
A travers les cris, les huées,
L'Impudeur des prostituées
Resplendit dans l'éternité.

Lorrain, like many of his contemporaries, seems to have regarded prostitution and sexual excesses of all kinds as the archetypal modern subject - perhaps superficially following the example of Baudelaire - though in a sense few subjects could be more timeless! 'Coquines' is typical of Lorrain's vision of contemporary Paris :

Avec des gestes de coquines
Les petites femmes des bars
Versent aux snobs des boulevards
Des poisons verts dans des chopines.

(76) op. cit., p.4; in the section Les Montreurs.

En jerseys collants, en basquines,
Deux grands yeux fous, comme hagards,
Sous des frisons d'or clair épars,
Ce sont les sveltes arlequines.

Des longs Pierrots en habit noir,
Qu'avec des gestes de coquines
Ces chattes blanches et taquines,
Attirent près de leur comptoir.

Leurs mains perversément câlines
En servant ont d'heureux hasards
Et leurs bouches rouges de fards
Ont des paroles si félines,

Qu'on est fou de ces libertines
Qui, raillant dans le chaud boudoir
L'entreteneur en habit noir,
Une fois seules, les coquines,
S'entre-baisent en colombines,
Les seins nus devant leur miroir.

(77)

A poem which makes a pleasant change from this source of inspiration is 'Jockey' (78) which describes the festivities after the Derby and the cynical thoughts of the winning jockey, Harry Lees, upon his ability to make or break members of the upper classes.

Lorrain's language is a strange mixture of convention and decadent tours de force. He is more daring than Rollinat in the use of enjambement. Attempts to capture conversational speech in, for example, 'Cratin' are not very convincing, and are, in any case, cast in dialogue form.

Paul Roinard's collection Nos Plaies of 1886 illustrates well the association between Decadence and politics. Richepin and the 'decadents' are mentioned in the dedication which prefaces the volume; in the introductory 'Ballade' the poet avows his socialism and the imagery of gore, blood and bandages anticipates the violence and directness of much of the rest of the volume.

(77) Ibid., pp. 22-3.

(78) Ibid., p. 89.

The collection largely consists of lengthy politically motivated satires of which the following passage from 'Le Revanche' is typical in its many references to modern life :

Je n'ai jamais compris pourquoi tous ces belâtres,
 Qui n'ont plus gagné leur argent que leurs titres,
 Qui n'ont pour tout esprit que le maigre talent
 De savoir à propos glisser un mot galant;
 Qui se montrent au bois, aux heures convenues,
 Pour se faire admirer par les beautés connues;
 Qui, mettant leur honneur dans leur stupide orgueil,
 Un cigare à la bouche, un monocle dans l'oeil,
 Bien chaussés, bien gantés, les moustaches frisées,
 Posent au boulevard comme aux Champs-Élysées;
 Pour occuper les nuits fréquentent l'Opéra,
 Vont souper chez Peters, banquer au baccara,
 Vont offrir un bouquet, avec un billet tendre,
 A quelque actrice en vogue et qui fait attendre....

Not all the poetry is as heavy-handed; 'Triolets libres', 'La Chanson de l'Épousée' and 'Gammes' (79) are close to popular song form. There are also joie de vivre poems of the kind popular in such gatherings as the 'Hydropathes' and akin to the libertin poetry of the seventeenth century :

Le champagne rutil et sa bouteille éclate;
 Son bouchon cabriole en l'air comme un pantin;
 Le gaz ensoleillé pétillie, se dilate,
 Et son clair flamboiement d'orpale du matin

Chatouille la poitrine et gonfle la plus plate,
 Donne au lâche du coeur, de l'esprit au crétin,
 Rend la vieille paillardie et la vierge écarlate,
 Car du meilleur médoc au meilleur chambertin

Tous les feux de nos crus tiennent dans le champagne...

(80)

Not only in his aggressive socialism, his hedonism and his predilection for distasteful images of gore does the poet demonstrate his allegiance to Decadence but also in the febrile evocation of the sensations of a moment and the attack on sexual propriety which are

(79) Nos Plaies, p.65, p.83 and p. 106 respectively.

(80) 'Le Champagne', *ibid.*, p.123.

combined in 'Echos d'un instant', a scarcely disguised description of orgasm. Throughout his main concern is with contemporary reality; he takes either a directly critical stance or engages in calculated provocation.

* * * * *

The lack of reluctance (or even enthusiasm) with which some poets, such as those just cited, accepted the idea that they were living in a period of decadence should not blind us to the fact that for almost all the major, and some of the minor, poets between 1870 and 1887 this was a cause for real concern and dismay. Their basic position seems to have been a degree of fascination with their own times which was more than tempered by a lack of sympathy for its materialism, philistinism and moral hypocrisy. In this they had been anticipated by Baudelaire whom Gautier, in his celebrated preface to Les Fleurs du Mal had compared to a bird both terrified and yet compulsively attracted by the snake which seeks to devour it.

In contrast to the decadence of modernity these poets turned to a vision of happiness, freedom, love and beauty, a world almost irretrievably lost, to which they felt they would have 'belonged'. Society at large is principally to blame for the poet's alienation but they were also often aware that as individuals they had fallen away from a state of relative grace and felicity. Thus the many variations of paradise lost to be found in the poetry of the 1870s and 1880s, and in the immediately preceding period, fall into two broad categories but which are nevertheless frequently interwoven, one with another. The first of these is concerned with reference to a usually hypothetical golden age in the past and the second with nostalgia for simple happiness which the poet has experienced in his own past life, more often than not

in childhood. Much of the best work of the major poets after 1870 is built around the contrast, either within poems or between some poems and others, between reality and the different versions of paradise lost. The second of the two categories mentioned needs little explanation (it is indeed a literary commonplace) but before examining the work of specific poets it would perhaps be useful to consider for a moment the first. The more so since this question has not, to the present writer's knowledge, been treated comprehensively elsewhere. 'Primitivist' nostalgia is an integral part of the response to contemporary reality and it merits examination here. W.M. Frohock has put one aspect of the question well in relation to Rimbaud :

Surely if, in the depths of a New England winter, one expresses an intention of going to live, say, in the Dry Tortugas, one can hardly be held at a subsequent time to have preferred life on some sterile tropical island; what the remark reveals is, rather, a particular disposition towards New England in January.

There is no need, consequently, to think that Rimbaud subscribed literally to the neopagan myth of the Parnassians. The attitude he expresses is focused upon life in the French provinces in 1870. One may have no belief in a past which, however pleasantly pictured, has the defect of never having existed, and still make the image of it an excellent bludgeon with which to assault one's own time.

(81)

The essential modernism of this nostalgia for another world, its interrelationship with the decadent modern age, and incidentally the pervading influence of Baudelaire, are nowhere better summarised than in that journalistic one-man band, Barrès's Taches d'encre :

Plaisir amer et des plus doux que de se répéter tel vers de Baudelaire au matin de la nuit parisienne, dans l'ombre coupée de fiacres plus rares et de gaz pâlisant, le long des boulevards désertés, alors qu'un écoeuement de nerfs surmenés, un souvenir des heures insipides, des camaraderies douteuses de la lutte si mesquine et si vaine, vous envahit toujours pareil et traînant une ordeur inassouvie, quelque irritation qui salit. - Des ombres rôdeuses chuchotent d'amour et d'argent; et le dégoût pâteux de cette vie, de son passé et de ses lendemains vous emplit et se fond dans une nostalgie des pays bleus et gris à l'âme voltigeant par dessus le corps au milieu des harmonies.

(82)

(81) Rimbaud's Poetic Practice, p.53.

(82) op. cit., I, 2, 5 December 1884, p.22.

* * * * *

Arthur Chisholm has seen nineteenth-century French poetry in terms of reaction to what he calls Dionysos - a personification of the Eternal Becoming, the Cosmic Will, or those forces that the determinist school of philosophy saw as governing the universe. Although Chisholm, in our opinion, attributes too much importance to the influence of philosophy (and German philosophy in particular) and not enough to the scientific, material and political background in accounting for the awareness of 'Dionysos' and the primitivist tendency in poetry (83) he does give an excellent account of the origin, or one origin, of the latter, quoting suggestively from E. Seillière's Pour le centenaire du Romantisme (84) :

With the Dionysos ideas is connected, undoubtedly, the Romantic myth of the golden age, one form of which appears in Rousseau's Contrat Social. According to this myth 'nos plus lointains ancêtres . . . furent inspirés par une haute sagesse primordiale, dont la source était une faculté fort différente de celles dont nous disposons aujourd'hui . . . il conviendrait . . . de désigner une faculté si éminente et si malheureusement atrophiée en nous par le nom de voyance, de contemplation directe du divin, de vivante communication avec l'Absolu allié . . . Tout cela tient par intermédiaire du romantisme allemand d'un Novalis ou d'un Baader'. Primitive man was more gifted metaphysically, than we are, because he was nearer to the source of life and energy. And so begins that long romantic legend of collective poetry, of epics created spontaneously by the pantheistic genius of the race, a legend which was not shattered until quite recently by the splendid researches of Joseph Bédier, incorporated in his Légendes épiques (85)

A study of primitivism is essential to an understanding of the complex attitudes of nineteenth-century French poets to contemporary reality. In one sense the attachment to primitivism obviously accounts for some of the reluctance to treat modern or everyday subjects; it is curious that poets like Rimbaud and Baudelaire should belong to both the modernist and primitivist camps and that this reluctance should be far from consistent. There are, perhaps, two explanations for this paradoxical situation. A.E. Carter has suggested that decadence, which is one of the faces of modernism, is primitivism 'à rebours' :

(83) Chisholm does not clearly distinguish between those poets who saw Dionysos as something to be combatted in as much as it was represented by determinism and those who did not consider it in this way but rather as a source of creative energy and even spiritual comfort. Amongst the latter may be counted Laforgue.

(84) The quotation from Seillière is to be found on pp.7-8 of this work.

(85) Chisholm, Towards Hérodias, pp. 17-18.

Civilised man, though at times so proud of his civilization, has never been able to rid himself of the sneaking fear that it is all somehow unnatural, artificial and corrupt. Whether because of obscure atavistic forces which call him back to the seas and jungles from which he emerged, or a spirit of sheer contradiction, he dislikes what he builds. Or rather, what he builds makes him uneasy.

(86)

It is not surprising that those poets who felt their age to be one of decadence and were therefore fascinated by it should also have been repelled by it and looked back to a Golden Age. There is also frequently actual common ground between the two camps in their treatment of sensation and sub-conscious experience at the expense of intellectual preoccupations.

Few important French poets of the second half of the nineteenth century were untouched by primitivism. Verlaine produced Parnassian poems such as 'Cavetri' and later some of the greatest poetic expressions of the 'primitive' world of sensation. Corbiere in 'Saint Tupetu de Tu-pe-tu' and in 'La Rapsode foraine' hints at the stratum of pagan practice which still subsisted and, more important, saw in the life of Breton sailors a version of primitive 'authenticity' ^{surviving} in the Brittany of his day. Laforgue was obsessed by the primitive force of the 'Inconscient' at work in the universe; a return to primitive vision is at the heart of his theory of Impressionism.

Dissatisfaction with accepted religion seems to have been a prime motivating force in poetic primitivism; this accounts for the paganism, stated or implicit, which pervades so much of the poetry of the period. It extends far beyond references to classical mythology and to primitive cultures and indicates a true revolt against the standards of the time.

How, then, does primitivism relate to the attitudes of late nineteenth-century French poets to contemporary reality? First, it explains why a few poets largely, or entirely, ignored the modern age in their work. They had no liking for modernity either on personal

or artistic grounds; primitivism provided a viable and 'original' alternative source of themes and imagery. Although it is possible to see poetic primitivism as the result of various philosophical influences, it is at least as important to stress the personal experiences of the poet's concerned. Earlier in the century Lamartine and Nerval were imbued with a sense of the primitive by their travels. Leconte de Lisle became heartily disillusioned, after the events of 1848-52, with the idea of social and political progress. Their excursions into the primitive and exotic are in one sense a form of escapism. Lautréamont appears to have been a political activist anxious to see the downfall of the Second Empire. Rimbaud had seen the dream of the Commune shattered, though he was in any case immersed in the primitivism of the Parnasse. Mallarmé had been affected by personal bereavements and the struggle to write poetry while earning a living as a teacher. The latter point is a reminder that almost all the major poets felt maltreated by the society in which they lived and longed for a return to an age when the poet was revered as the educator of his people. The role of disillusionment was so strong that Leconte de Lisle envisaged a return to the ultimate primitive state - the end of life on Earth, the wheel of creation gone full circle; yet ironically, it was a vision dependent upon the scientific cosmologies of the modern age :

Tu te tairas, ô voix sinistre des vivants!

Blasphèmes furieux qui roulés par les vents,
Cris d'épouvante, cris de haine, cris de rage,
Effroyables clameurs de l'éternel naufrage.
Tourments, crimes, remords, sanglots désespérés,
Esprit et chair de l'homme, un jour vous vous tairez!
Tout se taira, dieux, rois, forçats et foules viles,
Le rauque grondement des bagnes et des villes,
Les bêtes des forêts, des monts et de la mer,
Ce qui vole et bondit et rampe en cet enfer,

Tout ce qui tremble et fuit, tout ce qui tue et mange,
 Depuis le ver de terre écrasé dans la fange
 Jusqu'à la foudre errant dans l'épaisseur des nuits!
 D'un seul coup la nature interrompra ses bruits.
 Et ce ne sera point, sous les cieus magnifiques,
 Le bonheur reconquis des paradis antiques,
 Ni l'entretien d'Adam et d'Eve sur les fleurs,
 Ni le divin sommeil après tant de douleurs;
 Ce sera quand le Globe et tout ce qui l'habite,
 Bloc stérile arraché de son immense orbite,
 Stupide, aveugle, plein d'un dernier hurlement,
 Plus lourd, plus éperdu de moment en moment,
 Contre quelque univers immobile en sa force
 Defoncera sa vieille et misérable écorce,,
 Et laissant ruisseler, par mille trous béants,
 Sa flamme intérieure avec ses océans,
 Ira fertiliser de ses restes immondes
 Les sillons de l'espace où fermentent les mondes.

(87)

A second reason for the examination of primitivism is that it helps to explain the treatment of contemporary reality as a decadent condition to be contrasted unfavourably with a hypothetical Golden Age. The tension between the primitive and the modern, between an ideal past and an unsatisfactory present is an important feature in the work of both Baudelaire and the major poets after 1870. It frequently provides the 'moral structure' of the poetry of contemporary reality.

A third connection between primitivism and contemporary reality, already touched on in the reference to Leconte de Lisle, is that there is a whole brand of primitivism which is based upon, and uses, the terminology of nineteenth-century science. This embraces not only the 'scientific' recreation of past epochs but is to be related to a nostalgia for the primitive animal condition. These atavistic yearnings were given credibility by evolutionary science. This point will be discussed further in the next chapter (88).

Lastly, primitivism appears as another movement, along with the poetry of contemporary reality, which often, though not always, stresses the importance of the spontaneous, and dissatisfaction with the restraints of bourgeois

(87) 'Solvat Seclum'.

(88) See pp. 320-21 and 327-330.

society (frequently associated with Christianity). The rehabilitation of sensation by the primitivist poets is not only to be conceived in moral terms, however, but in purely artistic ones - as a reaction against centuries of rhetorical abstraction and intellectual preoccupation in French poetry, against verse the main function of which was all too often simply mnemonic. Primitivism as well as modernism was a source of the interest in immediate experience; in this respect it is highly significant that many of the poets whose work is examined in this thesis were both primitivists and modernists.

x x x x x x x

Among the poets writing after 1870 the continuing importance of the Parnassians as disseminators of primitivism in the midst of the age of modern materialism should not be neglected.

The work of the Parnassian poets in many ways represents the most obvious and substantial product of French poetic primitivism. It is most

probable that the neglect of primitivism by critics is due to the neglect of the work of some of its leading exponents. (28a) All the various modes of primitivism are to be found in the work of Leconte de Lisle the most prolific of the Parnassians proper. In his case there is usually only implicit tension between the modern and the primitive in his work, for reference to modern is largely excluded (28b). Such references as there are clearly depict the nineteenth century as an age of decadence in the pejorative sense of the term. The clearest indictment of modern society is to be found in 'Aux Modernes' first published in 1872. Key features of 'decadence' - loss of vigour, physical and moral corruption, emotional emptiness, disregard for the gods and for nature - are all catalogued. More particularly Leconte de Lisle chides his contemporaries for their philistinism :

Vous vivez.... sans rêve....
Votre cervelle est vide autant que votre sein...

and their thoughtless materialism :

Hommes, tueurs de Dieux, les temps ne sont pas loin
Où sur un grand tas d'or vautrés dans quelque coin
Ayant rongé le sol nourricier jusqu'aux roches,
Ne sachant faire rien ni des jours ni des nuits,
Noyés dans le néant des suprêmes ennuis,
Vous mourrez bêtement en emplissant vos poches.

This is not altogether the fault of the public at large for they have not been given the lead they should be poets, who in ancient times had been the guides of their people. Instead French poets of the nineteenth century had pandered to the lowest taste by divulging their own personal lives. In

-
- (28a) One looks forward to a suitable ^{new} introduction to the work of Heredia, one of the most unjustly neglected poets in any language.
- (28b) Or almost entirely. The decadence and corruption of modern society is the explicit subject of poems like 'Aux Modernes'. Leconte de Lisle's primitivism is almost always nostalgic in as much as Man's folly in accepting more sophisticated systems of belief than the primitive worship of nature is always the background against which those days of 'Dies Irae'. There are even one or two poems dealing with contemporary events such as 'Soir d'une Bataille' which evokes the battlefield of Solferino.

'Les Montreurs' Leconte de Lisle had openly revealed his contempt for this brand of Romanticism :

Je ne livrerai pas ma vie à tes huées,
Je ne danserai pas sur ton tréteau banal
Avec tes histrions et tes prostituées.

The qualities of vigour, spontaneity and a sense of awe are highlighted in Leconte de Lisle's primitivist vision in deliberate contrast to his view of modernity.

Strange and elusive figure though he is, it is not inappropriate to discuss the relationship between Lautréamont's work and contemporary reality in the context of an examination of primitivism in poetry.

From the little that may be surmised concerning Ducassé's life and ideals it seems that the excessive violence which characterises his work was the product of disgust for artistic convention and the prevailing social order (the last years of the Second Empire). The poet's avowed hatred for his

fellow men (89) should not perhaps be taken at face value. If it were to be so regarded then how could one explain the poet's decision to publish his work for others to read and his use of a particular artistic form? It is more reasonable to regard this hatred in two ways. First, it may be a verbal equivalent of anarchist terrorism which is willing to go to the extremes of destruction, without any apparent purpose. In practice this kind of terrorism is frequently regarded by its advocates as a necessary purgative step in the creation of a better world. This supposition fits in with the little that is known, or rather is suspected, concerning Ducasses's political activities. Second, the violence and perversion of the Chants de Maldoror are explicable in terms of the tapping of a new source of inspiration - those levels of the consciousness that were to be first systematically explored by Freud. Both these suggested motivations may be seen as reactions to the established order in society and art.

Much of the impact of the Chants de Maldoror derives from the contrast between the starting-points of the poet's fantasies which are sometimes located in everyday reality (e.g. 'Il est minuit; on ne voit pas un seul omnibus' (90) and 'Les Magasins de la rue Vivienne' (91) and the violent imagery which ensues. This procedure makes the violence seem all the more shocking; once again we have the paradox of a poet who seems to have loathed contemporary society making use of material drawn from it to lend power to his poetry.

Though it is obviously correct to say the Lautréamont had little patience with the formal experiments of the Parnassians, his work is not as different from theirs as some critics would have us imagine. (92) His

(89) See Alan M. Boase's introduction to The Poetry of France, IV pp.vv-v. Lautréamont declared: 'Ma poésie ne consistera qu'à attaquer, par tous les moyens, l'homme, cette bête fauve, et le Créateur, qui n'aurait pas dû engendrer une pareille vermine'. (Oeuvres Complètes, p.68).

(90) Chant deuxième, (Oeuvres Complètes, p.68).

(91) Chant sixième, p.232.

(92) See, for example, P.E. Charvet, A literary history of France, IV, p.350.

contempt for Man, and for God for creating Man, is quite worthy of Leconte de Lisle. Moreover, there is to be found in his work a perverted form of the idea of sensual freedom and harmony with nature which is to be seen in the primitivism of the Parnassians. The most obvious example is, of course, the passage 'Je cherchais une âme qui me ressemblât' (93) where we see Man once again restored to 'the law of the jungle' in all its savage beauty. This is the episode of the shipwreck and the slaughter of the survivors by sharks aided and abetted by Maldoror who eventually consummates a union with a ferocious female shark. Maldoror loves the shark because he sees in her a reflection of himself- a reflection he could never see in civilised society. Fifteen years later in 'Sacra Fames' Leconte de Lisle was to portray Man and shark united by hunger in their savagery.

Lautrémont's work fits very much into the pattern of tension between the modern and the primitive, between the wild fantasies of the subconscious and extreme sensuality on the one hand and the veneer of social conformity on the other. His work will probably always have a place in literary history if only because it is one of the first in French to treat the workings of the subconscious and to use the 'spontaneous' imagery which was to be the mainstay of the Surrealists. To what extent he showed only one small and extremely unpleasant aspect of the primitive world he uncovered and to what extent he failed to find a poetic medium adequate to the expression of the new material must, in all probability, remain a question of personal

(93) Chant deuxième, Oeuvres Complètes, p.103.

opinion and taste.

Cros

* * * * *

One of the most important features of the poetry of Charles Cros is the contrast between the reality of the modern world and the ideal world :

Vrai sauvage égaré dans la ville de pierre,
A la clarté du gaz je végète et je meurs.
Mais vous vous y plaisez, et vos regards charmeurs
M'attirent à la mort, parisienne fière.

Je rêve de passer ma vie en quelque coin
Sous les bois verts ou sur les monts aromatiques,
En Orient, ou bien près du pôle, très loin
Loin des journaux, de la cohue et des boutiques...

(94)

Sometimes this ideal world is probably the product of the nineteenth-century preoccupation with human evolution combined with an interest in reincarnation :

Corrects, le zinc et les ardoises
Des toits coupent le ciel normal,
On dort, dans les maisons bourgeoises,
Je ne dors pas. Quel est mon mal?

Est-ce une vie antérieure
Qui me poursuit de ses parfums?
Ces gens vont grouiller tout à l'heure,
Dispersant mes rêves défunts.

Je me souviens, c'étaient des frères
Que, chef bien-aimé, je menais
A travers les vastes bruyères,
Les aubépines, les genêts.

(95)

There is something curious about Cros's ambivalent attitude towards modernity. Clearly his activities as an inventor and many of his writings show a great enthusiasm for his own age. One suspects that the main cause of his primitivist nostalgia

(94) Oeuvres Complètes, p.94.
(95) Ibid., p.108.

was his failure to turn his genius to material advantage :

J'ai de beaux enfants (l'avenir), leur mère
M'aime bien, malgré cette idée amère
Que je ne sais pas gagner notre pain.
Le monde nouveau me voit à sa tête...
J'ai tout rêvé, tout dit, dans mon pays
J'ai joué du feu, de l'air, de la lyre.
On a pu m'entendre, on a pu me lire
Et les gens s'en vont dormir, ébahis...

(96)

This is the main cause of the poet's uneasiness at the sight of bourgeois normality. His most authentic vision of the ideal world would be constructed in material terms. This interpretation is confirmed by the unashamed banality of 'La Vie Idéale' :

Une salle avec du feu, des bougies,
Des soupers toujours servis...

(97)

* * * * *

(96) Ibid., p.200.
(97) Ibid., p.48.

Verlaine

One may identify perhaps three kinds of 'primitivism' in Verlaine's work : the first, which was shortlived, and superficial, was an emulation of the Parnassians' scientific recreation of ancient culture; this need not concern us. The second was a reflection of the demands of complex, rational existence in the modern world in favour of immersion in the world of sensation or in the simple pleasures of everyday life - both these aspects of the poet's work will be examined in the next chapter; the third is the concern of the present chapter and is a nostalgia for 'peasant' virtues which could almost be equated with the slogan of the *État Français* and were associated by Verlaine with his reconversion to Catholicism. It is a form of primitivism unique among the major poets examined in this thesis but which had much in common with the position of Barrès and other intellectuals involved with the Catholic revival of the 1890s. It involves a contrast, usually made explicit by Verlaine, with decadent modernity. Doubtless he had a variety of reasons to be dissatisfied with the realities of the present, which he only seems to have suppressed for any length of time during the moments of greatest excitement in his relationship with Rimbaud, when he seems to have been genuinely fascinated by modernity. In his case the Parnassian dismay at the divorce of poetry and science, between the fruits of the mechanical age and art which he expressed in the prologue to the Poèmes Saturniens probably responded to a personal sense of displacement. Perhaps this accounts for the vigour of his protest :

L'Action qu'autrefois réglait le chant des lyres,
 Trouble, enivrée, en proie aux cent mille délires
 Fuligineux d'un siècle en ébullition,
 L'Action à présent, - ô pitié! - l'Action,
 C'est l'ouragan, c'est la tempête, c'est la houle
 Marine dans la nuit sans étoiles, qui roule
 Et déroule parmi les bruits sourds l'effroi vert
 Et rouge des éclairs sur le ciel entr'ouvert!

(98)

This sense of displacement was complicated by what was evidently an early disposition towards the bitter-sweet sense of 'temps perdu'. Given the failures and disasters which beset the poet in his personal life the past was for him lost time in more than one sense - not only irretrievable but wasted. This nostalgia, not necessarily crucial in itself, but expressed with unusual effectiveness^{as} found in early poems like 'Nevermore' (Melancholia) 'Après trois ans' and 'Colloque sentimental'. It was to take on a new significance in later years when Verlaine was denied access to Mathilde and Georges.

As early as the poems of La Bonne Chanson the countryside provided images appropriate to the evocation of pure happiness and wholesome love :

Mais le songeur aime ce paysage
 Dont la claire douceur a soudain caressé
 Son rêve de bonheur adorable, et bercé
 Le souvenir charmant de cette jeune fille...
 La Compagne qu'enfin il a trouvée, et l'âme
 Que son^{âme} depuis toujours pleure et réclame.

(99)

This vision of a pure love is deliberately contrasted with modernity :

-
- (98) The whole argument of Verlaine's Prologue is remarkably similar to that contained in Rimbaud's letter to Demy of 15 May 1871 concerning the need to return to the situation of Greek poetry in tune with the society in which it was produced.
- (99) Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes, p.142.

Une odeur de charbon qui brûle et d'eau qui bout,
 Tout le bruit que feraient mille chaînes.....
 - Que me fait tout cela, puisque j'ai dans les yeux
 La blanche vision qui fait mon coeur joyeux.....

(100)

and in particular with the modern city :

Le bruit des cabarets, la fange du trottoir,
 Les platanes déchus s'effeuillant dans l'air noir,
 L'omnibus, ouragan de ferraille et de boues,
 Qui grince, mal assis entre ses quatre roues,
 Et roule ses yeux verts et rouges lentement,
 Les ouvriers allant au club, tout en fumant
 Leur brûle-gueule au nez des agents de police,
 Toits qui dégouttent, murs suintants, pavé qui glisse,
 Bitume défoncé, ruisseaux comblant l'égout,
 Voilà ma route - avec le paradis au bout.

(101)

An idealised picture of the happiness of country life (which his attempts to put into practice were disastrous) is one of the main products of Verlaine's Catholic patriotism in Sagesse where it is again contrasted with the life of the modern city which is morally debilitating :

La vie humble aux travaux ennuyeux et faciles
 Est une oeuvre de choix qui veut beaucoup d'amour....
 N'entendre, n'écouter aux bruits des grandes villes
 Que l'appel, Ô mon Dieu, des cloches dans la tour.....

(102)

The same point is made again in 'La "Grande ville"! Un tas criard de pierres blanches...' and 'Parisien, mon frère à jamais étonné...' The poet feels moved to make an act of renunciation:

Ne l'enfant des grandes villes
 Et des révoltes serviles,
 J'ai là tout cherché, trouvé,
 De tout appétit rêvé...
 Mais, puisque rien n'en demeure,
 J'ai dit un adieu léger
 A tout ce qui peut changer....

(103)

-
- (100) Ibid., p.146.
 (101) Ibid., p.152.
 (102) Ibid., p.248.
 (103) Ibid., p.262.

The reward is to be found in those moments of joy when the cycle of agricultural life seems at one with Catholicism :

Car sur la fleur des pains et sur la fleur des vins,
Fruit de la force humaine en tous lieux repartie,
Dieu moissonne, et vendange, et dispose à ses fins
La Chair et le Sang pour le calice et l'hostie!

(104)

More generally the world of simple faith is contrasted with the corrupting sophistication of modern thought in 'Petits amis qui s'êtes nous prouver...' Its sequel, 'Or, vous voici promus, petits amis....' implies that the whole of France is in a state of political as well as spiritual decadence. The poet's patriotism is inseparable from his dissatisfaction with the present :

Ce monde est si mauvais, notre pauvre patrie
Va sous tant de ténèbres,
Vaisseau désarmé dont l'équipage crie
Avec des voix funèbres,
Ce siècle est d'un tel ciel tragique où les naufrages
Semblent écrits d'avance.....

(105)

The tragedy of Verlaine's life was that in practice he could only survive in the milieu of modern sophisticated Paris, that he was unable to make a success of either his Catholicism or his attempts to live the country life. He was well aware of the double inspiration in his work and even paraded it in a collection like Parallèlement. It lends a poignant sense of tension to his life and work.

* * * * *

(104) Ibid., p.291.

(105) Ibid., p.253.

As one might expect the case of the young poet who was more than anything or anyone else, responsible for creating some of the immediate causes of this tension (the breakdown of Verlaine's marriage) is a good deal more complicated.

In Rimbaud's work 'Soleil et Chair' is a key poem in any examination of poetic primitivism or paganism. It is inspired by a pantheistic conception of nature at the centre of which we find the gods of antiquity and cosmic forces represented by the Sun and the Earth :

Le Soleil, le foyer de tendresse et de vie,
Verse l'amour brûlant à la terre ravie....

Nostalgic regret is expressed for the lost Golden Age which is associated in the poet's mind with the theme of love :

- Ô Vénus, ô Déesse!
Je regrette les temps de l'antique jeunesse,
De satyres lascifs.....

In keeping with this association the poet enumerates the great lovers of Greek mythology (Ariadne and Lysios, Leda and the swan, etc.)

The ideal world of love, harmony and sensual pleasure has disappeared because of the onslaught of rationalism and Christianity so that :

Notre pâle raison nous cache l'infini!
Nous voulons regarder : - le Doute nous punit!
Le doute, morne oiseau, nous frappe de son aile.....

and the poet exclaims in anguish :

Oh! la route est amère
Depuis que l'autre Dieu nous attelle à sa croix.....

The poem is filled with the contrast, essential to an understanding of Rimbaud's poetry, between the primitive and the modern :

Oui, l'Homme est triste et laid, triste sous le ciel vaste,
Il a des vêtements, parce qu'il n'est plus chaste,
Parce qu'il a sali son fier buste de dieu.....

Rimbaud shares Leconte de Lisle's views on the ideal primitive state and the reasons for its disappearance as expressed in 'Dies Irae' and elsewhere. In some of his most important works his sympathy with

the primitive is obvious; in Une Saison en Enfer the ancient Gaul, the negro, the barbarian and the pagan are the representatives of the primitive; in 'Le Bateau Ivre' Weinberg has correctly identified the 'Peaux-Rouges criards' with the 'forces of freedom'. (106) The latter example is a reminder that Rimbaud was even more interested in primitive freedom - in which violence might play a part - than in the idea of peaceful harmony with nature. His primitivism, much more so than that of the Parnassians, extends into the realms of the subconscious and sensation. The free play of sense impressions and subconscious experience and images is characteristic of the 'primitive' world revealed to the reader in the Illuminations. It is in this predilection for spontaneity and directness that the poet's primitivism finds common ground with the 'contemporaneity' of much of his poetry. Primitivism and modernism are also connected in his work through the procedure of contrast that has already been mentioned and which will now be further considered.

It was impossible for Rimbaud to express and formulate adequately in discursive language his fundamental feeling about life. This feeling, which he experienced very strongly, necessitated his poetic oeuvre : moreover it was so acute and so comprehensive that it could not be communicated entirely by reference to the imagination or to fictional realities. As a consequence Rimbaud is one of the most 'physical' of poets. This we shall see exemplified in his vocabulary by reference to food, drink and excreta. In very general terms Rimbaud's

(106) B. Weinberg, The Limits of Symbolism, p.96.

fundamental feeling about life seems to have been a sensation of being at one with the universe - he was a pantheist. Having said this, however, it should be noted that there is a basic ambiguity in the nature of this feeling. It seems likely that for much of the time Rimbaud did not have this feeling but merely the yearning for it. Thus it can be seen that the duality of primitivism and modernism far from representing a contradiction in his work is its very basis. In other works the poet saw contemporary civilisation as a strait-jacket which prevented him from returning to the perfect primitive state of communion with nature. This duality becomes a powerful source of tension and vivid contrast. Contemporary bourgeois society is equated with ugliness and the primitive in Man with beauty. Thus in 'A la Musique' the sickly desires and petty passions of the bourgeois are contrasted with the primitive fire and lust of the narrator. Variations of this technique of contrast are used most successfully in a number of poems. Even the early and deceptively simple poem 'Sensation' may be held to imply this contrast since it opposes pantheistic spontaneity to the discursive and rational modes of tackling experience :

Je ne parlerai pas, je ne penserai rien :
Mais l'amour infini me montera dans l'ame....

'Le Châtiment de Tartufe', 'Le Forgeron', 'Les Assis', 'Mes Petites Amoureuses', 'Accroupissements', 'L'Orgie parisienne', 'Les Soeurs de Charité' and 'Les Premières Communions' all employ a technique - which might be called Rabelaisian - which is essential to Rimbaud's contrative purposes. This is the demolition of appearances, of externals and, above all, of hypocrisy and affectation in a 'reduction'

to nature. The sophisticated veneer of civilisation is removed to the detriment of the targets of Rimbaud's satiric venom. In 'Le Châtiment de Tartufe' the representative of religious hypocrisy is stripped of the vestments symbolic of his station, reduced to basic nudity which can conceal nothing. The attention given to the bodily functions of Frère Miltus in 'Accroupissements' is a milder version of the same process. In 'Premières Communions' the girl selected by the priest as a symbol of simple piety and purity is seen to be subject to the tribulations of puberty and, again, disturbed movements of the bowels.

French bourgeois Christianity is, thus, one of the aspects of decadent modern society against which the poet uses this particular weapon. Other symbols of authority and repression suffer the same treatment. 'Le Forgeron' which, as well as being an historical poem, is an attack on the whole concept of monarchy (and indirectly upon Napoleon III) shows the frail, all too human condition of Louis XVI : 'Bien que le roi ventru suât...' The dizain in the Album zutique beginning 'L'enfant qui ramassa les balles, le Pubère' is a much more incisive variation of the technique turned upon the imperial family itself in which, through a clever play on words the prince impérial's exploits in the battle at Saarbrücken serve as a means for the poet to depict him as a masturbating adolescent. In 'L'Orgie parisienne' the would-be authority of the victorious, pompous and self-righteous Versailles is undermined by characterising their triumphant entry into Paris as a return to frenetic copulation.

The more immediate symbols of bourgeois authority in 'Les Assis' are described as sterile and decrepit creatures in great but detached anatomical detail by the poet. 'Mes Petites Amoureuses' and 'Les Soeurs de Charité' are violent pronouncements of Rimbaud's misogyny in which the poetic tradition of the idealisation of feminine beauty, and even sexual allure which has helped to create their position in modern society is unmercifully reversed. Rimbaud's reductio ad naturam does not necessarily imply a disgust for the human body - after all, the new poetics outlined in the letter to Demeny of 15 May 1871 does not neglect the place of sensation since the new poetic language would be 'résumant tout, parfums, sons, couleurs...'. Nor are such poems entirely destructive. Just as Rabelais had done before him, Rimbaud is seeking to destroy pomposity and affectation through his scatological methods and to 'return' to a life of freedom, honesty, spontaneity and unsullied beauty - even if one suspects that his belief in the possibility of this was, at times, extremely tenuous. There is thus, a positive side to this technique. The repression of sensual enjoyment which Rimbaud, like some of the Parnassians, sees as central to Christianity, is of course contrasted to the pagan ideal expressed in 'Soleil et Chair' but this ideal is also suggested even within a poem like 'Les Premières Communions' where énergies are stolen by Christ, where the potential joys of innocent sex with a future husband are what have somehow been preempted by the First Communion. Similarly the injustices which are enshrined within hypocritical modern society with its satirised privileged classes are contrasted to a dream of universal brotherhood - rekindled just before and during the Commune - which is suggested in 'Le Forgeron' and is a return

to the pagan ideal of harmony among men and between men and gods, extending to all living creatures :

La terre berçant l'homme, et tout l'Océan bleu
Et tous les animaux aimaient, aimaient en Dieu!

(167)

The same ideal of social harmony recurs more cryptically, in Illuminations, notably in 'A une Raison' in 'Villes' ('Ce sont des villes!...') and 'Génie'. (See next chapter)

Even the violent attacks upon the female sex are not without an antidote. Rimbaud, like Laforgue after him, wanted affection and companionship from women. His difficult relationship with his mother, his almost certainly unhappy experiences with girls, mean that it is difficult for him to come to terms with the more peculiarly sexual attributes of the opposite sex. In part, he blamed, as we have noted, this whole situation upon the malignant and stifling influence of the bourgeois Christian ethic with its cultivation of the concept of sin and the suppression of natural instincts. We know that Rimbaud had an ideal vision of womanhood, for he has recorded it in 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie' where the heroine is characterised by an absence of artifice, deviousness, and submissive weakness, where she earns the respect, admiration and love of fellow revolutionaries in her role of equality in comradeship. In 'Mes Petites Amoureuses' it is clearly women as 'sex-objects' whom the poet loathes. Modern artifice and enticement are combined in the 'genouillères' referred to in the lewd chorus. The point is made more explicit in 'Les Soeurs de Charité', for women are accomplices in the process which diverts the

(167) 'Soleil et Chair'.

idealised young pagan (who owes something to Baudelaire!) away from the straightforward natural state :

Le beau corps de vingt ans qui devrait aller nu...
to 'les laideurs de ce monde' of which women have allowed themselves to become the custodians and the epitome. Women at worst offer hatred and resentment - a revenge for former maltreatment. Their bodies are little compensation and may even be disgusting. At best they offer 'pitié douce' when what the poet needs is true 'charité' or camaraderie, the dependability associated by him with men. The only reliable sister of charity is death - the ultimate primitive condition! In the light of the above remarks 'Vénus Anadyomène', as we shall suggest in Part Two, Chapter Three, ^{is not} a straightforward attack on womanhood but rather a contrast between a modern, decadent variant of feminine beauty, that of the whore (pitilessly observed), and the pagan ideal which some poets and artists deceitfully apply to this and other equally ludicrous and modern ~~representatives~~ of the female sex.

On a lighter level, a similar contrastive process is at work in 'Oraison du Soir' where the part parody of the poetry of the simple life (represented for instance, by the 'pastoral' tradition, escapist Romanticism - à la George Sand - and by Coppée) and the partly genuine eulogy of everyday happiness culminates in a superbly pantheistic act of urination : a natural function balancing perfectly the detailed description of an artifact at the beginning of the poem. (103)

(103) This poem will be further discussed in Part Two, Chapter Three.

'Le Bateau ivre', which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, takes up in more extended and serious fashion the theme of the contrast between the confining civilisation of modern Europe and the freedom associated with a primitive life of adventure symbolised by the redskins and by the sea-driven boat itself. The theme is pursued in Une Saison en Enfer ('Mauvais Sang') where the poet, tongue in cheek, blames his Gallic heredity for his present predicament. In reality this section of Une Saison recounts the poet's rejection of Western civilisation (even though he eventually admits that in some form or other he must submit to it), whether it be represented by the Christian tradition, by the kind of political system Christian Europe has produced, or by the elitist society in the age of science and industry. His predicament is after all, in reality, a product of the age and far from unusual:

Pas une famille d'Europe que je ne connaisse. -
J'entends des familles comme la mienne, qui tiennent
tout de la déclaration des Droits de l'Homme. - J'ai
connu chaque fils de famille.

Although the poet affects reticence, even shame, at his pagan inclinations :

ne sachant m'expliquer sans paroles païennes, je
voudrais me taire...

Je suis une bête, un nègre...

this is what is really authentic

Le sang païen revient...

If 'nègre' is to be a synonym for stupid then it should more properly be applied to the representatives of European civilisation :

Vous êtes de faux nègres, vous maniaques,
 féroces, avarés. Marchand, tu es nègre; magistrat,
 tu es nègre; général, tu es nègre; empereur,
 vieille démangeaison, tu es nègre....

The irony of the poet's position, which is why it finds itself part of this most famous catalogue of failure and disillusionment, is that he has been so imbued with Western civilisation that even his escape into primitivism is conceived in its banal terms :

... je quitte l'Europe. L'air marin brûlera mes
 poudrons; les climats perdus me tanneront. Nager,
 broyer l'herbe, chasser, fumer surtout; boire des
 liqueurs fortes comme du métal bouillant, -
 comme faisaient des chers ancêtres autour des
 feux.

Je reviendrai, avec des membres de fer,
 la peau sombre, l'oeil furieux : sur mon masque,
 on me jugera d'une race forte. J'aurai de l'or
 je serai oisif et brutal. Les femmes soignent
 les féroces infirmes retour des pays chauds.
 Je serai mêlé aux affaires politiques. Sauvé.

More ironic still is the fact that despite his realisation of its hollowness it was just such an escape that the poet did make.....

The contrast between decadent modernity and the poet's primitive or pagan vision is also an important element in the city poetry of the Illuminations ; this will be discussed in the next chapter.

Nostalgia for happiness belonging to another phase of one's life is not absent from Rimbaud's work - although he was scarcely more than a child when he refers to childhood. His childhood was not happy and clearly it is not to the realities of this period but to the hopes that even an unhappy child may entertain that he looked back, longingly. Much of Rimbaud's work, and especially 'Le Cœur volé' and Une Saison en Enfer is thus a record of disillusionment.

* * * * *

Sonnenfeld rightly attributed neglect of Corbière's poetry, in part, to the inability of most critics to appreciate his work as a whole. They have generally been unable to reconcile the Parisian poems with the Breton poems. His admirers have tended to treat him either as a great provincial poet and a poet of the sea or as a sophisticated witty satirist of modernity. (Most have opted for the former view.) One of Sonnenfeld's achievements, though it has not met with universal approval, was to see Les Amours Jaunes as a coherent work with an 'architecture' based on a moral structure. This structure Sonnenfeld stated with the utmost simplicity : 'Il peint l'angoisse et la turpitude morales de la vie urbaine moderne; mais il voit cependant, dans une vie d'action, une voie vers le salut'. (169) With the exception of the Rondels pour Après Corbière's collection is arranged in the inverse order to its composition; the Breton poems were certainly written before the Parisian poems but are placed after them. Francis F. Burch has recently challenged the assumption that the Breton poems present a solution to the problems raised in the Parisian poems on the grounds that the poet's anguish is still clearly visible in them and not resolved as Sonnenfeld's hypothesis would seem to suggest it should be. Of course in practice Sonnenfeld believed no such thing. It is clear from his subtle analyses of Corbière's poems that he fully realised there were notes of anguish in the Breton poems - his contribution to Corbière studies

(169) Sonnenfeld, L'Oeuvre poétique de Tristan Corbière, p.5.

is far more significant than that of any of his detractors or successors including Burch himself. (160) However Sonnenfeld was somewhat at fault in presenting his hypothesis of the moral structure in a form too inflexibly dualistic. The moral structure of Les Amours Jaunes does take the shape of a transition from 'turpitude' and decadence to a kind of salvation but the book does not fall simply into two halves. One result of the straightforward division, Paris - Brittany, was that Sonnenfeld minimised the role of personal experience in the Italian poems and saw in them, almost exclusively, an attack on literary Romaniticism which could be considered as an aspect of the unvirile Parisian intellectual milieu. (166) The actual structure

 (160) Burch's Tristan Corbière, useful within its limits, is devoted to two completely different subjects: the influence of a classical education and traditional upbringing upon Corbière and the latter's influence on T.S. Eliot. The principal of originality of the book lies in its use of Corbière's childhood correspondence.

(166) Sonnenfeld, op. cit., p.39. Recent research supports our view that personal experience plays a considerable part in the Italian poems, See O.C., p.666.

of the collection is slightly more complicated than a simple division but Sonnenfeld's overall opinion remains intact and is certainly not to be dismissed as it has been by his critics. In our opinion Les Amours Jaunes does fall into two main sections but there are important subdivisions within these, particularly within the second. The first section begins the group of three introductory poems reflecting the poet's inability to come to terms with the modern city, with love, with life in general and with the contradictions of his own character : 'Ça', 'Paris' and 'Epitaphe'. As will be seen this group of poems is perfectly counterbalanced at the end of the book by the Rondels. (102)

The three groups which follow are devoted to the twin themes of 'Marcelle' and Paris : Les Amours Jaunes, Sérénade des sérénades and Raccrocs. Various points should be made here. First the theme of 'Marcelle' and Paris is a coherent one; 'Marcelle' is, after all, a product of the sophisticated city of which the poet

(102) Corbière's preoccupation with balance may also be seen in the dedicatory poems with which he prefaced and concluded the collection : 'A Marcelle. Le Poète et la cigale' and 'A Marcelle, La Cigale et le Poète'.

cannot be a part. Second, the several self-portraits included in these poems are not an exception to the pattern; they represent how the poet had come to look upon himself as a result of the experiences in the new setting. Third, the group entitled Sérénade des sérénades constitutes a relatively light interlude - the sarcastic treatment of the theme of unrequited love. The poems, however, conform to the pattern, for they recount the poet's many vain attempts to win 'Marcelle's' love and also parody one of the accepted creations of the Parisian literary world, the pseudo-Spanish love poem à la Musset. This leaves the question of the Italian poems. They were certainly written before Corbière went to Paris and are best regarded as an earlier variant of the theme of disillusionment. The poet had gone to Italy in high spirits (103) but all his dreams were shattered. Corbière's anti-Romanticism took definite shape there and was further developed in Paris. These poems did not grow out of the Parisian setting, rather they established some of the themes that were to be worked out in the Parisian poems. The subject of modern civilised decadence is treated in both the Parisian and Italian poems and for that reason the poet was happy to group them together.

The first section of Les Amours Jaunes is then, as Sonnenfeld suggested, a not very wholesome vision of life. In particular it highlights the inability of the poet to come to terms with society. The second section offers a solution, or at least an alternative, in the form of primitivism. But it is a primitivism in three stages each more embracing than the last. Corbière's primitivism had, of course, already been implicit in his rejection

(103) See J. Rousselot, Tristan Corbière, p.44.

of modern urban civilisation. The first solution offered in Armor is a representation of the values of his native Brittany written before he went to Paris but which, in contrast, he better appreciates. The poet nevertheless cannot even be fully accepted into Breton society, his illness and his non-conformism make this impossible.

In his real life and in his poetry he took refuge with the sea. Gens de mer deals with a people willing to accept the poet in their midst, a people even more 'primitive' than the other inhabitants of Brittany because of their life and death relationship with the elemental reality of the sea. The sea takes on an almost maternal role in the poems; death at sea and subsequent intermingling with the elements is looked upon as a grace denied to those who live on land. It is but a short step from such considerations to the Rondels pour après which are, indeed, concerned with this ultimate form of primitive bliss - death. Written last of all, these poems develop the idea already present in the pre-Parisian Gens de mer of the peace of death. They show the poet having resolved the contradictions and anguish of the three introductory poems to the whole collection in a calm and dream-like lyricism.

It is no coincidence that Armor almost immediately follows the Italian poems. The basic moral contrast of Les Amours Jaunes between perverted, materialistic, unmanly civilisation and the forthright life of seafarers is more sharply highlighted in this way :

Tristan, écoeuré par la pâtisserie trop sucrée, la liqueur trop sirupeuse de l'Italie, revient à Roscoff... Il y retrouve l'odeur du varech brûlé, le goût âcre des embruns, la compagnie des marins... et surtout, éteint le grêle pizzicati des mandolines, un climat viril....

(114)

The reader thus shares the same contrast Corbière had felt in his own life in the spring of 1870, and was to find again when he lived in Paris. Appropriately enough the very last poem of Raccrocs is 'Paria' which sums up the theme of the poet's exile in the world of big cities that had recurred in the first part of Les Amours Jaunes in 'Ça', 'Décourageux', 'Epitaphe' and other poems. As Sonnenfeld suggested the order of the collection implies that the poet realised that the only solution to his introspection and loneliness 'se trouve dans le retour à une vie plus simple et plus naturelle en Bretagne'. (115) Of course the Breton poems are not without signs of anguish and this is in keeping with Corbière's architectural intention, for in 'Le Poète contumace' the reader learns that the poet has succumbed to the vices of the city so that he can never entirely regain his place among his own people.

Morlaix and Roscoff, like Paris, have their brothels and bars but they lack artifice and perversity; they are the rightful place of amusement and refreshment for sailors on shore and are described with vigour and sympathy in Gens de mer. Moreover the Brittany of Armor is presented as a land of mystery and superstition which the poet in no way condemns. Pagan rites still survive, scarcely cloaked by Christianity, and are another aspect of a virile, primitive life.

(114) J. Rousselot, Tristan Corbière. p.56.

(115) L'Oeuvre poétique de Tristan Corbière, p.89.

* * * * *

The moral structure provided by the opposition between decadent modernity and various forms of the primitivist vision is one of the striking characteristics of the poetry of contemporary reality in the 1870s and 1880s. The two perspectives are not just inseparable in this way - as opposite magnetic poles - but on occasion coalesce. This is particularly interesting in the approach to sensation where decadents, modernists and primitivists share a common enthusiasm for variety and acuity of sensual experience and for its formulation in poetry.⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ Nevertheless, for the most part, the two attitudes remain in a state of authentically beneficial tension. It is partly from within the primitivist movement that the desire for greater spontaneity in life and art was born. It was also, in one way, a reaction not only against the literary establishment but also against the elitest cliques of the avant-garde, of which the decadents might be regarded as representatives.

⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ See next chapter, section (g).

(C) Modernity and Culture:Spontaneity, tradition and cultural allusion

It is not the purpose of the present section to deal with the complex question of the development of poetic forms and poetic language having the qualities of spontaneity or apparent spontaneity which were required in poetry in which poets sought to formulate ephemeral subjects and transitory experiences. This will be one of the purposes of Part Two, Chapter Four. At this stage we are concerned with a discussion of the rejection of tradition, out of a desire for originality and spontaneity, and with some of its implications. In particular, we shall examine the methods by which extremely knowledgeable and intellectual poets were able to balance their experience of, and their interest in, their cultural environment against the demands of déculture. This was one of the major predicaments which confronted the poets of contemporary reality.

As was indicated above (117) the 'decadent' modern society from which poets and writers felt themselves isolated was not merely the world of shopkeepers, bankers, lawyers and politicians, but also of literary and artistic convention. The emphasis on the value of spontaneity is, thus, both an aspect of revolt against society at large and of the challenge to tradition. But, as was suggested in the last section, considered as the authentic 'primitive' level of human consciousness, spontaneity in art can be the self-administered antidote to the artificiality and morbid introspection of the 'decadent' avant-garde. This was especially so as social mobility in the nineteenth century pushed the working and trading classes with their lack of sophistication and 'culture', either traditional or avant-garde, into prominence. It was also a concept of great importance in the Baudelairean aesthetic, (as we showed in Part One, Chapter One), and for this reason all the more commendable to the poets after 1870.

(117) In for instance the quotation from Laforgue :

Il faut ramper, ainsi que la limace au fil
D'argent! Ramper? toujours ramper! Voir des notaires
Et des grammariens, Coppée et des rosières!

Rarely has the weight of tradition seemed to press as heavily as it did upon the generation of artists growing up around the middle of the century. Just as Constable had said he wished he could forget he had ever seen a picture, Monet wished he had been born blind and then suddenly received his sight. Degas, who had more respect for tradition than most, nevertheless advocated the direct observation and notation of ordinary everyday experience, of such subjects as houses and monuments seen from below, or up close as one sees them going by in the street not as they had been previously painted (118) Baudelaire, like Degas in many respects a traditionalist, still stressed the quality of naïveté, of childlike curiosity, as being essential to the artist. (119) Rimbaud was to pour scorn upon the whole tradition of French poetry. (120) Corbière was to take as his motto : 'L'Art ne me connaît pas, je ne connais pas l'Art'. (121) Laforgue was to write that 'l'Impressionniste est un peintre moderniste qui... oubliant les tableaux amassés par les siècles dans les musées, oubliant l'éducation optique de l'école... à force de vivre et de voir franchement et primitivement... est parvenu à se refaire un oeil naturel...' (122) As early as 1852 Flaubert had written to Louise Colet that he believed all rules were on their way out, that barriers were crumbling and that a general work of demolition was in progress. (123) There is no doubt that from about 1840 onwards a movement began which elevated the artist's spontaneous vision to a position it had never before held and resisted any distortion of this vision by convention or preconception. This movement gathered momentum as the century wore on. Castagnary spoke of a mind free from the prejudice of education. Zola said that Manet did not know how to philosophise - all he knew was how to paint. Laforgue said the academies should be shut, Courbet did not set himself up as a professor for, he said, art could not be

(118) Manuscript notes in the sketch books of 1874-1883.

(119) See Part Two, Chapter Four.

(120) Oeuvres Complètes, 'Pléiade', pp.250-51.

(121) 'Ca'.

(122) Mélanges posthumes, p.134.

(123) O.C., Correspondance, II, pp.413-417.

taught. Pissarro, like Rimbaud, suggested burning down the Louvre.

The poets of the 1870s and 1880s realised that what had been lacking in French poetry was spontaneity, the expression of genuine experience. Almost all the poets we associate with the 'Symbolist' period were dissatisfied with poetic language, because the old rhetoric, which was little more than a bombastic variant of discursive speech, forced a false vision of reality upon those who had been brainwashed. Thus Ernest Raynaud wrote in Le Décadent:

Dès le collège on nous apprend à mentir à nous-mêmes, à nous vêtir d'une personnalité d'emprunt, à taire ce que nous éprouvons, et à exprimer dans les discours fictifs des sentiments que nous ne connaissons pas... ..

Il faut restituer aux impressions leur originalité, leur valeur primitive, il faut répudier les idées et les formules toutes agencées.... il faut s'apprendre à voir, à juger par soi-même, et à rendre sincèrement ce qu'on se sent sincèrement.

(124)

One cannot help but be reminded of Chateaubriand's celebrated remark in the preface to René (Plus ça change...!):

... la multitude de livres... rendent habile sans expérience.
On est détrompé sans avoir joué....

How is this widespread reaction, in both painting and poetry, against existing rules and traditions to be explained? An explanation is partly to be found in the notion of sincerity and truth in art which was a feature of the Realist school but is also an aspect of Romanticism. Saint-Beuve said that the threefold slogan that art was the beautiful, the true and the good was specious; for him it would be the true, the true alone. Duranty and Champfleury both saw sincerity in art as the essential Realist formula. Thus the genuine, lived experience of the artist gained a new and central importance. Again, this is an attitude greatly encouraged by the example of Baudelaire.

(124) Quoted in A.G. Lehmann, The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, p.184.

The deepfelt dissatisfaction with tradition is also to be accounted for, and this probably is the decisive factor, by the enormous changes in material life in this period. It has been remarked by several observers that the only significant changes in material existence after the Roman Empire did not occur until the Industrial Revolution. These changes affected the concept of art in a variety of ways. First, the technologist appeared as a rival to the artist; Raphael meant much less to the world than Stephenson. This is one reason for the growing gulf between artist and society in the nineteenth century that we have already noted, and also for the quest for new art-forms that might restore the artist's prestige or at least his relevance. Second, in the wake of the Industrial Revolution came social change which in turn led to the mobilisation of democratic forces. These drew attention away from the previously very limited world of artists and their patrons to the life of the masses. The existence of the **l**atter had hitherto been little reflected in any art-form and the presence of the rapidly increasing urban proletariat made this omission all the more striking. Taine was to advise his contemporaries to see men in their workshops, their fields and their houses, walking, drinking and going about the ordinary business of their lives. He claimed that this would be more instructive than the study of political constitutions or religious systems in understanding a people. (125) Third, the most important of all, the changed material circumstances and environment of the artist cried out for some kind of reflection in his work, (126) In particular the incredibly rapid changes in the period began to make the ideal of eternal and universal values in art look highly suspect. In the

(125) Quoted in L. Nochlin, Realism, p.23.

(126) Even if this were regret for passing of familiar things. This nostalgia is to be felt in Baudelaire's 'Le Cygne' and works like Daumier's La Chambre nuptiale (Lithograph published December 1853 in Charivari). Another reaction was a loathing for the social and material reality of the age and the adoption of a virile paganism or the aesthetic values of Hellenism we saw in the last section.

nineteenth century such permanency was neither believed in nor desired by many. In 1854 Flaubert had written that the leading characteristic of the age was its historical sense and the artists should consequently confine themselves to relating the facts. (127) The historical events of the late eighteenth and of the nineteenth centuries were of a kind to destroy previous confidence in stability and order as we have suggested in our introduction. However, regularity and symmetrical structure were not the only stylistic correlatives of the old order for it had also depended on the grandeur of its monarchs and of national triumphs (few and far between for most of the eighteenth century) particularly in war. This too had been reflected in literature and art. The decapitation of Louis XVI could arguably be said to mark the beginning of a gradual scepticism of authority and convention. Moreover, with the disappearance of the ancien régime the frequent dishonesty and chicanery of public life became more transparent. Rimbaud, for example, saw old-style rhetoric as being out of tune with the times. His letter to Demy of 15 May 1871 contained the exhortation 'demandons aux poètes du nouveau' and condemned the 'Frenchness' of the traditional rhetoric epitomised for him, by Musset.

The grandiose manner was felt by many poets and painters to be both inappropriate and reprehensible. (Though the success of Hugo shows that there was still great public demand for it!) One way of attacking it was through mockery or ironic juxtaposition, for instance in Daumier's Menelaus Victorius (128) and Manet's Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe (129) or in the poetry of Laforgue and Corbière or even in the anticlimatic endings of some of Baudelaire's poems (130).

(127) Oeuvres Complètes, Correspondance, IV, p.61.

(128) Lithograph of 1841, part of the series L'Histoire Ancienne.

(129) The use of a figurative pattern borrowed directly from Renaissance tradition (Giorgione) was an act of deliberate provocation on Manet's part.

(130) This is even true of 'Le Cygne', see above, p. 31.

As the discussion of Les Châts de Maldoror in the last section showed the means by which literary and social convention was attacked could be extremely violent. Among the minor poets in the period after 1870 Cros's equation of the primitive with the spontaneous was milder in expression and probably more profound. He was one of the first French poets to grasp the importance of the non-rational mind. In one of his sonnets he anticipated the language of Laforgue's exploration of our 'inner Africa' :

A travers la forêt des spontanéités,
Ecartant les taillis, courant par les clairières,
Et cherchant dans l'émotion des soifs aventurières
L'oubli des paradis pour un instant quittés....

(131)

This realisation was put to startling effect in the fantastic prose poems such as 'Le Vaisseau-piano' :

... Au milieu du vaisseau est une estrade surélevée et
sur l'estrade un très long piano à queue.

Une femme, la Reine des fictions, est assise devant
le clavier. Sous ses doigts roses, l'instrument rend
des sons veloutés et puissants qui couvrent le chuchotement
des vagues et les soupirs de force des rameurs...

(132)

On a more banal level Richepin's explanation of the apparent ruggedness and spontaneity of La Chanson des Gueux was the poet's desire to get at the truth, to lay claim to authenticity : 'j'ai dû faire penser, parler et agir mes personnages ainsi qu'ils pensent, parlent et agissent en réalité' (133); he spoke of his intention 'd'exprimer un coin de la vie' (134). This was to be a deliberate assault on 'la vertu bourgeoise' which is founded on hypocrisy (135).

Richepin's work also provides many instances of an entirely predictable consequence of the opposition of spontaneity to convention - the call to adopt a hedonist philosophy. This is perhaps the single most important theme of the cénacle poetry of the period and is, of course, an important feature of the

(131) Oeuvres Complètes, p.129.

(132) Ibid., p.159.

(133) La Chanson des Gueux (1902 edition), p.xiv.

(134) Ibid., p.xv.

(135) Ibid., p.xi and p.ii.

work of other minor poets and of the major poets also (136). When one recalls that almost all the cénacles in our period were drinking or banqueting clubs as well as literary societies this is even less surprising. It is perhaps worth remarking on the closeness of the spirit of this kind of poetic activity to a much earlier period in the history of French poetry. There is a considerable degree of common feeling between the poets who wrote in the heyday of libertinage and the 'realist-modernist' poets of the 1870s. Thus in the following libertin song (137) we find a reference to a modern object, 'une bombe', used to humorous effect, the use of popular language, 'Je me fous de leurs destins', and a generally rebellious attitude towards accepted standards (i.e. hedonism is substituted for Catholicism).

Qu'on parle de Dieu le Père
De toute la Trinité
Qu'une Vierge soit la Mère
D'un Sauveur ressuscité
Et que l'esprit en colombe
Descende comme une bombe,
Je me fous de leurs destins
Pourveu que j'aye du vin.

In the late 1870s Raoul Ponchon, among many others, was composing similar songs that were to become standard items in the repertoire of the gatherings of the Hydropathes. We may note the following extract :

Tu me peins les cieux roses
Comme des roses roses,
Vin rose qui m'arroses
Jene distingue plus
Jésus-Christ de Bacchus,
La Vierge de Vénus...

(138)

Such use of song-forms, with their apparent simplicity and spontaneity, was to become one of the most successful weapons in the attack, through irony and humour, upon convention and pomposity. It was a procedure adopted by minor and major poets alike after 1870 and may almost be regarded as a common denominator among

(136) See section (f) of the next chapter

(137) Quoted in F. Lachèvre, Le Libertinage au XVII^e siècle.

(138) La République des Lettres, 3 December 1876.

them (139). The popular song-form appealed to the poets all the more because it was not regarded by the establishment as part of serious art. Moreover, the song-form had already come to be regarded, through the considerable success of poets like Béranger and Dupont, as the normal medium for poems, especially light satire, treating contemporary events and society.

Like much else in Gros's career innovations in poetic language were inconsistent and unsustained - with one exception, the introduction of the humorous song-form. In his own lifetime Gros's reputation rested on his invention of the monologue as a literary form and on one verse piece of a similar nature, 'Le Hareng Saur', which is too well known to stand repetition here. This humour, often tinged with irony, colours much of his other poetry:

En attendant qu'on m'enterre,
Aujourd'hui, j'veux êtr' très gai,
Flon, flon, flon, lariradondaire,
Gai, gai, gai, lariradonde.

Je n'fais pas beaucoup d'affaires;
L'verr' cassé n'est pas d'mandé.
Flon, flon, etc.

Ma pauvr' femm' non plus n'gagn' guère;
Lui faut trop d'litr's dans l'gésier.
Flon, flon, etc.

Sa hott', son croc d'chiffonnière,
Ell' vend tout pour un d'mi-s'tier.
Flon, flon, etc...

(140).

(139) With the obvious exception of Mallarmé, although even the Symbolist generation of 1886-1900 was attracted by the 'naïve' song-forms of the Middle Ages.

(140) Oeuvres Complètes, pp. 142-43.

Occasionally the humour is straightforward and the song-form is used simply as something that would go down well at a drinking party:

Proclamons les princip's de l'art!
 Que tout l'mond' s'épanche!
 Le marbre est un'matière à part,
 Y'en n'a pas d'plus blanche...

Proclamons les principes de l'art!
 Que tout l'mond' s'entende!
 Les contours des femm's, c'est du lard,
 La chair, c'est d' la viande.

(141)

The most original and durable contribution of the Gueux was Richepin's use of quasi-popular song-forms (142), so influential upon Laforgue, of which the example given below is of particular interest for the realisation of the ironic power of the juxtaposition of the most sinister of statements (implying the threat of social violence) with a light, even humorous form:

(141) Ibid., pp. 140-41.

(142) An excellent example, unaffected by irony, is 'Il tomb' de l'eau, plic, ploc, plac...', La Chanson des Gueux, (1902 edition), pp. 22-23.

L'épine est en fleurs; à l'épine blanche,
En me promenant, j'ai pris une branche.
J'avais emporté mon petit couteau,

Oh! Oh!

Avec mon couteau
J'ai coupé la branche
Bien haut.

Je vais dans la rue pêcher à la ligne.
Beaux poissons d'argent, je vous ferai signe.
Voyez au soleil briller mon couteau,

Oh! Oh!

Avec mon couteau
Je vous ferai signe
Dans l'eau.

Quand je serai grand, pour gagner des sommes,
J'en ferai ma lance et tûrai les hommes.

Oh! Oh!

Avec mon couteau
Je trourai aux hommes
La peau.

Quand je serai vieux et la barbe blanche,
Pour béquille alors je prendrai ma branche.
Pour manche elle aura le bois du couteau,

Oh! Oh!

Avec mon couteau
Finira ma branche.
Hého!

(143)

This technique was used by Rollinat to particular effect in

(143) Ibid., pp. 14-15.

many of the poems in Les Névroses (144).

It would be a simple matter to compile a substantial and enjoyable anthology of chansons produced by the minor poets and the members of the cénacles in the years 1870 - 1887. What is of considerably more significance is the effect and influence this body of poetry had upon the major poets of the period.

Commentators have not been slow to draw the reader's attention to the song-like quality of much of Verlaine's poetry, encouraged no doubt by the fact that many of the poems have been set to music. Yet paradoxically, with the controversial exception of the Chansons pour elle, few of Verlaine's poems may be regarded as chansons at all. In his case the influence of this kind of poetry is to be seen in more subtle ways. One of the best examples is 'Bruxelles - Chevaux de Bois' where the opening stanza, in the form of a refrain, sets the rhythm which, throughout the rest of the poem, communicates the poet's mixture of confusion, dizziness and pleasure in contemplating the round of life and, in particular, the eternal process of copulation epitomised for him by the fair:

Tournez, tournez, bons chevaux de bois,
Tournez cent tours, tournez mille tours,
Tournez souvent et tournez toujours,
Tournez, tournez au son des hautbois.....

(144) Such as 'Le Fantôme du Crime', 'Les Deux Serpents', 'Le Baby' and 'Mademoiselle Squelette'.

Et dépêchez, chevaux de leur âme :
 Déjà voici que la nuit qui tombe
 Va réunir pigeon et colombe
 Loin de la foire et loin de madame....

(145)

The naive rhythm of a song is moreover, perhaps the essential ingredient in the disarming intimacy which is one of the most enduring features of Verlaine's poetry immortalised in poems like 'Il pleure dans mon coeur' :

Rimbaud, who was always more aggressive than Verlaine in his attack on conventions considered the appeal of spontaneous, popular forms of art as part of the process of 'dérèglement'. Such works are clearly contrasted by him to those of established reputation in 'Alchimie du Verbe' :

Depuis longtemps je me vantaïs de posséder tous les
 paysages possibles, et trouvais dérisoires les célébrités
 de la peinture et de la poésie moderne.

J'aimais les peintures idiotes, dessus de portes, décors,
 toiles de saltimbanques, enseignes, enluminures popu-
 laires; la littérature démodée, latin d'église, livres éro-
 tiques sans orthographe, romans de nos aïeules, contes
 de fées, petits livres de l'enfance, opéras vieux, refrains
 niais, rythmes naïfs.

Such inclinations were doubtless encouraged by Verlaine and it is certain, for instance, that he and Rimbaud showed an interest in Favart. However, a poem as early as 'Bal des pendus' already demonstrates this predilection :

Au gibet noir, manchot aimable,
 Dansent, dansent les paladins,
 Les maigres paladins du diable,
 Les squelettes de Saladins.

A feature of popular song and nursery rhymes in both French and English is their occasional lack of an immediately obvious meaning - either through the use of nonsense syllables or through the surprising association of logically unconnected words. Fittingly Rimbaud provides examples in 'Alchimie du Verbe' of this tendency in his own work, quoting 'Chanson de la plus haute tour', 'Faim' and 'Le loup criait sous les feuilles' :

Les salades, les fruits
 N'attendent que la cueillette;
 Mais l'araignée de la haie
 Ne mange que des violettes.

(146)

Corbière must have been intimately acquainted with the popular songs - especially sea shanties - of his native Brittany and echoes of these are to be found in the poems with a Breton setting. Like the other major poets of contemporary realities he saw, however, that there were excellent effects to be derived from an extension of the context of the popular song-form, in poems like 'Après la pluie', away from the purely folk setting to the everyday experience and feelings of the individual poet :

J'aime la petite pluie
 Qui s'essuie
 D'un torchon de bleu troué!
 J'aime l'amour et la brise,
 Quand ça frise...
 Et pas quand c'est secoué.

(147)

-
- (146) 'Le loup criait sous les feuilles'.
 (147) Oeuvres Complètes, p.722.

Echoes of popular song were, of course, an important element in the 'anti-culture' of Laforgue's poetry as of Corbière's. Further remarks on this question, with reference to Laforgue's poetry, will be found in the final part of this thesis.

The fascination with popular song-forms is but one instance of a more widespread effort towards the debunking of the language of French poetry or, on occasion, of 'accepted' language generally. In Rimbaud's case this is not only to be seen in the alleged galimatias of some of the more obscure Illuminations but is arguably present in his use - in something as matter of fact as his everyday correspondence - of a personal argot. His special vocabulary includes such items as Parmerde (Paris), Jumphe (juin), travaincer (travailler), Caropolmerdés (Carolopolitains), colrage (courage), l'académie d'Absomphe (left-bank café where Rimbaud and Verlaine drank absinthe), contemplotstate ('contemplation'), absorculant ('absorbant') and fraguemants ('fragments'). When Rimbaud wished to inform Delahaye that his mother would be returning to Charleville the following month he reinforces his emotional estrangement from her by impersonalisation, abbreviation and word-play:

La mère Rimb. retournera à Charlestown
dans le courant de juin.

(148)

Suzanne Bernard has rightly drawn attention to this aspect of the correspondence between Rimbaud, Verlaine and other members of their circle, describing it as 'Encanaillement et révolte, refus de la première des conventions sociales, le langage commun'. (149) Apart from personal argot there is a

(148) Oeuvres Complètes, p. 353.

(149) Oeuvres, p. 553.

significant use of general slang, popular idioms and syntax, and other aspects of contemporary speech in the poetry of Rimbaud, Verlaine, Corbière and Laforgue and the minor poets which will be discussed at greater length in Part Two, Chapter Three but which evidently is to be related to the whole effort of resistance against literary propriety and the prevailing reliance on traditional rhetoric. Although such language quite obviously did not separate the poets from society at large - indeed, in some measure, it should have brought them closer together - there is no doubt that a frequent result was to alienate the reader of poetry who expected to be 'uplifted' by what he read.

The apparent négligences to be found in Corbière's spelling (150), versification and syntax are combined with word-play and an extension of the poetic register to produce what must have seemed to the reader in the 1870s a veritable désarticulation of the accepted language of French poetry - a complete justification of Corbière's own pronouncement:

Bon, ce n'est pas classique ? - A peine est-ce français! ...
C'est un coup de raccroc, juste ou faux par hasard ...
L'Art ne me connaît pas. Je ne connais pas l'Art. (151)

The most iconoclastic poems were not always, of course, the best or even the most original works by the poets after 1870. No one would pretend that the Complaintes were Laforgue's masterpiece - underrated though they are - but they do mark the extreme point of his assault upon poetic

(150) Some of these négligences may have been real rather than apparent for they are to be found in his early correspondence with his family.
(151) Oeuvres Complètes, pp. 704-05.

convention through iconoclasm and, as a result, were labelled incomprehensible by contemporary reviewers (152).

Of all the poets writing in the two decades after 1870 Mallarmé made the most daring departures from convention, particularly as far as syntax was concerned. Yet it is the present writer's estimation, explained more fully below (153), that the primary objective of his experiment was not the creation of apparent spontaneity nor even, specifically, a direct challenge to tradition but rather the attempt to make poetry more difficult for the reader looking for immediate discursive meaning and to give the poet more flexibility in creating new, quasi-autonomous, patterns of sound and imagery.

* * * * *

The fight against tradition, the quest for authenticity, the desire to formulate the individual's experiences of a changing world had led to a greater emphasis on spontaneity and apparent simplicity, a disrespect for poetic convention, a preference for the humorous over the pompous, an interest in such forms as the popular song and even the nursery rhyme and the attempt to supplement the poetic register with aspects of everyday speech, previously largely untried. Taken together these tendencies seemed to amount to an attack on culture. Critics of

(152) An interesting selection is to be found in J. L. Debaue, Laforgue en son temps.

(153) See pp. 668 and 714-715.

the period faced with experiment in poetry and painting reacted sometimes not only as the guardians of taste but as the defenders of the whole tradition of Latin rationalism. (154)

A true and total rejection of culture in favour of a naïve primitivism, much though they might write about the latter, would have been an uncomfortably paradoxical and probably untenable position for poets writing in the late nineteenth century. One of the most striking aspects of the age was an increasing cultural awareness - through the spread of education, through travel, through an ever growing profusion of books and journals - coupled with an amazing, even alarming, growth in the sheer volume of human knowledge primarily through the development of the sciences.

All the major poets in our period possessed a degree of intellectual curiosity. They were aware of developments in literature, art, science and many other aspects of cultural life. Rimbaud and Laforgue were particularly voracious readers. Much though the poets might deride their own and their contemporaries' intellectualism (155) they had to come to terms with it. The poets did, however, find a way to show their knowledge of literature, art, science, philosophy and other subjects without being hypocritical. To some extent this was possible because new knowledge (for instance Laforgue's reading of Helmholtz) undermined

(154) Lethève's book provides many examples, as does a more general reading of 'establishment' periodicals and newspapers of the time; some of these are listed in Bibliography (iii).
 (155) Especially in the 'hedonist' poetry of the cénacles.

established ideas and prejudices of taste but often because the poets made their references to culture in an attitude of mischievous disrespect, through the techniques of humour, word-play and ironic cultural allusion.

Irony had been a feature of Baudelaire's poetry which would be particularly appreciated by the poets after 1870. Indeed, as we saw in Part One, Chapter One, Laforgue made extensive notes on the place of tonal contrast in Les Fleurs du Mal, being one of the first to grasp the very unFrench ironic effect of the device. Contrast and incongruity is the heart of irony and flavours much of the major and minor poetry after 1870. Contrasts between classical form, allusion to classical culture and modern, everyday life abound in the poetry of the period. In Goudeau's Les Fleurs du bitume the sections entitles Les Romaines and Les Grecs are made up of poems pointing an ironic contrast between the classical terms of the Parnasse and modernity:

Le culte avait pour temple un nid joyeux et fol
Situé voie Haussmann, à vingt marches du sol.

(156)

Ma Lesbie, occupée à perdre son Latin ...

(157)

Dans l'atrium un vieil esclave de concierge ...

(158)

They are satires of modern life transposed into a classical setting from which, however, modernity is never absent.

(156) Les Fleurs du bitume, p. 10.

(157) Idem.

(158) Idem.

In 1882 Trézenik contributed a number of poems to the Nouvelle Rive Gauche which involved making fun of both traditional forms and subjects. His intention in writing 'Sonnet vieux jeu' (159) may be compared to that of Corbière in 'I Sonnet avec la manière de s'en servir' for the departure from convention in Verlaine's 'Sonnet boiteux' which is, however, a far more serious piece. The deflation of conventional subjects such as romantic love, noted in the discussion of the cénacles was widespread practice. Corbière's superb parody of Baudelaire's 'A une Passante' in 'Bonne fortune et fortune', already cited (160), is an obvious example. Trézenik went one step further in 'Amour filial' (161) by making fun of romantic love and filial affection in one fell swoop : the prostitute with whom the poet has been for a drive asks for a generous tip for the coachman :

Fais-le pour moi, c'est p'pa.

Romantic love, seen as a deceptive trap, is the most important single theme in Laforgue's poetry and is not only to be related to the poet's own experience of his parents' marriage or of his own uncertainties as an adolescent but also to the whole cult of popular romantic literature, a striking aspect of his age, which filled the heads of girls with impossible expectations :

Mon Dieu, à quoi donc rêvent-elles ?
A des Roland, à des dent-elles ? ...

Ah ! pensionnats, théâtres, journaux, romans !

(162)

- (159) La Nouvelle Rive Gauche, 8-15 December 1882.
 (160) See above, Part One, Chapter Two (b)
 (161) La Nouvelle Rive Gauche, 8-15 December 1882.
 (162) Poésies Complètes, p. 46.

of the quest for originality, spontaneity and quasi-primitive simplicity with the preoccupations of an educated age mindful of its literary and artistic heritage, busily engaged in the accumulation of knowledge of all kinds, could be achieved through the technique of cultural allusion. Usually this was to be ironic but in Rimbaud's 'Bateau ivre' we find an outstanding instance of the reconciliation of spontaneity and culture largely uncoloured by ironic intention.

The very theme of 'Le Bateau ivre' is liberation from the controlling forces of, presumably, family, school and church:

Je ne me sentis plus guidé par les haleurs ...
J'étais insoucieux de tous les équipages

made sweeter by the thought of the triumph of primitive forces where savage passion is associated with art:

Des Peaux-Rouges criards les avaient pris pour cibles,
Les ayant cloués nus aux poteaux de couleurs.

Part of the act of rebellion and at the same time a way of freeing the mind from the force of habit is the time-honoured method celebrated so frequently by the cénacle poets - intoxication by alcohol. Rimbaud is far less banal in his reference to drink and quite clearly sees it as a rather unpleasant stage on the road to the greater and truer spontaneity symbolised by union with the sea, a union which removes the last vestiges of authority:

L'eau verte pénétra ma coque de sapin
Et des taches de vins bleus et des vomissures
Me lava, dispersant gouvernail et grappin.

More intoxicating than alcohol, this experience is equated with the beauty and rhythm of love:

Où, teignant tout à coup les bleuités, délires
Et rythmes lents sous les rutillements du jour,
Plus fortes que l'alcool, plus vastes que nos lyres,
Fermentent les rousseurs amères de l'amour !

Obviously Rimbaud's rebellion is, on one level, that of the child or adolescent, still in possession of idealism and imagination, against the staid materialism of bourgeois adulthood which threatens to

absorb him:

J'aurais voulu montrer aux enfants ces dorades ...
Si je désire une eau d'Europe, c'est la flache
Noire et froide où vers le crépuscule embaumé
Un enfant accroupi plein de tristesses, lâche
Un bateau frêle comme un papillon de mai.

The interference of adults can for a time be locked out by development
of the child's ability to ignore what he is told:

Moi, l'autre hiver, plus sourd que les cerveaux d'enfants ...

The agents of revenge against those in authority are precisely those
that might be gleefully invented by a child:

Des Peaux-Rouges criards.

Likewise, the invading sea is likened to the pleasures enjoyed by a
child:

Plus douce qu'aux enfants la chair des pommes sures,
L'eau verte pénétra ma coque de sapin ...

Yet the triumph of spontaneity described by Rimbaud is not simply
that of the child over the adult, for the poem is also an indictment
of European culture. All that the poet feels nostalgia for is the
dreaming child sailing his model boat, nothing else is worth
retaining. The return to Europe is made out of exhaustion but the
poet-ship would prefer total absorption into the sea to such a return:

L'âcre amour m'a gonflé de torpeurs enivrantes.
Ô que ma quille éclate! Ô que j'aille à la mer! (166)

Thus whilst one cannot wholeheartedly accept Chadwick's ingenious
interpretation of the end of the poem (167) one would not see
the end of the poem as a willing acceptance of everyday adult
existence. Self-destruction or a return to childhood idealism are
both clearly preferred to that.

(166) Could this refer to the sexual aspect of dérèglement already
hinted at in the adjective 'amères' in the otherwise joyful
stanza 7?

(167) In Études sur Rimbaud.

Stanzas six to fifteen constitute a catalogue of wonders which by their beauty, colour and magnitude and their numen contrast with the dullness of Europe. This section also provides the most striking instance of how the theme of the search for freedom is matched by considerable spontaneity and freedom of form. For the order here is governed not by reasoned progression from one experience to another but rather, in anticipation of poets like Saint-John Perse and, of course, of Rimbaud's own Illuminations, by the joy and wonder of accumulating sensual experiences. This is one aspect of the poem which elevates it far above minor Parnassian poems which shared the symbol of the boat and in which Rimbaud may have found some initial inspiration.

The other highly original aspect of the poem is the skill with which this plea for spontaneity (reflected in form as well as content) and escape from the constraints of modern European civilisation is made, nevertheless, to partake of that very culture through the technique of allusion. There are, in very broad terms, two kinds of cultural allusion to be found in poetry - as indeed elsewhere. The first may be unconscious or, if conscious, it is not meant to be seen as an allusion by the reader. This is, more often than not, a debt to other writers which the poet may even wish to conceal or disguise in order not to detract from his own originality. Such unconscious or muted references may be an interesting part of the poetic synthesis, for instance in the case of Laforgue's probably unconscious recollections, of Huysmans in 'L'Hiver qui vient' and 'Solo de lune', but they are to be differentiated from the second kind of cultural allusion with which we are presently concerned and which is deliberate and intended to be noticed by the reader.

Rimbaud's debt to other writers in 'Le Bateau ivre' very largely comes within the first category. What he might owe to Chateaubriand, Poe or Dierx is not deliberately or openly displayed.

Nor, for instance, are his familiarity with Parnassian diction or the very important and neglected debt to Vergil to be seen as attempts to give the poem a neo-classical orientation. It is indeed questionable whether literary reminiscence forms part of the network of deliberate allusion to contemporary culture in 'Le Bateau ivre' at all. There are a couple of possible exceptions to this. The present writer is tempted to see in the poem an assertion of the young poet's originality in the face of the established poets of the Parnasse. That there are so few hints of this can be explained by the simple fact that, at the time of writing, Rimbaud was still hoping for publication in Le Parnasse contemporain. It would have gratified Rimbaud's malicious wit to incorporate such references into the poem nonetheless. The 'haleurs' and 'équipages' with whom the poet wishes to dispense may well represent, among other things, the coterie of the Passage Choiseul rendered more reprehensible in Rimbaud's eyes by their recent attitudes towards the experiment in political 'freedom' of the Commune. (168) The poet makes his descent from his starting-point, the 'Fleuves impassibles' - unperturbed, sheltered, narrow areas of navigation to be compared to the narrow confines and emotional detachment of Parnassian poetry - to 'Le Poème de la Mer', true poetry involving the full range of sensual, emotional and spiritual experience unlimited by convention or rule. The poet's first inspirations and the period of his apprenticeship only lead him to the awesome wonder of this fuller poetic experience once his would-be mentors have been disposed of:

(168) The opening stanza may also represent in more general terms the overthrow of the ruling classes by the 'red savages' of the Commune - just as the poem in its entirety may be partly a reference to disillusioned hope in political and social freedom.

Quand avec mes haleurs ont fini ces tapages,
Les Fleuves m'ont laissé descendre où je voulais.

Fittingly, those who would seek to guide the poet have been nailed against the colourful artifacts of a contrasting savage culture. Indeed the resources of the Western poetic tradition have proved in any case to be inadequate for the formulation of experiences 'plus vastes que nos lyres' and for the evocation of numinous mysteries:

J'ai vu le soleil bas, taché d'horreurs mystiques ...

This new kind of 'total' poetry involves a degree of voyance which poets working within the Parnasse, and others, have only thought to possess:

Et j'ai vu quelquefois ce que l'homme a cru voir!

Their stereotyped attempts to evoke the mystery of the universe are referred to in the only certain moment of irony in the poem, a description of the sky:

..... le ciel rougeoyant comme un mur
Qui porte, confiture exquise aux bons poètes,
Des lichens de soleil et des morves d'azur.

The irony is based on three pairings of an almost unparalleled incongruity 'ciel rougeoyant - confiture exquise', 'lichens de soleil' and 'morves d'azur'. The Parnassians (not to mention the Romantics and Baudelaire) had devoted much time to skylscapes, particularly sunrise and sunset. Rimbaud sees their attempt at such evocations as being as distant from the truth as Corbière was to see the town-dweller's conception of the sea from the real thing. For such poets the beauty of the sky is merely something to be savoured, made equivalent by them to the ingenious produce of human artifice: 'confiture exquise'. Their 'sun' is so lacking in warmth that it resembles the thin, patchy growth of lichen which takes place in cold, damp climates. The cliché 'azur' - a mot-clé for the Romantics, Parnassians and Mallarmé - is debunked in one of the most successful

and surprising images in French poetry: 'des morves d'azur'. Their usage has become so debased and habitual that it is likened to the insipid, unpleasant and involuntary product of nasal congestion. The 'bons poètes' to whom Rimbaud refers are the accepted poets given the cachet 'bon' - implying the idea that their poetry was edifying and correct - by public taste. Almost certainly he has in mind 'tous les bons Parnassiens' of his sycophantic letter of 24th May 1870 to Banville. If our hypothesis is correct then 'Le Bateau ivre' is to be placed alongside 'Le Cygne' and 'L'Après-midi d'un faune' as a great poem having as one of its themes the writing of poetry itself.

Of the other literary reminiscences in 'Le Bateau ivre' those of Jules Verne and Hugo (169) are so clear that one is inclined to feel that Rimbaud must have known that they would not escape the attention of the astute reader. If it was Rimbaud's intention that the reader should be aware of these references then, of course, his possible motives have to be considered. This whole line of reasoning presupposes, naturally, that we do not share Étienne's view of the poem as a mere pastiche, an unoriginal piece undeserving of the critical attention and praise it has generally received. (170)

(169) As well as the more obvious allusions to Verne's Vingt mille lieues sous les mers and Hugo's epic novel Les Travailleurs de la Mer there are echoes of some of Hugo's best known poems including Océan, Nox, 'Pleine Mer', 'Plein Ciel' and 'Tristesse d'Olympio'.

(170) See Le Mythe de Rimbaud, II, p. 81. There is little doubt that in this instance Étienne's cynicism has led him to a view as extreme in its own way as the recherché exegeses he so delights in condemning in his massive contribution to Rimbaud scholarship. Suzanne Bernard wisely reminds us that Delahaye recalled Rimbaud's own estimate of the poem as: 'Ah! oui, on n'a rien écrit encore de semblable, je le sais bien'. (Oeuvres, Garnier edition, p. 422). The preoccupation with originality lends further substance to our own hypothesis that on one level the poem is concerned with the theme of poetic originality and expressiveness in contrast to Rimbaud's judgement of the poetic practice of the Parnassians.

Whether Rimbaud expected the reader to be able to identify his references to Hugo and Verne with precision is another question. If our hypothesis is valid at all - and on this point we would not press our suggestion too far - it is rather a matter of Rimbaud's bringing to our attention a kind of writing with which his readers would be familiar - the description of a more virile, passionate and adventurous existence holding out a hope for the future and forming the substance of that very dream of the child sailing his model boat, that is to say of Rimbaud himself. The poet is explaining an aspect of the genesis of his idealism, of his quest for freedom, telling us indirectly some of the books which have formed his personality. Vingt mille lieues sous les mers, for instance, had a seriousness and a sense of revelation that it is easy to overlook today: 'Des choses que Dieu a voulu interdire aux regards de l'homme', 'Je voudrais avoir vu ce que nul homme n'a vu encore!' and 'Je n'ai point rêvé. J'ai vu et senti!' are all expressions to be compared with Rimbaud's:

Et j'ai vu quelquefois ce que l'homme a cru voir!

Suzanne Bernard's remark, that these expressions (which she lists with her admirable thoroughness in the Garnier edition of Rimbaud's Oeuvres) should be differentiated from Rimbaud's own experience of voyance, does not invalidate the point. Rimbaud's childhood reading would be a necessary preparatory stage in voyance, the source or the symptom of his appetite for a truth outside the immediate confines of respectable bourgeois existence which later would cause him to turn to occult literature, alcohol, drugs, sexual dérèglement and, eventually, a life of exile.

The perennial theme of revolt is made contemporary by the indictment of the literary establishment of Rimbaud's time and by reference to the kind of adventure literature which would have encouraged him in his dream of freedom. The orientation of the poem in contemporary reality

is made even clearer by other cultural allusions. The most striking of these is to be seen in the profusion of scientific and quasi-scientific terms: phosphores, hystériques, cataractant, glaciers, pôles, zones, lunules électriques, hippocampes, Maelstroms, archipels, infusé d'astres, alcool, trombes, ressacs, glauque, fermenter, entonnoirs and so on. The poem thus reflects the characteristic precision and particularity of the vocabulary of the scientific age - a phenomenon also evident in the creation of neologisms: lactescent, bleuités, dérades. The poet's escape from modern civilization is thus described with extensive reference to the very terminology coined by that society. If 'Le Bateau ivre' is clearly a product of the scientific age it is equally one of the age of commerce. Here the allusions serve an important contrastive function, for they represent the surviving links between the ship at sea and the 'Europe' which it has left behind:

Porteur de blés flamands ou de cotons anglais ...

... les Monitors et les voiliers des Hanses ...

.....aux porteurs de coton ...

Appropriately in the mood of failure at the end of the poem the reader is reminded of the ultimate corruption of the sea by civilising forces - its use as a means of captivity:

... les yeux horribles des pontons.

The references to Monitors, porteurs de coton and pontons could all have arisen from Rimbaud's reading of accounts of the very recent American Civil War. It is not impossible that pontons may have been put into Rimbaud's mind by discussions of the likely fate of the Communards. Whatever the case it seems clear that these allusions are to a markedly modern reality. It would doubtless be possible to find many other cultural allusions in the poem but the last we wish to consider, and, in a sense, the most important and which strikes the reader as one of the most modern, is that which 'localises' the whole vision in the mind of a boy from Charleville sailing a model boat on a flache (itself an Ardennais word). The contrast of the grandeur

and excitement of the dream with the limited horizons of reality is one of the most poignant moments of the poem.

Normally the technique of cultural allusion, in the sense in which we are using the term, was based on irony of which there is only one indication in 'Le Bateau ivre'. To that extent the poem is an exception. Rimbaud did however write several poems which place him clearly in the mainstream of the ironic treatment of 'culture'. Of these perhaps one of the most interesting is 'Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs', an overtly satirical and modernistic piece. A precise assessment of Rimbaud's intention in writing the poem is difficult. It is symptomatic of the lamentable neglect of Banville's poetry (171) that most readers assume that the poem is an unqualified attack on the older poet. Reference to Banville's own work reveals, however, evidence of a similarity of attitude and technique which ought to lead the reader to suspect a greater complexity in Rimbaud's poem than is apparently the case after a cursory reading. Banville was far more than the 'impassive' poet of Les Cariatides and Les Stalactites. He had shown that he was a master of satire and parody in the Odes funambulesques. Moreover, a point overlooked by all the commentators, Banville was himself, in the late 1870s, to join the modernist camp. This was not a sudden volte-face but the natural consequence of his estimation of the value of poésie de circonstance (172). It is possible that under the influence of poets like Ricard and

(171) The writer looks forward to a definitive study of Banville by Eileen Souffrin-Le Breton.

(172) See pp. 226 - 27.

following the successful example of Coppee there was discussion within the Parnassian ranks at this time of the place of modernity in poetry. It is evident from their own work that a number of the minor Parnassians did not share Leconte de Lisle's extremist attitude reflected in his response to Du Camp's Chants modernes. If, as Suzanne Bernard reminds us, Banville had written lines - in the celebrated topical piece 'Bonjour, monsieur Courbet' - as apparently Rimboldian as

Les fleurs de la prairie, espoir des herboristes!
Arboraient des tons crus de pains à cacheter.

would one not be justified in regarding 'Ce qu'on dit au poète ...' not so much as an attack upon as an imitation of, and a tribute to, Banville? It is extremely doubtful, nonetheless, that Rimbaud would have devoted no fewer than forty stanzas to the respectful emulation of another poet. But the same is equally true if one conceives of the poem as a malicious parody of Banville. Rimbaud's purpose is surely more embracing than either of these possibilities. It is to the present writer's mind an attack on all forms of poetic préciosité, on fashionable motifs and vocabulary not arising out of the true expressive needs of the poet. The poem is built around the contrast between the pastoral - (or horticultural!) and exotic vocabulary and imagery of the Romantics and Parnassians and a vocabulary drawn from the modern, utilitarian world. Both lexes are shown to be as ridiculous as each other, when the poet allows himself to turn to them with obsessive frequency. Banville's satirical achievement in the Odes funambulesques is acknowledged through the technique of allusion (173) but it is doubtful whether Rimbaud would have considered him innocent of this very kind of préciosité in his other more serious collections. Who would better suit the term jongleur (174) than Banville himself? No important French poet can have

(173) Most have been meticulously noted by Suzanne Bernard.
(174) Stanza 37.

spent as much time not only studying the numerous metrical forms used through previous centuries but trying to revive them in his own work. Banville was unashamedly fascinated with the sheer virtuosity of poetry and might be considered to have adapted himself well to the public demand for patently skillful facture as the criterion for judging good poetry. One of the basic problems of interpreting the poem rests upon the identification of 'on' and 'poète' in the title. An obvious understanding is that the poet is Banville and 'on' Rimbaud. Another possibility is that the speaker is a practical bourgeois businessman - hence the several references to profitable plants such as cotton and tobacco - who complains of the irrelevance of the Parnassian herbarium. One could regard the poem as an attack by the same hypothetical bourgeois upon the whole tradition of nineteenth-century French poetry. Rimbaud would thus be making an amusing plea to Banville for the defence of poetry in the face of the materialist threat - a call for solidarity. It is not impossible, and certainly in keeping with Rimbaud's poetic practice, that the poem is meant to operate on several levels simultaneously. One helpful and plausible reading seems to have been ignored by the commentators. Is it not reasonable to see the poem as a satirical consideration of two of Rimbaud's own temptations: the escape into pantheistic nature poetry and, in contrast, the wholehearted acceptance of the modern age? (175) This is not to suggest that Rimbaud considered his own poetry in the same light as that alluded to in 'Ce qu'on dit au poète ...' but that he had seen that to go too exclusively in either direction might result only in lexical bric-à-brac.

(175) One thinks of a contrast between poems like 'Soleil et Chair' and 'Mouvement'.

The traditional vocabulary of French pastoral poetry and the exotic vocabulary of Parnassianism (especially of Leconte de Lisle) is referred to with considerable thoroughness: azur, la mer des topazes, lys, oeillet, amarante, brises du matin, lilas, violettes du bois, nymphes, roses, tiges de lauriers, lotos, hélianthes, açoka, papillons, lianes, acajous, romarin, cabane de bambous, pampas printaniers, la mer de Sorrente, cygnes, thyrses and so on.

If the poem is intended to warn Banville of the threat to poetry posed by the modern materialist age the solution is certainly not to be seen in the maintenance of this kind of vocabulary and imagery. Rimbaud's attitude to it is entirely disrespectful. Not once are these words allowed the resonance of even a momentary beauty, of the tiniest evocative vignette. No sooner are they encountered than they are made to seem ridiculous by contrast with some utterly mundane or utilitarian term. This makes it hard to sustain the argument that the 'on' in the title is an anti-poetic bourgeois. For he would need the knowledge and resourcefulness of an extremely well-educated littérateur in order to make his attack. Such knowledge is hardly congruous with philistinism. This hypothesis is almost certainly ruled out by word-play of which such an adversary would be incapable and which is so much in keeping with Rimbaud's own predilection for a combination of scatology, parody and cultural allusion:

Où tremble la mer des topazes ...

Le lys qu'on donne au Ménestrel
Avec l'oeillet ...

L'Ode Açoka cadre ...
Fientent ...

Incague la mer de Sorrente ...

(= merdes aux rentes?)

(Perhaps one should regard the title of the poem as a further example?)

Thus the poet, in turn, lends a scatological association to the Parnassian (as well as Baudelairean and Mallarméan) fascination with precious stones,

to the Romantics of 1830 and the Jeux floraux of Toulouse ('lys', 'oeillet', 'amarante' would be the rewards of the successful 'ménestrel'), to the exotic vegetation of the Parnassians ('açoka' is found in both Leconte de Lisle and Mendès) and to the sentimental poetry of Lamartine and the work of Madame de Staël, reflected in the reference to southern Italy. The inclusion of references to Parnassian poets along with the Romantics should demolish any idea the reader has that the poem is a defence of the Parnassians whose task of upholding poetry in the face of the materialist onslaught has been made that much more difficult by the irrelevances of the preceding tradition. Such an interpretation has, ~~however~~, been put forward by Antoine Adam. For instance, with reference to the line

Toujours les végétaux français ...

he comments: 'La plupart des poètes ne savent qu'évoquer de ridicules végétaux français. Est-il besoin d'observer que ce n'est pas le cas de Banville et des Parnassiens?' (176) What do we really learn from the poem about Rimbaud's view - for it surely is his view with which the poem largely deals - of the poetic practice of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors? In the first stanza we find an attack through ironic juxtaposition upon the exaggerated, posed emotional idealism of the Romantics: 'l'azur noir ... les Lys, ces clystères d'extases!' In the fourth stanza the same flower is held scarcely to exist in reality; it is a mere poetic emblem:

Des lys! Des lys! On n'en voit pas!

It is not lilies but 'les myosotis immondes' which, in the fifth stanza, are wafted by the morning breeze. The contrast extends to the personal

(176) Rimbaud, Oeuvres Complètes, p. 907.

level. Banville, who had been made to seem superhuman in Gautier's complimentary hyperbole: 'il voltige au-dessus des fleurs de la prairie, enlevé par des souffles qui gonflent sa draperie aux couleurs changeantes' (177), is brought down to the level of the craftsman whose garments are coloured only by sweat:

Ta chemise aux aisselles blondes ...

Only ironically can we now regard him as the poet taking his 'bain d'azur', lilacs and wood-violets are floral emblems too frequently utilised by the Parnassians which, in the sixth stanza, are likened to sickly over-sweet confections spat out by the perennial symbol of pastoral poetry - nymphs. Almost certainly there is more to the image than this. Not only is the Parnassians' regimented adherence to rules and proprieties brilliantly satirised in the phrase 'passe à tes octrois' ('allowed to pass through customs') but there is a possibility, noted by Gengoux and repeated in Suzanne Bernard's edition, that the addition of the adjective 'noires' could mean that the 'nymphes' in question might also be regarded as insects leaving their larvae which would be the 'crachats sucres'. However, the adjective 'noires' might more simply and plausibly be a way of bringing together the Romantic pastorale and the Parnassian and Baudelairean taste for exotic forms of female beauty.

The second section of the poem introduces the time-honoured emblem of the rose still favoured by the Parnassians and, notably, that compulsive emblematiser Mallarmé in 'Les Fleurs' published in Le Parnasse Contemporain of 12th May, 1866. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry were perhaps right to see this particular poem by Mallarmé as one of the principal targets of Rimbaud's parody in 'Ce qu'on dit ...' (178). Parnassian and

(177) Quoted by Bernard, p. 415.

(178) Mallarmé, Oeuvres Complètes, p. 1424.

Romantic mots-clés are combined with Romantic morbidity in Mallarmé's poem in such a way that Rimbaud's opening reference to 'azur noir' and 'clystères d'extases' may well recall Mallarmé's 'vieil azur Extase des regards De grandes fleurs avec la balsamique Mort'. The images of 'neige', 'laurier', 'cygnes', 'sang', 'rose', 'lys', are all parodied in Rimbaud's poem. The meaning of the second section is clear enough although the commentators have seemed hesitant: whatever the virtuosity of poets like Banville (and Mallarmé) nothing can enliven the inherent dullness of French vegetation as untroubled as a photograph and so stunted that even the belly of a basset hound can pass over it without difficulty. Thus the dissatisfied (Parnassian) poets committed to the description of flora have extended their range to include more exotic blooms. But all too often this is based on second-hand knowledge, the same stylised prints no more original or varied than 'sacred' pictures for young communicants. In any event Rimbaud makes it quite clear that he associates even the most recherché vegetation of the Parnassians with a basic conventionality which includes their attitude to form:

L'Ode Açoka cadre avec la
Strophe en fenêtre de lorette ...

It matters little whether the floral bric-a-brac is French or exotic; all are bundled together as old, worn out clothes:

Vieilles verdure, vieux galons !
Ô croquignoles végétales !
Fleurs fantasques des vieux Salons ! ...

Lys, Açokas, Lilas et Roses ! ...

Just as in 'Le Bateau ivre' Rimbaud was to compare the superficial evocation of nature with a mere foodstuff - 'confiture exquise' - here he refers to 'croquignoles'. For this reason it was possible to group together the 'açoka' with the 'pâquerette'; the poets make no significant distinction. Their attempts at evoking wild, untamed nature are so lame that one would fear danger from a may-bug rather than a rattle-snake. Grandville could use their plants along with chubby babies as motifs in

his marginal illustrations - the ultimate image of harmlessness and vulgarity.

The third section of the poem is a development of the idea of the widening quest of the Parnassian poet for more exotic material, now satirised as the intrepid 'white hunter'. Such a poet, lacking any real scientific knowledge, will tackle with apparent randomness and without making any meaningful distinction, subjects as different as the Rio Grande and the Rhine, Florida and Norway, or Spanish flies and crickets. Indeed there is little poetic advantage in turning to one rather than another. The mistake is to view differences of subject on this level as having any profound relationship with the essence of poetry at all. The reference to Leconte de Lisle who had used both Scandinavian and tropical settings in his poems is obvious. Just as in the second section Rimbaud moves from references to subjects to the question of form. Indeed the two are cunningly parcelled up together. Art should concern itself with the truth (a doctrine promulgated equally by the Romantics - notably Sainte-Beuve - and the Realists); the decorative exotic snakes of the Parnassians and the adherence to the alexandrine metre are irrelevancies, even obstacles to the purpose of modern art. Instead the poet should concern himself with what he knows from his own experience of modern life. Even in the South American colonies acajou is valued more for its use as mahogany in furniture than its picturesque attributes. Come to that, phosphate-rich bird droppings have more bearing on the nature of modern man than sentimental floral motifs. If the Parnassians had the chance actually to live in the tropical climes they describe (Rimbaud seems to have forgotten momentarily that poets like Leconte de Lisle and Heredia were in this very position - or is this his point?) they would still reduce what they saw to a storehouse of superficial motifs just as they had with French flora and fauna.

The fourth section of the poem is taken up entirely by advice to poets to treat modern subjects befitting a utilitarian consumer society in

the age of technology and, thus, only in this indirect sense does it refer to the poetic practice of the Parnassians.

The final section incorporates ironic references to another variant of both the Romantic and Parnassian movements - mysticism. Even the realm of ultimate reality can be reduced to bric-à-brac. Indeed, Rimbaud recommends Figuiet's works, complete with publisher!, (presumably Histoire du merveilleux dans les temps modernes and possibly the Tableaux de la nature) as a guide in composition to the aspiring 'mystical' poet. Neither Renan nor the tradition of fantastic literature, epitomised by 'Le chat Murr', have really glimpsed into mystical truth as found in pagan or Christian rites: 'les Bleus Thyrses immenses'. It would be better, for some poets at least, to confine themselves to one form of 'magic' with which they ought to be more familiar, the achievements of modern science.

Quite clearly Rimbaud's intention in 'Ce qu'on dit au poète ...' is not a qualified praise of established poetry as he saw it but an all-out attack. Quite clearly it is he, not a hypothetical bourgeois, who makes the attack - although, as we shall argue below, the alternative he maps out is not uncoloured by irony. He pays Banville the compliment of imitation but not adulation. If there were not enough evidence in the poem itself one could be left in no doubt by the sarcastic note which accompanied the manuscript to Banville:

Ai-je progressé ?

Nevertheless there are hints that nature poetry itself is not condemned but simply its perversion as the facile produce of word-smiths. An understanding of the true savagery and wonder of nature is a genuine poetic sentiment. What irritates Rimbaud above all is the inadequacy and inappropriateness of existing efforts:

Fleurs fantasques des vieux Salons !
- Aux hannetons, pas aux crotales ...

Such then is Rimbaud's judgement of the French poetry of his day.

One of his main criticisms is that it bears no relation to the modern age.⁶ But what is his own attitude to modernity as expressed in 'Ce qu'on dit au poète ...'? The present writer would argue strongly that Rimbaud is in favour of using modernist images and vocabulary - his other poetry provides ample evidence that this is the case - but largely (though not consistently) unsympathetic towards the age itself. In other words Rimbaud's attitude is the perfectly reasonable one, that if a poet wishes to evoke his unfavourable reactions to contemporary society he should do so by formulating his experiences of that society, by using vocabulary drawn from it. This is the explanation of the irony which quite clearly underlies the modernist references in the poem. However, that is not all. For these references, just like those to Parnassianism, are a parody of an existing literary tendency - la poésie progressiste exemplified by the work of Ricard, Du Camp and Hugo (¹⁷⁷). The first of these had been the object of a one-line parody in the Album zutique:

L'Humanité chaussait le vaste enfant Progrès. (¹⁸⁰)

The idea of progress also fascinated Rimbaud (¹⁸¹) but 'Ce qu'on dit au poète ...' is a destructive rather than a constructive look at poetry; he is not going to declare openly and unambiguously that he believes in anything himself.

Thus the reader is presented with an exaggerated contrast between the pastoral and the modern and mundane. In order to point the second term of the contrast Rimbaud has recourse to several kinds of vocabulary

(¹⁷⁷) References to candles and potatoes suggest that Rimbaud may have been familiar with Desnoyer's article Du Réalisme. See p. 741 below.

(¹⁸⁰) Oeuvres Complètes, p. 210.

(¹⁸¹) See pp. 360-61.

and imagery (some examples of which are listed below): utilitarian, commercial, technological, scientific, references to modern events and people and the generally anti-poetic: fonctionneront, travailleuses, allaitèrent, constrictors, cuillers Alfénide; tentures de perse brune, sagous, octrois, les Acajous ... en nos Guyanes, excrément d'oiseau marin, tabacs, cotonniers, exotiques récoltes, Dis ... de combien de dollars se rente Pedro Velasquez, Habana, réclames, sucres blancs, pectoraires, gommes, pantalons ... pour nos Armées, cotonneux, filer les noeuds, commerçant, colon, médium, (in the sense of profiteering charlatan), caoutchouc, rachète, Paramaribo; myosotis, photographes, végétaux, phtisiques, glucoses, botanique, insectes pondeurs, lichens microscopiques, pubescences, ovaires, amygdales gemmeuses, torpeurs, hystéries, rayon de sodium, dioptriques, electriques, poteaux télégraphiques, omoplates; Monsieur de Kerdrel, mil huit cent trente, BANVILLE, Grandville, Renan, le chat Murr, Monsieur Figuier, Monsieur Hachette; clystères, dégoûts, tu prends un bain, aisselles, se gonfle, immondes, pochant l'oeil, bouchons de carafes, crachats, le ventre des chiens bassets, fientent, croquignoles, poupards, bavures, oeufs frits, sans bas, tanna, pommades, ragoûts ... sirupeux, pommes de terre.

Rimbaud would probably have made the same distinction with regard to modernity as he had apparently made with Parnassianism, that is the distinction between merely decorative motifs and terms having a genuine dynamic poetic function. Yet it is extremely difficult to disentangle one group from the other for the obvious reason that, in the context of 'Ce qu'on dit au poète ...', almost all the terms are given a highly successful humorous and satirical function. The problem is to identify the kind of vocabulary which Rimbaud is implying has already become or is in danger of becoming bric-à-brac in the hands of the poets of progress.

One group of words is relatively easy to evaluate; they are those which the poets of progress would have held to be in bad taste or simply unpoetic but which Rimbaud's practice elsewhere clearly indicates are

seen by him to be a refreshing addition to the poetic register: clystères, crachats, aisselles, bouchons de carafe, le ventre des chiens bassets, fientent, croquignoles, poupards, bavures and other words listed in the anti-poetic category above. With the possible exception of clystères, which, however, seems together with clysopompe to have been a popular word with satirical poets at this time (192), all these terms have one thing in common. They belong to a register quite alien to the pomposity which was even more endemic in the poetry of progress than other poetic genres of the period. They are drawn from down-to-earth, humdrum reality.

It is more difficult to identify the terms which Rimbaud satirises as the stock in trade of the progressistes, but some are clear enough. These are words symbolic of the technological advance of mankind: rayon de sodium, dioptriques, papillons électriques, poteaux télégraphiques and, above all, the references to textile production in stanzas thirty-one and thirty-two (filer les noeuds ... noirs filons). For the loom, with the railway and the telegraph, was a recurring motif in the work of poets like Du Camp, Hugo, Ricard (and, before them, Barbier, although he sometimes put it to different use - a critique of the industrial age). It was the symbol of a worldwide commercial prosperity which would end poverty and, through international trade and travel, wars. It is such high-flown eulogies of the age of technological progress which Rimbaud lampoons in the phrase chants de fer. Stanza thirty-eight contains two vitally important allusions for some reason overlooked by the commentators: 'lyre aux chants de fer' is not merely an allusion to

(192) For instance in the work of Gagne and, more notably, Corbière. See Walzer's note in Corbière, Oeuvres Complètes, p. 1311.

Hugo's 'Et j'ajoute à ma lyre une corde d'airain' but more importantly to Du Camp's Chants modernes, the work representative of the whole genre Rimbaud is attacking in the 'modernist' references in 'Ce qu'on dit au poète ...'. By a doubly ironic twist Rimbaud condemns the age of progress through an allusion to what he considered to be an aspect of that age, anachronistic and hypocritical Catholicism, the condemnation of 'modernity' by Pope Pius IX immortalised in the French phrase:

Chemin de fer, chemin de l'enfer!

As for the bulk of utilitarian and commercial terms in the poem it is clear that their sheer accumulation is a device to ridicule the praise of commerce in the poetry of progress. But Rimbaud's obvious delight in handling them, their inherent closeness to the anti-poetic category and, most crucial of all, the fact that genuine particularised vocabulary of this kind was rarely used by the progressistes lead one to the assessment that Rimbaud is, in a sense, showing, by admittedly exaggerated example, how poetry of the modern age might be written. Similarly, it is also arguable that the scientific terms in 'Ce qu'on dit au poète ...' are not attacked for their own sake, for after all they are not uncommon in Rimbaud's other poetry, but as motifs symbolic of progress which could easily become clichés. Once again Rimbaud would be quite consistent in advocating the use of particularised vocabulary.

'Ce qu'on dit au poète ...' is a two-pronged attack on contemporary culture. Various kinds of poetry are satirised: the sentimental verse of the Romantics, the emblematic verse of both the Romantics and the Parnassians, the exoticism of the Parnassians, mystical poetry and the poetry of progress. Simultaneously the poet turns his satirical attention to modern society, specifically the culture of the materialistic bourgeoisie; its obsession with food, drink, digestion and health (sagous,

croquignoles, allaitèrent, oeufs frits, sucres blancs, Farceur,
ragoûts, pommes de terre, bouchons de carafes, clystères,
pectoraires, glucoses); its demand for artifacts (les Acajous,
tentures de perse brune, cuillers Alfénide); its inbred pets (chiens
bassets); its appetite for raw materials to meet its demands
(tabacs, cotonniers, garances, gommés caoutchouc); the commercial
network of the world:

Dis, front blanc que Phébus tanna,
De combien de dollars se rente
Pedro Velasquez, Habana ...

- Et, pour la composition
De poèmes pleins de mystère
Qu'on doive lire de Tréguier
A Paramaribo, rachète
Des Tones de Monsieur Figuier ...

Rimbaud makes his double attack through an impressive, even an
awe-inspiring, array of cultural allusions which may still hold one or
two secrets from the commentators. There are probable allusions to
the works of Desnoyers, Gautier, Armand Silvestre, Mallarmé, Banville,
Lamartine, Méral, Leconte de Lisle, Heredia, Mendès, Vermesch, Renan,
Hoffmann, Figuier, Ricard, Du Camp and Hugo. A popular illustrator
Grandville is mentioned. There are allusions to much older sources,
the New Testament in the second stanza, to De Rerum Natura in
stanza thirty-two. In one stanza references to recent political and
literary history are combined:

Le lys de Monsieur de Kerdrel,
Le sonnet de mil huit cent trente,
Le Lys qu'on donne au Ménestrel
Avec l'oeillet et l'amarante!

At one stage Rimbaud echoes a street-cry: 'Vieilles verdures, vieux
galons!' There is the reference to contemporary theological controversy
in stanza thirty-eight. Most of all there are the allusions to the
whole spectrum of modern life in the age of commerce and science
(even a reference to Latin American politics in stanza twenty-three:
'Noirs d'épouvantables révoltes!').

The success of the poem is, of course, not to be attributed to the wealth of allusion nor to the kinds of vocabulary used but to the incongruity of their juxtaposition. This is the mechanism of the irony of the poem and means that Rimbaud can make his assault on both types of culture simultaneously, sometimes with remarkable concision:

clystères d'extases ! ...

L'amour ne passe à tes octrois
Que les Lilas, - ô balançoires! ...

Quelques garances parfumées
Que la Nature en pantalons
Fasse éclore! - pour nos Armées! ...

Of the two cultures bourgeois materialism is, if anything, the more admiringly treated. Its basic straightforwardness is contrasted to the disadvantage of the posturing writers of superficial verse. For it is, surely, such a poet who is described as 'Commerçant! colon! médium!', or more plainly the poet who seeks to make money (c.f. the idea of prostituting poetry by combining subjects and forms for which there is an appreciative audience: 'L'Ode Açoka cadre avec la/Strophe en fenêtre de Lorette') by treating exotic subjects (a kind of poetic colonialism) or through mystical charlatanism.

It is perhaps not beside the point to remember, in conclusion, that Rimbaud's own future was to be devoted to a kind of compromise between his pantheistic love of untamed nature and the possibility of a respectable bourgeois existence by his becoming a trader and explorer. In a way this may be a reflection of the fundamental tension in his poetry between primitivism and modernism.

The irony, the word-play and even the subject of flowers all remind the reader of 'Ce qu'on dit au poète ...' of the work of Corbière and notably of 'A une Rose'. The Breton poet's work provides many outstanding examples of the technique of ironic cultural allusion involving humour and jeux de mots.

The unexpected nature of many of Corbière's images is one of the sources of the ironic humour of much of his poetry. The very title of his only collection gives the clue to the poet's essential attitude, which is that the anguish of love and self-knowledge must be cloaked in laughter and irony like the bitterness in a 'rire jaune'.

(183) The Romantic rhetoric of the emotions either used:

Clyso-pompant l'azur qui bâille leur sommeil! ... (184)

or implied, becomes the subject of irony or burlesque as in the line just quoted. Corbière's aesthetic is based partly on a kind of discord; the poet takes words out of their usual context, robs them of their accepted value and puts them in startling new relationships. This is clear in another example using the same Lamartinian mot-clé:

Bon jeune homme né brandezingue,
Dos-bleu sous la blouse d'azur. (185)

By a sudden twist the souteneur, whose milieu has been linguistically evoked with the utmost care and accuracy, is elevated to the status of a Romantic hero by being placed under the sign of 'l'azur'; presumably he merits this ironic appellation because he is not just a pimp but also some prostitute's Arthur, the name traditionally given to an amant de coeur of a lady of that ancient calling! The contrast between profound thoughts or feelings and the most mundane aspects of everyday reality is the quintessence of Corbière's irony. Thus in the first of the images cited above the poet likens his allegedly bold attitude to fate to the uselessness of a knife in eating spinach.

(183) Other ideas may be present in the title which is almost certainly a pun: the notion of betrayal, the idea of mental and physical corruption, the suggestion of pornographic interest and, paradoxically, the poet's love of Brittany of which the traditional colour is yellow.

(184) O.C., p. 782.

(185) Ibid., p. 776.

Word-play of all kinds, and particularly punning, is one of the most frequent humorous devices employed by Corbière. There is no doubt that the poet was fascinated by words and their sounds. Sometimes this fascination leads to a play on words which is not punning in the strictest sense - for there is no semantic link - but more properly straightforward verbal fantasy of a most telling kind:

Ô Vénus, dans ta Vénerie ... (186)

In the above example the word-play could arguably be said to be the inspiration of the whole poem. Of puns, as such, there are numerous examples:

Le soleil craquelait la route en blanc-d'Espagne ... (187)

Often the puns rely on a reference to popular or familiar speech:

Dis: veux-tu le paradis
De l'Odéon? ... (188)

Et nous fîmes bourse commune ...
La lune a fait un trou dedans ... (189)

- Une nuit blanche ... un jour sali ... (190)

Au Bois, les lauriers sont coupés,
Mais le Persil verdit encore ... (191)

Drôle de balle et drôle de pistolet! ... (192)

A feature of Corbière's poetry which is also an essential element of everyday speech is the creation of new metaphors, sometimes based on existing ones. Thus 'Rossignoler pas mal d'absinthes' is a modification of the popular metaphor 'siffler une absinthe'. (The expression is metaphorical and has its origin in the similarity of lip movement).

(186) Ibid., p. 751.

(187) Ibid., p. 791.

(188) Ibid., p. 723.

(189) Ibid., p. 726. The whole poem is constructed around the expression 'faire un trou à la lune'.

(190) Ibid., p. 737.

(191) Ibid., p. 780.

(192) Ibid., p. 885.

For a primitivist and an iconoclast Corbière is remarkably ready to make allusions to the cultural heritage in which his readers share. The Middle East, familiar to the reading public since Hugo's Les Orientales, is evoked in such terms as 'pacha', 'sultane', 'sérail', 'eunuque', 'hourî', 'derviche', 'djinn', 'fakir', 'chibouck'. The classical heritage is as well served as the Romantic with references to Menelaus, Prometheus, Tantalus, Cupid, Diana, Psyche, Atropos, Cerberus, Venus, Vergil, Juvenal, Archimedes and Messalina. In addition there are references to more recent culture; for example the following names are to be found: Isaac Laquedem (the Wandering Jew), Mazanielli (Italian revolutionary), Gagne (eccentric nineteenth-century barrister), Galimart and Ducornet (contemporary painters), Buridan (medieval philosopher), and Erard (piano-maker). These references, and numerous others like them, are never treated with respect: they are always an element of the poet's humour and incidental to the formulation of his own immediate personal experience. This is obvious in a poem such as 'Veder Napoli poi morì', already discussed above, where the poet's sad disillusionment prompted by the realities of travel in Southern Italy is humorously contrasted with his expectations through a whole series of references: to the English school of Italian landscape, Madame de Staël's Corinne, Ronsard, Dante, Mazanielli, Musset, Byron and Phoebus Apollo. Not only do such cultural allusions contribute towards the ironic discord of Corbière's poetry, as they will do in Laforgue's, but they are a means of making the poet's necessarily personal experience of contemporary reality accessible to the reader; this technique of filling the contemporary scene with allusions to shared culture is also, as we shall see in Part Three, a feature of Laforgue's poetry.

Verlaine

The technique of ironic cultural allusion plays little part in the work of Verlaine who is often regarded as one of the most spontaneous poets in our period. It is precisely his lack of inhibition in formulating his

emotions, sensations and thoughts which enables him to dispense with the mask of irony which was required by the more psychologically and intellectually complex Rimbaud, Corbière and Laforgue. Moreover his interest in the manifestations of the contemporary age was less consistent than theirs. When he treats 'culture' it is often in a nostalgic way, looking back to the Catholic Middle Ages, to the self-assurance of the seventeenth century or to the light-hearted eroticism of the eighteenth century. When he turns his attention to contemporary culture often, particularly in Sagesse, his attitude is one of straightforward moral condemnation, except during the period of enthusiasm for modernity which reached its zenith during his stay in London with Rimbaud.

However Verlaine's work does contain several excellent examples of an extreme form of cultural allusion. This is the full-scale parody of other poets. Few ages have produced parodies of higher quality than those written by the young poets in the two decades after 1870 including the Dixains réalistes and the Album zutique. This genre was to reach its pinnacle of achievement in the ultimate avatar of cultural allusion, self-parody, in Les Délivrescences d'Adoré Floupette which can still be read with considerable enjoyment. Turning again to Verlaine's poetry one may cite 'Ultissima Verba' (Autres Vieux Coppées, IV) as a particularly successful piece:

Épris d'absinthe pure et de philomathie
 Je m'emmerde et pourtant au besoin j'apprécie
 Les théâtres qu'on peut avoir à la Gatti.
 Quatre-vingt-treize a des beautés et c'est senti
 Comme une merde, quoi qu'en disent Gros et Tronche
 Et l'Académie où les Murgers boivent du ponche.
 Mais plus de bleus et la daromphe m'a chié.
 C'est triste et merde alors et que foutre? J'y ai
 Pensé beaucoup. Carlisse? Ah! non, c'est rien qui vaille
 À cause de l'emmerdement de la mitraille!

The parody starts with the title, a pseudo-Latin barbarism modelled on the celebrated poem by Hugo (193). In this context it is almost

(193) 'Ultima Verba', Les Châtiments VII, 17.

certainly meant as a satirical reference to Rimbaud's metaphysical ambitions. Although he is not mentioned by name in the text we know that the poem is about Rimbaud since the text which Verlaine sent to Delahaye on 24th August, 1875, was illustrated with a drawing depicting Rimbaud seated at a table strewn with glasses and bottles and in the process of consulting a huge dictionary. Rimbaud's voracious appetite for knowledge is debunked through the juxtaposition of 'absinthe pure' and 'philomathie'; his voyance is by implication suggested to be the result of intoxicants. In contrast Verlaine plays the honest simpleton who may have no ambitions to be a magus but who can appreciate vaudeville theatre. Having alluded to Hugo in his title Verlaine cannot resist a highly topical reference to Quatre-vingt-treize which had been published the previous year; its "substance", its "plastic" qualities enable the poet to pay it a mock compliment: 'c'est senti comme une merde', a parody of the critical jargon of figures such as Gros and Tronche. There follows a brilliantly concise attack on the critical establishment. They are hypocritical former members of the bohème (now become 'Académie') and respectable drinkers of punch. Recollection of bohemian days, following the example of Murger, was a profitable industry! The poet then proceeds to his most immediate subject: Rimbaud's attempt to join the Carlist forces in Spain in July 1875. This involves a probable pun on 'bleus' which means both new recruits and cheap red wine. The prospect of being under fire is too tiresome for Verlaine to consider it for himself and there is the obvious implication that Rimbaud himself has more in common with one kind of 'bleus' than the other and that his venture is not to be taken seriously.

These complex and, for the most part, extremely immediate cultural allusions take place within the framework of a parody of Coppée. This is based on the commonplace, the insufferably naïve and vulgar qualities of Coppée's poetry. But only one line of the dizain might have found

a place in Coppée's own poetry:

... j'apprécie
Les théâtres qu'on peut avoir à la Gatti.

Otherwise the poem is in fact a deliberate distortion and exaggeration of Coppée's efforts to create a 'popular' poetry.

The essential mechanism in this process, and indeed the only means by which a degree of 'harmony' and continuity is achieved in the poem is the repeated use of slang words - mostly etymologically connected with defecation: 'je m'emmerde', 'c'est senti comme une merde', 'la daromphe m'a chié', 'c'est triste et merde alors et que foutre?', 'l'emmerdement de la mitraille'.

Such pieces were doubtless Verlaine's main contribution to the technique of ironic cultural allusion, yet his poems devoted to 'mere' sensations and everyday life which we shall examine in the next chapter, were nevertheless one of the most crucial, if less aggressive, aspects of déculture in our period.

* * * * *

The implications of the revolt against tradition and 'culture' are immense for the poetic treatment of contemporary reality. They involve attitudes towards both subject-matter and poetic language.

As far as subjects were concerned the poets were drawn towards at least three areas which by their very nature seemed to reflect spontaneous experience and to be removed from the traditional vein of French poetry. The first of these, the experiences of everyday modern life, was the least original and the least safe from assimilation by establishment poets like Coppée and Manuel as we shall see in the next chapter. Nevertheless a genuine attempt to formulate such experience would require treating subjects long held to be anti-poetic, either because they were in bad taste or simply because they were too ordinary, not edifying enough. The second area was what we shall call

the world of sensation in the next chapter, that is the experiences which bombard our sensory organs, to our displeasure or delight, with a speed and complexity which often defy immediate rational analysis. Of course sensations can be codified and, in retrospect, can be placed in neat frameworks that aid a sane human existence. However, there was to be in the period after 1870, as to some extent there had been in Baudelaire, a desire to capture the freshness of these experiences. To devote a poem very largely to sensation alone was, in any case, a departure from the prevailing opinion that poetry should concern itself to a considerable extent with ideas. Even Parnassian poetry at its least didactic was usually intended to create in discursive terms a certain idea of beauty. The third area is related to the second and is the one of which it was thought pretentious to undertake an examination in the present study - the world of the subconscious mind. Interest in this source of inspiration is obviously to be related to work being undertaken by psychologists in the period, for instance by Charcot in the years 1870-1890, by Ribot from 1882-1885 and by Janet from 1883 onwards. This work lent a scientific twist to the widespread interest in the 'unconscious' as a largely metaphysical idea in the work of philosophers like Schopenhauer and Hartmann. The importance of this new attitude was established for French thought at the end of the 1880s by Bergson in his very first essay, Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience (1889). From 1870 onwards in France the idea of individuality, spontaneity, reflex action and intuition as motives and modes of thought and action as important as conscious intelligence took root. Laforgue was familiar with the psychological experiments being undertaken by Charles Henry (and, through him, those undertaken by Ribot), and Taine's theories of perception, but generally the poets reflected a widespread interest rather than underwent specific identifiable influences.

The implications of the opposition of spontaneity to tradition were, if anything, more profound for the language of poetry than for subject-matter. As we have seen the poets used an array of humorous and ironic devices in the technique of cultural allusion. The treatment of everyday life necessitated the increasing reference to ordinary speech, slang and affective speech which will be examined in Part Two, Chapter Three. The notation and formulation of fleeting experiences required an impressionistic style in poetry just as it had in painting. Finally, in order to bring about the necessary resolution of spontaneity and art, of sensation and intellect, of intuition and reflection the poets developed the synthetic techniques which, together with poetic impressionism, will be discussed in Part Two, Chapter Four.

P A R T T W O

Chapter Two

CONTEMPORARY SUBJECTS

The reader will have noted that all the subjects *to be* considered in this chapter were treated by the poets of the cénacles and some of the most important had been an essential part of Baudelaire's poetry. Moreover, attitudes examined in the previous chapter, and notably the challenge to accepted views, are evident in much of the treatment of themes drawn from contemporary reality. Indeed the subjects themselves are often indicative of this challenge. Some had previously been considered by most poets (with the important exception of Baudelaire) to be improper, inappropriate or even insufficient subjects for poetic treatment. This is particularly true of ordinary, everyday reality and of the world of sensation. Other subjects, which were original in themselves, had been more easily (although we would argue not very successfully) adapted to the abstracting process of traditional French poetic rhetoric; amongst such subjects one might include the modern city, the industrial age and speed and travel. Finally there are contemporary subjects which it was not original to treat in poetry and of which examples may be found in almost all periods of French verse; these include politics, society and historical events and philosophy (with which we have linked the rise of science). The latter

were the

least demanding of new methods of treatment. Yet they remain

very important, for in the treatment of such subjects one finds evidence of the basic attitude of rebelliousness, which was one principal psycho-social response of the poets of our period to contemporary reality, and of those feelings of impermanence and change which, in the long run, affected not only the subjects but the language of French poetry in the latter part of the nineteenth century. This idea of impermanence and uncertainty, which inevitably called into question the suitability of the existing resources of the French poetic language better suited to discursive exposition or descriptive writing of a marmoreal rather than fluid and imprecise kind (despite occasional successful exceptions in the work of the Romantics), may be regarded as a common denominator in the treatment of all the themes examined here in the work of the major poets and the best of the minor poets after 1870. This Weltanschauung was to be the stimulus for the innovations discussed in the last two chapters of this part of the thesis.

It will not have escaped the reader's attention that the poetic treatment of any one of these subjects would provide ample material for ~~extensive discussion~~ and so our own examination has aimed at being both selective yet representative.

(a) Contemporary Events, Politics and Society

It is a not uncommon phenomenon that the cultural changes consequent upon an event of a primarily political or social nature are not immediately manifest. To some extent this is true of the reactions of French cultural life to the traumatic events of 1870-71. Pierre Martino has stated:

Rien, après 1870, ne paraissait vraiment changé dans l'atmosphère intellectuelle de la France: Leconte de Lisle, Heredia, Taine, Flaubert, G. Sand, Alex. Dumas, E. Augier écrivait des livres, des poèmes ou des drames aussi semblables que possible à ceux qui, dix ou quinze ans auparavant, avaient assuré leur maîtrise. Les tristesses de la défaite n'eurent point d'influence immédiate sur tous ceux dont les habitudes de pensée et de travail étaient solidement installées. Elles agissaient, à vrai dire, mais sourdement, et sur les enfants ou les jeunes gens, sur ceux qui allaient avoir vingt ans entre 1875 et 1885. (1)

Whilst the delay may not have been as great as this assessment would suggest, it is true that the reaction of many writers to the recent events tended to be one of numbed silence. There can certainly be no quarrel with Martino's view of the long-term effects.

The social and political climate of the period was not of the kind in which compensation could be found for the intellectual and spiritual frustration which will be examined in the next section of this chapter. Guilt, fear and disillusionment resulting from the events of 1870-71 made the decade or so after them a period of stagnation in French political life. The guilt was a natural consequence of defeat but especially of a defeat without honour and of a defeat viewed almost as a punishment for, and certainly as a result of, the alleged moral corruption of the Second Empire. Even while this 'Götterdämmerung à la française' (2) was in progress the ferocious Catholic critic Louis Veuillot was looking upon the disaster with all the expectant glee of a Savonarola:

(1) Parnasse et Symbolisme, pp. 110-11.

(2) The phrase is P. Reboul's. (Laforgue, p. 9).

En quelques jours d'angoisse, avons-nous pu nous défaquiniser ? Cependant c'est cela qu'il nous faut, et suivant mon petit avis, ce qu'il faut au monde. Il importe au monde que la France soit victorieuse et défaquinisée. Si tel est le résultat de la campagne, ce sera bien un miracle immense, et il en enfantera de plus grands. Amen. Priez pour moi. (3)

But the destruction of a social order rarely goes hand in hand with victory and so it was that only one half of Veuillot's programme was completed. France was 'défaquinisée' or, more accurately, the misdeeds and shortcomings of her 'faquins' in all branches of the national life were laid bare for everyone to see. Zola's Nana was to become the allegorical representation of all that was rotten in Second Empire society. Sully-Prudhomme spoke of the revelation of those years in terms which Zola would doubtless have approved without perhaps arriving at as dark a conclusion:

Les sinistres événements qui ont abaissé notre patrie m'avaient, pour la première fois, forcé de voir de près, et à nu, les plaies jusque-là dissimulées, d'un corps social qui dans la déroute a perdu tous ses voiles. Quel spectacle ! Un pessimisme plein d'amertume avait supplanté ma confiance en la dignité humaine. (4)

Sully-Prudhomme was almost certainly thinking more specifically of the events of the Commune in this instance and these latter also contributed to the atmosphere of guilt after 1871, a guilt felt by some, though by no means all, of those who had condoned, through their silence, the bloody repression of the Communards. The same shameful episode lay at the root of the fear of both the bourgeois establishment at a renewal of the revolutionary extremism manifest during the Commune, and of the working classes and the left at the possibility of

-
- (3) Bibliothèque Nationale, Nafr. 24632, quoted by Reboul, Laforge, p. 10.
 (4) Preface to La Justice, p. 61. Written in 1878.

exploitation and persecution by the right-wing republican and even royalist government. Although the war of 1870 marked a social and political break it brought no immediate change in accepted taste in art and literature. for the simple reason that artistic innovation was equated with revolution in the widest sense. The new régime was based on the notion of authority and could brook no challenge from whatever quarter it came (5). The war and the suppression of the Commune had discredited the bourgeoisie, the church and the army. But the left too was discredited by defeat, for the Commune had failed and the revolutionary solution was not again to be seriously attempted up to the present day. Inevitably the outcome was disillusionment and the political developments of the period did little to discourage such an attitude. Political uncertainty dragged on. A predominantly royalist chamber eventually, and after a careful compromise, ushered in the Third Republic by a single vote. Even by the standards of the day the government was a singularly reactionary body until at least 1877.

The situation was reflected in poetry in a variety of ways. Poetry arising directly out of contemporary occurrences had

(5) See, for instance, Jacques Lethève's discussion of the régime's attitude to the new movement in French painting, soon to be labelled Impressionism, in Impressionnistes et Symbolistes devant la presse, p. 54.

always been acceptable to established taste (6) but had certainly achieved an even greater popularity after Hugo's success with Les Châtiments. Indeed it is Hugo again who appears as one of the most important poetic chroniclers of the events of 1870 with his L'Année Terrible, but he was far from being alone in such an enterprise. Banville with his Idylles prussiennes and Sully-Prudhomme in Impressions de la guerre were two other respected poets to treat a similar theme. Among poets who have been less well received by posterity but who enjoyed a not inconsiderable success in their lifetime, Emile Bergerat, Eugène Manuel and Paul Déroulède all contributed volumes of verse arising out of the war (7). The latter's verse which epitomised the spirit of revanche found a sufficiently wide public to give rise to imitators. R. Des Resnais's A tire d'aile contains the following exhortation:

Debout, debout sur nos ruines!
 La France ne périra pas,
 Les blés futurs ont leurs racines
 Dans les crânes de nos soldats. (8)

-
- (6) At the height of eighteenth-century literary conservatism Voltaire's Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne was an outstanding example of 'poésie d'actualité' though the fact that the poem set out to convey general philosophical truths rather than relate the poet's feelings is not without significance. It is doubtful that even the documentary form of the poetry of contemporary reality had ever before attracted poets as did in the latter half of the nineteenth century or that it had ever been endowed with such respectability.
- (7) Poèmes de la guerre, Pendant la guerre and Les Chants du soldat respectively.
- (8) Quoted in Reboul, Laforgue, p. 11. The poem is dated 1873 and the volume was published in 1881.

But France was divided and bitter and a return to the pre-1870 status quo was impossible. Patriotism was no longer a unifying force and was derided by certain intellectuals; even patriots like Renan and Zola were destructive in their criticism of France in order that something better might be built in place of the social structures of the Second Empire. (9) It is in keeping with the prevailing pessimism of the period that not only should the naively patriotic verse of Banville, Déroulède and their imitators be ill-received in intellectual circles but that one of the most important poetic reactions to contemporary reality of the previous thirty or so years should have suffered a loss of status after 1870; this was of course the poetry of progress, the optimistic vision of technological, social and political development. The composition of poems related directly to contemporary events was not limited to the more traditional poets; even as great an innovator as Rimbaud produced a whole group of poems whose inspiration is drawn from the happenings of 1870-71, but in his case it is the sense of futility or of disgust or, in poems dealing with the Commune, anti-establishment invective, *which predominates.* Neither the Franco-Prussian War nor the difficult years which followed produced much in the way of a poetic equivalent of the moving war poetry of, say, Aragon. Poetry as a reflection of events (or as patriotic rallying-cry) was not to be the most significant of the reactions of contemporary reality. Nevertheless it was important as regards the quantity

- (9) The solutions proposed by Renan and Zola would have little in common but a determination to avoid the alleged moral decadence of Napoleon III's régime and to learn a lesson from Prussian organisation.

produced at the time and, in company with all the other poetic reactions to be discussed here, it had its counterparts in the general artistic activity of the period. All wars have their artists both official and unofficial and the Franco-Prussian War and the civil war which ensued were no exception. Again not only minor artists were involved; Manet produced a pair of fine lithographs La Guerre Civile and La Barricade (10).

* * * * *

A convenient point for beginning a more detailed consideration of poetry reflecting events is the work of Hugo. His L'Année Terrible formed a kind of appendix and resolution to Les Châtiments produced fifteen years before but only widely available from the end of the Second Empire. Les Châtiments and L'Année Terrible were presented as a single composite work and it was thus that they were first encountered not only by many members of the poetry-reading public but, doubtless, by some of the young poets.

Exiled from France after Louis Napoleon's coup d'état of 1851, Hugo set to work on the collection which was to contain all his venomous hatred at the betrayal perpetrated by the former president. Les Châtiments is a volume characterised by variety of style and this variety obviously affects the poet's treatment of reality. By far the largest part of the collection is expressed in an awesome rhetoric which Hugo alone was capable of sustaining. The rhetorical element is stressed by the fact that many of the poems are cast in the form of an address:

(10) A typical example of a 'documentary' political painting from the later part of the period 1870-87 is Raffaelli's portrait of Clemenceau addressing his Montmartre constituents.

O vieux mont des martyrs, hélas, garde ton nom;
 Les morts sabrés, hachés, broyés par le canon,
 Dans ce champ que la tombe emplit de son mystère,
 Étaient ensevelis la tête hors de terre. (11)

The passage from which this example is taken is a curious blend of details based on eye-witness accounts of the Montmartre massacre and of generalised details added for 'poetic' and political effect:

'Le riche à la main blanche et le pauvre au bras fort ...'

and, of course of rhetorical intrusions by the poet:

Ô morts, que disiez-vous à Dieu dans ces ténèbres ?

Bitter humour and satire is reflected elsewhere in the collection which is a welcome and very successful variation on the 'peroration' style of the above examples which influenced poets after 1870:

Un mois après, cet homme allait à Notre-Dame.
 Il entra le front haut, la myrrhe et le cinname
 Brûlaient; les tours vibraient sous le bourdon sonnant;
 L'archevêque était là, de gloire rayonnant;
 Sa chape avait été taillée en un suaire;
 Sur une croix dressée au fond du sanctuaire
 Jésus avait été cloué pour qu'il restât.
 Cet infâme apportait à Dieu son attentat.
 Comme un loup qui se lèche après qu'il vient de mordre,
 Caressant sa moustache, il dit: "J'ai sauvé l'ordre!
 Anges, recevez-moi dans votre légion!
 J'ai sauvé la famille et la religion!"
 Et dans son oeil féroce, où Satan se contemple,
 On vit luire une larme ... - Ô colonnes du temple,
 Abîmes qu'à Pathmos vit s'entr'ouvrir saint Jean,
 Cieux qui vîtes Néron, soleil qui vis Séjan,
 Vents qui jadis meniez Tibère vers Caprée
 Et poussiez sur les flots sa galère dorée,
 Ô souffles de l'aurore et du septentrion,
 Dites si l'assassin dépasse l'histrion! (12)

On occasion the poet even makes use of a popular song form and for the modern English reader, at least, these are probably the most pleasing parts of Les Châtiments; they may also have been one inspiration of poems like Rimbaud's 'Les Corbeaux'.

- (11) Oeuvres Poétiques, Éd. de la Pléiade, II, p. 12.
 (12) Ibid., II, p. 13.

La femelle? elle est morte.
 Le mâle, un chat l'emporte
 Et dévore ses os.
 Au doux nid qui frissonne
 Qui reviendra? personne.
 Pauvres petits oiseaux!

Le pâtre absent par fraude!
 Le Chien mort! le loup rôde,
 Et tend ses noirs panneaux.
 Au bercail qui frissonne
 Qui veillera? personne.
 Pauvres petits agneaux!

L'homme au bain! la mère
 A l'hospice! O misère!
 Le logis tremble aux vents;
 L'humble berceau frissonne.
 Qui reste-t-il? personne.
 Pauvres petits enfants! (13)

Genuine attempts at the evocation of reality are surprisingly uncommon, given the obviously contemporary nature of the collection. One notable exception is the famous 'Souvenir de la nuit du 4' (14). Sentimentality is one failing of this poem but more damning is the feeling that we are confronted here with versified prose.

(13) Ibid., II, p. 42.

(14) Ibid., II, pp. 49-50.

It is regrettably fair to say that Hugo often failed to progress beyond this form of evocation of external reality.

One of these rare exceptions in Les Châtiments is the fine recreation of the atmosphere of the sea at night (which is, however, soon left to one side as the poet resumes his

commentary) in 'Cette nuit, il pleuvait, la marée était haute' (15).

L'Année Terrible, in most respects, does not differ greatly from Les Châtiments except that a much smaller proportion of the work is given over to invective and instead it takes the form of a day to day account of events, though, as one might expect from Hugo's previous collections, the thoughts and exhortations prompted by the events are the poet's main

(15) Ibid., II, p. 199.

concern and not the evocation of reality itself. The same rhetorical addresses we have already seen are again to be found in L'Année Terrible:

.... Ah! je voudrais,
Je voudrais n'être pas français (sic) pour pouvoir dire
Que je te choisis, France, et que dans ton martyre
Je te proclame, toi que ronge le vautour,
Ma patrie et ma gloire et mon unique amour! (16)

though sometimes Hugo relieves these with a charming device as in 'Lettre à une femme' (17) which is also notable for its humorous references to the hardships and, particularly, the bizarre diet of the besieged inhabitants of Paris:

..... Bonjour, madame.
On est un peuple, on est un monde, on est une âme.
Chacun se donne à tous et nul ne songe à soi.
Nous sommes sans soleil, sans appui, sans effroi.
Tout ira bien pourvu que jamais on ne dorme.
Schmitz fait des bulletins plats sur la guerre énorme;
C'est Eschyle traduit par père Brumoy.
J'ai payé quinze francs quatre oeufs frais, non pour moi,
Mais pour mon petit George et ma petite Jeanne.
Nous mangeons du cheval, du rat, de l'ours, de l'âne.

Paris est si bien pris, cerné, muré, noué,
Gardé, que notre ventre est l'arche de Noé;
Dans nos flancs toute bête honnête ou mal famée,
Pénètre, et chien et chat, le mammon, le pygmée,
Tout entre, et la souris rencontre l'éléphant.
Plus d'arbres; on les coupe, on les scie, on les fend;
Paris sur ses chenets met les Champs-Élysées.

In the latter part of L'Année Terrible, which was written in Brussels and concerns itself with the events of the Commune, there is even less reflection of external reality than in the first part of the poem. No longer an eye-witness of events, the poet concerns himself with expressing political opinions and pleas to the protagonists.

(16) Oeuvres Complètes, Ed. Hetzel et Quantin, Poésie, XII, p. 118.

(17) Ibid., pp. 133-34.

The Franco-Prussian war was a stimulus to Hugo's patriotism:

Soit, princes! Vautrez-vous sur la France conquise
De l'Alsace aux abois, de la Lorraine en sang,
De Metz qu'on vous vendit, de Strasbourg frémissant,
Dont vous n'éteindrez pas la tragique auréole,
Vous aurez ce qu'on a des femmes qu'on viole,
La nudité, le lit, et la haine à jamais. (18)

When this declamatory style is not being employed, it is often replaced by a pedestrian realism:

Elles acceptent tout, les femmes de Paris
Leur âtre éteint, leurs pieds par le verglas meurtris,
Au seuil noir des bouchers les attentes nocturnes,
La neige et l'ouragan vidant leurs froides urnes,
La famine, l'horreur, le combat, sans rien voir
Que la grande patrie et que le grand devoir. (19)

Like several other poets of the time he criticises the leadership given by the military and, in particular, the failure to adopt the levée en masse :

Quand on était là prêts à sortir, trois cent mille,
Ce tas de gens de guerre a rendu cette ville! (20)

Hugo's reaction to the events of the Commune and its suppression was very much to his credit. His opposition to reprisals was total:

Je sauverais Judas, si j'étais Jésus-Christ. (21)

(18) L'Année Terrible, Novembre 3, 'A tous ces Princes'.

(19) Ibid., Janvier 2.

(20) Ibid., Janvier 13, 'Capitulation'.

(21) Ibid., Avril, 'Pas de représailles'.

He attributed what he held to be the excesses of the Communards to an unjust society and did not hold them blameworthy:

Non, ce n'est pas toi, peuple, et tu ne l'as pas fait,
Non, vous les égarés, vous n'êtes point coupables ...
Votre société, la vieille criminelle,
La scélérate, a fait tout ce que nous voyons. (22)

The poetry of events developed by Hugo in Les Châtiments and reutilised in L'Année Terrible was immensely influential upon other poets inspired by the events of 1870-71. Unfortunately few of them possessed Hugo's redeeming satirical genius seen at its best in the descriptions of Napoleon III in Les Châtiments.

One is at first surprised to see Banville joining the ranks of the poets of events yet in 1847 he attacked modern materialism in 'Malédiction de Cypris', where he spoke of 'l'Or maître du monde', but used the railway as a concrete illustration of the materialism he so loathed (23). As if to excuse himself for treating contemporary events in the Idylles prussiennes, written in 1870-71, he quoted approvingly remarks attributed to Goethe:

... toutes les poésies doivent être des poésies de circonstance, c'est-à-dire que c'est la réalité qui doit en avoir donné l'occasion et fourni le motif. Un sujet particulier prend un caractère général et poétique, précisément parce qu'il est traité par un poète. Toutes mes poésies sont des poésies de circonstance; c'est la vie réelle qui les a fait naître, c'est en elle qu'elles trouvent leur fond et leur appui. Pour les poésies en l'air, je n'en fais aucun cas. (24)

(22) Ibid., Mai 1^{er}.

(23) Le Sang de la Coupe, pp. 287-307.

(24) Idylles prussiennes, pp. 3-4. (The source is Conversations de Goethe pendant les dernières années de sa vie, collected by Eckermann and translated by Delerot).

These remarks bear little relation to Banville's previous poetic practice; the fact that he feels obliged to cite them at all would lead one to suspect this. The collection itself contained witty tirades against Bismarck and the German Emperor, mostly very declamatory in style and full of classical references and turns of phrase. There are only a few exceptions to this prevailing tone such as the Coppéeesque 'La Soirée':

Lorsqu'en revenant du rempart
Où, plein d'une foi chaleureuse,
Il a bien veillé pour sa part,
Le père quitte sa vareuse,

En voilà jusqu'qu lendemain!
Il t'oublie, aigre vent qui souffles
Sur les talus, et, d'une main
Réjouie, il met ses pantoufles.

Après avoir dîné sans bruit,
Il regardera quelque estampe
Ou bien lira jusqu'à minuit
Aux douces clartés de la lampe,

Avec sa femme et ses enfants,
Amusant l'un d'eux sur sa jambe
Et voyant leurs fronts triomphants
Luire aux clartés du feu qui flambe ... (25)

In 'Le Sacre de Paris' Leconte de Lisle made one of his rare poetic ventures into contemporary reality. His tone and his reference to the levée en masse are strongly reminiscent of Hugo:

O Paris, qu'attends-tu? la famine et la honte?
Furieuse, et cheveux épars,
Sous l'aiguillon du sang qui dans ton coeur remonte,
Va, bondis hors de tes remparts!

Characteristically the idea is assimilated to the poet's recurring theme of heroic self-sacrifice as a glorious act in the face of cosmic indifference:

Offre ta libre gloire et ta grande agonie
Comme un exemple à l'univers ...

Patriotic cries of a less subtle kind but sharing the
vehemence of Hugo and Leconte de Lisle abound in the works of
minor poets such as Auguste Lacaussade:

Il est souillé le sol sacré de la Patrie
Nos cités, nos moissons, nos champs sont saccagés,
Nos toits fument! Debout pour la sainte tuerie!
Frappez! fauchez! hachez! des deux mains égorgez! (26)

or Jules Barbier whose 'Le Franc-Tireur' had as its epigram
'Delenda est Borussia'! Déroulède's own verse had at least
the merits of mixing descriptions of some exactitude and
concision with rhetorical calls for revenge in a language of a
simplicity not entirely inappropriate to soldiers:

C'était après un jour de lutte et de défaite,
- Hélas! de pareils jours furent nombreux pour nous! -
L'armée en désarroi commençait la retraite,
Et la neige montait, froide, jusqu'aux genoux. (27)

Manuel's Pendant la guerre likewise consisted of patriotic
rhetoric:

C'est le devoir nouveau qui s'impose à la France ...

interspersed with description:

La plaine n'était plus qu'une paille hachée
Où le sang abreuvait la terre desséchée ...

Bergerat's Poèmes de la guerre are banal narrative accounts of
acts of heroism typified by 'Le Maître d'école' who sends his
pregnant German wife back to Baden and returns his dowry to his
father-in-law since he can accept nothing from Germany. He
goes back to Alsace and makes a full confession to being a
franc-tireur and awaits execution by firing squad. He felt he
had no choice in the face of German educational policy:

(26) 'Le Cri de Guerre', September 1870.

(27) 'L'Arrière-Garde', Les Chants du Soldat.

Mais quand je vis cela, je compris qu'en effet
 Vous vouliez à jamais germaniser l'Alsace ...

Coppée joined the ranks of the revanchistes and the critics of
 military attitudes in poems like 'Aux amputés de la guerre':

Vous portez, mon bel officier,
 Avec une grace parfaite,
 Votre sabre à garde d'acier,
 Mais pensez à notre défaite.

On lit votre intrépidité
 Dans vos yeux noirs aux sourcils minces;
 Aucun mal d'être bien ganté!
 Mais on nous a pris deux provinces.

Not surprisingly, however, he is most at home in sentimental
 descriptive passages. Lettre d'un mobile breton may be use-
 fully compared with Corbière's 'La Pastorale de Conlie' (to the
 latter's advantage) for it introduces the theme of the mockery
 and even suspicion with which the traditionally royalist and
 catholic Breton soldiers were sometimes regarded:

Maman, et toi vieux père, et toi, ma soeur mignonne,
 Ce soir, en attendant que le couvre-feu sonne,
 Je mets la plume en main ...
 Quelques-uns d'entre nous se plaignent bien tout bas,
 Et sont avec raison mécontents qu'on ricane
 De notre vieil abbé, qui trousse sa soutane,
 Marche à côté de nous, droit, au-devant du feu,
 Et parle à nos blessés du pays et de Dieu;
 Mais aux mauvais railleurs nous faisons la promesse
 De leur bien montrer comment on meurt après la messe.

The attitude towards the war among the more 'philosophical'
 poets varied. Louise Ackermann's germanophile ~~views~~ would allow
 her only to make unbiased comments on the futility and waste of
 war:

Oui, bien fauché! vraiment la récolte est superbe,
 Pas un sillon qui n'ait des cadavres pour gerbe,
 Les plus beaux, les plus forts sont les premiers frappés
 Sur son sein dévasté, qui saigne et qui frissonne,
 L'Humanité, semblable aux champs que l'on moissonne,
 Contemple avec douleur tous ces épis coupés. (28)

Sully-Prudhomme, however, abandoned his previous unchauvin-
istic idealism in 'Homo sum':

J'aimais froidement ma patrie
Au temps de la sécurité,
De son grand renom mérité
J'étais fier sans idolâtrie,
Je m'écriais avec Schiller
'Je suis un citoyen du monde!' (29)

and 'Repentir':

Car je t'aime dans tes malheurs,
O France! depuis cette guerre,
En enfant, comme le vulgaire
Qui sait mourir pour tes couleurs (30)

Occasionally the minor poets succeed in matching Hugo's
satirical flair. Joseph Autran's A la France de 1871, in a
passage curiously similar to Rimbaud's 'Rages de Césars',
actually revitalised Hugo's technique with modern descriptive
detail:

A cette heure ou chacun, sous le canon qui tonne,
Tombe et meurt, et se dit: 'Je fais ce que je dois',
Lui fumeur somnolent, que ce spectacle étonne,
Circulait en wagon, sa cigarette aux doigts ...

Appeals for national effort, the celebration of heroism,
lament over defeat, cries for revenge: all these were straight-
forward attitudes for which the history of France had well
prepared the poets. The affair of the Commune was much more
disturbing and added a bitter twist to an already sad occasion.
One senses the real disorientation of the poets in the face of
this complication. Laprade attempted to write patriotic verse

- (29) The reference to a German poet is, of course, deliberately
ironic.
(30) The poet's separation from 'le vulgaire' is indicative of
the social isolationism of many of the philosophical poets -
a point which brings them close to Symbolism.

but confessed he was ill at ease in the Paris in which he found himself:

Sur l'hôtel communal, comme du haut d'un bouge,
Flotte un sanglant torchon, le hideux drapeau rouge,
Pour dire à tous les yeux, attestant nos excès,
Que les gens et le sol n'ont plus rien de Français ... (31)

Jules Barbier helped to propagate the myth of the complicity of the Communards in the Prussian victory:

Drapeau payé par le Prussien,
Tu n'es plus celui de la France! (32)

Coppée was more concerned with ending internecine strife and reprisals than in taking sides:

Je sais que la terreur va régner sur la ville,
Que peut-être aux tribuns de la guerre civile
On va me désigner du doigt.
Je le sais; mais il faut fulminer l'anathème,
Et le poète obscur, qui te pleure et qui t'aime,
Aura du moins fait ce qu'il doit. (33)

Sully-Prudhomme's pessimism and doubts about human dignity, already referred to, typified the most widespread attitude. Even Hugo seemed to run out of steam in the latter part of L'Année Terrible, for what he had begun as a chronicle of national heroism took an unwelcome and unexpected turn.

* * * * *

(31) Ode aux soldats et aux poètes bretons, November 1870.

(32) Le Franc-Tireur.

(33) 'Plus de sang', April 1871.

Of the poets to whom we are paying particular attention Corbière made but a single contribution to the poetry of events. One of the most substantial poems in Armor - 'La Pastorale de Conlie' - is very different from the other poems on Brittany. It is obviously modernistic in that it is a documentary poem based on events during the War of 1870. The incident related in the poem was the immobilisation of fifty thousand Breton soldiers under the Comte de Kératry in the muddy plain at Conlie near Le Mans lest they be the core for a possible royalist uprising. The wanton neglect of these soldiers, who were left without supplies, and the stupidity of depriving France of fifty thousand men, at a time when she could not spare one, justify the vengeful tone of the poem. Corbière's account seems to be based partly on discussions with his brother-in-law Aimé Vacher and with Rodolphe, both of whom were involved in the affair. The present writer cannot conceal a degree of disappointment with 'La Pastorale' which reads rather like rugged Hugo and holds a position in relation to Corbière's poetry in general (as regards style but not chronology) roughly akin to that of Rimbaud's 'Le Forgeron' in relation to his work; but it is enlivened by satirical humour:

Qui nous a lâchés là: vides sans espérance,
 Sans un levain de désespoir!
 Nous entre-regardant, comme cherchant la France ...
 Comiques, faisant peur à voir!
 - Soldats tant qu'on voudra! ... soldat est donc un être
 Fait pour perdre le goût du pain? ...
 Nous allions mendier; on nous envoyait paître:
 Et ... nous passions à la fin!

'La Pastorale' is by no means a bad poem but Corbière's greatest talent and originality lay not in the documentary kind of poetry of contemporary reality but in the evocation of his own personal experiences in all their immediacy.



Some of the poems which Verlaine wrote in connection with the events of 1870-71 were straightforward appeals to patriotism of the kind we have already noted:

Ce nom, Sedan! me dit de vacances d'enfance,
De passages en "diligence" dans un bruit
Joyeux de clics-clacs et de vitrailles qui fuit
Vers un horizon gai qu'on dirait qui s'avance.

Ce mot, Sedan! m'évoque, ainsi qu'à tous en France,
Une plaine lourde de sang, blême de nuit,
Des cris éteints qu'une rumeur de rêve suit,
Sur quoi plane très haut comme de l'espérance.

Sedan! Sedan! pourtant il sonne encore doux
Et frais, non plus pour l'avenir ou la mémoire,
Mais bien dans le présent bien vivant, grâce à vous!

Il sonne, il brille, le futur nom de victoire:
Accent joli, mignon entrain toujours accru,
Et l'Ardennais qu'est moi presque, en reste fêru. (34)

In 'Metz', written in 1892, Verlaine looks for revanche and combines Catholic patriotism with an attack on those who neglect their country through misguided political beliefs or through cynicism:

Je déteste l'artisterie
Qui se moque de la Patrie
Et du grand vieux nom de Français
Et j'abomine l'Anarchie
Voulant, front vide et main rougie,
Tous peuples frères - et l'orgie! ...

O temps prochains, ô jours que compte
Éperdument dans cette honte
Où se révoltent nos fiertés,
Heures que suppute le culte
Qu'on te voue, ô ma Metz qu'insulte
Ce lourd soldat, pédant inculte,
Temps, jours, heures, sonnez, tinez!

(34) 'A Mlle A. Rom ...', Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes, pp. 609-10.

Muge, joins à la générale
 Ton tocsin, rumeur sépulcrale,
 Prophétise à ces lourds bandits
 Leur dérouté absolue, entière
 Bien au delà de la frontière,
 Que suivra la volée altière
 Des Te Deum enfin redits!

In 1870, in rather less chauvinistic mood, Verlaine had written a poem in the form of an address to representative figures from the history of German culture culminating in the question:

Sur Paris, sur Paris! ce ne sont pas des mythes,
 L'Allemagne, il paraît, lance, qu'en dites-vous?
 Tranquillement des culs horribles de marmites. (35)

His attitude to Germany could be less respectful as in the predictable reference to Kaiser Wilhelm II's physical deficiency:

Guillaume Deux, l'homme à l'oreille mâle,
 Au bras long mal,
 Et qui parfois, - faveur impériale! -
 Agit pas mal ... (36)

More interesting was the short poem 'Paysage' which succeeds in imbuing a conventional theme with modernity and actuality in its last two lines:

Vers Saint-Denis c'est bête et sale la campagne.
 C'est pourtant là qu'un jour j'emmenai ma compagne.
 Nous étions de mauvaise humeur et querellions.
 Un plat soleil d'été tartinait ses rayons
 Sur la plaine séchée ainsi qu'une rôtie.
 C'était pas trop après le Siège: une partie
 Des "maisons de campagne" était à terre encor.
 D'autres se relevaient comme on hisse un décor,
 Et des obus tout neufs encastrés aux pilastres
 Portaient écrit autour: Souvenir des désastres.

It was the horrifying modernity of the German war effort which had particularly struck the poet in 'Les Renards':

-
- (35) 'Ecrit pendant le siège de Paris'. Ibid., pp. 928-9.
 (36) 'Ode à Guillaume II'. Ibid., p. 936.

C'est la guerre mathématique
 Dans l'horreur, toute neuve encor,
 De son impeccable tactique:
 - Pas de prestige; aucun décor ... (37)

By far the most important poem Verlaine wrote on the historical events of 1870-71 is 'Les Vaincus'. In fact of the four sections of the poem the first two dated from 1867 and had been entitled 'Les Poètes'. Under the probable influence of Vermersch and the other exiled Communards in London in 1872 the poet added two further sections intended as a powerful homage to the defeated Commune, modified very slightly the pre-existing section and gave the total poem its new title. What is most striking is the ease with which Verlaine was able to graft on the two new sections. The theme of political revolt is seen to be in complete accord with the poet's view of the poetic condition; poets and Communards alike are equally révoltés. Already the 1867 version of the poem had spoken of the battle waged against poets by society at large:

Nous allons, au hasard du soir et du chemin,
 Comme les meurtriers et comme les infâmes,
 Veufs, orphelins, sans toit, ni fils, ni lendemain ...

and of the need for revolt:

Allons, debout! allons, allons! debout, debout!
 Assez comme cela de hontes et de trêves!
 Au combat, au combat! car notre sang qui bout
 A besoin de fumer sur la pointe des glaives!

The new material talks of the imprisonment and maltreatment of the Communards and their heroism:

Tandis que les carcans font ployer nos épaules,
 Dans nos veines le sang circule, bon trésor.

in terms which might equally well have been found in the earlier part of the poem. The exhortation to rebellion now takes the form of a virulent demand for vengeance:

(37) The same tendency is apparent in the work of Rimbaud.

Et la terre, depuis longtemps aride et maigre,
 Pendant longtemps boira joyeuse votre sang
 Dont la lourde vapeur savoureusement aigre
 Montera vers la nue et rougira son flanc,

Et les chiens et les loups et les oiseaux de proie
 Feront vos membres nets et fouilleront vos troncs,
 Et nous rirons, sans rien qui trouble notre joie,
 Car les morts sont bien morts et nous vous l'apprendrons.

After his conversion Verlaine adopted reactionary political views (already discussed in the last chapter) which, however, proved insufficiently practical to provide a truly dynamic credo so that his old left-wing republican fervour was often replaced by despair and a sense of disorientation and of the past irretrievably lost:

Les passages Choiseul aux odeurs de jadis,
 Où sont-ils? En l'hiver de ce Soixante-Dix
 On s'amusait. J'étais républicain, Leconte
 De Lisle aussi, ce cher Lemerre étant archonte
 De droit, et l'on faisait chacun son acte en vers.
 Jours enfuis! Quels Autrans soufflèrent à travers
 La montagne! Le Maître est décoré comme une
 Chasse et n'a pas encor digéré la Commune.
 Tous sont toqués, et moi qui chantais aux temps chauds,
 Je danse sur la paille humide des cachots. (38)

In the same vein Verlaine's incidental poetry makes more references to contemporary politics than the work of any other major poet.

'Nébuleuses' is a genuinely amusing panorama of the political figures of the day :

Papa Grévy, l'affreux Ferry persécuteur,
 Constans proverbial et Cazot légendaire
 Même dans ce milieu de conte de Voltaire
 Pour la sottise crasse et la plate laideur;

Ces Chambres, bosse double au dos d'un dromadaire,
 Idoines au régime, ineptie, impudeur;
 Ces maires, ces préfets, leur argot, leur odeur,
 Et Farre, à lui seul tout l'opprobre militaire;

Et la file des purs, des barbes, des aîeux,
 Juillet, Février, Juin, et "ceux" du Deux Décembre,
 Bonnes jambes, jamais lasses dans l'antichambre;

(38) Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes, p. 933.

Et les jeunes encor plus bêtes que les vieux,
 Communards sans Hébert, Girondins sans Charlotte,
 - Le tout, un vol de sous dans un bruit de parlotte !

Other poems from the same collection to be read in this context

include : 'Bustes pour mairies', 'Opportunistes', 'Puero debetur reverentia',

'A propos d'un procès intenté à un archevêque français', 'Pour

dénoncer la "Triplice" au lieu du concordat', 'Rastas' and

'Un peu de politique' which is a remarkable résumé in thirty-one

lines of the traumatic political history of France since the fall

of the ancien régime.

The nineteenth century had witnessed too many awful events in
 France, too many changes; the poet would prefer to be insulated from
 it - as indeed he was for a time :

Depuis un an et plus je n'ai pas vu la queue
 D'un journal. Est-ce assez Bibliothèque bleue ?
 Parfois je me dis à part moi: "L'eusses-tu cru ?"
 Eh bien, l'on n'en meurt pas. D'abord c'est un peu cru,
 Un peu bien blanc, et l'oeil habitué s'en fâche.
 Mais l'esprit ! comme il rit et triomphe, le lâche !
 Et puis, c'est un plaisir patriotique et sain
 De ne plus rien savoir de ce siècle assassin
 Et de ne suivre plus dans sa dernière transe
 Cette agonie épouvantable de la France. (39)

It was to an idealised France, an abstract concept, rather than the
 reality of his day that Verlaine swore allegiance :

Je trouverais très ridicules
 Au lieu d'affreux que je le fais
 Cette cause et tous ses effets
 Qui démonteraient cent Hercules,

S'il n'était encor la Patrie,
 - Non ce "pays" qu'il faut haïr,
 Ni son "bon droit" qu'il faut trahir -
 Mais cette aveuglement chérie

Patrie à qui tous sacrifices
 Extravagants, exorbitants,
 Sacrés, saints, sont dus en tous temps,
 En tous lieux, malgré tant de vices !

Et j'implore, en ma joie amère
 De voir s'abîmer ce pays
 Dans ces opprobres inouïs,
 La France, l'éternelle mère !

(40)

Although the poetry of Verlaine and the other poets so far discussed in this section is interesting and, on occasion, even illuminating (for instance the oscillation between dream and action, which Nadal has seen as central to Verlaine's life and work (41) in 'Les Vaincus') it is with increased pleasure that one turns to the poetry of Rimbaud. For almost without exception the other poets failed to be at their most original, technically, in the poetic evocation of events. In the case of Rimbaud the psycho-social aspect of rebellion is often combined with originality of expression. Rimbaud's poetry dealing with the events of 1870-71 constitutes a very significant proportion of his total output and would provide a self-contained subject of considerable interest for detailed study, of which only a beginning can be made here.

* * * * *

(40) Ibid., pp. 933-34.

(41) Preface to Oeuvres Complètes, (Club du meilleur livre), Tome I, quoted in Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes, p. 1157.

All but two of Rimbaud's poems on the Franco-Prussian war are satirical. They are evidence of his disgust at the callousness of those in power who needlessly throw away lives in war and of political views which accord well with the poems on the Commune. The two exceptions are 'Le Dormeur du val' and 'Les Corbeaux'. The first of these is one of Rimbaud's most anthologised poems - perhaps because it is suitable for the eyes of schoolchildren? - and if anything it is in the curious position of being neglected through over-exposure. The sonnet is built around a moving contrast between the beauty of life and nature evoked in the first two stanzas and the realisation in the last two stanzas that the young soldier is not sleeping but dead, culminating in the celebrated and brutally simple statement:

Il a deux trous rouges au côté droit.

Few things indicate better the deficiencies of traditional French poetic rhetoric than a contrast between poetic declarations of the futility and waste of war, such as that by Madame Ackermann quoted earlier in this section, and Rimbaud's deceptively simple and almost sotto voce poem. In order better to express the stillness and sensual unawareness of death the earlier part of the poem is devoted to an almost magical formulation of the contrasting qualities of vibrancy and sensorial delight. Into an enclosed green paradise ('un trou de verdure' - suggesting peace and security) a singing river flows, casting silver reflections with gay abandon onto the grass to which is added the light of the sun shining down from above the mountains so that the total effect of light is almost effervescent as in Impressionist painting: 'c'est un petit val qui mousse de rayons'. The soldier in the poem is described precisely in a way to suggest that he should profit most from this environment. He is young, with his

mouth open to the life-giving air and his head bare to the elements. There follows a line remarkable for its sensual image and an example of Rimbaud's colorisme:

Et la nuque baignant dans le frais cresson bleu ...

In the same stanza there is another reference to the vibrant luminosity: 'la lumière pleut'. The youth of the soldier and the hint of death which leads to the finale are combined in one pathetic image:

Souriant comme/sourirait un enfant malade ...

The poem is notable for the complete absence of any kind of commentary. This combined with the masterly formulation of sensual experience makes it a clear advance on the work of most of Rimbaud's elders and predecessors. A further instance of how Rimbaud brought technical freshness to what, in other hands, appears as a hackneyed theme is provided by his use of enjambement. It enabled Rimbaud to draw attention to some of the most expressive words in the poem by casting them as rejets: 'd'argent', 'luit', 'dort', 'sourirait', 'tranquille'. Rimbaud's artistry is also evident in the symmetry of the poem with the opening reference to 'un trou de verdure' being balanced by a reference to a matching yet contrasting colour, both optically and emotionally, in 'deux trous rouges'. The change in the meaning of 'trou' is the only suggestion of irony in the whole poem.

'Le Dormeur du val' is an excellent example of how a poem dealing with an aspect of contemporary reality - the horror of war - which had always been acceptable to the French tradition could be rendered more vital and more emotionally moving by reference to another aspect of contemporary reality, the immediacy of sensual awareness, in terms which already anticipate the poetic impressionism which will be discussed in Part Two,

Chapter Four. 'Les Corbeaux' on the other hand, is a much less original piece technically and the present writer is at a loss to understand those who see it as one of the pinnacles of original achievement in the Poésies. The traditional tone is set by the inversion in the opening line:

Seigneur, quand froide est la prairie ...

and maintained through lines straight out of the rhetorical storehouse:

Dispersez-vous, ralliez-vous! ...
Sois donc le crieur du devoir,
O notre funèbre oiseau noir!

The very strong evidence for a date of composition in 1872 (42) leads one to the question why, at such a relatively late date, Rimbaud should have adopted a style so traditional and so different from the original poetic medium he was by then beginning to forge for himself. Was his intention parody and did his reference to his Romantic precursors extend beyond a probable recollection of the grisly episode of the old woman's corpse beset by crows in the blizzard scene in Hugo's L'Homme qui rit (published only a year before the Franco-Prussian war) to an imitation of their verse? This question brings us to the beginning of an idea of the complexity of the poem and to some of the compensations for its technical shortcomings.

'Les Corbeaux' is a patriotic poem with a twist - or several twists. The poet to some extent adopts the style of the Romantics but even more so that of the popular (religious) ballad (which was one of the forms they had been largely

(42) See A. Adam's remarks in Rimbaud, Oeuvres Complètes, pp. 874-75.

responsible for reviving) both of which might be used for a lament on the national misfortune. The second is particularly suitable for the quasi-rural flavour of the poem. Yet the relish with which the poet looks upon these funereal birds:

Les chers corbeaux délicieux ...

suggests that one of the poet's intentions is ironic parody.

For the crows are not simply a reminder of a tragedy but a call to duty upon possibly complacent survivors:

Pour que chaque passant repense!
Sois donc le crieur du devoir ...

More than this they are the symbols of devouring vengeance upon the society which threw away the lives of the victims of the war of 1870 who are alone to be spared by the crows:

Laissez les fauvettes de mai
Pour ceux qu'au fond du bois enchaîne,
Dans l'herbe d'où l'on ne peut fuir
La défaite sans avenir.

Thus regarded the crows are open to a further symbolic interpretation: they are the black vengeful spirits of the defeated Communards (or their future disciples) come to wreak retribution on the society whose actions, culminating in the events of 1870, justified their revolution. Yet there is a gloom of despondency about the poem which any real hope of vengeance should have alleviated. The truth is that the poet knows that the crows will probably remain allegorical and that the 'défaite sans avenir' was not merely that of the French nation in the war but of the Commune and even more, of his own attempts to make a success of his adventures in Paris. We would thus suggest February 1872 as the date of composition for the poem which would accord well both with Rimbaud's pessimism (it was the time of his return to the Ardennes while Verlaine sought a reconciliation with Mathilde) and with the winter landscape of 'Les Corbeaux'. Thus while Verlaine may well have been

right in describing the poem as 'patriotique bien' (43) it is certain that, even if this were its initial inspiration, it involves an association of mood dependent upon other factors.

The satirical poems on the war of 1870 should present none of the difficulties of interpretation encountered in 'Les Corbeaux'. The least incidental of the poems is 'Le Mal' which, despite its obvious meaning, has been misunderstood by several of the critics including W. M. Frohock normally one of the more sensible of Rimbaud exegetes (44). The Evil referred to in the title is surely God himself and his terrestrial representatives of Church and Monarchy. Rimbaud may well have had in mind the formula of Proudhon, a writer with whose work he was well acquainted:

Dieu, c'est le Mal

To see the poem as a reference to the God of justice who will take the side of the poor and oppressed is a contresens not only on the basis of the evidence of the poem but in the light of Rimbaud's contempt in this period for orthodox conceptions of God. For him Nature is the true deity and it is Nature that has been offended against. The poem may be summarised as follows: against a beautiful backcloth ('l'infini du ciel bleu', 'dans l'été, dans l'herbe, dans ta joie, Nature!') men on both sides ('écabates ou verts') are being slaughtered by the ugly and monotonous machinery of modern warfare ('les crachats rouges de la mitraille/sifflent tout le jour'). This is being done not only in the service but for the amusement of kings. In the second stanza, in a description remarkably similar to Leconte de Lisle's 'Le Soir d'une Bataille' men are converted into a smoking

(43) Oeuvres en prose complètes, p. 655.

(44) Rimbaud's Poetic Practice, p. 59.

debris - the same men over whose creation Nature had taken such a careful and religious concern. This last point introduced, by contrast, the irony of the tercets. The God of the establishment who is used as a justification for war laughs, like the kings, with satisfaction at the slaughter; he sleeps contentedly through the praise and sumptuous worship of his followers only awaking to the sound of money wrung, ironically, from those he has most maltreated, the mothers whose sons have been taken by the war. The picture is one of the exploitation of simple piety and anxiety by a rapacious and hypocritical church. 'Le Mal' thus combines the treatment of the war with two more general aspects of Rimbaud's thought and work - his left-wing republicanism and his anti-clericalism. Although not as interesting stylistically as 'Le Dormeur du val', 'Le Mal' is nevertheless much more advanced than 'Les Corbeaux'. The opening line of 'Le Mal': 'Tandis que les crachats rouges de la mitraille...' is one of Rimbaud's most justly celebrated images representing a fusion of ugliness, ordinariness and modernity entirely appropriate to his subject. Again the use of enjambement is fruitful. In the second line a sense-impression 'sifflent' is highlighted as a rejet. In the second line of the third stanza the irony of the worship of the false god, in the place of Nature, is stressed in the carrying over of 'Des autels'. This is symmetrically balanced by the contrasting position of the worshippers in the second line of the final stanza 'Dans l'angoisse'. The modernist image of the opening, the metrical freedom and the reference to humble aspects of reality ('leur vieux bonnet noir', 'un gros sou lié dans leur mouchoir') are a measure of the distance between this poem and that of Leconte de Lisle.

The remaining poems on the war are pieces of less consequence. However, it may be worth remarking that although one important poem, 'A la musique', is discussed elsewhere (45), it, also, is to be related to the war. It refers specifically to the period of jingoism immediately preceding the declaration of war. On the 7th July 1870 a concert was given at Charleville by the '6ème de ligne' which included in its programme Pascal's Polka-Mazurka des Fifres (46) referred to in the poem as the Valse des Fifres. Rimbaud's reference in a letter to Izombard of the 25th August 1870 to 'cette benoîte population ... prudhommesquement spadassière' thus shows a continuation of the anti-bourgeois satire, stimulated by the behaviour of the bourgeoisie in the face of war, already clearly expressed in 'A la musique'.

Turning to the remaining war poems proper, we find two dealing with events from the earliest period of the war and one describing Napoleon III after his capture by the victorious Germans.. 'Morts de Quatre-vingt-douze ...' is a straightforward piece of republican rhetoric attacking the hypocritical appeal to patriotism made by people like Paul de Cassagnac through their incongruous allusions to the spirit of 1792-93. The device employed by Rimbaud to ridicule the likes of Cassagnac is to contrast the almost mystical self-sacrificial heroism of the conscripts of 1792-93:

Ô millions de Christs aux yeux sombres et doux ...
with the realities of the present:

Nous, courbés sous les rois comme sous une trique ...

(45) See pp. 147 and 294-95.

(46) See Rimbaud, Oeuvres Complètes, p. 858.

There is nothing of particular note stylistically in this well-written but conventional sonnet libertin.

A more interesting poem technically is 'L'Éclatante Victoire de Sarrebruck' which recounts a rather absurd incident from the early campaigns of the war. An engagement on 2nd August 1870 resulting in enemy losses of two officers and seventy men had been blown up into a major victory involving the participation of himself and the Prince Imperial by Napoleon III. This poem finds Rimbaud much closer to the tone and spirit of the Album zutique (and, for that matter, to Corbière). It is a humorous and ironic transposition d'art based on the 'gravure belge' mentioned in the superscription. Needless to say the conviction of Rimbaud's satire stems considerably from the benefit of hindsight; by October 1870 with France defeated and Napoleon III taken prisoner the Saarbrücken affair could be seen for what it was. The technique of ironic juxtaposition employed by Rimbaud in this poem is similar to that already examined in connection with 'Ce qu'on dit au poète ...' (47):

'apothéose ... sur son dada flamboyant', 'Féroce comme Zeus et doux comme un papa'.

The Emperor is thus presented as a comic hybrid of Roman imperial grandeur and the ideal French bourgeois paterfamilias. Indeed such a figure could only attract the loyalty of simpletons and children, hence the use of the term 'bons Pioupious' and the description of the asinine soldiers and their behaviour in the rest of the poem. The supreme irony of the poem is that the most penetrating comment is made unwittingly by the most stupid of the soldiers who in response to the cry "Vive l'Empereur!!!" asks "De quoi?" Rimbaud has gone to considerable trouble to match the colour of the engraving: 'une apothéose bleue et jaune', 'des tambours dorés et des rouges canons', 'un schako surgit

comme un soleil noir', 'Boquillon rouge et bleu', and cannot resist an extension of colour description into a pun 'car il voit tout en rose'. Similarly the simple composition is also made clear: 'Au milieu, l'Empereur', 'En bas, les bons Pioupious', 'A droite, Dumaget', 'Au centre, Boquillon'. The reference to a plastic point de départ enables Rimbaud to achieve, quite naturally, a degree of caricature entirely appropriate to his satirical purpose. The latter is also assisted once more by enjambements: the Emperor's apotheosis is merely an artistic convention as we learn in the rejet 'bleue et jaune'; his 'gee-gee' is portrayed with comic inappropriateness in the rejet at the start of the third line, as 'flamboyant' and by the use of particular vocabulary referring to modern warfare - 'la crosse de son chassepot' - which although authentic is made to seem incongruous in contrast to the ineptitude of the troops.

The last poem on the war of 1870 is 'Rages de Césars' a more subtle attack on Napoleon III. At times the defeated emperor appears to be treated almost sympathetically (as in the third stanza). This poem is perhaps the most accurate indictment of Napoleon III for his crime is shown to be 'carelessness' in the Scott Fitzgerald sense of the term, his inability or unwillingness to relate to his real circumstances and to those around him. This is characterised by reference to 'son oeil terne' and 'l'oeil mort' and to the insulating 'fin nuage bleu' coming from 'le cigare aux dents'. Paradoxically, the emperor's defeat and captivity has meant the restoration of liberty after twenty years of thoughtless orgy. This time of regretful meditation for him is one of joy for the poet. The weakness and helplessness rather than villainy of Louis Napoleon suggests that

Rimbaud is attacking the folly of one-man rule as an institution rather than an individual.

Indeed the one overriding lesson to be learned from Rimbaud's war poems is political - not aesthetic. He is against the political and social establishment of which Napoleon III's regime is the epitome. He looks in contrast to the almost atavistic grass-roots republicanism of the heroes of 1792. Thus 'Le Forgeron' is also to be grouped with the poems attacking, in this case indirectly, the Second Empire. Rimbaud's left-wing stance becomes obvious in the poems on the Commune.

The Commune was the inspiration for five verse poems and is also referred to in Une Saison en Enfer and probably the Illuminations. It provided a precise temporal, historical and political focus for the feeling of revolt which Rimbaud had already experienced as a psychological phenomenon and which, in aesthetic terms, he saw as the need for originality and a new poetic language.

'Chant de guerre parisien' merits more attention than it has customarily received since Rimbaud himself clearly considered it to be an important poem. It is the 'psaume d'actualité' which ~~opens~~ the celebrated letter to Demeny of 15th May 1871 and which Rimbaud presents as a part of 'une heure de littérature nouvelle'. It is nonsense to suggest that the poem is included merely as an antidote to possible overseriousness in the text of the letter. Why write such a substantial letter at all if it were not intended to be taken seriously? This does not mean that the letter contains no moments of self-deflating humour. But to prejudice his reader's attention to it before he has even begun the letter proper by presenting a text which is not meant to illustrate some at least of the aspects of the new literature he is discussing would be absurd. On the other

hand it would be wrong to expect the intercalated texts in this letter to be fully-fledged examples of the new language since Rimbaud is talking primarily about 'l'avenir de la poésie' (48). What one should expect then, is a poem sufficiently in accord with the principles outlined in the letter to suggest the beginnings of originality, enough to show that the poet may be on the right track. This is what we have. Although there is no evidence of voyance there are images unusual and obscure enough to hint at the intervention of that other 'JE' in the poetic process. More important, however, and a point consistently undervalued by the commentators, is Rimbaud's insistence on Greek poetry and its harmonious relationship with its social context. 'Chant de guerre parisien' is called a 'psaume' which gives it the same religious connotation as ancient Greek verse and it is also, like its classical antecedent, in tune with 'actualité'. As Rimbaud would have it the poem, on a rudimentary level at least, 'rythme l'action'. Moreover, although this is political satire it is obviously different from the easy discursive exposition of most satirical poetry of this period. The poem is sufficiently complex to require exegesis and may be summarized as follows: The first stanza is ambiguous; Spring has arrived as can be seen from the green properties of the suburbs vacated by the bourgeoisie in the wake of Thiers and Picard's flight from Paris and left wide open to the people's gaze. (Picard's property had been confiscated by the Commune). But it is also from some of the richest Parisian suburbs occupied by the advancing Versaillais

(48) Our italics.

that another flight (of shells falling on the fortified positions held by the Communards) announces a new lethal kind of blossoming.

In the second stanza Nature's intoxicating sensual delights in the month of May and the Versaillais artillery are combined in the scatological pun 'délirants cul-nus'. Rimbaud does not differentiate between suburban areas used by the Versaillais as artillery enplacements (Sèvres and Meudon) and those which were the target of their fire (Bagneux and Asnières) since both were forced to listen to the sowing of the metallic seeds in one capacity or the other. The third stanza shows just how much this

poem is to be regarded as an 'actualité'. We know that the artillery barrage had only commenced in earnest a month before the date of the letter to Demy, which is remarkable enough, but here there is a reference to an event which ^{only} ~~and~~ the very day that Rimbaud wrote the letter and presumably, in part at least, the poem. This was the ^{battle for the} capture of the Bois de Boulogne with its lake by the Versaillais: 'Le lac aux eaux rougies'.

Unlike the Communards who are obliged to use 'la vieille boîte à bougies' because paraffin lamps were required as incendiary weapons, the Versaillais are a properly equipped army with all the paraphernalia of the loathsome military establishment: 'schako, sabre et tam-tam' satirised in 'L'Éclatante victoire de Sarrebruck'.

Rimbaud ridicules these forces by making them seem disproportionate to their achievement - the traversing of a park lake - something befitting children as the echo of the song Le Petit Navire brilliantly suggests in the reference to their untried boats. The fourth stanza likens the exploding shells to yellow gems bursting over the dwellings of the workers in the light of singularly strange dawns. This will provoke the Communards into going on a spree more than ever - an ironic allusion to the charges of drunken irresponsibility made against them - but one

suspects the spree they have in mind is vengeance. The fifth stanza intensifies the word-play already evident in the poem. Thiers and Picard are like cupids gathering sunflowers: 'des Eros' invites the association 'des zéros' and implies that it would be an offence against the truth as well as pronunciation to regard them as 'héros'! But there is a more sinister side to the word-play, for their business is cutting down and capturing the troops of the Commune fighting in the Spring sunshine ('héliotropes'/'hélio-troupes'). There is a continuation of the quasi-artistic pastoral imagery in the third line of the stanza:

Au pétrole ils font des Corots ...

With petrol bombs (incendiary shells) the Versaillais have created sky effects to be compared to Corot's paintings. (An allusion which proves, beyond doubt, that Rimbaud knew something of contemporary painting). Their troops are advancing with the devastating ponderousness of a may-bug or of Thiers's political rhetoric ('tropes'/'troupes'). In the sixth stanza the Versaillais are the representatives of law, order and religion epitomised in the pun 'Grand Truc'/'Grand Turc' (which is also found in Corbière's 'La Balancelle'). In the apparent haven of the countryside Jules Favre is practising his crocodile tears of patriotism. The penultimate stanza begins the warning of revenge. Although the Versaillais have tried to quench the fires of revolution by showering Paris (with petrol) the Communards remain as ardent as ever and the time has come to turn the tables on the attackers. The theme is continued in the last stanza where Rimbaud creates the picture of the over-confident Ruraux caught with their trousers down by ambushing Communards.

Although ^{this particular} exegesis may make the poem seem a fairly straightforward piece of political satire the 'meaning' is only arrived at

with some difficulty. With the evidence of a very brief period of composition one is even more inclined to see the obscurity of the poem as a result of the spontaneity and concision of the images. Rather than aiding discursive clarity by expanding them Rimbaud adds to the complexity through word-play. The poem is even more remarkable when it is realised (as Gengoux indicated) that Rimbaud has managed to combine with its other functions a parody of Coppée's 'Chant de guerre circassien' evident in the title, the form (eight octosyllabic quatrains) and the pun 'Grand Truc' (Coppée's poem recounts an anti-Turkish revolt). Moreover the basic thematic structure of the poem is based on the traditional pastoral treatment of Spring. 'Chant de guerre parisien' is thus a complex poem combining political revolution and literary revolution and making a small but not insignificant step towards the new poetry discussed in the letter to Demyen.

By far the most controversial poem which the reader may justifiably expect to be examined in connection with the Commune is 'Le Coeur Volé'. A sensible exegesis - at least in the present writer's opinion - must assume that, in part at least, this is a description of an incident in an army barracks and its effect on a sensitive adolescent. Whether Rimbaud himself had this experience must remain conjecture but the basic descriptive framework must surely be accepted. We have chosen to examine the poem at this juncture first because one school of thought has long considered that it refers to an experience in the Caserne de Babylone sometime between mid April and early May 1871 and second, because our own interpretation, although it refutes this, for an altogether different reason would see the poem as being connected with Rimbaud's 'association' with the Commune. The critical attention paid to 'Le Coeur volé' is an excellent instance of how Gengoux's (and others') preoccupation with signs of interest in the occult and with meta-

physical ambition (encouraged here by 'abracadabra ntesques') causes certain poems to be taken out of their context in immediate reality and others, which could shed light on the more difficult poems but which appear to be merely incidental, to be neglected. A major clue to the meaning of 'Le Coeur volé' is provided in 'L'Éclatante victoire de Sarrebruck' where Napoleon III's wretchedly stupid soldiers are called 'pioupious'. In the later poem Rimbaud uses the adjective 'pioupiesques'. We are already part of the way to a solution from this evidence alone. If one considers next that another 'incidental' poem, 'Chant de guerre parisien', ^{may have been} written after 'Le Coeur volé' (as it ~~might~~ have been since it refers to an event ^{ending} 15 May 1871 and the letter containing 'Le Coeur volé' was written on 13 May 1871) and yet demonstrates full-blooded support for the Communard forces, scarcely congruous with a nauseating experience at the hands of Commune troops only a few days before, one aspect of the meaning of 'Le Coeur volé' becomes clear. It is a corroboration of Rimbaud's anti-militarism directed against the regular army, this time stemming from a personal experience of the brutishness of soldiers rather than from a political attitude. What the commentators seem to have overlooked is the likelihood (the present writer would say the extreme probability) of a traumatic experience with drunken regular soldiers stationed in or near Charleville, ~~possibly~~ some months before the writing of the poem. The fact that we have three extant versions of the poem suggests a longer period of gestation than is obviously the case in a poem like 'Chant de guerre parisien' and helps to support the view that it relates to an incident when the army was stationed at Charleville. Moreover the nautical imagery was less prominent in the earlier versions which were thus more clearly situated within the framework of a barrack-room experience. 'Le

coeur volé' would appear to have been inspired by such an experience on to which was grafted the nautical imagery (associated by Rimbaud with youthful idealism and which he was shortly to cast in definitive form in 'Le Bateau ivre'). That Rimbaud underwent such an experience helps to explain his anti-militarism. It is noteworthy that nowhere does he describe the Communard partisans in traditional military terms. For him they were not soldiers at all. The Commune was the revolutionary manifestation of the people (symbolised by Jeanne-Marie) against established values including the military system with its discipline, ranks, uniforms and pomp which are ridiculed in poems like 'L'Éclatante victoire de Sarrebruck' and 'Chant de guerre parisien'. The vehemence of Rimbaud's anti-establishment invective, his predilection for scatological vocabulary and the sufferings of dérèglement could all have been intensified by an event such as that described in 'Le Coeur volé'. It signifies the complete destruction of any romantic notion of sexual love through an 'antithèse aux douces vignettes pérennelles où batifolent les cupidons', as Rimbaud himself described the poem to Demeny (49). The effect is perfectly judged and arises largely from the disparity and resulting tension between the serious and disturbing content and the light even gay rhythm and form (triolets). Critics have spoken of the obscurity, the mystery and the hallucinatory aspects of 'Le Coeur Volé' as a sign of the coming masterpieces in the Derniers Vers and the Illuminations. In fact the imagery of the poem is scarcely more hermetic than that of a poem like 'Chant de guerre parisien'. The difference lies in the amount of external evidence the machinery of modern exegetical scholarship can

(49) Letter to Demeny of 10th June 1871, (O.C., p. 255).

bring to bear. In the case of 'Le Coeur volé' this is virtually nothing unless one accepts Belfichon's picture of Rimbaud in the Caserne de Babylone which has proved so tempting.

A brief summary of the poem could be made along the following lines: the poet has undergone a morally degrading and physically nauseating experience equivalent to seasickness (this is surely a straightforward explanation of the starting-point of the nautical imagery in the definitive version of the poem - a phenomenon with which all practising poets are familiar, the germ idea from which other images grow and around which they cluster. Here the ship is also associated with youthful innocence and ideals soiled and needing to be washed by the sea). The poet has been made physically sick on chewing tobacco ('caporal', with its additional military connotations). The third line is clearly the hub of the first stanza. It must be the substance of the 'quolibets' and the beginning of the scene described in the second stanza. But what are the 'jets de soupe'? They could be taken literally as referring to insipid army soup forced down the poet's throat to wash down the tobacco (or the 'juice' of it) in his mouth. They could be tobacco-brown saliva spat at the poet. Most disgusting of all, they could be semen. In the light of the rest of the poem the present writer is inclined to the last interpretation, even though it is unfortunately the most lurid. Whatever the precise nature of the trauma, and Rimbaud's reticent lack of clarity suggests that it must have been singularly unpleasant, it gives rise to mocking laughter on the part of the soldiers. That the event is sexual is scarcely deniable once one moves on to the second stanza. Some protection is afforded the poet's emotional wounds by transposing the scene in terms of

Rimbaud's classical culture. It becomes an orgiastic fresco or vase painting but the adjective 'pioupiesques' serves as a reminder that in reality these figures with a tumescent membrum virile are no satyrs but 'soldier-boys'. In both the Izambard and Demy manuscript versions of the poem the third line of the poem reads:

A la vesprée, ils font des fresques ...

The reference to 'gouvernail' thus represents a later extension of the nautical imagery but one which is entirely appropriate to the sensations being evoked. For what is being described is above all a drunken orgy. The poet's nausea is not only caused by his degradation and chewing tobacco but by drink. The sea-sickness image is altogether fitting since it is part of a general sensation of reeling and spinning that one would experience in the less pleasant stages of drunkenness. Even if Rimbaud knew nothing of the sea through direct experience at this time, there are many popular idioms and jokes comparing intoxication with a rough sea voyage which might have suggested these images. The 'gouvernail' in question is thus the wall at the back of the room on to which the shadows are cast; moreover it was probably the one area on which the poet was able to focus at all, hence the relevance of the idea of stability. In a further extension of the sea images the poet calls upon the waves to cleanse him (as in 'Le Bateau ivre'). The adjective 'abracadabrantésques' presents no real obstacle to exegesis; quite clearly it is a synonym for 'magiques' - possessing magical healing properties. The important thing about the word, which seems to have been missed, is its poignancy by association with the vocabulary of childhood, the period of sexual innocence. Rimbaud would have known the word 'abracadabra' in his childhood from stories of magic and from its use on protective amulets. (50)

(50) See Rimbaud, Oeuvres Complètes, p. 891.

The poet wants a return of the magical innocence of childhood to erase the experience of his orgiastic initiation, as if by a spell. The final stanza returns to the images connected with tobacco. This is an instance of synecdoche or the use of epitome which will be discussed in Part Two, Chapter Four as the meeting ground between symbolic and impressionistic poetry. Although tobacco was clearly one of the unpleasant sensations of this experience it is made to stand for all of them. The use of the verb 'tarir' with 'chique' encourages one to see the latter as a symbolic synonym of the membrum virile referred to in the second stanza. Such a usage might have suggested itself by association with the other meaning of 'chique' as something unclean (a kind of flea) which penetrates the flesh and causes infection. When the 'pioupious' have satisfied their lust, and if the poet is able to recover from the physical symptoms of the orgy, where is he going to find a motivation for future action?

Those who have seen 'Le Coeur volé' as a symbolic poem have only half understood it. The epitomising tendency is much more important. One piece of incontrovertible evidence is Rimbaud's own description of the poem as the antithesis of 'pretty-pretty' erotic poetry. Why mention just this if the central experience of the poem (or the initiation on which it is based) was not erotic? Nauseating drink, tobacco and mockery are given all the unpleasant connotations which were primarily drawn from another even more disgusting aspect of the affair. Only the adjective 'ithyphallique' survives as an unambiguous indication of this particular aspect.

Perhaps 'Le Coeur volé' should really be counted among the poem relating to the war rather than the Commune since, in our opinion, it refers to the regular army stationed at Charleville or other nearby garrison towns. However, as we have suggested,

understood in this light it helps greatly to explain the strength and the manner of expression of Rimbaud's disgust for the establishment, of which the army was the instrument of power. It is by no means inappropriate that 'Le Coeur volé' should be followed in the usual order by 'L'Orgie parisienne'.

'L'Orgie parisienne ou Paris se repeuple' was for long considered to be one of Rimbaud's most straightforward poems - an outpouring of invective against those who had just put down the Commune. Marcel Ruff has very recently argued that this interpretation is incorrect and that the poem is really about an earlier situation, the return to normality after the peace agreement with the Prussians. In either case this would be a Commune poem but obviously the respective merits of the two interpretations have to be considered seriously. An additional problem is the reliability of the text. It seems likely that Verlaine wrote it down from memory some years after losing the letter from Rimbaud in which it was contained. It ^{is} not certain that the text as we know it is entirely authentic. Nevertheless since no unimpeachable text exists one must base one's comments on what there is available. However, if one believes, with the present writer, that the poem refers to Paris after the suppression of the Commune, a possible explanation of some of the poem's lack of originality and its debt to traditional rhetoric may be the construction work undertaken by Verlaine and Vanier. One is only too well aware of the former's prodigious ability 'to turn a stanza' in traditional rhetoric. Much of his own minor poetry is in this style.

The most obvious explanation of the divergence of interpretations of the poem is that it inevitably describes both periods in question. Indeed that is our own view. In a few months Paris has undergone a double disaster yet neither tragedy has altered the behaviour

and life-style of the ruling classes. Thus, although the poem is a verbal assault upon the victorious Versaillais it quite naturally, in one or two instances, may be held to refer to the siege by the Prussians. There is a further reason for the apparently traditional style of the poem which the commentators have overlooked. The debt to Leconte de Lisle and Hugo is obvious and has been noted in all the critical editions but there have been few explanations of Rimbaud's reasons for being so untypically derivative. 'L'Orgie parisienne ...' is not the work of a plagiarist it is an example of deliberate and conscious cultural allusion. What Rimbaud has done is to use the monumental rhetoric associated with national defeat at the hands of a ruthless enemy ('Le Sacre de Paris') or the tyrannical oppression of a usurper (Les Châtiments (51)) in an historically ironic context. This disaster is the crushing of the people by so-called patriots and even so-called republicans with a barbarity and a thoroughness which surpasses that of an enemy in war or a tyrant seeking to dispose of opposition.

What are the reasons for rejecting Marcel Ruff's interpretation of the poem, an interpretation which we now see is supported by Antoine Adam? Perhaps the most important is the date of the poem. In order to support his argument Monsieur Ruff proposes a date earlier than the traditionally accepted end of May 1871. This, he maintains, explains the derivative nature of the style of the poem. As we have attempted to show there are other explanations for the stylistic characteristics of the poem. However, there is

(51) In the celebrated letter of 15th May 1871 Rimbaud wrote to Demy: 'J'ai Les Châtiments sous main'. (O.C., p. 253).

less controversial evidence which strongly supports the date usually accepted. We know on Rimbaud's own admission that he was reading Les Châtiments in May 1871 and this accords perfectly with the allusion to Hugo's poetry in 'L'Orgie parisienne'. There are words and phrases in the poem reminiscent of poems written in May 1871 or later. One thinks of 'baver' in the fifth stanza and the 'stupides hoquets' in the sixth stanza which echo 'Le Coeur volé'. Moreover, although the versification and the declamatory rhythm are Hugolian the vocabulary is of a richness close to the verbal exuberance of 'Ce qu'on dit au poète' and 'Le Bateau ivre'. Yet supposing the poem was written in May 1871 and still refers to Paris after the Prussian siege had been lifted? This is exceedingly unlikely. Confronted with the events of the 'semaine sanglante' Rimbaud would hardly have been inclined to divert his attention to an earlier situation. In any event the return of the ruling classes to Paris after the Prussian siege is a scarcely identifiable moment and one which is historically dubious. Most of the bourgeoisie were inside Paris during the siege and we know from contemporary satirical articles and poems that the most offensive phenomenon as far as left-wing sympathisers at this time were concerned was not an exodus of the wealthier bourgeoisie but their continued ability to eat reasonably well (at a price only they could afford) in famous restaurants and even to flaunt their wealth. Indeed it has been suggested that disparities of this kind, suddenly brought into sharper focus, were one of the causes of the Commune insurrection. (51a)

An examination of the poem will also, incidentally, bring to light other reasons for rejecting Ruff's hypothesis. The opening stanza describes the return by rail of the Versaillais

(51a) See addenda.

castigated as 'lâches!'. The verb 'dégorgé' betokens a vehement antipathy of a strength disproportionate to the event which Ruff and Adam would have us believe was the point de départ of the poem; 'dégorgé' also suggests the verb 'égorgé' which is an entirely appropriate echo in view of the events of 'la semaine sanglante'. It required all the sun's energy to keep light the boulevards darkened by the 'Barbares' - a term used by Leconte de Lisle to refer to the Prussians but which Rimbaud through the context implies might also refer to the Versaillais. Twice Paris has been subjected to humiliation. Like a western Jerusalem she stands nonetheless glorious amidst her ruins. There is an irony in the opening stanza which seems to have eluded the commentators. Anti-Communards like Leconte de Lisle had pictured Paris as a holy city desecrated by the Teutonic barbarians, yet they themselves were to condone (if only by their silence) atrocities far worse than those committed by the Prussians. The same picture of a holy city being desecrated had been used as a propaganda weapon by the Versaillais against the iconoclastic Communards. The opening stanza thus incorporates an allusion to religion as one of the pillars of the establishment. (Even though writers like Leconte de Lisle had used such terminology as an image of the cultural preeminence of Paris there had been much propaganda associating right-wing patriotism, and later anti-Communard feeling, with Catholicism). In the second stanza the poet reassures the Versaillais that there is no need to worry about a renewal of fires which will be carefully guarded against. This is a doubly barbed allusion to the Communard incendiaries responsible for destroying much bourgeois property and to the fire-bombs with which the Versaillais forces bombarded the working-class districts of Paris. One is inclined to think, given the opulence of the description in the third line and the political

associations of the noun 'rougeur' in the last line, that, contrary to what has usually been supposed, the principal allusion in this stanza is in fact to the recent activities of the Communards and that the stanza constitutes a veiled threat of renewed activity already hinted at in its opening line. In the third stanza the idea is momentarily continued -

'les palais morts' are imposing buildings, not simply, as has been supposed, left vacant when the bourgeois fled Paris (since this would make nonsense of the present tense in 'Cachez') but gutted by the activity of the Communards (to be described in 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie') and now hidden from view behind planks lest they be a reminder of the erstwhile success of the uprising. The second half of the stanza introduces the theme of the orgy with its reference to a horde of prostitutes with dyed red hair emerging to satisfy their well-to-do patrons now returned to Paris. The fourth stanza pursues this theme in terms which require little comment. It is clear that Rimbaud has in mind prosperous clients from the phrase 'des maisons d'or'. The opening line represents one of the peaks of achievement in Rimbaud's quest for repulsive images. The very end of the stanza leads to a daring enjambement with the next stanza treating the theme of drink. This fifth stanza makes the connection between early morning drinking and the hour of greatest male sexual arousal. With glazed eyes as though already in a state of paroxysm the early morning tipplers dream of the orgy ahead. In the sixth stanza Paris is personified as the ultimate prostitute :

... la Reine aux fesses cascadantes !

in whose honour her devotees drink themselves into a condition where they are like automata moved by 'l'action des stupides hoquets déchirants'. Evening will see the same reprobates

spring into sexual activity. The words used by Rimbaud could, as critics have pointed out, apply very easily to the aged supporters of the status quo. (Thiers was 74 years old in 1871). Hugo had written in very similar terms of the supporters of Louis Napoleon in Les Châtiments. The seventh stanza is a description in terms of filth and stench of the 'Vainqueurs', as Rimbaud ironically calls the Versaillais. That the poem is to a considerable extent allegorical is made abundantly clear by the opening of the stanza :

O coeurs de saleté ...

It is the minds and hearts of these conquerors that are rotten and corrupt. The eighth stanza begins the most Hugolian section of the poem, a massive tirade hurled by the poet at the Ruraux. But before opening the inverted commas the poet utters a warning which has been passed over in silence by most of the critics. He invites the victors to sniff the nauseating stench of their pleasures while they still can, for only the smell of the strongest poisons could make them oblivious to the fact that he is placing a noose around their tender necks. The poet is to be their metaphorical executioner and, by implication, the herald of a very unmetaphorical revenge.

The grand apostrophe which begins in the last line of the eighth stanza marks a change in the poet's attitude to Paris. Previously described as the great prostitute it is now made clear that she may still be redeemed, that, indeed, she is more the victim of rape. In the ninth stanza Paris becomes simply 'la Femme' (perhaps associated in Rimbaud's mind with the female partisans of the Commune he so admired). Paris may yet have a convulsion sufficient to suffocate her ravishers. No amount of filth and viciousness can enable the victorious rabble of sycophants morons and deceivers :

Syphilitiques, fous, rois, pantins, ventriloques truly to overcome Paris which has the experience and resilience of a hardened putain. Ruff and Adam see this threat as entirely inappropriate in the wake of the devastating defeat of the Commune and much likelier in the period when the spirit of the Commune was gaining ground. This is to ignore the widespread desire for revenge and hopes that such vengeance might be implemented in the not too distant future which those who survived the defeat of the Commune still entertained. Certainly for Vermesch and his fellow exiles in London this was to become one of their main raisons d'être. It was such a hope which gave rise to Verlaine's 'Les Vaincus'. The eleventh stanza describes a Paris victorious over her 'clients' (demanding their money back) in terms clearly related to a militant Commune:

La rouge courtisane aux seins gros de batailles ...

Stanzas twelve to fifteen emphasise the idea of resilience. Despite the hatred in which she has been immersed, despite the body blows she has received, Paris even at her lowest state, lying half dead and in pain, retains a glimmer of hope, a longing for a future to replace her dark past. There has been a transition, swift enough to suggest that Verlaine may have forgotten some stanzas, from the idea of vengeance to a more distant future, an era of reconstruction after the city has purged itself. Paris will receive new energy (the modernist image 'remagnétise' anticipates 'Ce qu'on dit au poète ...' and 'Le Bateau ivre') to overcome these ordeals. She may feel the worms which had invaded her hopefully as though she were a corpse and the icy fingers of her ravishers, now equated with death, but she will not be vanquished. Her progress is as inevitable as the victory of light and beauty (symbolised by the Cariatides which

Banville said would never bow their heads and on which the sunlight streams from blue skies) over the forces of darkness and destruction (symbolised by the Stryx - nocturnal vampires).

Although the apostrophe should end here, at the close of the inverted commas, there is no real break in the tone or the sense with the next two stanzas. Although she has been hideously disfigured, this resilience and the poet's optimism justify the exclamation :

Splendide est ta Beauté

Indeed it is the recent agony which has made this supreme beauty. In the face of the city's depths of energy and the stirrings of the new age death can only grumble.

This would seem to be an ideal point for the poem to end but there are two more stanzas which seem singularly ill at ease in their present position. One wonders if they are connected in some way with the abrupt transition already mentioned. Did they form part of the hypothetical missing section ? Whatever the case the penultimate stanza, in the present order, is surely in itself sufficient evidence of the untenability of Ruff's exegesis. It is no wonder that he ignores it completely as does Adam. The 'Infâmes', the 'Forçats' and the 'Maudits' can only refer to the defeated Communards. The poet will take their sufferings and protests and together with his own insights into universal love will use them to sting those who would prostitute themselves for the returning Versaillais into the realisation that they are bandits. The last stanza ironically juxtaposes the idea of the return of ordered society (by reutilising a satirical device already employed by Hugo (52)) with the ominous sight of the

(52) In sub-titles in Les Châtiments such as La société est sauvée and L'ordre est rétabli.

orgy in progress illuminated by the light of the gas lamps against the walls stained with blood from the fusillades of the previous week - another reference *surprisingly* overlooked by Ruff and Adam.

There is much in 'L'Orgie parisienne' which transcends immediate events and would make of the poem a vision of the modern city to be compared to Baudelaire's Tableaux parisiens. This will be discussed below. (53)

(53) See pp. 449-50.

No-one has challenged the connection between 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie' and the Commune; its context is clear even if stylistically it is much more advanced and difficult than a poem like 'L'Orgie parisienne'. The most striking aspect of the poem is an association we have already noted between political revolution and attack on the literary establishment through parody. The poem is based on a contrast between the types of feminine beauty favoured by Romantic and Parnassian poets and Jeanne-Marie. As all the commentators have now realised, in particular the poem (or rather part of it) is a parody of Gautier's 'Études de mains'. 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie' thus foreshadows that extravaganza of parody - 'Ce qu'on dit au poète'. Its theme, however, is much more serious. It is a token of just how closely linked political revolution and poetic revolution were in Rimbaud's mind that he should enter into parody and word-play in a poem dealing with acts of great heroism which he greatly admired. In this particular case the link is easy to see. Gautier had been a welcome figure at Napoleon III's court and the first of the 'Études de mains' deals with Impéria (whose name alone would have aroused Rimbaud's antipathy) who is representative for Rimbaud of the Society courtesan associated with Louis Napoleon's effete court.

The opening stanza is one of the most difficult, perhaps because it does not lend itself to exegesis by reference to external evidence it has been passed over by the commentators. The reader might think this is because it must be self-explanatory. But it most certainly is not. How can the two contrasting descriptions be applied to the same hands?:

Mains sombres que l'été tanna,
Mains pâles comme des mains mortes.

The first description would be appropriate for a peasant woman but less so for a Parisienne. The second description is easier to account for; it is simply a question of a transferred epithet. It is not the hands that are pale and death-like, so much as the deeds they perform of which we see something in stanza fourteen. Returning to the first description one may see there a double image of liberty. Unlike her gloved counterparts Jeanne-Marie allowed the summer sun and air to tan

her hands. Now they are also tanned by her revolutionary activities (alluded to in the second description) in defence of freedom - 'tanned' by kerosene in her role as a pétroleuse. In her fascinating account of the women partisans of the Commune, les Pétoleuses, Edith Thomas recounts the story of Anne-Marie Menand who was known by the name Jeanne-Marie and was sentenced to death (a sentence later commuted) as an incendiary. Edith Thomas rightly posed the question as to whether Rimbaud is referring directly to her case in the poem. (54) The first stanza concludes with a possible but soon dismissed solution to the apparent paradox of the two descriptions. Are they the hands of the archetypal languid, delicate female beauty epitomized by the greatly loathed Musset's Juana (in 'A Juana') made brown, as we learn in the second stanza, only by the use of exotic make-up? This Mand of beauty would have been doubly loathsome for Rimbaud (as also in the case of Gautier's Imperia) because of the association with the Empress Eugénie. The evocation of other female hands is the subject of the rest of the first half of the poem (Stanzas 1-8). Are they hands using cosmetics manufactured from plants growing on moonlit ponds (a Romantic picture)? Or the hands of women from exotic climes? ('des cieux barbares' sounds Parnassian, the reference to cigars and diamonds more in keeping with the adventure literature of Romanticism). The allusion to rolling cigars may, as Suzanne Bernard suggested, recall Mérimée's Carmen. It is perhaps not without significance that Mérimée helped Louis Napoleon to write love letters to Eugénie! Are they the hands of superstitious girls seeking the assistance of the Madonna in their love affairs? Or the hands of a female poisoner of the Italian Renaissance? (Both typical Romantic themes). Or girls, in a pastoral vision (made ridiculous as in 'Ce qu'on dit au poète ...' by the incongruity of modern scientific feminology and the neologism 'bleuisions') chasing away insects as they come to sample the dawn scent of the flowers? Are they the hands of the intoxicated Persian beauties of Parnassian poetry ('Khenghavaras' is an imitation Parnassian spelling) lost in a trance-like state? The idea of an absorbing dream is ridiculed by the use

(54) Op.cit., p. 207. The fact that Anne-Marie Menand survived lends some support to our interpretation of the pallor of the hands which could otherwise be a suggestion of death. (This alternative interpretation may not, however, be ruled out.) Further evidence that Anne-Marie Menand may have been the model for Jeanne-Marie is the similarity of Rimbaud's reference to 'tache de populace' to Du Camp's description of her in Convulsions de Paris, III, pp. 113-114: 'le visage tout piolé de taches de rousseur ... elle avait je ne sais quoi de sauvage'.

of the technical term 'pandiculations'. These are not the hands of women from the East selling exotic fruit, worshipping strange gods and dutifully bringing up children afflicted by trachoma (as Bernard suggests) and 'lourds' (because they are still carried and breast-fed at an age by which European children have been weaned.?) Nor are they the hands of a victim of the industrial revolution such as the exploited women working in appalling conditions described in the 'social' variant of Romantic poetry as represented by Barbier and some of Hugo. Such is a very brief résumé of the first part of the poem.

The second half of the poem describes Jeanne-Marie's hands as they really are. They are the almost super-human hands of Jeanne-Marie as personification of the people seeking justice through revolution - as certain as machines, strong as a horse, crushing spines, inexorable and infallible in their working:

Des Mains qui ne font jamais mal ...

With all the power of furnaces the only hymns they know are to revolution not the hymns to the Christian God which beg for forgiveness. Such hands will crush the bones of courtesans and 'aristocratic' women described in the early stanzas of the poem. These are not like the white and calm hands of a society mistress; these living hands might be those of a peasant girl tugging reluctant sheep (or even slaughtering them by breaking their necks). They do not have the jewellery of a courtesan but the sun decorates the joints of their fingers as with a ruby. These hands are adorned by a freckle ('tache de populace' based on expressions such as 'tache de rousseur' and 'tache de vin') caused by exposure to sunlight as one would expect in a working woman as opposed to the shielded and gloved skin of a courtesan. The effect is like the deep flesh tones given by bared breasts in an eighteenth-century décolleté dress. Yet these are not hands to be kissed by an ancien régime fop but by a revolutionary. Jeanne-Marie's hands seemed marvellously pale in contrast to the bronze-coloured machine guns which she manned on the barricades. Now such hands worshipped by adoring revolutionaries are sometimes to be seen manacled - an allusion to convoys of chained captive partisans. The heroines of the Commune pay for their courageous deeds with their life-blood through torture, maltreatment and death.

'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie' is one of the most advanced and complex of the

Poesies. Rimbaud has found a revolutionary poetic medium as radically different from the poetic tradition as the Commune was from the previous régime. In particular one is struck by the freedom of selection and association of images, especially in the first half of the poem, and the absence of the constraint of discursive elucidation. Few poems could be much further removed from the style coulant beloved by the bourgeois oppressors of the Commune who constituted the bulk of the poetry-buying public.

The other verse poem which we believe is related to the Commune is 'Qu'est-ce pour nous mon coeur, que les nappes de sang' which although it is included in the poems sometimes classified as the Demiers Vers (i.e. written after 'Le Bateau ivre') may well belong to the period soon after the fall of the Commune (possibly June 1871) both on account of its subject and its versification. In this instance there is no obvious intention of parody to explain the attachment to regularity of form and it is thus a fairly reliable guide to the date of the poem. Such a hypothesis is in accord with the destructive vehemence of the poem - a violent reaction to the overthrow of the Commune and a temporary sense of hopelessness. The poem takes the form of a debate within the poet's consciousness. In the first and second stanzas the poet tries to persuade himself that detachment is possible, that anguish over 'les nappes de sang et de braise et mille meurtres, et les longs cris de rage' and the desire for 'toute vengeance' are for him 'Rien!' This intellectual stoicism cannot be sustained and the end of the first line of the second stanza begins a plea for comprehensive destruction worthy not just of a Communard or even of an anarchist but more of the nihilistic terrorists operating in Russia in this period. Political and social systems, nations, armies even justice and history are to be swept away in the wave of terror and vengeance evoked in the second and third stanzas. 'Industriels, princes, sénats' refers quite clearly to the supporters of men like Napoleon III just as the references to blood and flame refer to the instruments of the Commune's opposition to the establishment. The fourth stanza is enigmatic and seems to bring in the net of Rimbaud's violent scorn 'intellectual revolutionaries', Romantic daydreamers. Perhaps there is even a note of self-criticism here for the reference

to not having to work obviously may be attached to Rimbaud himself who saw work as an unacceptable concession to normality (as in the famous letter to Izambard of 13 May 1871). From the fourth stanza onwards the reader is warned that this is wild fantasy. We are brought close to the ironic retrospective view of Rimbaud's revolutionary experiments in life and poetry that is to be found in Une Saison en Enfer, (which contains on the subject of work the exclamation 'J'ai horreur de tous les métiers'). The very scope of the proposed vengeance in the fifth stanza hints at irony but the use of the past tense in

Notre marche venge resse a tout occupé ...

is conclusive. The poet is living in an entirely imaginary and implausible future. The sixth stanza continues to develop this idea of destruction on a cosmic scale. The civilised continents of the fifth stanza ('Europe, Asie, Amérique') are to be overwhelmed by Africa represented by 'Nois inconnus'. It is no surprise, since the poet has prepared us, when we are told in discursive terms that the orgy of destruction is entirely fantastic:

Ce n'est rien! j'y suis! j'y suis toujours.

'Qu'est-ce pour nous, mon coeur ...' is a revolutionary version of the Baudelairean theme of the escapist dream shattered by the return to reality.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Revolutions in more than just a socio-political sense for, as in other poems we have examined, one may see indications of a matching challenge to 'establishment' poetry. There is a particularly significant example in the enjambement between the third and fourth lines of the first stanza:

.....renversant
Tout ordre

Moving from Rimbaud's verse poetry to Une Saison en Enfer and the Illuminations one is on even more contentious ground in seeking reflections of the Commune. However Rimbaud's claim in this opening section of Une Saison en Enfer:

Je me suis armé contre la justice is to be compared to 'Qu'est-ce pour nous mon coeur' (Stanza 2) and would seem to refer to his sympathy and support for those seeking to overthrow 'law and order'.

(55) As, for instance, in 'La Chambre double'.

'Justice' is a more ambiguous term in French than in English. In English it is possible to contrast law with justice, but in French 'justice' is used to refer to the workings of the law as though the two terms were necessarily synonymous. Thus Rimbaud may well have hoped for justice through the overthrow of 'justice'. Later in the same section Rimbaud seems to be referring to his delight that Napoleon III's rule had been brought to an end, and, (even though this might involve the bloodshed of war and civil war) only to realise later that the Prussians and then, especially, bourgeois republicans were a very questionable improvement on the previous régime. This attitude had brought him to place his hopes in the Commune and to see them dashed in a paroxysm of violence:

J'ai appelé les bourreaux pour, en périssant, mordre la crosse de leurs fusils. J'ai appelé les fléaux, pour m'étouffer avec le sable, le sang ...

In 'Mauvais Sang' Rimbaud seems to have imagined himself as a Communard partisan feeling his own weakness in the midst of (older?) men with the courage and conviction to advance against the enemy. Yet the revolutionary role, even martyrdom, that he may have desired eluded him. The representatives of society are 'lâches' not only because they suppressed the Commune with great savagery, killing many who were unarmed, but in his own case, we may surmise, they created a situation in which it was impossible for him to be a Communard in reality, or to find meaning and purpose in self-sacrifice:

Où va-t-on? au combat? Je suis faible! Les autres avancent. Les outils, les armes ... le temps!...
 Feu! Feu sur moi! Là! Ou je me rends.
 - Lâches! - Je me tue! Je me jette aux pieds des chevaux!

Trapped by social pressures in Charleville when he might have been in Paris, sensing that his own experiments have been a failure and knowing that the Commune had been crushed, the only prospect left was that of an almost unbearable return to French bourgeois respectability:

Ce serait la vie française, le sentier de l'honneur.

Allusions to the Commune in the Illuminations are even more open to debate and argument than those in Une Saison en Enfer. There are grounds for interpreting 'Après le deluge', in part and on one level, as a description of the suppression of the

Commune. The latter is transmitted by association with the age-old myth of the Flood, into a picture set in a compensating dream-world in which elements of reality nevertheless subsist. For Rimbaud the overthrow of the Second Empire by the Prussians followed by the Commune was a purifying flood (to be compared to Veillot's wish to see France 'défaquinisée') which should have meant, and temporarily did mean, the re-surgence of hope, beauty, freedom and happiness - suggested here by the hare (representative of gentleness) the rainbow and the spider's web. But the symbols of this beauty are almost immediately shown in a state of limitation and retreat.

Un lièvre s'arrêta ...
 Oh! les pierres précieuses qui se cachaient,
 les fleurs qui regardaient déjà ...

The tide of revolution has subsided so that men of commerce can return to their dirty profits (symbolized by the 'étals' in 'la grande rue sale' and the renewed accessibility of the sea). An alternative interpretation of these lines, even more closely connected with the Commune, would understand the 'étals' as bodies lined in rows in the streets like butcher's meat and the 'barques' as the ships waiting to take other Communards into exile. The more serious offenders (or just the less lucky) in the eyes of the Versaillais were executed en masse (hence abattoirs) after first being rounded up in the only suitable large buildings - churches (with their stained-glass windows). A situation singularly appropriate for the anti-clerical Rimbaud! Not just men but women perished in the purge (hence the reference to 'lait'):

Le sang coula, chez Barbe-Bleue, - aux abattoirs, - dans les
 cirques (56), où le sceau de Dieu blêmit les fenêtres. Le
 sang et le lait coulerent

Life has returned to a sordid normality (as in 'L'Orgie Parisienne'). Buildings damaged or destroyed are being rebuilt. (Les castors bâtirent'). Fashionable drinks are again being consumed. Children, obliged by the hypocritical bourgeoisie

(56) The Mass is not uncommonly described by Frenchmen unsympathetic to Catholicism as 'cirque' or 'pantomime'. The image may be further explained as a reference to domed churches.

to observe a state of mourning at the national defeat, look at patriotic or religious pictures either in school or in church. One child (Rimbaud) rebels against this return to normality and slams the door on school and makes a gesture indicative of his new freedom (weather-vanes are pointers to the four corners of the globe) which he owes to the deluge, the affects of which he still feels: 'sous l'éclatante giboulée?'

Such an interpretation of this part of 'Après le déluge' (57) might lend one to expect an escape into fantasy at this point and it is true that the rest of the prose poem is of an obscurity which appears almost impenetrable in view of the lack of points de repère drawn from identifiable reality. However there are close connections between the latter section of the poem and what has gone before of more than a contrastive nature. The next paragraph and indeed the rest of the poem does in fact pursue the theme of a return to normality and its regrettable and scarcely palatable consequences. One of Rimbaud's most hermetic and mysterious utterances:

Madam *** Etablit un piano dans les alpes ...

may provide a clue. During the early idealistic, left-wing period of the 1848 Revolution suggestions were made (to the mocking delight of the Revolutions opponents) that pianos be set up in the fields and other places of work to make the life of the workers happier. Some experiments in providing musical entertainment for workers were undertaken. Similar unrealistic suggestions were again made in 1871 by the 'romanesques amis' castigated in 'Qu'est-ce pour vous mon coeur ...'. But these woolly-minded intellectuals have now fled to safe and comfortable places of refuge, such as Switzerland, leaving the only music being provided for the people that which is resounding throughout the newly rampant churches of France. Switzerland is indeed to

(57) Antoine Adam's new edition of the Oeuvres Complètes has brought to the present writer's attention an article, which he had missed, by Yves Denis in La Brèche (November 1965) which lends considerable support to the interpretation suggested here even though the exegesis of the opening sentences is radically different. Also Monsieur Denis's emphasis on a sexual interpretation of the later part of the prose poem seems to be inappropriate and scarcely congruous with the 'political' content.

become the resort not only of these but of the well-to-do generally. So much so that the poet is able to speak of 'caravanes' departing for the 'Splendide - Hôtel' in its 'glacial' Alpine setting. Rimbaud's dream of a virile new poetry in tune with progress has also received a setback since the literary establishment has returned with the political and economic establishment. Hence the parody of Parnassian and Romantic poetry (especially the pastorale):

Depuis lors, la Lune entendit les chacals piaulant (58) par les déserts de thym, - et les églogues en sabots grognant dans le verger. Puis, dans la futaie violette bourgeonnante, Eucharis (59) me dit que c'était le printemps.

All in all the spectacle is too much for Rimbaud who calls for a renewal of the deluge. It is particularly relevant that he should address his plea initially to a pond which will overflow and flood all around it rather than external forces. The parallel with revolution welling up within society (rather than dependance on outside intervention) is obvious. The imagery of water, lightning and thunder is linked with death-bringing revenge in the reference to 'draps noirs et orgues'. A return of the deluge is to be longed for. Since the floods have subsided the erstwhile revelation of beauty and truth (symbolized by gems and flowers) is no longer to be enjoyed. The tedium has returned of what he called ironically in 'Mauvais Sang' 'la vie française, le sentier de l'honneur'. The ~~last~~ allusion in the poem to 'la Reine, la Société' is no more obscure than the rest of the poem. In the present writer's opinion the he represents a fairly logical alliance of the forces of primitivism (this aspect of Michelet's la Sorcière has been noted with reference to this poem by Gengoux, Bernard and Adam) with the specific idea of evolution. In 'Qu'est-ce pour nous mon coeur ...'. Rimbaud had evoked 'les nappes de sang et de braise'. In 'L'Orgie parisienne' revolutionary Paris had been described as 'La Reine' and 'la Femme! Thus, 'la Reine, la Sorcière qui allume sa braise' is the spirit of revolution, political, poetic and metaphysical. This spirit holds the key to Man's true self-discovery through a life of spontaneity and freedom but the ebb of the tide of

(58) An allusion to Leconte de Lisle's 'Les Hurlleurs'?

(59) Rimbaud may have been reminded of the name of this nymph ^{in Télémaque} while thinking of the Catholic Mass referred to earlier.

revolution means that the secret will be withheld.

Although there may be other references to the Commune in the Illuminations these are, in our opinion, insufficiently clear or insufficiently extensive to merit attention within the scope of the present study.

* * * * *

The poetry of events in our period thus yields a rich harvest and any doubts about 'poetic' as opposed to thematic interest are more than compensated for by the work of Rimbaud where the ideas of poetic innovation and political revolution coexist and intermingle.

* * * * *

Many of the more general attitudes to society of the poets writing after 1870 were used in the last chapter and other information may obviously be gleaned from their treatment of politics and historical events. However, it is worth considering this aspect of their work specifically for a few moments.

One reaction to contemporary society is not altogether unexpected and that is the attempt to match in verse the thematic material and preoccupations of the Naturalists. It is one consequence of the neglect of the development of French poetry as a whole in the period 1870-85 (attention being focused on individual poets like Rimbaud and Mallarmé who are treated as precursors of Symbolism rather than seen in context) that the very concept of 'poésie naturaliste' is rarely encountered. Yet no originality can be claimed by the present writer in this respect for no less eminent and venerable a figure than Gustave Lanson had anticipated this categorisation:

Avec M. Leconte de Lisle, la poésie fuit vers l'archéologie et l'histoire: avec M. Sully-Prudhomme, elle s'allie à la philosophie et la science. Une troisième direction reste, dans laquelle la poésie objective peut se trouver; elle consiste à recevoir de la perception extérieure la matière des vers, en sorte que le moi n'y contribue que par sa représentation du non-moi. Parallèlement au

roman naturaliste peut se développer une poésie naturaliste, tout appliquée à rendre les aspects de la vie familière, de la réalité vulgaire, même triviale, même laide. (60)

It is interesting to note that Lanson sees naturalist poetry as a further form of the objectivity of the Parnasse and this judgement tallies with the usual classification of the principal exponent of the genre - Coppée - as a Parnassian despite the most un-Parnassian nature of his poetry in almost all other respects (61). There were several reasons why the poets of period after 1870 should have been tempted to incorporate elements of Naturalism into their work. The first was the obvious success enjoyed by the Naturalist novel in which they no doubt hoped to share, but there were other more significant motives. Naturalism offered a 'scientific' method of writing bound to appeal to poets in an age ostensibly dominated by positivism. Although this rarely extends beyond the objectivity to which Lanson referred it may also be seen in the themes and vocabulary of the early poetry of Laforgue and even possibly in the technical and anatomical terms used by Rimbaud (62). Sully-Prudhomme's preference for the accomplishments of science over and above those of art and literature is of course another indication of this tendency as is,

(60) Histoire de la Littérature française, pp. 1064-65.

(61) Le Reliquaire apart it is doubtful whether Coppée even adhered to the Parnassian credo of careful workmanship. The other poets mentioned by Lanson include Verlaine, Richpin, Maupassant and Verhaeren.

(62) Rimbaud was familiar with the poetry of Coppée and of Glatigny and from them may have partly acquired his taste for everyday reality and indecency respectively. His association with the scientist-poet Charles Cros may have encouraged his use of technical terms but these already occur in poems like 'Vénus Anadyomene' written before their meeting. The question of the influence of the rise of science is further discussed in the next section.

perhaps, Bourget's transition from the somewhat unsuccessful attempts to portray the soul of modern Man in La Vie inquiète and Edel to the analytical Essais de psychologie contemporaine (63).

Naturalism, despite its allegedly objective treatment of reality, tended to confine itself to certain areas in its selection of the reality to be depicted, paying particular attention to the less prosperous sectors of society and to the sordid and ugly aspects of life. This not only appealed to the socio-political interests of some of the poets but also to their pessimism. Even before 1870 Coppée had begun his portrayal in verse of the humbler parts of life and society (64) though Victor Hugo was still earlier in the field with many of his poems depicting social injustices. The growing attraction of Naturalism after 1870 and the celebrity of Coppée after the publication of the Parnasse contemporain of 1871 won the poet of Les Humbles a number of disciples and imitators (65). Lanson, in his discussion of 'poésie naturaliste', expressed doubts as to the merits of the new genre and it is no wonder if he had in mind the kind of verse contributed to the Renaissance artistique et littéraire under the aegis of Coppée:

Elle était pauvre et seule, et voulut rester fille.
De bonne heure, elle avait adopté pour famille
Les enfants sans parents, délaissés ici-bas. (66)

-
- (63) It was probably inevitable that Sully-Prudhomme, who was given to writing enormously long prefaces discussing the scientific and philosophical problems raised in his poems, should eventually abandon verse entirely; Bourget very quickly became dissatisfied with the analytical capacity of poetry becoming first an essayist and then a novelist.
- (64) In the Intimités of 1868.
- (65) Even Rimbaud called Coppée a 'talent' in his letter to Paul Demeny of 15 May 1871.
- (66) Opening lines of poem by Auguste Baluffe in La Renaissance artistique et littéraire of 31 August 1872, quoted by Cornell, The Symbolist Movement, p.14.

Such pedestrian verse is bad enough when it confines itself to description but when, as Kenneth Cornell has suggested, the same treatment is accorded to an idea rather than a narration the effect is, if anything, even more disastrous(67):

A rester tout le jour incliné sur un livre
On se fatigue, il faut de l'air à qui veut vivre,
De l'air au cerveau lourd, à l'oeil appesanti. (68)

The same themes were to remain popular throughout the 1870s and well into the 1880s. Thus in the second edition of Goudeau's Fleurs du bitume, the title of which indicates how easily the young poets associated Baudelaire's poetry with the thematic material of Naturalism, we read:

Soit! - Vous êtes venue à Paris; sous les toits,
Une machine à coudre, acquise à tant par mois,
S'efforçait de payer les termes du concierge,
Et le maigre repas de l'ouvrière vierge:
C'est alors que le diable a fait valoir ses droits... (69)

All the major poets of the period joined in the production of poetry treating the humbler aspects of existence: Verlaine in 'La Soupe du Soir', Rimbaud in 'Les Effarés', Corbière in 'Le Bossu Bitor', Laforgue in 'Intérieur' (70) and even Mallarmé in the ChansonS Bas (71). Naturalism frequently went beyond the merely humble or sordid spectacles of life to even less pleasant subjects and this tendency, too, greatly attracted a number of poets. Thus whilst the title of Richepin's La Chanson des Gueux might indicate merely a preoccupation with the lower strata of society the collection was found shocking even by devotees of Coppee. 'A Adrien Juvigny, quatre ans après' is typical of a certain range of vocabulary and

(67) The Symbolist Movement, p.15.

(68) Opening lines of poem by Julien Lugol in the same number as the Baluffe poem and also quoted by Cornell, op.cit., p.15.

(69) 'C havirette'; Les Fleurs du bitume, 1885 edition, p.19.

(70) Poésies Complètes, p.318.

(71) Oeuvres Complètes, pp.62-67.

tone found among poets of the 1870s and those associated with Decadence(72). This love of the physically repulsive, of the frenetic and of the obscene was identified by both critics and supporters of Naturalism. In Mes Haines Zola had approved subsequent events in his declaration:

Mon goût, si l'on veut, est dépravé. J'aime les ragouts littéraires fortement épicés, les oeuvres de décadence où une sorte de sensibilité malade remplace la santé plantureuse des époques classiques. (73)

A belated review of Rollinat's Les Névroses captured perfectly the character of this brand of 'poésie naturaliste':

Et quelle mouche le Chat noir a-t-il fait de M. Rollinat? Une mouche bleuâtre, pompant les viandes putréfiées, la matière en décomposition, une mouche de mauvais lieux... Ce qui manque surtout à cette poésie vaseuse et purulente, c'est la facilité. Chaque strophe ressemble à une brochette d'asticots jaunâtres qui auraient été récoltés avec peine et empalés difficilement. Gluants et visqueux, ils glissaient sur les doigts; mais l'empaleur a tenu bon: tu entreras, mon bel ami! et ils sont entrés, en effet, plus ou moins éventrés et rendant un peu de leurs entrailles. (74)

Such poetry seemed to appeal to its creators because of its power to shock through unpleasant images or subjects and through improper language. At its most serious it may be an indication of frustrated revolt or of a deep-seated disgust with life; on a lighter level it may simply be little more than the recording of a private joke of a more or less scurrilous nature for the delectation of friends. The poems in the Album zutique, of which 'L'Idole' is a notorious example, are the best illustration of the latter category. No doubt the admittedly not very strong

(72) La Chanson des Gueux, pp.269-70.

(73) Mes Haines (1866), Oeuvres Complètes, X, p.62

(74) This review, which dates from 1883, is quoted in Reboul, Laforgue, p.22. The source and author are not given.

possibility that such productions might fall into the hands of some unsuspecting reader added an incentive to their composition!

Baudelaire was the one poet writing before 1870 to whom both poets and critics alike turned for a justification or an explanation for the introduction into verse of the more 'decadent' aspects of Naturalism. The title of Goudeau's Fleurs du bitume has already been cited as an example as well might have been the sub-Baudelarian style of the extract from Richepin's Nos Tristesses. Rollinat also acknowledged his debt to the masters of the new generation, principally through the imitation of that vein of Baudelaire's poetry which is concerned with physical decay and corruption. Bourget saw in Baudelaire the origin of the major tendencies of his epoch: the probing analysis of the darkest corners of the human personality, the obsession with sensation, the intensity of life(75). In his article of 1879, Le mouvement poétique en France, Jules Lemaitre asserted that Lamartine, Musset and Hugo were the three great French poets of the nineteenth century but conceded that Baudelaire's poetry with its attachment to 'la psychologie bizarre'(76) was exerting a considerable if regrettable influence over many young poets. But there was another capacity in which Baudelaire's name was linked with the association between poetry and Naturalism; he was the guarantor in poetry of modernism which was held to be an aspect of Naturalism. In the article just referred to Lemaitre recognised the existence of a modernist movement in poetry but does not associate Baudelaire with this, preferring to name Coppée

(75) See the essay on Baudelaire in Essais de psychologie contemporaine.

(76) 'Le mouvement poétique en France', Revue Politique et Littéraire, 9 August 1879, p.121.

as its leading exponent and seeing his greatest quality as 'le sens de la vie moderne'(77). Among members of this group of what he calls 'peintres de la vie moderne'(78) the critic lists Richepin, Bourget, Valade, Mérat, Aicard, Rollinat, Theuriet, Manuel and Lemoyne(79). There is no denying that the Naturalist novelists did concern themselves exclusively with contemporary reality and in the long term it was not their scientific pretensions nor even the attractions of the gutter which were of great influence but rather this concern with present reality. The jargon and manifestos of Naturalism and its association with temporarily triumphant positivism gave a new prestige to the treatment of modernity in literature, even in the minds of those who would have been unconvinced by the pleas so consistently uttered by Baudelaire. Naturalism has been seen as essentially nothing other than the fulfilment of an eternal human need - the sense of the present as opposed to the past or future(80). Most of the earlier cénacles and periodicals of the years 1870-87 were sympathetic towards Naturalism and only gradually did poets and theorists become aware of its lack of subtlety; at first Naturalism was accepted as the most striking literary form of the modernism to be found in the other arts, especially in the work of the painters associated with the Impressionist school. There are numerous paintings by Degas which correspond exactly to Naturalism's realistic depiction of the less pleasant

(77) Ibid., p.124.

(78) Ibid., p.125.

(79) Ibid., p.125-26.

(80) By Charles Beuchat, Histoire du naturalisme français, I, p.19.

aspects of life and the seamier parts of society. His Le Viol was in all probability inspired by Zola's Madéleine Féral. (81) A number of the minor poets of contemporary reality never progressed beyond a poetic form of Naturalism; Verlaine (though there were to be retrogressions) and Rimbaud showed signs of its influence but moved rapidly to more subtle forms of the poetry of contemporary reality; Laforgue made his way through a decidedly naturalistic phase before finding his true poetic self.

Part and parcel of Naturalism was another reaction to contemporary society - direct criticism. In its concentration on the less prosperous sectors of society Naturalism questioned the existing social order in an indirect though nonetheless effective way; in its more provocative moments 'la poésie naturaliste' had represented a challenge to bourgeois taste and thus to bourgeois values in general. It is true that the most virulent literary manifestations of anarchism, revolutionary socialism and so on were to be found not in poetry but in review articles. This is true even of those periodicals which welcomed new poetry; La Nouvelle rive gauche (later Lutèce) and La Revue indépendante though sympathetic to young writers were happy to see the most violently anti-bourgeois or anti-clerical sentiments expressed alongside poetry in the Parnassian or Romantic style. It is of course possible to argue, as has been done many times, that almost all the important French poetry of the late nineteenth century is revolutionary, the disdain shown by Mallarmé and the Symbolists

(81) Degas's painting, more properly called 'Intérieur', dates from about 1870. Somewhat more tenuous links have been suggested with other art forms both by recent critics and by writers of the period. Even before 1870 Gasperini had associated Wagner's music with the state of modern society; the Symbolists were to associate it slightly more accurately with the modern personality and the requirements of modern art, though their thinking was, to say the least, confused in this respect.

for values recognisable to the majority of the poetry-reading public being as indicative of this tendency as anything else. Direct social criticism in poetry at this time is, however, a relatively minor though not insignificant genre.

Already in the early 1870s Bouchor, Ponchon and Richepin were composing their anti-bourgeois satires. Bouchor's Chansons joyeuses and Richepin's Chanson des Gueux(82) were publicly condemned, the latter volume gaining a short term of imprisonment for its author. Such works were seen to be a dangerous mixture of political seditiousness and sexual ^{and} linguistic impropriety by the authoritarian regime. Actually, the political content of these poems was by no means that large or always that clear but it was the mixture as a whole that was found to be distasteful, if not downright poisonous, rather than any one of the ingredients. In the 1880s and 1890s Laurent Tailhade wrote poetry which illustrates both the direct and the indirect forms of social non-conformity in poetry. His Le Jardin des rêves of 1880, though following the precepts of Banville as regards form, was totally and deliberately opposed to prevailing bourgeois taste with its accumulation of liturgical imagery and other excesses(83). Later in the same decade Tailhade became associated with Baju's Le Decadent, with the mood of decadence in general and in particular with the composition of pieces attributed to the erstwhile decadent hero Rimbaud. In the 1890s Tailhade turned to more direct methods of attack with satirical verse of some violence aimed at the hypocrisy

(82) Published in 1874 and 1876 respectively.

(83) Banville himself wrote an enthusiastic preface for Le Jardin des rêves.

and complacency of middle-class society. The dual nature of Tailhade's revolutionary intention(84) is clear when the satirical ballads of Au pays du mufle are considered alongside the carefully wrought sonnets and Le Jardin des rêves which are replete with sumptuous imagery; it is through such a juxtaposition that one appreciates the title often accorded him of the leading exponent of 'le symbolisme féroce'.

Social satire or the direct criticism of society was not confined to the work of minor poets. The most consistent assaults against the materialism and philistinism of late nineteenth-century France came from the pen of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. The finest expression of Villiers's scorn for the values of his age are to be found in the celebrated collection Tribulat Bonhomet whose hero epitomised the confident but basically ignorant materialism of the period. These direct attacks are, however, limited to Villiers's prose works. Of the major poets of the period 1870-1887 none wrote more powerful or passionate tirades against middle-class values than Rimbaud in poems like 'A la musique' or 'Les Assis', and for all his later apparent disaffection with political or social issues such poems constitute a significant proportion of his work. The loathing Verlaine felt for the France of 1880, ruled as he considered by money, was openly expressed in the prose pamphlet Voyage en France par un Français(85)

(84) Tailhade was associated with the anarchist movement. In 1894 he lost an eye in a mysterious explosion at the Foyot Restaurant. This made him a living legend.

(85) '...l'argent pour tout argument, pour toute objection, pour toute victoire...' Oeuvres posthumes de Verlaine, II, p.43. In a footnote to the same edition (p.35) Louis Loviot suggested the influence of Veuillot on Verlaine's tone and style.

which serves as an explanation of the ~~aggression~~ of some of the last poems of Sagesse and certain poems in Bonheur and Invectives (86). Mallarmé alone of the major poets of these years failed to use, or rather refused to use, poetry as a vehicle for social criticism though they perhaps all felt a certain uneasiness at demanding such a role of their muse; Rimbaud was the least inhibited but he was more often absorbed by other preoccupations. (A clear reflection of social injustice implying criticism is also to be seen in work in the plastic arts such as the early paintings of Van Gogh or Dalou's or Meunier's depiction in sculpture of the lot of the working classes which again offer a parallel with poetry.)

* * * * *

The treatment of contemporary society is a useful aspect to examine as an approach to some of the minor poets of the period, notably Richepin.

The publication of La Chanson des Gueux in 1876 was a literary bombshell; the volume was an instant success - in a scandalous way. Richepin was fined and imprisoned for his outspoken views on social injustice and 'attacks' on traditional morality. Two poems, Ballade de joyeuse vie and Fils de fille, and parts of three others had to be removed from subsequent editions because of their dangerous blend of political sedition and sexual licence. The preface to the later editions retained, however, much of the original venom; in it the poet described the Gueux as:

La poésie brutale de ces aventuriers, de ces hardis, de ces enfants en révolte à qui la société presque toujours fut marâtre, et qui, ne trouvant pas de lait à la mamelle de la mauvaise nourrice, mordent à même la chair pour calmer leur faim.

(86) e.g. 'Buste pour mairies' and 'Nébuleuses' (Invectives), Bonheur X, Sagesse I, xii.

It is difficult for the modern reader to appreciate the alarm caused by the appearance of the volume and its originality.

Alexandre Zévaès has given an account of the impact of the work seen in terms of its subject-matter:

La solitude des grèves et des bas ports, les huttes excoriées et jaunes, les terrains vagues aux maigres herbes roussies, poussant dans les tessons et les ordures, les fours à plâtre, les barrières et les fortifs, le pavé clapotant et gras, les rues étroites et montantes: voilà le cadre et le paysage. Les cris: vieux habits, vieux galons; fillettes qui offrent des violettes, gamins quémendant l'aumône, vieilles femmes qui vendent 'du mouron pour p'tits oiseaux' ramassé dans la haie et dans le fossé; échos de cabarets et bruits de glouglous; mélopées d'orgues de Barbarie, dont la voix lamentable tour à tour chatouille et mord; voilà ce qui chez Richepin remplace la chanson des prairies et les soupirs des bois. Au milieu vont, viennent, circulent, rôdent, s'aiment, s'accouplent, se battent les gueux célébrés par le poète - non pas les gueux de Béranger qui sont heureux et clament leur bonheur, mais de vrais gueux des faubourgs débraillés et depennailés, mais des voyous, des tire-laine, des procureurs de filles... (87)

The collection has three main parts as well as a prologue and epilogue. The first of these main parts Gueux des champs has three sections: Chansons de mendiants, Les Plantes, Les Choses, Les Bêtes and L'Odysée d'un vagabond. The main interest in the first of these seems to be metrical ingenuity; stanzas range from four to eight lines in length and the lines are between two and ten syllables long. Some of the poems in this section contain threats against the rich. The poems in the second section are among Richepin's earliest and they have only tenuous links with the rest of the volume; they are almost entirely inspired by classical sources. The third section

(87) A, Zévaès, Les Procès littéraires du XIX^e siècle, pp.202-03.

is more vigorous and pungent. 'Nativité' relates in harrowing detail the birth of a bastard delivered in a ditch by a gueuse on an icy December day, concluding with this blasphemous reference to the infant Jesus:

Et par sa mère au ventre ouvert
Je jure, le front découvert,
Que l'autre n'a pas tant souffert! (88)

The second main part, Gueux de Paris, is generally the best part of the collection. Valabregue considered that it made Richepin the greatest poet of Paris after Baudelaire(89). The section of Gueux de Paris entitled Au pays de largonji is free from the mawkishness of much of the book and consists of brutal, mocking verses about the endless war waged by the criminal poor against the bourgeoisie. It is in this section that Richepin came closest to later chansons by Bruant and even by Piaf and Brassens. The last of the main parts of the book, Nous autres gueux, is a disappointing group of occasional pieces.

Yet Richepin's verse is not as modernistic as one might expect. There is little in Gueux de Paris to make it clear to the reader that this is a picture of Paris in the nineteenth century. There are a few exceptions such as 'Balochard' in which trams and omnibuses are mentioned. It was the themes treated by Richepin and his apparently realist approach that struck his readers as being modern. In 'Nos Revanches' he dealt with the rift between the poet and society:

Le bourgeois digère, gavé,
Ses trois repas et son bien-être,
Et rit de voir sur le pavé
Les poètes traîner la guêtre... (90)

(88) Ibid., p.73.

(89) A. Valabregue, 'La Poésie parisienne', Revue bleue, 22 March 1890 p.368.

(90) La Chanson des Gueux, 1902 edition, p.230.

In 'Sonnet consolant' with social injustice:

Malheur aux pauvres! C'est l'argent qui rend heureux.
Les riches ont la force, et la gloire et la joie.
Sur leur nez orgueilleux c'est l'or qui rougeoie.
L'or mettrait du soleil même au front d'un lépreux. (91)

* * * * *

Of the work of major poets dealing with contemporary society that of Verlaine and Rimbaud at least is worth serious attention.

Verlaine, of course, adopted the techniques and subject-matter of Naturalism in a prose work like Louise Leclercq of which the opening lines are ample example:

Il n'y a guère de mélancolie plus épaisse
de tristesse plus lourde que la pensée de vivre
dans ces énormes maisons de plâtre, à cinq
et six étages, avec leurs innombrables volets
gris, comme des poitrines de squelettes à plat
sur le blanc sale du mur, de l'ancienne
banlieue parisienne. Je parle plus spécialement
des quartiers paisibles, honnêtes, où la bâtisse a
prospéré grâce aux locataires bons payeurs, où ont
pu se former de très longues vues sans air et
sans soleil. (92)

This style was also utilised in poems like 'La Soupe du soir', dedicated appropriately enough to Huysmans, but first published fifteen years before Louise Leclercq in the Parnasse contemporain of 1871. This poem is often mistakenly dismissed as a Naturalist tranche de vie in the manner of Coppée but it has a sinister aspect within its brief narrative structure which is usually overlooked. Much of the poem, and the third and final stanzas in particular, do operate on the level of Coppée's bathos it is true:

(91) Ibid., p.233.

(92) Oeuvres en prose complètes p.5.

L'homme, grand front, grands yeux pleins d'une sombre flamme
 A vraiment des lueurs d'intelligence et d'âme
 Et c'est ce qu'on appelle un solide garçon.
 La femme, jeune encore, est belle à sa façon

Mais la Misère a mis sur eux sa main funeste,
 Et perdant par degrés rapides ce qui reste
 En eux de tristement vénérable et d'humain,
 Ce seront la femelle et le mâle demain.

Also these are examples of Naturalist set-piece description:

Tous se sont attablés pour manger de la soupe
 Et du boeuf, et ce tas sordide forme un groupe
 Dont l'ombre à l'infini s'allonge tout autour
 De la chambre, la lampe étant sans abat-jour

Yet in the seventh and eighth stanzas we encounter mysterious,
 unexplained references to a more serious undercurrent:

Non loin d'un vieux fusil rouillé qu'un clou supporte
 Et que la lampe fait luire d'étrange sorte,
 Quelqu'un qui chercherait longtemps dans ce retrait
 Avec l'oeil d'un agent de police verrait

Empilés dans le fond de la boîteuse armoire,
 Quelques livres poudreux de "science" et d'"histoire",
 Et sous le matelas, cachés avec grand soin,
 Des romans capiteux cornés à chaque coin.

The dramatic tension is increased by the daring enjambement between stanzas. What is the reader to make of this situation? The likeliest explanation is that the man in question was one of the intellectuals who took up arms in the 1848 Revolution and whose principles (or more probably the necessity of hiding - hence the reference to 'retrait' and 'agent de police') have cost him material comfort and social respectability. (In the last stanza the wife dreams of a former friend: 'Laquelle a tout, voiture et maison de campagne'.) Escapism has been his only consolation, that is why the novels are well-thumbed but the science and history books have become 'poudreux'. But what of the rusting rifle? Does it hang on its nail to be used in self-defence if its owner is cornered? Or is it a symbolic warning that in such desperation

men may yet again resort to arms? Verlaine might well have harboured ideas with which his Parnassian publishers would scarcely have sympathised.

Verlaine's other principle response to the nature of contemporary society was satire of which we have already seen examples in relation to his views on 'paradise lost' and, in this section, on politics. Perhaps his most significant contribution to the genre was one of his earliest, the famous sonnet 'Monsieur Prudhomme', first published in La Revue du Progrès.

Il est grave: il est maire et père de famille.
Son faux col engloutit son oreille. Ses yeux
Dans un rêve sans fin flottent insoucieux,
Et le printemps en fleur sur ses pantoufles brille.

Que lui fait l'astre d'or, que lui fait la charmille
Où l'oiseau chante à l'ombre, et que lui font les cieux,
Et les prés verts et les gazons silencieux?
Monsieur Prudhomme songe à marier sa fille

Avec Monsieur Machin, un jeune homme cossu.
Il est juste-milieu, botaniste et pansu.
Quant aux faiseurs de vers, ces vauriens, ces marouffles,

Ces fainéants barbus, mal peignés, il les a
Plus en horreur que son éternel coryza,
Et le printemps en fleur brille sur ses pantoufles.

There is little doubt that here Verlaine reached a peak in the writing of satire which he rarely equalled later. The pseudo-Romantic description of lines 2 - 7 is perfectly judged as in the three-line 'deflation' which follows. The point of the poem is then made: the bourgeois antipathy for poets, who are regarded as bearded, unkempt good-for-nothings who irritate him as much as his recurring nasal inflammation. The last line returns to the idyllic style made to seem ridiculous once more by the word 'pantoufles'. 'Monsieur Prudhomme' is an important document in tracing the effects of the schism between poet and society already examined. It was also influential, particularly upon Rimbaud. Most notably it combines a parody of an existing poetic

medium with social criticism, a typically Rimbaudian procedure as we have already seen. Even the precise technical term 'coryza' juxtaposed with Romantic, idyllic style foreshadows exactly the techniques of ironic incongruity which the younger poet was frequently to employ.

'Monsieur Prudhomme' is clearly the forerunner of poems like 'A la Musique' and 'Les Assis' just as 'Jésuitisme':

... C'est un Tartuffe qui, tout en mettant des roses
Pompons ~~par~~ les autels des Madones moroses,
Tout en faisant chanter à des enfants de chœur
Ces cantiques d'eau tiède où se baigne le cœur...

N'en médite pas moins ma ruine, - l'infâme!

anticipates 'Le Châtiment de Tartuffe'.

* * * * *

One of Rimbaud's central concerns from the early poems right through to Une Saison en Enfer and the Illuminations is with the state of society and the possibilities of a new era of justice, harmony and bliss. We know that at Charleville Rimbaud was an avid reader of Utopian thinkers like Fourier, le Père Enfantin, Quinet, Michelet, Louis Blanc and Proudhon as well as literary figures like Hugo and Verne who also sometimes took on the role of heralds of the millenium. In the period leading up to and during the Commune the young poet read the literature produced by left-wing 'revolutionaries'. In London he was to mix with figures like Vermersch, Adrieu and Lissagaray. Rimbaud's personal search for a better order of things was thus not deprived of stimulus.

One of the earliest manifestations of his beliefs was concrete reference to the condition of the deprived and oppressed:

"oh! tous les Malheureux, tous ceux dont le dos brûle
Sous le soleil féroce, et qui vont, et qui vont,
Qui dans ce travail-là sentent crever leurs fronts...
Chapeau bas, mes bourgeois! Oh! ceux-là sont les Hommes!..." (93)

A genoux, cinq petits, - misère!-
 Regardent le Boulanger faire
 le lourd pain blond. (94)

Even in this period a future utopia is anticipated:

..... Nous sommes
 Pour les grands temps nouveaux où l'on voudra savoir,
 Où l'Homme forgera du matin jusqu'au soir,
 Chasseur des grands effets, chasseur des grandes causes,
 Où, lentement vainqueur, il domptera les choses
 Et montera sur Tout, comme sur un cheval!..... (95)

The obverse of the picture of deprivation is satirical attack upon the complacent and hypocritical bourgeois establishment. In 'A la Musique', as we have suggested, Rimbaud's scorn had been further encouraged by the absurd militarism leading up to the outbreak of war in 1870. Moreover, his portrayal of the bourgeoisie had been contrasted with the primitive 'honesty' of the narrator. It is time to look in more detail at this portrayal. Neatness, correctness, unnaturalness are the first qualities noted by the poet: 'mesquines pelouses', 'tout est correct', 'les bourgeois...qu'étranglent les chaleurs'. In part this is a result of ambition and jealousy; the bourgeois are uncomfortable because they 'portent...leurs bêtises jalouses.' To the music of the military band one of the young bourgeois is showing off his elegant clothes and the notary his fashionable pocket watch. Unnatural neatness has given way to ostentation and petty rivalry as the aspects of the bourgeoisie which most catch the poets's attention. In the third stanza it is their lack of individuality, stressed by Rimbaud's use of plurals. The opening line is particularly successful as an evocation

(94) 'Les Effarés'. The attractive psychoanalytical edifice which Professor Hackett has built on the single phrase 'chaud comme un sein' should not cause us to overlook the obvious. This is a genre picture in verse in which material deprivation is associated above all with 'spiritual' needs ('A genoux' 'le Boulanger', 'les pauvres Jésus') which might well include the need for a loving home.

(95) 'Le Forgeon'.

of the almost *mechanical* appearance of one group:

Des rentiers à lorgnons soulignent tous les couacs

The ladies in waiting to the fat wives of bureaucrats are brilliantly portrayed as 'officieux *couacs*'! The fourth stanza refers, above all, to the pompous and empty verbosity of retired grocers who

Fort sérieusement discutent les traites,
Puis prisent en argent, et reprennent: "En somme!..."

The latter image is notable not only as a forerunner of Rimbaud's more obscure imagery (it takes a moment to realise that he is referring to silver snuff-boxes) but also, in its original form, as an indication of Rimbaud's debt to Verlaine. The line had read:

En prisant en argent mieux que monsieur Prudhomme...

The fifth stanza introduces a specific instance of the double-standards of the bourgeoisie:

Un bourgeois ...
Savoure son onnaing d'où le tabac par brins
Déborde - vous savez, c'est de la contrebande; -

which may additionally be taken as an example of their limited conception of what might be excitingly illicit ... Limited horizons combined with lack of straightforwardness are the essence of the sixth stanza which refers to the silly laughter of the local street-urchins and then to the duplicity of the ever-naive 'pioupious' already encountered more than once in this section *of our thesis*:

Et, rendus amoureux par le chant des trombones,
Très naïfs, et fumant des roses, les pioupious
Caressent les bébés pour enjôler les bonnes...

The remaining three stanzas are a contrasting description of the narrator's own behaviour and feelings - his primitive directness being compared to the unnatural restraints and humbug of the bourgeois but also, in as much as it takes the form of fantasy, clearly to be related to the developing sexuality of a sensitive adolescent.

In 'Les Assis' Rimbaud narrows his perspective by taking just one example of the bourgeois establishment with which he was particularly well-acquainted and by which he had been victimised - public librarians. They may be held to typify all those in positions of petty authority who are satisfied with a routine (and physically unnatural) existence. The latter point is one explanation of the basic technique of the poem which is the description of the physical appearance of the librarians in terms which are both extremely unflattering but also possessing the dehumanising precision of modern medical and scientific terminology. This unpleasant form of description had been employed in 'A la Musique':

Epatant sur son banc les rondeurs de ses reins...

and anticipates closely the tone of 'Les Assis':

Tout leur pantalon bouffe à leurs reins boussoufflés....

As with 'A la Musique' there is a concern with the notion of **suppressed** sexual instinct which is one of the principal threads, along with physical decrepitude, of the poem:

Les dix doigts sous leur siège aux rumeurs de tambour,
S'écoutent chapoter des barcarolles tristes,
Et leurs caboches vont dans des roulis d'amour...
- Et leur membre s'agace à des barbes d'épis.

The repulsive unnaturalness of the librarians is the mark of those who sacrifice their virile instincts for the compensations of positions of authority and the power to dominate others, in however petty a capacity. Furthermore, this distance from life is something almost communicable like a disease:

...Et leurs boutons d'habit sont des prunelles fauves
Qui vous accrochent l'oeil du fond des corridors!
Puis ils ont une main invisible qui tue:
Au retour, leur regard filtre ce venin noir
Qui charge l'oeil souffrant de la chienne battue,
Et vous suez, pris dans un atroce entonnoir.

Once again the uncertainty of the adolescent faced with those in authority in this instance only reluctantly complying with his request for livres douteux, channels his frustrations into poetry where he turns his verbal brilliance against the victims of his satire. As in 'A la Musique' there is the strong suggestion of hypocrisy. The librarians are reluctant to make certain books available for Rimbaud's reading but secretly harbour sexual desires (made to seem disgustingly incongruous through Rimbaud's description of their senility) of their own.

In 'Les Pauvres à l'Eglise' Rimbaud uses another approach. The attack on the establishment is only implicit, even oblique. Here the poet turns his satirical attention to the poor themselves who are presented as the willing accomplices in their own exploitation. Ultimately Rimbaud's unsympathetic description may be seen as an indictment of those responsible for the poverty and superstition of the poor as the reference to 'les Dames des quartiers/Distingués' suggests in the last stanza. The opening stanza begins the contrast which underlies the poem between the poor and the rich. Here their stinking breath is to be contrasted to 'le choeur ruisselant d'orrie'. In the second stanza the poor are attacked for being happy in their humiliation like beaten dogs. For them God is equated with employers and aristocrats before whom they cower, unmoved by the injustice of their position:

Les Pauvres au bon Dieu, le patron et le sire
Tendent leurs oreilles risibles et têtus.

For poor women and their hungry children the church is really an escape for them after a week's hellish drudgery and from the cold, from hunger and from a drunken husband. Their expression is fixed in prayer to

justify their presence in church but it is temporary escape from material deprivation which is their real motive. They look at a group of awkward gamines soon to follow in their own footsteps and are surrounded by examples of what they themselves will become - silly, chattering old women. With them are epileptics and the blind all making professions of faith which Rimbaud finds absurd:

Et tous, bavant la foi mendicante et stupide....

Jesus on his cross hanging from the roof looks down, remote from this squalour, as though in a dream as one would expect from a statue. But his representatives, the clerics, have their interest and enthusiasm awakened by the arrival of rich women suffering from liver complaints, (caused ironically, one assumes, from over-eating and over-drinking), hoping to be cured.

Rimbaud's principal poetic response to social injustice was neither depiction of the conditions of the oppressed nor anti-bourgeois satire but the formulation of a vision of better things. This vision however, was frequently beset by doubts. It is of the utmost importance since Rimbaud saw his own function as a poet as part of the new order of things. His anxiety and despair was, thus, closely associated with doubts concerning the viability of this dream. The closest evocations of the millennium are in Une Saison en Enfer:

Quand irons-nous, par delà les
grèves et les monts, sauver la naissance
du travail nouveau, la sagesse nouvelle, la
fuite des tyrans et des démons, la fin
de la superstition, adorer - les premiers!
- Noël sur la terre!

Le chant des cieux, la marche des
peuples! Esclaves, ne ~~ma~~dissons pas la vie. (96)

Il faut être absolument moderne...
 Recevons tous les influx de vigueur, et de
 tendresse réelle. Et à l'aurore, armés
 d'une ardente patience, nous entrerons
 aux splendides villes.

(97)

Rimbaud's confessional and record of despair is thus brought to
 an indubitably optimistic conclusion after the doubt of prose
 poems like 'L'Eclair':

"Rien n'est vanité; à la science, et en avant!"
 crie l'Ecclésiaste moderne, c'est-à-dire Tout le monde.
 Et pourtant les cadavres des méchants et des fainéants
 tombent sur le coeur des autres... Ah! vite, vite un
 peu; là-bas, par delà la nuit, ces récompenses futures,
 éternelles... Les échappons-nous?...
 Alors, - oh! - chère pauvre âme, l'éternité
 serait-elle pas perdue pour nous!

Rimbaud's vision of the new era is an area in which, for once,
 (for it is normally exaggerated) the question of the dating of the
Illuminations is of considerable importance. There are both optimistic
 and pessimistic pieces in the collection. So we are not only concerned
 with whether the Illuminations were written before or after Une Saison
en Enfer but with the relative dates of composition of the prose poems
 within the Illuminations. It would appear to be impossible, in the
 light of current evidence, to say with certainty whether Rimbaud's
 final statement on society was one of hope or despondency. The latter,
 of course, is the more tempting in view of Rimbaud's abandonment
 of poetry and the nature of his subsequent activities. Two of the
 most optimistic pieces in the Illuminations are 'A une raison' and
 'Genie'. In the first of these as in 'Matin' there is reference to
 the forward march of the human race in the guise of 'nouveaux hommes'
 transformed one presumes by some kind of revolution - possibly
 to be related to the Commune. The new age, in musical terms reminiscent

(97) 'Adieu'.

of the utopian thinkers, will be one of harmony:

Un coup de ton doigt sur le tambour décharge
tous les sons et commence la nouvelle harmonie.

Left-wing visionaries from Michelet (whom Antoine Adam considers to be one of the decisive influences upon Rimbaud) to Vermetch had associated the coming dawn with the idea of universal love. Rimbaud follows in their wake:

Ta tête se détourne: le nouvel amour! Ta tête
~~se~~ retourne: - le nouvel amour!

The placing of 'Génie' at the end of the Illuminations (entirely accidental since it was merely the last of the five poems published separately in 1895) has tended to give the impression that Rimbaud's work (in those editions - now the majority - which put the Illuminations last) ended with a poem of love and contentment which optimistically anticipates the new age:

Il est l'amour, mesure parfaite et
réinventée, raison merveilleuse et imprévue,
et l'éternité....
Ô ses souffles, ses têtes, ses courses; la
terrible célérité de la perfection des
formes et de l'action.
Ô fécondité de l'esprit et l'immensité
de l'univers!....
Son jour!. l'abolition de toutes souffrances
sonores et mouvantes dans la musique
plus intense....

Actually Génie is not, in any case, the straight forward vision of harmony that some of the commentators would have us believe. It is much more concerned with the pains of revolution (already glimpsed in the abortive Commune) than other utopian poems by Rimbaud:

Son corps! Le dégagement rêvé,
le brisement de la grâce croisée de
violence nouvelle!...
Ô monde! et le chant clair des
malheurs nouveaux!...

This supports the view that the g nie of the title is to be equated not only with the innate genius of the human mind and with spiritual insight but specifically to poetic inspiration, to poets and to Rimbaud himself who knew the purgative sufferings of d r glement at first hand. Other of the Illuminations describe moments of anxiety and disillusionment. 'Angoisse' which appears to be concerned with the ultimate domination of death and fate speaks of 'les ambitions continuellement  cras es' and concludes in an atmosphere of utter desolation :

Rouler aux blemeures, par l'air lassant et
la mer; aux supplices, par le silence des
eaux et de l'air meurtriers; aux tortures qui
rient, dans leur silence atrocement houleux.

Nature itself is thus represented as conspiring in this destruction of hope. 'D mocratie' is a conversion of disillusionment into bitter irony utilising the terminology normally employed by Rimbaud to evoke the millenium. This fact combined with references to spice-producing regions may support Adam's arguments for a late date of some of the Illuminations (which we do not generally find very convincing). One may imagine a situation in which Rimbaud did not abandon poetry out of despondency but simply wished, for a time, to devote his energy to the action side of the poetry/action equation. He may have hoped to have his vision (sometimes associated, as in 'Mauvais Sang' with the primitive) confirmed by travel and experience. It was disillusionment in this pilgrimage which may have marked the true end of his poetic ambition. Whatever the case one would surely be justified in regarding 'D mocratie' in view of ironic self-quotation as one of the last

of the Illuminations. Democracy in practice, the interference of Europe in the 'third world', amounts to callous exploitation not to civilisation. Native drums become silent before the chatter of invading European troops. Their presence will encourage prostitution in the towns. Any revolts, perfectly logical according to the ideals of democracy which are being so blatantly disregarded, will be crushed mercilessly. In the lands of ~~spice~~ drenched by monsoons everything will be directed towards industrial or military exploitation. Nothing matters to the troops but to move on to somewhere new -- their only philosophy is to seek immediate comfort. For worlds to come they care nothing. The next march is the only progress which concerns them:

"C'est la vraie marche. En avant, route!"

* * * * *

Rimbaud's achievement is the most exciting aspect of the treatment of contemporary events, politics and society in French poetry of the 1870's and 1880's. In a sense his work is the high-point of the genre because he combined technical originality with originality of view and tone. This is the main reason why his modernism -- which partakes of the technical, scientific and colloquial language of his day -- appears more authentic than that of most of his contemporaries. Nevertheless this aspect of contemporary reality generally attracted more poets than ever before after 1870 as we have seen. It is certainly time that proper attention was given to these works without which a full understanding of even major poetry in this period is not possible. In their totality they are the reflection of

of an age distinguished by uncertainty, change and revolution, when gifted poets also felt the need to evolve if they were to 'rythmer' ('action'). This 'branch' of the poetry of contemporary reality may be directly related to the new perspectives discussed in the last chapter. For at its best it demonstrates the role of the poet as outsider both critical and yet needing to belong, the poet's belief that the modern age was somehow corrupt and decadent (to be contrasted unfavourably to a hypothetical past) and, finally the attack on tradition and culture through innovation but also through ironic allusion and contrast.

CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT AND THE RISE OF SCIENCE

The question of reflections of contemporary thought on French poetry after 1870 would merit a full-length study to itself. Again our object will be to balance the need to be selective against the wish to be representative. Of all the subjects examined in this chapter 'philosophy' (and we have linked science with this since it was the determining factor on the thought of our period) was perhaps the least innovative in itself. 'Encyclopaedic', philosophical or scientific verse had already been an important genre in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the work of poets like La Motte Houdard, Voltaire, de Fontanes, Ricard, Gudin de la Brenderie, Daru, Lebrun, Lemer cier and Chênedollé.

The Romantics were to make 'la poésie philosophique' one of the most distinguished branches of French poetry with outstanding contributions from Vigny and Hugo. This rich seam had been further exploited by the Parnassians. In a sense the relative unoriginality of the genre is an excuse for the rather cursory treatment it must receive here. Nevertheless it remains extremely interesting. Moreover, although its impact on the language of French poetry was, in one sense, less than that of some of the other subjects to be examined it was not negligible. One kind of impact was indirect - in the sense that, for the most part, the poetry of contemporary thought was not of great stylistic originality but the ideas which it communicated contributed to the feelings of impermanence, insecurity and dissatisfaction which proved to be basic to the challenge to the traditional poetic medium in France. Poets are more likely to assimilate ideas through other poetry than in any other form. The other kind of impact was of greater importance and is immediately obvious even to the casual reader. This was the growing tendency to incorporate technical and particular vocabulary and images into poetry. This will be examined in the next chapter.

* * * * *

The philosophical climate after 1870 is both distinctive and fascinating. It is also, as will be shown, more than evident in the poetry of the period.

One effect of the war which had consequences of lasting importance was the somewhat surprising admiration for German ideas and methods which was felt by many intellectuals at the time. The most immediate form this took was admiration for German science and organisation. Thus Zola wrote in Lettre à la jeunesse: 'Ce qu'il faut confesser très haut, c'est qu'en 1870 nous avons été battus par l'esprit scientifique... Nous avons été écrasés par des masses manoeuvrées avec logique..' (98). The reform of the educational system, the introduction of general conscription and the reorganisation of the army were all changes modelled on the Prussian example. The defeat of France was seen as a defeat of French culture in its totality, and the German victory as a symbol of the supremacy of German civilisation. Many leading thinkers asserted that not only had the army and officers of France been defeated but also her bishops, her teachers and her scientists. The most outstanding and the most enduring example of such thinking was doubtless Renan's La Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France. Paradoxically, the long-term effect of the increased interest in German civilisation was not a wholesale dedication to the principles of positivist science, methodology and organisation but a widespread fascination with the idealist and pessimistic philosophies of the German thinkers only fully revealed after 1870 and in many ways directly opposed to materialism and positivism. The period after 1870 until the late 1880s is remarkable for the conflict waged between what is best termed as the religion of science and all forms of metaphysical and idealist belief and enquiry. Initially the German influence worked to the advantage of the first camp and lent support to the out and out positivism of intellectuals like Berthelot who held metaphysical curiosity a childish waste of endeavour; efficiency, success and power could be achieved through the application of scientific method to all aspects of national life as it was thought to have been in Prussia. The decadence and ultimate

(98) Le Roman expérimental, p.130.

collapse of the Second Empire was readily associated in many minds with Roman Catholicism which had given support and a seal of respectability to Louis Napoleon's regime. The events of the Commune had cast doubt upon the viability of left-wing solutions to the prevailing social and political problems. Thus it was that of the values of pre-war society the belief in science was one of the few to emerge relatively unscathed. Certainly one reason for the violence of the debate between science and metaphysics after 1870 is that so many intellectuals needed desperately to believe in science. It is perhaps noteworthy that many of the figures associated with positivism, both before and after 1870, move away from a strictly scientific position, at least as far as the presentation of their ideas is concerned (and sometimes even more profoundly) towards a quasi-religious conception. This transition is to be seen in Comte's religion of Humanity (99) in Renan's religion of the Ideal, in Taine's neo-panteism (100) and even in the visions of an ideal future society expressed in Berthelot's Science et philosophie and Science et morale (101). The trappings of religion given to allegedly purely scientific systems are sufficient indication of the need felt for a substitute for traditional belief of which the rejection had ironically been the starting-point of the new philosophies.

The optimistic enthusiasm of the first half of the century, of which Ménard's Prométhée Delivré (1843) serves as an eminent example:

La Science est le Dieu dont mon âme est le temple.... survived after 1870 in the work of a number of minor poets. Armand Silvestre's 'Les Cieux nouveaux' is such a declaration of positivist faith:

L'homme vieilli n'a plus soif que de vérité;
Il a des cieux profonds déchiré le mystère.
La raison pour témoin, la loi pour deité,
L'idéal qu'il conçoit se mesure à la terre. (102)

(99) Described by Thomas Huxley as 'Catholicism without God'. The eccentricities of Comte in his later years are celebrated and above all those connected with his sensitivity regarding his position as 'high priest'.

(100) Under the influence of Hegel, Taine strove after an all-embracing explanation of the totality of life and the universe believing in a procedure whereby it is possible to move along the chain of causality until one arrives at the 'supreme causes'.

(101) Published in 1886 and 1897 respectively.

(102) La Chanson des heures.

The period of twenty years or so after 1870 was the apogee of scientism in France yet it was precisely during the same period that various factors were at work which would so compromise the position of science as a creed that even by the 1890s it began to be treated with ridicule in intellectual circles. It is probably true that the prestige of science with the general public is almost as high as ever but it no longer arouses the same warm glow of optimism; in any event it frequently takes two generations or more for new thinking in both arts and science to reach the level of the ordinary layman (103). Rarely in the history of ideas can there have been a success as short-lived as that of the religion of science in the latter part of the nineteenth century nor a return to favour as startling as that enjoyed by Catholicism in the 1890s; a turn of events all the more surprising and ironic as it was thought that science had destroyed Christianity.

This swift change of fortune is nowhere better exemplified than in the life and thinking of Paul Bourget. He was typical of his generation when in a poem in the collection La Vie inquiète he wrote:

C'est en vain qu'en ces temps de repos et de paix
Le soupir de la cloche importune nos âmes,
Il n'éveillera pas la foi morte à jamais. (104)

Yet it was the same Paul Bourget who was to write an indictment of Taine's arid positivism in Le Disciple (105) and to find his true metier as a Catholic novelist. In the years immediately following 1870 science seemed not only to have brought about the destruction of traditional religious belief but to be threatening art as a worthwhile independent pursuit. Even a poet as careful of his craft as Sully-Prudhomme was able to write:

Certainement la littérature a produit des ouvrages
merveilleux, mais je vous avoue que c'est par
l'expression de la vérité qu'elle me semble le plus,
digne d'intérêt; les ouvrages de science sont, à mes
yeux, bien supérieurs aux ouvrages d'imagination; je
ne connais pas une oeuvre littéraire qui approche
pour moi des découvertes de Newton. (106)

It is not surprising that Sully-Prudhomme ended his career writing exclusively in prose.

-
- (103) For instance 'Impressionism' is often heard used as a synonym of non-representational painting because it was the last term describing innovation in painting borrowed into popular vocabulary.
(104) 'Obsession': La Vie inquiète was published in 1875.
(105) Published in 1889.
(106) Lettres à une amie.

There were several reasons why the apparently nearly total victory of positivism should have proved to be a mirage. Although the war according to some observers had shown the necessity for practical scientific education and the benefits, in the case of Prussia, to be gained from such an education it had also destroyed the myth of an already active and inevitable process of harmonisation in human affairs which would make major wars impossible and which had been held by some thinkers to be a natural result of scientific and technological progress. The increasing pessimism of Renan's later years may in all probability be attributed to the jolt given to his belief in the inevitability of human progress by the war of 1870, a belief already slightly wobbly after the events of 1848-52. The contact with German idealist philosophy provided an entirely alternative approach as did the revelation of other foreign anti-positivist thinking such as Spencer's idea of the unknowable which formed an integral part of his scientific system (107). Much of the ultimate failure of the religion of science was to be due to its own intrinsic shortcomings; science as a discipline was breaking up into a multitude of specialisations and thus the interested amateur was soon to become a rara avis; the hopes of scientific discoveries that would bring solutions to problems along the broad front of intellectual enquiry disappeared; as scientists made discovery after discovery it became clear that all science could offer was an admittedly prodigious but nevertheless piecemeal extension of human knowledge. Suspicions not unnaturally arose as to the possible philosophical bankruptcy of science and with them the feeling in some quarters that the dismissal of the mysterious and spiritual as a part of human life had been over hasty and ill-considered. Neo-Criticist and Idealist philosophers offered a picture of existence in which the free creativity of the individual and of society at large was preserved, which contrasted sharply with the positivist scheme of things in which behaviour was entirely determined according to invariable scientific laws. The very invariability of such laws was also questioned; the so called 'truths' uncovered through the application of scientific method were shown to be stop-gap solutions

(107) Translations of Spencer's work began to be published in 1871.

in need of constant revision. Not surprisingly the positivist claim to deal with reality was challenged on the grounds that reality itself was far more complex and more difficult to define than Comte, Taine or Zola would have one believe. In its mildest form this last reaction insisted that reality is in practice always coloured by our individual perception of it, by the uniqueness of the individual's personality. The consequences of this reaction for poetry were various - one of the most fruitful was the development of poetic impressionism. An extreme form of this reaction is the seemingly total Idealism of a writer like Villiers de l'Isle-Adam for whom the world was truly our 'idea', the creation of our own imagination. The gathering reaction to positivism coincided exactly with the period of positivism's greatest success in the realm of literature as well as thought. Some of the most eminent men of letters of the time showed in their work the simultaneous influence of both positivism and the reaction against it. Leconte de Lisle, the value and complexity of whose poetry is still sadly overlooked, is a case in point. As we have seen, on the one hand there is his repeated declaration that his poetry was intended to be scientific (108) and on the other hand his attachment to the Hindu concept of Maya, to the belief that the material world is merely illusion (109). One field of scientific enquiry had itself contributed to the downfall of scientism as a comforting philosophy and this too is reflected in Leconte de Lisle's poetry. (110) In the earlier part of the century evolutionary speculation, although partly responsible for the relativist concept of history and existence, had culminated in the cosy schemes of Comte, Renan and Victor Hugo; evolution was presented as the mechanism of progress with social, moral and material harmony as its imminent and certain conclusion. The savage twist given to evolution by Darwin's theory of natural selection and the survival of the fittest seemed to highlight the randomness of life and thereby encouraged disillusionment with the idea of progress and of Man's material ability to shape his destiny.

(108) In the preface to the Poèmes antiques of 1852 Leconte de Lisle states that his poetry is intended to be 'archaïque et savant'.

(109) Most obviously expressed in the poem 'La Maya'.

(110) For instance in 'Sacra Fames' and 'Solvat Seclum'

Moreover the extension of such thinking to the cosmic level presented the world as being at the mercy of wandering comets and stellar calamities (111). A less tangible reason for the decline of scientism but perhaps as significant as any of the others mentioned was what Pierre Martino has called 'un besoin de la sensibilité' (112). In the case of artists and writers the renewed interest in metaphysical reality might well indicate a need for refreshment after the aridity of positivism. One is also tempted to think that it constituted a defence against a social system in which they felt they no longer had a place. Thus conceived this reaction, and especially the more bizarre forms it took, appears as a gesture of defiance made in the face of the rampant materialism of philistine bourgeois society.

Even when science seemed to have won the day there were those who grasped the emptiness of its victory whilst accepting that it had 'disproved' religion. In 1873 Bourget contributed a virulent attack on Catholicism to La Renaissance artistique et littéraire in which he accused Catholics of being 'furieux que l'idée moderne l'emporte, ennemis de la nature et de la joie, éprouvés stériles par tout le Moyen âge, combattus depuis quatre cents ans, débordés par le flot des générations qui les balaye plus loin à chaque coup...' (113) Yet he was unable to derive any solace from science as he stated in Edel:

Je suis un homme né sur le tard d'une race,
Et mon âme à la fois exaspérée et lasse,
Sur qui tous les aïeux pèsent étrangement,
Mêle le scepticisme et l'attendrissement;
L'immense obscurité de l'univers m'accable
Et j'éprouve, à sentir la vie inexplicable,
Une amère pitié qui me fait mieux chérir
Les êtres délicats et beaux qui vont mourir. (114)

By 1881 when the comfort of faith was still more than a decade away Bourget

(111) This is of course not the only conclusion to be drawn from evolutionary thinking; in our own day Teilhard de Chardin has built an optimistic and influential philosophy upon the fact of evolution. Among the poets of the period under discussion René Ghil made evolutionary development the basis of his philosophy of life, making a return to the old belief in ultimate social harmony. French periodicals after 1870 ran numerous articles on the relationship between evolutionary theory and all aspects of life, e.g. L. Carau, 'Le Darwinisme et la morale', Revue Politique et Littéraire, 1878, p.289.

(112) Parnasse et Symbolisme, p.139.

(113) Article of 15 March 1873.

(114) Edel, I, viii, 4, p.52. (1878 edition. In the definitive edition the quotation is to be found on pp.34-35.)

had already outgrown the violent anti-Catholicism of the article in Blémond's Renaissance and had become aware of the 'besoin de la sensibilité': 'Ne survit-il pas, dans notre siècle d'implété, assez de catholicisme pour qu'une âme d'enfant s'impregne d'amour mystique avec une inoubliable intensité? La foi s'en ira, mais le mysticisme, même expulsé de l'intelligence, demeurera dans la sensation.' (115) A new form of 'mal du siècle' resulted from the situation into which the failure of scientism had placed the intellectuals coming to maturity in the two decades after 1870; science offered no modus vivendi, the high hopes it had once encouraged had now been dashed and the picture of the universe it had constructed was a frightening one. The spiritual disarray of the writers and artists of the time was exacerbated by the apparent destruction of traditional religious belief accomplished by scientism before it suffered its own death throes. Writers like Bourget found themselves in a spiritual and moral vacuum, leading lives without purpose or direction.

New discoveries which would once have been greeted with enthusiasm are made to seem sour in much of the philosophical and scientific poetry after 1870. Guyau, one of its foremost exponents, typifies the position in

'L'Analyse spectrale':

Nous pouvons maintenant dire ce que vous êtes!
 Nous avons dans la nuit saisi votre rayon...
 Hélas! du fer, du zinc, du nickel, et du cuivre,
 Tout ce que nous foulons des pieds sur notre sol,
 Voilà ce qu'on découvre en ce ciel où l'oeil ivre
 Croyait suivre des dieux lumineux dans leur vol! (116)

Less particular and specific declarations of the disquiet caused by modern science were naturally forthcoming as in these lines from Dupuy's Les Parques of 1883:

Mais la science auguste et ses calmes propos?
 C'est un lit de torture et non pas de repos,
 Qu'étend sous nos douleurs sans nombre la pensée.

Even in the work of a disciple of Sully-Prudhomme devoted to the cause of science there is little basis for belief that science will produce solutions sufficient to compensate for the uncertainty it has brought:

(115) Essais de psychologie contemporaine, I, p.7.

(116) Les Vers d'un Philosophe.

O triste Humanité, bien que depuis cent ans
 Tes pas multipliés soient devenus géants,
 Quelle auberge t'a pu séduire sur les routes?
 Quel est donc l'idéal dont tu ne te dégoûtes?
 Dans mille ans, l'auras-tu saisi, ton feu follet?
 Le but t'échappe; seul, l'impossible est complet. (117)

Just as sure an indication of the awe and misgivings with which modern discoveries were regarded was the humorous, ironic treatment science received, not only at the hands of Laforgue, but in the work of minor poets and especially those in the Cénacles:

L'azote est un gaz bien malsain
 Dans l'quel on n'peut pas vivre,
 Il se trouve dans l'air le plus sain,
 C'est pas lui qui enivre.

Il n'a pas la moindre action,
 La faridondaire, la faridondon,
 Il empêche même la vie
 Biribi

A la façon de Barbari mon ami.... (118)

The contrast between technical subject and popular diction, between serious theme and the light ballad form are essential ingredients of the ironic poetry of the period. Some of the more rhetorical reflections of the new picture of the universe are also remarkably close to Laforgue's 'astronomical' poetry:

Vois-tu vers le zénith cette étoile nageant
 Dans les flots de l'éther sans borne?
 L'astronome m'a dit que sa sphère d'argent
 N'était plus rien qu'un cercueil morne. (119)

(117) Paul Delair, Le Testament philosophique

(118) Poem ascribed to 'K. Lomel', Le Chat Noir, 10 June 1882. Another delightful poem, in the same vein, is Ponchon's 'La Salade' (La Muse au Cabaret):

Echinocoque, trichocéphale, dispar
 Anguillule, amoeba, coli, lombricoïde,
 Askaride, ahkylostome, microbar,
 Oxyure verniculaire, balantide....

J'en passe et des meilleurs. Tels sont, mes chers enfants,
 Entre mille autres, qui vivent à nos dépens,
 Les vers intestinaux, les monstrueux reptiles,
 Sans compter les crochus et vigoureux bacilles
 Qui rongent, sapent, scient, sucent nos intestins
 Quand nous faisons intervenir, dans nos festins,
 Ce que vous appelez, moi de même, salade.....

(119) Auguste Dorchain, La Jeunesse pensive. (Haraucourt treated the same theme in 'L'Agonie du Soleil').

It should not be forgotten that such ideas - if less precisely modern in their scientific references - had already entered French poetry earlier in the century in works like Lamartine's 'L'Infini dans les cieux' or Hugo's 'Magnitudo Parvi', 'A la Fenêtre pendant la Nuit' and, most of all, 'Abîme'. Even before 1870 Dierx had added scientific precision to the Hugolian vision in 'Choeur des derniers hommes':

Sous les astres éteints, sous le terne soleil
La nuit funèbre étend des suaires immenses.
Le sein froid de la terre a gardé les semences.
C'est à son tour d'entrer dans l'éternel sommeil. (120)

Leconte de Lisle's and Laforgue's almost happy expectation of the end of the world as part of the evolutionary cycle had been anticipated by Bouilhet in Les Fossiles:

Montez tous à la fois, océans irrités!
Astres détachez-vous des cieux épouvantés!
Et vous, formes de l'être à jamais disparves,
Gigantesques débris que heurtaient les charrues,
Pressez-vous sous la terre, et dans vos lits poudreux
Faites-nous une place, ô frères monstrueux.

Science obviously caused Man to look at himself as well as the universe in a new way. This is the case with Laforgue's 'foetus' poems to which, once again, contemporary minor poetry, such as Raoul de la Grasserie's Poème de la Vie may be compared:

Mon oeuf se segmente,
Pas de forme encor, pas encor de chair,
Pourtant je deviens...quoi donc!...pas un homme,
Je deviens pourtant...C'est de la chair comme
Celle des aïeux nageant dans la mer....

Disillusioned by the failure of science to fulfil its promises, disillusioned by defeat in war, disillusioned by the political and social situation some young writers turned away from material reality altogether and turned instead to metaphysical realms.

The range of metaphysical systems and beliefs by which many writers of the last three decades of the nineteenth century were tempted was most extensive and included the occult alongside Roman Catholicism and the Idealism of German philosophers such as Schopenhauer, the outlandish alongside the mystically or

intellectually respectable. German thought, and through it the philosophies of the East, seems to have made the first impact and to have been to some extent the prime mover in the whole process. Initially, however, it was probably not Schopenhauer's idealism which found a receptive public in France but rather his pessimism. The mood of French intellectuals was ripe for the discovery (or rediscovery) of the German's work. There had been an almost organic development from scientism to pessimism; even the faithful adherents to scientific truth no longer saw any comfort in that truth. Thus in the Dialogues philosophiques of 1876 Renan publicly abandoned his former optimism at one point confessing through his mouthpiece Théoctiste: 'je n'ai jamais dit que l'avenir fût gai. Qui sait si la vérité n'est pas triste?' (121). Sully-Prudhomme set himself up as the spokesman of the philosophical anguish of Man in the age of science and responded so accurately to a feeling of the age that his poetry won him the Nobel prize. Unlike Hugo, in his philosophical poetry, the 'fin de siècle' poets of science like Sully-Prudhomme offered no solutions and no leadership they merely mirrored the thoughts of many of their contemporaries, at best setting an example of neo-stoic resignation as in the poem 'Sur la mort':

Je m'abandonne en proie aux lois de l'univers. (122)

The dissemination of the ideas of Schopenhauer in France began in earnest in 1870 and was vigorously carried through by Challemeil-Lacour, Burdeau and Ribot. (123). In brilliant but, in retrospect, somewhat shallow articles in 1877 and 1878 (124) Elme-Marie Caro launched what was intended to be a critique of the whole pessimist 'movement' thereby drawing attention to the work of not

(121) op.cit., pp.110-11.

(122) Les vaines Tendresses, p.134.

(123) Challemeil-Lacour's contribution was in the article 'Un Bouddhiste contemporain en Allemagne: Arthur Schopenhauer' in the influential Revue des Deux Mondes, LXXXVI, 1870, pp.296-332. Théodule Ribot, who was later to attain celebrity as both a clinical psychologist and as a researcher into the relationship between the artistic imagination and the unconscious, was responsible for a first-rate book: La Philosophie de Schopenhauer of 1874. Auguste Burdeau gave great impetus to the process of dissemination with his three-volume translation Le Monde comme volonté et comme représentation of 1888-90.

(124) The articles were published in the widely read and respected Revue des deux mondes but were even more influential when published in book form in 1878 under the title: Le Pessimisme au XIX siècle.

only Schopenhauer but also Leopardi, Hartmann, Hegel and Schelling and even found time and space for the thought of the Orient whose influence he saw as regrettable but transient. The fate of Caro's exposé of pessimism was not dissimilar to that of Chateaubriand's René, the revelation turned out to be more influential and enduring than the warning; many of his readers were more fascinated than repelled. At first finding a soulmate in a philosopher, one of whose tenets was that evil was the norm and that happiness, goodness, absence of pain and so on were the exceptions to this rule, the pessimistic French intellectuals of the 1870s and 1880s began to see that his ideas (which seem not to have been properly known let alone understood except by a very few of his alleged French disciples) provided a glimpse of a non-material approach to the enigma of the universe and one, moreover, which had the advantage of offering a possible comprehensive vision as opposed to the scraps of 'factual' knowledge provided by positivist science. Thus it was, somewhat paradoxically, that using the ideas of the most pessimistic German philosophers, like Hartmann and Schopenhauer, as a base, young writers were able to arrive at a scheme of belief which enabled them to tackle more happily the problem of life and art. (125)

Once the influx of German and other ideas had helped to undermine the dominant position of positivism a suitable atmosphere was created for even such a surprising eventuality as the spate of conversions to more or less orthodox religion in the 1890s as well as the plethora of sects and cults seeking, with varying degrees of seriousness, insights into ultimate truth.

It would be wrong to see the idealist philosophies replacing positivism except in the case of a writer like Villiers de l'Isle-Adam or possibly, on the level of theory rather than belief, Mallarmé. (126) The more usual procedure was for idealism of some form to supplement positivism the achievements of which could not be dismissed but were now seen to be circumscribed in scope. In his as yet unpublished notes for an essay on Schelling Laforgue spoke of the need for

(125) Laforgue is a case in point; the whole question of the influence of German philosophy is discussed at greater length in Part Three, Chapter Two.

(126) For the influence of the ideas of Hegel and Schopenhauer on Mallarmé see D.J. Mossop, Pure Poetry, pp. 134-40 and A.G. Lehmann, The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, pp. 61-67.

speculative philosophy and for 'poetry' and of the subordinate role of the practical sciences of which he was nevertheless a keen student:

La vraie philosophie - en dépit de l'émancipation autonome des sciences (un Dieu est au-dessus des castors) doit toujours rester la science première et universelle et dernière... Rien de la cathédrale Herbert Spencer - Il faut des poètes. Les sciences doivent rester les ancillae diligentes de la philosophie, de la métaphysique, dans leur anarchie bornée. Toutes ces pauvres sciences sont basées sur le sens commun, sur l'arbitraire. Elles ne doivent pas se peiner de premiers principes. - D'ailleurs ce n'est qu'une fugue de gamins qui jettent leur gourme. Le progrès des sciences spécialisées ne peut à la longue que les ramener à la science première et dernière, à la métaphysique. - Le vice radical des sciences c'est qu'elles sont impersonnelles - Tandis qu'une métaphysique vient d'une âme. (127)

Nor is it easy to assess just how profound was the conviction of the adherents of the idealist philosophies that the metaphysical realities of which they wrote existed. It is extremely doubtful, for example, that Mallarmé, when all the jargon of aesthetics and speculative philosophy is discarded, truly believed in transcendental reality at all. Bourget and Brunetière both seem to have been especially attracted by the power of Catholicism to give moral direction to society rather than by any primarily spiritual consideration. Brunetière did not conceal the fact that he had philosophical misgivings about Catholicism and one of his last lectures was entitled 'Les Difficultés de croire'; but it would be incorrect to deduce from this that his faith was insincere. If the founder of Christianity was able to doubt on the cross then doubt must be expected to be part of the spiritual trials of his followers. Barrès seems to have experienced the same difficulties as Brunetière, though for him Catholicism was particularly associated with his mystico-nationalism, almost as a provincial protest against the spiritually corrupting influence of Parisian sophistication. Huysmans's motives at the time of his conversion seem to have been primarily aesthetic and emotional rather than rational but those who have read an account of the calm heroism with which he met a painful death will find it difficult to doubt the sincerity of his religious convictions (128).

(127) Fragment quoted in notes to Warren Ramsey's Jules Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance, p.254

(128) For instance that given by R. Baldick in The Life of J.-K. Huysmans, pp. 329-352.

It is of course questionable whether rational explanation is the best means of describing the experience of conversion; Bloy, Claudel and Verlaine all took the view that intellectual argument was inappropriate but this does not mean their faith was not surely founded. Catholicism was, in all probability, more genuinely part of the spiritual lives of its converts than the other forms of idealism then current. In Un Coup de dés the basic despair of Mallarmé is apparent and one is left with the terrifying possibility that the whole of the writer's mature life has been spent in pursuit of a truth which does not exist and the only fruitful result of which has been to provide a very limited (and possibly limiting) store of themes for his poetry. In Une Saison en Enfer Rimbaud depicts his 'metaphysical' adventures as self-deception and futility, a judgement borne out by the rather sordid nature of his later commercial activities. For writers like Moreás the Ideals, in the Platonic sense, to which he made reference in the manifesto of 1886 were little more than a terminological toy of passing interest. D.G. Charlton is certainly right in distinguishing two forms of idealism in this period: 'the first taken from "ideal", supposes belief in a transcendent reality or an objective moral order; the second, taken from "idea" (i.e. 'subjective idealism'), is the view that we can know only our own mental states...' (129). He goes on to make what he considers to be a sweeping but in our view a nonetheless penetrating generalisation that 'many of the Symbolists aspired to idealism in the first sense, but often ended in idealism in the second sense' (130). In other words, the idealism of the poets of the period under discussion was frequently, in practice, nothing other than an extended subjectivism or relativism, those attitudes which are at the heart of poetry which concerns itself with the most fleeting and elusive aspects of contemporary reality.

The years between 1870 and 1890 were marked by gloom and anxiety. This atmosphere is partly to be attributed to the events of 1870-71 and partly to

(129) 'Positivism and its Aftermath', p.14

(130) Idem.

philosophical uncertainty, but as Pierre Martino has pointed out (131) these years were also marked by revolt - a revolt against the established order in society and art, but often a somewhat unhealthy, introspective kind of revolt brought on perhaps by the impossibility of political revolution. This spirit of revolt at the condition of the artist and of the human condition in general is seen in the verbal excesses of Decadence, in the hermeticism and fantasies of Symbolism, and in those challenges to the establishment we have already noted in this and the previous chapter.

A less original reaction to the situation existing after 1870 was the poetry of ideas, the poetry which took for its subject the predominant scientific and philosophical questions of the day. Poetry concerned with a philosophical problem, whether metaphysical or moral, had already been made into a well-established genre earlier in the nineteenth century. After 1870 it became a cult. In some ways the interest in evolutionary science and astronomy shown in this period is reflected in the similarity between this poetry and the cosmological poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. If the philosophical poetry of the late nineteenth century did not always share the latter's obsession with cataclysm it had a powerful equivalent in the all-pervading sense of meaninglessness in the universe.

Among the leading exponents of the genre were Sully-Prudhomme, Cazalis, Catulle Mendès, Bourget, Madame Ackermann, Ghil and Laforgue. (132) The latter was not the only major poet to engage in the composition of philosophical poetry; even Verlaine, so often criticised for the inconsequential nature of his work, treated the subject of the conflict between religion and science. One of the most consistent themes in the poetry of Rimbaud is essentially a question of moral philosophy - the contrast between primitive spontaneity and the modern Catholic and bourgeois ethic whose corrupting influence is detailed in

(131) Parnasse et Symbolisme, pp.142-43.

(132) It is the Laforgue of Le Sanglot de la Terre and certain of the Fleurs de Bonne Volonté who is referred to here. Laforgue's philosophical poetry, however, almost always displays a marked interest in material reality. The same is true, to a lesser extent, of the philosophical poetry of Bourget.

poems like 'Les Premières Communions'. Moreover, there is in his poetry, as we shall show, a preoccupation with the idea that science might bring 'salvation'. Mallarmé, too, it has been alleged, was basically concerned in much of his mature poetry with problems which were more properly the concern of a speculative philosopher. (133) It is impossible, however, to categorise his poetry as the exposition of ideas in any obvious form.

A number of the main practitioners of the poetry of ideas were associated with the Parnassian school; indeed Cazalis and Mendès both wrote poetry which comes within the scope of Parnassianism proper. Yet despite its close connections philosophical poetry was not generally Parnassian. Leconte de Lisle had been as preoccupied as any poet with certain philosophical problems, notably the incomprehensibility of nature towards Man, but he almost always made reference to concrete, even though not normally contemporary, reality in the expression of his ideas. His attachment to science was one of the keystones of his aesthetic thinking:

L'art et la science, longtemps séparés
par suite des efforts divergents de l'intelligence,
doivent tendre à s'unir étroitement et à se confondre. (134).

It is to be seen in his concern for philological, archaeological, anthropological, zoological and botanical exactitude. It is also manifest in the subject matter of his poems. 'La Ravine de Saint-Gilles' (135) notable not only for the striking precision of the references to natural phenomena generally but for the allusion to geological evolution:

Plus bas, tout est muet et noir au sein du gouffre,
Depuis que la montagne, en émergeant des flots,
Rugissante, et par jets de granit et de soufre,
Se fêça dans le ciel et connut le repos.

'La dernière Vision' (136) and 'Solvat Seclum' (137) are almost joyful anticipations of the end of the world; but this is an eschatology rooted firmly in contemporary scientific theory:

Un long silence pend de l'immobile nue.
La neige, bossuant ses plis amoncelés,
Linceul rigide, étreint les océans gelés.
La face de la terre est absolument nue...

Le soleil qui se meurt regarde et ne voit rien...

(133) By, among others, Robert Gibson in Modern French Poets on Poetry, pp.89-90.

(134) Preface to Poèmes Barbares.

(135) Poèmes Barbares.

(136) Ibid.

(137) Ibid.

Et ce ne sera point, sous les cieux magnifiques,
 Le bonheur reconquis des paradis antiques,
 Ni l'entretien d'Adam et d'Eve sur les fleurs,
 Ni le divin sommeil après tant de douleurs;
 Ce sera quand le Globe et tout ce qui l'habite,
 Bloc stérile arraché de son immense orbite,
 Stupide, aveugle, plein d'un dernier hurlement,
 Plus lourd, plus éperdu de moment en moment,
 Contre quelque univers immobile en sa force
 Défoncera sa vieille et misérable écorce,
 Et, laissant suisseler, par mille trous béants,
 Sa flamme intérieure avec ses océans,
 Ira fertiliser de ses restes immondes
 Les sillons de l'espace où fermentent les mondes.

One of the most interesting and neglected aspects of Leconte de Lisle's animal poetry is his recreation of the consciousness of animals. (It is still too often assumed that the animal poems are mere plastic representations.) This is complementary to the symbolic function of the poems (e.g. the stoic resolve of the elephants) but it is also scientific to the extent that it shows a remarkable closeness to transformism. Poems like 'Les Éléphants', 'Le Rêve du Jaguar', 'Le Sommeil du Condor', 'L'Incantation du Loup', 'Sacra Fames' and 'Les Hurlleurs' are all to be considered in this context. Leconte de Lisle's effort is directed towards the recreation of the inner workings of their consciousness, their nervous and cerebral life. This is consciousness in a process of evolution which the poet knows will culminate in the sensitivity and rationalism of homo sapiens. Some of the animals the poet describes seem to possess an inkling of their future intelligence and especially an intuitive knowledge of the despair which intelligence brings. Perhaps this is the best explanation of the mystery of 'Les Hurlleurs'. (137a)

Devant la lune errante aux livides clartés
 Quelle angoisse inconnue, au bord des noires ondes,
 Faisait pleurer une âme en vos formes immondes?
 Pourquoi gémissiez-vous, spectres épouvantés?

Je ne sais; mais, ô chiens qui hurliez sur les plages,
 Après tant de soleils qui ne reviendront plus,
 J'entends toujours, du fond de mon passé confus,
 Le cri désespéré de vos douleurs sauvages!

'Sacra Fames' (137b), published in 1884, shows the influence of Darwin's theory of natural selection but the same basic transformist ideas lie behind the

(137a) Ibid.

(137b) Poèmes Tragiques.

comparison between man and shark:

Va, monstre! tu n'es pas autre que nous ne sommes,
Plus hideux, plus féroce, ou plus désespéré.

Sully-Prudhomme was close to the Parnasse in his careful craftsmanship and precise notation but removed from it through the nature of his inspiration which was primarily drawn from the anxieties of the intellect when confronted with the enigmas of existence; he perhaps belongs as much to Naturalism as to Parnassianism for although he showed little interest in contemporary external reality he was engrossed by the discoveries of science and their impact on the soul of modern Man. He is one of the most representative poets of his epoch. His work is an instance of the transition from the Romantic mal du siècle (which had been vague and nebulous - one reason why it was so insidious) to a form of intellectual anxiety with one specific cause. This was, on the poet's own admission, scientific determinism. In his more optimistic moments, Sully-Prudhomme, like Darwin, saw humanity as the spearhead in an advance towards an apotheosis of consciousness, intelligence and justice. But this optimism was swamped by his uncertainty and by the reflection that even if this were true, the waste and injustice to which the world will have been submitted in the meantime is almost overwhelming for an individual living in the late nineteenth century. The commonest impression of Sully-Prudhomme's work (apart from those whose only acquaintance with his verse is 'Le Vase brisé') is of an abstract formulation of modern despair:

Nos cris monteront-ils à jamais oubliés,
Solitaires de monde en monde,
Errants, et d'âge en âge, hélas! multipliés,
Sans que rien là-haut y réponde? (138)

But this could, more often than is sometimes supposed, be given a particularised context. He was yet another poet, for instance, to be both fascinated and disappointed by spectrum analysis:

Le chimiste apprend des soleils
Par une sublime analyse
Leurs éléments qu'avec surprise
Il trouve aux corps connus pareils... (139)

(138) Le Bonheur.
(139) Ibid.

Sometimes he gave way to genuine, untroubled enthusiasm as in this account of the 'discovery' of electricity:

Franklin l'annulait terrassée;
Volta la gouverne amassée;
Ampère fait d'elle un aimant.
(140)

One of the closest reflections of contemporary science lies in his account (stated more than once) of a positivist variant of monism:

Wentzel, Dalton, en leurs balances
Révèlent qu'entre tous les corps
Par d'exactes equivalences
Le poids régit tous les accords.
Ces alliances régulières
Fournissent au palais des pierres
Et de plus fins matériaux
Aux éphémères édifices
Des plantes et des animaux.
Ah! qu'en leurs multiples offices
Les principes unis entre eux
Pour tant d'oeuvres sont peu nombreux!
Les vieux atomes d'Epicure
Vont ressusciter, tous pareils
Pour composer les clairs soleils
Aussi bien que la terre obscure,
Et peut-être que, seuls divers,
Le poids, le nombre et la figure
Expliqueront tout l'univers.
(141)

Most readers of Latin poetry would agree that Sully-Prudhomme must have taken Lucretius as his model in such verse. Unfortunately his work lacks the vigour and the powerful image of his illustrious predecessor. Such attempts are an excellent instance of the danger to poetry when it seeks to relate ideas of this kind. They provide a justification for the doubts expressed by Baudelaire about a possible rapprochement between poetry and science:

La poésie ne peut pas, sans peine de mort ou
de déchéance, s'assimiler à la science.... La
Vérité n'a rien à faire avec les chansons.
(142)

Only rarely did Sully-Prudhomme grasp that the most interesting aspect of science for the poet was its impact on language and on the quality and nature of everyday life. He certainly felt more at ease in the realm of ideas both because it was more suited to discursive exposition but also because, in a paradoxical way, it provided an escape from reality.

(140) Ibid.

(141) Ibid.

(142) Oeuvres Complètes, p. 1035.

The turning away from contemporary reality to ideas may be seen as partly the result of the failure to find compensation for metaphysical doubts and anguish in life itself. Madame Ackermann represents an interesting case-history of the attempt to find comfort or at least distraction in the world of ideas and of the parallel influence of positivist and idealist philosophies. Through her reading of Pascal (143), Hegel, Schopenhauer, Spinoza, Kant and positivists like Berthelot and Littré (144) she arrived at the conviction that life was basically bad though she seems to have derived from this belief a kind of serenity which oscillated somewhat uneasily between total scepticism and pantheism. These attitudes were closely allied in her mind to modern science and to her poetic vocation:

.....je suivais avec un intérêt intense les travaux de la science moderne. Les théories de l'évolution et de la transformation des forces étaient en parfait accord avec les tendances panthéistes de mon esprit. Les côtés poétiques de cette conception des choses ne m'échappaient pas non plus.

(145)

The renown she won in 1874 with the publication of her Premières poésies. - Poèmes philosophiques (and as a result of the attention paid to her by Caro in one of his articles) was an indication of the mood of the times. The prevailing themes of her poetry are the indifference of nature, the illusion of love (146), the meaninglessness of life, the proud rebellion of Man against his conditions and against a non-existent God. Strangely enough in the amalgam of idealist and

(143) Madame Ackermann seems to have regarded Pascal as a primarily sceptical thinker. The first part of the seventeenth-century apologist's massive enterprise of showing the wretchedness of the human condition and the reality of God as the only solution would certainly have appealed to the age of pessimism after 1870. Voltaire's buoyant reaction, in the Lettres philosophiques, to Pascal's vision of Man in a condemned cell awaiting his turn was not in keeping with the climate of the time. It is more than coincidence that the period after 1870 was one of renewed interest in the author of Pensées.

(144) In 'Positivisme' she wrote:

Nous restons sans espoir, sans recours, sans asile...

(145) Ma Vie, p. xix.

(146) One of the several inconsistencies in the work of Madame Ackermann is her inability to reconcile a Schopenhauerian scepticism concerning love between the sexes with her self-confessed love for her late husband whose death she acknowledged as the tragic catalyst in her poetic career.

As far as disillusionment with love is concerned she is close to Darwin and, of course, to Laforgue. 'L'Amour et la Mort' summarises Nature's ruthlessness:

Toute sa prévoyance est pour ce qui va naître;
Le reste est confondu dans un suprême oubli,
Vous, vous avez aimé, vous pouvez disparaître,
Son vœu s'est accompli.

positivist ideas which constitutes her thought she arrives at a position close to that of the Symbolists as she revealed in a telling comment in her Pensees d'une solitaire of 1882:

Quand je me représente que j'ai apparu fortuitement sur un globe emporté lui-même dans l'espace, au hasard des catastrophes célestes, quand je me vois entourée d'êtres aussi éphémères et aussi incompréhensibles que moi, lesquels s'agitent et courent après des chimères, j'éprouve l'étrange sensation du rêve. Je ne puis croire à la réalité de ce qui m'environne. Il me semble que j'ai aimé, souffert, et que je vais mourir bientôt en songe. Mon dernier mot sera: J'ai rêvé. (147).

To a considerable extent this view was derived from the impermanence and mutability of life as revealed by science. She was aware of the certain end of the world but her account is gentler than Leconte de Lisle's and lacks his bitter satisfaction at the thought of extermination:

Dans ces mondes épars, dis, avons-nous des frères?
T'ont-ils chargé pour nous de leur salut lointain?
Ah! quand tu reviendras, peut-être de la terre
L'homme aura disparu. Du fond de ce séjour
Si son oeil ne doit pas contempler ton retour,
Si le globe épuisé s'est éteint solitaire,
Dans l'espace infini poursuivant ton chemin,
Du moins jette au passage, astre errant et rapide,
Un regard de pitié sur ce théâtre vide
De tant de maux soufferts et du labeur humain.

(148)

There is another respect in which Louise Ackermann was representative of the intellectual climate after 1870 and that is the obsession with all things German. Juliette Adam quoted Madam d'Agoult who was a member of Madame Ackermann's circle: 'Elle me tolère parce que je parle allemand et que pour Mme Ackermann, il n'y a que l'art, que la science, que la philosophie de l'Allemagne.' (149) Madame Ackermann is a classic instance of the retreat into the realm of ideas under the influence of German philosophy; she was even able to adapt her positivism to this attitude.

One encounters some surprising figures amongst the ranks of the minor poets treating contemporary thought and science. Richepin, of all people, acquired the ambition to be a new Lucretius in his La Mer of 1886:

(147) Quoted in Martino, Parnasse et Symbolisme, p.84.

(148) 'A la Comète'.

(149) Juliette Adam, Premières armes, p. 279.

Nous estimons que pour chanter tout ce vivant,
C'est peu d'être poète, il faut être savant...

Like so much of the poetry of ideas his work is strongly influenced by evolutionary thought. There is a description in a single page of La Mer of the whole evolutionary process up to Man beginning with the lines:

Ô vie, ô flot montant et grondant, je te vois
Produire l'animal, plante et bête à la fois,
Te transformer sans fin depuis ces anciens types...

He too appears to be struck by the address of life which implies a new attitude to our own biological existence:

Un être existe là, que la science nomme
Bathyllos, un être informe, sans couleur,
Une larve plutôt qu'un être; une pâleur,
Encor moins qu'une larve; une ombre clandestine,
Semblable à du blanc d'oeuf, à de la gélatine,
Quelque chose de vague et d'indéterminé;
Ce presque rien pourtant, il existe. Il est né,
Il se nourrit, respire et marche et se contracte
Et multiplie, et c'est de la matière en acte.

The almost obligatory reference to a scientific version of the apocalypse is also made but Richepin's variant is original. He sees the world

Ce cadavre hagard tournant en rond....

as having perished as the result of a gradual process of dessication!

* * * * *

Philosophical poetry appealed to those who shared the Parnassians' distaste for contemporary life, partly because they were disillusioned with it but partly also because they found it an unworthy subject for art. Not everyone had the calling to be a literary archaeologist and 'philosophical Parnassianism' provided a genre acceptable to poets like Sully-Prudhomme. Moreover this subject-matter was ideal for the allegorical and rhetorical exposition traditional in French verse and obviated the difficulties of coming to terms with the transient phenomena of the non-intellectual aspects of contemporary reality.

Not surprisingly the representation of ideas was scarcely attempted in other art-forms though it did exist. There is much in common between Fernand Cormon's carefully and traditionally executed and scientifically accurate paintings of the

history of human evolution and the poetry of, say, Cazalis which complied in every detail with the tenets of scientific Parnassianism in poems on subjects similar to those painted by Cormon and where this friend of Mallarmé showed his multiple interests as poet, scholar, orientalist and scientist. Though on reflection it may be that such works as Cormon's decorative series on the triumphant evolution of the human race are closer in spirit, but certainly not in form or manner, to the work of Ghil who was in all probability the only French poet of any significance after 1870 to offer an unequivocally optimistic brand of évolutionnisme (150):

La théorie évolutionniste me fut décisive. Tel est le fond
de tout mon oeuvre. (151)

Indeed his poetry constituted a vast and, unfortunately, often indigestible, epic of evolutionary development. It is in keeping with his fundamental optimism and belief in the future that he should incorporate into his poetry allusions to the latest achievements of the human scientific genius. Thus these lines on the nature of matter take into account research on radio-activity:

Toi, l'élément de l'Acte!.....
toi de toute genèse et qui, naissant du poids consumes tes
pesanteurs!...

Qui du sourd transport
de ses oppressions intr'atomiques, roule
des énergies neuvement après la houle
d'où résulte l'onde du phénomène....

(152)

In plainer language Verhaeren from the 1890s onwards was to provide, in his more optimistic moments, which amount almost to a return to Romantic scientism, the best poetic celebration of progress based on science in poems like 'La Recherche', 'Les Idées', 'Vers le Futur' (153), 'L'Action', 'L'Attente', 'Vers la Mer' (154)

(150) It should be recalled, however, that from about 1900 onwards, Cazalis himself embarked on a programme combining art and science and based on a regained faith in human progress. See Lawrence A. Joseph, Henri Cazalis, pp.234-248.

Cormon's series of decorative paintings is to be seen in the Musée de l'Homme, Paris.

(151) De la Poésie scientifique, Gastein-Serge (1909).

(152) Dire du Mieux, IV, 'L'ordre altruiste'.

(153) Les Villes tentaculaires.

(154) Visages de la Vie.

and 'Sur la Mer', 'La Conquête', 'L'Utopie', 'La Science' (155).

* * * * *

It is important to understand the relationship between the predominant philosophy based on various forms of determinism and two other influences, one of which we have previously discussed. The latter, primitivist nostalgia, we have already shown to be occasionally associated with science. There is one particularly interesting instance of this association. Leconte de Lisle was not alone in hinting that through the transformist process Man and other creatures have much in common - indeed a shared past from which many human instincts may be held to have been derived. Thus in 'Les Hurlleurs' the poet's 'passé confus' surely has a double sense referring ostensibly to the memory of the wild dogs which still haunts him after the passing of so many years but also suggesting strongly that the half-realised despair of the dogs had once been the condition of Man's ancestors on the path to human rationalism. This theme was taken up and rendered entirely explicit by Cazalis in an important poem dedicated to Darwin called 'Réminiscences' which is one of the best statements of this mode of scientific primitivism:

Je sens un monde en moi de confuses pensées,
Je sens obscurément que j'ai vécu toujours,
Que j'ai longtemps erré dans les forêts passées,
Et que la bête encor garde en moi ses amours....

Certains soirs en errant dans les forêts natales
Je ressens dans ma chair les frissons d'autrefois,
Quand, la nuit, grandissant les ombres végétales,
Sauvage, halluciné, je rampais sous les bois...

(156)

In similar vein, Madame Fernand Gregh declared that

Tout homme participe au primitif mystère....

(157)

and in 'Jeunesse' (Poèmes) expanded this idea with some success:

Ce parfum, ô stupeur! ce goût de mer farouche
Nous le trouvions aussi mouillé sur notre bouche!
C'était vraiment le même, unique, universel:
Le sang de l'homme avait le goût marin du sel!
Étranges goûts pareils et vieux comme le monde!...
Mystérieux retour des choses, c'était comme
Du coeur des eaux et de la terre, au coeur de l'homme

(155) Les Forces tumultueuses.

(156) L'Illusion.

(157) 'Réminiscence', Poèmes.

Un obscur souvenir des temps évanouis;
 Et nous sentions, émus de troubles inouïs,
 Dans le vent saturé des éternelles fièvres,
 Le sang de l'univers qui saignait à nos lèvres.

Iwan Gilkin's Prométhée, although not published until the late 1890s, was a definitive statement of ideas which belonged very much to the 1880s and is worth quoting at length:

Parfois, dans le demi-sommeil du clair matin,
 Quand mes yeux éblouis par la lumière intense
 Se referment d'instinct
 Sur le monde indistinct
 Des ombres incertaines
 Alor, je me souviens!
 Je me souviens des mille existences lointaines
 Dans un obscur passé d'énigmes et de nuit.
 Non; je n'ai pas toujours été ce que je suis.
 Qu'étais-je?
 Hélas! le sais-je?
 Peut-être mon énergie était-elle
 Prisonnière jadis de ces rochers poudreux
 Qu'un stérile soleil et la foudre éternelle
 Brûlent sans fin de leurs terribles feux.
 Peut-être flottait-elle avec l'écume amère
 Des vagues de la mer.
 N'a-t-elle point dormi dans les êtres informes
 Accrochés, sous les eaux à des algues énormes?
 N'a-t-elle point fleuri sur de vastes marais
 Ou rampe sur le sol spongieux des forêts.
 Monstre aux flancs écaillés, aux mâchoires bruyantes?...
 Mais un effort perpétuel
 Sans cesse me poussant
 De la forme où je passais
 Vers une forme nouvelle,
 Lentement, lentement,
 Imperceptiblement,
 De génération en génération
 Durant des siècles innombrables
 Sur l'échelle sans fin des transformations,
 Malgré les cieus insecourables,
 Je m'élevais par degrés vers le mieux.
 La forme plus parfaite où je vois la lumière.
 Grossière encore! Hélas! combien grossière!
 Mon désir la dépasse et mon rêve l'épure.
 Voilà pourquoi je veux créer des créatures
 Selon l'être divin que j'entrevois en moi.

Gilkin's poem is a combination of scientifically-based nostalgia for a primitive existence and of hope for the perfectibility of Man through evolution. Like many of the primitivist poets his views entail an attack on established religion. Here this is evident in the reference to 'cieus insecourables' and, most notably, in the parody of Catholic liturgical phraseology and hymn-like rhythm beginning:

Lentement, lentement.....

His is a secular vision of the millenium.

Both the dissatisfaction with established religion and 'evolutionary nostalgia' may, in fact, be linked with the second influence which it is necessary to examine - oriental philosophy. Cazalis's 'Réminiscences' included a stanza which makes it clear that he had assimilated the eastern concepts of transmigration and reincarnation with Darwinism:

(Je sens...)
 Et que j'ai transmigré dans des formes sans nombre,
 Et que mon âme était, sous tous ces corps divers,
 La conscience et l'âme aussi, splendide ou sombre,
 Qui rêve et se tourmente au fond de l'univers!

There were other areas in which science and oriental philosophy were close. He was to write of Buddhism:

De toutes les religions le bouddhisme est celle qui
 semble en réalité le moins en antagonisme avec la science
 actuelle... Il est d'accord, avec le pessimisme de Darwin.

(158)

Just as Buddhism may be compared to science so science in its turn may be likened to the contemplative calm of Brahmanism:

La science qui, distinctement, dans le passé voit la
 genèse du soleil, voit sa mort aussi dans l'avenir, et elle
 assiste aux révolutions du monde avec la tranquillité des
 Brahmanes....

(159)

There was much common ground between Hinduism and nineteenth-century science especially in the notions of monism and transformism. Perhaps the closest equivalent to positivism and determinism was, however, Buddhism since all three abandoned any attempt to explain first causes but looked at human experience in the world where we find ourselves without resorting to dogma. The interest in oriental philosophy, and particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, in France, from the time of the Parnassians onwards, was more than coincidence; it was completely in accord with the prevailing scientific and philosophical climate. To many intellectuals the three characteristics of life as defined by Buddhists must have seemed singularly applicable to their own situation: dukkha (unsatisfactoriness of ordinary empirical existence), anicca (impermanence

(158) La Gloire du Néant.

(159) Ibid.

and transient quality of all earthly phenomena and experience) and anatta (absence of a permanent enduring private self - in late nineteenth-century France this was usually limited to a disbelief in immortality and not extended to scepticism concerning the existence of individuality). Of these three concepts the influence of anicca upon the nineteenth-century preoccupation with the ephemeral should not be overlooked. Its impact on the plastic arts and especially Impressionist painting was primarily through the intermediary of oriental (especially Japanese) art which reflected the desire to show the basic transience of reality. But in poetry after 1870 it entered as a fundamental attitude having been pre-digested either by Western 'Buddhists' like Schopenhauer or, more usually, Parnassian poets like Cazalis and Leconte de Lisle.

* * * * *

It was suggested above that the influence of contemporary thought and science is discernible even in the work of some of the major poets, apart from the obvious case of Laforgue. Verlaine and Rimbaud both wrote poetry which comes within the scope of the present section.

In his Parnassian period Verlaine had predictably referred to the discord between 'harmony' and Man's new-found technological power:

Aujourd'hui, l'Action et le Rêve ont brisé
Le pacte primitif par les siècles usé
Et plusieurs ont trouvé funeste ce divorce
De l'harmonie immense et bleue et de la force.

(160)

Yet this idea was to prove remarkably enduring in his case, even though, as was shown in the last chapter, it underwent an important modification in that he was to replace the Parnassian notion of ancient harmony with Catholicism. Verlaine was fond of playing the simpleton and this too contributed to the basic attitude of his mature years not only towards science but all 'new-fangled' ideas:

Schopenhauer m'embête un peu
Malgré son épiqueïsme,
Je ne comprends pas l'anarchisme,
Je ne fais pas d'Ibsen un dieu.

Ce n'est pas du Nord aujourd'hui
Que m'arriverait la lumière;
Du Midi non plus, en dernière
Analyse. Du Centre, oui?

(160) Prologue to Poèmes Saturniens.

Non. Mais d'où? De nulle part, - là!
 Rien négale ma lassitude:
 Laissez-moi rentrer dans l'étude
 Du bon vieux temps qu'on persifla.

J'aime les livres lus et sus,
 Je suis fou de claires paroles,
 J'adore la Croix sans symboles:
 Un gibet et Jésus dessus. (161)

Verlaine's rejection of contemporary thought at least has the merit of humour - in this instance in the ironic reference to Schopenhauer's epicureanism and the directional jeu de mots in the second stanza. It is interesting to note the use of the modern idiom 'en dernière analyse' - itself a product of the new positivism.

Verlaine's most important poetic statements on contemporary thought occur in Sagesse:

Petits amis qui sâtes nous prouver
 Par A plus B que deux et deux font quatre,
 Mais qui depuis voulez parachever
 Une victoire où l'on se laissait battre,

 Et couronner vos conquêtes d'un coup
 Par ce soufflet à la mémoire humaine:
 'Dieu ne vous a révélé rien du tout,
 Car nous disons qu'il n'est que l'ombre vaine,

 Que le profil et que l'allongement,
 Sur tous les murs que la peur édifie,
 De votre pur et simple mouvement,
 Et nous disons cette philosophie.'

 - Frères trop chers, laissez-nous rire un peu,
 Nous les fervents d'une logique rance,
 Qui justement n'avons de foi qu'en Dieu
 Et mettons notre espoir dans l'Espérance,

 Laissez-nous rire un peu, pleurer aussi,
 Pleurer sur vous, rire du vieux blasphème,
 Rire du vieux Satan ainsi,
 Pleurer sur cet Adam dupe quand même!

 Frères de nous qui payons vos orgueils,
 Tous fils du même Amour, ah! la science....

(162)

Verlaine's target is the same logic-chopping 'sophistry' which Rimbaud attacked in 'L'Impossible'. Paradoxically whereas Rimbaud blamed Christianity for robbing mankind of joy (and in his more optimistic moments saw science as offering

(161) Epigramme XXII.

(162) Sagesse, I, xi.

a hope of salvation) Verlaine sees a return to orthodox Catholicism as the only way of bringing peace of mind and contentment. It is the whole of society which pays the price - in despair - of the overweening pride of scientists. It is men like this - materialistic, atheistic republicans - who now control France and devote their statistical skills to the manipulation of the masses:

Vous voici rois de France! A Votre tour!....

A l'oeuvre, amis petits! Nous avons droit
De vous y voir, payant de notre poche,
Et d'être un peu réjouis à l'endroit
De votre état sans peur et sans reproche.

Sans peur? Du maître. Ô le maître, mais c'est
L'Ignorant-chiffre et le Suffrage-nombre,
Total, le peuple, un "âne" fort.....

(163)

The collection Amour contains a further interesting - and usually overlooked - account of Verlaine's position:

Roi, le seul vrai roi de ce siècle, salut, Sire,
Qui voulûtes mourir vengeant votre raison
Des choses de la politique, et du delire
De cette Science intrusive dans la maison.

De cette Science assassin de l'Oraison
Et du Chant et de l'Art et de toute la Lyre,
Et simplement, et plein d'orgueil en flouaison,
Tuâtes en mourant, salut, Roi! bravo, Sire!

Vous fûtes un poète, un soldat, le seul Roi
De ce siècle ou les rois se font si peu de chose,
Et le martyr de la Raison selon la Foi....

(164)

The death by drowning (presumed suicide) of the mad king of Bavaria, Ludwig II, at Starnberg in 1886 becomes for Verlaine the focus of a meditation upon the times. The poet attributes Ludwig's insanity to two things: political changes (he had become a mere puppet-ruler after the formation of the Kaisereich in 1871) and to the intrusion of the inventions and gadgets of modern science into his palaces on a colossal scale. His suicide is the vengeance of his reason upon these challenges to tradition, some of which he himself had encouraged. He is heralded by Verlaine as the only true king of the age - because (according to Verlaine) his suicide stemmed from a revelation of the true nature of kingship, of divinely inspired monarchy ('martyrs de la Raison selon la Foi'). Science is the main culprit; it has destroyed religion, art and poetry.

(163) Ibid., I, xii.

(164) 'A Louis II de Bavière'.

Verlaine's own career and poetry is characterised by uncertainty. The underlying malaise and mild bewilderment in some of his ~~best~~ poetry is of course an indication of the poet's psychological condition but this in turn is to be related to his inability to identify with his own times. Interestingly, his consolation in religion, although intermittent, anticipates the fin de siècle Catholic revival. The whole phenomenon is to be related to the same widespread spiritual uneasiness provoked by positivist and determinist science.

* * * * *

An awareness of the role of science is essential to a full appreciation of Rimbaud's poetry. One still awaits a proper study of the influence of the age of science and technology upon his work. The effect upon the style and language of his poetry was crucial and this will be discussed in the next chapter. Thematically, contemporary thought and science also have great importance in both the verse and prose works. There is in Rimbaud's poetry a fundamental contradiction with regard to science and the modern philosophies derived from it. On the one hand he is inclined to see in science a solution to the problems and injustices of human existence. Yet, on the other, there is a scepticism and even a disillusioned bitterness concerning the promises which science seems to make. So much is this the case that on occasion science is associated with Christianity and Western Bourgeois materialism as the factors which have led to the suppression of the authenticity, freedom, spontaneity and joy which were, the poet seems to believe, a part of primitive existence. This contradiction is evident throughout the entire period of his poetic activity.

In 'Le Forgeron' science will be one of the methods by which Man will not only achieve social justice but bring all things under his submission:

...Lentement vainquer, il domptera les choses
Et montera sur Tout, comme sur un cheval!

His faith in human progress and technological resourcefulness is ^{here} as unambiguous as that of Victor Hugo in 'le Satyre'. Yet, as we noted in 'Soleil et Chair' it is the very powers of human rationalism which are blamed for the abject condition of modern Man:

whether or not the poet is being ironic. 'Mauvais Sang' presents a clear instance of the dilemma:

La race inférieure a tout couvert - le peuple, comme on dit, la raison; la nation et la science.

Oh! la science! On a tout repris. Pour le corps et pour l'âme, - le viatique, - on a la médecine et la philosophie, - les remèdes de bonnes femmes et les chansons populaires arrangés. Et les divertissements des princes et les jeux qu'ils interdisaient! Géographie, cosmographie, mécanique, chimie!....

La science, la nouvelle noblesse! Le progrès. Le monde marche! Pourquoi ne tournerait-il pas?

C'est la vision des nombres. Nous allons à l'Esprit.

Most commentators seem to have assumed that Rimbaud's references here to the benefits of science are to be taken at face value. But there are indications that such an interpretation may be incorrect. Rimbaud has been giving a brief and highly personal summary of the history of the French race. The period of joint domination by nobility and Church is over. The time of individual adventurers and vague idealistic wars (like the Crusades and the Wars of Religion?) has come to an end. In the modern age new concepts have to be reckoned with; people and nation have replaced race; raison and science have replaced religion. But what do these changes amount to? The fruits of science, notably medicine and 'philosophy', have been democratised but in the process debased, for 'les remèdes de bonnes femmes et les chansons populaires arrangés' surely has an ironic ring. Great discoveries have been brought down to the level of everyday commerce - 'remèdes de bonnes femmes' advertised and on sale at pharmacists. The 'chansons populaires' are the insights of secular philosophy arranged and diluted for popular consumption by, one suspects, a new elite of intellectuals and scientists who have taken over the mantle of those previously in authority ('la nouvelle noblesse'). The sciences - 'géographie, cosmographie, mécanique, chimie...' are gimmicks, mere pastimes which were once the monopoly of leisured princes. Science has become the new aristocracy. We have progress and the advancement of science and technology but - in an ironic allusion to Galileo's celebrated remark - the poet wonders why the world might not turn - why there would not be a true 'revolution'.

What the future is claimed to hold by the new elite is the domination of matter by intelligence but does this really mean much more than the worship of mathematical abstractions in place of the old theological abstractions? Both are equally removed from virile pagan sensuality and it is this gloomy prospect which constitutes the substance of the poet's oracular declaration.

Other interpretations of this passage remain, of course, valid and plausible. This is itself an indication of the ambiguity of Rimbaud's own feelings. His better judgement told him that the promises of science were largely groundless but he needed desperately to believe. Hence what irony one finds is as much self-mockery as anything else. 'L'Éclair', as we have seen in the context of the poet's attitude to social change, relates the moments of doubt and disillusionment which provoke this kind of irony:

"Rien n'est vanité: à la science, et en avant!" crie
l'Éclésiaste moderne...Ah! vite, vite un peu; là-bas
par delà la nuit, ces récompenses futures, éternelles
...les échappons-nous?...la science est trop lente....

'Angoisse' demonstrates the same attitude in the Illuminations. Death and fate threaten the achievements of science along with social progress:

Que des accidents de féerie scientifique et des
mouvements de fraternité sociale soient chéris..
Mais la Vampire qui nous rend gentils commande que
nous nous amusions avec ce qu'elle nous laisse.....

Even 'Mouvement', which, at first sight, would appear to be a fairly straightforward celebration of the wonders of science and technology contains hints of irony. A young couple (Rimbaud and Verlaine one supposes) are on a voyage on a ship by river and on the open sea which becomes symbolic of the whole forward march of mankind. The excitement of the first stanza is clouded in the second by the phrase 'les conquérants du monde' which suggests success at the expense of others. This suggestion is corroborated by the notions of 'fortune...personnelle', 'sport' and 'comfort' (sic). In the third stanza 'l'héroïsme de la découverte' is mingled with references to commerce: 'comptes agités' and 'stock d'études'. The 'couple de jeunesse' may thus be interpreted as the representatives of 'ancienne sauvagerie' awaiting, on the ship which has become an ark, a cleansing flood which

will wipe out modern commercial civilisation for all its scientific marvels and its prosperity (for some). It has to be admitted, however, that the sense is far from clear. There can be little doubt, nevertheless, that the poem which appears to be strongly influenced by Whitman's poems of progress in both form and content contains those elements of doubt and self-questioning as well as of excitement which distinguish the American's work.

If further evidence were needed of the fact that Rimbaud's commitment to the new age was not total this is to be found in the existence of a one-line parody of Louis-Xavier de Ricard, one of the poets of progress, in the Album zutique:

L'Humanité chaussait le vaste enfant Progrès.

To parody such a vision is another example of Rimbaud's self-mockery.

One of Rimbaud's most interesting works reflecting contemporary thought brings us back to the question of oriental philosophy. 'L'Impossible' contrasts modern European society with the ancient culture of the East - to the former's detriment. The poem begins, significantly, with a remembrance of the freedom and self-confidence of childhood. The link we have already noted in the last chapter between primitivism and the vision of childhood is visible in 'L'Impossible'. Nevertheless there was too much pride in this self-confidence so that his 'freedom' was really only 'sottise'. The freedom of the tramp and the wanderer (like Rimbaud in his escapes from Charleville) is not even as self-reliant as it at first appears. For such men and youths depend on the pity, affection and care of good-natured women that they encounter (like the serving girls in Rimbaud's Belgian poems) - women often out of tune with their hard-hearted husbands ('nos femmes' is an indication that Rimbaud is momentarily speaking - ironically - as a respectable bourgeois). But the poet's intuition had been right, even if his methods had been unsatisfactory. Now he is about to find real escape. There follows a description of the European civilisation with which the poet is so profoundly dissatisfied. This is a civilisation in which familiarity has bred contempt, without charity, governed by conventions of politeness, where merchants cater for the gullible consumer. Rimbaud and other Europeans are not beyond redemption

but how would an elect of truly enlightened men look upon them? The only elect in the West are a socio-economic elite; it takes courage and humility to approach them. They are scarcely beneficent. (A return to the idea that charity is unknown). Despite this unsympathetic environment, the poet has acquired a little reason ('deux sous' is both colloquial and also an ironic allusion to the commercial society he seeks to condemn). It will not last long but it is enough to show that his troubles stem from being bogged down in the West. His mind wants to consider all the wrong developments away from primitive wisdom that have taken place but his temporary insight seems to be failing and the poet has to struggle to prevent his vision being blotted out by his intellect which wants to return to Western 'normality'. With an effort he resists the intrusion long enough to stage his planned conclusion. To hell with the epitomes of Western civilisation: Christian martyrdoms, the inspiration of art, scientific invention, military conquest. He turns again to the wisdom of the East because it is 'première et éternelle' - although the way of life is dismissed as laziness by those who uphold the bourgeois work-ethic. Such an accusation would be unjustified in his case for he does not seek to escape modern sufferings. He does not wish to retreat into a paradise described in 'lazy', sensual, material terms as in the Koran. (Suzanne Bernard is wrong when she considers that Rimbaud is referring to fatalism - this was much more a feature of the religions of India). Islamic wisdom is 'bâtarde' because it is too close to the materialism of the West and, for that matter, to the Judaeo-Christian tradition which he despises. There is a real torment, since Christianity and science (brought together once again by Rimbaud as co-partners in Western decadence) gained the ascendancy, in living in the modern world. Man has become obsessed with the logic-chopping wisdom of the French Cartesian tradition, to which the Jesuit version of Christianity may be related. Nature would have little to do with these abstractions within which modern Man thinks he has encompassed her! The archetypal representative of modern materialistic bourgeois existence, Monsieur Prudhomme, was

brought into existence simultaneously with Christ. For Rimbaud materialistic science and Christianity are inseparable. It is strange that he should have coupled the two bitter enemies of the Kulturkampf of the 1870s and 1880s. Yet they had been vaguely associated by some of his Parnassian precursors. Modern civilisation does not cultivate wisdom but fog. Although 'brume' is symbolic and is to be compared with the desire to be a 'fils du soleil' it is the present writer's opinion that Rimbaud also has in mind the very real fog produced by modern industry. It seems more than likely that, part at least, of 'L'Impossible' was written in London and may have been inspired by it. The next sentence could thus be regarded as a summary of impressions of his life in England - overcooked vegetables which produce fever (resulting from nutritional deficiencies?), drunkenness and smoking, religious conversions based on ignorance. (Rimbaud would have been bound to witness the evangelical movements - particularly the Salvation Army - at work amongst the poor of London. There is surely a reference to this in the later allusion to 'partis de salut'). Such abominations make a nonsense of the so-called achievements of the modern world, which is so distant from the wisdom of the East. Rimbaud anticipates Catholic readers who will say that there is no need to meddle in oriental religions; surely all he has in mind is Eden. He agrees with them. The purity of primitive peoples is exactly what he seeks but what would modern Christians know of this? There are philosophers who would persuade him that he is free to live in a mental version of the ancient East without relinquishing the West - but such arguments belong to that very brand of Western sophistry he has already condemned. The poet is emerging from his insight. His spirit is sensitive. He must beware of the temptation to seek Christian salvation through the promptings of emotional evangelists. Science is to blame for his condition for it does not move quickly enough - he is able to see the damage it has done but may not ever see the millenium it might bring. At this stage he tricks himself. His insight becomes confused with Christianity. If only his spirit had not gone to sleep it would have perceived this 'revelation' - the assimi-

lation of primitive wisdom with the Christian vision. Finally he turns his scorn upon what he now sees as self-delusion:

- Par l'esprit on va à Dieu!
Déchirante infortune!

Rimbaud's references to oriental philosophy are so imprecise as to make it almost certain that his only sources were the 'orientalising' members of the Parnasse. Such a view is supported by the closeness of his idea of 'les élus' to Leconte de Lisle's 'héros', 'poètes' and 'sages' 'assis, parfaits, en un rêve éternel' (165).

* * * * *

A study of the poetry of 'ideas' after 1870 reveals certain common factors. Poets clearly saw their age as distinctively modern, as something separate from the preceding centuries. This separation resulted from the discoveries and concepts of positivist and determinist science. The price to be paid for the material benefits of modern science was an unparalleled awareness of insecurity and impermanence - made crystal clear in evolutionary science. Reactions to this situation were various. One was a nostalgia for primitive wisdom, which may or may not be associated with oriental philosophy. Another was a revival of interest in metaphysical exploration of all kinds. Some writers, of course, like Ghil, were simply enthusiastic at the approach of the 'new age'. Yet another was pessimistic acceptance of a meaningless universe. Finally - and this lies at the base of the experiments to be discussed in the next two chapters - many poets, consciously or unconsciously, realised that their work should reflect evolution and mutation, the fundamental impermanence of modern life and experience generally. For the major poets this was to entail a revolutionary attitude to the language of poetry.

Closely allied to the development of science was the advance of technology, the effects of which upon poetry form the subject of the next section.

(165) In ' Prière védique pour les Morts ', Poèmes Antiques.

(C) The Industrial Age and the Idea of Progress

Technology had interested the Romantic poets in three ways - as a comprehensive alteration to the traditional world-picture (and particularly for its aesthetic novelty), as the motive power behind progress and, conversely, as a means by which the working classes were exploited and degraded on an unprecedented scale. The first of these was perhaps the most promising aspect, involving new landscapes, new life-styles and even new language, but it was the ~~least~~ frequently treated. The second and third represented the two poles of opinion, optimism and pessimism sometimes, as in the case of Hugo, entertained by the same poet. They were the two which lent themselves most readily to the traditional discursive and rhetorical patterns. In the 1870s and 1880s the industrial age per se was no longer a subject of great importance in poetry. The reasons for this are various. Baudelaire, the master of the generation after 1870, had largely ignored it in his verse and had even discouraged its poetic treatment in his critical writings (for instance in his remarks on Barbier). The absence of his recommendation must have contributed to the neglect of the theme. It is to be contrasted, in this respect, with most of the other subjects discussed in this chapter. Modern society had been treated indirectly by Baudelaire who had set an example of rebelliousness. Although he claimed to abhor science, he had captured perfectly the condition of the tortured soul of modern Man beset by doubt and uncertainty. But industry he ignored. There are other more important reasons. As a result of the events of 1870-71 the idea of Progress had been, very considerably, discredited. Ironically, ^{by} this time, so too had the notion that the condition of the working classes was worsening as a result of the industrial revolution. Under Napoleon III, although most intellectuals (including the poets) would never have admitted it, the conditions of the working classes had improved immensely. The treatment of modern industry in a more concrete way had been rendered less attractive by the simple fact that it was becoming an established part of

ordinary life and had ceased to be thought of as a novelty. This in itself, however, would not explain its neglect. After all, from the 1890s onwards, it was to become a major theme in the work of Verhaeren, the Unanimists, the Futurists, and the Cubists. It was still a potentially exciting subject. Much of the reason for the strange silence of many of the poets on this issue after 1870 is to be attributed to a controversy in French poetry beginning in the mid 1850s and the reverberations of which were still fresh in the minds of the poets writing in the 1870s. Rimbaud was certainly aware of it as we have shown in the discussion of 'Ce qu'on dit au poète...'

The question of the place of modern industry in poetry became a bone of contention when Maxime Du Camp launched his campaign of which Les Chants modernes (1866) was the principal item of propaganda. Du Camp's volume, and more especially the preface, lay at the heart of one of the greatest literary controversies of nineteenth-century France.

The poetry of Les Chants modernes, to which we shall be returning shortly, is extremely bad, but this fact seems to have been largely neglected by both favourable and unfavourable critics alike in the general furore caused by the ideas Du Camp was proposing. The modernist tenor of his proposals is obvious in the famous statement in the preface:

On découvre la vapeur, nous chantons Vénus, fille de l'onde amère:
on découvre l'électricité, nous chantons Bacchus, ami de la grappe
vermeille. C'est absurde! (167)

Du Camp and his supporters constituted an organised movement potentially as strong, and seen to be so, as the Romantics had been in 1830. This much is clear from a comment by Gustave Planche, a scathing critic of the movement:

On sent qu'il (Du Camp) ne parle pas en son nom seulement mais
au nom d'une armée frémissante, qui n'a pas encore tiré l'épée,
et qui demande à grands cris le combat... Cette préface vantée
d'avance par des amis complaisants comme un prodige de hardiesse,
n'est tout bonnement qu'une parodie de la préface de Cromwell. (168)

(166) 1855.

(167) M. Du Camp, Les Chants modernes, p.7.

(168) Revue des Deux Mondes, 15 May 1855.

A poor parody perhaps, but it remained true that just as the mediocrity of Cromwell did not prevent the preface, and the ideas provoked by the controversy surrounding it, having the widest currency so too was there no reason why Du Camp's preface should not enjoy a similar fate. The virulence of the attacks made on Du Camp suggests how great his opponents considered the threat to be. In the event the greatest publicity was given to the whole question.

No less eminent a figure than Sainte-Beuve was involved in the fray. He made the telling comparison between Du Camp and Delille, and thus claimed that there was nothing new in the former's ideas. However, even he overlooked some vital differences. Whereas Delille with his encyclopaedic ambitions had wanted to embrace all subjects from elephants to the specimens in the Jardin des Plantes in the realm of nature as well as every aspect of human activity (and thereby inevitably dealt with modern mechanical discoveries), Du Camp claimed specifically to be a poet of the new age of technological progress. Moreover, he wanted poetry to be utilitarian in the sense of guiding and changing society. Despite his reservations concerning Du Camp's originality Sainte-Beuve did feel bound to agree with the overall tendency in the attitude of Du Camp and his supporters: 'c'est que l'artiste doit être de son temps, doit porter le cachet de son temps: à ce prix est la vie durable, comme le succès' (169). The great critic could not bring himself to praise the poems contained in the collection and in this his taste is to be commended. What is noteworthy is that in spite of this he felt he had to discuss the issues that had been raised. It was obvious by the 1850s that the industrial society was not just a passing phase but it seems to have required the efforts of Du Camp and his followers to make a number of intellectuals and writers alive to the situation and take up definite attitudes towards the way such change should influence art. Already, of course, the art for art's sake movement had presented a definite attitude of hostility towards any idea of

(169) Causeries du Lundi, XII, p.15. (Originally published in L'Athenaeum français, 28 July 1855).

reflecting contemporary developments in art, and particularly poetry. Du Camp's preface is primarily directed at the advocates of art for art's sake and Parnassianism.

Leconte de Lisle's reply is to be found in the preface to the Poèmes et Poésies of 1855. Other notable critics of Du Camp's ideas were Laprade, Renan and Flaubert.

Victor de Laprade, the poet and critic, made a lengthy and interesting reply to Du Camp's claim that French poetry should take industry and machines for its subject in an article in Le Correspondant (170). In this article Laprade talks about art in general and not just about poetry and what he has to say is of great interest in the age when the old classical and Renaissance concept of anthropocentric art was about to be challenged by the Impressionists. According to Laprade there are three poetic orders, God, Man and Nature; great poetry requires that none be omitted and that they be kept in their proper order. Homer did not hesitate to describe vividly the industry of his day but would not have written an epic about it. He considered the anger of Achilles far superior to the forge of Vulcan. (The latter is a direct reference to a phrase in the Chants modernes.) The poet-critic goes on to ask whether modern industry can by its very nature be artistic. Supplying the answer himself he outlines *four* principles. First, any mechanical apparatus which does not leave to Man the largest place and most prominent role in the scene depicted is irreconcilable with art in general and with the necessary laws of the beautiful. (Laprade would presumably have accepted the low regard in which pure landscape was held by the artistic establishment of the day.) Second, any object must have simplicity and elegance of line in order to be artistically reproduced either in painting or sculpture. Third, objects whose dimensions are out of all proportionate relation with those of the human body are incompatible with art. Finally, the qualities of solidity and permanence are essential to a work of art. Hence, concludes Laprade, extensive reference to modern industry is detrimental to painting, sculpture, architecture and poetry:

(170) Le Correspondant, 1856, p.34.

'La poésie restera la poésie, c'est-à-dire une oeuvre morale; l'industrie restera l'industrie, c'est-à-dire une oeuvre matérielle.'

Renan's increasing pessimism after the events of 1848-52 led him to adopt a rather sour attitude to the notion of progress. His main argument in his remarks prompted by Du Camp's volume (171) is that artistic progress is in no way linked with material progress - an opinion he shares with Baudelaire. Moreover, he feels that industrial expansion and material progress have produced nothing for the intellect; Man needs something more than the satisfaction of his material and physical desires. (172) (Most thinking men would probably agree with these views. What is astonishing, and perhaps reveals the extent of Renan's antipathy to the idea of progress, is his foolish choice of examples. He says that Greece in the fifth century B.C. attained its cultural peak at a time of material neglect, that the Italian Renaissance is another example of the same paradox and lastly, that although China had advanced industrial processes long before Europe she produced nothing worthy of the name of art! Needless to say all these assertions are patently untrue and possibly the product of a mind clouded by disillusionment).

Even though he was Du Camp's close friend Flaubert could not lend his support in the controversy. The novelist loathed the whole concept of utilitarian art which was totally opposed to his own aesthetic. As a consequence of the social utility of poetry Du Camp had seen fit to talk in terms of the declining importance of form. The gulf between the friends on this subject is obvious. (173)

The publication of Les Chants modernes in 1855 was the culmination of a campaign that had been running in the Revue de Paris for some years. The basic cause of the banding together of the young men behind the campaign was what they

(171) Contained in the article 'La Poésie de l'Exposition' in Journal des Débats, 27 November 1855.

(172) See footnote above.

(173) c.f. Flaubert's remark 'la forme et l'idée: pour moi, c'est tout un et je ne
de l'esthétique française, p.170. Compared Du Camp's comment: 'La pensée
ne se formule plus; la forme seule se contourne et se tourmente pour
voiler le squelette qu'elle habille'. (Les Chants modernes, p.3).

considered to be the obvious decline of French poetry. They sought a driving force for its revival. Thus Achille Kauffmann had written in the Revue in July 1853:

Qui donc a osé dire le premier que l'industrie a tué la poésie, l'a ensevelie dans un linceul de bitume, de vapeur et de fumée? qui a proféré un tel blasphème? qui l'a répété, sans s'informer si la pensée est vraie, sans comprendre que cette industrie dont on fait la meurtrière de la poésie, est, en réalité, le plus puissant inspirateur des temps nouveaux, le dieu créateur de notre époque?

The young writers stepped up their campaign when they feared that the nascent 'L'art pour l'art' movement would steal their thunder and halt the progress of French poetry by providing what they held to be a retrograde stop-gap. The publication of Du Camp's volume was the direct result of this intensification of the campaign. It is to be regretted that it was Du Camp who became the most influential of the industrial poets for he was also one of the least endowed with talent. Auguste Barbier, silent for some years, would have proved a more persuasive advocate.

There is no doubt that the main interest of the work is the long preface. The author claimed that both art and literature were in decline, the great masters had been reduced to silence. Too much attention had been paid to mere form and in consequence, in painting, sculpture and even in poetry, ridiculous ornamentation had replaced richness and purity of line:

On accumule images sur images, hyperboles sur hyperboles, périphrases sur périphrases; on jongle avec les mots, on saute à travers des cercles de périodes, on danse sur la corde roide des alexandrins, on porte à bras tendus cent kilos d'épithètes, et l'on fait le saut périlleux par-dessus le dénouement. De but il n'y en a pas; de pensée, il n'y en a pas; de foi, de croyance, de mission, d'amour, il n'y en a pas. Le plus fort est celui qui a le plus de mots à son service; on polit les phrases, on fait battre des antithèses, on surveille les enjambements, on alimente le jeu croisé des rimes; on parle pour ne rien dire. Ou sont donc les écrivains? Je ne vois que des virtuoses. (174)

This is an accurate description of the classical values of poetry in decline. It is unfortunate that Du Camp's powers of destructive criticism were not matched by artistic creativity.

Du Camp's preface constitutes a plea for modernity. He complains that the last poetic 'concours' had had for its subject the 'Acropole d'Athènes'. To

(174) Les Chants modernes, pp. 4-5.

pick such subjects in the age of steam, electricity, gas, chloroform and photography is as ludicrous an anachronism as the poetic evocation of the gods of Olympus in the age of Owen, Fourier and Saint-Simon. He considers that literature including poetry, should interpret science and should direct industry (the utilitarian aspect of his theory that Flaubert had found so abhorrent). In support of the viability of the new subject matter, he states that the one lesson to be learnt from the classical poets is to describe one's own times just as they felt ready to describe theirs. The second argument for the aesthetic potential of modern industrial subjects takes the form of a splendidly vivid description - alas in prose - of a factory scene. The author's conclusion is that poetry must harness itself to industrial progress and help hasten on the dawn of the Golden Age.

The poetry itself is very poor and as an example of Du Camp's theory it is disappointing and contradictory. It is difficult to understand how a man who was capable of indicating many of the faults in contemporary poetry should himself commit all of them in abundance. Perhaps the worst abuse is that of periphrasis; the poet fails to learn any lesson from the successful experiments of Barbier.

Throughout the collection Du Camp frequently mentions the idea of progress but of the translation of the pictorial qualities of industry into verse (for which we had been led to hope in the prose example in the preface) there is very little. Certainly there is nothing that even begins to match the prose description. His debt to earlier poets is great and the work has no claims to originality. A heavy oratorical manner bedevils the poetry and the effect is worsened by the use of outmoded terminology and inappropriate personifications. Most of all the poems have no feel of familiarity or involvement with their subject. Du Camp was a literary theorist remote from the people and he shows no understanding of their position. His optimism is born of the warm glow of comfort:

Plus on produit, plus on consomme:
 Il n'est maintenant si pauvre homme
 Qui grâce à nous ne puisse enfin
 S'habiller des pieds à la tête,
 Et mettre pour les jours de fête
 Quelque bel habit de drap fin.

(175)

Du Camp's opponents seem, in the long term, to have been the more persuasive. With a few exceptions, the impact of the industrial age, where it is reflected at all, seems to have been transposed into motifs such as elements of the modern urban landscape - a tendency reflected in Laforgue's factory chimneys. One aspect of the industrial age, which had been treated from the very start, did, however, continue to fascinate poets after 1870. This, the new methods of travel (and related phenomena such as tourism) will, like the modern city, be treated in the sections which follow.

Du Camp's lamentable efforts only served to encourage the abstracting tendency of French poetry. Later, on the very threshold of the 1870s, the abstract poetry of Progress was still an important genre. Its association with the more pompous variant of Hugolian rhetoric, as well as historical and social calamities which made it seem incongruous may have contributed to its ^{partial} discredit after 1870 even amongst those of the younger poets like Rimbaud who wished very strongly to believe in the coming of a man-made Utopia.

The idea with which Hugo was most preoccupied and which also has its origins in the eighteenth century, in the work of Condorcet and others, is certainly this idea of progress. In William Shakespeare (176) he had summed up his attitudes to poetry.

L'art pour l'art peut être beau, mais l'art pour le progrès
 est plus beau encore. Le génie n'est pas fait pour le génie,
 il est fait pour l'homme... L'utile, loin de circonscrire
 le sublime, le grandit.

(175) Ibid., p.288. An examination of the content of Les Chants modernes reveals how little Du Camp adhered to the principles he lays down in the preface regarding subject-matter. Most of the poems have little or nothing to do with a modernist programme, typical examples being 'Insomnie', 'Jalousie', 'Femmes Turques', 'Spes non vana', 'Luther' and 'Anniversaire'. Of the fifty-one poems only the six in the section called Chants de la matière, together with one or two others such as 'La Câble' and 'La Maison Démolie', are in conformity with his alleged intentions. That Du Camp was an opportunist lacking in any real perception of the value of contemporary reality in art became obvious in 1863 when he wrote harsh reviews of the 'Salon des Refusés' for the Revue des Deux Mondes. See J. Lethève, Impressionnistes et Symbolistes devant la presse, pp.20-21.

(176) 1864.

In the period 1840-1870, the poetry of progress became a veritable genre and it is not too preposterous to see Hugo as almost a 'chef d'école'. Of the host of Hugolian heralds of progress perhaps the best known to literary historians is Louis-Xavier de Ricard (although not as a poet), famous as founder of Le Parnasse Contemporain. In 1866 Ricard published his collection Ciel, Rue et Foyer which, although apparently unread today, contains much of interest to the student of nineteenth-century French poetry.

It is surprising, considering the poet's affiliation to the Parnasse, that the collection should look to the future rather than to the past. (181) The preface, cast in the form of a sonnet, sets the tone of the collection:

Salut, ami lecteur: accueille avec bonté
Ces poèmes nouveaux, écrits pendant l'aurore
De cette ère naissante, où l'on entend éclore
Dans les sillons profonds la jeune humanité. (182)

The 'Ouverture' (dédicace) has for its subject the death of the gods who are now replaced in Man's esteem by his own progress:

Mais nous replanterons l'arbre des Libertés;
Il s'épanouira dans la cité-nouvelle;
Ses futures splendeurs, que l'aube nous révèle,
Baigneront ses rameaux d'éternelles clartés. (183)

It is fair to say that the influence of Hugo is detectable in both the tone and the content of the extracts already given. The second book of the collection is dedicated to Hugo in the most flattering terms. The poet maintains that he himself cannot lavish sufficient praise on Hugo and he therefore calls upon his Muse for assistance. The poem 'L'Esprit' (184), which is included in Book II, typifies one aspect of the poetry of progress, viz. its 'non-involvement'. The poet is contemplating the city from a hill high above it and meditates upon the impurity and vile passions of some of its inhabitants. Progress is a movement to be controlled by an elite of which the poet is always a key member. This 'odi profanum vulgus' attitude is certainly, to some extent, a consequence of Ricard's association with the Parnasse. The poem 'Les Deux Pôles' (185) sets the artist and men of vision as beings apart; several of the poems particularly

(181) The first book of the collection is dedicated to Edgar Quinet as the prophet of a new future and a striver after liberty. Although generally pessimistic the Parnassians were not consistent disbelievers in progress; Ménard, for example, seems to have hoped for a growth of universal harmony.

(182) Ciel, Rue et Foyer, p.1.

(183) Ibid., p.5.

(184) Ibid., pp. 59-66.

(185) Ibid., pp. 10-16.

in the first book also show the influence of the Parnasse on Ricard's spelling:

'Aphrodite Anadyomene', 'Okeanos', for example.

Ricard's poetry is worth examining because it highlights the differences between the poetry of contemporary reality, prophétant dit, and the poetry of progress. The latter is filled with vague generalised references and allusions; all specific reference is avoided. A poem like 'L'Esprit' does not concern itself with the poet's immediate experiences or with concrete reality but is a statement, in the best rhetoric he can muster, of the poet's 'partis pris'. Only one poem in the entire collection, in our opinion, derives its inspiration from actual experience of contemporary reality and this poem, 'Les Chats' (186) shows the beneficial influence of Gautier and Baudelaire. The subject of the poem is simple, the poet is reminded of his sexual desires by some cats:

Vite, j'allume une lumière,
J'ouvre ma fenêtre; j'attends...
Ces cris partaient de la gouttière
Où les chats prenaient du bon temps.

Ricard himself summarises well his own aesthetic ideas and notably his reluctance to let modern subjects stand on their own:

Pour marier le moderne, à l'antique
Sur l'idéal j'ai calqué mes dessins.... (187)

The poet of contemporary reality, whether he enthuses over it or loathes it is always involved in it. The distinction between this type of poet and the poet of progress with his futuristic vision is clear and important and one which has been sometimes overlooked by poets and critics alike, both in the nineteenth century and since.

* * * * *

(186) Ibid., p.126. The third book, in which this poem is found, is dedicated to Gautier.

(187) Ibid., p.109, ('A Théophile Gautier').

Sully-Prudhomme's earlier poetry contained many optimistic references to technological progress. In 'La Roue' (188) he praised the inventor of the wheel but his real purpose is to allude to the tremendous advances made in his own lifetime:

Mais que la roue aux chars d'Olympie était lente!
Regarde-la qui vibre et ruit, toute brûlante
D'une rapidité que tu n'inventas pas!

One of the keys to a new age of peace and cooperation would be rapid communication (ironically it was fully exploited by the Prussians for military purposes in 1870).

'Dans l'Abîme' (189) celebrated the installation of undersea cables, one of Du Camp's themes:

C'est là qu'immense et lourd, loin de l'assaut des ondes,
Une câble, un pont jeté pour l'âme entre deux mondes,
Repose en un lit d'algue et de sable nacré;

Car la foudre qu'hier l'homme aux cieux alla prendre,
Il la fait maintenant au fond des mers descendre.
Messagere asservie à son verbe sacré.

In the light of Sully-Prudhomme's positivism it is not surprising to find that, for him, photography was to be preferred to painting for its accuracy and authenticity. 'Réalisme' (190) in its very title provides interesting support for the theory that realism as a symbolistic mode in all the arts may have owed a great deal to the example of photography. His demotion of 'realistic' painting also supports the theory that the Impressionists, who were themselves largely positivist in outlook, strove to find a kind of accuracy (what we have called elsewhere 'physiological subjectivity') which could not be reproduced in photography. At times Sully-Prudhomme's need to believe in the future was almost desperate. His attitude to science reveals an undercurrent of fear and pessimism which was gradually to dominate his work:

Ô savant curieux, mais dur, qui soulevas
Les langes chauds encor de la vive Nature,
Prouve au moins l'Idéal, si tu ne le sens pas! (191)

(188) Les Épreuves, 1866.

(189) Ibid.

(190) Ibid.

(191) Ibid.

Faith in progress was not something the poets after 1870 found easy to jettison. Richepin put the point succinctly:

Beau ciel en qui je n'ai pas de foi, ciel de progrès,
Souvent je sens en moi sourdre un désir de suivre
Ceux qui marchent vers toi, qui te disent tout près,
Et j'ai beau m'assurer que ton aube est menteuse,
Si je ne m'y rends pas, ce n'est pas sans regrets.

(192)

Rimbaud, as we have suggested in the two previous sections, was especially ambivalent in this regard. Naturally, the decline in the idea of progress is not to be attributed specifically to the events of 1870-71 (curiously it, like the technological age generally, recovered some of its prestige in the period from the 1890s until the First World War). The technological age had resulted in disillusionment on several counts. If on the one hand, the worst injustices and exploitations of the industrial revolution were over by 1870, on the other there was little sign of the spread and uniformity of prosperity that the social utopians had hoped would be a consequence of economic expansion and particularly the introduction of mass production methods. Urban growth may have meant increased excitement and opportunity for the city-dweller, but it brought unsightly, ill-planned housing, the depopulation of the countryside and a feeling of disorientation for those, like Baudelaire, who had loved Paris before the rebuilding programmes began under Napoleon III. The individual began to feel dwarfed by mechanical inventions and by the crowd and also by a rapidly expanding bureaucracy. Finally, the beginnings of the modern consumer society were marked by what seemed to be a deterioration in taste and the appreciation of art. Demand was large and there were the means to satisfy it - but what was produced was produced was shabby, unoriginal, artificial. The examination of 'Ce qu'on dit au poète' showed something of the impact of such a society upon a sensitive and idealistic personality through Rimbaud's catalogue of modern crassness. Perhaps it was such a mood which led to a new edition of Auguste Barbier's poems in 1872 for his poetry had consistently expressed scepticism at some of the benefits of the industrial society.

(192) La Mer .

If Barbier has come perilously close to losing the immortality that Baudelaire was sure was his (193), it remains true that he was a poet of considerable stature and that some of his modernist poems are not only superior to those of his contemporaries but even to some of the work produced in the 1870s and 1880s.

For Barbier modern industry had more than gimmick value; it also offered more than a fresh field in which to exercise oratorical powers of description - though the content of the poems is largely descriptive. His poetry is politically motivated; it is redolent of Saint-Simonist humanitarianism and it provides some of the most powerful examples of politically motivated verse in the century. Barbier had shown that he was more than a success-hungry poet in search of novelty in his early political satires where, incidentally, he had already demonstrated his preoccupation with industrial problems. In the collection Lazare, published as long ago as 1837, he had devoted all his energies to portraying the results of the Industrial Revolution in England and Ireland. One poem 'La lyre d'airain', if a trifle overstated, nevertheless contains some remarkable descriptive writing; moreover the poet succeeds in conveying some of the misery consequent upon industrialisation by the attributes he gives the machines rather than by straightforward social pamphleteering (though he not infrequently resorts to this also):

Et le bruit des métiers de plus fort recommence,
Et chaque lourd piston dans la chaudière immense,
Comme les deux talons d'un fort géant qui danse,
S'enfonce et se relève avec un sourd fracas.
Les leviers ébranlés entre-choquent leurs bras,
Les rouets étourdis, les bobines actives,
Lancent leurs cris aigus, et les clameurs plaintives,
Les humaines chansons, plus cuisantes, plus vives,
Se perdent au milieu de ce sombre chaos,
Comme un cru de détresse au vaste sein des flots. (194)

By the careful choice of adjectives and similes, by the combination of technical terms (such as 'métiers, pistons, chaudières, bobines, rouages, crampons' and 'rouets') with appropriate verbs, Barbier succeeds, in this poem, in conveying all the noise and oppressive power of a factory at the height of the Industrial Revolution. This kind of realism in poetry was shocking in its

(193) Sur mes contemporains, II, Auguste Barbier, 'Pleiade' O.C., p.714

(194) Reprinted in Lambes et poèmes, E. Dentu, 1872.

originality and was heavily criticised by the famous Gustave Planche in the Revue des Deux Mondes (195), where he attacked it for being too detailed and technical; such poetry he claims 'se condamne à la sécheresse ou à l'obscurité'. Planche supported his criticism with a statement of the classical doctrine of non-particularisation: 'S'il est permis à la poésie d'introduire dans ses tableaux le mouvement de l'industrie, c'est à la condition de négliger les détails pour ne montrer que les résultats généraux.' In retrospect we see that it is precisely this use of detailed descriptive elements that accounts for whatever vigour, picturesqueness and originality a poem like 'la lyre d'airain' possesses. In Barbier's bold innovations and Planche's criticism we have already an intuition of the great conflict between the classical ideal of universality through the particular which is so striking a feature of nineteenth-century French poetry, and no less after 1870.

It has already been remarked that Barbier occasionally resorted to undisguised pamphleteering in his work and in these instances the interests of society, made in 'Les Mineurs de Newcastle' (196), not to neglect the real foundation of society - the workers. It was Barbier's sense of commitment which Baudelaire had singled out as the biggest failing in his poetry when he speaks of 'la plus monstrueuse, la plus ridicule et la plus insoutenable des erreurs, à savoir que le but de la poésie est de répandre les lumières parmi le peuple....' (197), a criticism all the more biting because it was an error which the poet of Les Fleurs du Mal had, for a period, made himself (198). Baudelaire also criticises Barbier for having celebrated the lightning-conductor and automatic loom in his verse. However, it is surely not ridiculous to see some connection between Barbier's concern with reality as it was and his relatively unrhetorical manner of 'celebrating' or describing scientific and industrial phenomena and those qualities which, according to Baudelaire, transcended the shortcomings of his poetry:

(195) Vol. II, 1837.

(196) In Lazare.

(197) 'Pléiade' O.C., p.717.

(198) In 1851 Baudelaire had said that 'l'art fut désormais inséparable de la morale et de l'utilité'. The remarks on Barbier date from 1859. ('Pléiade' O.C. p.1674).

A travers tout son oeuvre nous retrouvons les mêmes défauts et les mêmes qualités. Tout a l'air soudain, spontané; le trait vigoureux,..... jaillit sans cesse à travers les défaillances et les maladresses.

In poems like 'La lyre d'airain' Barbier had shown that it was possible to write good poetry that made use of contemporary matter. (199)

One of Rimbaud's most beautiful poems 'Bonne Pensée du Matin' seems to be an exquisite reformulation of the old vision of those poets who, like Barbier, took their inspiration from the social utopians. That the 'bonne pensée' in question was meant to be taken at face value is clear from the citation of the poem in that catalogue of disillusionment 'Alchimie du Verbe'. Although the poem appears to make allusions to the eighteenth-century pastoral tradition and to the New Testament it does not have the irony usually associated with Rimbaud's cultural references and parodies. It has been customary to compare the fifth paragraph of Rimbaud's famous letter to Delahaye of June 1872 with the 'dawn' poems. This is entirely appropriate in the case of 'Bonne Pensée du Matin' and has rightly led to the assumption that the poem is basically an evocation of dawn in Paris. The poem opens with what could be a description of the aftermath of nocturnal revelry, generally, being cleansed by the coming of dawn or of Rimbaud's own activities. The letter to Delahaye talks of working through the

(199) Barbier's poetry is also of interest for the proven influence it had on the work of the author of Les Fleurs du Mal. The latter's not inconsiderable attention to the works of Barbier is more than a reflection of a common interest in modernity or of Baudelaire's flirtation with utilitarian art. For all that Baudelaire criticised the technical weakness of some of Barbier's verse, Yves-Gérard Le Dantec has demonstrated beyond question, in his article 'Baudelaire et Barbier', that he was nevertheless so imbued with the verse contained in Lambes et Poèmes as to show many precise recollections of lines by Barbier in the composition of Les Fleurs du Mal. There are about forty identifiable reminiscences of the poetry of Barbier in the latter volume, occurring in such famous poems as 'Femmes damnées', 'Le Crépuscule du Soir', 'Le Soleil', 'Le Vin des chiffonniers', 'A une Mendiante rousse', 'Spleen', 'La Muse malade', 'Le Jeu', 'Les Sept Vieillards', 'La Cloche fêlée', 'Un Voyage à Cythere', 'Au Lecteur', 'Paysage', 'Les Petites Vieilles' and 'Le Couvercle'. Thus Baudelaire's 'debt' to Barbier already visible in the interest in modernity, and in particular in the urban poor, extends into the realm of imagery and form itself, supporting the theory that the poet may even have learnt something from his elder of the value of the enthusiastic treatment of a subject even when this led to the relative neglect of poetic technique.

night so the first interpretation is the likelier. There is a contrast between those who have enjoyed the 'soir fête', and the 'charpentiers' beginning their day's work. Yet the expression 'sommeil d'amour' is almost too gentle to interpret this as a contrast between the debauchery of the rich and the honest toil of the labouring classes. Nor is the 'l'odeur du soir fête' necessarily unpleasant - it could be the smell of perfume and wine. The contrast appears, therefore, to be without bitterness or condemnation - in keeping with a 'bonne pensée'. (In any event Rimbaud must himself, on many occasions, have been a participant in 'soirs fêtes' of a kind!) The second stanza introduces the poet's idealised vision of the workers already busying themselves in their shirtsleeves in the 'immense chantier' which is the modern city. The expression 'le soleil des Hespérides' has caused some consternation among the critics. The garden of the Hesperides was held to be beyond the Atlas mountains on the very western fringe of the world. This image does not at first sight seem to accord well with a poem about sunrise. Décaudin's explanation (quoted by Suzanne Bernard) of the image as a symbolic reference to the golden apples is insufficient. A fuller explanation might be made along the following lines. As one might expect the poet readily makes the association between contented virile labour and pagan values. This has led him to think of the labours of Heracles. The twelfth labour was seen even in classical times as a symbol of the triumph of life over death and of day over night. In the oldest tradition (represented by Hesiod) the Hesperides were, indeed, the daughters of Nox and Erebus (one of the gods of the underworld). Rimbaud might well have been further encouraged along this thought process by a possible knowledge of the 'meteorological' interpretation of myths being made by the Parnassians. Thus Rimbaud was renewing a myth which was all along related to the triumph of day over night. Heracles's seizure of the golden apples as the symbols of the life-force would be a singularly appropriate cultural allusion in a poem celebrating the union of labour with dawn. There is certainly no confusion on Rimbaud's part; he was a much better classicist than most of his commentators. This does not mean that he did not also value 'Hesperides' for its evocative

'musical' quality - like 'Babylone' in the fourth stanza. One of the most difficult images, occurring at the very beginning of the third stanza, has to the present writer's knowledge been passed over in silence by previous commentators: 'désert' refers both to the fact that there are few people about at such an early hour, apart from the workers, and to the dust and sawdust of the 'chantier'. Suitably for a desert it is drenched in sunlight like the 'petit val qui mousse de rayons' in 'Le Dormeur du Val'. If the fêtards of the first stanza have their rewards, so too do the workers; but theirs is more precious, for it is peace of mind. The references to the artificiality of the décor of luxurious apartments are another contribution to the vaguely eighteenth-century flavour of the poem. (The art and artifacts of the eighteenth-century were very much in fashion in the 1860s and 1870s and many imitations were produced by craftsmen and even painters). They also invite a contrast with the vigorous 'natural' existence of the carpenters. In the fourth stanza the workers are described as 'charmants', the kind of adjective one might have expected from a condescending pastoral poet. But it is unlikely that Rimbaud is being sarcastic. The workers are once again associated with pagan (if not classical) antiquity by being seen as 'sujets d'un roi de Babylone'. Apart from its evocative value this unexpected word may well have further significance here. The Babylonian empire was renowned for its ruthlessness, its demands upon its workers. Modern industrial society is perhaps just as demanding of its subjects. The public awareness of the great Babylonian monuments through recent archaeological discoveries led to a popular use of the adjective 'babylonien' in this period to describe constructions built on an enormous and impressive scale. It is interesting to note that Verlaine applies the adjective to the awe-inspiring products of the technological age. The iron bridges of London were described by him as 'véritablement babyloniens, avec des centaines de piles en fonte, grosses et hautes...' (200) Modern society can come close to being an overbearing tyrant even if the worker has the reward of participating in its colossal achievements.

(200) Correspondance, I, p. 42.

Thus the carpenters are in need of gentleness and refreshment as compensation for the effort of their labours. The poet calls upon Venus to turn her attentions from the lovers alluded to in the first stanza (their hearts are so entwined that they no longer have need of her assistance) to the workers. Venus is competent for this task since she is used to caring for workers (shepherds) in the pastoral setting (where they are equated with lovers) as the poet indicates in the final stanza. The morning eau-de-vie may well recall certain New Testament phrases as Suzanne Bernard suggests (as also 'Reine des Bergers' may be an echo of some of the litanies of the Blessed Virgin Mary). 'Bonne Pensée du Matin' is contemporary with 'Comédie de la Soif' in which the references to 'Bitter' and 'Absinthe' may well provide an explanation of the enigmatic ~~lost~~ livre; 'le bain dans la mer', it has been suggested by Yves Denis (201) may be a pun ('le bain dans l'amer') referring to lunchtime liqueurs such as curacao. This is a compelling interpretation. It should not, however, lead us to undervalue the beauty of the pagan/nature associations of the line as it stands. It is entirely in keeping with this idyllic vision of the life of workers which might be compared to certain paintings by the Pre-Raphaelites.

The poem in Rimbaud's oeuvre which makes most extensive reference to the industrial age is probably 'Ce qu'on dit au poète...' which has already been examined. There are many other references, however, from the verse poems right through to the Illuminations and Une Saison en Enfer. 'Le Mal' and 'Le Bateau ivre' both make allusions to the application of modern technology to warfare:

Tandis que les crachats rouges de la mitraille
Sifflent tout le jour.....

Moi dont les Monitors.....

Modern weapons are mentioned in 'Les Machines de Jeanne-Marie' and 'L'Éclatante Victoire de Sarrebruck':

(201) "Le bain dans la mer à midi", les Temps Modernes, May 1969, pp.2067-2074. Referred to by A. Adam in Rimbaud, Oeuvres Complètes, p. 932. One should not forget, however, the delight with which Rimbaud pictured bathing in the sea; c.f. the letter to Izambard of 12 July, 1871:

'Vous prenez des bains de mer, vous avez été en bateau...je vous jalouse, moi qui étouffe ici'.

Sur le bronze des mitrailleuses.....

A droite Dumanet appuyé sur la crosse
De son chassepot.....

These references to the least commendable aspects of the industrial age are indicative of the basic attitude found in the verse poems. With the exception of a few instances of obvious fascination with railway travel and awe in the face of the modern city this attitude is usually hostile. In 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie' the poet speaks of factory conditions (although as we have suggested above this may be, in part, semi-parody of social Romantic poetry):

Ce ne sont pas mains de cousine
Ni d'ouvrières aux gros fronts
Que brûle, aux bois puant l'usine
Un soleil ivre de goudrons.

In the same poem machines are seen as essentially destructive:

Ce sont des ployeuses d'échines,
Des mains qui ne font jamais mal,
Plus fatales que des machines....

'Qu'est ce pour nous, mon coeur....' makes special mention of 'Industriels' as part of the society which he dreams is being swept away in a nihilistic revolution on a cosmic scale. It is probable that it is the modern industrial age that he has particularly in mind when he speaks of 'les laideurs de ce monde' in 'Soeurs de Charité'.

One of the motives behind the self-induced hallucinations described in Une Saison en Enfer seems to have been a desire for escape from, or metamorphosis of, the modern environment:

Je m'habituai à l'hallucination simple: je voyais très-
franchement une mosquée à la place d'une usine.... (202)

Despite this hostility the treatment of modern technology in Rimbaud's poetry is imbued with the same ambiguity as the treatment of society and science. The poet cannot entirely suppress a measure of enthusiasm and optimism:

Cet avenir sera matérialiste.....
(203)

(202) O.C., p.108

(203) Ibid., p. 252 (letter to Demeny, 15 May 1871).

Rimbaud was to be singularly well-placed for a poet who retained a hope in advance through technological progress. He had the chance to develop his ideas at first hand by being able to visit the foremost industrial society of his day on his trips to England. For those of us who find improbable the kind of arguments proposed by Antoine Adam for a very late dating of several of the Illuminations the best explanation of many of the 'modernist' references in the prose poems, which are mentioned in connection with this controversy, lies in seeing them in an English context. Such a view is encouraged by the further realisation that it was in England that Rimbaud came into personal contact with exiled progressistes associated with the Commune. It was at this time that Vermeesch was founding l'Avenir in London. England presented to Rimbaud the whole gamut of the effects of the industrial age: a dazzling technological achievement which went hand in hand with grime and smoke of which the interlacing overground and underground railways of London were an astonishing example, immortalised by Doré. Side by side with the mechanical gadgetry and pyrotechnic displays of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham or the great exhibition buildings in London in South Kensington (204) (something which is retained in the present-day museum complex, especially the science museum) the poet would have observed the disproportion of wealth so evident in nineteenth-century London and the effects of the availability of cheap alcohol upon the working classes. This opposition of technological achievement and squalor (reminiscent of some developing countries in the twentieth century) corresponds very closely to the ambiguity in Rimbaud's poetry discussed above. The impact of his sojourns in England is especially evident in poems treating the modern city and modern travel. These will be examined in the sections which follow.

Verlaine made at least one important contribution to the poetry of the industrial age after 1870.

'Charleroi' contrasts sharply with the other Paysages belges in that it conveys an unpleasant sensation of drabness and ugliness. The poet shows little

(204) The present writer's grandmother was never able to forget the variety of moving (mechanical) displays on show both at the permanent and occasional exhibitions and compared them to the Festival of Britain.

sympathy for the achievements of the industrial age. Indeed like many other poets of modern life Verlaine's attitude is, at times, one of hearty disapproval. This is one of Verlaine's most direct and revolutionary poems, yet it contains two 'learned' allusions which may surprise the reader. The allusions in question are 'Les Kobolds' and 'des sistres'. How does one account for the use of such terms in a modern, impressionistic poem? First one has to admit that Verlaine's break with the past is never a total one; it remained easy for him to assume the role of poet-scholar or poet-dilettante, particularly if we bear in mind the example set by his Parnassian contemporaries. In any event Baudelaire had combined the utterly modern with cultural allusion and the same technique is found in Corbière, Rimbaud and Laforgue. In actual fact the use of these terms, though at first sight detrimental to the direct impact of the poem, makes a marked contribution to the atmosphere created. Both terms are taken from cultures alien to the nineteenth-century Frenchman. 'Les Kobolds', the spirits said in German mythology to guard underground treasures, have dark and eerie associations (because they come from below the ground) and these together with the unfamiliarity of the word give an unpleasant ring to the term. 'Des sistres' (205) are associated with the civilisation of ancient Egypt - a culture that many Europeans find vaguely sinister (Verlaine himself rhymes 'sistre' with 'sinistres') because of its remoteness, the obsession with mummification, and perhaps simply because their contact with it usually takes place in the gloomy vaults of museums. Thus, although the precise impact of these terms will vary from one reader to another, it seems probable that in most cases they suggest the malevolence and the awe-inspiring quality of the atmosphere and particularly the noises of Charleroi.

The first stanza which is repeated as a conclusion sets the tone for the whole poem. In it are found the notions of ugliness and desolation ('l'herbe noire'), of the presence of evil spirits ('Les Kobolds') and of the resultant anguish ('le vent profond pleure'). Verlaine seeks to formulate the peculiar feelings aroused in him by two sense impressions, one visual and one aural (the colour of (205) The sistrum was a jingling instrument or rattle used commonly in the rites of Isis.

the grass and the moaning of the wind respectively). These sense impressions combine in such a way as to cause the poet to imagine the malevolent spirits roaming in the discoloured grass that surround the mine shaft of Charleroi. It is as though a poet evoking the atmosphere of the Durham pits were to utilise the legend of the Lambton Worm, but in its original terrifying aspect not as the object of humour it has become.

The rest of the poem consists of a series of impressions which rely on their juxtaposition alone for order, no attempt being made to furnish any 'logical' connection between them. The succession is so swift that the poet does not have time to impose any order on them nor fully to grasp their significance. Thus he asks a series of questions: 'Quoi donc se sent?', 'on sent donc quoi?', 'Où Charleroi?', 'Qu'est-ce que c'est?', 'Quoi bruissait..?' Thus we are presented with the seemingly direct expression of 'sensations brutes' or, at least, this is almost the case; for it is true that Verlaine finds time to make comparisons: e.g. 'Plutôt des bouges/Que des maisons' and 'Quoi bruissait/comme des sistres?'. The first of these comparisons, however, could certainly be almost instantaneous, the second is, as we have seen, highly effective and may even represent the poet's actual thought processes at the time of the original impression. (206)

The presence of modern industry and its unpleasant consequences is evident in this stream of impressions: 'l'herbe noire', 'Plutôt des bouges que des maisons', 'horizons de forges rouges', 'Des gares tonnent', 'Parfums sinistres', 'Sites brutaux', 'Cris des métaux'. These take their place alongside impressions of nature and perhaps derive additional impact from the contrast: 'Le vent profond pleure', 'L'avoine siffle./Une buisson gifle/L'oeil au passant'. The overall impression is one of suffocating grime and ugliness. Having said this we must ask ourselves the question - who is being 'suffocated'? Is it just the poet? Almost certainly not. In fact Verlaine seems to have incorporated into this seemingly spontaneous and instantaneous poem a social message. This is done so unobtrusively as to be in no way detrimental to the other qualities of the poem. Indeed this hint of a

(206) The human mind, as the Surrealists emphasised, is capable of furnishing the most astonishing analogies without any conscious effort - a process already grasped by Baudelaire, though he, like most great poets, put much stress on the selection that was necessary.

social message is all the more penetrating because it is part and parcel of the series of vivid impressions. First we note the sense of anguish in 'le vent profond pleure'; the wind can be regarded as representative of nature, freshness and freedom of movement in the poem. Second there is the judgement implicit in the description of the workers' homes as 'bouges' rather than 'maisons'. Finally there are the questions asked in the fifth stanza and the reply to them in the sixth: what are the 'parfums sinistres' and the strange unexpected noise? They are in fact the 'haleine' of the 'sites brutaux' which is the fumes that come forth from them and the sweat of the men that labour in them, and what the poet calls the 'cris des métaux'. The adjective 'brutaux' is a highly coloured one and suggests that these places are not fit for human work with all their terrible sweat and turmoil.

Thus it is that, somewhat surprisingly, Verlaine has combined in this poem the social message of an early industrial poet like Barbier and a brilliant new impressionistic technique that takes no account of the old rhetoric. This technique will be further discussed in Part Two, Chapter Four.

* * * * *

The two faces of technological progress thus continued to haunt the poets after 1870. The attainment of utopia through human progress was a dream which died hard (207). If the less pleasant consequences of industrial advance received less attention than they had from the Romantic poets they are still a notable theme in the work of even major poets like Rimbaud and Verlaine. Moreover, certain specific aspects of the industrial age remained extremely important and these are the subject of the two sections which follow.

(207) Much of the ambiguity in Rimbaud's position is, naturally, to be related to the dichotomy between progressiste ideas and his primitivist reaction to 'decadence'.

(d)

Speed and Travel

There is little doubt that of all the material results of the technological revolution of the nineteenth century the one which most aroused the wonder of the general public and of artists alike was the possibility of fast travel primarily by train or steamship. The changes, of which this innovation was a part, were as rapid as they were dramatic - occurring in the space of a single lifetime.

Raymond Cogniat has referred to them in connection with Monet:

In 1840 the modern world was still in its infancy. Men lived in physical conditions and at a tempo that had scarcely changed since antiquity. Railways were just being introduced, and the gallop of horses was as common as it had been in Roman times. Houses and town plans continued to obey time-honoured norms; peasants followed the monotonous rounds imposed by the change of the seasons. Only on the material plane did the recent application of the energy supplied by the steam engine begin to give a new impetus to industry and to effect a transformation of the means of production. Electricity, however, was still far from entering into everyday life ...

When Monet came into the world nothing had changed in essence, but everything was prepared for change. When Monet died he had lived long enough to see the whole past fall away, engulfed by a world that was completely new. Whether he wished it or not, his art was inextricably linked to a transformation that was nothing less than a metamorphosis. (208)

This was perhaps the first age to have a true awareness of 'speed' as that term is now conceived. (209) The very newness of the concept necessitated an extension of the traditional poetic language, or at least it ought to have done. 'La Maison du Berger'

(208) Monet and his world, pp. 5-6. Paul Ginestier has elaborated on the impact of 'speed' in Le Poète et la Machine.

(209) See P. Rousseau, Histoire de la Vitesse.

was a fine didactic poem with passages of great beauty but in parts it ^{had} remained the archetypal example of the consequences of the failure to adapt poetry to new subjects and, incidentally by that very fact, an excellent indication of the newness of this particular concept. Vigny shows his distaste for contemporary industrial developments in the poem. The poet's reactions to industrial society are scorn and the desire to escape. He picks the railways as the symbol of over-developed technology and of capitalism. The sections of the poem dealing with the railway are notable for what now appears as the appalling clumsiness of the description of the locomotive:

Que Dieu guide à son but la vapeur foudroyante
 Sur le fer des chemins qui traversent les monts,
 Qu'un Ange soit debout sur sa forge bruyante,
 Quand elle va sous terre ou fait trembler les ponts
 Et, de ses dents de feu dévorant ses chaudières,
 Transperce les cités et saute les rivières,
 Plus vite que le cerf dans l'ardeur de ses bonds! ...

Sur ce taureau de fer qui fume, souffle et beugle,
 L'homme a monté trop tôt. Nul ne connaît encor
 Quels orages en lui porte ce rude aveugle,
 Et le gai voyageur lui livre son trésor;
 Son vieux père et ses fils, il les jette en otage
 Dans le ventre brûlant du taureau de Carthage,
 Qui les rejette en cendre aux pieds du Dieu de l'or.

Mais il faut triompher du temps et de l'espace,
 Arriver ou mourir. Les marchands sont jaloux.
 L'or pleut sous les charbons de la vapeur qui passe,
 Le moment et le but sont l'univers pour nous.
 Tous se sont dit: "Allons!" mais aucun n'est le maître
 Du dragon mugissant qu'un savant a fait naître;
 Nous nous sommes joués à plus fort que nous tous.

These extracts serve as a ready example of the incongruity which results from the use of traditional poetic resources in the treatment of contemporary subjects. Vigny is almost reduced to the 'iron horse' periphrases of the conventional Hollywood Red Indian. 'Le Taureau de fer qui fume, souffle et beugle', 'le ventre brûlant du taureau de Carthage' and the 'dragon mugissant' are awkward enough but 'plus vite que le cerf dans l'ardeur de ses bonds' is a totally inappropriate and inadequate use of a stock expression. Vigny had fallen foul of the existing proprieties and conventions of French poetry.

It was the railway, despite this inauspicious beginning, which was to become the favourite symbol of technical modernity in both literature and art. One simple reason why it continued to fascinate both painters and poets after 1870 was that impressions of a train journey or the sight of railways in the French countryside were still a relatively fresh subject since the main expansion of the French railways had only occurred under the Second Empire. It is interesting in this respect to compare Baudelaire's poetry. There the noise and bustle of Parisian traffic is evoked but there is not a single reference to the railway. As an aspect of everyday modern life affecting ordinary Frenchmen the railway was still something of a novelty in 1870. It is only at about this date that it ceased to become the object of heavy-handed periphrasis and allegory that it had often been in the work of the Romantics. Nevertheless it frequently retained a symbolic function but this function now seemed to spring more naturally from an established place in the fabric of modern life rather than to constitute the prime element in a futuristic vision. This function often involved the identification of this aspect of progress with transitory reality:

Les conflits du feu des locomotives, des fumées des trains et des paquebots avec les nuages, dont Monet, Pissarro et Sisley avait perçu la vision sur la Tamise, le pont de Charing Cross ou dans l'oeuvre de Turner, serviront le thème de l'heure fugitive impressionniste. Le chemin de fer a remplacé carrosses, cochers et diligences. C'est grâce à lui que la banlieue a été si bien découverte dans la fragilité de ses villas, la rapidité des dimanches ensoleillés et des joyeuses parties éphémères. La fumée des trains devient presque un symbole. Elle signifie ... l'élément le plus fugace qui soit pour exprimer la notion de l'instant. (210)

It is important to remember that even before the period under special scrutiny in this thesis the attitude towards speed and modern

(210) Raynal, Leymairie and Read, De Baudelaire à Bonnard, p. 29.

travel had not been uniformly hostile. Indeed the majority of poets who treated the subject from the 1830s onwards belonged to the camp of the optimists who heralded such things as the railway as the sign and token of the inevitability of human progress. As early as 1833 Nisard had been moved to refer to the phenomenon with his customary acid wit:

A cette heure toute poésie est sur la proue
des bateaux à vapeur et sur les rails des chemins
de fer. (211)

As the century wore on an increasing number of poets and writers took up the theme of modern transport including not only Vigny, as we have seen, but Musset, Gautier, Laprade, Du Camp, Barillot, Pommier, Barthélemy and Houssaye. (212) There was some oscillation between those who might be counted among the optimists and those who saw the march of technology, epitomised by fast methods of travel, as a threat to civilisation. Du Camp and Laprade both began as progressistes but later went over to the 'other side'.

Even the one major post-Romantic poet of the nineteenth century who has more in common with the poetic hermeticism, later associated with Mallarmé, than with the 'movement' examined in our study, was nevertheless fascinated with travel and its means. One critic has remarked that travel for Nerval was a suspension of the normal laws of time and that it enabled him to enter into the 'univers de sensations immédiates'. (213)

- (211) Mélanges, I, p. 370. Other critics involved in the fray were Veuillot who saw technology as a dangerous challenge to Catholicism, and at the other extreme Janin who enthused over the railway.
- (212) Houssaye's condemnation of the railways is to be compared to Pio Nono's dictum cited above (p. 202): 'Lits de fers! Chemins de fer! Age de fer ... Cercueils de fer' (in L'Artiste, 1840, p. 429).
- (213) R. Jean, Nerval par lui-même, p. 101.

Sometimes this interest took very specific form. 'Le réveil en voiture'

(214) is an interesting experiment in conveying the confusion of the mind and senses on a journey spoilt only by the party-piece ending.

Voici ce que je vis: Les arbres sur ma route
Fuyaient mêlés, ainsi qu'une armée en déroute
Et sous moi, comme ému par les vents soulevés,
Le sol roulait des flots de glèbe et de pavés!

Des clochers conduisaient parmi les plaines vertes
Leurs hameaux aux maisons de plâtre recouvertes
En tuiles, qui trottaient ainsi que des troupeaux
De moutons blancs, marqués en rouge sur le dos!

Et les monts enivrés chancelaient, - la rivière
Comme un serpent boa, sur la vallée entière
Etendu, s'élançait pour les entortiller ...
- J'étais en poste, moi, venant de m'éveiller!

The poem demonstrates Nerval's fascination with the bustle and constant movement of travel and modern life in general even though this be sometimes regretted as for instance in 'Le relais':

En voyage, on s'arrête, on descend de voiture;
Puis entre deux maisons on passe à l'aventure,
Des chevaux, de la route et des fouets étourdi,
L'oeil fatigué de voir et le corps engourdi.

Et voici tout à coup, silencieuse et verte,
Une vallée humide et de lilas couverte,
Un ruisseau qui murmure entre les peupliers, -
Et la route et le bruit sont bien vite oubliés!

On se couche dans l'herbe et l'on s'écoute vivre,
De l'odeur du foin vert à loisir on s'enivre,
Et sans penser à rien on regarde les cieux ...
Hélas! une voix crie: 'En voiture, messieurs!' (215)

As the foregoing examples suggest Nerval's rejection of contemporary reality was by no means as complete as has been supposed. In fact he was

(214) Poésies, p. 28. 'De Ramsgate à Anvers' (p.60) is another example of such a preoccupation though the poet's concern there is more with thoughts than with sensation.

(215) Ibid., p. 29.

a staunch advocate of the idea of progress, which he saw in practical terms. Paul Berret has related (216) that Nerval wrote the preface to Julien Turgan's Histoire des Ballons (217) where he boldly states his optimistic views on the future of Man, predicting what he considered to be the imminent conquest of the air (218).

For Hugo of course, as we have seen, the idea of progress was of paramount importance despite some hesitation in his early career. More often than not it was the railway which he selected as the symbol of this progress although reference was also made to balloon flights and to the steamship as well as to futuristic conceptions of aviation. Strangely, of the actual experience of travel there is little reflection in his work. Nor for that matter is he noticeably concerned with the impact of the new transport systems upon landscape or on lifestyles.

Although most poets after 1870 were more inclined towards Hugo's or Nerval's enthusiasm for modern travel than to Vigny's or Musset's pessimism (219) their attitude was not always one of approbation. Its

(216) In 'Comment Victor Hugo composa 'Plein Ciel'', Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France, IX, 1902, pp. 596-607.

(217) Published in 1851.

(218) Which he believed would be achieved by the Pétin system of balloon construction.

(219) Vigny was preoccupied with the dangers of rail travel as evidenced in the Bellevue disaster and which persuaded him to ~~describe~~ the invention as something so powerful that it could slip out of Man's grasp:

Nous nous sommes joués à plus fort que nous tous ...

('La Maison du Berger')

But, interestingly, he was dismayed at the prospect of fast travel in itself:

La distance et le temps sont vaincus. La Science
Trace autour de la terre un sentier triste et droit.
Le Monde est rétréci par notre expérience,

Et l'Equateur n'est plus qu'un anneau trop étroit ... (Ibid.)

Surprisingly, Musset may well have been the first French poet to mention the railway. In the fourth part of Rolla he attacks the Industrial Revolution and its spearhead the railway:

Tout est bien balayé sur vos chemins de fer,

Tout est grand, tout est beau, mais on meurt dans votre air ...

These lines were published barely a year after the introduction of the first locomotive in France on the Saint-Etienne to Lyon line.

treatment is often ambiguous. In Rollinat's poetry, for example, the railway is seen as a disruptive intrusion into the countryside (and as a reminder of the temptations of travel and, primarily, of the city now so close at hand):

Au loin, sur le chemin de fer,
Un train passe, gueule enflammée;
On dirait les chars de l'enfer
Au loin, sur le chemin de fer:
La locomotive, dans l'air,
Tord son panache de fumée! (220)

The idea is developed with deliberate simplicity in 'La Locomotive' (221) where the equestrian poet is put into a position to contrast the old rhythm of life with the new. His horse, which seemed fast as it goes by stationary objects, is in turn made to seem stationary by the sudden passage of a train:

- Et l'arbre fuit avec stupeur
Comme une ombre lente et furtive.
Dans la vespérale torpeur,
Je fouette ma jument rétive.

Soudain passe à toute vapeur
Une grande locomotive,
Si lumineuse et si plaintive
Que ma bête hennit de peur ...

Progress may bring light where there is darkness but darkness can cloak contentment. The dramatic appearance of the train is a challenge to the old ways, causing fear and restlessness; its plaintive sound may even be a tempting call to the poet. The temptation was heeded; in 'Le Touriste' (222) the poet treats himself as a tourist in his own native Berry:

-
- (220) 'Le Champ de chardons', Dans les Brandes.
(221) Ibid.
(222) Ibid.

Je chemine tout à mon aise,
Loin des fiacres et des calèches ...
Cher pays, comme tu m'allèches
Par tes rocs et ta terre glaise ! ...

Of course the various attitudes to means of travel often fluctuated with the very specific and changing circumstances of the individual poet rather than corresponded to profound and lasting convictions. This will be noted in connection with Rimbaud and Verlaine. The point is made half-humorously in Cros's 'Drame en Trois Ballades' where the railway is first the object of the poet's gratitude at a reunion with the beloved and then the basis of a remarkably concise evocation of the repulsive aspects of the modern world when the affair is broken off:

A toi, merci! chemin de fer,
J'étais seul; mais un soir d'ivresse,
Tu m'as tiré de cet enfer,
Car j'ai retrouvé ma maîtresse ...

Monde jaloux de ma vie embaumée,
Enfer d'engrais, de charbon et de cuir,
Je hais tes biens promis, sale fumée! ...
Pour ne penser qu'à toi, toujours, où fuir,
Ô ma maîtresse absolument aimée ?

Ambiguity of another kind is found in Cros's dizain entitled 'Tableau' where the poet appears to hover between dismay at the effect of the grime of the railway upon health and physical appearance and envy of what is nonetheless the contented existence of those who work for it. It treats a theme which occurs several times in the poetry of the period - the dream of other possible lives stimulated by scenes glimpsed from a train window:

Enclavé dans les rails, engraisé de scories,
Leur petit potager plaît à mes rêveries.
Le père est aiguilleur à la gare de Lyon.
Il fait honnêtement et sans rébellion
Son dur métier. Sa femme, hélas! qui serait blonde,
Sans le sombre glacis du charbon, le seconde.
Leur enfant, ange rose éclos dans cet enfer
Fait des petits châteaux avec du mâchefer.
A quinze ans il vendra des journaux, des cigares:
Peut-être le bonheur n'est-il que dans les gares.

The poem in Le Collier de griffes entitled 'Aux Imbéciles' is

remarkable for the threat of violence which simmers beneath the light, playful style. The position is that discussed in the opening section of the last chapter - of the poet neglected and victimised by unappreciative society. Travel is identified as a form of escape which ironically only the wealthy themselves can afford leaving the poet with another more radical response to social injustice:

... On devient très fin,
 Mais on meurt de faim,
 A jouer de la guitare,
 On n'est emporté,
 L'hiver ni l'été,
 Dans le train d'aucune gare.

Le chemin de fer
 Est vraiment trop cher.
 Le steamer fendeur de l'onde
 Est plus cher encor;
 Il faut beaucoup d'or
 Pour aller au bout du monde.

Donc, gens bien assis,
 Exempts de soucis,
 Méfiez-vous du poète,
 Qui peut, ayant faim,
 Vous mettre, à la fin,
 Quelques balles dans la tête.

As in the case of Rimbaud, Verlaine and other major poets, Cros introduced aspects of modern travel into the imagery of his poetry. In one instance this assumed allegorical proportions. In the aptly titled 'Effarement' rail travel becomes the dream-image of life itself, subject to laws of causality that the individual does not comprehend and in which in his own welfare may not play a part. The idea is so basic that there is no need to presuppose a debt to Mallarmé for the personification of causality as M. Igitur although this remains entirely possible. Despite the fantastic nature of the poet's vision elements of reality are much more distinct than, for example, in some of Rimbaud's Illuminations:

Au milieu de la nuit, un rêve. Une gare de chemin de fer. Des employés portant des caractères cabalistiques sur leurs casquettes administratives. Des wagons à claire-voie chargés de dames-jeannes en fer battu. Les brouettes ferrées roulent avec des colis qu'on arrime dans les voitures du train.

Une voix de sous-chef crie : La raison de M. Igitur, à destination de la lune! Un manoeuvre vient et appose une étiquette sur le colis désigné - une dame-jeanne semblable à celles des wagons à claire-voie. Et, après la pesée à la bascule, on embarque. Le coup de sifflet du départ résonne, aigu, vertigineux et prolongé.

Réveil subit. Le coup de sifflet se termine en miaulement de chat de gouttière. M. Igitur s'élance, crève la vitre et plonge son regard dans le bleu sombre où plane la face narquoise de la lune.

* * * * *

Speed and travel could find a place in poetry simply as a fully integrated part of modern life. Bourget's first volume of verse, La Vie Inquiète of 1874, is largely notable for the poet's reluctance to put into practice the ideas on modernism he was already at that time developing. The best pieces show the influence of other poets such as Heine, Tennyson, Shelley and Musset, but generally the landscape descriptions lack movement and the style is often hackneyed and clumsy. The few intrusions of modernity that the poet allows are amongst the most refreshing moments in the collection. One of these is the evocation of the fugitive impressions of a train journey in 'A Amedée P.':

Quand le wagon bruyant t'emportait vers Paris,
N'as-tu pas, mon ami, par le carreau, surpris
Quelquefois un recoin charmant de paysage,
Une maison perdue au milieu d'un feuillage ?

The basic theme of the collection, an adolescent love affair, is enlivened in 'Délicatesses' where social life and emotional difficulties are contrasted, in true Romantic fashion, with consolations offered by the sea - but it is the 'humanised' sea of the holiday resorts favoured by the demi-monde, not the wild untamed ocean:

Quand au Casino vous dansiez le soir,
Moi qui ne sais pas valser, la musique
Me faisait du mal; et, mélancolique,
Loin, bien loin de vous il fallait m'asseoir.

Là parmi les bruits, les jeux, la fumée,
 La mer me jetait son cri désolé,
 Et je me sentais si fort isolé,
 Que je ne vous ai jamais mieux aimée. (223)

Edel is a much more successful volume than La Vie Inquiète. This is true of almost all aspects of the poems including the authenticity of their modernism. The hubbub of city traffic is a part of the urban panorama which will be discussed in the next section. The mechanical inevitability and the speed of a parting in a modern setting are captured in the rhythm of these lines which after a brisk start, slow down to the 'speed' of melancholy reflection:

Le train partit. Je vis Edel à la fenêtre
 Pencher sa tête blanche et mince, et disparaître.
 Et la lourde rumeur du train s'évanouit,
 Lugubre, dans la grande épaisseur de la nuit. (224)

(223) This may serve as a reminder of the links between well-known Impressionist subjects and the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the new life-style. One of these is to be seen in the growing fashion of taking holidays by the sea and Sundays off by the river (see the discussion of Valabrègue's 'La Canotière' in Section (f)): the beach became a popular Impressionist subject, and the parasol a recurring motif:

Les plages sont une création du Second Empire, et notamment du duc de Morny, qui lança Deauville et Trouville. C'est à Trouville que les Goncourt conduisent les peintres de Manette Salomon (1866). Elles ont joué un rôle important dans la formation de l'impressionnisme, autour de Boudin et de Jongkind. Mais ... les jeunes peintres leur préférèrent les joies moins coûteuses et plus populaires du canotage et des guinguettes aux abords de Paris, dont la vogue naquit également vers les années 1870. Ces nouvelles habitudes de vie en plein air entraînèrent l'apparition, à la plage, à la promenade, au jardin, d'un charmant accessoire de la mode féminine, l'ombrelle, dont les impressionnistes surent tirer aussitôt le meilleur parti.

(De Baudelaire à Bonnard, p. 18.)

(224) Edel, (Poésies, II), p. 55.

Allusions to modern means of travel are to be found even in the work of figures closely associated with the Symbolist 'rejection' of the modern age. Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's 'Esquisse à la manière de Goya' (225) is cited with uncharacteristic inaccuracy by Suzanne Bernard (226) as a forerunner of Rimbaud's 'Rêvé pour l'hiver' (227). It is difficult to see why this poem should be mentioned in connection with Rimbaud's piece since the two have nothing in common except that they deal with trains. Whereas Rimbaud's non-declamatory poem is uniquely concerned with the 'interior' aspects of railway travel - the cosy intimacy of a train compartment - Villiers's poem is concerned with the locomotive as a symbol of technological progress. His 'Esquisse' is largely one more, rather late, example of the Romantic overblown, periphrastic treatment of the age of steam:

Admiron le colosse au torride gosier
Abreuvé d'eau bouillante et nourri de brasier,
Cheval de fer que l'homme dompte!

Rimbaud was just as likely to have been aware of the whole corpus of poetry accumulated since the 1830s in France on the subject of the locomotive as of Villiers's poem. In fact, Rimbaud's poem is of an altogether different tenor from almost any of these earlier evocations of the railway.

There is scarcely an original image in Villiers's 'Esquisse' which relies heavily, as did many poems of this genre, on allusions to

(225) Le Parnasse Contemporain, I, pp. 260-261.

(226) She gives the incorrect title 'Chemins de fer' which was, curiously, the title of an earlier version, as we shall note.

(227) See below, pp. 389-90, for a discussion of this poem.

classical mythology and on comparisons with animals. In particular it would seem to be heavily indebted to Hugo's 'Le Satyre'. The poem is a reworking of an earlier piece entitled 'Chemins de fer' published in 1863 in Le Publicateur des Côtes-du-Nord (228) which was much more optimistic. Of special note, amongst the stanzas and part-stanzas omitted from the 'definitive' version in Le Parnasse Contemporain, are, in this respect, the following lines:

Salut, machine obscure où vagit l'avenir!
 Dans l'immortalité qui va se définir,
 Tu portes la cause commune!
 O notre premier-né, conçu dans notre enfer,
 En avant! coursier noir! ... Sur ta croupe de fer
 Tu portes l'homme et sa fortune! ...
 Enfant de l'industrie aux seins gonflés et beaux,
 La meute de lions des grands siècles nouveaux
 Court sur les traces furibondes ...
 Et penchés sur la carte universelle - un jour,
 Nos fils demanderont, calmes et pleins d'amour,
 Ce que c'était que des frontières ...

More important still, and perhaps the only truly original moment in either version of the poem, is the opening stanza of the earlier version which Villiers completely excised from the version published in Le Parnasse. It is the earliest evocation in French poetry known to the present writer of railway stations. Villiers's motives for the suppression of the stanza are not difficult to guess, for more than any other part of the poem, it celebrates the wonder, the magic of the new age in which human progress may be worthy of worship. By 1866 he was already, in all probability, partly disillusioned. Even though it is obviously symbolic, even rhetorical, this description of the railway station has a genuine feeling of excitement about it which does bring it close to some of the poems of travel written by Verlaine, Rimbaud and, in the twentieth century, by poets like Nau, Larbaud, Cendrars and Carco:

La gare, sous le ciel épouvantable et sourd,
 Flamboie! Et c'est un temple en éveil nuit et jour;
 C'est un endroit magique et grave ...

Mallarmé himself had made an early contribution to the poetry of travel in the form of the prose poem 'La Pipe'. Although the poem had been written at Toulon in 1864 it was not published until 1868 in the Revue des Lettres et des Arts. The piece was not forgotten, either by Mallarmé himself or by his admirers, since it later appeared in 1872 in L'Art libre and in 1886 in La Décadence.

The basic theme of the poem is banal in the extreme - a separation which led to the end of a love affair (although a certain mystery is added by hints which may refer to the beloved's death : 'un manteau qui collait humide, à ses épaules froides') :

Je n'avais pas touché à la fidèle amie depuis ma rentrée en France...
Autour de son cou s'enroulait le terrible mouchoir qu'on agite en se disant adieu pour toujours.

However, within this framework, the poet succeeds remarkably in evoking a remembered atmosphere, that of London and of the cross-channel voyages made the previous winter. (His trip to England was the separation in question). It is the smell of travel, as befits a disciple of Baudelaire, which particularly fascinates the young poet :

.....Londres tel que je le vécus en entier à moi seul, il y a un an, est apparu; d'abord les chers brouillards qui emmitouflent nos cevelles et ont, là-bas, une odeur à eux, quand ils pénètrent sous la croisée. Mon tabac sentait une chambre sombre aux meubles de cuir saupoudrés par la poussière du charbon sur lesquels se roulait le maigre chat noir.....

But other sensations are also recalled with precision :

....les grands feux! et la bonne aux bras rouges versant les charbons, et le bruit de ces charbons tombant du seau de tôle dans la corbeille de fer, le matin - alors que le facteur frappait le double coup solennel qui me faisait vivre!

This is true of the description of the sea voyages in which the poet finds room for the hints at the beloved's death and for a comment on social inequality :

...j'ai vu le large, si souvent
traversé cet hiver-là, grelottant,
sur le pont du steamer mouillé
de bruine et noirci de fumée -
avec mon pauvre bien-aimée errante,
en habits de voyageuse, une longue
robe terne couleur de la poussière
des routes, en manteau qui collait
humide à ses épaules froides, un
de ces chapeaux de paille sans
plume et presque sans rubans, que
les riches dames jettent en
arrivant, tant ils sont
déchiquetés par l'air de la mer
et que les pauvres bien-aimées
regarnissent pour bien des saisons
encore.....

'La Pipe' is thus an anticipation of the travel poems of Verlaine and Rimbaud in that it evokes the peculiarly forlorn atmosphere in which the traveller sometimes finds himself immersed. The creation of this atmosphere more than compensates for the banal theme of separation. Laforgue was right when, in his letter of 13 May 1864 to Mallarmé, he wrote :
'...dans La Pipe vous donnez la sensation vraisemblable de Londres'.

* * * * *

Modern travel was an important theme in the work of Verlaine, Rimbaud and Corbière. One of Laforgue's finest poems 'Solo de Lune' (analysed in Part **Three**) is a formulation of the experiences of a night journey through industrial suburbs and open country.

* * * * *

It is often thought that the subject-matter of Verlaine's poetry is largely timeless : intimate personal relationships, the quest for God, spiritual remorse. We have already discussed a good many exceptions to this generalisation. His specific 'modernity' is nowhere clearer than in his allusions to travel. The influence of Rimbaud may be discounted here for one of the most startling and original references to railways occurs in La Bonne Chanson :

Le paysage dans le cadre des portières
Court furieusement, et des plaines entières
Avec de l'eau, des blés, des arbres et du ciel
Vont s'engouffrant parmi le tourbillon cruel
Où tombent les poteaux minces du télégraphe
Dont les fils ont l'allure étrange d'un paraphe.

Une odeur de charbon qui brûle et d'eau qui bout,
Tout le bruit que feraient mille chaînes au bout
Desquelles hurleraient mille géants qu'on fouette;
Et tout à coup des cris prolongés de chouette.
- Que me fait tout cela, puisque j'ai dans les yeux
La blanche vision qui fait mon coeur joyeux,
Puisque le Nom si beau, si noble et si sonore
Se mêle, pur pivot de tout ce tournoisement,
Au rythme du wagon brutal, suavement.

(229)

Thus the rhythm of a train journey which one feels in some of the Paysages belges was probably present in Verlaine's mind before he even met the younger poet. The theme of railways, railway stations, trains and travel recurs several times in Verlaine's poetry and probably constitutes the single largest group of modernist motifs. No doubt in this respect he shared the feeling of the Impressionist painters that the railways epitomised an age of modern technology and speed. More

(229) La Bonne Chanson, VII. Verlaine was probably the first poet in the world, almost certainly in France to evoke specifically, the sensations of a railway journey. In addition, he anticipated Laforgue by fifteen years in the introduction, sometimes attributed to the younger poet (e.g. by W. Ramsey, Jules Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance, p.37), of telegraph poles into the French poetic landscape.

specifically they had become a part of the poet's own rootless existence.

There is an even earlier reference to railway travel in Verlaine's poetry than La Bonne Chanson. Although not published until 1890, 'L'Ami de la Nature', was written in 1868 'au lendemain d'une excursion... faite dans les bouges de La Villette' and recited at Nina de Villard's salon where its modernism and originality were warmly appreciated (230). It is one of the earliest literary references to the growing habit, even amongst the less prosperous sections of the population, of weekend outings by train to the countryside :

Nous prenons un train de banlieu'
Qui nous brouette à quèques lieu's
Dans le vrai pays du p'tit bleu,
Car on n' boit pas toujours d' champagne
A la campagne

It thus anticipates those poems by Verlaine (and Rimbaud) which associate travel with excitement and pleasure rather than solitude and insecurity. 'Malines' written in August 1872, during the happiest phase of the relationship with Rimbaud recalls the younger poet's 'Rêvé pour l'hiver' (discussed below) although Verlaine's poem is much more substantial and ambitious. Railway travel is a means of achieving a new sensation of contentment : the pleasure of ~~see~~ing ever new scenery combined with the encapsulated comfort and intimacy of a train compartment. The speed of travel is not so great as to make one oblivious to detail, yet the succession of landscapes created a feeling of drifting into an almost magical state, into infinity, even eternity :

Vers les prés le vent cherche noise
Aux girouettes, détail fin
Du château de quelque échevin,
Rouge de brique et bleu d'ardoise,
Vers les prés clairs, les prés sans fin...

(230) Lepelletier, quoted in Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes, p. 1092.

Comme les arbres des féeries,
Des frênes, vagues frondaisons,
Echelonnement mille horizons
A ce Sahara de prairies,
Trèfle, Luzerne et blancs gazons.

This is to be compared to Rimbaud's 'cent Solognes longues comme un railway' (see below). This leads to a peculiarly modern version of pantheism, in which both nature and machines play a part, in the evocation of a privileged moment of peace and contentment :

Les wagons filent En silence
Parmi ces sites apaisés.
Dormez, les vaches! Réposez,
Doux taureaux de la pleine immense,
Sous vos cieux à peine irisés!

There is no doubt that 'Malines' would have been taken much more seriously as a poem had it ended with the third stanza. The fourth and final stanza shows a rather prosaic, self-contained awareness of the novelty of the subject; from a fine evocation of moods which would have been difficult to define in discursive language the reader is brought to a reflection on the 'civilised' character of rail travel :

Le train glisse sans un murmure,
Chaque wagon est un salon
Où l'on cause bas et d'où l'on
Aime à loisir cette nature
Fait à souhait pour Fénelon.

Yet this pleasure may well have been as important to Verlaine as anything else in the poem; indeed it may even have been from this mood of 'cosiness' that the poem developed. It is only to be regretted that it stands too much as an urbane and spiritual conclusion to the poem, in the manner of a good deal of minor poetry in the 1860s and 1870s. 'Walcourt' on the other hand raises not even this modest attempt to convey a message. It is restricted to the formulation of a mood of gaiety through the rocking rhythm of a train, which epitomises for the poet the life of travel and freedom and new experience :

Gares prochaines,
 Gais chemins grands....
 Quelles aubaines,
 Bons juifs-errants!

(231)

Even in recollection, and despite memories of the discomforts involved,
 one senses that this period of liberty remains exciting:

C'était voilà longtemps, environ quatre lustres,
 Deux voyageurs alors, ni l'un ni l'autre illustres,
 Riches, je crois que non,
 S'arrêtèrent dans un buffet dans une gare,
 Et ma foi, las et souls de toute la bagarre
 D'un train à bon marché,
 Burent sans trop compter, marcs, rhums, bitters, absinthes,
 Et dame! leur langage en paroles peu saintes
 S'était, las! épanché.....

(232)

There are a number of poems of little consequence, which may be related to those already examined in the present discussion since they reflect the frequently 'cosmopolitan' quality of modern existence. These are particularly descriptive pieces celebrating various places visited by the poet and include 'Fountain Court', 'Fog', 'Oxford', 'Souvenir de Manchester' and 'Rotterdam'. The latter has the merit of an association between atmospheric descriptive writing and the evocation of mood, a complexity usually missing from other pieces of this kind. In the recherche quality of this description ('un peu rose, telle une femme de luxure') and the 'diabolical' undertones ('Le train comme infernel et méchant...tant de terreurs de cieux et d'eaux... notre caravane délirante') there is nevertheless a deliberate effort to conform with a taste for 'decadent' style :

Après qu'il a franchi d'abord les terres vertes,
 Pleines d'eau régulière et qu'un moulin à vent
 Gouverne à chaque bout des champs, puis l'en-avant
 Et l'en-arrière des écluses grand'ouvertes

(231) See pp. 94-95 for a further discussion of this poem.

(232) Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes, pp. 917-918.

Formant des lacs d'une mélancolie intense,
 Presque sinistres dans l'or sanglant de cieux noirs
 Où quelque voile noire, on dirait, par les soirs,
 Où quelque mole noir, on dirait, rôde et danse,

Le train comme infernal et méchant sous la lune
 Tout à coup rôde et danse, on dirait, à son tour,
 Et tonne et sonne et tout à coup, comme en un four
 De lumière très douce et très gaie, un peu brune,

Un peu rose, telle une femme de luxure
 Apaisée, entre, en des barreaux entre-croisés,
 Au-dessus d'une ville aux toits comme apaisés,
 Aux fenêtres d'où la vie appert, calme et sûre,

Bonhomme, et forte et pure au fond et rassurante
 Combien? après tant de terreurs de cieux et d'eaux
 Regardant défiler à travers des rideaux,
 Galoper notre caravane délirante.

The idea of melancholy in 'Rotterdam', whatever the sincerity of the poet's emotions is a reminder of one of the other aspects of modern travel referred to earlier : the insecurity and loneliness which a rootless life of travel can bring. Sometimes this is simply a banal reflection on separation from loved ones :

Mon coeur est gros comme la mer,
 Qui s'exile de l'être cher!
 Gros comme elle et plus qu'elle amer.

(233)

Naturally the mood of the poet is to be related to the kind of landscape through which he travels. Thus 'Charleroi' is deliberately paired with 'Walcourt' to show the other face of travel through modern industrial Europe - the oppressive grime, stench and noise. The rhythm of the train is still felt but it is more ponderous and less exciting. The idea of shadowy, frightening figures glimpsed through train windows which was used humourously in Rimbaud's 'Révé pour l'hiver' takes on a decidedly serious connotation in Verlaine's invocation of the kobolds. This melancholy is thus

contingent upon the immediate environment in which the poet finds himself; it does not necessarily correspond to a basic and pre-existing état d'âme. In Sagesse, however, it is clearly associated with spiritual malaise :

Qu'en dis-tu, voyager, des pays et des gares?
Du moins as-tu cueilli l'ennui, puisqu'il est mûr,
Toi que voilà fumant de maussades cigares,
Noir, projetant une ombre absurde sur le mur?..
Mais voyons, et dis-nous les récits devinés,
Ces désillusions pleurant le long des fleuves,
Ces dégoûts....

(234)

The long poem beginning 'Du fond du grabat...' is partly a catalogue of places, none of which are specifically named, associated with moments of crisis in the poet's life, of which the alternative title, appropriately is 'Via dolorosa'. The annotated manuscript from Cellulairement identifies the items in this catalogue : Stanza 1 : "Impressions de Paris en Déc. 1871", Stanzas 2 and 3 : "Souvenir de Charleville, Xbre", Stanza 4 "Charleroi, 1872", Stanza 5 : "Bruxelles, 1872", Stanza 7 : "Traversée d'Ostende à Douvres, 1872", Stanzas 8 and 9 : "Londres, 1872", Stanza 11 : "Bruxelles, juillet-août 1873", Stanzas 12 and 13 : "Mons, août 1874", Stanzas 14 and 15 "Mons, août-7bre 1874" (235). It is thus clear that Verlaine associates geographical with spiritual dislocation. Much later, when the fires of conversion had been dampened if not extinguished, the poet could still be aware of the aimlessness of an itinerant existence :

Je me rembarque sans motif
Meilleur que celui de me plaire
A justifier mon motif.

(236)

(234) Ibid., p.234.

(235) Ibid., p.1129.

(236) Ibid., p.1008. See also the curious piece in quasi-English 'In the Refreshment Room', (Ibid., pp.1009-10).

Modern travel was a theme so thoroughly absorbed into Verlaine's poetry that it can occur in the nostalgic evocation of happiness with Lucien in 1882 as a totally accepted, and no longer novel, aspect of ordinary life. Incidentally it is one of the earliest poetic references to the life of the suburban 'commuter' :

Ame, te souvient-il, au fond du paradis,
De la gare d'Auteuil et des trains de jadis
T'amenant chaque jour, venus de La Chapelle?
Jadis déjà! Combien pourtant je me rappelle
Mes stations au bas du rapide escalier
Dans l'attente de toi.....

(237)

More important, it could assume a symbolic or even allegorical function. In 'Je revois, quasiment triomphal..' the railway is explicitly the symbol of fugacity to be contrasted to the permanence of God :

Le train passe, blanc panache en l'air,
Devant la rougeâtre architecture
Où je vécus deux fois un hiver
Et tout un été...sans aventure.
Le train passe, blanc panache en l'air,
Avec moi me carrant en voiture.....

Le train passe et les temps sont passés,
Mais je n'ai pas oublié la bonne,
La grande aventure, et je le sais,
Que Dieu m'a béni plus que personne.
Le train passe et les temps sont passés,
Mais l'heure de grâce reste et sonne.

(238)

This symbolic function is also demonstrated in 'Tantalized'. This 'dizain' is remarkable for the use it makes of the setting of a railway station and all its concomitant noises. It demonstrates admirably how completely Verlaine had adopted modern life as fit material for poetry. Within the space of these

(237) Ibid., pp.456-57.

(238) Ibid., pp.867-68. It is interesting to note Verlaine's use of the motif frequently a feature of Impressionist paintings and also used by Rollinat : 'blanc panache en l'air.' Here it seems to suggest the groundless pride of human achievement - manifested in something utterly transitory.

ten lines he has constructed a complex symbol as well as a fine descriptive vignette.

The structure of the symbol is roughly as follows : the poet begins by describing the noises in the railway station which are then likened to those of birds attempting to fly through the glass roof out into the early morning sky. Thus the title would seem to refer to these imaginary birds so near the open sky but unable to make the essential flight through the glass. One is however, naturally inclined to think that this is really a reference to the poet's condition. Might Verlaine be thinking in terms of a Mallarmean 'azur'? Might there even be a play on the word 'aile' in the first line which ostensibly refers to the wing of a building? All this is conjecture and seems less plausible if we look at the last line:

Ô ces wagons qui vont dévaler dans la plaine!

Verlaine would seem in fact to be thinking in terms of a rather prosaic freedom - the freedom and excitement of travel, an escape from his miserable existence in Paris. Yet there may be more to it. If Verlaine has identified 'la plaine' with the French countryside, the escape could also be to the peace, stability and spiritual well-being which he associated with his life with his mother in the country and with the simple Catholic piety of the country folk (239). It is, thus, not impossible that having attributed this spiritual value to 'la plaine' it was for him an equivalent of Mallarmé's 'azur'. It is certainly an equivalent of the sky for which the birds crave.

This complex symbol is structured without any reference to heavy-handed allegory (or indeed to the calculated préoccupé that we might have found in Mallarmé). It is true that the success of the poem depends on a

(239) For a discussion of this form of 'primitivism' see the last chapter.

definite comparison between the noises of the railway station and those of the birds which might not allow us to classify this as an impressionistic poem in the strictest sense (i.e. one which finds all its resources in the subject itself). However, the comparison with the birds has a very sensual basis : the similarity of the actual sensations caused by twittering and shrieking birds and the noises made by locomotives and related equipment. It has not been necessary for the poet to 'intellectualise' in order to make this comparison; either of these noises could instantly evoke the response usually reserved for the other; the similarity is actual not allegorical. Furthermore, it is our guess that the image of the birds was suggested by some birds that the poet actually saw in the railway station. Certainly today most stations have feathered inhabitants in their 'cieux de fente et de verre'. The image used in the comparison may, therefore, have been originally just another visual impression. A poem like 'Tantalized' may thus be relevant to the procedures examined in Part Two, Chapter Four.

In any event Verlaine has blended the descriptive elements in this poem in such a way as to give them a powerful symbolic function. The modernism of the subject-matter of this poem is so obvious as not to warrant further examination. The language used to describe the locomotives and trains is matter-of-fact. We have moved a long way from the iron beast of Hugo, Vigny and, for that matter, from most of the early industrial poets. The comparison with the birds is, as we have seen, justifiable enough on the grounds of its effective symbolism but is probably drawn from the same realm of experience of contemporary reality in any case.

Modern travel is at least as important in the work of Rimbaud as it was in the case of Verlaine. It has been sufficiently assimilated into his poetry to be part of the poet's stock of images :

Mais moi, Seigneur! voici que mon esprit vole,
Après les cieux glacés de rouge, sous les
Nuages célestes qui courent et volent
Sur cent Solognes longues comme un railway.

(240)

The blissful participation of the poet's imagination in the storm wind is likened to the state of excitement ('to travel is better than to arrive') and hypnotically smooth passage of a railway journey through the terrain like the Sologne multiplied a hundred times. It almost becomes a glimpse of eternity.

In 'Bruxelles' the railway becomes part of a complex image based on a combination of recollection of Rimbaud's and Verlaine's recent experiences of train journeys to and in Belgium and of sexual allusion (241).

In October 1870 Rimbaud had already devoted an entire poem, Rêvé pour l'hiver to a charming evocation of an erotic adventure in a railway carriage :

L'Hiver, nous irons dans un petit wagon rose
Avec des coussins bleus.
Nous serons bien. Un nid de baisers fous repose
Dans chaque coin moelleux....

The fascination seems to be that of a small enclosed world, (perhaps of some relevance to Professor Hackett's interpretation of 'Les Effarés' in Rimbaud l'Enfant) cosily insulated from the dark outside, described in humorous terms as likely to frighten the poet's female companion :

Tu fermeras l'oeil, pour ne point voir, par la glace,
Grimaces les ombres des soirs,
Ces monstruosités hargneuses, populace
Des démons noirs et de loups noirs....

The love play described in the final two stanzas leads to a jeu de mots which may well have been one of the raisons d'être of this part of the poem :

(240) 'Michel et Christine' .
(241) See pp. 688-94 .

Puis tu te sentiras la joue égratignée...
 Un petit baiser, comme une folle araignée,
 Te courra par le cou...

Et tu me diras : "Cherche!" en inclinant la tête,
 - Et nous prendrons du temps à trouver cette bête
 - Qui voyage beaucoup...

Nothing could be further removed from the 'iron-horse' bombast of the progressistes than this light piece in which the train setting, although clearly novel, has become the framework for what purports to be an ordinary, everyday experience. If the subscription in the cahier Demy is to be relied upon then the poem was actually composed during a train journey : 'En wagon, le 7 octobre 70'. This does not, of course, as the commentators have noted, rule out the possibility that literary inspiration (such as Banville's 'A une muse folle' in Les Cariatides) has played a part.

But the railway could present an altogether different aspect; far from being a symbol of insulated contentment as in 'Rêvé pour l'hiver' it could epitomise the rootless existence of the traveller, doubtless seen by Rimbaud from his own experience as part of the vocation of a voyant. It occurs in one of Rimbaud's finest verse poems : 'Larme'. It is fitting that allusions to travel should find a place in this great evocation of solitude. The poet has apparently left behind even the signs of human presence that one finds in the countryside; he is instead, so it seems, engulfed by comforting nature :

Par un brouillard d'après-midi tiède et vert...

(This cosy microcosm is the only point of contact between 'Rêvé pour l'hiver' and 'Larme') The opening stanza also contains the first mention of the mysterious recurrent image of the poem, that of drinking. This is taken up again in the second as is the description of the enclosed, solitary world in which the poet finds himself. But this time the reference is more precise :

Que pouvais-je boire dans cette jeune Oise,
 Ormeaux sans voix, gazon sans fleurs, ciel couvert.
 Que tirais-je à la gourde de colocase?
 Quelque liqueur d'or, fade et qui fait suer.

There is no doubt that Rimbaud is seeking to give mystical significance to his experience. This is clear from the oblique and somewhat curious allusion to Vergil's Fourth Eclogue - the most famous passage in the Roman poet's whole work which was long taken to indicate his prophetic gift by Christian commentators (242). It may even be that Rimbaud also intends an allusion to the aurum potabile of the alchemists as Enid Starkie has suggested (243). Nevertheless the present writer's interpretation is that such allusions are largely ironic. In his isolation the poet thinks upon his own would-be role as the poet of the new golden age (in this connection it is worth recalling that 'Age d'Or' was written in the following month) but suspects that his inspiration is based upon nothing more than alcohol. This is both the simplest and the most probable basic sense of the last line ~~of~~ the stanza. Hence the recurrent image of drinking. It should not be forgotten that 'Comédie de la Soif' ^{Although Rimbaud was in the Ardennes at this time} also dates from May 1872. ~~there is no~~ ^{recessary} to suppose that the bucolic setting is real at all (in any case several of the words, including the proper name Oise, seem to have been selected for their phonic qualities). The poem is just as likely to have its origin in the afternoon of alcoholic hallucinatory stupor at a café table, a frequent part of Rimbaud's rootless existence. The 'après-midi

-
- (242) Ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas;
 magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo...
 iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto.
 tu modo nascenti puero, quo fernea primum
 desinet ac toto surget gens aurea mundo...
 At tibi prima, puer, nullo munuscula cuttu
 errantes hederas passim cum baccare tellus
 mixtaque ridenti colocasia fundet acantho...
- (243) Arthur Rimbaud, p.168.

tiède et vert' might well refer to the effects of absinthe (244). This interpretation is made far more plausible by the third stanza which unambiguously identifies the poet as a modern traveller and hence provides the key to the whole poem. (Doubtless it was this clear glimpse into the mundane reality behind the poem which caused Rimbaud, still anxious to mystify the reader, to delete this reference from the version he cites in Une Saison en Enfer). If the poet had retained this afternoon posture he would have resembled a rather poor inn sign, instead there is a change of mood as he is obliged to resume his travels. He describes the scenery flashing past a moving train on a night journey :

Ce furent des pays noirs, des lacs, des perches,
Des colonnades sous la nuit bleue, des gares.

(The 'Colonnades' are presumably vertical objects such as trees and telegraph poles). The receding landscape is described in the first two lines of the final stanza where there is just possibly a further reference to the basic 'drink' imagery of the poem in 'des glaçons aux mares' which may be a play on words. The different layers of possible inspiration are thus, one may suspect, completely confused: symbolic or imagined landscape, the effects of alcohol, actual landscape on a train journey, remembered journeys. The irony of the last two lines has been missed by the commentators. In fact the poet is asking himself whether he has been really fishing for the gold of 'new knowledge' as would befit the earlier allusions to Vergil, or has deceived himself and simply been fishing for shells: pretty, alluring and even, sometimes, superficially golden but ultimately worthless. He has drunk deep of both metaphysical ambition and alcohol, but it is his solitude which is the only certain outcome. The best commentary of his

(244) This combination of alcohol, scholarship and mystical ambition coincides exactly with the text and illustration of Verlaine's 'Ultimissa Verba'. See above, pp. 208-10.

position is perhaps the title of the poem. Occasional tears of self-pity are a natural consequence of the search for new experiences through travel and dérèglement.

The same idea occurs in 'Comédie de la Soif' where the poet compares his thirst for ultimate knowledge with the bourgeois drinking habits of his family and the bohemian appetite for strong alcohol of his Parisian companions. Travel is an essential part of his quest and moments of disillusionment cause him to long for a more stable and secure existence :

Peut-être un soir m'attend
Où je boirai tranquille
En quelque vieille Ville,
Et mourrai plus content:
Puisque je suis patient!...

Et si je redeviens
Le voyageur ancien
Jamais l'auberge verte
Ne peut bien m'être ouverte.

(245)

His wanderings and consequent loneliness are recounted in Une Saison en Enfer :

Sur les routes par des nuits d'hiver, sans gîte, sans
habits, sans pain... Pas même un compagnon.....

(246)

It is also in Une Saison en Enfer that the link between travel and the new, quasi-magical experiences that the poet sought is made clear :

Je rêvais...voyages de découvertes dont on n'a pas de relations...
je croyais à tous les enchantements....Je dus voyager, distraire
les enchantements assemblés sur mon cerveau.

(247)

(245) 'Le Pauvre Songe', (Comédie de la Soif, 4). Green was the colour associated by Rimbaud with security, comfort and happiness; c.f. 'Au Cabaret-Vert', 'Voyelles'. Suzanne Bernard has referred to the 'vert paradis des amours enfantines' in this connection. (Rimbaud, Oeuvres, p.433).

(246) 'Mauvais Sang'.

(247) 'Délires', II.

In the Illuminations he uses the imagery of travel to evoke the futility of his attempts to escape from bourgeois reality. He was 'le touriste naif' hoping to leave behind the 'horreurs économiques' of modern life. But there was, after all, no escape :

La même magie bourgeoise à tous les points
où la malle vous déposera!....

(248)

This feeling of insecurity and futility was far from being the only attitude of the mature Rimbaud to travel. As we shall suggest in a moment it could awaken a genuine enthusiasm in him. Indeed there are more references to the joy of travel in the Illuminations than in the rest of Rimbaud's work. It may well be that disillusionment in this regard was a passing phase primarily associated with the depressing period of the unsuccessful relationship with Verlaine. There would, thus, be no contradiction between Rimbaud's latest poetic pronouncement and the peripatetic existence he was to lead for the remainder of his life. Before passing to this question, however, it is worth pausing to consider briefly one other function of modern travel in his work which is unconnected with self-pity; this is its association with satire.

Like Corbière, Rimbaud was to be the victim of customs officials, one of the potential nuisances of international travel. They are contrasted with 'real' soldiers and labelled as 'Soldats des Traités' in 'Les Douaniers'. There they are described on night duty on the Franco-Belgian frontier keeping an eye on women of easy virtue who seek to cross the border, checking for contraband, especially tobacco, and carrying out body searches of which

(248) 'Soir Historique' .

the poet clearly has unpleasant recollections. This is, like 'Les Assis', a straightforward attack on representatives of authority. Modern travel also plays a part in that epistolary parody of the reactionary views of a Versaillais in 1871 : Lettre du Baron de Petdechèvre à son secrétaire au de Saint-Magloire. It is associated with the complacency of the right-wing forces which have been responsible for crushing the Commune, part of the fabric of existence of the prosperous sectors of society as they will shortly be restored.

The excitement, even the joy, of travel is an important theme in the Illuminations. It is summarised in the enthusiasm of Départ which may well refer to a new phase in the poet's life as well as the actual departure on a journey - possibly his journey to England with Germain Nouveau at the beginning of 1874 :

Assez vu. La vision s'est rencontrée à tous les
airs.

Assez eu. Rumeurs des villes, le soir, et au soleil,
et toujours.

Assez couru. Les arrêts de la vie. - Ô Rumeurs
et Visions!

Départ dans l'affection et le bruit neufs!

Sometimes this involves a sense of awe at the very means of modern transport as in 'Mouvement'. Given the description of a substantial journey by river before the sea voyage begins, Underwood's hypothesis that the poem refers to the journey Rimbaud and Verlaine made from Antwerp to London on 26 May 1873 seems highly plausible (249). This would have involved a trip to the mouth of the Escaut. First the ship threads its way through the succession of changes of level or locks :

Le mouvement de lacet sur la berge des chutes du fleuve....

leaving a wake of white water :

Le gouffre à l'étambot....

The next line may either refer to the speed of the downward journey to the rivermouth or alternatively be a recollection of the rapidity of the with-drawal of the passenger ramp as the ship set sail :

La célérité de la rampe.....

The ship leaves the river and enters the open sea like a quickly released embrace or a parting of lovers:

(249) Verlaine et l'Angleterre , pp. 127-128.

L'énorme passade du courant...

The two poets then witness (for the first time) the varied luminous effects of the receding shore lights, the sunset and those strange phosphorescences that are to be observed on the sea at night :

.....les lumières inouïs
Et la nouveauté chimique.....

and are reminiscent of 'Le Bateau ivre'. So great is the effect of the ship's passage upon the water, both of the river (hence 'val') and of the sea, that Rimbaud uses exaggerated terms normally applied to natural phenomena to describe the swirling foam :

Les voyageurs entourés des trombes du val
Et du strom.

It is this exciting manifestation of the achievements of modern technology which leads on to the more general reflections on progress already examined (250) following the example of Whitman in poems like those published in the Renaissance littéraire in 1872 (and others which Rimbaud may have read in the original) which appear also to have influenced the form of this free-verse poem.

The full importance of travel in the Illuminations is to be grasped from the poem which serves as a fitting, if accidental, conclusion to the collection. For the mysterious entity evoked in 'Génie', which is probably a combination of poetic inspiration and spiritual beatitude rather than an individual, is itself associated with travel and, particularly, railway travel :

.....lui qui est le charme
des lieux fuyants et le délice surhumain
des stations. Il est l'affection et l'avenir,
la force et l'amour.....

(250) See above, pp. 336-37.

It is the joy of both the journey and the places where are stays, the two aspects of travel, that are celebrated and associated with ecstasy.

There has developed a school of critical opinion, of which Antoine Adam has become the leading protagonist, according to which the Illuminations could almost be considered as a kind of travelogue.

This approach to the collection relies on a late dating of many of the poems which are thus seen as a reflection of the travels Rimbaud undertook in Europe and the Far East between 1875 and 1878. The question of the chronology of the Illuminations has received a great, even disproportionate amount of attention from Rimbaud scholars. This is not the place to put forward yet another theory although there may be some grounds for a fresh examination of the whole problem by those better equipped to undertake it. The present writer's opinion, for what it is worth, is that a relatively small number of the poems may already have existed in 1872 since Delahaye claimed to have had some of them recited to him by Rimbaud himself in that year. The most obvious and yet understressed evidence for ruling out the possibility that the whole collection belongs to this period is the fact that nowhere are ~~any of the poems mentioned in Une Saison en Enfer~~ **which is nevertheless rich in references to the verse poems. So a date after** August 1873 would seem to be necessary for most of the pieces at least. Given the numerous concrete references to England in the collection there is some support for relating many of the poems to the years 1873 and 1874, although of course it could be claimed that Rimbaud might have acquired all his material in the course of his first visit in 1872. Yet the extent of the poet's experience which suggests he was able to frequent theatres, exhibitions and so on is scarcely concomitant with the state of material deprivation in which he and Verlaine found themselves on their

visit in the Autumn of 1872. Underwood's hypothesis, based on a highly detailed analysis of 'Promontoire' and much local research in Scarborough, leaves the present writer in no doubt that that particular poem, at least, dates from 1874. Hackett's attempts to dismiss the hypothesis seem both unjust and biased but are an indication of the strength of feeling on the issue of the chronology of the Illuminations (251). All in all there is much to commend Verlaine's supposition, supported by Bouillane de Lacoste's graphological 'evidence', that the collection dates from 1873 - 1875 and came into his possession in Stuttgart in February 1875 at the time of his meeting with Rimbaud. One may take into account Delahaye's claim for 1872 by allowing that a few of the poems may have been composed by then. The remaining problem is whether any poems could have been added after 1875. The history of the manuscripts makes this entirely possible but there is absolutely no evidence of the transmission of any further poems to Verlaine or Charles de Sivry after 1875.

The internal evidence of the poems has tempted a number of critics to adopt the position of Antoine Adam; many of the allusions to travel would be easier to explain. Yet there is one vital flaw in this approach. It leaves unexplained the many references to localities which we know Rimbaud never visited. Given this fact it may well be, after all, that the cosmopolitan nature of many of the Illuminations, which seems an anticipation of the travel poetry of Cendrars and Larbaud, is in fact the product of an avid reader rather than of the well-travelled Rimbaud of the late 1870s. There can be no doubt that Rimbaud had dreamed of travel

(251) See V.P. Underwood, 'Rimbaud et l'Angleterre', Revue de Littérature comparée, 1955 and C.A. Hackett, Autour de Rimbaud, pp. 95-96.

before his abandonment of 'Europe' and had undertaken voyages of discovery in his imagination long before he had experienced the real thing. The whole phenomenon is close to the spirit of 'Le Bateau ivre' upon which we have already noted the influence of Jules Verne. Some of the Illuminations are thus the product of an age of relatively easy and increasing travel without necessarily implying that the poet had direct experience of things and places he refers to at the time of writing.

'Villes' (XVII), provides a good instance of the technique with its opening reference to 'ces alleghanyes et ces Libans'. We know that Rimbaud never visited America although he did, eventually, see the Levant. The allusion to America is sufficient to deter the exegete from attributing the reference to 'Libans' to the poet's direct experience. Both are clearly, as the poet says, 'de rê^{ve}'. But one may wonder how tempted some of the critics, who accept a very late dating for the Illuminations, would have been had they not had the first allusion to put them on their guard! The later reference to Bagdad is also of the same imaginary inspiration. The entire poem in fact is a fantastic description in which elements of identifiable reality may nevertheless subsist. In style and mood it is very similar to the prose fantasies of Charles Gros. One reference in the poem appears to be to a form of transport which Rimbaud could have seen in the Swiss Alps in either 1875 or 1878 :

Des chalets de cristal et de bois qui se meuvent sur des rails
et des poulies invisibles.....

The most obvious understanding of this passage is that it describes a funicular railway. It is not necessary, as Antoine Adam seems to presume, to presuppose first-hand acquaintance with such railways on Rimbaud's part. We have already suggested that 'Après le Déluge' contains references to

Switzerland both as a refuge for émigrés after the Commune and an attraction for tourists. It is more than likely that Rimbaud, from the flat Ardennes, would have been fascinated by books on the Alps. Nor, for that matter, is it certain that the reference is to funicular railways; it may be a straightforward futuristic invention, or it may refer to the enclosed platform, raised and lowered by pulleys, in use on construction sites, or to the large ornamental lifts which were being installed in important buildings in the last third of the nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic.

'Barbare' contains several allusions to a volcanic 'arctic landscape' (more probably Iceland) which Rimbaud almost certainly never saw at any time in his life :

La soie des mers et des fleurs arctiques...
 Les brasiers, pleuvant aux rafales de givre...
 Les feux à la pluie de vent de diamants jetés par le coeur
 terrestre éternellement carbonisé pour nous.....
 Les brasiers et les écumes... au fond des volcans et des grottes arctiques.

Antoine Adam's hypothesis, that the poem was inspired by the journey to and from Java with the return via the Cape of Good Hope and St. Helena, seems unnecessary and improbable. Why should the poet have specified an 'arctic' rather than an 'antarctic' landscape? In any event Rimbaud himself says of the 'fleurs arctiques' : 'elles n'existent pas'. On the other hand there are many details which could be attributed to an acquaintance with the novels of Jules Verne.....

The pièce de résistance in the geographical amalgam poems is the highly evocative 'Promontoire'. Although Underwood has argued convincingly for the underlying inspiration of various topographical elements of the locality of Scarborough, the total effect of the poem is that of a whirlwind tour of the world including references to hotels, completely in accord with the age of modern travel :

..... un promontoire aussi étendu que l'Épire
 et le Péloponnèse, ou que la grande île du Japon,
 ou que l'Arabie!...des grands canaux de
 Carthage et Embankments d'un Venise louche;
 de molles éruptions d'Étnas et des crevasses de
 fleurs et d'eaux des glaciers; des lavoirs entourés
 de peupliers d'Allemagne... les façades circulaires
 des "Royal" et des "Grand" de Scarbro' ou de Brooklyn...

Corbière:

Although there are other allusions to speed and travel in Corbière's poetry - notably the speed and bustle of life in Paris which bewildered the newly arrived poet, and, in the Breton poems, references to the introduction of steamships - by far the most important contribution he made to the treatment of the subject is in the neglected (252) 'cycle' of Italian poems in which Corbière established himself as one of the greatest poet-tourists.

The available evidence suggests strongly that Corbière's real loathing for the Romantics did not occur until his trip to Italy from December 1869 to the spring of 1870. (253) They seem, for the most of his life, to have been amongst his favourite reading. (254) Moreover, one can hardly contemplate that Corbière would have gone to Italy at all had he already held such opinions. All this leads one to suppose that the journey was the occasion of a very profound disillusionment, that this was the creative impulse behind the poems and not some mere desire to indulge in literary parody. The Italian poems reflect the bitterness of Corbière's actual experiences. Instead of the fabled beauty of Naples or the grandeur of Vesuvius the poet found commercialisation and tourists attractions, a country whose scenery and whose soft and dishonest inhabitants compared

(252) Even by Sonnenfeld.

(253) With one of his painter friends from Le Gad's - Jean-Louis Hamon. Here as elsewhere Rousselot's indications of time and place are not to be trusted. He dates the Italian trip from 1868-69. A more serious error was his attribution of the inspiration of Sérénade des sérénades to a journey to Spain for which there is no evidence.

(254) See, for example, Sonnenfeld, L'Oeuvre poétique de Tristan Corbière, p.31.

unfavourably with the ruggedness of his native Brittany. Added to all this were the inconveniences of travel, particularly irksome when it involved the laconic officialdom of Southern Italy and for a man of Corbière's sensitive health. It was only to be expected that the poet should seek to blame those who were responsible for building the false hopes that were so cruelly dashed by reality - at least as Corbière saw it.

The cycle of six Italian poems begins, appropriately enough, with an evocation of an arrival - at Naples. The reader is presented with a thoroughly contemporary scene. Corbière appears as the first poet of tourism and all its hazards. The basic framework of the poem is clear enough; the poet recounts his passage through customs, the check by the health inspector, the Neapolitan lazzaroni lounging in the sun, the interference with his luggage and its eventual theft. Within this framework the poet introduces further details of his ordeal and his impressions of Naples, but 'Veder Napoli poi morir' is also remarkable for the several cultural allusions through which the poet attacks those who have misled him. The whole is clothed with an ironic humour having its foundation in the juxtapositions the poet makes of his anticipations and the actuality of Italy and in his word-play. The customs officials have opened his luggage, have found his cigars and are sorting through his dirty washing. At this point they make a gesture which the poet interprets as a desire to shake hands but which is really a demand of money if the poet is to be allowed through without any further fuss. A photograph of a girl is passed around for everyone's inspection and comments. The poet who had come to sing the praises of the poor of Naples, will himself end up dressed in rags the way his clothes are being pulled about.

While his detachable collars are being unceremoniously detached he is offered the services of the daughter of one of the officials. Whilst all this is going on his attention turns to the surrounding lazzaroni; they at least, with only a bag and an oar for possessions, are still the sun-loving brothers of the poet who were celebrated in the verse of Musset and spurned by Byron; at least until the poet realises that one of the bags is his own and that the good-for-nothings are swarming all over his luggage like maggots in a cheese! The poet's impressions are inextricably bound up with these events. Naples is like a badly painted picture with an unnatural blue background. The lounging lazzaroni are soaking up the blue from the sky as though they were using a machine for administering enemas. The sun should not be tanning these rogues, they are not playful lizards but leeches. How different this all is from what he had been led to expect by Madame de Staël ('- O Corrinne! -') by his readings of Dante ('Lasciate speranza') by the visions of amorous adventure ('- O Mignon!....; ' here Ronsard is introduced somewhat implausibly!), by Musset and Byron, by the opera based on the exploits of the revolutionary hero Masaniello. (255) To express his new-found ironic perspective - the fruits of his bitter experience - the poet indulges in a veritable orgy of puns and jeux de mots. The artists who have painted Naples in 'bleu-perruquier' and indigo have not warned the unwary traveller of that other blue - the colour of the customs officer's uniform which is ultramarine (but also foreign - 'outremer'). The poet's dirty washing is brought out beneath the blue of the spring sky whereas it really needs some laundry-blue. Instead of singing the praises of Naples the poet is being subjected to blackmail ('chanter - chantage'). The officials are removing the poet's collars like petals from a flower; in return one of them offers his daughter to be deflowered; all of which causes the froth to be removed from

(255) It will be recalled that it was a performance of Auber's opera La Muette de Portici (in which Masaniello is the hero) that unleashed the Belgian independence movement in 1830.

the beer of Corbière's illusions about Italy. The lazzaroni have an unhealthy and unmerited sun tan as though they had been electroplated. These are but a few striking instances of the poet's word play.

The same blend of uncompromising modernity, genuine experience of reality, cultural allusion and ironic humour is to be found in the other Italian poems.

'Vésuves et Cie' opens with the suggestion that modernity itself is one reason for the destruction of the poet's illusions :

Pompeïa-station - Vésuve, est-ce encor toi?

Since he was a small child Corbière has seen various representations of Vesuvius, but the real thing is a disappointment. The only criterion by which he knows it to be real is that, in this land of tourism, it has cost him a hundred francs to see it! He preferred the childhood memory of Vesuvius on a lamp shade belonging to an aunt in which the crater was illuminated by the light inside, or its operatic representation in Le Dernier Jour de Pompei. Corbière epitomises in his reaction to the real Vesuvius a basic truth about life that childhood illusions are often better than the real thing:

Mais les autres petits étaient plus ressemblants.

He does this not only by reference to details of everyday experience - the lamp shade - but, inevitably, through punning and cultural allusion. Here this takes the form of the double reference to the Moslem saying concerning Mahomet and the mountain between which comes the reference to Christian Rome. In the time of childhood faith and credulity the poet was able to let the mountain (Vesuvius) come to him, like Catholicism and the lamp shade his grandmother's confessor brought back from Rome. Now he has come, as a curious adult, to the mountain and he pays the price of disillusionment - and a hundred francs of which he has been robbed or extorted.

'Soneto a Napoli' is a brilliantly condensed evocation of the sounds, sights and activities that the poet has come to associate with Naples. The sub-title itself, in which the elisions have baffled Walzer (256) who did not see here an imitation of 'kitchen' Italian, reflects the rhythm of the speech going on around the poet and summarises the themes of this most unusual sonnet: the unrelenting sun (so different from that of Brittany), the moonlit setting for the never-ending serenades and amorous exploits, the impending gaiety of the next day - Saturday - on which the hypocritical priest will frown, all the popular entertainments and activities of which one figure - Pulcinella - may represent also the poet himself. The very density of the poem almost defies analysis. The sonnet starts clearly enough with a calque of the proverb 'Il n'est si vilain samedi, que le soleil me brille à midi' to which the poet adds his own proverb, in the same form, concerning the fact that attractive women are never without a lover. The two proverbs are interlocked by the use of the verb 'soleiller' and the repetition of 'midi'. It is with the second stanza that the poet's technique of compression gives rise to something close to inscrutability. So much so that the reading of the third line is in doubt. Should it be 'corne au seuil' or 'corde au seuil'? (257) The main cause of the trouble seems to be that the poet's references 'all' luna' and 'all' canonico' are inextricably combined. The 'cornes' in question are surely the cusps of the moon, the corners of the priest's hat and the horns of the goat. The moon is likened to a sour old priest, a 'fuddy-duddy' who looks unfavourably ('du mauvais oeil') upon the proceedings. The intertwining of meaning begins with the very first word 'Lune' which means 'old-fogey' as well as moon and immediately provokes the associations 'Bouc' with its double meaning, and 'cafard'. There is, however, an added ingredient in that the priest's three-cornered hat causes the poet to make the comparison with the devil (taken up in the last

(256) O.C., p.1314.

(257) O.C., p.1314.

stanza of 'Diavolo') who is horned. Thus 'mauvais oeil' also takes on the connotations of sin and malevolence, (so that 'corne au seuil', if the reading is correct, suggests the hidden sinful gaze of the priest), the lustful stare (the goat is also traditionally associated with sexuality) and the evil eye. This fourfold comparison of the moon, the devil, a disapproving priest and a goat, for all its difficulties, evokes well the poet's contrasting impressions of sexual licence and Catholicism. The idea of coupling in the first stanza is brought out again in the third with the oblique reference to its end product - 'L'Ombilic du jour'. In a stroke of genius the poet likens the sunlight to an umbilical cord of burning macaroni. The sun beats down with the same monotony as the endless monotony and consumption of ~~macaroni~~ macaroni to the rhythm of the 'tarantela' which, with equal regularity, brings male and female together, in the reproductive process. The sonnet concludes with another imitation of the speech going on around the poet, with perhaps a final reference to himself. This is a truly impressionistic poem combining the poet's reflections on Naples, as he sits in a restaurant, with the activities around him. These impressions form a synthesis based on the interdependence of his images. The whole sonnet is a reflection of an immediate reality (258).

'A l'Etna' is a return to the Vesuvius theme in which the volcano is treated with more affection than in the opening poem of the Italian cycle. The poet hails Vulcan as a brother for they are both wan and sick, victims of disease and love. The modernity of this poem is limited entirely to its colloquial language 'Ça fait rêver' and to its use of images befitting Baudelaire.

(258) Cultural allusion is not omitted; e.g. 'Maz' Aniello'.

- Tu ris jaune et tousses : sans doute,
Crachant un vieil amour malsain;
La lave coule sous la croûte
De ton vieux cancer au sein.

'Le Fils de Lamartine et de Graziella' relates the poet's encounter with a self-declared offspring of Lamartine who thereby manages to earn a living from curious tourists. (One is reminded of similar claimants today, vis-à-vis Gauguin, in Tahiti and the Marquesas!) This self-styled son of the French Romantic poet earns his living showing tourists over the sites of the celebrated love affair. Women visitors are particularly eager. For male visitors, however, he has a special extra - his own daughter who so resembles Graziella, shares her name and costs only one hundred sous!! Corbière cleverly turns this experience of reality into an assault on Lamartine. His progeny exploits the sentimentality of tourists, but Lamartine did exactly the same thing with his readers; he commercialised his feelings. What is worse it was a miracle that such an effeminate master of 'poésie larmoyante' could even have a son. To that extent Lamartine, his romance and the subsequent abuse of it by a charlatan all fit exceedingly well into this unmanly Southern setting. Once again word-play and cultural allusion, especially to Catholicism and Lamartine's works, add to the overall ironic effect.

'Libertà', so the poet would have us believe, was written in gaol in Genoa. There is no evidence to support this and one must, provisionally at least, count this as another of Corbière's mythical notations of time and place. So different is this poem from the others in the Italian cycle that one may question whether it should really be included with them at all. In the poems ninety-six lines there is only a single reference to Italy :

Et le far-niente....

which may lead one to suppose that the poem is a re-working, with only minor changes, of an earlier text or idea. In fact, it seems to be a reminiscence of Musset's 'Le Mie Prigioni' (259). The poem has a rhetorical ring quite out of place in Corbière's mature style :

- Prison, sûre conquête
Où le poète est roi!
Et boudoir plus qu'honnête
Où le sage est chez soi...

though this is not unrelieved by colloquialisms and humour.

'Libertà' apart, the Italian poems constitute one of the most important, and neglected, parts of Corbière's work. Here as much as in the Parisian poems he displayed his startling readiness to incorporate modernity and reference to the most fleeting aspects of contemporary reality (snatches of conversation in 'Soneto a Napoli') into his poetry.

* * * * *

The notion of speed itself, experienced most acutely through travel, may be seen more widely as one of the determining factors in impressionistic art-forms. The aim of impressionist painting, for instance, to capture the moment and to fix the most evanescent features of nature could only be achieved through extraordinary rapidity of observation and execution.

This preoccupation with instability, so evident in the shift in the aesthetic point of view, relates to a general acceleration of the tempo of life and to the requirements in the everyday world. In all areas the rhythm of life picked up speed and new records were set which had previously seemed inconceivable. Time and space had changed in scale. Art required new form and techniques if it was to come to terms with this new rhythm and express it in pictorial or poetic terms.

(259) Musset, Poésies Complètes ('Pléiade'), p.418. See O.C., pp1321-1322.

(e) The Modern City

The example of Baudelaire's Tableaux Parisiens and of the prose poems continued to be influential upon the thematic interests of the poets of contemporary reality throughout the 1870s and 1880s. In the 1870s the Naturalist novel became at least as influential in encouraging the poetic treatment of the modern urban scene; by the 1880s the additional influence of Impressionist painting cannot be discounted - indeed some poetry of the modern city was produced in avowed imitation of it.

There are basically two visions of the modern city in the poetry of the period; one an optimistic, excited presentation of a welter of activity and interest, the other a picture of decadence evident in vice, squalour, material ugliness and the dwarfing of the individual by the teeming crowd. (This absorption of the individual by ~~a~~collectivity was later to be emphasised as a positive advantage of city life by the Unanimists; occasionally even in our period it had this connotation.) As in the case of other subjects discussed in this chapter it is possible to find the same poet entertaining both visions so that there is often an ambiguous attitude towards urban life - sometimes even within a single poem. Urbanisation was one aspect of the Industrial revolution which retained the interest of writers from Romanticism right on through the century. (260) It still retained all its vitality after 1870.

Possibly because of the available models of Baudelaire and Naturalism, also because some aspects of the modern city lent themselves to descriptive writing and therefore to Parnassian techniques, this was a subject widely

(260) Where the ~~theme~~ theme of technological progress, or of individual exploitation seemed to lose appeal. In the Romantic period the theme of the corrupting modern city contrasted with the virtues of rural life had attracted many writers including Vigny and George Sand.

treated by minor as well as major poets. (261)

The decadent interpretation of the modern city and its contract with a version of paradise lost is to be seen at the beginning of our period in the work of major poets like Verlaine, Rimbaud and Corbière. It is also evident in minor poetry; a striking instance is provided by Cros's 'Plainte' where the decadence of Paris is equated, in a not uncommon fashion, with woman, the temptress (262) who drags the poet away from his primitivist dream into a world of modern artifice:

Vrai sauvage égaré dans la ville de pierre,
A la clarté du gaz je végète et je meurs.
Mais vous vous y plaisez, et vos regards charmeurs
M'attirent à la mort, parisienne fière.

Je rêve de passer ma vie en quelque coin
Sous les bois verts ou sur les monts aromatiques,
En Orient, ou bien près du pôle, très loin,
Loin des journaux, de la cohue et des boutiques.

Mais vous aimez la foule et les éclats de voix,
Le bal de l'Opéra, le gaz et la réclame.
Moi, j'oublie, à vous voir, les rochers et les bois,
Je me tue à vouloir me civiliser l'âme.

Je vous ennue à vous le dire si souvent:
Je mourrai, papillon brûlé, si cela dure ...
Vous feriez bien pourtant, vos cheveux noirs au vent,
En clair peignoir ruché, sur un fond de verdure!

(261) There was another genre involved in the evocation of modern urban life; a mildly satirical étude de mœurs. This is well illustrated in some of Taillade's Poèmes aristophanesques. One poem, 'Rus' (op. cit. p. 45) describes the life of a suburban Parisian who has retired from his pharmacy to spend quiet evenings at home in Grenelle.

(262) The modern Parisienne as conceived in the poems of the period is nowhere better described than in Cros's 'Scène d'atelier' (O.C. p.130)

Sachant qu'Elle est futile, et pour surprendre à l'aise
Ses poses, vous parliez des théâtres, des soirs
Joyeux, de vous, marin, stoppant près des comptoirs,
De la mer bleue et lourde attaquant la falaise.

Autour du cou, papier d'un bouquet, cette fraise,
Ce velours entourant les souples nonchalairs,
Ces boucles sur le front, hiéroglyphes noirs,
Ces yeux dont vos récits calmaient l'ardeur mauvaise.

Ces traits, cet abandon opulent et ces tons
(Vous en étiez, je crois, au club des Mirlitons)
Ont passé sur la toile en quelques coups de brosse.

Et la Parisienne, à regret, du sofa
Se soulevant dit: "C'est charmant!" puis étouffa
Ce soupir: "Il ne m'a pas faite assez féroce!"

In 1874 Cros published a long poem with illustrations by Marquet, 'Le Fleuve', which makes a more general contrast. The first ninety-five lines are devoted to a description of the natural beauty of the river's course; the presence of human beings takes the form of rural activities entirely compatible with the rhythm and harmony of nature, indeed almost seeming to be part of it:

Puis la plaine avec ses moissons, puis les hameaux
D'où viennent s'abreuver, au bord les animaux:
Boeufs, chevaux; tandis qu'en amont, les lavandières
Font claquer leurs battoirs sur le linge et les pierres.
Ou bien plongent leurs bras nacrés dans l'eau qui court,
Et, montrant leurs pieds nus, le jupon troussé court,
Chantent une chanson où le roi les épouse.

The nostalgic almost anachronistic tone of passages of this kind is a preparation for the most dramatic part of the poem - the ugly and vicious intrusion of the modern city and its appetites into the countryside. Nature then becomes constrained and distorted and thus parallels the effects of the modern city upon human nature:

Puis, voici l'industrie aux discordants réveils.
Les rossignols, troublés par le bruit et la suie
Des usines, s'en vont ...

C'est la ville,
La ville immense avec ses cris hospitaliers.
L'eau coule entre les quais corrects. Des escaliers
Mènent aux profondeurs glauques du suicide.
A la paroi moussue un gros anneau s'oxide,
Pour celui qui se noie inaccessible espoir

In the city, artifice has replaced or outshone the most alluring beauties of nature:

On voit s'allumer moins d'astres au firmament
Que de lumières sur les quais et dans les rues
Pleines du bruit des voix, des bals gais, parcourues
Par les voitures.

This beauty and excitement is, however, entirely superficial; it is an attractive veneer which conceals disgusting urban filth and decay. Nevertheless the poet's conclusion is surprisingly optimistic since he depicts the river, unheeding as it pursues its course to the sea, as triumphant over the worst Man can do:

L'égout vomit l'eau noire aux affreuses écumes,
 Roulant des vieux souliers, des débris de légumes,
 Des chiens, des chats pourris qu'emmène le courant,
 Souillure sans effet dans le Fleuve si grand
 Dont la lune, oeil d'argent, paillette la surface,
 Mais qu'importe la vie humaine à l'eau qui passe,
 Les ordures, la foule immense et les bals gais?
 L'eau ne s'attarde pas à ces choses...

The river thus attains a symbolic status similar to Leconte
 de Lisle's elephants: it represents permanence and resolution in
 contrast to the frivolity and transience of human activity so evident
 in the life of the modern city.

The city easily becomes a backdrop for the poet's personal
 misfortune, as in 'Drame en Trois Ballades':

Le soir, traînant la flèche qui me blesse,
 Je vais, longeant la rue aux bruits divers.
 Le gaz qui brille aux cafés grands ouverts,
 Les bals publics, flots d'obscène souplesse,
 Montrent des chairs, bons repas pour les vers.
 Mais, qu parfois, accablé, je consente,
 Muet, à boire avec vous, mes amis,
 La bière blonde, ivresse alourdissante,
 Parlez, chantez! Rire vous est permis,
 Et moi, je pense à ma maîtresse absente...
 À toi, merci! chemin de fer,
 J'étais seul ; mais un soir d'ivresse,
 Tu m'as tiré de cet enfer,
 Car j'ai retrouvé ma maîtresse...

Woman is not always represented as the instigator of Parisian
 decadence, she may also be its victim. One of the commonest themes is
 the poetry of the cénacles was that of the innocent country girl dragged
 into a life of corruption by material deprivation. This, too, found a
 place in Cros's work; it is, of course, one of the most obvious and
 banal forms of the decadent/primitivist contrast, but in his case it
 has an interesting twist for he admits that his own taste plays a part
 in such cases of moral degradation:

Jeune fille du caboulot,
 De quel pays es-tu venue,
 Pour étaler ta gorge nue
 Aux yeux du public idiot...

Jeune fille du caboulot,
 Ne penses - tu plus à ta mère,
 À la charrue, à ta chaumière?...
 Tu ne ris pas à ce tableau.

Jeune fille du caboulot,
 Tu préfères à la charue
 Écouter les bruits de la rue
 Et vous verser l'absinthe à flot...

Je t'aime mieux ainsi pâlotte,
 Les yeux cernés d'un bleu halo...

Jeune fille du caboulot,
 continue
 À charmer de ta gorge nue,
 Les yeux du public idiot. (263)

In Cros's work the city could even become part of the fabric of
 happiness, transmuted by love:

Je viens de voir ma bien-aimée...
 Mes yeux voient...
 Dans chaque lanterne une étoile,
 Un ami dans chaque passant...

Le gaz s'allume aux étalages...
 Moi, je crois, au lieu du trottoir,
 Fouler sous mes pieds les nuages
 Ou les tapis de son boudoir... (264)

The ambiguity of the modern city is the theme of Cros's most important
 evocation of the urban scene, the prose poem 'L'Heure Froide'. The poem
 opens with a description of the magical qualities of ^aParisian sunset
 which, aided by the resonance of literary reminiscence, actually
 stimulate the recreation of a ideal previous existence and of lost
 youth:

Les crépuscules du soir m'ont laissé tant de
 pierreries (265) dans la mémoire, qu'il me suffit de
 prononcer ces mots "crépuscules du soir,
 splendeurs des couchants" pour évoquer à la
 fois les souvenirs solennels de vie antérieure
 et les ravissements de jeunesse enivrée.

Night proper is equally magical; this magic is in no small part
 derived from the modernity and bustle of Paris:

(263) 'Vocation'.

(264) 'Soir'.

(265) Is Cros's work a possible source for this Rimbaudian mot-clé?

Alors, à Paris, le gaz s'allume. L'été, le gaz brillant parmi les arbres des jardins, donne aux feuilles qu'on ne voit qu'en dessous, des tons verts et mats de décor de féerie. (266) L'hiver, délire du soir: le thé, le vin dans les familles, la bière et les nuages de tabac dans les cafés, les orchestres qui font tourbillonner, à leur respiration vibrante, les élégances de toutes classes.

The sheer variety of experiences leads the poet to employ a notational, impressionistic style (already evident in the catalogue of 'délire du soir' in the passage just cited):

On marche. On écoute ses propres pas. Tout le monde est rentré. Les bouchers, ensommeillés, reçoivent d'énormes moitiés de boeufs, des moutons entr'ouverts et raidis.

The description of the carcasses is in fact part of the poet's preparation of the reader for the conclusion of the poem: a meditation upon death and solitude. The poet theorises on the existence of a pivotal hour between one day and the next when every being may question whether or not its existence will continue. The other face of the city is, thus, its exclusion of the sensitive outsider from its corporate complacency, ('Tout le monde est chez soi, égoïstement et lourdement endormi'). He is condemned to the restless, morbid anxiety of a nuit blanche when at last he has exhausted the nocturnal distractions the city has to offer:

Alors être seul chez soi, sans dormir c'est l'horreur...
Oh! oui, à cette heure-là, on étoufferait, on râlerait, on sentirait son cœur se rompre et le sang tiède, fade, monter à la gorge, dans un dernier spasme, que personne ne pourrait entendre... (267)

(266) Another possible link between Cros and Rimbaud.

(267) The association of the modern city with death may have been inherited from Baudelaire. It is the dominante of Verlaine's 'Nocturne Parisien'. It also continued to be made by poets throughout our period, notably Rollinat. In an early poem 'A la Morgue' (La Basoche, I, 5, p. 192, 1885) Merrill had described corpses kept 'fresh' by running water in the city mortuary.

The contrast between modern urban decadence and paradise lost is put in very simple terms in Rollinat's work where the poet's present situation in Paris (which, as events proved, he was right to see as a threat to his sanity) often provokes nostalgic recollection of his native Berry. Indeed even the most insipid and uninteresting provincial landscape would be preferable to the artificiality of Paris:

Paris, c'est l'Enfer! - sous les crânes
Tous les cerveaux sont desséchés!...
Fuyons squares et bois de Boulogne!
La, tout est artificiel!
Mieux vaut une lande en Sologne,
Gris^{âtre} sous l'azur du ciel! (268)

The infernal characteristics of the modern city are, one suspects, mostly the product of the uncertainty of human relationships there, of duplicity and disloyalty. The poet needs the peace and refreshment of pure, straightforward and spontaneous nature:

Hors de Paris, mon cœur s'élançe
Assez d'enfer et de démons:
Je veux rêver dans le silence
Et dans le mystère des monts...

Plus de fâcheux, plus d'hypocrites!
Car je fréquente par les prés.
Les virginales marguefites... (269)

By the time of writing Les Névroses, however, the poet seems to have succumbed to the fascination of the very qualities he continued to despise, as though hypnotised like the victim of a stoat or a snake. This is clear in the frenetic tone of poems such as 'La Pluie' with its swiftly moving description of the man-made urban landscape:

Lorsque la pluie ainsi qu'un immense écheveau
Brouillant à l'infini ses longs fils d'eau glacée
Tombe d'un ciel funèbre et noir comme un carreau
Sur Paris, la babel hurlante et convulsée.

J'abandonne mon gîte, et sur les ponts de fer,
Sur le macadam, sur les pavés, sur l'asphalte,
Laisant mouiller mon crâne où crépite un enfer,
Je marche à pas fiévreux sans jamais faire halte.

(268) 'Fuyons Paris', Dans les Brandes,

(269) 'A travers champs', Ibid.

The picture of the modern city in Nouveau's poetry is broadly similar to that in Cros's or Rollinat's work. One finds the same contrast between town and country. This is treated in banal fashion in the narrative prose piece 'Le Manouvrier' which nevertheless is a good indication of the initial impact of Paris upon the newly arrived provincial (270) and serves as a model for the experience of countless young people of the period:

Où donc c'est-il ici? Ah! bon! il se
souvient; il essuie dans ses yeux les fumées
d'un rêve fait d'un arbre, d'une maisonnette...
Débarbouillé, il ouvre la lucarne: les toits
de Paris, une mer; les cheminées, des mâts... (271)

The city is essentially soul-less and it is for this reason that the poet needs to return to the country, the scene of his childhood:

La Province! Eh bien oui, poète, qu'en dis-tu?
T'y voilà. Ton Paris, était-ce rebattu,
Avoué? Était-ce vieux, hein? Et s'il faut tout dire,
Tu riais d'y pleurer, et tu souffrais d'y rire!...
Car la province, au fond, est conseillère et sainte,
Car elle garde, aux champs où ton enfance est peinte,
La tombe de ta mère et la voix de ta soeur!
Pour rallumer un peu ton coeur. Ton coeur, ton coeur! (272)

The recurrent decadent theme of prostitution is also found in Nouveau's poetry. It is treated at excessive length in 'Cadenette', a deterministic account of how a life of prostitution develops organically from a bad environment:

(270) Complete with an imitation of provincial syntax!

(271) Oeuvres Complètes, p.444.

(272) 'Dizain', Ibid., pp. 391-92'

Oui, je sais bien, c'était une grue, et vulgaire!
 Ça vint au monde "à la guerre comme à la guerre"
 Dans ce Paris mêlé des arrondissements
 Excentriques, parmi les lourds désœuvirements
 D'un faux ménage ayant pris la vie "à la douce".
 Son enfance fut un "va comme je te pousse"...

The rootlessness and impermanence of life in the city nevertheless
 has its compensations in the form of variety of experience, an ever-
 changing vista. In the second of the Fantaisies Parisiennes the poet
 locates, within just this setting, a chance encounter:

Et dans la splendeur qu'il étale
 Comme une ville orientale (273)
 Baignait la froide capitale;

Comme j'errais, le nez au vent,
 Dans la rue au tableau mouvant,
 En flâne naïf et savant

Je vis sur l'asphalte élastique
 D'un trottoir aristocratique
 Une vivante et fantastique

Parisienne au pas léger,
 Type dont rêve l'étranger!

The woman of Paris are the subject of the Notes Parisiennes which
 are to be compared to the apparent disorder, spontaneity and consequent
 obscurity of some of Rimbaud's Illuminations. These are descriptions
 of the life-style of the ladies of the demi-monde. Much of the difficulty
 of the pieces may simply stem from jeux de mots such as the reference to
 Madame's extravagance in setting fashion which clearly suggests the
 likelihood of an allusion to shops:

Madame est sortie. Sa coiffure est javanaise,
 Sa Toilette aussi, d'une simplicité ruineuse, elle
 ne s'en doute même pas, ni qu'elle dépense
 en cravates les appointements d'un chef
 aux Finances... Quand elle fait trois pas
 en levant un peu la sous-jupe, le
 siècle la regarde.

Au grand louvre "elle règne, au Printemps"...

(273) c.f. Rimbaud's reference to Baghdad in 'Villes', Illuminations, XVII.

A successful high-society courtesan is the idol of the whole diplomatic corps:

"Niniche", aux boulevards, se fait suivre
des coeurs à millions, de fougues pérouviennes,
de toquades moscovites... La nuit, sous le
gaz, c'est le front de glace, les joues
pures comme l'argent, la lèvre assyrienne,
le sourire de l'idole. Le matin: un
incendie de mèches sauvages, l'ébat
dans la blouse gris d'eau, l'air caniche,
la jambe nue et douce, - et l'odeur
de l'oreille où s'étouffent les mots
de bonheur.

Longtemps le souvenir de sa cigarette
fume dans les cours étrangères.

There is not a single note of malice in these pieces which
thus constitute a positive, if specialised, picture of the modern
city. Nouveau has celebrated in verse one of the more pleasant of
contemporary phenomena, the chic Parisienne, product of the capital of
haute couture.

Nature was not absent from the modern city, it was simply transformed;
its presence and its cyclical patterns more subtle and needing to be
sought out. In 'Fin d'automne', Nouveau showed himself to be one of
the masters of the description of the urban manifestations of nature,
in remarkably Laforguian tones:

C'est le soir, au jardin du luxembourg...

Un brouillard gris et fin s'estompe dans les airs;
le mystère se fait dans les mornes allées
Que hanteront bientôt les bises désolées;
Les moineaux sont partis et les bancs sont déserts.

Oh! le triste retour des saisons enrhumées!
Déjà sur votre épaule un frisson vient courir;
Déjà le coeur se serre, et, comme pour s'ouvrir,
Aspire au chaud parfum des chambres bien fermées.

Nature in the city was described in pleasant terms by other minor
poets.

Jules Lemaitre rightly counted Léon Valade among the 'peintres de la
vie moderne' whom the critic saw as constituting a school within French
poetry in 1879 (274). Valade was associated with the Impressionist painters

(274) Revue politique et littéraire, 9 August 1879.

~~and~~ is one of the figures immortalised in Fantin-Latour's Coin de table.

Not surprisingly he interested himself in evoking the life of Paris and in recreating landscapes. His unambitious and quiet approach to modern subjects saved him from the rhetorical excesses of some of his contemporaries. This is true of ^{A Mⁱ-côte} (1874), which justifies Valade's inclusion amongst the first poets to follow Baudelaire in treating the urban scene, as well as of the posthumously published poems. Of special interest is his realisation that in the modern city the ways of nature and the rotation of the seasons can no longer be perceived as they once were; the poet must look for the modern urban manifestations of nature and not use outmoded pastoral images:

Il est hélas! mainte fenêtre
 Dans les ruelles aux murs noirs,
 Où jamais soleil ne pénètre,
 Close aux parfums, sourde aux espoirs.

Mais partout, jusqu'au dernier houe
 Roule, en dépit du pavé gras,
 Le ~~beau~~ Printemps, bleu, jaune et rouge,
 Sur l'étroite charrette à bras. (275)

Even the Baudelairean image of decadent Paris as the nocturnal realm of poets and madmen takes on a certain charm because of the softness of the description of the urban landscape:

Le ciel des nuits d'été fait à Paris dormant
 Un dais de velours bleu piqué de blanches nues,
 Et les aspects nouveaux des ruelles connues
 Flottent dans un magique et pâle enchantement.

L'angle, plus effilé, des noires avenues
 Invite le regard, lointain vague et charmant,
 Les derniers Philistins, qui marchent pasamment,
 Ont fait trêve aux éclats de leurs voix saugrenues.

Les yeux d'or de la Nuit, par eux effarouchés,
 Brillent mieux, à présent que les voilà couchés...
 - C'est l'heure unique et douce où vaguent, de fortune,

Glissant d'un pas léger sur le pavé chanceux,
 Les poètes, les fous, les buveurs, - et tout ceux
 Dont le cerveau, fêlé, loge un rayon de lune. (276)

(275) A Mⁱ-côte, p. 138.

(276) Ibid., p. 25.

Merat's poetry of contemporary reality has much in common with Valade's; in fact the two were life-long friends and collaborators. In the early 1870s Merat had written Les Villes de marbre very much in the Parnassian manner and had gained official recognition of his work. In 1875 a new direction in his vision of the city became obvious with the publication of Printemps passé which, together with the Poèmes de Paris of 1880, contains most of his modernist poetry. Again, as in the case of Valade, an eye for nature's presence in the city and a quiet, unassuming manner operated to his advantage.

Poems like 'Les Fenêtres Fleuries', which describes the window-boxes of Paris, the town dweller's garden, have many charming vignettes;

Les Parisiens, entendus
Aux riens charmants, plus qu'au bien-être,
Se font des jardins suspendus
D'un simple rebord de fenêtre.

On peut voir en toute saison
Des fils de fer formant treillage
Faire une fête à la maison
De quelques bribes de feuillage... (277)

The coming of dawn as it occurs in the city is evoked in 'Le Chanteur':

A cette heure, vers le matin,
La vie hésitante s'arrête,
On entendait dans le lointain
Le bruit vague d'une charrette.

Où le pas lourd d'un balayeur
Et, comme une baleine plaintive
Où se mêle de la frayeur,
Un sifflet de locomotive... (278)

In one instance, the interest in specifically urban landscape gave rise to what may have been a new art form. Georges Lorin's Paris-Rose enjoyed a considerable reputation among the cénacles of the 1880s. Most of the poems published in 1884 in this volume had already been read at the gatherings. The general nature of the collection may be ascertained from

(277) Poèmes de Paris.

(278) Ibid. See also, in the same collection, the poem 'Le Matin',

titles of some of the twenty-four poems it contains: 'Mon Salon', 'Les Maisons', 'Les Affiches', 'Le Marché aux Fleurs', 'Les Ombrelles', 'Les Éventails', 'Le Brouillard', 'Le Ballon', 'Les Becs de gaz', 'Les Clowns', 'Les Joujoux', 'Les Voitures', 'Les Patineurs', 'Les Bateaux', 'Les Boutiques'. The light, conventional verse is intended to provide a running commentary on the Parisian scene. Contemporary sources make it clear that in its published form Paris-Rose was meant to be a composite work; the illustrations by 'Luigi Loir' and 'Cabriol' were as important as Lorin's verse some of which barely qualifies for the title of poetry at all. 'Les Gens', for example, is made up entirely of fragments of between one and four lines each accompanied by an illustration. Lorin's handling of the octosyllabic line occasionally reduces the verse to a series of rather tiresome jingles:

C'est très joli. Comme il en est!
Plus l'homme court, plus il en naît... (279)

The most interesting thing about Lorin's collection is the endeavour to provide a panorama of the modern Parisian landscape incorporating such themes as trains, buses, trams, chars-a-bancs, cabriolets, children playing with model boats and so on. 'Les Affiches' dealt with an aspect of the visual nature of contemporary reality which had perhaps not been treated before. It recounts, something in the manner of the modern French chanson, what the posters tell us, the gaiety of their colours and how they become worn and tattered in the wind and the rain, in a tone half-humorous, half-melancholy. Lorin does not have the fixation with vice and depravity so prevalent among the modernist poets but prefers to give a more representative picture of modern everyday reality. (280)

(279) 'Les Becs de gaz', op.cit., p. 152.

(280) His poems rely heavily on the illustrations and are also on average about eight pages long; these factors have made quotation and inclusion in anthologies very difficult.

More often, however, it was the decadent vision of the urban landscape which prevailed, provoking a feeling of desolation and anxiety. This is the most characteristic image of the modern city presented, for instance, by Richepin in La Chanson des Gueux. His landscapes are clearly modern and similar to those treated by painters like Raffaëlli, Signac and Seurat or novelists like Huysmans, and later in poetry by Agalbert:

Quand juillet a roussi l'herbe des terrains vagues,
 Ils ont l'air de grands lacs de rouille, dont les vagues
 Portent pour immobile écume des gravats.
 C'est là pourtant, Ô gueux de Paris, que tu vas,
 Dans ce lugubre champ qui pour fleur a l'ordure,
 Quand tu veux par hasard prendre un bain de verdure.
 La campagne est trop loin. L'omnibus est trop cher...
 Dans les jardins publics on n'est pas à son aise:
 Trop de monde! D'ailleurs il faut payer sa chaise
 Comme à l'église. Il faut être un richard. Ou bien,
 Si l'on dort allongé sur un banc, un gardien
 Surgit, chasse le rêve à sa voix de rogomme,
 De son poignet brutal étrangle votre somme,
 Et, parmi les badauds dont une meute accourt,
 Vous traîne par le col en criant comme un sourd:
 "Il faut dormir chez soi quand on est soulé, crapule..."
 Tu ne sens nul dégoût d'avoir pour matelas
 La cuvette où vomit la cité colossale.
 Un lit est toujours doux, même quand il est sale...
 Tu t'estimes veinard, fadé d'un chouette écot,
 Si quelque pissenlit, quelque coquelicot,
 Avec son pompon jaune ou bien sa rouge crête
 Fait un mouchetis d'ombre au-dessus de ta tête... (281)

Mikhaël's city poetry has far fewer social overtones than Richepin's. He is much more interested in the rapports between landscape and mood. Nevertheless in his **poetry** as in Richepin's the same desolate panorama confronts the reader: Concrete reference to the urban landscape in the expression of the poet's mood is made in such poems as 'L'Heure grise', 'Crépuscule pluvieux' (282), 'Lueurs' and 'L'Hierodule'. The place of the urban landscape in some of the prose poems is even more striking:

(281) La Chanson des Gueux, pp. 118-20 ('Les Terrains vagues').

(282) See pp. 746-47.

Au coin du boulevard Clichy, un marché en plein air. Il fait froid; pas de beaux fruits éclatants, rien que des choses ternes, grises villaines; des poissons, des herbes tristes. J'aime à traverser cette cohue. Il s'y rencontre d'étranges et sinistres figures. Les femmes qui vendent, vieilles, énormes, ventruës, sont plutôt grotesques. Mais il y a de vieux hommes douloureux qui offrent leur marchandises avec tant de tristesse; ils sont d'une couleur terreuse et morne, leur rides ont l'air de souffrir; et les yeux sont inquiets, humides, sanglants, comme blessés. Un surtout, petit, maigre, avec un mouchoir rouge soutenant la mâchoire malade. Une humilité mauvaise le courbe. Il doit être méchant; mais il a l'air tellement épouvanté! Il offre des salades avec un geste effrayé, tragique; on dirait qu'il présente vaguement devant lui, pour conjurer de mauvais sorts épars, des gerbes expiatoires.

(283)

Despite the widespread feeling that Impressionist painting is uniformly light-filled and joyful it is curious to note that poetic evocations of the modern city which overtly claimed inspiration from the Impressionist painters contain much gloom and even pessimism. The answer, of course, is partly in a mis-judgement of Impressionist painting. In the 1880s especially, several painters associated with the movement produced a considerable number of pictures of those same industrial areas, with their terrains vagues, which had caught the attention of Richepin. The dull coloration of these and pictures of central Paris also (particularly of the Seine) was a natural consequence of the Impressionists' concern for authentic lighting.

Some of Moréas's early poems resulted from his acquaintance with the Impressionist painters; one of them at least, cited below, mentions a painter by name. In December 1884 Laurent Tailhade wrote to his mother :

Les Syrtes de Jean Pappadiamant, une des fortes déceptions que j'ai eu dans ma vie. Ne me dis rien au sujet de ce misérable volume de vers.

(284)

(283) Oeuvres, pp. 156 - 57.

(284) Quoted in R.A. Jouanny, Jean Moréas écrivain français, p.132.

In what sense was Tailhade disappointed? He more than practically anyone had shared in Moreás's early poetic activity of 1882 - 83, now largely forgotten, which had been almost exclusively devoted to modernism. Tailhade found the subject-matter and manner of Les Sytres hackneyed and regressive. The mixture of neo-classical plasticity and of autobiography seemed the very antithesis of what Moreás had at first planned to include in the volume which he had originally entitled La Chanson de la Vie.

Moreás's modernist-realist poems, which would have served as the starting-point of the collection as it was initially conceived, were published in Le Chat Noir, La Nouvelle Lune and Lutèce between the summer of 1882 and the summer of 1883. Most of them show strongly the influence of Richepin and Naturalism and some, that of Impressionism; their pedestrian quality helps to explain Moreás's later dissatisfaction with Naturalism and even with Baudelaire whose reconciliation of modernism with the highest poetic aspirations he could neither properly appreciate nor emulate. These poems remain of documentary interest for the assessment of the scope of the influence of modernism and pictorial Impressionism upon poetry in this period; in this piece there is a threefold equation of modernity, decadence and Impressionist art :

Dix heures soir d'été, square des Batignolles
Un vent fade répand de très vagues odeurs,
Conducteurs de tramways, quelques fillettes folles
De placides bourgeois et de louches rôdeurs.

Dans la pénombre sous la frondaison poudreuse,
Contre le tronc chétif d'un arbre rabougri,
Avec un cabotin ainsi qu'une pierreuse,
La quinquaiillère flirte au nez de son mari.

Dehors, devant la grille infinie, une grasse
 Matrone tenant par la main un garçonnet
 Reste là, pour voir le chemin de fer qui passe
 - On dirait un tableau du grand maître Manet.

(285)

Ajalbert's poetry is discussed at greater length in Part Two, Chapter Four, but it is worth considering it here for a moment. Both the long poem in free verse, Sur les Talus, and the collection Sur le Vif acknowledge the influence of the Impressionists and lay some claim to finding a poetic equivalent of their practices, certainly of their attitude to subject-matter. Sur les Talus is a love poem deliberately given the dreary colouring of the Paris suburbs. It is set amidst the fortifications of the capital at the end of the commuters' tram route; a deliberate attempt to match the topicality and modernity of Impressionism. Caze's preface to Sur le Vif is an interesting document to which further reference will be made below (286). The preface leaves no doubt that it was the fascinating ugliness of the urban sprawl which prompted Ajalbert to write the poems which have been grouped to form the collection. The inspiration came in the course of walks Ajalbert and Caze had been on together through the outer industrial suburbs of Paris. They had seen :

tout l'envahissement de la malade civilisation dans la malade campagne sururbaine... un terrain vague de banlieue, sali par une herbe galeuse et rare; des arbres poitrinaires au premier plan, et dans le fond, des maisons à six étages avec des coins de puisards noirs entrevus...

(287)

-
- (285) Some other modernist poems of this period are 'Montmartre', (Le Chat Noir, 30 September 1882), 'A Maggy', (Ibid., 21 October 1882) 'L'Hiver', (Ibid., 27 January 1883), 'Viandes de Gargote', (Ibid., 24 March, 1883), 'Sonnet lunatique' (La Nouvelle Lune, 19 November 1882), 'Quatorzains', (Ibid., 28 January 1883), 'Fleur de Caboulot', (Ibid., 1st April 1883), 'Spleen', (Lutece, 12 January 1883), 'Résignation', (Ibid., 29 June 1883).

(286) See pp. 709-11.

(287) An extreme instance of the perversion of nature by modern civilisation is to be seen in 'Gennevilliers' where what was once a babbling brook in open countryside has become an open sewer in an industrial suburb.

In fact the collection does contain a few pieces akin to the brighter side of pictorial Impressionism which make it a good deal more attractive than if Ajalbert had stuck solidly to his original brief.

The decadent vision of the urban landscape and its contrast with nature is one of the most important themes in the pessimistic interpretation of the modern city. There were, on the other hand, important minor poets who on balance remained enthusiastic and accepted the city, ~~wor~~ts and all, as an exciting phenomenon. The case of Bourget is particularly significant since he was not only a poet but a theorist of modernism.

Bourget's introduction to the work of Baudelaire in 1870 by Aubert-Hix (288) reinforced his appreciation of modernism and psychological analysis in literature already apparent in his admiration for Stendhal, Laclos, Constant, Flaubert and, above all, Balzac. In the early 1870s he formed a close relationship with the young modernist poets, especially Richepin. In succession to the 'Vilains Bonshommes' he was the founder member of the 'Vivants' who were also centred on the Café Tabourey, already made famous by Baudelaire. Bourget was fascinated by Taine's modernism and his application of science to all aspects of life and art :

Cet homme devenait pour nous l'apôtre de la Foi Nouvelle.... (289)
Paradoxically he did not have a very high regard for Naturalism until he was 'converted' by a reading of L'Assommoir in 1877, after which time he became a friend of Zola and Maupassant. His friendship with Sully-Prudhomme may help to explain his later preference for the philosophical rather than the concrete aspects of reality.

(288) L.J. Austin, Paul Bourget, p.23.

(289) Essais de psychologie contemporaine, II. 179-80.

Sully-Prudhomme's influence, along with that of Heine, Tennyson, Shelley and Musset, is to be detected in Bourget's first volume of verse, La Vie Inquiète of 1874. Bourget was singularly reluctant, or so it seems, to put his views on modernism into practice in this collection. Generally the collection is noteworthy for its lack of movement in the landscape descriptions and for its hackneyed and often clumsy language. There are occasional references, however, to the presence of the modern city such as the evocation of the fugitive impressions of a train journey in 'A Amedee P.' already noted in the previous section. (290)

which enliven the collection. Much of the collection is concerned with recounting an adolescent love affair which minimises the role of Paris. One vision of Paris is to be found in 'Aurore sur Paris' :

Quand d'un rayon obscur l'aube blanchit à peine
 Les pauvres toits penchés que reflète la Seine,
 Sur un pont versoulu des antiques quartiers,
 Bien souvent, je m'accoude et m'abîme en pitié
 Pour ces durs travailleurs, forcés de la matière,
 Qui nous font nos plaisirs de toute leur misère;
 Comme ils courent transis sur le quai plein d'éveil
 Ou l'ombre des grands murs dérobe le soleil!
 Derrière eux le Cité, qui mêle ses murmures
 Aux roulements plaintifs des premières voitures,
 Pour prier au ciel bleu pousse un cri de labour....

(291)

(290) La Vie Inquiète, p. 7.

(291) The conventionality of Bourget's poetic language evident in the above examples blurs into an almost ridiculous awkwardness when he handles abstract subjects, as, for instance, in 'L'Art'

Remue tout entier par le desir sublime
 De revêtir mon nom d'un éclat immortel,
 Je gravirai sans peur les marches de l'autel
 Ou je veux m'immoler moi-même pour victime....

In 1878 Bourget decided to put his modernist ideas into practice in Edel, a poem of the modern city. This collection had a celebrated preface which, as it was deleted from the later definitive editions of Bourget's poetry, we have reproduced in its entirety in the notes below (292). Bourget's intentions were more exciting than his poetry. Without doubt he failed to find 'une langue inventée, un vers fouillé, palpitant, nerveux, souple à la pensée comme le gant à la main' which he held to be necessary for the evocation of modern life. This discovery was to be made by his friend Laforgue who was greatly impressed by Bourget's ideas. Nevertheless the scope of Bourget's picture of modern life is fairly wide; although it conc-

(292) Je détache ce poème d'un recueil plus complet et définitif qui paraîtra à son heure et portera le titre de Contes modernes. Edel reproduit assez exactement la nuance générale de ce livre, composé sous l'obsession d'une idée commune, je pense, à bien des écrivains consciencieux de ma génération: la recherche de ce phénix encore à trouver, malgré tant d'efforts et de si heureux: le poème moderne. - Oui, un poème se passant de nos jours, absolument impossible à un autre moment de l'histoire de nos mœurs, traversé par des figures contemporaines et coudoyées, beau d'une beauté parisienne, complexe et raffiné comme nos sensations, enfermé dans les horizons connus de la Madeleine, des Champs-Élysées et du Boulevard, un poème en bottines vernies et en habit noir, et cependant humain, frémissant et lyrique même dans l'analyse, un poème qui ne soit ni un roman ni une nouvelle en vers, - et pour l'écrire une langue inventée, un vers fouillé, palpitant, nerveux, souple à la pensée comme le gant à la main; - un rêve d'artiste, quoi! dont on ignore si c'est une Amérique et si on la découvrira, ou bien une pierre philosophale, et si on mourra fou pour en avoir entrepris le grand oeuvre.

Un mot maintenant sur Edel. C'est une histoire d'amour simple jusqu'à en être banale. Un jeune homme aime une jeune fille, il met tout son coeur là où elle ne met que le bout de sa main gantée. Musset a dit :

Il n'est de vulgaire chagrin
Que celui d'une âme vulgaire.

Ai-je réussi comme je voulais, et sous cette forme personnelle si naturellement vouée à l'expression de l'analyse intime, à disséquer la passion d'un écrivain né sur le tard du siècle, avec ses contrastes inexplicables, son scepticisme et sa tendresse, ses énervements et ses frénésies, ses extases et ses abattements? Ai-je assez mystérieusement adombré, en regard de cette figure tourmentée, l'aristocratique profil d'une de ces adorables étrangères qui vivent une saison de leur vie parmi nous, entre le parc Monceau et le bois de Boulogne, et dont le charme

(292)une fois senti demeure inoubliable comme les airs de musique de leur cntd.pays? Ce n'est plus à moi de le décider. J'ai voulu simplement, par ces quelques lignes, me rattacher au groupe des poètes qui se sont, en des genres divers, attaqués à la vie parisienne. Baudelaire par ses Fleurs du Mal, Coppée par ses Intimités, ses Humbles et son Olivier, Richepin par sa vigoureuse Chanson des gueux, ont ouvert la voie. A nous d'y marcher courageusement.

Voici quarante ans accomplis que le plus étonnant génie du XIXe siècle, notre père à tous, le grand Balzac, à magistralement posé l'idéal moderne : "Toute génération, disait-il, est un drame à quatre ou cinq mille personnages que la littérature a pour mission d'exprimer," - sous peine de devenir ce qu'elle fut à Rome au temps de Claudien, un stérile agencement de syllabes mortes. Ce principe a ramené l'art d'écrire à une psychologie vivante, et renouvelé l'histoire. Apporte-t-il avec lui une poésie nouvelle, destinée à occuper une place brillante entre la poésie historique si merveilleusement représentée par Leconte de Lisle et la poésie romantique dont les élèves de Hugo portent avec vaillance le vieux drapeau? Pour ma part, je le crois en toute sincérité de conscience. Je vois nettement ce qu'il faudrait faire pour que cette poésie fut créée. Hélas! Il me suffit de relire Edel pour constater une fois de plus que dans la littérature comme dans la vie, l'homme réalise malaisément ses rêves.

Et je vis arriver, l'une après l'autre, celles
 Qui, dans ce grand Paris, passent pour les plus belles.
 Les diamants changeants illuminaient de feux
 Le blond pâle et le noir lustré de leurs cheveux,
 Et l'or serrait leurs bras gantés, et des rangées
 De perles ruisselaient sur leurs gorges, plongées
 Dans un nid moelleux de blonde et de satin.
 Ces femmes s'accoudaient avec un air hautain
 Sur le rouge velours de la loge, et, distraites,
 Ayant toute la salle au bout de leurs lorgnettes,
 Elles causaient avec des hommes en frac noir,
 Qui, tour à tour, venaient derrière elles s'asseoir.
 A l'orchestre, les gens de lettres, une armée
 Des princes de la presse et de la renommée,
 Siégeaient, montrés au doigt par les tout jeunes gens,
 Leurs yeux luisaient, aigus, subtils, intelligents,
 Et leur expression de fatigue profonde
 Contrastait avec l'air comblé des gens dumonde.
 Tous ils avaient souffert, lutté, durant quinze ans,
 Tous connu la misère et ses jeunes cuisants,
 Tous douté, tous trempé leur talent dans les larmes,
 Comme on trempe dans l'eau l'acier des bonnes armes;
 Et les plus acclamés, les plus durs, les plus forts,
 Maintenant qu'ils tenaient leur rêve corps à corps,
 Sachant le peu que vaut la gloire parisienne,
 Estimaient que ce prix ne payait pas leur peine.

(293)

Bourget's enthusiasm for high society is, however, only part of a
 general appreciation of the allure of Paris. He anticipated the Unanimists
 in seeing the crowd as an exciting rather than threatening phenomenon.
 In one passage he seems to seek immersion in the total activity of the
 city in the way Romantic poets and primitivists sought to become one
 with nature; it is a modernist equivalent of pantheism in which effects
 of light play an important role:

Deux jours après, j'étais au Bois, l'après-dinée,
 Pour la première fois depuis la matinée
 Délicieuse, intime et tendre des adieux.
 Mais cette fois, c'était le Paris fou, joyeux,
 Qui se ruait, bruyait, paradait à la place
 Où nous alanguissions notre âme aimante et lasse.
 Entre l'Arc de Triomphe et le Lac, ce n'était
 Qu'un grand fourmillement vivant qui remontait
 Et descendait, et les équipages en foule
 Se pressaient, se croisaient, remuaient, noire houle

Que le soleil criblait de son blanc poudroiment,
 Et tout ce soleil flamboyait, allumant
 Les vieux ors des blasons aux panneaux des portières,
 Caressant les frissons des mobiles crinières,
 Pailletant de ses feux les vitres des hôtels;
 Un bon soleil, baignant de rayons paternels
 Les enfants énervés qui jouaient dans le sable,
 Avivant d'un éclat tendre, indéfinissable,
 La peau fine et les yeux des femmes; un soleil
 Joli, parisien, coquet et plein d'éveil,
 Qui se jouait dans l'or des dernières feuillées,
 Qui chatoyait sur les fourrures déployées,
 Miroitait dans le cuivre et l'argent des harnais.

(294)

The thirst for modernity was an identifiable and specific condition among young writers and artists to the extent that Bourget makes it the subject of one passage in Edel; it is possible that it is reference to Laforgue whose acquaintance Bourget may just have made - but the dates are not certain :

Mais, ailleurs, comme il souffre! Il n'est guère exalté
 Que par un mot, pour lui divin: "Modernité!"
 Les femmes de ce temps, leurs parfums, leurs voitures,
 Leurs toilettes, lui sont autant d'âpres tortures.
 Se sachant laid, ayant perdu toutes ses dents,
 L'air d'un vieillard, quoiqu'il n'ait pas encor trente ans,
 Ce malheureux Laurens sent trop bien que sa vie
 Passera sans donner à son âme asservie
 L'âpre possession de tout ce qu'il rêva.
 Naïf et corrompu tout ensemble, il s'en va
 A travers un Paris factice. - Les premières,
 Saint Augustin, le Bois, les courses printanières,
 Les ventes à l'hôtel Drouot, le boulevard,
 Il voit tout, il sait tout. Il est épris d'un art
 Neuf et complexe et fait d'outrance et de névrose.
 Quand on lui dit: "Ecris toi-même," il dit: "Je n'ose."
 La vie aura passé devant ces deux yeux-là,
 Mais comme une duchesse, en un soir de gala,
 Passe dans son coupe devant un café borgne,
 Parée, étincelante, et sans voir qu'on la lorgne.

(295)

(294) Ibid., p.72.

(295) Ibid., pp.65-66.

A disciple of Balzac and Baudelaire could hardly have failed to have been fascinated by the seamier side of Paris. Yet although he is capable of atmospheric description of the squalor of the working-class districts of the city, his description turns away from the purely pessimistic decadent vision by seeing in the very ordinariness of the scene an enviable example of happiness; even scenes such as these thus come to be regarded as positive aspects of the modern city :

Ce soir encor, j'allais. A tous les horizons,
 Ce n'était qu'un amas suintant de maisons
 Noires, et que, de place en place, une fenêtre
 Eclairée et cachant quelque drame peut-être,
 Oeil sinistre, trouait d'une tache de sang.
 Partout des omnibus filaient, éclaboussant
 La foule, tressautant sur les pavés, énormes,
 Crottés, puants, pareils à des monstres difformes,
 Avec leur cargaison d'hommes ayant un cœur
 Qu'ils emportaient vers la joie ou vers la douleur,
 Leurs lanternes crevaient une épaisseur de brume
 Impalpable, et couleur de suie et de bitume.
 La foule remuait, passait, grouillait, criait;
 Et le gaz, palpitante haleine, flamboyait;
 Et j'enviais ces gens qui couraient dans la boue.
 Eux, du moins, une fièvre intense les secoue!
 Vils ou nobles, qu'importe? ils vivent ardemment,
 Ils n'ont pas, comme moi, pour un songe qui ment,
 Un vain fantôme, l'Art, abdiqué la nature;
 Ils la sentent en eux qui veut, qui sourd, qui dure;
 Qui que ce soit, quelqu'un les aime, ils sont heureux...
 Je donnerais tout mon talent pour être un d'eux.

(296)

Bourget's enthusiasm was equalled by some of the leading figures in the cénacles.

Emile Goudeau arrived in the Latin Quarter in 1874 and soon began frequenting the literary cafés and trying to have work published in Blémont's Renaissance. In the space of four short years he became the chief organiser of the young avant-garde, founder of the 'Hydropathes' and the author of a successful volume of modernist verse, Les Fleurs du bitume.

(296) Ibid., pp. 16-17.

A provincial in Paris, he relates in his autobiographical Dix ans de bohème how he was overwhelmed by the excitement of the city, the fashionable beauty of its women, the constant change and rebuilding, the special effects of light, and so on, and how he determined that these should become the subject of poetry (297). Not surprisingly the poets with whom he associated included Coppée, Méral, Richepin, Bouchor, Bourget, Rollinat, Ponchon, Gill and Cros. From its very inception the gathering of the 'Hydropathes' had, in Goudeau's view, the performance and creation of specifically modernist poetry as one of its main aims(298).

Les Fleurs du bitume has six sections : Les Romaines, Chavirette, Cueillette sur l'asphalte, Les Grecs, Une Saison de Spleen and Sifflé.

The debt to Baudelaire is obvious in the title of the collection and of the fifth section as well as in the sub-title of the volume - Petits poèmes parisiens. Goudeau's battle-cry is contained in the opening poem 'La Fée asphalte' :

Aussi ne songe plus aux forêts, aux prairies,
Les squares sont mieux ratissés!
Les soleils de là-bas berçaient les rêveries:
Par le gaz ils sont remplacés.
Que t'importe la rose, et l'humble marguerite,
Et l'insupportable muguet?
Le bitume a des fleurs dont le parfum irrite:
Va donc m'y cueillir un bouquet.

He treats themes popular with nearly all the 'decadent' poets of the modern city, such as the fallen woman. 'Chavirette', is little more than sub-Coppée :

Soit! - Vous êtes venue à Paris; sous les toits,
Une machine à coudre, acquise à tant par mois,
S'efforçant de payer les termes du concierge,
Et le maigre repas de l'ouvrière vierge:
C'est alors que le diable a fait valoir ses droits...

(299)

(297) Dix ans de bohème, pp.14-15.

(298) Ibid., p. 156.

(299) Les Fleurs du bitume, p. 19.

The hedonistic eulogy of sex or alcohol, so much part of the cénacle stock in trade, is particularly effective in the hands of Goudeau because of its precise location in contemporary Paris and the ironic cultural allusions with which it is expressed :

Il est allé partout: en Seine, en Seine-et-Oise;
 Il connaît la Vénus urbaine et villageoise,
 La Vénus des monts et des bois.
 C'est son étude, à lui; c'est sa flore et sa faune;
 Science desséchante, il est devenu jaune
 A force d'en chercher les lois...

(300)

Only occasionally does one sense a more profound irony in which the light-hearted expression cloaks a deadly serious reality. For all his enthusiasm Goudeau knew that the city could destroy life and sanity :

Plus loin, une bouteille
 Très vieille,
 Dont on a bu le cognac,
 Sur le pavé qui glisse,
 Esquisse
 Une marche ab hoc ab hac...
 Le spleen diabolique
 Réplique:
 C'est un frêle mirliton,
 L'âme d'un très chouette
 Poète,
 Qu'on emporte à Charenton.

(301)

In 1879 the ranks of the poets of the modern city received a new and surprising recruit. One of the most substantial items in the first number of La Vie Moderne was a long poem by Banville enthusiastically advocating modern urban life as the proper subject of poetry and art. Since this has not usually been included in the collected editions of Banville's work it is reproduced here in its entirety :

(300) Ibid., p.44.

(301) Ibid., p.147; (Sur la route de Charenton).

Artiste, désormais tu veux peindre la Vie
 Moderne, frémissante, avide, inassouvie,
 Belle de douleur calme et de sévérité;
 Car ton esprit sincère a soif de vérité.
 Vois, comme une forêt d'arbres, la ville immense
 Murmure sous l'orage et le vent en démençe;
 Ses noirs entassements de toits et de maisons
 Ont le charme effrayant des larges frondaisons;
 Aime son monuments qu'en vain le Temps railleur insulte,
 Ses marches, ses jardins; aime ses pauvres cieux
 Toujours mornes, d'un gris terne et délicieux.
 Surtout n'imité pas Hamlet; sans épigramme
 Et d'un coeur chaleureux, aime l'Homme et la Femme.

La Femme surtout! Suis de l'oeil ces bataillons
 De gamines, blanches sous les haillons,
 Et qui, montrant leurs dents, croquent de jaunes pommes
 De terre frites, sous l'oeil allumé des hommes!
 Peins la svelte maigreur aux méplats séduisants
 Et la gracilité des filles de seize ans;
 Va, ne dédaigne rien, ni la bourgeoise obèse,
 Ni la duchesse au front d'or que le zéphyr baise,
 Ni la pierreuse, proie offerte au noir filou,
 Qui peigne ses cheveux lourds avec un vieux clou,
 Ni la bonne, admirant parmi la transparence
 Des bassins, le reflet d'un pantalon garance,
 Ni la vieille qui, pour implorer un secours,
 Se coiffe d'un madras et chante dans les cours,
 Ni ces filles de joie aux tragiques allures,
 Offrant au vent furtif les roses chevelurées,
 Qui poursuivent les soirs leur patient calcul
 Devant les Nouveautés et le Café Menul!
 Catins dont les satins sans jamais faire halte
 Comme des serpents noirs se traînent sur l'asphalte!

Regarde l'Homme aussi! Peins tous les noirs troupeaux
 Des hommes, sénateurs ou bien marchands de peaux
 De lapins; droit, bossu, formidable ou bancroche,
 Vois l'Homme, vois-le bien, de l'Arthez à Gavroche!
 L'homme(sic) actuel, sublime à la fois et mesquin,
 Est vêtu d'un complet comme un Américain;
 Mais tel qu'il est, ce pitre, épris de Navarette,
 Qui dans ses doigts pâlis roule une cigarette,
 Lit dans les astres noirs d'un oeil terrible et sûr,
 Voleur divin, saisit Isis en plein azur,
 Pose un baiser brutal sur ses yeux pleins d'étoiles,
 D'un ongle furieux déchire tous ses voiles,
 Comme un fer rouge met la lèvre sur son col,
 Et la contemple, et pâle encor de son viol,
 A ses pieds gémissant une plainte ingénue
 Regarde la Nature échevelée et nue.

Oui, l'Homme vois-le bien! tire parti de tout!
 Il est beau l'orateur farouche, qui debout,
 Du Progrès fugitif embrassant la chimère,
 Parle, et courbe les fronts sous sa parole amère;
 Mais le vieux chiffonnier, qui sous le ciel changeant
 Montre son crochet noir et sa barbe d'argent,
 Près de la verte Seine à des beautés de Fleuve;
 Et c'est un beau modèle, avec sa blouse neuve,
 Que l'Alphonse blêmi, fashionable et vainqueur,
 Dont la cravate rose et les accroche-cœur
 Font fanatisme, et qui, doux jeune homme de joie,
 Tortille crânement sa casquette de soie.

Oh! ne dédaigne rien dans ta ville! Chéris
 Les parcs éblouissants, ces jardins de Paris
 Où pour nous réjouir, en leurs apothéoses
 Brillent les cœurs sanglants et fulgurants des roses;
 Mais artiste, aime aussi les pauvres talus des
 Fortifications, (302) où sous le triste dais
 Du ciel gris, l'herbe jaune et sèche qui se pèle
 Semble un front dévoré par un erysipèle;
 Car c'est là que, toujours las de voir empirer
 Son destin, l'ouvrier captif vient respirer,
 Et que la jeune fille heureuse, en mince robe,
 Laissant errer son clair sourire, où se dérobe
 Quelque rêve tremblant de ménage et d'amour,
 Avec ses yeux brûlants vient boire un peu de jour!

(303)

Banville's intoxication with the modern city seems sincere enough. He is fully aware of its shortcomings but suggests by example that these merge into an epic, panoramic sweep, satisfying and exciting for its own sake, where 'la bourgeoise obèse' has ^{as} much place as 'la duchesse au front d'or'. His poem is primarily of interest for the scope of the picture of modern Paris. Its language is conventional, even rhetorical, with the exception of some colloquialisms - 'catins', 'bancroche', 'cranement' - and modernisms ('cigarette', 'fashionable') and also frequent, daring enjambements and some internal rhymes. Banville's declaration is strong evidence of just how widespread and influential the modernist movement in

(302) This motif also occurs in the poetry of Gill and Albert.
 (303) La Vie Moderne, 10 April 1879, pp.7-8.

poetry had become in the 1870s. (304)

* * * * *

Many of the features of the treatment of the modern city by the minor poets recur in the work of the major poets also.

* * * * *

Primarily under the influence of Baudelaire but also that of realist 'Parnassians,' such as Coppée, Méral and Valade, Verlaine had from the start of his poetic career interested himself in urban life and urban landscape as poetic subjects. The evolution of his poetry of the modern city is one of the examples discussed at length, in Part Two, Chapter Four, of the transition from modernity to immediacy and the development of forms of poetic impressionism. For the moment we wish to consider the treatment of the theme in more general terms.

- (304) Despite Banville's very limited contribution to the treatment of contemporary reality in poetry - the poem in La Vie Moderne remained an isolated exercise in our period - it is noteworthy that he continued to look upon himself as a modernist which is itself interesting :

Dans tous les poèmes, trop nombreux, hélas!
que j'ai donné au public, je n'ai pas cessé de
poursuivre un double but. D'abord être autant
que possible vivant, sincère et moderne; puis
restituer et renouveler les formes anciennes
laissées injustement dans l'oubli. C'est ainsi
que j'ai été assez heureux pour remettre en
honneur le Triolet, la Ballade, le Rondel de
Charles d'Orléans....

(Riquet à La Houppe
(1884), p. 183).

To the modern reader the second enterprise seems to have received far more attention.

Verlaine's spiritual struggle is set just as clearly against the backdrop of modern urban civilisation as Baudelaire's. The sights and sounds of the modern city furnish the basic atmosphere and setting of many of his poems. These aspects of the urban landscape, including flora and fauna, (the thoroughness of the creation of milieu is reminiscent of Balzac), the pastimes and work of the town-dweller are treated as forming part of the fabric of modern everyday life. These motifs are discussed below, pp. 506 - 508.

The vision of the modern city in the Poèmes Saturniens is primarily one of decadence. In 'Croquis Parisien' the descriptive vignette of modern Paris, in which the predominant colours are grey and black and the prevailing mood sombre, builds up to a contrast with evocative names from classical antiquity :

Moi, j'allais rêvant du divin Platon
Et de Phidias,
Et de Salamine et de Marathon,
Sous l'oeil clignotant des bleus becs de gaz.

Nevertheless one senses a certain potential fascination with the city in lines such as these :

Au loin, un matou frileux et discret
Miaulait d'étrange et grêle façon.

Furthermore there is the definite possibility of gentle irony (perhaps directed at himself) in the picture of the Parnassian absorbed in dreams of ancient Greece beneath the dull skies of modern Paris.

It is entirely in keeping with the decadent interpretation of the city that in one poem, 'Sub Urbe', Verlaine should have chosen as his subject the dead rather than the living and, thereby, anticipated the macabre taste of poets like Rollinat :

Les petits ifs du cimetière
Frémissent au vent hiémal,
Dans la glaciale lumière.

Avec des bruits sourds qui font mal,
Les croix de bois des tombes neuves
Vibrent sur un ton anormal.

The longest of all Verlaine's city poems, 'Nocturne Parisien', is itself characterised by the same morbid preoccupation, this time extended to incorporate a judgement of Paris as a destroyer of souls :

Roule, roule ton flot indolent, morne Seine. -
 Sous tes ponts qu'environne une vapeur malsaine
 Bien des corps ont passé, morts, horribles, pourris,
 Dont les âmes avaient pour meurtrier Paris.....

For all this, however, the poet sees compensations which may even tip the balance on the side of the positive aspects of urban existence. The Seine may be less romantic, less colourful than other rivers; it may even be a dark conveyer of corpses. Yet it can offer its own brand of pleasures :

Oui, mais quand vient le soir, raréfiant enfin
 Les passants alourdis de sommeil ou de faim,
 Et que le couchant met au ciel des taches rouges,
 Qu'il fait bon aux rêveurs descendre leurs barges
 Et, s'accoudant au pont de la Cité, devant
 Notre-Dame, songer, coeur et cheveux au vent!

Some of these pleasures reflect the prevalent taste for sensations gringantes, (overspiced as Zola might have said) and, in one instance, anticipate a theme in the work of Richépin and Laforgue :

- Puis, tout à coup, ainsi qu'un ténor effaré
 Lançant dans l'air bruni son cri désespéré,
 Son cri se lamente et se prolonge, et crie,
 Eclate en quelque coin l'orgue de Barbarie...
 C'est écorché, c'est faux, c'est horrible, c'est dur....

In one poem in La Bonne Chanson it is the squalour and vice of Paris which is highlighted and contrasted with the pure beauty of the beloved and the poet's happiness with her :

Le bruit des cabarets, la fange du trottoir,
 Les platanes déchus s'effeuillant dans l'air noir,
 L'omnibus, ouïe de ferraille et de boues,
 Qui grince, mal assis entre ses quatre roues,
 Et roule ses yeux verts et rouges lentement,
 Les ouvriers allant au club, tout en fumant
 Leur brûle-gueule au nez des agents de police,
 Toits qui dégouttent, murs suintants, pavé qui glisse,
 Bitume défoncé, ruisseaux comblant l'égout,
 Voilà ma route - avec le paradis au bout.

Every item in this impressionistic panorama (305) of the crowded city

(305) See below, p.683, for a discussion of the poem's style.

is seen to its worst advantage : the streets, pavement and even the walls are filthy, the drains overflowing. What could have been a call to pleasure or excitement becomes a noisy intrusion upon the poet's thoughts of his fiancée :

Le bruit des cabarets...
L'omnibus, ouragan de ferraille....

With a change of partner came a change of heart towards modernity. Encouraged by Rimbaud, Verlaine developed an enthusiastic curiosity and appreciation for the modern urban setting and its activities which is in marked contrast to the reservations, even condemnation, of his earlier poetry. One of the high points of this enthusiasm is to be seen in the descriptions contained in his correspondence from London, descriptions which at one time he seems to have contemplated incorporating into a collection of prose poems. The poet's eye for detail and sense of atmosphere is applied to both the architecture and the way of life of the inhabitants :

D'ailleurs la Tamise est superbe : figure-toi un immense tourbillon de boue : quelque chose comme un gigantesque gogueneau débordant. Ponts véritablement babyloniens, avec des centaines de piles en fonte grosses et hautes comme feu la Colonne et peintes en rouge-sang.

(Corr. I, p.42)

La devanture (des établissements de consommation) est en bois couleur d'acajou vernis avec des gros ornements de cuivre. A hauteur d'homme le vitrage est en verre dépoli avec des fleurs, oiseaux, etc., en poli, comme chez les Duval. Vous entrez par une porte terriblement épaisse retenue entrouverte par une courroie formidable (...) Tout petit, l'intérieur : un comptoir d'acajou avec tablette en zinc le long duquel, soit debout, soit perchés sur de très hauts tabourets très étroits, boivent, fument et nagillent messieurs bien mis, pauvres hideux, porte-faix tout en blanc, cochers bouffis comme nos cochers et hirsutes comme eux.

(Corr. I, pp.60-61)

Chapitre des femmes : chignons incroyables, bracelets de velours avec boucles d'acier, châles rouges, (comme des saignements de nez, - a dit très justement Valler) (...) misses à la longue jupe de satin groseille, jaspée de boue, tigrée de consommés épanchés, trouée de cigarettes (...) Des nègres comme s'il en neigeait. Au café-concert, dans la rue, partout!

(Corr. I, p.48)

Les grenadiers (splendides hommes en rouge, frisés et pommades) "donnent le bras" moyennant 6 pences (sic), le dimanche, aux dames. Mais les Horseguards, - cuirassés, bottés, casques à traînes blanches - un shilling! - dame!

(Corr. I, p.80)

The same enthusiasm is evident in certain of the Romances sans Paroles :- in the excitement of Walcourt', in the fascination with effects of light in the modern city in the first 'Bruxelles - Simples Fresques', in the poet's involvement in the joyful whirl of the fairground in 'Bruxelles - Chevaux de bois' or of street dancing in Soho in 'Streets', I, and in the objective serenity of the description in 'Streets', II.

Yet, there is, even in the Romances sans Paroles, another face of the city. In the third of the Ariettes oubliées it corresponds to a mood of melancholy anxiety :

Il pleure dans mon coeur
Comme il pleut sur la ville;
Quelle est cette langueur
Qui pénètre mon coeur?

In 'Charleroi' the harmful effects of modern industry upon the landscape provide the poet with a specific and identifiable cause for a similar mood as his train draws into the Belgian town :

On sent donc quoi?
Les gares tonnent,
Les yeux s'étonnent,
Où Charleroi?.....

Dans l'herbe noire
Les kobolds vont.
Le vent profond
Pleuve, on veut croire.

This pessimistic tone is corroborated by an important poem in Jadis et Naguère. Just as Verlaine had written alongside the pure utterances of La Bonne Chanson three contrasting erotic 'vieilles "Bonnes Chansons" ' showing another part of his personality and feelings, hidden from the beloved, so he produced a poem in stark contrast to the excited evocations of the London he visited with Rimbaud. The poem which is now known by the title 'Sonnet boiteux' was actually written in 1873 and is a description of the winter of 1872-73 which Verlaine spent with Rimbaud in London. Its original title was 'Hiver'. Nevertheless, although its total lack of euphoria may seem to indicate a profound disillusionment with that period of the relationship with Rimbaud, it is very close to some of Rimbaud's own poetry. In particular one is struck by the apocalyptic style of what is basically a call for vengeance upon the city in which the poets have experienced extreme hardship and seen the poverty of the working classes:

Ô le feu du ciel sur cette ville de la Bible!

More precisely there is a parallel between the coloration of Rimbaud's descriptions of London and 'Sonnet boiteux'. For Rimbaud the predominant colours of London were red and black, seen especially in the mud which is held to be simultaneously blood-red and black. There are several well-known examples of this :

Dans les villes la boue m'apparaissait soudainement rouge
et noire.....

(Mauvais Sang, Une Saison en Enfer)

... la cité énorme au ciel taché de feu et de boue.....

('Adieu', Ibid.)

La boue est rouge ou noire.

('Enfance', V.)

Moreover the same combination of colours is applied by Rimbaud to what seem to be aspects of the life-force : the vitalism of eyes or blood itself :

Des yeux hébétés à la façon de la nuit d'été,
rouges et noirs...

('Parade')

.... des blessure écarlates et noires....

(Being Beateous)

It is altogether possible, however, given the difficulty of the poems in which these two latter references are found, that they are also evocations -admittedly somewhat symbolic - of effects of lighting or landscape. A number of critics, notably Jean - Pierre Richard, have attributed the obsession with this pair of colours to an idiosyncratic psychological dominance on Rimbaud's part. The fact that they are also central to Verlaine's 'Sonnet boiteux' casts considerable doubt upon this interpretation (at least as a complete solution to the problem), the more so since there is other evidence to relate the colours to the reality of the London landscape which Verlaine and Rimbaud knew. In Verlaine's poem the rôle of actual landscape is clearer than in Rimbaud :

Londres fume et crie. Ô quelle ville de la Bible!
Le gaz flambe et nage et les enseignes sont vermeilles.

(306)

(Yet Verlaine does not limit himself to descriptive evocations for the same connection with blood is made :

Ah! vraiment c'est trop la mort du naïf animal
Qui voit tout son sang couler sous son regard fané...
Non vraiment c'est trop un martyr sans espérance.....

(306) The original version of the second stanza contains an additional reference to black :

Et les maisons, dans leur ratatinement terrible,
Epouvantent comme un tas noir de petites vieilles.

There is an interplay of mood and sense-impressions in the poem, of which this connection is an example; this interplay will be further discussed in Part Two, Chapter Four.) The two predominant colours of London in the 1870s were red and black. Both Rimbaud and Verlaine allude to the blackening effects of smoke and fog - an entirely authentic phenomenon noted by many visitors to London in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular this accumulated grime, given a muddy consistency on the roads by the effects of rain and horse traffic, was thought to be a health hazard even at the time. More surprising, perhaps, are the references to red. Yet in the 1870s there were many newly constructed buildings in what was then a very bright, blood-red brick. Moreover, Verlaine's correspondence reveals other possible 'sources' for the preoccupation with red :

Ponts véritablement babyloniens, avec des
certaines de piles en fonte grosses
et hautes..... peintes en rouge-sang.

Chapitre des femmes.... châles rouges.
comme des saignements de nez.

Thus the best explanation of Rimbaud's red and black mud is probably the simplest : the reflection of red buildings and bridges, sunsets and possibly lamps on the glossy surface of damp black mud in London's streets. Verlaine's poem is a major clue in such an interpretation. Apart from these visual impressions in 'Sonnet boiteux', sound plays the same intrusive rôle as in La Bonne Chanson XVI; *the poem differs in that* the poet's pure ideal is no longer Mathilde but a broader, nostalgic conception of a rural way of life to which he would attempt, unsuccessfully to return. If there had been ambiguity in Verlaine's attitude to the modern city it is now consistently hostile. It is characterised by impermanence :

Né l'enfant des grandes villes
Et des révoltes serviles,
J'ai là tout cherché, trouvé....
Mais, puisque rien n'en demeure,
J'ai dit un adieu léger
A tout ce qui peut changer...

(I, XXIII)

by vice and ugliness :

.... Dis les gaz, et l'horreur identique
Du mal toujours, du laid partout sur les chemins...

(I, III)

by loneliness in a harsh, inhospitable setting where nothing has
meaning :

La "grande ville" ! Un tas criard de pierres blanches
Où rage le soleil comme en pays conquis.
Tous les vices ont leurs tanières, les exquis
Et les hideux, dans ce desert de pierres blanches.

Des odeurs. Des bruits vains. Où que vague le coeur,
Toujours ce poudroiment vertigineux de sable,
Toujours ce remuement de la chose coupable
Dans cette solitude où s'écoeure le coeur!

(III, XVI)

It is interesting to note that even in the period of the
composition of Sagesse Verlaine could see attractions in city life. This
attitude did not find its way into his published work. In the poem
'Londres', probably written in 1876, the atmosphere of the British capital
is seen as almost too alluring, in particular its Sundays filled with the
sound of church bells :

Trop doux peut-être, il faut la crainte de l'Enfer.
The protestant complacency of London is no substitute for Catholicism
and the city, which has after all its vices and injustices, is in need of
God's intervention :

....Dieu puissant, versez - leur la lumière
Pour qu'ils apprennent à comprendre enfin Jésus.

Six heures. Les buveurs regagnent leur buvette,
La famille son home et la rue est à Dieu:
Et dans le ciel sali quelque étoile seulette
Pronostique la pluie aux gueux sans feu ni lieu.

After Sagesse (the rewriting of 'Hiver' and its transformation into 'Sonnet boiteux' being an important exception) there are few city poems by Verlaine of any significance. One or two pieces seem to suggest a fellow-feeling with the Impressionist painters' evocation of the modern urban scene. A favourite pictorial subject was the outer suburbs of Paris. Verlaine treated this in 'L'Aube à l'Envers' written in 1882 when he was working at the École d'Aguesseau in Boulogne-sur-Seine :

Le Point-du-Jour avec Paris au large,
Des chants, des tirs, les femmes qu'on "rêvait",
La Seine claire et la foule qui fait
Sur ce poème un vague essai de charge.

On danse aussi, car tout est dans la marge
Que fait le fleuve à ce livre parfait,
Et si parfois l'on tuait ou buvait,
Le fleuve est sourd et le vin est litharge.

Le Point-du-Jour, mais c'est l'Ouest de Paris!
Un calembour a béni son histoire
D'affreux baisers et d'immondes paris.

En attendant que sonne l'heure noire
Où les bateaux-omnibus et les trains
Ne partent plus, tirez, tirs, fringuez, reins!

Nevertheless the sonnet's central preoccupation seems to a declared (and rather facile) play on words which devalues the importance of the poem; only the impressionistic style of the final stanza saves the poem from banality.

* * * * *

Although the modern city is not a major theme in Rimbaud's verse poems, the treatment it will receive in the Illuminations is nevertheless to some extent foreshadowed in them.

The earliest vision of the modern city in Rimbaud's poetry is of Paris as the microcosm of the class struggle. 'Chant de guerre parisien' is not simply a reflection of revolutionary determination and bravado at the time of the Commune and its imminent suppression; it also provides an indication of the roots of revolution - social inequality made more

obvious in the structure of large cities. So it is, in a contrast often overlooked, that the grand bourgeois 'Propriétés vertes' of the opening stanza are to be compared with 'nos tanières' in the fourth. The prosperous suburban sprawl (the pleasures of suburban life are described by a Versaillais in the Lettre du Baron de Petdechève) is further suggested by the accumulation of place names in the second stanza : Sèvres, Meudon, Bagneux, Asnières. (The technique is reminiscent of the brilliant piling up of proper names in the satirical sonnet 'Paris' in the Album zutique which spares neither establishment nor avant-garde figures; one suspects an underlying irritation with the notables of city society whose names acquire a disproportionate currency.) Social injustice is condensed into reflection on a single event - the return of the victorious Versaillais - in 'L'Orgie parisienne', (307). The poem has a wider significance than this, however. It may rightly be regarded as an early post-Baudelarian version of the decadent characterisation of the city as corrupt and vicious. It is therefore with irony that Paris is referred to as 'la Cité sainte' in the opening stanza (a probable allusion to the cultural and religious pretensions of the defenders of the establishment). The 'orgy' is not a unique indulgence in vice as a celebration of victory; much worse than that it is simply a return by the ruling classes to their normal but perverse way of life. They are the clients and exploiters of expensive prostitutes and courtesans (made hungry by the recent séges) :

Voici le troupeau roux des tordues de hanches:
Soyez fous, vous serez drôles, étant hagards!
Tas de chiennes en rut mangeant des cataplasmes,
Le cri des maisons d'or vous réclame....

(307) See the discussion of this poem on pp. 258 - 66.

Alcohol has always been a consolation and a stimulant for the depraved, lulling them into a stupor in which nonetheless desires subsist and are to be titillated in expectation of the return to vice with nightfall :

.....Ô buveurs désolés,
Buvez! Quand la lumière arrive intense et folle,
Fouillons à vos côtés les luxes ruisselants,
Vous n'allez pas baver, sans geste, sans paroles,
Dans vos verres, les yeux perdus aux lointains blancs?

The unseemly nocturnal activities of Paris are evoked in the wake of Baudelaire :

.....Écoutez sauter aux nuits ardentes
Les idiots râleurs, vieillards, pantins, laquais

By a not altogether logical transformation Paris ceases to be the fount of vice - 'la Reine aux fesses cascadantes' - and by the tenth stanza becomes a good-hearted putain who is merely the intended victim (although she will prove to be too robust) of :

Syphilitiques, fous, sois, pantins, ventriloques....

In a progressiste view of the future, Paris even becomes the symbol of a new age which will one day dawn :

Corps remagnétisé pour les énormes peines,
Tu rebois donc la vie effroyable...

Yet the parting shot, (possibly as a result of an incorrect ordering of the stanzas!) is a return to the decadent equation of modernity with vice: (with a specific allusion to recent events) :

- Société, tout est rétabli : - les orgies
Pleurent leur ancien rôle aux anciens lupanars.
Et les gaz en délire, aux murailles rougies,
Flambent sinistrement vers les azurs blafards!

'Chant de guerre parisien' and, more obviously 'L'Orgie parisienne...' contain suggestions of how the city may be redeemed (through left-wing revolution). There is indeed a more positive, even enthusiastic, attitude towards the modern city to be found in the verse poems. In 'Bonne Pensée'

du Matin', as in the evocative letter to Delahaye of June 1872 describing a Parisian dawn, it is the presence of the workers and their wholesome activity which lends the city an almost pagan allure :

Mais là-bas dans l'immense chantier
Vers le soleil des Hespérides,
En bras de chemise, les charpentiers
Déjà s'agitent.

The same enthusiasm for urban activity pervades the quietly beautiful poem 'Est-elle almée...', again a dawn scene; the mysterious 'Elle' which has puzzled most commentators is in all probability dawn itself, (the same goddess who would later be evoked in 'Aube') with all the delicate, elusive beauty of an oriental dancer :

Est-elle almée?... aux premières heures bleues
Se détruira-t-elle comme les fleurs feues....
Devant la splendide étendue où l'on sente
Souffler la ville énormément florissante!

'Bruxelles', which is discussed again below with regard to the development of Rimbaud's poetic impressionism, is a more detailed formulation of a feeling of excitement and pleasure at being in a city and becoming absorbed by its sights and sounds. So much is this the case that the poet sees the experience as the summary of all potentialities in which further description would serve no purpose; he is quite literally lost for words :

C'est trop beau! trop! Gardons notre silence.....
Réunion des scènes infinies,
Je te connais et t'admire en silence.

The ambiguity of Rimbaud's response to the modern city, of which the extreme points in the verse poem are parts of 'L'Orgie parisienne' on the one hand and 'Bruxelles' on the other, is present in both Une Saison en Enfer and the Illuminations. In the former the less pleasant aspects of the city predominate. 'Mauvais Sang' has a vivid, almost infernal description of the city :

Dans les villes la boue m'apparaissait soudainement rouge et noire... je voyais une mer de flammes et de fumée au ciel; et, à gauche, à droite, toutes les richesses flambant comme un milliard de tonnerres.

The sea of flame and smoke belched out by the city is to be contrasted with the real sea referred to a few paragraphs earlier; not even the comforts of modern urban life (such as artificial lighting) are enough to win over the poet who has determined on a new departure :

Que les villes s'allument dans le soir. Ma journée est faite; je quitte l'Europe. L'air marin brûlera mes poumons...

In 'Délires', I, it is drunkenness and poverty which characterise the city; both were features of London which particularly stuck Verlaine and Rimbaud :

Dans les bouges où nous nous enivrons,
il pleurait en considérant ceux qui nous
entouraient, bétail de la misère. Il
relevait les ivrognes dans les rues noires.....

The description of the city as a kind of industrial desert in 'Délires' II is less biographical and more deliberately modernistic :

J'aimai le désert, les vergers brûlés, les
boutiques fanées, les boissons tiédies (308). Je
me traînais dans les ruelles puantes... bombarde-
nous avec des blocs de terre sèche. Aux glaces des
magasins splendides! dans les salons! Fais manger
sa poussière à la ville. Oxyde les gargouilles....

Only in 'Adieu' is there really any sign of enthusiasm for the city, even then there is a sharp contrast between the poet's present experience and a futuristic vision :

... le port de la misère, la cité énorme au ciel taché de
feu et de boue. Ah! les haillons pourris, le pain trempé de pluie,
l'ivresse...

Il faut être absolument moderne...

Cependant c'est la veille ... à l'aurore, armés d'une ardente
patience nous entrerons aux splendides villes.

The most celebrated Rimbaldian evocations of the modern city are to be found in the Illuminations. One possible reference, which seems to have been overlooked, is in 'Enfance' V, where the 'tombeau, blanchi à la chaux' has been seen as an allusion to Cain's willing descent into the

(308) Is this an allusion to England?

tomb in La Légende des Siècles. This, however, seems to have little connection with what are surely references to London :

... les brumes s'assemblent. La boue
est rouge et noire. Ville monstrueuse,
nuit sans fin!...

There is obviously an element of fantasy (or even hallucination) in the poem but one fact, other than an apparent location in London, emerges : the poet is underground in a 'room' which he first imagines is a tomb, or at least is sealed off from the world above like a tomb, but then realises is something else. It is connected to the outside world, after all, by a ventilation system. Two possible explanations spring to mind : either the poet is in the underground stack of a large library ('la lampe éclaire très vivement ces journaux, que je suis idiot de relire, ces livres sans intérêt'), or one of the newly constructed underground stations of the Metropolitan railway ('blanchi à la chaux avec les lignes du ciment en relief - très loin sous terre') perhaps Baker Street. The latter explanation would accord well with the precise notation, suitable in a description of a piece of constructional engineering : 'Moins haut, sont des égouts'. (Nor would it contradict the reference to books and newspapers which the poet could be reading in the train). The poem may, of course, be an amalgam of both these, or other, variants of the new forms of subterranean existence in the modern city.

One of the most curious pieces in the Illuminations is 'Ouvriers' written in a style appropriate to the realist novel. It describes a walk in the industrial suburbs of a large city by an impoverished young couple (Rimbaud and Verlaine?); the rather unlikely name of Henrika is given to the narrator's female companion. They are encouraged to go on their walk by a South wind unexpectedly warm for a February morning. The effects of modern industry are described in unpleasant terms : 'les vilaines odeurs des jardins ravagés et des prés desséchés'. Nevertheless one senses an admiration for

the workers referred to in the title, and a vain desire to be part of their effort : 'La ville, avec sa fumée et ses bruits de métier nous suivait très loin... Non! ... nous ne serons jamais que des orphelins fiancés...'

But this exclusion is a reminder of a lifetime of frustration beginning in childhood and its unhappy summers (309). The poet may quit this particular variant of modern industrial society ('cet avare pays') but will he ever attain 'l'humble quantité de force et de science que le sort a toujours éloignée de moi'? This may be a reference simply to Rimbaud's ambition as a voyant but it may be a pun implying also his separation from modern society characterised by power and technological achievement.

Less controversial than 'Enfance', V is a poem which will be discussed at greater length in the section devoted to poetic impressionism in Part Two, Chapter Four. 'Les Ponts' is the evocation of glimpses of a colourful public ceremony set against the lattice-work of London's bridges seen on a misty day, beneath which flows the Thames 'large comme un bras de mer'. (Moreover, the skyline is dominated by churches, notably, one suspects, St. Paul's : 'les rives chargées de dômes'). Grand ceremonial must have been one of the more aesthetically pleasing aspects of the London Rimbaud knew. The contrast of the modernity of functional metallic and stone bridges, made to seem greyer still by the pervading atmosphere, with the bright colours of traditional costume would doubtless have caught his attention. This poem is surely to be related to parts of 'Villes', (XIX), where the 'bras de mer' and the 'dôme' recur, and where 'passerelles de cuivre' may, in part at least, be an elliptical allusion to bridges. This being said it is perhaps not too much to expect further clues to the meaning of 'Les Ponts'. 'Villes', (XIX), does, indeed, contain a much clearer reference to public ceremonial than the more tenuous hints in 'Les Ponts' :

-
- (309) Summers must have been unhappy for Rimbaud, partly because of the prohibitions imposed on him by his mother, made more obvious at holiday time when the sun was a reminder of impossible adventures, and partly because of his separation from the one environment where he was a success - school.

... les promeneurs d'un matin de dimanche
à Londres, se dirigent vers un diligence
de diamants. Quelques divans de velours
rouge.....

(310)

'Les Ponts' is thus, an early example of a decidedly modern theme :
the tourist's view of an exciting capital city.

Rimbaud's reputation as a poet of the modern city rests primarily on
the quartet of poems in the Illuminations : 'Ville', 'Villes' (XVII),
'Villes' (XIX) and 'Metropolitain'.

'Ville' is written in a strange, dry, possibly ironic style which
leads the reader to question Rimbaud's seriousness. Is the condemnation of
modern city life to be taken altogether at face value or is the poet
'killing two birds with one stone' by linking with this condemnation (in
which other poems suggest he must in part at least have shared) a subtle
attack on an imaginary pamphleteering guardian of the traditional standards
of good taste? Once again there appear to be grounds for seeing a real
city - London - as the subject of the poem rather than pure fantasy. The
city is described as a 'métropole' which suggests a link with 'Métropolitain'
where allusions to London are generally acknowledged. Unlike Paris and
many continental cities London's shape is unplanned - the result of
spontaneous growth. It was, as Verlaine remarked in his correspondence,
without monuments, by which he presumably meant great medieval churches
and cathedrals. The city in the poem is inhabited, like London, by
'millions de gens' who are contrasted with 'les peuples du continent'.
The closest comparison with Victorian London is in the reference to
l'épaisse et éternelle fumée de charbon'. The word 'cottage' is not only
English but the phrase 'mon cottage qui est ma patrie et tout mon coeur' may
have its origin in a recollection of the proverb 'an Englishman's home is

(310) Could this be an allusion to the Lord Mayor's coach. The scenery
described in 'Les Ponts' and parts of 'Villes', XIX, is obviously
applicable to the City of London. The Lord Mayor's Show has always
taken place at the weekend, although nowadays on a Saturday morning.

his castle'; for that matter the negative construction in the first line of the poem - 'point trop mécontent' - is more English than French in flavour. The final reference to mud in the streets is one of the recurring motifs of Rimbaud's London poetry; its association with crime and despair in this poem is almost certainly a result of the direct acquaintance Rimbaud and Verlaine made with the more sordid and deprived quarters of London.

Although Rimbaud may have his tongue in cheek in his condemnation of the bad taste evident in a modern city like London, there are clearly aspects of urban life which would have genuinely disturbed him : the equation of modernity with ugliness (or even squalor), a materialist functionalism (311) which affects even morality and language (312), the breakdown of personal relationships and the destruction of the rôle of the individual - 'les millions de gens qui n'ont pas besoin de se connaître....'

In contrast to 'Ville', 'Villes'(XVII) provides the exegete with very few clues concerning possible 'sources' in reality for most of the poem; this is one piece which really does, at least at first sight, merit being called a fantasmagoria. The use of the plural title is perhaps in itself an indication that this is a conglomeration of real and imagined features of cities fused into an ideal vision. The poet makes this clear from the very start in a fundamental paradox in which cities are made synonymous with two non-urban geographical locations which are, moreover, the stuff of dreams :

Ce sont des villes! C'est un peuple pour qui
se sont montrés ces Alleghanys et ces Libans
de rêve.

Perhaps all ~~that~~ this means is that the poet has a vision of towering cities

- (311) This could have compensating advantages of which Rimbaud was aware, but these are still put up for sale in 'Solde' where the English spelling 'comfort' suggests the influence of London: 'A vendre les habitations et les migrations, sports, féeries et comforts parfaits, et le bruit, le mouvement et l'avenir qu'ils font'.
- (312) This could be regarded as a prophetic statement in view of the extent to which all our lives are now dependent upon computers.

(like mountains) full of wonders to which he attaches names associated by him, through his reading of travel stories, with adventure and beauty. For what follows, even if idealised, is description of urban landscape. Tempting though Adam's explanation is of the next sentence, a reference to a funicular railway scarcely seems congruous with the basic setting of the poem. Moreover, Rimbaud's normal practice is for the terms of his comparisons to cause a jolt, to make use of the unexpected; to compare a funicular railway with a moving chalet seems a little obvious since both would be found in Switzerland. There are likelier explanations given the poet's intention of evoking cities. The period of the visits Rimbaud and Verlaine made to London was one of great building activity (to be temporarily halted after the great crash of 1876). There might be a case for interpreting this sentence as a reference to construction platforms which do move horizontally as well as vertically, thus explaining the apparent conflict between rails and pulleys which is left unexplained by Adam's theory. It is also possible, though perhaps less satisfactory, to see a reference to the grand ornate lifts with which public buildings were being equipped at this time in the major cities. One cannot rule out the notion that it refers to part of the equipment for loading and unloading ships in London's docks. The theory that the poet is describing construction sites (313) is, however, strengthened by the next sentence which, incidentally, shows that 'ces Alleghany, et ces Libans' are 'de rêve' because they have been transposed from natural to artificial landscape (although there is no need to suppose a detrimental contrast between the modern and the primitive) :

Les vieux cratères ceints de colosses
et de palmiers de cuivres rugissent
mélodieusement dans les feux.

(313) For the theme of the chantier see also 'Bonne Pensée du Matin' and 'Being Beateous'.

The hollowed out construction site is surrounded by tall red-brick buildings with, possibly, some metallic motifs in the landscape such as girders, glowing in the sunset (314) The time of day is indicated elsewhere in the poem : 'la lumière des cimes', 'L'ardeur du ciel', 'l'écroulement des apothéoses', 'la mer s'assonbrit parfois avec des éclats mortels', 'la lune brûle', 'la fête de la nuit'. 'Villes' (XVII) is, thus, a fantastic version of a theme already treated by Baudelaire - the coming of night in the modern city. This realisation helps to explain the unusual references to lighting in the poem - possibly an indication of the fascination of artificial illumination. (315)

It also accounts for the several references to sex (for every night Venus is reborn) which in this instance seems to have been made into something beautiful (even if it takes the form of prostitution) by the transposition into magical, mysterious terms : 'Des fêtes amoureuses sonnent', 'les centauresse s s é r a p h i q u e s', 'la naissance éternelle de V é n u s'. The presence of Mab, the queen of fairies (316) is surely to be accounted for as an oblique reference to prostitution (or possibly even homosexuality if Rimbaud was sufficiently acquainted with English slang). The 'cortèges de Mabs en robes rousses, opalines' make their appearance on the nocturnal city streets just as in the poetry of Baudelaire and Corbière, but they have been transformed by Rimbaud into an almost magical phenomenon with costume befitting a fairy tale. Even the frustrated appetite for sex and alcohol of suburban women is lent a certain glamour by a pagan reference :

Les Bacchantes des banlieues sanglotent et la lune
brûle et hurle.

Both artisans in their factories and workshops and intellectuals working in the solitude of their studies hear the call of love :

-
- (314) This is made more likely if one compares the 'passerelles de cuivre' in 'Villes' (XIX).
 (315) 'la rumeur des perles et des conques précieuses' may be an oblique reference to a 'ville-lumière'.
 (316) In, of course, A Midsummer-Night's Dream.

Vénus entre dans les cavernes des forgerons
et des ermites.

The pagan allusions associated with the references to sex are entirely appropriate in the light of the primitivist colouring given by Rimbaud to a global description of the night of love :

Les sauvages dansent sans cesse la fête
de la nuit.

Perhaps one of the keys to the beauty of the poem is that in this idealisation the modern and the primitive are reconciled; the city is given the attributes of wild and awe-inspiring nature and its inhabitants respond to this.

Sexual love is treated unusually favourably in the poem because it is one aspect of a progressiste dream of universal love and harmonious activity :

Des groupes de beffrois chantent les idées
des peuples. Des châteaux bâtis en os
sort la musique inconnue. Toutes les
légendes évoluent et les élans se
ruent dans les bourgs... Et une heure
je suis descendu dans le mouvement
d'un boulevard de Bagdad (317) où des
compagnies ont chanté la joie du
travail nouveau.

Other references in the poem which have perplexed commentators may be easier to understand if one accepts the basic setting of evening in the city. One of the best-loved pastimes of Londoners on a summer evening was attendance at open air concerts (318) given by military bands and large choruses :

La chasse des carillons crie dans les
gorges. Des corporations de chanteurs
géants (319) accourent dans des
vêtements et des oriflammes éclatants...
Sur les plates-formes au milieu des
gouffres les Rolands sonnent leur
bravoure.

-
- (317) Is not the best explanation of this allusion that it is a metaphor? A street in the idealised modern city would have the colour, excitement, bustle and variety of a street lined with an oriental bazaar.
 - (318) A subject already treated in 'A la Musique' and anticipated by Baudelaire.
 - (319) Here, if our interpretation is correct, Rimbaud has added to the mystery of his poem by the simple and age-old device of a transferred epithet.

The sounds, drifting through the air (together, possibly, with other evening music, from taverns, barrel-organs and even birds) provide the accompaniment for love :

Vénus, chargée de flottes orphéoniques....

There is synaesthetic blending of evening sounds with visual impressions :

Vénus, chargée de flottes orphéoniques
et de la rumeur des perles et des conques
précieuses...

One should not overlook the possibility that the phrase 'palmiers de cuivre rugissent mélodieusement dans les feux' is intended as an articulating image between two scenes (320) and between visual and aural impressions, since it could obviously be an allusion to a brass band.

One other important motif in the poem - water - would not be out of place in an evocation of London : 'les canaux pendus...', 'les mâts', 'une mer troublée... la mer s'assombrit...'. This could simply indicate the presence of the Thames as a backdrop. At least one concert platform is still the scene of military band concerts on the embankment (321).

The exegesis we have suggested goes a long way towards elucidating the mysteries of the poem which now appears as an optimistic and fantastic descendant of Baudelaire's 'Crépuscule du Soir'. Much of the mystery stems from an elliptical style - at times almost poetic hyperbole (322) and the fact that the poem does not follow a logical sequence but instead follows the pattern of the modern city and the associations and reflections this

- (320) The hypothetical construction site and the concert gardens - both of which could be different kinds of urban 'cratères'.
- (321) One other possibility, known personally to the present writer, is Kenwood in North London where a concert pavilion stands by the side of the park lake in a hollow formed by surrounding slopes. Evening concerts were given there in the nineteenth century although precise information about dates has not yet been forthcoming.
- (322) Seen for instance in phrases like 'flottes orphéoniques', in the personification of love or the animistic treatment of the moon and flowers.

generate. What the poet has related is one of his privileged moments, a fact stated without ambiguity in the last paragraph and another sure symptom of which is the typically Rimbaldian device of referring to changes in the sky : 'le paradis des orages s'effondre'. It would be idle to pretend that our exegesis, even if it were right in every detail - which it almost certainly is not, solves all the problems in the poem. Full allowance must be made, first for the visionary power of Rimbaud's imagination, second for the possible influence of literary sources for some of the images, (Bernard mentions several, none of which we find completely convincing), and finally the possible effects of drugs and alcohol. Even so, some of the outstanding exegetical problems may yet turn out to have 'prosaic' solutions. Is it not conceivable, for instance, that the following perplexing lines allude to an actual piece of statuary with a fountain : 'Là-haut, les pieds dans la cascade et les ronces, les cerfs tettent Diane'?

In the case of 'Villes' (XIX) one is on surer ground. Not only has Underwood argued (323) convincingly for the influence of a visit to the Crystal Palace upon this poem, but Rimbaud himself refers to London and uses a number of anglicisms. It may be true that Rimbaud is talking of imaginary cities and that these could be contrasted with the reality of a city like London; nevertheless it is in just such a reality that this particular vision of the modern city has its starting-point.

The mood at first seems closer to the pessimism and dry style of 'Ville' than the magical vision of 'Villes' (XVII), for the poet speaks of going beyond even 'les conceptions de la barbarie moderne les plus colossales'. It is true that Rimbaud uses a style which seems to ape that of scientific journalism, (324) in its precision. The 'acropole officielle' is

(324) For a discussion of this phenomenon generally see the next chapter.
 (323) In his article 'Rimbaud et l'Angleterre' and in his invaluable book 'Verlaine et l'Angleterre'.

most likely, itself, a reference to the Crystal Palace - the showpiece of empire (l'éclat impérial des bâtisses). This would account for the unusual light : 'le jour mat produit par ce ciel immuablement gris..... la neige éternelle du sol'. As well as changing exhibits relating to the different domains of the British Empire, and to the achievements of modern industry (usually/ⁱⁿthe form of easily appreciated gadgets some of which could be operated by visitors) there was a permanent exhibition of historical rooms illustrating through art, architecture and artifacts the great phases of human civilisation - the great empires of antiquity. (325) These exhibits embrace the achievements of the whole world, of the mightiest kingdoms; they are perhaps quite literally twenty times more important than the paintings found in a palace associated even with a great Renaissance king like Henry VIII.

It is at this point that allusions to London proper seem to become interwoven with the references to the Crystal Palace (itself almost a city of the future as well as a museum of the past) so that it is not always possible to separate the elements of the amalgam. The reference to 'les escaliers des ministères' would seem to imply an allusion to Whitehall, the name of which might have caused Rimbaud to reflect upon the striking whiteness of the buildings which lined it. In the 1870s they would have stood in stark contrast to the majority of public buildings in red brick. So it is, perhaps, that the poet imagines a nordic emperor responsible for the construction of the buildings. The partially illegible word in the text is almost certainly the key to a deliberate irony: the proud young officers who come in and out of the ministries responsible for the military organisation of the British Empire are

(325) The present writer owes a posthumous debt of gratitude to his grandmother, Florence Watson, who became a regular visitor to the Crystal Palace not many years after the period of Rimbaud's stay in England and recounted her vivid memories of the exhibits. These confirmed amply not only the facts of Underwood's hypothesis in 'Rimbaud et l'Angleterre' but indicated just how great the impact of the exhibits could have been on an impressionable youngster.

compared to the haughtiest of their subjects : Indian Brahmins. This reading, which Suzanne Bernard has dismissed as inappropriate, is in fact entirely satisfactory. It represents a continuation of the theme of empire, of the comparison of ancient empires with the domains of Queen Victoria. The two sentences that follow would serve as an accurate description of residential areas of central London and clearly contain a reference to the English garden style in urban parks :

Par le groupement des bâtiments en squares,
cours et terrasses fermées, on a évincé les
cochers. Les parcs représentent la nature
primitive travaillée par un art superbe.

The next sentence seems to be another of Rimbaud's descriptions of the Thames (or at least a fantastic vision of a river like the Thames, for the perspective is scarcely realistic : 'le haut quartier'). The 'quais chargés de candélabres géants' seems a mild flight of fancy unless they are simply street lamps lining the Embankment. The use of the adjective 'géants' would thus be no more than an example of the kind of hyperbole we have already noted in 'Villes', (XVII). Indeed it is completely in accord with the deliberate exaggeration in the dimensions of 'le dôme de la Sainte-Chapelle', ('de quinze mille pieds de diamètre environ') described at the end of the first paragraph. Underwood, in the article already cited, considers this to be a further reference to the Crystal Palace in which case there has been a sudden change of scene. This is not at all uncommon in the Illuminations; much of the difficulty of the poems stems from this kind of disorder, of the apparent breaking up and reshuffling of normal sequences. However, the possibility should not be overlooked, considering the previous reference to the river, that Rimbaud is in fact thinking primarily of St. Paul's Cathedral. This would not prevent him from giving it some of the qualities of the Crystal Palace, ~~where~~ this would serve his purpose of creating a Babylonian vision - even more evident at the beginning of the second paragraph. The obsession with

depth and levels may nevertheless have some roots in reality. Rimbaud could have studied London from bridges, from the Golden Gallery of St. Paul's or even from the nearby Monument (to the Great Fire). The latter interpretation would explain 'des escaliers qui contournaient les halles et les piliers', if 'halles' is understood in the sense of 'market', for the Monument is adjacent to Billingsgate Market. Moreover, it is topped with an observation platform with a brass rail : 'quelques points des passerelles de cuivre, des plates-formes'. Underwood considers the next description, of the 'quartier commerçant', as an allusion to Piccadilly Circus and Burlington Arcades. This seems extremely probable, and would thus constitute another change of scene. (It would be possible, however, to find other localities near to London Bridge (326) which would approximate to the description. This would lend support to our hypothesis, already suggested, that the 'diligence de diamants' may be an indication of Rimbaud's presence at the Lord Mayor's Show in the City of London). Whatever the case may be, Rimbaud returns once more to the leitmotif of empire - 'nababs', 'roupies' - a reminder that this city is not just a capital but the heart of great colonial dominions.

The final paragraph of the poem is surely, as other commentators have already suggested, a reference to the 'County Set', to the inhabitants of that indeterminate area where Greater London merges with, and eventually becomes the Home Counties.

The changes of scene in both the 'Villes' poems perhaps provide a clue to the plural title. Is not one possibility that it is mild jeu de mots implying the description of different faces of the same city, that one of the qualities of the modern city is its 'plurality'?

The last of the great quartet of London poems, 'Métropolitain', describes the place in the modern city of the new systems of transport.

(326) Furthermore, London Bridge Station was a point at which one could catch the train to the Crystal Palace at Sydenham. Does this fact provide a link between the scenes?

Parallels between Rimbaud's vision of London - in particular the interplay of different levels - and that to be seen in Doré's etchings have long been remarked on. Whether Rimbaud needed to be acquainted with them is another matter. The suggestion is that both artists have performed a similar distortion and exaggeration. Suzanne Bernard, for example, speaking of 'Villes'(XIX) says that Doré in his illustrations to Enault's Londres 'suggère des impressions de profondeurs non moins insolites'. The hint is that Rimbaud knew, and was influenced by, Doré's work. In fact the most striking aspects of his engravings of London scenes - the interlacing network of transport systems at different levels ; railway bridges, railway tunnels, roads, canals, and the smoke-blackened working-class districts through which these were cut, were a real part of London in which distortion was scarcely needed to bring out the strange mixture of the exciting and the infernal. Scenes characterised by sudden drops and gulfs of darkness really existed (327) and were there to be observed. Given the fact that the scenes depicted by Doré were all too real, even if he usually chose the most dramatic perspective, there is no need to presuppose his direct influence upon Rimbaud although this remains entirely possible. Rimbaud may simply have been an impressionable observer of reality.

'Métropolitain' seems to be a vision of London such as the poet might have had on a trip on the Metropolitan Railway, part of which was in the open, or from a number of main railway lines which crossed bridges. The poem opens with a deliberate attempt to stress the northern, mysterious qualities ('hence Ossian') of the view over the river at low tide, probably just before sunset :

(327) Something of the effect is still to be seen in the part of London where the present writer spent his childhood through which passes the local railway line from Liverpool Street to stations in North-East London and the suburbs.

Du détroit d'indigo aux mers d'Ossian, sur
le sable rose et orange qu'a lavé le
ciel vineux.....

In the gloom, artificial light is being used which causes the poet to remark on the criss-crossing 'boulevards de cristal' which come into view. The city is primarily a place of deprivation inhabited by 'jeunes familles pauvres qui s'alimentent chez les fruitiers', presumably because they cannot afford meat. In the second paragraph the poet moves from a continuation of the general urban landscape to what he calls 'la bataille', which may be the activities of the evening rush-hour. First he completes the atmospheric description which takes in the fog and smoke of a dull London day :

Les ruelles de brume échelonnées en bandes affreuses au
ciel qui se recourbe, se recule et descend, formé de
la plus sinistre fumée noire que puisse faire l'Océan
en deuil.....

(328)

For evoking the bustle of what may be rush-hour traffic Rimbaud employs an impressionistic nominal style more effective by holding back the nouns so that they appear as an almost independent series of notations :

Du désert de bitume fuient droit en déroute.....
les casques, les roues, les barques, les croupes.

(329)

(328) Once again the poet equates his impression of the broad Thames with that of the sea; c.f. 'Villes' (XVII): 'la mer s'assombrit parfois avec des éclats mortels...'

(329) Obviously 'les roues' and 'les croupes' are references to (horse) traffic. Similarly 'les casques' must surely be a reference by synecdoche, either to policemen controlling traffic or possibly to firemen rushing to a fire (or both). But what of 'les barques'? Their position between 'les roues' and 'les croupes' would seem to indicate that they were part of the same sequence of impressions. One might simply assume, already given the references to the river, that poet has a viewpoint, (from a bridge?), that enables him to see activity in the docks simultaneously with other aspects of a busy London morning. If, however, one accepts the suggestion that 'casques' may refer to firemen, a more precise exegesis becomes tenuously possible. The sky may be blackened by smoke which seems particularly sinister and funereal because it is hanging over a dockside fire (perhaps in a warehouse) which is being fought both by horse-drawn fire engines and fire tugs. The urgency and danger of such a situation, the presence of uniformed and helmeted firefighters would have enabled Rimbaud to see a modern urban equivalent of a battle - an instant of glamour and excitement in the pervading gloom. Conflagration is a theme occupying elsewhere in Rimbaud's work. This passage could, if we are right, be considered as an example of the miniature epic of modernity to be compared to Baudelaire's 'Crépuscule' poems.

Having already evoked 'la ville' and 'la bataille' Rimbaud proceeds to an impressionistic description, in a heavily nominal style, of the countryside around London, (the next section of his railway journey), commencing with the outer suburbs with their vegetable gardens. Here a wooden bridge is to be seen in contrast to the metallic structures of the city. The reference to Samaria may only seem explicable in the light of Rimbaud's admission that the reader is being presented with 'fantasmagories'. It may also, however, be an indication of the parallel, already discussed in the previous section of this chapter, between travel and spiritual pilgrimage (330). Moreover, a substantial clue is to be derived from a comparison with the first of the Proses Évangéliques where Samaria is described as 'la parvenue.... l'égoïste, plus rigide observatrice de sa loi protestante .. la ville étrangère'. As opposed to the deprived working-class districts of metropolitan London with which he could empathise and in the life of which he had shared, the outer suburbs presented to Rimbaud (as did those of Paris in 'Chant de guerre parisien') the prosperity of the bourgeois parvenus, the protectors of 'respectability' and property (331). In this he could have no part just as he saw Jesus unable to preach successfully in Samaria. This journey into a less congenial setting coincides with the cold descent of night and a series of moonlit effects in which the jogging lantern anticipates Laforgue's 'Variations sur le mot falot, falotte' and 'Solo de Lune'. The combination of moonlight and lantern creates wierd effects for the onlooker : 'ces masques enlumines.... ces crânes lumineuses dans les plans de pois' are most probably scarecrows. Incidentally they suggest the falseness and the distance from life of those whom, in 'Villes' (XIX), Rimbaud called 'le "Comté"'. As in 'Après le Déluge' and other

(330) c.f. 'Damás', in the next paragraph.

(331) It is interesting to note that the references to the material wealth of Samaria seem to be of Rimbaud's invention. One may even wonder whether the Proses Évangéliques were not an exercise in transposing and allegorising his own experiences as a voyant, engaged in the pilgrimage of travel.

poems Rimbaud combines an attack on the social establishment with satirical references to the prevailing taste of the establishment in literature and art. Here it is the insipid pastoral tradition,

one motivation of the town-dweller who decides to live in the pseudo-countryside on the fringes of large cities, which comes under attack : 'l'ondine niaise à la robe bruyante, au bas de la rivière'. The position of this allusion in the sequence (sandwiched between 'ces masques enluminés' and 'ces crânes lumineuses') suggests that its origin is visual/aural impression - perhaps simply a reflection in the murmuring water. The next paragraph devoted according to Rimbaud to a description of the sky, continues the attack upon sentimentalism and bourgeois taste. (332) Neat roads of suburban houses designed to protect their occupants from the larger world ('bordées de grilles et de murs') allow room only for a pretty-pretty, controlled nature which nevertheless threatens to spill beyond its limits : 'contenant à peine leurs bosquets, et les atroces fleurs qu'on appellerait coeurs et soeurs'. This kind of bourgeois contentment is rejected and with it the temptation of one aspect of modernity - artificial indoor comfort (333). From this world the poet is excluded by his own painful version of the long journey to Damascus in search of illumination. Moreover the carefree joy of his adolescent wandering, symbolised by inns, is irretrievably lost. Instead there is another magical world of imaginary delights, linked once again with the idea of travel and exotic climes, of which he can only dream. Eventually this might lead to truth and 'salvation' : 'l'étude des astres - le ciel'. This new dawn will serve as a contrast with, and a recompense for, the present night of isolation and impotence; then the poet will be immersed in the life force, a process adumbrated in his description, in the final paragraph, of a kind of synaesthetic ecstasy.

(332) For a similar attack see 'Ce qu'on dit au poète...' especially :

Ces poupards végétaux en pleurs
Que Grandville eût mis aux lisières.....

(333) The apparent paradox of horror in the face of material poverty and suspicion of material comfort is also found in 'Adieu', (Une Saison en Enfer). 'J'exècre la misère. Et je redoute l'hiver parce que c'est la saison du confort'. Perhaps it was the unequal distribution of such comfort which angered Rimbaud.

'Métropolitain' is the best summary of Rimbaud's city poetry. It reveals the basic ambiguity between enthusiasm and pessimism. In it one may see the effects of the new perspectives discussed in the last chapter : isolation from society at large, the contrast between modern decadence and nature, satirical allusion to aspects of establishment 'culture'. What is more it demonstrates the link between new subjects and new language. The sensation of travel and the sheer variety of experience lead Rimbaud to employ an impressionistic style for considerable sections of the poem. Indeed it is an extreme example of one impressionistic technique (334) : the evocation of the qualities of an object before the object itself is disclosed. In 'Métropolitain' this is implicit in the very structure of the poem, where the 'subjects' are revealed in two words at the end of each paragraph, after the poet's impressions of them.

* * * * *

Corbière presents a picture of the bustling capital with its heedless crowds, carriages and buses darting to and fro (335), its ever welcoming bars (336), its shops (337), its parasols (338), all the business of printing and publishing newspapers and books. (339) The poet goes so far as to incorporate the names of cafés and their price lists into the typography of his poems (340). Yet it is not the excitement or the pleasures of city life which attract the poet's attention but rather a prevailing sense of vice (341) and artificiality.

Corbière realised that in Paris he became that traditional figure of fun, in conversation and in literature, the ignorant provincial in the big city :

Bâtard de Créole et Breton,
Il vint aussi là - fourmilière,
Bazar où rien n'est en pierre,
Où le soleil manque de ton.

- Courage! On fait queue... Un planton
Vous pousse à la chaîne - derrière! - ...

(342)

(334) See Part Two, Chapter Four.

(335) O.C., pp. 705, 706 and 778.

(336) Ibid., p. 706 and p. 707.

(337) Ibid., p. 776

(338) Ibid., p. 722

(339) Ibid., p. 704.

(340) Ibid., p. 725 and p. 776.

(341) Ibid., pp. 704, 706 and 708
for references to prisons and
courts.

(342) Ibid., p. 705.

To the poet's provincial eye the city seemed to swarm with people all preoccupied with their own affairs like an ants' nest, a beehive or an Oriental bazaar. He is so benumbed by the swirl of movement that even the very buildings seem not to be made of stone. When, in all innocence, he attempts to get on a bus he is pushed rudely to the back of the queue and treated as a country oaf. However, as he ironically explains, this mad house appear to be the home of poetry; it is here that he must find fame in his chosen vocation :

Non, petit, il faut commencer
Par être grand - simple ficelle -
Pauvre : remuer l'or à la pelle;
Obscur : un nom à tout casser!

(343)

He knows the road will be hard :

La pente est âpre, tout de même,
Et les stations sont des fours,
Au tableau remontant le cours
De l'Elysée à la Bohème...

- Oui, camarade, il faut qu'on sue
Après son harnais et son art!...
Après les ailes : le brancard!
Vivre notre métier - ça tue...

- Parmi les martyrs ça te range....

(344)

What is most sickening is that in order to be a success one must become known to all the whores and maquereaux of Paris :

... un nom à tout casser!...
Le coller chez les mastroquets,
Et l'apprendre à des perroquets
Qui le chantent ou qui le sifflent....

(345)

The most striking aspect of the big city is the vastly diminished part that nature is able to play - that nature which for all his sarcasm was one of his comforts in Brittany. (346) Paris is a bazaar where the sun does not shine

(343) Ibid., p. 706.
(344) Ibid., p. 779.
(345) Ibid., p. 706.
(346) It will be recalled that on the point of death the poet requested that some heather be brought into his room for him to smell. (Ibid., p.680).

with a pleasing or a natural light. Here the artificial triumphs, even the sun is no longer a vivifying force but is, instead, seen as the heat for cooking thousands of ragouts :

Vois aux cieux le grand fond de cuivre rouge luire,
Immense casserole où le Bon Dieu fait cuire
La manne, l'arlequin, l'éternel plat du jour.
C'est trempé de sueur et c'est poivré d'amour.

Les Laridons en cercle attendent près du four,
On entend vaguement la chair rance bruire,
Et les soiffards aussi sont là, tendant leur buire;
Le marmiteux grelotte en attendant son tour.

The poet, however, cannot share in the materialistic self-advancement of the city beneath a sickly sun pouring down its bounty. He prefers his own cup of bitterness :

Tu crois que le soleil frit donc pour tout le monde
Ces gras graillons grouillants qu'un torrent d'or inonde?
Non, le bouillon chien tombe sur nous du ciel.

Eux sont sous le rayon et nous sous la gouttière
A nous le pot-au-noir qui froidit sans lumière...
Notre substance à nous, c'est notre poche à fiel.

Ma foi j'aime autant ça que d'être dans le miel.

(347)

In keeping with the denatured urban scene the poet makes the flower beloved of poets since time immemorial undergo a series of apparently startling metamorphoses in 'A une Rose'. The petals of the flower are suddenly transformed into the pages of a newspaper and the traditional nature image is radically altered through the intrusion of modernity :

Feuille où pendent les journalistes
Un fait-divers,
Papier-Joseph, croquis d'artistes:
- Chiffres ou vers - ...

The perfume of the flower is likened to the irritating odour of the embalming liquid used by undertakers; then it is further transformed into fetid breath. The whole flower becomes associated with one of its decadent functions in the city - an ingredient in drinks, which leads the poet to compare it to the poisonous substance in the complexion of a sick person. Finally even when

(347) Ibid., p. 887.

the rose is regarded as a flower by the perverted inhabitants of the city it is merely as an ornament in the buttonhole of the bourgeois' waistcoat. Yet all these metamorphoses are derived from everyday life - and as we shall see in the next section this is part of the poem's success.

As for the Bois de Boulogne the poet merely sees that as an extension of the ugliness and vices of Paris as we shall suggest in a moment with regard to 'Déjeuner de soleil'.

How then do these Parisians live who have banished nature from their midst? The city is shown as riddled with prostitution, controlled by pimps and villains. This is inevitable when its very existence seems to be directed towards the provision of pleasures, from the temptations of which the poet himself is not immune.

'Marcelle' who performed under the name Herminie involved Tristan in the world of theatres, actresses and make-up. (348) From her and her friends he heard that the only realistic ambition of the small-time actress is just to appear on stage, to be noticed :

Rôde en la coulisse malsaine
Où vont les fruits mal secs moisir,
Moisir pour un quart-d'heure en scène...
- Voir les planches, et puis mourir!

(349)

Quarts-d'heure d'immortalité!
Tu parais! c'est l'apothéose!!!!..
Et l'on te jette quelque chose:
Fleur en papier, ou saleté. -

(350)

Despite the insults and the puny rewards the actress continues to dream of great roles :

'N'es-tu pas dona Sabine?
Carabine?....
Dis: veux-tu le paradis
De l'Odéon?.....'

(351)

(348) 'Je te le dis sans fard, c'est le fard que j'aimais' (O.C., p.890). There is possibly a reflection of Baudelaire's attitude here.

(349) This line is, of course a parody on 'Veder Napoli poi morir'.

(350) O.C., p. 708.

(351) Ibid., p. 723.

The world of operetta is just as artificial as the make-up and paper flowers of the ordinary theatre; it is nothing like the world of real action that it claims to represent :

Vos marins de quinquet à l'Opéra .. comique
Sous un frac en bleu-ciel jurent 'Mille sabords! '....

(352)

Prostitution is linked inextricably in the poet's mind with the world of the theatre - no doubt an indication of his actual experience ! :

Va : trétaux, lupanars

(353)

Like Baudelaire he evokes the hour when Prostitution lights the lamps and roams the streets :

..... En haut, l'amour
Fait la sieste en tétant la viande d'un bras lourd,
Où le baiser éteint laisse sa plaque rouge...
l'heure est sexle - Écoutez:.... pas un rêve ne bouge....

(354)

One of Corbière's finest panoramic poems of Paris - 'Idylle coupée' has as one of its main subjects the activities of prostitutes 'the morning after the night before' :

C'est très parisien dans les rues
Quand l'Aurore fait le trottoir,
De voir sortir toutes les Grues
Du violon, ou de leur boudoir....

Even the sun is made to ~~part~~take in the walking of the streets. The tired prostitute who wants to go for a walk after leaving her bedroom or the police cell is instantly recognisable by her noisy jewellery and clothes and her loud voice :

Chanson pitoyable et gaillarde :
Chiffons fanés papillotants,
Fausse note rauque et criarde
Et petits traits crus, turlutants:

(352) Ibid., p. 813. The poem 'Matelots' appears to be the only one in Gens de mer definitely written after Corbière had gone to Paris. It provides a long modernistic and contrastive introduction to that group of poems.

(353) Ibid., p. 708.

(354) Ibid., p. 888.

474

Velours ratissant la chaussée;
Grande-duchesse mal chaussée,
Cocotte qui court becqueter
Et qui dit bonjour pour chanter....

She stops to say good morning to shopkeepers opening their shops, especially the hairdresser and the pharmacist whose services are indispensable to her trade :

J'aime les voir, tout plein légères,
Et comme en façon de prières,
Entrer dire - Bonjour, gros chien -
Au merlan, puis au pharmacien....

Her next port of call is the bar :

J'aime les voir, chauves, déteintes,
Vierges de seize à soixante ans,
Rossignoler pas mal d'absinthes,
Perruches de tout leur printemps.....

- C'est au boulevard excentrique,
Au - **BON RETOUR DU CHAMP DU NORD** - ...

(355)

where her pimp is waiting :

Et puis payer le mannezingue,
Au Polyte qui sert d'Arthur
Bon jeune homme né brandezingue
Dos-bleu sous la blourse d'azur.

(356)

Corbière's familiarity with the milieu and its vocabulary is here total! (357)

Sordid commercialism is always present in this town of pleasures which in other respects is like a Moslem paradise :

- Musique ! C'est le paradis
Des mahomets et des houris
Des dieux souteneurs qui se giflent!

(358)

Even though the poet sees the shabbiness he cannot resist succumbing to the pleasures themselves :

-
- (355) Corbière's experiments with typography, here and elsewhere, are reminiscent of those undertaken much later by Apollinaire and Cendrars.
(356) O.C., pp. 775-76.
(357) See O.C., p. 1306 for an explanation of the slang terms which were entirely authentic.
(358) Ibid., p. 706.

Mais ici : fouette-toi d'orgie!
 Charge ta paupière rougie,
 Et sors ton grand air de catin!

(359)

Évohé! fouaille la veine;
 Évohé! misère : Éblouir!
 En fille de joie, à la peine
 Tombe, avec ce mot-là. - Jouir!

(360)

The attraction of these pleasures seems at times to come close to outweighing his disapproval but the poet's real attitude is in the end evident in his irony. So effective is Corbière's ironic tone in 'Déjeuner de soleil' That the present writer, when he first encountered it a decade ago in a text which did not provide the aid of italics, mistook it for a light and playful evocation of the beauties of a Parisian dawn rather in the manner of the rhétoriciens; an impression no doubt strengthened by the superficially conventional nature of the poem and the references to classical mythology. The truth is of course very different.

The theme of the poem is that the Bois de Boulogne, far from being a solace for the poet seeking after the straightforward joys of nature, is nothing but an extension of perverse Parisian civilisation. Despite the ironic pose the poem is without doubt one of the clearest statements of Corbière's primitivism. The reader should be forewarned of the double meaning of much of the poem by the title, itself a pun, which on one level describes the apparent subject of the poem - breakfast in the open air under a benevolent sun, but on another refers to the popular idiom 'to dine on thin air'.

The Bois is a very urbanised nature populated by the same guilty lovers, prostitutes and pimps that one finds in the bars and disreputable hotels of the city itself. The first line of the poem creates a disarmingly naive atmosphere through the paraphrase of the old song 'Nous dînons plus au bois'. But the stanza is full of double meanings which, when penetrated, show that nature has been corrupted by the vice of the city. 'Le persil' is slang for pubic hair.

(359) Ibid., p. 707.

(360) Ibid., p. 708.

whence the expressions 'faire son persil' and 'aller au persil' : to solicit, and 'travailler dans le persil' : to make love to a prostitute. The parked carriages are occupied by adulterous couples engaged in 'le serpolet' (marital infidelity) who are ironically described as 'vertueux'. They are going to 'lever l'Aurore' which suggests the slang meaning of 'lever' : to make a pick-up. In the second stanza the sun shining on the multicoloured foliage with the coming of dawn is likened to a coquette putting on her make-up :

L'Aurore brossant sa palette :
 Kh'ol, carmin et poudre de riz;
 Pour faire dire - la coquette -
 Qu'on fait bien les ciels à Paris.

In the third stanza the term 'petit-lever' suggests not only the fact that this is a restricted almost theatrical variant of nature but evokes the artificiality of life associated with the rigid court routine of Louis XIV and ironically implies that the occupants have not really risen at all but merely transferred their 'horizontalité' to another setting. Whereas lovers in traditional bucolic poetry might drink freshly drawn milk here the only froth is on champagne. There is a play on the word 'fraîchement' which also means that the champagne will have been kept chilled. In the fourth stanza and in the rest of the poem this notion that the lovers transform nature to their own image recurs; these habitués of bars and bedrooms feel out of place in the Bois :

Là, j'ai vu les Chère Madame
 S'encanailler avec le frais...
 Voici l'école buissonnière :
 Quelques maris jaunes de teint,
 Et qui rentrent dans la carrière
 D'assez bonne heure... le matin...
 Arthur même a presque une tête,
 Son faux-col s'ouvre matinal...

Those who come to the Bois for some other purpose are readily assimilated into the imagery connected with the prevailing activity :

Le sportsman promène sa bête,
 Et le rêveur la sienne - à pied. - ...
 Naseaux fumants, grand oeil en flamme,
 Crins d'étalon : cheval et femme
Saillent de l'avant....

The sun itself, which presides over this insipid and perverse spectacle, is labelled 'vieille Belle-Impure'.

This is a vision directly drawn from contemporary reality and doubtless personally observed by the poet on more than one occasion. The modernity of the poem is heightened not only by the use of slang and familiar speech : 'persil', 'serpolet', 'lever', 's'encanailler', 'faire l'école buissonnière', 'rentrer dans la carrière', and so on, but by the use of fashionable 'new' vocabulary : 'sportsman'. The complexity of the poem is increased by the fact that modern urban artificiality and vice is not contrasted directly with vigorous authentic nature but with another form of artificiality - the Renaissance 'pastoral' ideal :

L'Aurore brossant sa palette...
 Diane au petit galop de chasse
 Fait galoper les papillons
 Et caracoler sur sa trace,
 Son Tigre et les vieux beaux Lions....

Only at the very end of the poem is the poet's true ideal hinted at in the reference to the forthright humour of sailors :

..... - Peu poli.
 - Pardon : maritime ... et joli.

* * * * *

The poetry of the modern city provides perhaps the most striking instance of the effects of the new perspective provided by the tension between the feeling that modern society was decadent and nostalgia for a more 'natural' order. Nevertheless the modern city was rapidly becoming the normal setting for the lives of most French poets and for their poetry itself. Many of the thematic elements analysed in this section could, therefore, also be regarded as part of the fabric of everyday life which is the subject of the following section.