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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

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(f) Everyday Life

Children in Ancient Egypt played with toy boats (359)

In one sense, therefore, it is clearly impossible to describe such an activity as modern Yet when Rimbaud writes

Si je désire une eau d'Europe, c'est la flache
Noir et froide où vers le crépuscule embaumé
Un enfant accroupi plein de tristesses, lâche
Un bateau frêle comme un papillon de mai
(360)

many readers find this image more authentically modern than, for example, progressiste references to the achievements of the technological age The modernist cachet of the poetic evocation of the activities and experiences of everyday life, of which Rimbaud's toy boat is an example chosen at random, is not as difficult to explain as it might at first appear Such evocations are modern to the extent that they correspond to our own present experiences, they are part of that pool of experience shared between artist and public which was the underlying principle of Baudelaire's theory of modernity This is confirmation of one obvious point, the modern does not have to be new it simply has to be contemporary Any activity which is still part of the fabric of everyday life may in this way be modern Nevertheless there is no denying that what we hold to be modern is more often not just a shared experience common to most of us but one which we feel is distinctively part of our age, part of a collective identity which may be seen as separate from previous ages So why should the sailing of the toy boat be modern? One thing becomes clear, ^{it is} not so much the fact but its treatment in poetry which is specifically modern Although the Romantics had spoken of the

(359) As the collections in the Louvre and the British Museum attest

(360) 'Le Bateau ivre'

introduction of ordinary reality and language into their work, in practice they had tended to prefer extremes of passion, of beauty and ugliness Baudelaire and Sainte-Beuve were more truly pioneers in this respect Even then, in Baudelaire's case, it was often the macabre potential of everyday reality rather than genuine ordinariness which fascinated the poet (361)

(361) Sainte-Beuve's influence upon the generation after 1870 is often underestimated He was in fact widely read in the period and directly influenced poets such as Richépin, Verlaine and Laforgue Sainte-Beuve's contribution to the poetry of contemporary reality is without doubt greater than that of most of those Romantic poets whose poetic reputation has better stood the test of time Alison Fairlie has seen him as 'the centre of the attempt to give a new sting and a new savour through everyday subjects and a language close to prose yet not prosaic' (A Fairlie, Baudelaire Les Fleurs du Mal, p 18) Poems such as 'Les Rayons Jaunes' have been seen as antecedents of Baudelaire's revelations of spleen and Laforgue's evocations of rainy Sunday afternoons (A G Lehmann, Saint-Beuve, p 66) He was the originator of 'realism in the description of humble scenes drawn from ordinary, everyday or domestic life' (H Cockerham, introduction to Gautier, Poésies, pp 16-17) The poetry is, of course, that to be found in Vie, Poésies et Pensées de Joseph Delorme

A few examples will suffice to demonstrate the poet's preoccupation with the ordinary The elegy 'Rose' is concerned with a prostitute to whom the narrator returns to spend a night She is completely unexceptional, not even enlivened by voluptuousness, a parallel has justly been drawn between her and Manet's Olympia (Lehmann, op cit, p 69) The setting is correspondingly modern and the tone subdued or even conversational

Entre les orangers, oh' qu'il fait beau, le soir,
 Se promener au frais, respirer et s'asseoir
 Voir passer cent beautés dont le regard enivre,
 Et celles au long voile, et celles qu'on peut suivre'
 Mais, assise à deux pas, avec son œil châtain
 Et ses cheveux cendrés sur un cou de satin,
 Plus blanche que jamais bergère au pied d'un hêtre,
 Son mouchoir à la main, j'ai cru la reconnaître,
 C'est Rose 'Bonjour, Rose' - Ah' c'est vous que je vois,
 Méchant, et n'être pas venu de tout un mois''
 Au sofa gémissant que voile un demi-jour,
 Aux soupirs de l'alcôve, on dirait de l'amour
 Mais, hélas' quand parmi ces fureurs de jeunesse
 Tarit la jouissance
 Pourtant il faut causer, se dire quelque chose
 Je te demande alors, te voyant triste, ô Rose,
 Ton pays, ta famille, et les secrets ennuis,
 Et l'emploi de tes jours, je connais trop les nuits'
 Comme ta jeune soeur que la pudeur décore,
 Dis-moi, sage à quinze ans, voudrais-tu l'être encore?
 Rêves-tu quelquefois à l'avenir longtemps?
 On n'aura pas toujours ces blonds cheveux flottants
 (Poesies Complètes, pp 116-17)

Rimbaud's several poems devoted to ordinary, 'uneventful' experiences are ample proof that the toy boat image is not an isolated device

(361) Cont/ 'Promenade' is an explicit rejection of the wild landscapes of the other Romantics in favour of the quiet scenery of the environs of Paris

Quoi? des rocs, des forêts, des fleuves? oh' non pas,
 Mais bien moins, mais un champ, un peu d'eau qui murmure,
 Un vent frais agitant une grêle ramure,
 L'étang sous la bruyère avec le jonc qui dort,
 Voir couler en un pré la rivière à plein bord,
 Quelque jeune arbre au loin, dans un air immobile,
 Découpant sur l'azur son feuillage débile,
 A travers l'épaisseur d'une herbe qui reluit,
 Quelque sentier poudreux qui rampe et qui s'enfuit,
 Ou si, levant le yeux, j'ai cru voir disparaître
 Au détour d'une haie un pied blanc qui fait naître
 Tout d'un coup en mon âme un long roman d'amour ,
 C'est assez de bonheur, c'est assez pour un jour

(Ibid , pp78-79)

'Causerie au bal' is an interesting experiment in trying to capture the flow of conversation while the poet dances

Et je vous ai revue, et d'espérance avide
 J'ai rougi, pres de vous un fauteuil était vide,
 Et votre oeil sans courroux sur moi s'est reposé,
 Et je me suis assis, et nous avons causé
 ' - Que le bal est brillant, et qu'une beauté blonde,
 'Nonchalamment bercée au tournant d'une ronde,
 'Me plaît' sa tête penche, elle traîne ses pas
 ' - Vous, madame, ce soir, vous ne dansez donc pas?
 ' - Oui, j'aime qu'en valsant une tête s'incline,
 'J'aime sur un cou blanc la rouge cornaline,
 'Des boutons d'oranger dans des cheveux tout noirs,
 'Les airs napolitains qu'on danse ici, les soirs,
 'Surtout j'aime ces deux dernières barcarolles,
 'Hier on me les chantait, et j'en sais les paroles
 ' - Qu'un enfant de quatre ans, n'est-ce pas? dans un bal
 'Est charmant, quand, tout fier, et d'un pas inégal,
 'Il suit une beauté qui par la main le guide,
 'Et qui le baise après, rayonnant et timide
 ' - Au milieu de ce bruit, comme votre enfant dort,
 'Madame' ses cheveux sont, au soir, d'un blond d'or,
 'Il sourit en rêvant, lui passe une chimère,
 'Il entr'ouvre un oeil bleu c'est bien l'oeil de sa mère '
 — Et Mille autres propos Mais qu'avez-vous déjà?
 J'ai cru revoir l'air froid qui souvent m'affligea
 Avons-nous donc fait mal? d'une voix qui soupire
 Ai-je effrayé ce coeur, ou d'un trop long sourire?
 Ai-je parlé trop bas? ai-je d'un pied mutin
 Agacé sous la robe un soulier de satin?
 Saisi trop vivement un éventail qui glisse?
 Serré la main qui fuit au bord de la pelisse?
 Ai-je dit un seul mot de regrets et d'amours?
 Mais qu'au moins nous causions et longtemps et toujours'

(ibid , p61)

On the contrary it is completely in accord with the work of
 an anti-establishment poet The equation of the mundane with

(361) Cont/ It is not altogether successful as neither
 the conversation nor the poet's inner thoughts are evoked in
 a sufficiently authentic language In particular the word order
 appears to be affected by the necessity of placing the rhyme-word
 at the end of the line, the very first line provides an instance
 of this 'Les Rayons Jaunes' is one of Saint-Beuve's most celebrated
 poems It is one of the earliest poetic statements of the theme
 of childhood innocence lost in the hubbub of modern city life, it
 combines nostalgia with a vivid awareness of contemporary reality
 and points the dilemma of the artist unable to reconcile himself
 with modern life

Les dimanches d'été, le soir, vers les six heures,
 Quand le peuple empressé déserte ses demeures

Et va s'ébattre aux champs,
 Ma persienne fermée, assis à ma fenêtre,
 Je regarde d'en haut passer et disparaître
 Joyeux bourgeois, marchands,

Ouvriers en habits de fête, au coeur plein d'aise
 Un livre est entr'ouvert, près de moi, sur ma chaise

Je lis ou fais semblant,
 Et les jaunes rayons que le couchant ramène,
 Plus jaunes ce soir-là que pendant la semaine,
 Teignent mon rideau blanc

J'aime à les voir percer vitres et jalousie,
 Chaque oblique sillon trace à ma fantaisie

Un flot d'atomes d'or,
 Puis, m'arrivant dans l'âme à travers la prunelle,
 Ils redorent aussi mille pensers en elle,
 Mille atomes encore

Ce sont des jours confus dont reparait la trame,
 Des souvenirs d'enfance, aussi doux à notre âme

Qu'un rêve d'avenir
 C'était à pareille heure (oh' je me le rappelle)
 Qu'après vêpres, enfants, au choeur de la chapelle,
 On nous faisait venir

La lampe brûlait jaune, et jaune aussi les cierges,
 Et la lueur glissant aux fronts voilés des vierges

Jaunissait leur blancheur,
 Et le prêtre vêtu de son étole blanche
 Courbait un front jauni comme un épi qui penche
 Sous la faux du faucheur

- Ainsi va ma pensée, et la nuit est venue,
 Je descends, et bientôt dans la foule inconnue

J'ai néyé mon chagrin
 Plus d'un bras me coudoie, on entre à la guinguette,
 On sort de cabaret, l'invalidé en goguette
 Chevrote un gai refrain

the modern in the period 1870-87 was a direct challenge to the concept that the subjects (as distinct from the forms in which they were encapsulated) of art and poetry should be uplifting and of universal and eternal significance. Thus the transient experiences of everyday life came frequently to be preferred to subjects of more monumental or intrinsically important dimensions, primarily because the latter had been too closely associated with the grander rhetorical resources of French poetry. A particularly successful way of referring to everyday life was as part of a carefully planned contrast with the higher levels of culture (362)

(361) Cont/

Ce ne sont que chansons, clameurs, rixes d'ivrogne,
 Ou qu'amours en plein air, et baisers sans vergogne,
 Et publiques faveurs,
 Je rentre sur ma route on se presse, on se rue,
 Toute la nuit j'entends se traîner dans ma rue
 Et hurler les buveurs

(Ibid , pp 68-71)

What was remarkable about the poetry in Joseph Delorme was that Saint-Beuve's willingness to call a spade a spade did not involve any desire to shock, it was simply a realisation of the aesthetic value of everyday reality. His poetry had a quiet but persistent influence on the development of intimate, anti-heroic verse. Both Baudelaire and Verlaine spoke of their admiration for the collection, the latter's praise is all the more obviously sincere as it was written after Saint-Beuve's death. (See A G Lehmann, Saint-Beuve, pp 70-72)

(362) A point discussed in the last chapter,

usually to ironic and humorous effect Interestingly in 'Le Bateau ivre' the contrast between the extraordinary adventures of the imaginary boat and the frail hopes and dreams of an Ardennais boy is ironic, but it is an irony of profound poignancy

There is another sense in which the poetry of everyday life is to be seen as an altogether fitting manifestation of the poetic modernism of the two decades after 1870 Faced with a depressing political situation and finding themselves in a confused and comfortless philosophical climate it is not surprising that some young writers, at least, developed a carpe diem attitude to life The acceptance of life in its more basic and sensually enjoyable forms was a provisional solution with considerable attractions (363) Sometimes such poetry is characterised by an unbridled sense of joie de vivre as, for instance, in Rimbaud's 'Au Cabaret-Vert' Sometimes it is tinged with irony (or in Laforgue's case steeped in it) Jean Richepin's 'Ô TI V TUXW', as we have suggested, reflects the spirit of intellectual abandon without entirely concealing a very real malaise

Faut-il tant penser? C'est sot,
Et ça fait mal à la tête
De Platon je tiens un mot
Qu'avec Platon je repete
Bah! Zut!
A l'hasard de la fourchette!
Bah! Zut!
J'vas fourrer mes doigts dans l'pot

(363) Even Sully-Prudhomme succumbed to this temptation in moments when science seemed pointless

A quoi bon mesurer, par des chiffres moroses,
Le temps que met l'étoile à resplendir pour nous,
Quand nous la contemplons les paupières mi-closes,
La tête pour coussin ayant deux chers genoux?

(Le Bonheur)

J'ai passé plusieurs hivers
 A lire en jargons divers
 Plus d'un philosophe
 Ils sont de noir habillés
 Et leurs esprits sont taillés
 Dans la même étoffe
 Des mots, des mots et des mots'
 Nous sommes des animaux,
 Voilà mon système
 Qu'on le prenne par un bout
 Ou l'autre, le Grand Tout
 Est toujours le même (364)

Both in style and theme the Richepin poem is not dissimilar from the libertin poetry of the early seventeenth century. It brings us to another important point - the link between the treatment of everyday life and changes in the poetic register. Richepin was not alone in realising that the expression of such attitudes in verse could hardly be achieved by means of traditional French poetic resources alone. Although his use of a register of language which might roughly be described as an educated variant of popular speech was scarcely original it was a step in the right direction towards the everyday speech used in some of the poetry of Laforgue, Verlaine and Rimbaud (365). Attempts were of course made to write poems on the simple pleasures of living in absolutely traditional style. The contrast between a flat-footed poem like Paul Marrot's 'Assiettes Peintes', quoted below, and such masterpieces as Verlaine's 'Walcourt' is sufficient reminder that the new subject-matter, if it were to be successfully treated

(364) La Chanson des Gueux 1902 edition, pp 217-221
 The meaning of the quotation from Plato is 'Whatever might befall me''

(365) The most accurate description of the kind of language used by Richepin here and by many of the minor satirical and realist poets of the period is that it is the self-consciously witty and yet quasi-popular or even coarse speech used by French students, both then and now. Rimbaud, on the other hand, in poems like 'Au Cabaret-Vert' used a register of language that is more authentically like ordinary language of perhaps the majority of Frenchmen without ever being people. The whole question of the impact of contemporary speech is dealt with in the next chapter.

required a new idiom

J'estime cette vieille auberge
 Que la grande ville n'a pas,
 Dans la salle au rideau de serge
 On fait d'impayables repas
 On apporte d'abord la pinte
 Où pétille un vin ferme et vert,
 Dans une grande assiette peinte
 Un aubergiste lent vous sert
 Soit quelque fruit, soit des rillettes,
 Comme les fermières en font,
 Et votre œil suit sur les assiettes
 Les beaux dessins qui sont au fond (366)

The exigence of finding a poetic manner other than that

of Coppée and his imitators or the neo-libertine style of ^{some of} the cénacle poets

for the adequate expression of the new theme of simple happiness was one
 of the most important consequences of the poetic treatment of
 everyday life

It should not be forgotten that this whole trend is to be
 seen in the context of the social changes of the period. A form
 of literary 'democratisation', in which theorists like Taine and
 novelists like Zola played a major rôle, made the ordinary life of
 the middle (367) and lower classes a favourite subject of writers

Eugène Manuel's Poèmes Populaires, published in 1872 and written
 in 1870, is a volume primarily of interest as one of the first documents
 advocating the introduction of popular subjects and themes into poetry
 in recognition of the fact that modern life had brought with it a
 restructuring of society. The most significant remarks from the
avertissement have already been quoted (in our introduction). The

(366) In the collection Le Chemin de Rire.

(367) To which the poets themselves more often than not belonged

poems themselves are largely cast in dialogue form which makes the introduction of a semblance of everyday speech more easily acceptable to Manuel's readers (368), it is not without significance that Manuel compared poetry to the theatre in the avertissement. There is some attempt to give a comprehensive picture of modern life as the titles of some of the poems suggest 'La Chanteuse', 'La Bien-Aimée de l'ouvrier', 'Orgue de Barbarie', 'La Fille aux bobines', 'Le Poète des cafés'. Several excursions into the streets of Paris capture something of the movement of modern city life and these lessen the theatrical 'feel' of the collection. Nevertheless the poems tend to be sentimental and their language stilted. 'La Robe' is a typical example, a married couple decide to part, squabble over the division of their belongings only to realise that they are happier together, the following is a representative passage

Et les voilà prenant les meubles, la vaisselle
 Examinant, pesant, sur leur front l'eau ruisselle,
 La fièvre du départ a saisi le mari,
 Muet, impatient et sans rien d'attendri,
 Ouvrant chaque tiroir, bousculant chaque siège,
 Il presse ce travail impie et sacrilège
 Tout est bouleversé dans le triste taudis
 Dont leur amour peut-être eût fait un paradis
 Confusion sans nom, spectacle lamentable!
 Partout, sur le plancher, sur le lit, sur la table,
 Pêle-mêle, chacun, d'un rapide regard,
 Entasse les objets et se choisit sa part
 'Prends ceci, moi cela'
 - Toi, ce verre, moi l'autre'
 - Ces flambeaux, partageons'
 - Ces draps, chacun le nôtre' (369)

Coppeé, whose work is a better illustration of Manuel's ideas than their protagonist's, is one of the most famous of the minor poets discussed in this thesis. In recent years his poetry has enjoyed something of a fashionable revival among French students. Despite many failings his work has better survived the ravages of time than

(368) There were many of them, six editions had appeared by 1879

(369) Op cit, pp 5-6

that of many of his contemporaries. It is not altogether unjust that he should have retained a grip, if a somewhat insecure one, on immortality, for he did much to encourage the great advances in French poetry after 1870. He occupied a unique position in that he was a respected member of the literary establishment as well as a friend and protector of the young poets - even to the extent of supporting and participating in the cénacle gatherings. In 1883 Léo Trézenik wrote in La Nouvelle Rive Gauche that Coppée had brought French poetry down from superhuman heights and instead situated it in real life without condemning it to vulgarity. He saw his work as a halfway stage between the unoriginality of Mendès and the excessive originality of Mallarmé, he considered that Les Intimités and Les Humbles Coppée had produced two of the milestones in the evolution of French poetry (370). Trézenik's views are not altogether unjustified, historically Coppée was perhaps the first modern French poet to look consistently upon ordinary everyday reality as a self-sufficient subject for poetry. Even Baudelaire had only been so daring in his use of commonplace subjects because he felt they were a reflection of a spiritual reality.

Coppée is, nevertheless, a minor rather than a major poet because he usually failed to make the transition from poetic modernism or naturalism to a poetry that formulated the more elusive aspects of experience or to a poetry that established an intricate relationship between the poet's emotions and external reality. Moreover, despite Trézenik's view that Coppée avoided vulgarity, the poet of Les Humbles did, not infrequently, lapse into sentimentality. Villiers de l'Isle-Adams one-line miniature portrait of Coppée could not be surpassed

(370) 'Les Vivants et les morts François Coppée,' 26 January 1883

Donnez-moi de l'argent, puisque j'aime ma mère (371)

Coppée was an unusual figure in that he tried to be popular, something he had in common with neither his Parnassian friends nor his young protégés. It is not preposterous to see his work as one of the forerunners of the modern chanson whose exponents are also not averse to employing a sentimental tone on occasion.

In subject-matter, though not in style, Coppée's poetry is often close to the everyday suburban world treated in pictorial Impressionism.

Ainsi je fuis la ville et cherche la banlieue
Avec mon rêve heureux j'aime partir, marcher
Dans la poussière, voir le soleil se coucher
Parmi la brume d'or, derrière les vieux ormes,
Contempler les couleurs splendides et les formes
Des nuages baignés dans l'occident vermeil,
Et quand l'ombre succède à la mort du soleil,
M'éloigner encor plus par quelque agreste rue
Dont l'ornière rappelle un sillon de charrue,
Gagner les champs pierreux, sans songer au départ,
Et m'asseoir, les cheveux au vent, sur le rempart .. (372)

Coppée's language in the above extract reflects the years of Parnassian apprenticeship. 'quelque agreste rue', 'l'ombre succède à la mort du soleil'. Even his work, however, may demonstrate the link between the treatment of everyday life and the increased importance of sensation in poems as well as the development of an impressionistic style. The intensity of the poem grows with the approach of evening and the stilted language becomes less of an obstacle for the reader as the poet concentrates on conveying primarily sound impressions. One may note the successful play on the tense 'i' and 'e' sounds.

(371) Quoted in Jeanès, D'après nature. Souvenirs et portraits, p. 39

(372) 'Promenade', (Les Intimités).

Le sombre azur du ciel s'épaissit. Je commence
 A distinguer des bruits dans ce murmure immense,
 Et je puis, écoutant, rêveur et plein d'émoi,
 Le vent du soir froissant les herbes près de moi,
 Et, parmi le chaos des ombres débordantes,
 Le sifflet douloureux des machines stridentes,
 Ou l'aboiment d'un chien, ou le cri d'un enfant,
 Ou le sanglot d'un orgue au lointain s'étouffant,
 Ou le tintement clair d'une tardive enclume,
 Voir la nuit qui s'étoile et Paris qui s'allume

Another alliterative effect is the repetition of the 'oi' sound which heightens the impression of a growing symphony of evening noises. The words 'Je commence' begin a single sentence which lasts until the end of the poem. The great distance between 'je puis' and the infinitive 'voir' together with the repeated 'ou' causes the breathtaking list to develop its own momentum so that the reader hears the sounds in the same tumbling impressionistic sequence as the poet, all in the brief moment it took him to scan the night sky. A poem such as 'Petits Bourgeois' (373) is noteworthy for the banal moralising with which it begins and for the sentimentality of much of the rest of the poem, it may fairly be regarded as the kind of poem which most antagonised Coppée's critics and made him such a tempting target for parody among the young poets. Yet even in this type of verse there is a sense of joie de vivre like that which one finds in Impressionist painting and in some of the poetry of Rimbaud and Verlaine, both of whom were acquainted with Coppée personally and had an intimate knowledge of his work (374)

Chaque dimanche, ils ont leur fille avec leur gendre,
 Le jardinet s'emplit du rire des enfants,
 Et bien que les après-midi soient étouffants,
 L'on puise et l'on arrose, et la journée est courte
 Puis, quand le pâtissier survient avec la tourte
 On s'attable au jardin, déjà moins échauffé,
 Et la lune se lève au moment du café .

(373) Les Humbles

(374) Particularly evident in their parodies of his poetry'

Coppée's evocation of the sights and sounds of everyday life and particularly of Paris and the Parisian suburbs is very much a continuation of what Saint-Beuve had already undertaken in a few pieces in Joseph Delorme. There appears to be a stronger political undercurrent in Coppée's work but it is difficult to draw the dividing line between socialism and the exploitation of sentiment. Certainly one always suspects middle-class complacency to be his prevailing mood, even when the poet seems to be aware of it as in the following introduction to a scene of deprivation

Le soleil froid donnait un ton rose au grésil,
Et le ciel de novembre avait des airs d'avril.
Nous voulions profiter de la belle gelée.
Moi chaudement vêtu, toi bien emmitouflée
Sous le manteau, sous la voilette et sous les gants,
Nous franchissions, parmi les couples élégants,
La porte de la blanche et joyeuse avenue
Quand soudain jusqu'à nous une enfant presque nue . (375)

Lanson praised Coppée for 'l'intensité de l'impression réaliste' and his modernism in treating factories, railways and the urban scene in his verse, but criticised him sharply for a lack of pity and sincerity and for allowing literary artifice to be so obvious. One may query the absence of pity but on the second point his estimate was perhaps not too wide of the mark (376).

The vein which Coppée had done more to open up than any other poet was soon exploited by many others. The nostalgia for simple life, carefully observed, was the mainstay of Theuriot's verse, widely appreciated in his lifetime but eventually eclipsed by his immense popular success as a novelist

(375) 'La petite marchande de fleurs', (Les Intimités)

(376) G. Lanson, Histoire de la littérature française, pp 1064-65

Voici l'heure Déjà dans l'ombreuse cuisine
 Les pains de sucre blanc, coiffés de papier bleu,
 Garnissent le dressoir où la rouge bassine
 Replète les lueurs du réchaud tout en feu

Le clair sirop frissonne et bout, l'air se parfume
 D'une odeur framboisée Enfants, spatule en main,
 Enlevez doucement la savoureuse écume
 Qui mousse et perle au bord des bassines d'airain' (377)

Not only the basic mundane themes but the extensive references to sensation in such poems are a reminder that the poetry of everyday life produced by the major poets - one may think of Rimbaud's 'Le Buffet' and even 'Les Effarés' - was very far from being isolated from general trends in the poetry of the period. More accurately their work brought nearer to perfection a whole movement towards a poetry in closer touch, through theme and language, with contemporary everyday life. Some poets were quick to realise that evocations of everyday life might be more effectively formulated in a language other than the carefully sequential discursive style with which they were familiar. Germain Nouveau, for example, employed an impressionistic, nominal style in a description of his native village going about its daily routine, it is a pity that he did not recall this stylistic advance in many of his later poems

Un vieux clocher coiffé de fer sur la colline
 Des fenêtres sans cris, sous des toits sans oiseaux
 D'un barbaresque Azur la paix du Ciel s'incline
 Soleil dur' Mort de l'ombre' Et Silence des Eaux.

Marius' son fantôme à travers les roseaux,
 Par la plaine' Un son lent de l'Horloge féline
 Quatre enfants sur la place où l'ormeau perd ses os,
 Autour d'un Pauvre, étrange, avec sa mandoline

(377) 'Les Confitures', Le Bleu et le Noir

Un banc de pierre chaud comme un pain dans le four,
 Où trois Vieux, dans ce coin de la Gloire du Jour,
 Sentent au rayon vif cuire leur vieillesse

Babet revient du bois, tenant sa mule en laisse
 Noir, le Vicaire au loin voit, d'une ombre au ton bleu,
 Le Village au soleil fumer vers le Bon Dieu (378)

The Sunday scene in Coppée's 'Petits Bourgeois' is typical of a substantial number of poems of the period devoted to the new pattern of leisure activities enjoyed by the urban population. One such activity, trips by the river, was a favourite theme of the Impressionist painters and was to furnish the setting of Rimbaud's 'Mémoire' (379).

Valabrègue, whose poetry ~~may~~ be further considered in relation to the development of poetic impressionism, had treated the subject as early as the second Parnasse contemporain in his poem 'La Canotière' (380). It is interesting both for its own sake and for the possible influence, hitherto unnoticed, it may have had on Rimbaud's famous poem Both poems actually locate the narrator in a rowing boat on the river and begin with a reference to the limpid water

Quand le canot partit, en laissant un frisson
 Aux feuillages du bord qui pendaient sur l'eau claire .

There is in both poems a somewhat mysterious female presence In Rimbaud's poem this controversial presence will be of several kinds, in 'La Canotière' it is simply a question of an unexpected and unusual passenger

(378) 'Pourrières', Premiers poèmes
 (379) For a discussion of this poem see below
 (380) It was reprinted several times in different periodicals before its definitive publication in the collective edition of Valabrègue's L'Amour des bois . in 1902

Elle semblait, dans son costume rouge et noir, (381)
 Vêtue étrangement et mise en canotière,
 Une baigneuse au corps lassé qui vient s'asseoir
 Sur le bateau tremblant qu'elle incline à l'arrière.

Despite a superficial gaiety there soon enters into both poems a
 growing mood of melancholy which affects the description of the land-
 scape In 'La Canotière' the change of mood begins with the breeze

Un vent léger sur l'eau passait, nous pénétrant
 De quelque odeur de fleurs lointaine et pourtant vive.

and soon the river seems to respond

Le fleuve, qui souffrait, sonnait plaintivement,
 Nos avirons semblaient meurtrir l'eau douloureuse

In 'Mémoire' Rimbaud will write of the river

Qu'elle pleure à présent sous les remparts' l'haleine
 des peupliers d'en haut est pour la seule brise

This melancholy is associated with the intrusion of a woman. In

'La Canotière' she declares

Quelque chose m'irrite et m'énerve à la fois,
 Quand je suis en canot, j'éprouve une tristesse.

In 'Mémoire' it is the mysterious 'Madame'. Interestingly both women
 are equipped with a parasol In 'La Canotière' this is used to jog the
 men out of their dreamy contemplation of the happiness of childhood
 of which the river is a reminder

(381) Curiously both these colours occur, admittedly in a different
 context, in the third section of Rimbaud's poem. There is also
 a possible connection between the colour of Valabrègue's
canotière's costume and the oriflammes referred to by Rimbaud
 in the opening description of 'Mémoire'.

Sa main gauche étendait sur l'eau ses doigts mouillés,
 Et l'autre nous frappait du bout de son ombrelle.
 Nous la laissions parler, étant peu soucieux
 D'arrêter le caprice expansif d'une femme,
 Nous nous sentions saisis, dans nos rêves joyeux,
 D'un amour pour l'eau pure où plongeait notre rame
 L'eau semble jeune encore, elle est restée enfant ..

In 'Mémoire', the parasol is symbolic of 'Madame''s exclusion of nature and introduces the part of the poem which recounts the destruction of the purity and joy of childhood. The equation of the river and childhood in both poems is the best evidence of a direct influence of 'La Canotière' upon 'Mémoire'. It also involves a number of images common to both poems - the idea of the bed

Couchée en son lit clair, sa fraîcheur la défend

('La Canotière')

. Elle
 sombre, ayant le Ciel bleu pour ciel-de-lit ...
 L'eau meuble d'or pâle et sans fond les couches prêtes

('Mémoire')

or the relationship of the change of mood to the prospective change of the seasons. In 'La Canotière' the river is seen as triumphing over these changes and retaining its purity and 'youth' unlike living things

Et cette pureté dure sans se ternir .

In marked contrast, 'Mémoire' depicts the river so closely implicated in the poet's emotional state that it too becomes dull and clouded

. eau morne
 l'eau couleur de cendre

There are, however, more differences than similarities between the poems. One such difference, a difference of degree, affects the amount of detail in the evocation of the scene. Whilst 'Mémoire', as we shall suggest, clearly locates the setting in modern everyday reality it contains fewer direct references than 'La Canotière'. The scenery and activities of the riverside are evoked with complete authenticity - there is an almost identical stretch of river which attracts present-day

Parisians at Champigny-sur-Marne

Autour de nous tombaient des filets de pêcheurs,
On entendait les bruits d'un tir couvert de planches,
Près du mur peint en bleu d'un débit de liqueurs,
Des bains flottants longeaient le rang des maisons blanches.

The speciality of the eating places by the river was (and still is) fritures, a fact which caused the canotière some concern

J'ai grand' peur du repas qu'on cherche à l'aventure
Il ne me suffit pas d'avoir une friture

One of the features of La Canotière is that it incorporates a description of the pleasures of Paris from which the 'heroine' is momentarily absent and in this way presents the reader with both urban and suburban versions of the distractions of everyday life

... J'étais hier au bal,
Je portais en dansant ma robe violette,
J'avais un éventail pailleté de métal,
Je cachais des parfums de musc dans ma toilette.

'La Canotière' is, thus, not as banal as one might fear, through an evocation of Sunday on the river between Paris and Bougival it conveys a slight sense of mystery and a reflection upon the fragility of happiness and the passing of youth The authenticity of the setting is not consistently matched by authenticity of language (there are several heavy poetic locutions and 'unnatural' inversions even in the canotière's speech) but clearly the poet has made efforts in that direction

Hé' vous, mes mariniers, quand viendra le dîner .

Leisure activities became an important part of the fabric of everyday life as it was presented by poets throughout the period. In 'Les Cartes' (Valentines), Nouveau depicts the beloved playing cards on Sunday afternoon

C'était en octobre, un dimanche,
Je revenais de déjeuner,
Vous jouiez au lit, toute blanche,
Vos cartes dans votre main . franche,
Qui commence à les retourner.

Guy-Valvor's poems which have recently been the subject of an extremely interesting article (382) include one piece 'Raquettes et volants' (383) where two girls are presented playing badminton, they are as yet too young to be aware of love but there will come a day when they will become the racquets, and the hearts of their tormented lovers the shuttlecocks. The poem, like so many pieces of the period evoking everyday life, has the same feeling for light as Impressionist painting

Mais elles, insouciantes,
De l'amour encor lointain,
Avec leurs grâces riantes
Éblouissaient le jardin

Quand les blanches mousselines
S'envolaient en plis bouffants,
Les brises semblaient câlines
Ravir les belles enfants'

It is true that in 'Raquettes et volants' the reference to an everyday pastime has a symbolic function, even in Nouveau's 'Les Cartes' the reference introduces the theme of the beloved's ability to see through the poet's deception, just as one may tell fortunes by using playing cards. These 'symbolic' functions do not detract from the authenticity of the references, rather they are an indication of the extent to which references to everyday life could be integrated into poetry, and in particular could form a refreshing supplement to the existing stock of images (384)

- (382) P. Stephan, 'Paul Verlaine and Guy-Valvor', Romance Notes, XI, pp 41-5. (1969). 'Raquettes et volants' is proved, beyond dispute, to have been influenced by Verlaine's 'La Chanson des ingénues'
- (383) Lutèce, 7 - 14 September, 1883.
- (384) See below, in the next chapter.

The interest in pastimes was one instance of the gentler side of the carpe diem attitude to life - the enjoyment of harmless pleasures. In the case of Cros this even gave a deliberately banal colouring to his vision of the ideal life

Une salle avec du feu, des bougies,
Des soupers toujours servis, des guitares,
Des fleurets, des fleurs, tous les tabacs rares,
Où l'on causerait pourtant sans orgies (385)

In his more optimistic moments Cros considered that the pleasures of modern everyday life were such as to be more than an adequate compensation for nostalgia for classical antiquity and, by implication, should become the subject of the modern poet

Venez Sylvains, venez Faunes, venez Dryades!
Venez' Les jours présents ne seront plus si fades
Cravatez-vous, Sylvains, Faunes, mettez des gants
Dryades, montrez-nous vos chapeaux arrogants,
Allons souper, Bacchus' Paris vaut bien Athènes.
Je quitte sans regrets mes visions lointaines
Oh' berce-moi toujours de tes chuchotements,
Muse ou démon des jours actuels et charmants (386)

One form that the poetic interest in everyday life took was the envious description of contented and simple life-styles in modern society in which the poet could not share. Thus there is a genuine admiration for his subject which outweighs any intention of literary parody (primarily of Coppée) in a few of Cros's dizains

Voici la fin de la demi-journée approche,
Et l'on travaille bien en attendant la cloche
Onze heures. On déserte en foule l'atelier.
L'ouvrier va manger, et peut-être lier
Connaissance avec cette enfant, frêle ouvrière,
Chez le traiteur fumeux où l'on sert l'ordinaire.
Mais l'apprenti n'a pas de ces luxes Avec
Une saucisse plate et deux sous de pain sec
Il déjeune, pourvu qu'il trouve sur la place
Votre eau limpide à boire, ô fontaines Wallace. (387)

(385) 'La Vie idéale', (Le Coffret de santal).

(386) 'Évocation', (Le Collier de griffes).

(387) 'Toute la semaine'. The fontaines Wallace were famous public drinking fountains used by Parisian workers.

Yet even a similar subject may be treated in a way which demonstrates the more desperate, almost frenetic search for happiness through pleasure. There are hints of this in Richépin's exaggeration of bodily needs

A la fraîche' à la glace' qui veut boire?
 Qui qu'a soif? Qui qui veut boire un bon coup?
 Écoutez la sonnette au vieux Grégoire.
 On est soûl pour un sou, c'est pas beaucoup

Qui qu'a soif? Qui qui veut boire a là glace
 Mais j'ai beau clocheter drelin din din.
 Les clients vont gratis à la Wallace
 Mon calin reste plein, je suis un daim'

Qui qu'a soif? Qui qui veut boire à la fraîche?
 Sur mon dos au soleil ma glace fond
 De crier, ça me fait la gorge sèche
 J'ai le plomb tout en plomb. Buvons mon fond' (388)

In Les Blasphèmes of 1884, Richépin expounded the philosophy of life already contained in germ in La Chanson des Gueux. Everyday pleasure is the ultimate consolation of Man in the age of positivism once he has faced up to the meaninglessness of the universe and his isolation in it

N'a-t-il pas le soleil et ses riches bontés
 Les arbres, les prés verts, les animaux domptés,
 Pour subvenir à sa pâture? .
 N'a-t-il pas le bon vin saignant dans les pressoirs,
 Et qui même en hiver sait parfumer les soirs
 De chaudes odeurs printanières?

There is a restlessness and discomfort in the collection which would seem to answer the question in a way the poet had not intended.

Returning to the work of Cros one may note the same phenomenon. Sex and alcohol in his work, as in that of other poets, are the principal panaceas suggested, but Cros has seen through the fallacy as in the following conclusion to an evocation of a night spent in the company of his cat

 (388) La Chanson des Gueux, p 121.

Ruis, hors du lit, au matin gris,
 Nous chercherons, toi, des souris
 Moi, des liquides
 Qui nous fassent oublier tout,
 Car, au fond, l'homme et le matou
 Sont bien stupides (389)

Such pleasures, despite the ingenuity of modern Man (evidenced in
 the invention of absinthe), can never be more than a temporary
 distraction

Avec les fleurs, avec les femmes,
 Avec l'absinthe, avec le feu,
 On peut se divertir un peu ... (390)

* * * * *

One of the most interesting aspects of the treatment of modern every-
 day life was the way it enabled traditional themes to be renovated. Such
 as the first meeting of lovers (a theme also modernised in Rimbaud's
 'Roman') which is given a new complexion in Nouveau's 'La Rencontre'
 (Valentines) by the ordinariness of the café setting

(389) 'Berceuse', (Le Coffret de santal)

(390) 'Lendemain', (Le Coffret de santal) On the specific subject of
 women, Cros can, in his unenthusiastic moments, be almost as harsh
 as Bernard of Clairveaux

Que tout l'mond' s'entende'
 Les contours des femm's, c'est du lard,
 La chair, c'est d'la viande.
 ('Chanson des Sculpteurs', Ibid)

J'aimerai toujours cet endroit,
 Un café de la Rive-Gauche ..
 Charmant cabaret de l'Amour'
 Je veux un jour y peindre à fresque
 Le Verre auquel je fis ma cour.
 Juin, quatre-vingt-cinq, minuit .. presque (391)

The same is true of Nouveau's version of 'heroic' death in the modern age in the solitude of a hotel bedroom

De l'égoïsme froid de ce siècle mortel,
 Seul, sans larmes de femme et sans bruit de prière,
 Sans une main d'amî pour clore sa paupière,
 De La Billette est mort dans sa chambre d'hôtel. (392)

Even a theme as old as the physical qualities of the beloved may be enlivened by reference to the environment of everyday life, as in the fourth section of Cros's Les Quatre Saisons

C'est l'hiver Le charbon de terre
 Flambe en ma chambre solitaire

La neige tombe sur les toits,
 Blanche' Oh, ses beaux seins blancs et froids'

Même sillage aux cheminées
 Qu'en ses tresses disséminées.

* * * * *

(391) Compare the setting, for which the poet employs the language of property advertisements, of a more mysterious encounter in 'La Visite', (Valentines)

... tu prends du bout d'une paille,
 Au temps chaud, ton sorbet .. très froid ..
 Beau café, terrasse, pratique
 Chère aux chanteurs du vieux Faubourg,
 A proximité fantastique
 De l'Odéon, vue artistique
 Sur les arbres du Luxembourg.

(392) 'Építaphe', Autres poèmes, O.C , p 677

Strangely, despite his extirpation of 'le hasard' from poetry and his frequent hermeticism, Mallarmé made a substantial and highly original contribution to the poetry of everyday life. This is of a very specialised kind which enabled the poet to avoid compromising his principles or detracting from the intricate, seemingly autonomous beauty of his poems

A. R Chisholm has said of Mallarmé

For him as for Blake, Reality was totally present
in the smallest object, but was accessible only to mind,
not to the senses (393)

which supports the view that Mallarmé does not describe reality in his poetry nor, as a rule, the impression reality has on him but rather a 'metaphysical' insight that he has as a result of thinking about an object. Mallarmé is a poet of the intellect. In view of his sympathy with the idealist and pessimist philosophers one might have expected him to decry existence or to stress the illusory nature of material reality but instead he attempts to recreate in his poetry ideals themselves, and these he arrived at largely through the use of his intellect. It is perhaps because he set about this deliberately rather than because he was overwhelmed by a sense of the numinous, or some

(393) A R. Chisholm, Mallarmé's 'Grand Oeuvre', p 119

such experience, that he applies his mind painstakingly to quite mundane objects around him (394). So it is that Mallarmé in one sense at least turns to reality for the starting-point of a good deal of his poetry. Fortunately it is only a starting-point. For poetry that seeks to evoke mere objects rather than the complexity of reality would be akin to some of the shallower verse produced in France before the late nineteenth century. This is of course an accusation that can be levelled at a handful of Mallarmé's less successful occasional pieces. The danger was the more acute because Mallarmé was so fascinated by objects and in particular manufactured objects. In this taste for the artificial he is close to the

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- (394) There is certainly an ambivalence in Mallarmé's attitude to spirituality which in turn is reflected in critical comment upon his ideas. Professor Mossop, for instance, quite legitimately states at one moment that 'it would be interesting to know for certain whether Mallarmé believed in an actual creation of the world in time' (Pure Poetry, p. 138), which is a theological question, similarly he sees Mallarmé interpreting 'the Logical Idea as a mysterious Absolute' (Idem.) Yet elsewhere, again legitimately, the poet is presented in all probability as having no belief in a spiritual or metaphysical reality at all. Man can only attain 'an inner paradise .. attainment of this mental paradise called for acceptance of the fact that every individual was doomed to struggle vainly against forces which would reduce his highest hopes and eventually himself to nothingness' (Ibid., p. 140). In view of Mallarmé's lack of religious belief we may wonder exactly what he meant by such terms as 'idée', 'Mystère', or 'explication orphique de la terre'. One is led to the not altogether satisfactory formula that his ideals existed only in the human intellect. Is one really justified in applying the term 'metaphysical' to Mallarmé's poetry and ideas at all, or should it perhaps be replaced by 'psychological' or just simply 'aesthetic'? The object of the 'Grand Oeuvre' was none other than the celebration in poetry of the achievements of the human mind. Supernatural, spiritual or metaphysical powers or realities could arguably be said to play only a small part in his poetry except by virtue of their absence, one exception was the 'néant' which is an instance of an external 'force' that overwhelmed him in a quasi-numinous way. Not surprisingly his greatest poetry is that which reflects this experience and not the poetry which results from thinking about objects in themselves but the tension between them and non-existence

préciosité of earlier French poets, as he is in a neglect of reality, his liking for oblique statements (e g the reference to Poe's alleged drunkenness in 'Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe'), and his obsession with analogy (395). In the more recent past Banville was a master of the artificial and research has just brought to light the extent to which the evocations of landscape in Banville's poetry are in fact references to theatrical décor. (396) Mallarmé's admiration for Banville is well-known Finally on the subject of Mallarmé's predilection for manufactured objects we should recall that under the pseudonym of Marguerite de Ponty or Miss Satin he wrote articles on such topics as furniture, furnishings and fashion for his periodical La Dernière Mode A strange occupation indeed for a poet It is true that he needed money but other poets would have produced literary chroniques or something more closely allied to their craft, in any case La Dernière Mode was scarcely a lucrative undertaking. One is left convinced that despite complaints the poet enjoyed this kind of writing. It was in keeping with his taste for the artificial.

It is interesting to see how in a poem like 'Tout Orgueil' Mallarmé avoids the danger referred to above by allying his thoughts about an everyday object, in this case a polished table, to solar imagery The two strands are interwoven in a subtle and satisfying way In general terms the pattern we find in these 'object' poems is a transition from a physical reality of very limited significance to a metaphysical reality of cosmic significance. This was probably the process that Mallarmé went through in writing 'Tout Orgueil' but in the actual poem we find the process reversed The sonnet opens on the cosmic level with an 'evocation' of sunset, and it is not until the second tercet that we arrive at the

(395) c.f. G Davies, 'The Demon of Analogy'

(396) v. E Souffrin-Le Breton 'Banville et la poétique du décor'.

material inspiration of the poem, the beginning of the metamorphosis 'la fulgurante console' is all that remains of the glory of the vanished sun and thus is a poignant suggestion of mortality. This particular symbolism is reinforced by the 'marbre' of the mantelpiece, which suggests a tomb. Moreover the table separates ('isole') the hypothetical spectator from the 'marbre' just as surely as the grave separates the living from the dead. If the former occupant of the room were to return not only would he be shut off from the warmth of life but in place of a fire in the room he would find only a deceptive imitation in the form of the cold 'fulgurante console'. He would be like a sun that has set never to return. In contrast the real sun, the pride of the evening, always rises again after its apparent death, for it is like a torch blown out as the spinning of the Earth ('branle') makes it disappear. Yet we know that it will rise again from our daily experience. The reason for the pattern reversal in this poem now becomes clear, we start with sunset which is a perpetually ironic reminder that we too must 'set' but that we shall not rise again. This is suggested by the sequel of the poem that moves away from the warmth of the sun to the coldness of the table from cosmic significance to insignificant reality. For us there is no 'orgueil . du soir', no resurrection, the most that we leave behind is someone else's warm recollection of us but this cannot diminish the coldness of our tomb.

'Tout Orgueil' is typical of the use Mallarmé makes of material reality. No poet could have dealt with more 'everyday' or humdrum objects (a vase in 'Surgi de la croupe et du bond', a curtain in 'Une dentelle s'abolit') yet he is not interested in evoking them as aspects of reality at all, nor usually in his own sense-impressions or his reactions to these impressions.

What of specific modernity in Mallarmé's work? Professor Austin sidestepped the issue in his 'Mallarmé et le réel' by making a (somewhat spurious) distinction between 'l'actuel' and 'le réel' as a grounds for

the omission of the former in the interests of examining 'le problème dans toute sa généralité' (397) With the obvious exception of the Vers de circonstance (398) Mallarmé's verse poetry is virtually devoid of references to modern life The prose poems are more fruitful in this respect, in 'Le Phénomène futur' 'maint réverbère attend le crépuscule', in 'Plainte d'automne' the poet is moved to tears by 'l'orgue de Barbarie des faubourgs', in 'La Pipe' he talks of his pipe, his cigarettes, of journeys on steamships, in 'Un Spectacle interrompu' he evokes the life of the modern 'grande ville' with its crowds, gas-lighting and journalists. Significantly all these prose poems were written at Tournon in 1864 when the poet was still very much under the influence of Baudelaire. It is not surprising that J -P. Richard's study of modernity in Mallarmé's work should confine itself entirely to the writings in La Dernière Mode (399) It is noteworthy that Mallarmé, with his distrust of particular reality and determination to avoid the constraints of 'le hasard' in his poetry should have found an outlet for what was nonetheless, on occasion, a marked personal enthusiasm for modern life in a work of prose journalism described by Richard as 'cette extraordinaire encyclopédie de la frivolité' (400) It is clear which of the two independent branches of language as seen by Mallarmé - poetry and reportage - he considered appropriate for the evocation of modern life. The modernity of La Dernière Mode is primarily the modernity of the object the knick-knack, furniture, dress, interior

(397) art. cit., p 12

(398) Even here references are surprisingly few

(399) L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé

(400) Ibid , p. 297.

decoration, jewels, perfumes The only approximation to the recreation of modern life lies in the poet's vivid descriptions of the activities of high society La Dernière Mode may be seen as a self-prescribed antidote for the anguish of Igitur There is no question of creating the universal through the particular, for this is the particular only. This, as Richard has indicated, is what distinguishes 'la mondanité mallarméenne de la modernité baudelairienne' (401) One is faced with the unusual spectacle of a poet who, instead of 'escaping' into the past like Rimbaud or the Parnassians, has so successfully eliminated actuality from the main body of his poetry that he feels he must escape into the present, for relief, in another part of his writing. (402)

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The treatment of everyday life is, not surprisingly, an extremely important feature of the poetry of the modern and the ephemeral in the work of Verlaine, Rimbaud and Corbière.

* * * * *

The sights and sounds of everyday urban life are found in many of Verlaine's poems. barges carrying timber and coal down the Seine (403),

(401) Ibid., p 302.

(402) Interestingly some of Mallarmé's disciples not only borrowed his solar imagery but also combined this imagery with the Master's predilection for artifacts and furniture. Mockel in 'Lustre' (Clartés) describes the death of the chandelier at dawn

Regarde consumé sous l'apparat vermeil
où s'épuise l'aride flamme de sa gloire,
le Lustre, pâissant au souffle de la mort,
brûle son agonie en face du Soleil

(403) 'Nocturne parisien' (Poèmes saturniens)

the gaslit streets of Paris (404), the riverside bookstalls of Paris (405), the new boulevards (406), the smoke-filled cafés (407), the modern city life in general - not only in Paris but of the Belgian towns and of London and Manchester as well (408) In addition to the general hubbub of modern city life (409) the sounds of musical instruments to be heard in the streets and cafés are evoked barrel-organs (410), harmonicas (411), cornets (412), accordions (413) and pianos (414)

Although the decadent theme of nature's struggle to survive in the city is reflected in the debilitated vegetation, as it is in Laforgue and Rimbaud

Les platanes déchus s'effeuillant dans l'air noir (415)

the animal inhabitants of the city seem to be presented as just a pleasant or intriguing part of everyday life

L'hirondelle s'enfuit à l'approche de l'ombre,
Et l'on voit voler la chauve-souris sombre. (416)

.. les cafés auront des chats sur les dressoirs (417)

Au loin, un matou frileux et discret
Miaulait d'étrange et grêle façon (418)

Everyday activities and entertainments both in and out of Paris find their way into Verlaine's poetry, as into that of all the best poets of contemporary reality cafe concerts (419), the circus (420),

- (404) e.g. 'Croquis parisien' (Poèmes saturniens) 'Nocturne parisien' (Ibid), Sagesse, I, 111, 'Sonnet boiteux' (Jadis et Naguère).
- (405) 'Nocturne parisien' (Poèmes saturniens)
- (406) Sagesse, III, xx
- (407) Poème saturnien' (Parallèlement).
- (408) e.g. 'Charleroi' (Romances sans paroles) 'Streets', II (Ibid), 'Souvenir de Manchester' (Dédicaces)
- (409) e.g. La Bonne Chanson, XVI
- (410) 'Nocturne parisien' (Poèmes saturniens)
- (411) Idem.
- (412) Sagesse, III, xx11.
- (413) Idem.
- (414) 'Poème saturnien' (Parallèlement)
- (415) La Bonne Chanson, XVI
- (416) 'Nocturne Parisien' (Poèmes saturniens)
- (417) 'Kaléidoscope' (Jadis et Naguère)
- (418) 'Croquis parisien' (Poèmes saturniens).
- (419) 'Poème saturnien' (Parallèlement)
- (420) 'Le Pitre' (Jadis et Naguère)

fairs (421), 'bals publics' (422), fishing by the Seine (423), throwing pebbles in the water (424), drinking in bars and guinguettes (425), and the pleasures of time spent in a simple inn

Murs blancs, toit rouge, c'est l'Auberge fraîche au bord
Du grand chemin poudreux où le pied brûle et saigne,
l'Auberge gaie avec le Bonheur pour enseigne.
Vin bleu, pain tendre, et pas besoin de passe-port .

Entendez-vous? C'est la marmite qu'accompagne
L'horloge de tic-tac allègre de son pouls.
Et la fenêtre s'ouvre au loin sur la campagne. (426)

There is, in fact, a whole body of Verlaine's poetry which deals with the simple joys of everyday life. Particularly in the later collections the theme is developed almost ad nauseam, clearly it was a subject about which Verlaine found it easy to produce verse, more or less at will. It was also a subject for which he must have thought there was a ready market. Nevertheless, in smallish doses this poetry is not unpalatable, moreover it provides a balance, within his work as a whole, to other features such as a banal form of interiorised lyricism, a confessional stance, or flights of erotic fantasy (427). Thus a poem like Odes en son honneur, XIII, in which Verlaine sets out to describe the contentment he found in the simple pleasures of life, may be refreshing. Even the erotic

(421) 'Bruxelles - Chevaux de bois' (Romances sans paroles)

(422) 'Kaléidoscope' (Jadis et Naguère)

(423) 'Nocturne parisien' (Poèmes saturniens).

(424) Idem.

(425) 'Walcourt' (Romances sans Paroles)

(426) 'L'Auberge', Jadis et Naguère.

(427) The references are to erotic fantasy even though this may disappoint those who believe that such poems are a candid account of Verlaine's love life. To be sure, a number of them contain realistic elements but it is impossible to accept them at face value knowing the poet's debilitated state of health and the rather sordid nature of his affairs. All this is obvious, for instance, in a poem like 'Ballade Sappho' where his idealisation, or more probably his irony, is evident.

Je presse alors tout ton corps goulûment,

Toute ta chair contre mon corps d'athlète

Jacques Robichez (op cit p. 430) also remarks 'à lire

'Séguidille' ou 'Auburn' qui croirait que cet amant fougueux passe les trois quarts de sa vie à l'hôpital, qu'il est sale, négligé, malade, que l'une de ses jambes constamment douloureuse et ankylosée lui donne la démarche d'un vieillard?'

references in the last two stanzas have the ring of truth. It should not be forgotten, when considering the whole phenomenon of the poetic interest in this kind of subject, that all too frequently poets, by virtue of their ill-paid craft, were excluded from material comforts which other members of the middle classes took for granted. Considerations of this kind lay behind Cros's evocation of the ideal life, in the terms described above, as well as much of the poetry of everyday life of Verlaine and Rimbaud.

The form of Odes en son honneur, XIII, offers little worthy of mention and, for our purposes its interest lies purely in its subject. Verlaine maintains a tone of simplicity but it is genuine and not counterfeit. He makes no attempt in his vocabulary or manner to hide the fact that he is a man of letters - indeed there is a certain mild humour to be derived from the resulting contrast of style with subject. It cannot be denied that this poem falls well short of the masterpieces of the early 1870s in the expression of 'joie de vivre' but it does possess a certain charm which it owes to the honest and 'sympathique' details recounted in it.

. les restes
Du rôti d'hier ou de ce récent pot-au-feu
En hachis et ragoûts comme on n'en trouve pas chez Dieu

+ + + + +

Pour le pain, comme on n'en a pas toujours mangé,
Qu'il nous semble excellent me semble un fait archijugé
Et le café, qui pour ma part fort m'indiffère,
Ce qu'elle l'aime, mes bons amis, quelle affaire!
Je m'en amuse et j'en jouis pour elle, vrai!
Et puis je sais si bien que la nuit j'en profiterai.

For the most part the poem avoids an excessive sugariness, or the temptation to overplay the simpleton, because, perhaps, it comes from the heart of 'petit bourgeois manqué'. Few men can have appreciated more the rare moments when this kind of existence could be enjoyed.

However, Verlaine's most successful evocations of everyday life were doubtless in the earlier collections. Jacques Borel has recently put forward the interesting theory (unfortunately unsupported by examples)

that the Fêtes Galantes may partly be a transposition of aspects of everyday life in the 1860s

Aussi bien, cette "modernité" n'est-elle pas absente, pour peu qu'on y prenne garde, des Fêtes galantes auxquelles travaille Verlaine dans les années 1866-68. Secrètement transposées dans un XVIII^e siècle de rêve et de fard, elle n'y laisse pas moins deviner sous les jets d'eau, les boulingrins, les confuses perspectives d'un parc à la Watteau, d'autres figures tournoyant dans un bal de bord de Seine, des couples noués et dénoués au hasard des rencontres et des promenades du dimanche, les faciles plaisirs du petit peuple sous les feuillages des banlieues Ces déjeuners sur l'herbe ces pavillons "à claires-voies", ces bateaux chargés de groupes joyeux ou libertins, alanguis ou ingénus, et qui filent "gaîment sur l'eau qui rêve", on peut douter soudain si ce n'est pas dans quelque île de la Jatte que nous les surprenons (428)

What actual evidence may be found to support Borel's unsubstantiated intuition? One important piece of circumstantial evidence which should not be underestimated is Verlaine's association, in the very period when he was working on the Fêtes galantes (1866-1869) with the group of poets who came to be known as the Batignollais (429) and took their name from a riverside location in the Parisian banlieue (to the east of Clichy) which they shared with the painters who were to found the Impressionist movement. The paintings produced by Manet, Monet and Renoir in the 1860s were predominantly evocations of modern everyday life in which the new leisure patterns of the (primarily) lower middle classes played

(428) Verlaine, Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes, pp 100-01.

(429) They included Valade, Méral, Renaud, Lafenestre, Blémond and Coppée

a part (430) As we have noted, the same themes could interest poets counted among the minor Parnassians such as Valabrègue Mérat, Valade and Coppée all produced poetry on similar subjects.

Looking at the poems themselves it is impossible to prove the case with certainty. It is, however, possible to go some way towards providing the support which Borel's theory needs. There are moments which seem to indicate the influence of a prosaic, modern reality

Un pavillon à claires-voies
Abrite doucement nos joies ...
Et l'Amour comblant tout, hormis
La faim, sorbets et confitures
Nous préservent des courbatures.

('Cythère')

L'Étoile du berger tremblote
Dans l'eau plus noire et le pilote
Cherche un briquet dans sa culotte

('En Bateau')

Even the following reference from 'Dans la Grotte' may be a deliberate pun

AI-je même besoin de lui
Pour descendre aux Champs-Élysées?

- (430) For instance Manet's La Musique aux Tuileries (1863), Monet's version of a Déjeuner sur l'Herbe (1866), his landscape of urban pleasure gardens in Jardin de l'Infante (1867), river scenes like his La Seine à Bougival (1869 - exactly corresponding with Valabrègue's 'La Canotière', which has the same setting), 'La Grenouillère' (also 1869) and Renoir's painting of the same subject executed at the same time

It is interesting to note that the Batignollais poets and the future Impressionist painters formed part of the same avant-garde for whom Fantin-Latour's studio (located in the Batignolles) became one focal point.

In addition certain of the poems have no specific eighteenth-century connotations at all and could just as easily have been originally conceived as atmospheric pieces recounting the poet's own simple pleasures in the company of his young friends or moments of reflection 'Les Ingénus', 'A la Promenade', 'En Sourdine', 'Colloque sentimental'. The second of these, in particular, suggests very strongly, both in the general treatment of the subject and the specific reference to coloured shadow, that Verlaine observed these scenes in the company of progressive painters

Le ciel si pâle et les arbres si grêles
 Semblent sourire à nos costumes clairs
 Qui vont flottant légers, avec des airs
 De nonchalance et des mouvements d'ailes

Et le vent doux ride l'humble bassin,
 Et la lueur du soleil qu'atténue
 L'ombre des bas tilleuls de l'avenue
 Nous parvient bleue et mourante à dessein

Finally it is worth noting that one poem, 'L'Ami de la Nature', which was contemporary with the Fêtes galantes but is in an altogether different spirit, quite clearly refers to the Sunday exodus, made possible by the railway, from Paris to the nearby countryside

J'crach' pas sur Paris, c'est rien chouett'
 Mais comm' j'ai une âme de poète,
 Tous les dimanch's j'sors de ma boîte
 Et j'm'en vais avec ma compagne
 A la campagne

It is probable, therefore, that in part at least the Fêtes galantes are a continuation of the interest shown in the poetic potential of everyday life in the Poèmes Saturniens, both in the enumeration of the compensations of city life in the third section of 'Nocturne parisien' and, in another way, in those quiet poems of superficially insignificant events such as 'Après Trois Ans', 'Promenade sentimentale' and 'Chanson d'automne'

For all their shortcomings, too often listed to stand repetition here, the poems in La Bonne Chanson are perhaps due for a critical reappraisal.

Whatever the case, the vision of everyday happiness they contain is often more attractive than that found in other poetry of the period or in many of Verlaine's own later poems. It is probably unfair to Verlaine to take the more banal utterances of La Bonne Chanson out of the context of the collection which is enlivened with pieces of a refreshing musicality such as 'La lune blanche'. Thus the fourteenth poem, which is in any event a great improvement on *Coppée*, gains from being read in the totality of the collection, but it is also of interest for the impressionistic sequence of the first seven lines which do not contain a single verb, for the modern tone and authenticity of the scene. Even the point of the poet's parting exclamation seems sincere in the circumstances, if a little contrived in its expression.

Le foyer, la lueur étroite de la lampe,
 La rêverie avec le doigt contre la tempe
 Et les yeux se perdant parmi les yeux aimés,
 L'heure du thé fumant et des livres fermés,
 La douceur de sentir la fin de la soirée,
 La fatigue charmante et l'attente adorée
 De l'ombre nuptiale et de la douce nuit,
 Oh' tout cela, mon rêve attendri le poursuit
 Sans relâche, à travers toutes remises vaines,
 Impatients des mois, furieux des semaines'

The moments of carefree enjoyment of everyday life in the Romances sans Paroles have nearly all been discussed in other contexts elsewhere in this thesis. (Although they are probably the high point of Verlaine's work in this genre one should be careful to note that they represent only one of several moods in the collection which at times is nothing short of melancholy.) They include 'Walcourt', with its prospect of pleasures to come

Guinguettes claires,
 Bières, clameurs,
 Servantes chères
 A tous fumeurs'

Gares prochaines

'Molines' with its description of a precisely modern form of comfort

Chaque wagon est un salon
 Où l'on cause bas et d'où l'on
 Aime à loisir cette nature
 Faite à souhait pour Fénelon

and 'Bearns' where a trip on the cross-Channel steamer is given a playful air of mystery

Against all this there is no doubt that the more desperate variant of carpe diem poetry is also to be found in Verlaine's work. In the Romances sans Paroles there is a slightly frenetic and curiously ambiguous quality about 'Bruxelles-Chevaux de bois', not that far removed from some of ollinat's later descriptions of Paris

C'est ravissant comme ça vous soûle
D'aller ainsi dans ce cirque bête
Bien dans le ventre et mal dans la tête,
Du mal en masse et du bien en foule.

The inclusion of the same poem in Sagesse reinforces this interpretation since in the context of the later collection it can only be seen as an example of the futility of the poet's life before his return to Catholicism. The tone of this poem was foreshadowed in the description of the barrel-organ in 'Nocturne parisien'

Il brame un ce ces airs, romances ou polkas,
Qu'enfants nous tapotions sur nos harmonicas
Et qui font, lents ou vifs, réjouissants ou tristes,
Vibrer l'âme aux proscrits, aux femmes, aux artistes.
C'est écorché, c'est faux, c'est horrible, c'est dur

'Laeti et Errabundi', published in 1888, brings for the reader an ironic twist to the treatment of the two themes of everyday contentment and of the desperate quest for pleasure. Looking back on the hectic pursuit of excitement, primarily through travel and alcohol, on which he had embarked with Rimbaud (431) the poet now considers this period to have been the time of his greatest happiness

(431) The same period which had been condemned in Sagesse and seen in dark colours in 'Sonnet boiteux'.

Entre autres blamables excès
 Je crois que nous bûmes de tout
 Depuis les plus grands vins français
 Jusqu'à ce faro, jusqu'au stout ...

Des paysages, des cités
 Posaient pour nos yeux jamais las,
 Nos belles curiosités
 Eussent mangé tous les atlas.

In contrast all the efforts to believe in happiness in forms of domesticity, evident in the many poems in collections like Odes en son honneur dating from the later years, are seen to be suspect, doomed to failure because of the strength of the opposite temptation (and of his memories), and in any case hollow and tedious

Les courses furent intrépides
 (Comme aujourd'hui le repos pèse)
 Par les steamers et les rapides
 (Que me vaut cet at home obèse?) ..

Assez toutefois pour souffrir.
 Ah, quel coeur faible que mon coeur'
 Mais mieux vaut souffrir que mourir
 Et surtout mourir de langueur.

Verlaine could not settle for either solution to his fundamental spiritual and psychological malaise

In keeping with other poets in the period, both minor and major, Verlaine was able to draw on modern everyday life as a means of refurbishing the resources of French poetry. An outstanding example was the seventh poem of La Bonne Chanson, referred to in an earlier section of this chapter, where the theme of absence from the beloved is thoroughly renovated by situating the poet amidst the sights, sounds, smell and rocking rhythm of a moving train. Other examples abound in his work. In 'Paysage' (Jadis et Naguère) a lovers' quarrel is set in the suburban 'wasteland' of Saint-Denis to the north point of Paris rather than against a more tempestuous natural backdrop that might have been utilised in Romantic poetry. Nevertheless nature does correspond to mood in the poem, but it does so in a humdrum monotonous kind of way, emphasising the arid rather than the passionate quality of the disposition

of the lovers An everyday image has the effect of bringing the mood
down to the level of mere grumpiness

Nous étions de mauvaise humeur et querellions
Un plat soleil d'été tartinaît ses rayons
Sur la plaine séchée ainsi qu'une rôtie

Similarly the ugliness of modern war, which at first may be taken as a mirror
of the general mood, is reduced to the level of decorative mementos

Et des obus tout neufs encastrés aux pilastres
Portaient écrit autour SOUVENIR DES DÉASTRES.

One of the most astonishing uses of imagery drawn from everyday
life occurs in one of Verlaine's religious poems, 'There', published
in 1885. The poem describes a moment of spiritual enlightenment

C'est la Grâce qui passe aimable et nous fait signe
in a much more effective way than many of the poems of Sagesse The
poet draws an analogy between a state of grace and the 'simplicité
primitive' of childhood - which is a banal enough procedure - but the
starting-point of this analogy is the recollection of a district of
London - "Angels" (432) - and its everyday nocturnal activities which
seemed wholesome and unperverted just because of their very ordinariness
The articulation of this threefold analogy is obviously the word
'Angels' itself but there is little doubt that Verlaine associated evenings
spent in the district with a peculiar sense of well-being, with the
pleasures of a bain de foule, now given a spiritual significance

"Angels" seul coin luisant dans ce Londres du soir,
Où flambe un peu de gaz et jase quelque foule
C'est drôle que, semblable à tel très dur espoir,
Ton souvenir m'obsède et puissamment enroule
Autour de mon esprit un regret rouge et noir

(432) Surely Verlaine means The Angel, Islington?

Devantures, chansons, omnibus et les danses
 Dans le demi-brouillard où flue un goût de rhum,
 Décence, toutefois, le souci des cadences,
 Et même dans l'ivresse un certain décorum,
 Jusqu'à l'heure où la brume et la nuit se font denses

The poem is thus an unexpected anticipation of some recent
 'humanity-oriented' Catholic devotional works such as Michel
 Quoist's beautiful prayers and meditations on everyday events
 like football matches

* * * * *

Rimbaud's poetry is characterised by numerous highly varied
 details drawn from everyday life such as children waiting for
 gifts on New Year's Day (433), military band concerts (434), new
 fashions in pocket-watches (435), the taking of snuff (436),
 strolling soldiers making passes at nannies out to take the babies
 in their charge for a walk (437), tin bath tubs (438), the sights
 and sounds of a bakery (439), drinking beer and lemonade in cafés
 (440), smoking cigars (441), a winter journey in a cosy train
 compartment (442), welcome meals in hospitable cabarets after a
 tiring journey (443), the contents and smells of an old sideboard
 (444), the broken elastic of a pair of shoes (445), scenes in a
 public library (446), going through customs control (447), smoking

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- (433) 'Les Étrennes des Orphelins'
 (434) 'A la Musique'.
 (435) Idem.
 (436) Idem.
 (437) Idem.
 (438) 'Vénus Anadyomène'
 (439) 'Les Effarés'
 (440) 'Roman'.
 (441) 'Rages de Césars'
 (442) 'Rêvé pour l'hiver'.
 (443) 'Au Cabaret-Vert' and 'La Maline'.
 (444) 'Le Buffet'
 (445) 'Ma Bohème'
 (446) 'Les Assis'
 (447) 'Les Douaniers'

a pipe (448), fairs (449), chewing tobacco (450), photography (451), pet dogs (452), drinking tea, coffee, milk and many kinds of alcohol (453), the use of pesticides (454), parasols (455), boating on the river (456), public urinals (457), overcooked vegetables (458), fashionable new drinks (459), the activities of pigeon fanciers (460), Christmas toys (461), the pageantry of ceremonial processions in London (462), the circus (463), eating biscuits (464), children playing at being desperadoes (465) Examples, such as these, which one readily finds looking through the work of the whole of Rimbaud's brief poetic career, more than almost anything else account for the modern 'feel' of his poetry This system of references to ordinary contemporary reality is, of course, paralleled by the large-scale introduction of aspects of everyday speech into Rimbaud's poetic language, a point discussed in the next chapter

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- (448) Oraison du Soir'.
 (449) 'Les Poètes de Sept Ans'
 (450) 'Le Coeur volé'
 (451) 'Ce qu'on dit au poète'
 (452) Idem.
 (453) 'Comédie de la Soif'.
 (454) 'Bruxelles'.
 (455) 'Mémoire'
 (456) Idem.
 (457) 'Délires', II (Une Saison en Enfer)
 (458) 'L'Impossible' (Ibid)
 (459) 'Après le Déluge'
 (460) 'Vies', I.
 (461) 'Phrases'
 (462) 'Les Ponts'.
 (463) 'Ornières'
 (464) 'Vagabonds'.
 (465) 'Jeunesse', I

As well as numerous details drawn from everyday life, to be found through the whole range of Rimbaud's poetry, a not inconsiderable number of poems are devoted in their entirety to its evocation. Three representative examples are 'Roman', 'Au Cabaret-Vert' and 'Mémoire'.

Some commentators have spoken of the irony of 'Roman', but it is surely an irony completely without bitterness, even less a contrived parody. More simply, the poem is a good-natured reflection upon the fickle sentimental and romantic notions of an adolescent. The mild eroticism of poems such as 'Première Soirée', 'Rêvé pour l'hiver', 'La Maline' and 'A la Musique' is sufficiently authentic to suggest that Rimbaud had a fairly normal interest in the opposite sex at the age of sixteen or seventeen (466). He may well, therefore, be making fun of his own emotions in 'Roman'. This seems, all in all, the best explanation of the gentle, playful tone of the poem.

Nothing could be more ordinary than this evocation of the sensations and feelings of a June evening. There is no superfluous or incongruous romantic bric-à-brac, on the contrary the poem is given an explicitly modern everyday setting

On n'est pas sérieux, quand on a dix-sept ans.
 - Un beau soir, foin des bocks et de la limonade,
 Des cafés tapageurs aux lustres éclatants'
 - On va sous les tilleuls verts de la promenade

The reference to 'bocks' - a recent word, and the result of a recent taste for Alsatian type beer - gives the poem a clear chronological context, as the reference to the cafe creates a mundane physical setting against which the poet light-heartedly rebels. The second stanza appears,

(466) A traumatic event, such as that obliquely described in 'Le Coeur volé', could later have aggravated latent psycho-sexual problems stemming from his unhappy childhood but there seems to have been at least an intervening period of normality.

for a moment, to be an attempt to change to a more appropriately romantic setting, a natural landscape in which love would find more correspondances But this only serves to illustrate Rimbaud's light humour This nature is still very much under the influence of the town - so much so that the perfume of beer mingles with that of the vine' The effect is very much to root the poet's sentimental adventure in the basically mundane setting already suggested in the opening stanza

Les tilleuls sentent bon dans les bons soirs de juin'
L'air est parfois si doux, qu'on ferme la paupière,
Le vent chargé de bruits, - la ville n'est plus loin, -
A des parfums de vigne et des parfums de bière .

The third stanza continues this strain of humour. The prettiness of the description of the night sky is prevented from becoming unpalatable by the use of a down-to-earth image 'un tout petit chiffon d'azur sombre'. Attempts to see allusions to the occult in Rimbaud's poetry have probably never been less appropriate than in the case of the 'mauvaise étoile' of this stanza In the context of the stanza it has the same deflationary effect as 'chiffon', even the most mediocre little star and a tiny patch of sky are enough to intoxicate the sentimental adolescent There is another (also humorous) interpretation the star could be light-heartedly seen as a sign of ill-omen, the herald of the poet's meeting with the beloved, the first meeting in an affair which can only come to nought .. The two interpretations may stand simultaneously, it is quite possible that there is a deliberate play on words In the fourth stanza the evening scent and alcohol merge into one through a fusion of images of the poet's intoxication, in this state he imagines being kissed

Nuit de juin' Dix-sept ans' - On se laisse griser.
La sève est du champagne et vous monte à la tête ...
On divague, on se sent aux lèvres un baiser
Qui palpite là, comme une petite bête .

Only in the fifth stanza does the 'beloved' make her entry on to the scene Daydreaming and reading romantic stories have brought the poet to the frame of mind where this evening will be seen as a first meeting of lovers. The whole setting is given a modern and deliberately mundane tone (to be

contrasted to the adolescent's idealised expectations) by being swathed not in moonlight but by the light from a street-lamp. Nor are the obstacles to the poet's love of truly romanesque proportions

Le coeur fou Robinsonne à travers les romans,
- Lorsque, dans la clarté d'un pâle réverbère,
Passe une demoiselle aux petits airs charmants,
Sous l'ombre du faux-col effrayant de son père ..

From that moment on the poet is smitten. Another touch of realism brings in the reaction of his friends to his starry-eyed romance 'vous êtes mauvais goût'. But it is all a game, when the poet has actually reached the stage where he is written to by the beloved one senses that his interest will wane (hence the influence of the 'mauvaise étoile' in the third stanza?) and that he will be content to return the pleasures of everyday reality seen, once again, for what it is rather than through the rose-coloured glasses of love.

Ce soir-là, ... - vous rentrez aux cafés éclatants,
Vous demandez des bocks ou de la limonade ..
- On n'est pas sérieux, quand on a dix-sept ans
Et qu'on a des tilleuls verts sur la promenade.

The very effective references to sensation in 'Roman' (taste suggested in the allusion to drinks, the scents of the evening, the noises of the cafés and the town, the feel of the evening air on one's face, the sights of evening sky) are one instance of the close links between the treatment of everyday life and of the world of sensation in Rimbaud's poetry. This point, and the possible effect of the treatment of everyday life upon poetic style are two questions which may be usefully considered with regard to 'Au Cabaret-Vert', in anticipation of the wider discussions of them in the final section of this chapter and in the next chapter respectively

Professor Enid Starkie said of Rimbaud's flight through France and Belgium in October 1870 which inspired this poem

In spite of hunger and hardship, these two weeks of liberty, of untrammelled wandering seem to have been the happiest Rimbaud had ever spent. There is no bitterness or coarseness to be found in the poems which resulted from them, there is only the expression of celestial happiness, of joy in freedom, and of delight

in mere living (467)

The poem is so successful in the immediacy and spontaneity of the expression of this happiness that it is, in fact, extremely difficult to comment on. There are few problems to be elucidated or references to be explained, the 'message' of the poem, which could be summarised as 'I was happy here', is conveyed directly to the reader and arouses sympathy by this directness, by its appeal to a kind of human experience in which most readers will have shared.

One startling indication of the 'directness' of the poem is the fact that it does not contain a single metaphor or simile. Even the Parnassians rarely applied their doctrine of 'images directes' with such rigour. Of all Rimbaud's contemporaries in the 1870s (with the exception of Verlaine) only Coppée is at all comparable in this respect and beside the personal involvement and candour of Rimbaud's poem his work seems artificial.

Although Professor Starkie says that this poem and the others grouped with it are free from any coarseness, this does not mean that they are polite or refined. This poem is essentially expressed in everyday speech. Moreover it is not the pseudo-popular speech of Hugo, of which we still find traces in 'Le Forgeron', but everyday speech with the rhythms and structures of prose. For just as the language is not in any sense refined (e.g. 'têtons énormes') no more is it 'poetic' in any traditional sense.

Indeed if we were to alter the typography of this poem and set it out as prose many readers would surely mistake it for a letter written in a rather casual and intimate style. Despite the respectable sonnet form, the only major evidence of poetic rhetoric is perhaps the last line. Until we reach this the poem consists entirely of the narration of actions

interspersed with brief descriptive vignettes, themselves so intimately connected with the actions as to assume the same 'rhythm' (e.g. the description of the action of bringing the food and drink in which 'rieuse' becomes associated with both the serving girl and the action). The momentum gradually slows down towards the end of the poem, signalled by the repetition of 'jambon' as the poet's gaze becomes fixed on the forthcoming feast. The poet becomes more enthusiastically lyrical, a development indicated by the increase in descriptive elements. The natural pause in the action which occurred when the beer was poured out is also, of course, simultaneous with a rise in pleasurable anticipation. The hypnotic power of this climax and pause is made evident in the last line where the inversion and adjectival phrase suggest the fixing of the poet's thoughts and gaze during this superbly protracted moment and the beautiful vision upon which they were concentrated. It may also, incidentally, be a humorous parody of traditional lyrical devices - yet it could not be bettered as a poetic expression of feeling.

The prose-like rhythm is suggested by the matter-of-fact abruptness of 'J'entraîs à Charles', by striking enjambements (e.g. lines 3-4, 5-6 and 12-13), by the interjection 'Celle-là, ce n'est pas un baiser qui l'épeure' which captures perfectly, in its position, the flavour of everyday speech. All this taken in conjunction with Rimbaud's willingness to 'call a spade a spade' i.e. to name and describe precisely the object of his enjoyment, (e.g. 'tartines de beurre', 'jambon à moitié froid', 'la fille aux tétons énormes', 'jambon tiède', 'jambon parfumé d'une gousse d'ail', 'la chope immense avec sa mousse') instead of employing general terms like 'repas' or 'boisson' accompanied by some suitable 'rustic' adjective - all this might lead the reader to forget that this is a sonnet written in alexandrines.

Rimbaud is following up the slight advances made by Baudelaire in the

direction of giving poetry the freedom of prose (468) Ultimately the poet was to abandon verse for prose having become increasingly revolutionary in his treatment of the former One might conceive an argument that this is a bad poem precisely because it could be mistaken for prose and that, therefore, its verse-form is purposeless and so little utilised as to make it an unnecessary artifice Yet for all its prose-like qualities we could argue that this is poetry on two grounds first we accept Mallarmé's dictum that where there is conscious organisation and stylistic effort, poetry is potentially present (469), second the poem is in verse which has been given the characteristics of prose, in this case the apparently spontaneous expression of sensation (470) Considered in this latter way the poem is to be contrasted with prose which has been versified and inflated with rhetoric which is exactly what a good number of earlier French poets had produced with their constant references to dictionaries of rhymes'

Admittedly the first of these two arguments sidesteps the issue as to whether the poem would have been better expressed in prose, but it is worth recalling just how revolutionary the introduction of 'prosaismes' into poetry still was, and reiterating that this was not necessarily detrimental to the interests of poetry. The second argument, which really amounts to the belief that the poem gains from being in verse, is more serious For the overall form of the poem - the sonnet structure - is itself of value. The incident related is a fairly brief one and the

- (468) The 'très' qualifying 'naïfs' is reminiscent of that particular aspect of Baudelaire's 'Yankee' accent that was to be noted by Laforgue
- (469) Mallarmé did not bother to dilute his dictum with an adverb like 'potentially'
- (470) Suggested, for example, by the repetition of 'jambon' as a 'mot-clé' in the stream of consciousness

sensual experiences were acute and varied. The concision resulting from the limitation in length enables the sensual experiences to seem in proportion to the duration of the events, does not allow time for interpretation ~~off~~ for comment upon these experiences and therefore heightens them as sensations rather than topics for philosophical discussion or allegorical excursions. The length of the alexandrine allows plenty of room for rhythmic variety (a possible placing of the main caesura being after syllables 4, 6, 5, 6, 3, 6, 6, 9, 3, 6, 6, 6, 8, 6, respectively) yet ensures also a certain concision that would not have been guaranteed in prose. One might have expected Rimbaud to use an octosyllabic line in dealing with such a subject, in the manner of a popular song or ballad, but he obviously prefers the greater variety possible with the alexandrine, e.g. the ability to slow down the tempo in the last few lines by a greater regularity in placing of the caesura. Undoubtedly, however, the main advantage in the use of verse in this instance lies in the value of rhyme. For it is rhyme, which above all, heightens the sense of ~~gamy~~ in the poem, making it reminiscent of a popular song without recourse to the octosyllabic line or an obvious song-form. Thus the poet has here combined the advantages of prose and verse and does not allow too close an observance of the 'rules' of one or the other to hamper the expression of sensation.

This expression and formulation of the sensations of an everyday experience is the main concern of the poem. All of the senses are involved in it. The sense which we loosely call tactile but which here is more complex, involving general muscular awareness, is vividly evoked by the contrast between 'j'avais déchiré mes bottines aux cailloux des chemins' and 'j'allongeai les jambes sous la table' which makes the reader aware of that marvellous feeling of well-being when aching and battered limbs are stretched and relaxed. Taste, a sense so often neglected by poets, is considered worthy of poetic expression with 'jambon', 'tartine', 'chope', etc. Smell so closely linked physiologically

with taste is linked with it in this poem in 'jambon rose et blanc parfumé d'une gousse d'ail' The auditory sense is only specifically involved in 'rieuse' but this laughter seems to pervade the whole poem as a result of the rhyme and of the general light-hearted tone. Finally there is a feast for the eyes in 'la table verte', 'la fille aux tétons énormes aux yeux vifs', 'un plat colorié', 'jambon rose et blanc', and 'sa mousse que dorait un rayon de soleil arriéré' Such a comprehensive formulation of sensual experience is remarkable in the space of fourteen lines.

Professor Starkie, who does not deal specifically with this underrated poem at all, groups it with 'Les Effarés', 'La Maline' and 'Le Buffet', which are roughly contemporary with it, as being 'in the style of the Flemish school of painting, similar to the poems written after 1880, by the leaders of the Belgian Renaissance by poets like Verhaeren'. (471) The latter remark would not seem to be particularly appropriate in the case of 'Au Cabaret-Vert' The pure 'joie de vivre' has none of the cruelty of Verhaeren's early 'plastic' poetry (e.g. Les Flamandes and Les Moines) nor the social concern of later collections like Les Villes tentaculaires. There is, moreover, little resemblance between this poem and Rodenbach's work, which is characterised by wistful melancholy The link with Flemish genre painting is more satisfying, though the Impressionists, who were genre painters after their own fashion, were surely even more successful in the evocation of everyday reality and the total life of the senses than their Flemish predecessors and this poem has remarkable affinities with a painting like Le Bon Bock (472) One is thus able to claim that Rimbaud's poetry is not an isolated phenomenon

(471) E. Starkie, Arthur Rimbaud, p 55.

(472) Painted by Manet 1872-73

but has much in common with contemporary trends in French art, as well as literature

Even some of Rimbaud's most controversial poems become more comprehensible if one views them in the context of the growing interest among poets after 1870 in the experiences of ordinary everyday life. A subject which gained in importance throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (so that some of the world's best and most poetic novelists, including Proust, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, made it the keystone of their work) was the poignant and mysterious interrelationship between present experience and remembered experience of the small events and sensations that make up most of life. Rimbaud made several contributions to this art. 'Mémoire' is primarily an impressionistic meditation upon remembered and actual experiences of a superficially insignificant kind. The stimulus to meditation is, appropriately enough in an impressionistic poem, the play of light upon water (473). The activity which provides the setting is the same as that already exploited by poets like Valabrègue - boating on the river. As we have suggested, Valabrègue's poem may have been consciously or unconsciously recalled in the writing of 'Mémoire'. Rimbaud has written a summer poem of light, when the women by and on the river would have been dressed in pale colours and virginal white - a thought which introduces an apparent allusion to Jeanne d'Arc via the articulating image of 'oriflammes', used both in the etymological sense of banners of St Denis and its modern sense of a bright splash of colour. The opening line of the first stanza suggests that there will be a flashback to childhood at some stage in the poem, this may mean that the present experience of a summer's day on the river is being fused with memories of such experiences. The historical

(473) Rimbaud's entry into contemplation through a fascination with light shimmering upon water may be compared with the effect of flickering flames in 'Nocturne vulgaire' and Veillées, III.

references help to create an atmosphere of mystery and magic appropriate to reminiscences of childhood. Nevertheless, the basic setting of the poem is quite clearly the same aspect of modern everyday life - Sunday relaxation on the river - so frequently celebrated by the Impressionist painters, the poem shares their feeling for shimmering light and its play on water and fabric

L'eau claire, comme le sel des larmes d'enfance,
L'assaut au soleil des blancheurs des corps de femmes,
la soie, en foule et de lys pur, des oriflammes
Sous les murs dont quelque pucelle eut la défense ..

The second stanza continues the basic preoccupation with light. Now the poet's attention moves from the angelic whiteness of the women to the gold of the sun's reflection in the river. This is so intense that, in a device typical of Rimbaud's impressionistic colorisme, the grass lining the river seems black in comparison. In this stanza the poet also fills in the background description of the sky and the landscape beyond the grass banks seen through an arch of trees

l'ébat des anges, - Non le courant d'or en marche,
meut ses bras, noirs, et lourds, et frais surtout, d'herbe. Elle
sombre, ayant le Ciel bleu pour ciel-de-lit, appelle
pour rideaux l'ombre de la colline et de l'arche

Already in the opening section of two stanzas Rimbaud hints at a connection between the sun-filled landscape and the idea of femininity in 'blancheurs des corps de femmes', 'pucelle' and the apparent personification of the grass as 'Elle'. This idea is further developed in the imagery of the second section. The first two lines of the third stanza seem to incorporate an allusion to the preparation of a bridal chamber (474), but the imagery of the décor of love is appropriate to a landscape characterised by gentleness

(474) An echo of 'ciel-de-lit' in the second stanza

Eh' l'humide carreau tend ses bouillons limpides'
L'eau meuble d'or pâle et sans fond les couches prêtes

The actual, visual interplay and correlation between landscape and the presence of the female sex has much to do with this as the next two lines indicate

Les robes vertes et déteintes des fillettes
font les saules, d'où sautent les oiseaux sans brides

The fourth stanza shows Rimbaud's increasing fascination with the imagery he is using, he comes close to a Mallarméan preciousness, indeed there were 'Parnassian' models for such a style, notably in the work of Gautier which Rimbaud may actually have had in mind when he wrote 'Mémoire'

The starting-point is simple enough a marigold by the river, delicate as an eyelid, brighter than a gold coin At midday when the heat haze blurs the reflection of the sun in the river, so that it seems almost to be pink, the colour of the marigold seems to rival it The epithet 'chère', given to the sphere of the sun, continues the idea of love in the previous stanza but this continuation is mostly accomplished through the interjection 'ta foi conjugale, ô l'Épouse' This itself is, however, a reference to everyday life - to the traditional marriage colour in France - yellow.

The first two sections of the poem seem primarily to be an evocation of a present experience in which the poet feels at ease with his surroundings and, perhaps more important from his point of view, with the female sex suggested in his imagery - and incidentally in the feminine rhyme used throughout the poem The introduction of the idea of pride in the third section spoils the previous serenity It is thus more than likely, as some commentators have suggested, that 'Madame' represents the poet's mother, the creator of his inhibitions. If our interpretation is correct it is here, for the first time in the poem, that the poet's thoughts turn consistently to the past rather than the present It is, of course, impossible to be sure that this is where the flashback begins to operate Certainly Rimbaud gives little clue, for 'Madame' is presented simply as

being in the meadow next to the scene he has just evoked. In any event this transition is a reminder of the second element of everyday reality in the poem - Sunday on the river was primarily a family activity; thus it has emotional as well as visual impact upon the poet. The earlier imagery of love and marriage is not just a fanciful conceit, it is very much part of the essential domesticity of the reality which the poet is evoking - this is the everyday world of things like listes de mariage. Such a world is often the target of Rimbaud's scorn and abuse but here he seems to see it as a world to which he could have, perhaps happily, belonged but for the effects of his upbringing.

'Madame' destroys the potentially happy world of children of which the 'fillettes' mentioned in the third stanza may have served as a reminder. She sees and dominates too much 'trop debout', she crushes the spontaneous beauty of nature underfoot because it is not sufficiently submissive for her taste. This is not surprising since she shelters herself from the effects of nature 'l'ombrelle aux doigts'. Whereas the earlier references to furniture were in accord with nature, here modern artifact is seen as precisely unnatural. The image of the parasol is of considerable importance in the exegesis of the poem since it rules out the suggestion made by Suzanne Bernard, Etiemble and others that 'lui' really refers to the sun, 'Elle' to the river and that this section of the poem is little more than a précieux description of natural phenomena. Almost certainly this is one level of meaning, even a disguise of Rimbaud's intention. But a river cannot hold a parasol in its fingers, moreover, contrary to Suzanne Bernard's argument, surely few epithets would suit Madame Rimbaud better than 'froide' and 'noire'. Indeed the black costume of his pious provincial mother is directly contrasted with the earlier 'blancheur des corps de femmes'. Her froideur could apply equally well to her general attitude or to her attitude towards sex. That the latter is involved somewhere is suggested by 'le départ de l'homme', the exciting father-figure has gone far away over the mountains and the light he could have

brought into Rimbaud's life has dispersed like

mille anges blancs qui se séparent sur la route

One may even wonder whether the 'ombrelle trop fière' is a symbol (unconscious or conscious) of male sexuality. The precise reference to the binding of the books the children are reading on the grass anchors this whole section in mundane reality. It is also an example of Rimbaud's feeling for colour - the same contrasting but associated colours are paired in 'Le Dormeur du Val' - to be compared with the red on green of Monet's coquelicots. The image of the book clearly has some personal significance which may never be established with complete certainty. As this section is predominantly sombre perhaps the reference is to the fact that the children had to be well-behaved, to read rather than play (in contrast to the children who play by the river in 'Jeunesse' I, although even they have to watch their language in the presence of adults'). As this is almost certainly an evocation of Sunday, the book could be a devotional work or a Bible - its binding the only splash of colour allowed by Madame Rimbaud in a life in which contact with other oriflammes would be kept to a minimum.

The fourth section of the poem introduces the mood of despondency and disillusionment consequent upon the separation of Rimbaud's parents. The purity and hope of childhood, symbolised by the green banks of the river, which the scintillating light had for a moment recalled to the poet, are gone. In place of the gentle spring-like symbol of married love there is a vision of harsh reality. The river is sullied by the detritus of industry in the heat of August evenings. In the same way perhaps the poet's innocence has been destroyed by the full flowering of his own sexuality. In both cases there is an inevitable intrusion of ugliness, not without compensating joy but far removed from the serenity of the opening of the poem.

Regret des bras épais et jeunes d'herbe pure'
Or des lunes d'avril au coeur du Saint lit' Joie
des chantiers riverains à l'abandon, en proie
aux soirs d'août qui faisaient germer ces pourritures'

The happiness that Rimbaud might have had has flowed past like the river In the opening line of the poem the water was compared with a child's tears Now the river weeps, like Rimbaud for his lost childhood, for the happiness and scintillating reflections which have gone, leaving only the struggle of an old man to make a living, unable to move Perhaps this is all that is left for the poet

Puis c'est la nappe, sans reflets, sans source, grise
un vieux, dragueur, dans sa barque immobile, peine

Such an interpretation is indeed confined by the final section of the poem where the poet adopts the first person His 'canot' is immobile like the old man's 'barque' He cannot reach the yellow flower (the marigold) - the symbol of domestic happiness as he was once able to conceive it - nor the blue flower which may symbolise the ideal new world sought by the voyant (a variant on the already traditional image of the azur) This world, however, is as insubstantial as the ashes of which the poet is reminded by the colour of the new sunless river In the same way the willows that the poet had associated with girls are nothing more than powder, consumed like those other flowers symbolic of love - 'roses' - by the ravages of time The poet is trapped in the mud of reality, his existence pointless, as the play on words (which appears to have gone unnoticed by commentators) suggests 'à quelle boue?'. Although this section refers to the poet's present condition it seems also to refer back to an earlier moment of realisation, in childhood itself Fittingly the poem concludes, in this way, by incorporating another reference to everyday reality the poet playing in a 'toy' canoe by the banks of the Meuse. Delahaye has recorded the fact that Rimbaud used to play with his brother in a small boat tethered by the river (475)

(475) Souvenirs familiers à propos de Rimbaud, Verlaine, Germain Nouveau, quoted by Suzanne Bernard.

'Mémoire' is an exquisite example of a process to be examined at length in Part Two, Chapter Four, how a setting drawn from everyday life, already treated in minor poetry, can serve as the framework for a synthetic masterpiece Vivid sense impressions, references to mundane and modern reality (476), are interwoven with memories and emotions so that the elements of the synthesis are no longer separable. Such préciosité as there is in the poet's imagery is almost certainly not intended as parody but is part of the deliberately gentle evocation of a child's conception of romantic love in marriage

* * * * *

Corbière's work, more than that of any other poet in the period 1870-1887, seems to make the equation between the modern and the mundane, his greatest originality lay in his provocative use of everyday subjects, images and language The 'quotidien' is sometimes the pin with which he deflates the balloon of the Romantic rhetoric he so despised, sometimes the shield behind which he hides his own vulnerability Much of this tendency will already have been seen in the earlier sections of this chapter and will be further discussed in the next chapter It is worth recalling here something of the scope of his picture of modern everyday life as it is presented through the plethora of ordinary objects, activities and experiences which are treated in his poetry printing and stationery (477), queuing for a bus (478), theatrical performances and audience

(476) The reference to industry in the poem is modern but so too is the whole basic setting of Sunday by the river (as well as the reference to the parasol) See *above* p 376

(477) Oeuvres Complètes, p 701, pp 704-5 and p 725

(478) *Ibid* , p 705

behaviour (479), drinking absinthe (480), ragoûts (481), a coconut-shy (482), frying food (483), polished shoes and umbrellas (484), eating spinach (485), toy soldiers (486), telegram messages (487), parasols (488), smoking a pipe (489), hotel wallpaper (490). This list, which is based on just the first twenty or so pages of Les Amours Jaunes is, moreover, highly selective. A comprehensive list for the whole of Corbière's poetry would be very long indeed.

Nowhere is Corbière's usual poetic treatment of everyday life better illustrated than in 'A Une Rose', the sole purpose of which is to cast ridicule upon one of the most enduring images of the European lyrical tradition by showing the fate of 'roses' in the harsh world of modern reality (491). The opening stanza presents the myth but already warns the reader of its falseness (presumably to be equated with the deceptions of love itself)

Rose, rose d'amour vannée,
Jamais fanée,
Le rouge-fin est ta couleur,
Ô fausse-fleur'

-
- (479) Ibid., p. 708
 (480) Ibid., p. 709
 (481) Ibid., p. 710
 (482) Ibid., p. 713
 (483) Ibid., p. 714
 (484) Ibid., p. 714
 (485) Ibid., p. 715
 (486) Ibid., p. 718
 (487) Ibid., p. 718.
 (488) Ibid., p. 722 and p. 727
 (489) Ibid., p. 729 and p. 734
 (490) Ibid., p. 730
 (491) It is to be compared, obviously, with Rimbaud's 'Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs'

This statement is followed by a catalogue of the everyday avatars of the rose, uses which as we have seen are primarily associated with urban civilisation as a substance in paper manufacture

Feuille où pondent les journalistes
 Un fait-divers,
 Papier-Joseph, croquis d'artiste
 - Chiffres ou vers -

in embalming fluid(')

Coeur de parfum, montant arôme
 Qui nous embaume
 Et ferait même avec succès,
 Après décès

or in air fresheners to hide cooking smells, or cachous to sweeten the breath

Grise l'amour de ton haleine,
 Vapeur malsaine,
 Vent de pastille-du-sérail,
 Hanté par l'aïl'

Similarly it may be an imitation rose, a piece of jewellery. It may also be an ingredient in drinks

Rose-thé - Dans le grog, peut-être' -

or in cosmetics (if these lines refer, as we believe, to drinks being sipped through lipstick)

Rose-mousseuse, sur toi pousse
 Souvent la mousse
 De l'Aï Du Bock

The final stanza is the perfect pendant to the opening description of the traditional image

Va, gommeuse et gommée, ô rose
 De couperose,
 Fleurir les faux-cols et les coeurs,
 Gilets vainqueurs'

With the exception of the virile leisure activities of Breton sailors, as described in poems like 'Le Bossu Bitor', the hedonistic appreciation of ordinary pleasures has relatively little place in Corbière's poetry. There are occasional exceptions such as 'La Pipe au Poète'. The pipe is personified as the comforter of the poet's alter ego

Je suis la Pipe d'un poète,
Sa nourrice, et j'endors sa Bête

Like Mallarmé, Corbière was fascinated by the evanescent quality of tobacco smoke. It enabled him to pursue his dreams but is a reminder of the impermanence and insubstantiality of reality

- Dors encore la Bête est calmée,
File ton rêve jusqu'au bout ..
Mon Pauvre' la fumée est tout
- S'il est vrai que tout est fumée

The impact of everyday reality upon Corbière's poetic register was, as we shall suggest, even more considerable than its thematic implications

* * * * *

The poetry of everyday life was more often than not a product of the widespread enthusiasm for the modern age that was sometimes, paradoxically, found in the work of those very writers and artists who were directly critical of society or had at least shared the interests, themes and style of the more sombre variants of Naturalism. Thus Verlaine brought the railway and the telegraph into his poetry and Rimbaud recorded somewhat elliptically the wonders of the Crystal Palace but both poets also wrote of the poverty and ugliness of the modern city, Manet painted his absinthe drinker and his Bar aux Folies-Bergère, Degas painted his down and outs and his sunlit scenes of the races, Huysmans, whose Naturalist novels were amongst the most depressing of the whole movement, was also a convinced and cheerful modernist. 'Nous sommes des hommes qui croyons qu'un écrivain aussi bien qu'un peintre, doit être de son temps, nous sommes des artistes assoiffés de modernité, nous voulons l'enterrement des romans de cape et d'épée, nous voulons l'envoi au décrochez-moi-ça de toute la défroque des temps passés et tous les rigaudons grecs et hindous' (492). The titles and contents of some periodicals of the years after 1870 also

(492) L'Actualité, April-May 1877

reflect the same enthusiasm - La Vie Moderne, La Revue Moderne, and L'Actualité spring to mind.

This turning towards the pleasures and excitements of everyday life, the appreciation of this reality for its very transitoriness, created a distance in mood and style between the new poetry and most of what had preceded it. Whereas some contemporary subjects already discussed had, relatively easily, been expressed through the traditional discursive, emphatic or descriptive styles the 'new' thematic material of ordinary everyday life required a new idiom that would capture the freshness and immediacy of the inspiration. One idiom which has enjoyed a great fortune with French chansonniers until our own day is that of the humorous and conversational tone. Something of this was seen in Section (c) of the last chapter, the influence of everyday speech will be one topic discussed in the next chapter.

(g) The World of Sensation

Upon first consideration the world of sensation appears to be a completely different category of subjects drawn from contemporary reality than those so far examined - if indeed it may be so classified at all. After all have not sensations always been the same, in what sense are they contemporary? Yet it is not only possible to demonstrate that there are valid reasons for regarding sensation as an aspect of contemporary reality but specifically to see relationships between concepts of sensation and modernity in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Moreover it is arguable that treatment of the world of sensation is not only one, but perhaps the most distinctive, of the 'thematic' preoccupations of the poets of contemporary reality from Baudelaire onwards (and one which had a particularly notable effect on poetic language in the years 1870 - 1887 (494).

There is a fairly obvious sense in which sensations are 'contemporary' . they are singularly ephemeral experiences which may be derived from the poet's contact with phenomena which are contemporary with him. Sensations emanating from (or felt in response to) contemporary external reality could on these grounds alone, therefore be considered a legitimate and important area of enquiry for the present study. However, there are more precise reasons why the world of sensation is not as far removed from the 'subjects' examined earlier in this chapter than might be supposed. It is

(494) A discussion of the development of poetic impressionism in response to a growing sense of the immediacy of contemporary reality (in which the treatment of sensation was of great importance) is to be found in Part Two, Chapter Four.

interesting, in this regard, to recall some of the most significant utterances, in the late nineteenth century, on the place of sensation. There is very little support for the common-sense notion that sensual perception is unchanging and that sensation could not, therefore, be thought of as specifically modern.

In our period (to a large extent, one suspects, under the influence of evolutionary thought), it was, on the contrary, commonplace to consider hypersensitivity as a phenomenon of the modern age, and the quest for variety and intensity of sensual experience as one of its leading obsessions. This belief did not always stem from a feeling that the refinement of sensual perception was unwholesome. Laforgue saw the Impressionist painter as the most advanced example of the evolving perfection of the human eye which might develop still further (495). In this instance evolutionary science encouraged a positive and optimistic attitude. More generally, however, the association of modernity and acute sensitivity was made within the perspective of the contrast between contemporary decadence and earlier more 'balanced' epochs. This does not necessarily mean, of course, that hypersensitivity was considered an inferior state, as we suggested in the last chapter the avant-garde was often proud of its decadence.

Many of the statements concerning the links between modernity and sensation were made in connection with discussions of the work of Baudelaire whose own evocation of the modern city, for instance, had incorporated a rich array of references to sensation. In Baudelaire's poetry

(495) Notes sur l'impressionisme, Mélanges posthumes.

The relationship between modernity and sensation is particularly clear with regard to sound. The blaring noise of the modern city has an important place in Les Fleurs du Mal :

Quand je te vois passer, ô ma chère indolente
Au chant des instruments qui se brise au plafond . . .

(496)

J'ai vu parfois, au fond d'un théâtre banal
Qu'enflammait l'orchestre sonore,
Une fée . . .

(497)

Ils rampent, flagellés par les bises iniques,
Frémissant au fracas roulant des omnibus . . .

(498)

. . . un de ces concerts, riches de cuivre,
Dont les soldats parfois inondent nos jardins . . .

(499)

. la voirie
Pousse un sombre ouragan dans l'air silencieux . . .

(500)

Enfin! seul! On n'entend plus que le roulement de quelques
fiacres attardés et éreintés. Pendant quelques heures, nous
posséderons le silence, sinon le repos. . .

(501)

- (496) — 'L'Amour du Mensonge'.
(497) 'L'Irréparable'.
(498) 'Les Petites Vieilles', I.
(499) 'Les Petites Vieilles', III.
(500) 'Le Cygne'.
(501) 'A une Heure du Matin'.

On entend ça et là les cuisines siffler,
 Les théâtres glapir, les orchestres ronfler . . .

(502)

La Diane chantait dans les cours des casernes . . .

(503)

Most of Baudelaire's admirers in the two decades or so after his death seem to have regarded the poet's evocation of the world of sensation as an aspect of his modernity and, more particularly as one of his functions as a chronicler of a civilisation in decline. These sensations were valued for their intensity, variety but perhaps above all, for their artificiality; they were to be related to human ingenuity, vice and corruption rather than reliance on the unaided offerings of nature. For most of the

minor poets the role of sensation as an ingredient in Baudelaire's poetic synthesis (and even as an insight into a spiritual order of reality) was doubtless ignored. The great poets of contemporary reality after 1870 were less obsessed with the need to see Baudelaire as a precursor of decadence, for them his treatment of the world of sensation was also to be valued as a symptom of the greater lyrical authenticity to be derived from a move away from discursive, 'abstract' poetry to the more confused but compelling domain of feelings generally. In both these ways, Baudelaire's example had endowed sensation with a new prestige as a poetic subject.

One of the most influential correlations between sensation and modernity in Baudelaire's poetry was made by Gautier in the celebrated 'Notice' to Les Fleurs du Mal where Baudelaire's style is seen as singularly appropriate to the age which is an example of 'civilisations qui vieillissent'. In such an epoch 'la vie factice a remplacé la vie naturelle et développé chez l'homme des besoins inconnus'. To render the most ineffable experiences, 'traduire les confidences subtiles de la névrose, les aveux de la passion vieillissante', the poet must take 'des couleurs à toutes les palettes, des notes à tous les claviers . . . '. Significantly Gautier had been anticipated in this judgement by Verlaine, one of the outstanding poets of sensation after 1870. In a now famous article published three years before Gautier's 'Notice' he had written .

La profonde originalité de Charles Baudelaire, c'est à mon sens, de représenter puissamment et essentiellement l'homme moderne . . . Je comprends ici que l'homme physique moderne, tels 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, en un mot, le bilio-nerveux par excellence, comme dirait H. Taine.

(504)

Writers as different as Barbey d'Aurevilly, Barrès and Verhaeren took a similar view; all of them apparently convinced of the peculiar sensitivity of modern man. (505) Barbey d'Aurevilly spoke of 'la poésie du spleen, des nerfs et du frisson, dans une vieille civilisation matérialiste et dépourvue' (506). Barrès pursued the same point .

Parmi ceux qui se partagent le domaine mental, c'est-à-dire qui représentent la sensibilité et l'intelligence d'aujourd'hui... Baudelaire et ses amis s'imposent comme les interprètes de la sensation... Tous les esprits vraiment de cette époque se sont rencontrés à quelque heure à sentir de façon analogue.

(507)

For Verhaeren (who was to know from personal experience the anguish of nervous depression and breakdown) Baudelaire had succeeded in formulating the feelings of men in an age of pessimism and spiritual and mental disorientation : 'Nul poète ne sent d'une façon plus aigue, avec des nerfs plus surexcités . . . il semble avoir des sens spéciaux pour subir les morbidesses, les mélancolies, les navrements, les désespoirs' (508).

The association of sensual refinement (or over-refinement) and modernity was, however, frequently made in contexts other than consideration of Baudelaire's work. One of the foremost spokesmen of modernism, Bourget, identified the same phenomenon in the themes and style of the Goncourts' works (and turned again to the idea that a new language was necessary for the rendition of modern experience) :

Sous l'influence de ces troubles, [du système nerveux] l'émotion morale est accompagnée d'un cortège de fortes impressions physiques, et, comme cet énervement est la maladie de l'époque, les frères de Goncourt ont employé leurs procédés de style avec un bonheur rare . . . Ces monographies de névroses n'auraient jamais pu être rédigées dans la langue que nous a transmise Voltaire . . .

(509)

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- (505) A reflection of much contemporary biological theory.
 (506) Quoted in A.E. Carter, Baudelaire et la critique française, p.50.
 (507) 'La Sensation en littérature : la folie de Baudelaire', Taches d'encre, November - December 1884.
 (508) Quoted in A.E. Carter, Baudelaire et la critique française, p.55.
 (509) Nouveaux Essais, p.192.

His estimate of A Rebours was broadly similar :

... ce roman ... où se trouvaient analysées les sensations d'un homme uniquement épris d'artifice, n'est pas loin d'être un livre de stricte exactitude ...

(540)

A Rebours itself remains one of the most outstanding documents in any study of the relationship between modernity and the obsession with sensation. Des Esseintes devotes his time and ingenuity to the titillation of the senses by means of the artificial. The curious hero's literary tastes are particularly revealing. He admired Edmond de Goncourt's style as 'diligent à noter l'impalpable impression qui frappe les sens et détermine la sensation, un style expert à moduler les nuances compliquées d'une époque . . . singulièrement complexe'. The 'minor' poets he admires (including Verlaine, Corbière and Mallarmé) are appreciated for their refusal to constrain within traditional language 'les sels effervescents des sensations et des idées'. It was no surprise that Bajou, whose declarations were not notable for their originality, should have summarised this whole tendency

L'homme moderne est un blasé!
Affinement d'appétits, de sensations, de goût,
de luxe, de jouissances, névrose, hystérie, hypnotisme,
morphinomane, charlatanisme scientifique,
schopenhauérisme à outrance, tels sont les produits
de l'évolution sociale.

(541)

In the 1880s judgement which had been attached to Baudelaire could now be applied to a new generation of poets. Barrès wrote of Verlaine's preoccupation with sensation that it was 'le dernier degré d'énervement dans une race épuisée. C'est de l'art, parfois le plus exquis que nous sachions' (542). This was quite in keeping with Barrès's own attitude which summarises well the position

(540) Lutèce, April 1885.

(541) Le Décadent, I, p.1, 1886. Bajou corroborates the feeling that the tendency is intimately linked with a new language : 'C'est dans la langue surtout que s'en manifestent les premiers symptômes'. (idem).

(542) Les Taches d'encre, 2, p.27, 1884.

of many members of the avant-garde .

Il faut sentir le plus possible ... Pour moi,
uniquement curieux de surveiller mes sensations
et qui désire m'anémier tant j'ai le goût
des frissons délicats.

(543)

* * * * *

There are other ways in which the poetic treatment of the world of sensation is to be seen as a natural and logical development of the various factors already examined in this thesis. We have noted that such treatment was sanctioned by the example of Baudelaire but it was also encouraged by the milieu of the cénacles. There the world of sensation was a favourite subject : because, as sex and scatology, it was provocative, because enjoyed through food and drink, it was part of the prevalent hedonism. Also it not only fits into the perspective of decadence and neo-paganism (544) but is related to the poet's exclusion from society whose proprieties can be undermined, (and a

(543) Ibid., 'Le Culte du moi', Not all writers who depicted this situation, seen in an extreme form in the pairing of modernity and depravity in poetry like Lorrain's 'Modernités', were happy with it. Zola (whose attitude was not, however, unambiguous) deplored the condition of modern man in his article 'La Littérature et la gymnastique'. 'Nous sommes malades, cela est bien certain, malades de progrès... Cette victoire des nerfs sur le sang a décidé nos mœurs, de notre littérature, de notre époque tout entière'. Jules Lemaitre saw the concentration on sensation in literature as a product of an age of pessimism and disillusionment: 'Quand on renonce à ce qui avait été presque le tout de la littérature classique et de la littérature romanesque, à la peinture de la vie morale et à l'idéalisation de l'homme, que reste-t-il que la sensation, l'impression pittoresque et sensuelle?' ('La Jeunesse sous le Second Empire et sous la Troisième République', La Revue Bleue, June 1885, pp.743.)

(544) Although the artificiality of decadent modernity was most often associated with the interest in sensation it is true that neo-paganism and the wish to escape from modern materialist society to a more natural and physical way of life also greatly encouraged this interest. Rimbaud's life and work are perhaps the best example of the hunger for both artificial and natural sensations which although, at first sight, in opposition to each other, are united against 'bourgeois' stuffiness and sobriety. The influence of neo-paganism is also one of the main explanations of the great importance of sensation in the poetry of the Parnassians (itself a usually underestimated force in attempts to assess the place of sensation in French poetry after 1870), the other being the influence of scientific method and 'detachment'.

measure of revenge enacted) through the treatment of subjects previously considered inappropriate or even taboo. Most obviously the desire for spontaneity and the fight against tradition were well served by the elevation of sensation (at the expense of discourse, logic and rhetoric) to a position of eminence. Moreover several of the other contemporary 'subjects' treated in poetry after 1870 presuppose an involvement in the world of sensation. The scientific age was above all concerned with the notation and analysis of sense data. The concept of speed is a sensation in itself : a rapid sequence of sights and sounds on a train journey, for instance, remained at the level of sense-impressions since the ever-changing landscape leaves insufficient time for reflection or commentary. Similarly the modern city is characterised by a variety of experience, change and movement all of which encourage the functioning of the sensibility at the level of sensation rather than rational thought. Many of the pleasures and pains of everyday life, from the very fact that they are humble, are likewise concerned with sensation rather than the intellect.

Perhaps nothing distinguishes French poetry in the three decades running from the publication of Les Fleurs du Mal to the death of Laforgue more than the wealth of its references to the world of sensation. If anything the references grew in both subtlety and quality after 1870.

* * * * *

An analysis of the place of sensation in the minor poetry of the two decades or so after 1870 would be an immense, although profitable task. For the moment it will have to suffice to draw the reader's attention to a handful of representative examples illustrating, at least, something of the diversity of the appeal of the world of sensation.

Cros was probably the most talented of all the minor poets discussed in this thesis. One token of this talent is that his treatment of contemporary reality extended beyond mere description to an evocation of the world where sensation and immediate mental experience meet :

Comme bercée en un hamac,
La pensée oscille et tournoie,
A cette heure où tout estomac
Dans un flot d'absinthe se noie.

Et l'absinthe pénètre l'air,
Car cette heure est toute émeraude.
L'appetit aiguise le flair
De plus d'un nez rose qui rôde.

Promenant le regard savant
De ses grands yeux d'aigues-marines,
Circe cherche d'où vient le vent
Qui lui caresse les narines.

Et, vers des dîners inconnus,
Elle court à travers l'opale
De la brume du soir. Vénus
S'allume dans le ciel vert-pâle.

(545)

Moreover it is world located in modern times, as the reference to absinthe makes clear, and of somewhat banal aspirations - suggested by 'dîners inconnus'.

Two poets whom posterity has judged less kindly than their admiring contemporaries (among whom even Rimbaud may be numbered) were nonetheless sufficiently original to enliven their work with references to the world of sensation. Valade was capable of filling his poetry with a convincing sense of sensual awareness and movement

Cris, braves, délire... La toile
Se relève sur la diva
Que Venise salue étoile,
Puis tombe encore. L'on s'en va.

(546) 'L'Heure verte', O.C., p.82.

Un bruit de toilettes froissées
Emplit le vestibule étroit.
Avec d'amoureuses pensées,
Les jeunes gens s'en viennent droit.

Au bord du canal, où la lune
Fait, parmi l'humide escalier.
Luire le satin blanc de l'une
Et sur l'autre l'or d'un collier...

(546)

Some of Méral's poetry is close not only to Impressionist painting in its subject-matter but also to Decadence in its predilection for the acute observation of unpleasant sensation :

L'air épais et chargé des bals de la barrière
Qui mêlent au parfum des grogs et de la bière
Celui des pipes, près des saladiers de vin,
(Un cigare quelconque étant un luxe vain),
Le relent affadi des vagues cosmétiques,
L'odeur de renferme des arrières boutiques,
Cet air lourd, vicié de germes malfaisants,
Que respirent le soir des bouches de quinze ans,
Blesse, ici comme ailleurs, l'odorat et la vue...

(547)

No-one would surely claim to see a writer of exceptional talent, let alone a poet, in Anatole Baju, yet some of the prose poems he wrote under pseudonyms in Le Décadent are among the most interesting instances of the identification of modernism (548) with a concern for detailed notation of sense-impressions :

Après une purnée torrescent, atmosphère languide,
papillotante d'électricité. Ciel d'azur tacheté
de laiteurs chlorotiques. Sidération stellaire
moins ardescente que de coutume et pleine
de langourosité universelle.

A l'occident, hémicycle lumineux aux
rutilances palissantes, sous les loines et ultimes
réfulgences du soleil disparu. A l'Orient, ronde
comme la plus impeccable des circonférences, la
lune au milieu d'un grand cercle presque
incandescent, dans l'azuration pâlotte des
surfaces éthériennes.

(549)

(546) Poésies posthumes, pp. 19-20.

(547) Un Bal à Montmartre, Poèmes de Paris, p.135.

(548) Evident primarily in the pseudo-scientific style, also in the neologisms and syntactical innovations ('loines').

(549) 'Clair de lune', 'Le Décadent' I,1, written under the pseudonym Pierre Vareilles.

The world of sensation was a rich hunting ground for poets of decadent inclination as the introductory remarks to this section suggested. One need look no further than Rollinat's Les Névroses for ample confirmation of this. Sex is a recurrent theme in the collection and is the subject of some of its best-known pieces including 'La Chair', 'Les Drapeaux' and 'Les Seins', 'Les Dents', which has sexual connotations, is also partly about the pleasures of eating. The evocation of intoxicating pleasurable olfactory sensations in 'Les Parfums' may be compared with the decadent excesses in the description of smells of cheeses in 'La Belle Fromagère'. Against poems of this kind one should not forget the simple atmospheric formulations of the sensations of a country landscape in that oasis of serenity in Les Névroses, the section entitled Les Refuges.

The treatment of sensation in the work of poets like Méral, Valade and Cros is a reminder of the immense influence of the Parnassians who themselves continued to be major contributors to the poetry of sensation after 1870 as before.

Sustained evocations of 'la vie sensationnelle' are relatively uncommon (520), but in Leconte de Lisle's work there are occasional masterpieces like 'La Verandah' in which it is not too fanciful to see an almost impressionistic rendering of a sensual experience where the confused state of the consciousness is also hinted at :

Au tintement de l'eau dans les porphyres roux
 Les rosiers de l'Iran mêlent leurs frais murmures,
 Et les ramiers rêveurs leurs roucoulements doux.
 Tandis que l'oiseau grêle et le frelon jaloux,
 Sifflant et bourdonnant, mordent les figues mûres,
 Les rosiers de l'Iran mêlent leurs frais murmures
 Au tintement de l'eau dans les porphyres roux.

(520) That is entire poems. There are many fine vignettes evoking the sensual experience of the traveller in the tropics though these rarely extend beyond descriptive notation to actual recreation of sensation.

Sous les treillis d'argent de la vérandah close,
 Dans l'air tiède embaumé de l'odeur des jasmins.
 Où la splendeur du jour dande une flèche rose,
 La persane royale, immobile, repose,
 Derrière son col brun croisant ses belles mains,
 Dans l'air tiède, embaumé de l'odeur des jasmins,
 Sous les treillis d'argent de la vérandah close.

Jusqu'aux lèvres que l'ambre arrondi baise encor,
 Du cristal d'où s'échappe une vapeur subtile
 Qui monte en tourbillons légers et prend l'essor,
 Sur les coussins de soie écarlate, aux fleurs d'or,
 La branche de hûka rôde comme un reptile
 Du cristal d'ou s'echappe une vapeur subtile
 Jusqu'aux lèvres que l'ambre arrondi baise encor.

Deux rayons noirs, chargés d'une muette ivresse,
 Sortent de ses longs yeux entr'ouverts à demi,
 Un songe l'enveloppe, un souffle la caresse,
 Et parce que son beau sein qui se gonfle a frémi,
 Sortent de ses longs yeux entr'ouverts à demi
 Deux rayons noirs, chargés d'une muette ivresse.

Et l'eau vive s'endort dans les porphyres roux,
 Les rosiers de l'Iran ont cessé leurs murmures,
 Et les ramiers rêveurs leurs roucoulements doux.
 Tout se tait. L'oiseau grêle et le frelon jaloux
 Ne se querellent plus autour des figues mures.
 Les rosiers de l'Iran ont cessé leurs murmures.
 Et l'eau vive s'endort dans les porphyres roux.

In poems such as 'La Vérandah' Leconte de Lisle compares favourably with the best French poets writing after 1870. He matches their subtlety of sensual evocation and his only shortcoming is the failure to find a poetic medium of greater flexibility than the traditional alexandrine which would have allowed an even more convincing vision of the world of sensation. So much nonsense has been written about Leconte de Lisle that it is probably not unfair to claim that most students still consider him to be almost exclusively an exponent of a type of poetry in which the principal intention is formal and plastic perfection. The truth is very different, the turning towards the world of external reality at the expense of abstraction is indeed one of the most important and valuable elements in his work but if there is one

major failing in his poetry it is not this interest in the 'plastic' but rather his tendency to fall back on a decidedly Romantic form of poetry, whether this be the expression of personal disillusionment or invective (521) or the exposition of 'Vignyesque' philosophical themes (522). It is this Romantic aspect perhaps even more than his primitivism which limits Leconte de Lisle's contribution to the poetry of contemporary reality, for on occasion the poet's longing for a life of sensual simplicity, of primitive contact with nature, enables him to subordinate his intellectual preoccupations to immediate sensations.

In Heredia's poetry one finds an even greater wealth of sense - impressions - heat and cold, colour, sunlight, moonlight - than in the work of Leconte de Lisle. In 'Le Tepidarium', a poem drawn from the sophisticated setting of Roman civilisation the two tercets are an admirable example of the equation of the sensual with the exotic and primitive.

Sentant à sa chair nue errer l'ardent effluve,
Une femme d'Asie, au milieu de l'étuve,
Tord ses bras éternés en un ennui serein,

Et le pale troupeau des filles d'Ausonie
S'énivre de la riche et sauvage harmonie
Des noirs cheveux roulant sur un torse d'airain.

It is the poet's sensualism that saves the poems devoted to well-known classical subjects from being dry, lifeless and stilted. Thus even the poem on the hackneyed theme of 'Le Bain des Nymphes' conveys a vivid impression of gaiety and splashing movements in water at first cold to the touch

C'est un vallon sauvage abrité de l'Euxin,
Au-dessus de la source un noir laurier se penche,
Et la Nymphé, riant, suspendue à la branche,
Frôle d'un pied craintif l'eau froide du bassin.

(521) e.g. 'Aux Modernes'.

(522) The most striking example is 'Quain'.

Ses compagnes, d'un bond, à l'appel du buccin,
 Dans l'onde jaillissante où s'ébat leur chair blanche,
 Plongent, et de l'écume émergent une hanche,
 De clairs cheveux, un torse ou la rose d'un sein.....

Such highlights in the poems on more conventional subjects should prepare the reader for the supreme beauty of Heredia's masterpieces which despite their adherence to the classical roles of prosody truly belong to the great works of poetic impressionism. The peculiar harmony of thought and physical experience that is experienced in a dreamy state of drowsiness is perfectly formulated in 'La Sieste' which is worth quoting in full.

Pas un seul bruit d'insecte ou d'abeille en maraude,
 Tout dort sous les grands bois accablés de soleil
 Où le feuillage épais tamise un jour pareil
 Au velours sombre et doux des mousses d'émeraude.

Criblant le dôme obscur, Midi splendide y rôde
 Et, sur mes cils mi-clos alanguis de sommeil,
 De mille éclairs furtifs forme un réseau vermeil
 Qui s'allonge et se croise à travers l'ombre chaude.

Vers la gaze de feu que trament les rayons,
 Vole le frêle essaim des richespapillons
 Qu'énivrent la lumière et le parfum des sèves,

Alors mes doigts tremblants saisissent chaque fil,
 Et dans les mailles d'or de ce filet subtil,
 Chasseur harmonieux, j'emprisonne mes rêves.

In a poem like 'La Sieste' which contains no reference to the past, Heredia makes the transition from being a primitivist poet of sensation to being a poet of contemporary sensual reality. One wonders what Heredia's reputation might be today had he concentrated on expressing personal experience of this kind rather than restricting his subject-matter in the way that he did, beautiful though many of the resulting poems are.

As was so often the case Jules Lemaitre allowed his perspicacity to overcome his prejudice in linking Parnassian poetry, Naturalism in the novel and Impressionist painting as art-forms in pursuit of a common aim - the notation of sensation .

Et l'on voit aussi comment le naturalisme, et la poésie parnassienne, et l'impressionisme s'appellent et s'engendrent... que reste-t-il que la sensation, l'impression pittoresque et sensuelle?

(523)

Poets and critics of the younger generation were also to acknowledge their debt to the Parnassians as precursors in a poetry of feelings and sensations as distinct from rational discourse (524).

* * * * *

There is some controversy as to the extent to which Mallarmé's poetry is a direct reflection of nature, real life and experienced sensation. Our own judgment is that his poetry is more usually concerned with the formulation of 'universal' truths about such philosophical entities as being and non-being and with the creation of self-justifying patterns of sound and image (525). For the most part he achieved this by stylised emblematic reference to the solar drama which replaces real involvement in the world of sensation. He even devoted one of his best known sonnets to the subject of the rejection of the temptations of the senses, 'Le Pitre châtié'. The general argument of the poem is as follows: the poet has looked into a woman's eyes and has been tempted to renounce his art thinking that he has hitherto been like a clown entertaining an ungrateful audience. He has wasted his time instead of living life and enjoying it - incapable of action just like Hamlet. Pursuing this false revelation he had burst out of the canvas walls of the showman's tent and plunged into the torrent of the senses ('lacs') - a traitor to his vocation. The sun melts his greasepaint and thus, for all its beauty, this

(523) 'La Jeunesse sous le Second Empire et Troisième République', La Revue Bleue, June 1885, p. 742.

(524) See, for example, Léo Trezenik, 'Les Parnassiens', Lutèce, November 1884.

(525) For a discussion see Part Two, Chapter Four.

sunshine of life has robbed him of the sign of his calling which is also the proof of his talent. He now realises his mistake, that for a pair of beautiful eyes he had given up everything that mattered - his vocation as a poet. Those eyes which seemed like lakes turned out to be treacherous glaciers. For the most part Mallarmé, like the poet-hero of this poem is only momentarily tempted by the life of the senses; his poems are largely empty of directly sensual content and instead dominated by the rigours of the intellect. The one great exception is, of course, 'L'Après-midi d'un faune'.

L.J. Austin has considered that sensual reality has a very considerable part in Mallarmé's poetry. 'Son "univers imaginaire"', Jean-Pierre Richard l'a brillamment démontré, est édifié à partir d'une expérience fort concrète et fort riche de l'univers réel, perçu et senti par des sens d'une extrême finesse et capables de rendre les impressions les plus subtiles et les plus complexes' (524) It is questionable whether L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé does in fact demonstrate this. Most of Richard's fine study is more properly concerned with concepts and recurring images in Mallarmé, with the exception of the section entitled La Lumière (527) sensations per se are not seen, at least in the present writer's interpretation, to be of primary importance (528)

Objects, and especially manufactured objects, (as we suggested in the last section) are therefore to be widely found in Mallarmé's poetry for these are

(524) Ibid., p 16.

(527) op cit, pp.467-523.

(528) This may be another result of confusion over the definition of the word sensation, a question to which we shall return in our discussion of the place of sensation in the poetry of Verlaine and Rimbaud

suitable for transformation through his intellect into ideals or 'essences' but of reality as a complex totality he is highly suspicious, fearing its involvement with the senses. An example of this attitude is furnished by the sonnet 'La Chevelure vol d'une flamme' which at a quick glimpse might seem to be a wholly sensual poem. The starting-point of the poem, a head of red-gold hair, might lead us to expect ~~this~~. Even the comparisons with the sun spreading its glory across the Western sky might ~~serve~~ to heighten the sensual impact. However, with Mallarmé this sort of comparison immediately lends the original object cosmic significance. It becomes clear that what is most 'real' ~~for~~ Mallarmé is not the head of hair at all ~~but~~ the source of its beauty. What is in question is the essence of beauty itself, something akin to a Platonic ideal. This essence survives despite having breathed out the gold of the hair, ('or soupirer') for it is the source of all such splendour ('originellement la seule') and exists independently of the hair, in fact the same vitalism can be seen in the woman's eyes. It is the same beauty that is available for all men to see in the glory of the sun. Of course this essential beauty is beyond the reach of passion and so the temptation of outright sensuality is avoided. Nevertheless in this sonnet the poet makes substantial use of precise references to heat and dazzling glowing light in order to evoke two groups of impressions : the visual beauty of Méry Laurent's red hair (recorded for posterity in the paintings of Manet), and the poet's own feelings of happiness and self-confidence ('le doute qu'elle écorche') resulting from the good fortune in being the recipient of the affections of the beautiful Méry. A whole series of words recreate both the red glow of the hair and the inner warmth of the poet's happiness: 'chevelure', 'flamme', 'occident', 'diadème', 'couronne', 'foyer', 'or', 'ignition', 'feu', 'joyau', 'astres', 'feux', 'fulgurante', 'rubis', 'écorche', 'torche'. (The sonnet thus represents a magnificent example of the Baudelairean aesthetic in practice - the formulation of the universal through the

particular!)) The essence of feminine beauty is expressed through the poet's evocation of his mistress's hair, a process rendered more universal through the association with the solar drama. What is unusual about this sonnet is that the poet elected to retain considerable reference to the particular reality that was the origin of the poem and thus came close to Baudelaire's procedure and that of the great poets of contemporary reality after 1870.

There may be a case for seeing in the years 1885 - 90 a move away from the previous quasi-metaphysical preoccupations of Mallarmé's poetry towards the celebration of the pleasures of life - a period of mild hedonism. The relationship with Madame Laurent would seem to be at the root of this development and a fruitful line of research would be the investigation of the justification for talking of a 'Méry Laurent cycle' of poems. (529) Méry was nicknamed 'Paon' by Mallarmé, a fact which amply demonstrates his association of sensual pleasure with her, the peacock invariably has connotations of either erotic pleasure or visual splendour in his writings. He described a Monet painting of a tree as 'un paon brûlant le paysage de sa queue étalée' (530), and combined his frequently expressed admiration for the visual impact of fireworks with erotic pleasure in writing to Méry: 'Voilà que je croyais t'envoyer un baiser à l'heure des feux d'artifice (tu te rappelles, Paon, dont la queue les défie, où nous vîmes ensemble le dernier')'. (531) This was also the period when Mallarmé's

(529) Professor Mossop has recently informed us that he is involved in work suggesting the presence of Méry Laurent in the Prose pour Des Esseintes written at the very beginning of this period.

(530) Quoted in H. Fontainas, 'Réverie à propos de Stéphane Mallarmé', p.61. Cited in J.-P. Richard, 'L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé', p.131.

(531) Quoted in H. Mondor, 'Mallarmé plus intime', p. 242. Méry is the subject of some of Mallarmé's most delightful occasional poems including the following variant reproduced by J.-P. Richard (op.cit., p.128):

Méry, l'an pareil en sa course
Allume ici le même été
Mais toi tu rejeunis la source
Où va boire ton pied fêté.

described as a 'merveilleux petit poème, qui condense peut-être en son cristal le plus pur de l'érotique mallarméenne,' (Idem).

circle of admirers was growing, when he enjoyed the life of Paris and equally the pleasures of the forest and the river at his retreat at Valvins. (532)

Occasionally even in the work of poets pursuing the paths of Mallarmean emblematicism, and employing particularly those emblems related to the solar drama, stylisation seems to merge with a genuine evocation of sensation :

Les pourpres du brasier sanglant où s'effondra
Le Dôme d'or rougi s'éteignent une à une ...
Des décombres du pur et de son appareil
Il forme des nuages d'encre, vers la lune ...

(533)

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The world of sensation is a subject of the utmost importance in the work of Verlaine and Rimbaud, its place is not inconsiderable in Corbière's poetry.

* * * * *

More than any other poet Verlaine has suffered from being regarded as a poet of sensation. He merits the title, though perhaps no more than some other poets including Rimbaud. In Verlaine's case, however, it is used almost as an insult, or more charitably as a definition of his limitations. What is often overlooked by both his admirers and detractors is that sensation for Verlaine is part of a totality of feeling, an état d'âme, both complex and elusive, which cannot be adequately formulated in discursive language and therefore requires the gifts of a true poet. This relationship between sensations and feeling will be considered in a moment, and at greater length in a later chapter (534). First we must examine the place of sensation proper. It is impossible to do this without, to some extent, duplicating the exhaustive study of

(532) For Mallarmé's willingness to immerse himself in the pleasure of life in this period and the realisation that 'la seule grâce qui lui soit évidemment accordée' was 'celle de vivre', see L.J. Austin, 'Mallarmé et le réel', p.20 and Richard, L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé, pp.601-02.

(533) Vielé-Griffin, Cueillette d'Avril, V, (1886).

(534) In a discussion of the Verlainian synthesis to be found in Part Two, Chapter Four.

Cuénot. We shall therefore confine these remarks to a few salient examples. (535)

The most important reasons for Verlaine's interest in contemporary reality are aesthetic rather than just political or social. This is particularly evident in his explorations of the life of sensation which matter much more to him (at least in the periods of his greatest creative activity) than the naive treatment of modern subjects. Verlaine was fascinated by the problems involved in the poetic formulation of sensual experience and of the relationships between the life of sensation and the life of the mind. It is in this context that we are most justified in speaking of his impressionism. One could say with complete justification that like Impressionist painting his poetry goes beyond an interest in modern life to the treatment of the most fleeting aspects of reality in nature and of the human experience of these. Few aspects of the life of sensation escaped Verlaine's attention. Not surprisingly one area which is especially favoured is that of sex, words like 'vertige', 'énervement', 'écoeurement', 'ivresse', 'extase', 'pamaison' recur in his work as do evocations of these various sensations. The opening two stanzas of the first of the Ariettes oubliées are one of the most beautiful expressions of the sensations of love-making in the whole of literature. A clear (if possibly over-systematic) picture of Verlaine's sensual impressionism is obtained if one takes each of the traditional five senses in turn and examines their treatment in his work.

Reference to the sense of taste is relatively slight in Verlaine's poetry though adjectives such as 'fade', 'amer', and 'sucré' are to be found. Likewise

(536) One wonders whether, in the growth of the 'school' of French literary criticism devoted to the place of sensation which has been roughly contemporary with the writing of this thesis, adequate acknowledgement has been made of the work of Cuénot alongside that of Jean-Pierre Richard and Octave Nadal.

the sense of smell plays a much less significant role in his poetry than that of Baudelaire or Rimbaud. Cuénot has noted (536) that smells in Verlaine's work fall into four categories liturgical, vegetable (mostly flowers), sexual and unpleasant. (537) The tactile sense is especially shown in contact with heat or cold (e.g. the references to the cold in 'En patinant' from Fêtes galantes), and with the wind (A la promenade' from Fêtes galantes and Epilogue I from Poèmes saturniens).

As for the sense of hearing the poet seems above all fascinated by the musical qualities of the human voice; in comparison references to bird song, for example, are extremely imprecise. The human voice has an interest for him which is quite independent of the words it expresses .

Et quand vous parliez, à dessein distrait,
Je prêtais l'oreille à votre secret.

Car la voix, ainsi que les yeux de Celle
Qui vous fait joyeux et triste, décèle,

Malgré tout effort morose ou rieur,
Et met au plain jour l'être intérieur.

(538)

One may note also :

'Quel fut ton plus beau jour?' fit sa voix d'or vivant,
Sa voix douce et sonore, au frais timbre angélique.

(539)

This preoccupation is not surprising in the case of one of the great masters of 'poésie faite dans la bouche' nor are his many references to music and musical instruments.

(536) Le Style de Paul Verlaine.

(537) As the third of these categories may be the most surprising the reader is referred to 'Gouls royaux' (Femmes) which makes one realise how discreet Verlaine's other erotic verse is in comparison!

(538) La Bonne Chanson, XIII.

(539) 'Nevermore', (Poèmes saturniens).

Despite the interest in sound which is usually held to be Verlaine's main preoccupation with sense-data we would claim that vision plays an even more important role in his poetry. The poet himself noted in his Confessions (540) :

Les yeux surtout chez moi furent précoces: je fixais tout,
rien ne m'échappait des aspects, j'étais sans cesse en chasse
de formes, de couleurs, d'ombres. Le jour me fascinait et bien
que je fusse poltron dans l'obscurité, la nuit m'attirait, une
curiosité m'y poussait, j'y cherchais je ne sais quoi, du blanc,
du gris, des nuances peut-être.

Cuénot remarks on the richness of Verlaine's palette and lists about seventy-five different terms of colour description to be found in the poet's work, among them some very precise notations such as 'rouge-flamme' and 'bleu de Prusse'. (541)

Precise notations such as these are a reminder of the poet's interest in painting which is of course reflected even in some of the titles he chooses for groups of his poems e.g. Fêtes galantes, Aquarelles, Eaux-fortes, Paysages tristes, Paysages belges. We have already noted Verlaine's connection with the Impressionist movement (we shall have more to say on this in Part Two, Chapter Four) and we should also bear in mind his admiration for Gautier and the Goncourt brothers.

Examples of highly detailed or evocative visual description abound in his poetry and they demonstrate his painterly approach :

La lune plaquait ses teintes de zinc
Par angles obtus.
Des bouts de fumée en forme de cinq
Sortaient drus et noirs des hauts toits pointus.

(542)

(540) Confessions, Éd. Du Bateau ivre, p. 36.

(541) Cuénot, op.cit., p. 20.

(542) 'Croquis parisien', (Poèmes saturniens).

Quelques buissons d'épine épars, et quelques houx
Dressant l'horreur de leur feuillage à droite, à gauche,
Sur le fuligineux fouillis d'un fond d'ébauche.

(543)

Et voici qu'à l'appel des cors
S'entrelacent soudain des formes toutes blanches,
Diaphanes, et que le clair de lune fait
Opalines parmi l'ombre verte des branches,
- Un Watteau rêvé par Raffet -

(544)

Especially remarkable are those poems where Verlaine seems to adopt the Impressionist painters' treatment of light or colour in some readily recognisable way, as for instance in the attribution of colour to shadow in these examples :

Leur élégance, leur joie
Et leurs molles ombres bleues
Tourbillonnent dans l'extase
D'une lune rose et grise...

(545)

C'est la fête du blé, c'est la fête du pain
Aux chers lieux d'autrefois revus après ces choses!
Tout bruit, la nature et l'homme, dans un bain
De lumière si blanc que les ombres sont roses.

(546)

The second of these two examples is of particular interest, for the Impressionist painters had demonstrated the scientific fact that in strong light shadows may take on a violet or even reddish hue; Monet used pink shadow in one of his Cathédrales.

Verlaine even went so far as to describe the decomposition of light into its chromatic elements :

-
- (547) 'Effet de nuit', (Poèmes saturniens).
(548) 'Nuit de Walpurgis classique', (Poèmes saturniens).
(549) 'Mandoline' (Fêtes galantes).
(550) Sagesse, III, xxi.

Et puis sous les cieux
 Qui s'y rient plus clairs,
 Elle a des airs bleus,
 Roses, gris et verts.....

(547)

From the above examples it is clear that the most evanescent aspects of contemporary reality as manifested in the life of sensation played an enormous part in determining the thematic material of Verlaine's poetry. (Later we shall consider the ways in which this attitude to contemporary reality affected his poetic language.)

Jean-Pierre Richard's assertion that the distinctive essence of Verlaine's genius was 'toute entière située sur le plan du sentir' was intended as a key to a more profound appreciation of the poet's work but in retrospect has probably done more harm than good to Verlaine's reputation since it has tended to be viewed as a confirmation of what both his supporters and opponents were already saying in his own lifetime - that he was the poet of sensation par excellence and to the exclusion of all else. We encounter here a problem of definition to which we shall turn again in relation to Rimbaud: what is sensation? In French the term (both the nouns sensation and the verb sentir) may or may not be limited to physical sensation, it may embrace moods and emotions. (In English it is more usual for the usage to be restricted to physically experienced phenomena). This basic ambiguity has confused the position and encouraged sly attacks upon Verlaine's status. Yet the poetry itself demonstrated that physical sensation was only one ingredient (and no less important for that) in the formulation of moods derived from a variety of elusive, ephemeral and evanescent experiences. Verlaine's poetry is one of the

(547) Ibid., III xv.

relatively infrequent glimpses one may have of the authentic nature of human sentience. It is true that Verlaine's best poetry is hardly ever overtly symbolic or allegorical but that is mostly an indication of its distance from discursive rhetoric. It does not preclude the formulation of spiritual experience as we shall suggest in our examination of the Verlainian synthesis.

The link between sensation and feeling is sufficiently illustrated by reference to a poem like the first of the Ariettes oubliées in Romances sans Paroles. Like Baudelaire's ^{pioneering} 'Jet d'eau' this is a direct formulation of sensation but not only are the sensations evoked more numerous and complicated, they are also more intricately related to an état d'âme. The basic technique of the poem is impressionistic: sensations are simply added to one another in enumerations linked only by the weakest of French verbs 'être', there is no logical framework. Juxtaposition has replaced a relationship of cause and effect. Like Rimbaud's celebrated violin Verlaine submits himself to sensual experiences without question and without reflection, his sensibility is plastic rather than intellectual. Although he is able to enter into the most secret movements of outside phenomena and of his own being he does so intuitively and passively; he is not able to analyse, distinguish or control. This is in fact one clue to the relationship of sensation and feeling, (and to poetic synthesis more generally). The poet's sensibility and external reality have interpenetrated each other so that there is no longer a clear dividing line between the two. This is achieved not by the old rhetorical devices of personifications, detailed similes, and so on, but by giving pride of place to the area where human sensibility and external reality meet: sensation. 'C'est tous les frissons des bois' evokes both an element of external ephemeral reality -

leaves stirring in the wind - and a movement inside the poet's sensibility through the psychological overtures of the noun 'frissons' which is the articulation of the relationship. The light vowels and emphasised and alliterated consonants in the second stanza recreate the sounds of nature without actual imitation but rather through a pattern of poetic equivalences emanating from the impact of sense-impressions upon the poet's sensibility, a half-emerging swirl of whispering thoughts and emotions. This underlying 'sensation' of confused passivity is also expressed through the versification of the poem where the seven-syllable lines and the ever-changing position of the caesura react against the lulling sounds of the poem to produce a curiously tense combination of restless anxiety and languor. In recent years there has been an attempt to go beyond the simple (but not all that unsatisfactory) conclusion that at his best Verlaine is expressing as directly as possible his own feelings. What critics, such as Richard and Nadal, have tried to find is a consistent underlying factor in Verlaine's personality or sensibility (a kind of dominant sensation) which may ^{lead} identify to the whole flavour of his poetry. We are inclined to think that there is such a factor, for what it is worth, but we are not prepared to be as precise as Nadal or Richard. This is what we can only term a décalage between the poet's sensibility and the demands of reality, an absorption with sensation and mood which delays analysis, action and decision. It could be argued that such a response may have been encouraged by Verlaine's addiction to alcohol or even certain medical conditions. Whatever the case it is the reader who gains by being allowed a privileged insight into the immediate and elusive world of sentience. Moreover it is in this peculiarly debilitating form of hypersensitivity that Verlaine's contemporaries would have seen the principal indication of his modernism.

* * * * *

A comprehensive study of the place of sensation is one of the most urgent needs in scholarly research devoted to Rimbaud's poetry. Such a study would surely confirm the extensive dependence of his poetry upon immediate reality and nature (and would prove more ~~useful~~ useful than occultist interpretations of his work). It is not appropriate to undertake an examination of such scope here but it is hoped at least to be able to demonstrate the importance of the world of sensation and something of the wealth of references to it in his poetry. It is already becoming a justified commonplace to speak of the Illuminations as, in part at least, the notation of sensations as directly experienced by the poet, in their intensity, even their disorder. (549)

A careful examination reveals, however, that this was not a new departure for Rimbaud; his verse poetry was already distinguished by the variety and acuity of the sense-impression it evokes.

As early as May 1870 Rimbaud had written to Banville that in his poetry 'je me suis mis ... à dire mes bonnes croyances, mes espérances, mes sensations.....' It may be argued that by 'sensation' Rimbaud is really referring to an emotional state, to an état d'âme and that this is supported by the enclosure, in the same letter, of 'Sensation' which is normally interpreted in similar fashion. Whilst no one would deny that this poem does evoke a mood - to be precise a longing for quasi-pantheistic union with nature - it does so in a way which allows a substantial role to physical sensation as catalyst: the sights of nature, the feel of the grass under his feet, the coolness of the evening air on his face will be the starting point of a state of rêverie in which the poet will

(549) This point will be further discussed in Part Two, Chapter Four, with reference to Rimbaud's poetic impressionism.

experience the surge of 'l'amour infini'. Indeed a further reference to the world of sensation - sexual union- rounds off the poem. 'Sensation' amply illustrates the fact that almost from the start of his poetic career Rimbaud sought the synthesis of sensation, emotion and idea (549). Other poets might well have concentrated almost exclusively on the last of these ingredients and thus falsified the nature of the experience which was very far from being uniquely intellectual. Rimbaud himself affirms the inadequacy of discursive resources.

Je ne parlerai pas, je ne penserai rien.

The attempt to formulate sensation per se rather than expound ideas or describe sentiments and emotion in discursive terms, is one of the most striking features of Rimbaud's work (550) and one he has in common with the best of Verlaine. Doubtless one reason for the attention paid to sensation by Rimbaud is his neo-paganism (discussed in the previous chapter) of which the most substantial defence was 'Soleil et Chair'. The poem is a nostalgic celebration of an epoch in which physical sensation was openly enjoyed as a part of Man's harmonious relationship with nature. This attitude did not cease with Rimbaud's abandonment of any hope of being accepted into the Parnassian fold, it was not just a literary exercise. In June 1871 he described male beauty in neo-pagan terms in 'Les Soeurs de Charité' :

- (549) The search for synthesis of mood and sensation is the best explanation of the system of personal association outlined in 'Voyelles'. It also relates to the important place given to sensation in Rimbaud's poetic theory where a primitive approach, upsetting normal preconception, to banal experience might lead to undiscovered truths. 'Il s'agit d'arriver à l'inconnu par le dérèglement de tous les sens (letter to Izambard, 13 May 1871). Furthermore Rimbaud sees this as the appropriate function of the poet in the age of experimental science and technological progress who will thereby not merely keep in step with, but become the leader of, his fellows on the road to a corresponding spiritual progress :

Cette langue résumant tout, parfums, sons, couleurs
le poète ... serait vraiment un multiplicateur de progrès.

(Letter to Demy, 15 May 1871.)

- (550) This is the meaning of Rimbaud's half-boasting, half self-mocking declaration in 'Une Saison en Enfer' :
- 'J'écrivais des silences, des nuits...'

Le jeune homme dont l'oeil est brillant, la peau brune
 Le beau corps de vingt ans qui devrait aller nu

This openness to nature is contrasted with a feminine complicity in the ugliness of the modern world in which women have a position enabling them to gain revenge for earlier sufferings at the hands of brutal men. Rimbaud's search for the spontaneous enjoyment of sensation in a life free from the dictates of what he regarded as bourgeois normality is exemplified both by his travels with Verlaine and, possibly, his later flight from Europe. The former was still in his mind at the time of writing the Illuminations :

J'avais en effet, en toute sincérité d'esprit, pris
 l'engagement de le rendre à son état primitif de fils
 du soleil, et nous errions, nourris du vin de la caverne
 et du biscuit de la route, moi pressé de trouver
 le lieu et la formule.

(561)

In accordance with his neo-pagan sentiments (and in the company of many of his contemporaries) Rimbaud contrasted the insipid and artificial quality of some modern sensations with the wholesome purity of pagan antiquity (even if this be probably hypothetical) :

Nous mangeons la fièvre avec nos légumes
 aqueux. Et l'ivrognerie et le tabac

Pourquoi un monde moderne, si de pareils
 poisons s'inventent... C'est vrai, c'est à
 l'Éden que je songeais! Qu'est-ce que
 c'est pour mon rêve, cette pureté des
 races antiques!

(562)

Yet as we noted above there was a widespread ambiguity in attitudes to modernity which also finds a place in Rimbaud's treatment of sensation. His enthusiasm for the modern world may be expressed in sensual terms .

(561) 'Vagabonds'.

(562) 'L'Impossible', (Une Saison en Enfer).

Devant la splendide étendue où l'on sente
Souffler la ville énormément florissante!

(5~~63~~)

La ville avec sa fumée et ses bruits de métiers.

(5~~64~~)

The motives for Rimbaud's references to the world of sensation are therefore diverse, sometimes even contradictory. What there is no question about is that they are very extensive, more numerous even than in Baudelaire's poetry which nevertheless must have considerably influenced Rimbaud's work. Indeed, although it is Verlaine who is usually dubbed a poet of sensation the title could at least as reasonably be accorded to Rimbaud who was more consistent in this regard than his elder companion.

References to all five basic senses in Rimbaud's poetry are very numerous and distinguished by the incisiveness of their evocation, amounting, at times to a kind of hyper-realism completely in accord with both the prevailing scientific spirit and the objects of impressionistic forms of art. References to olfactory sensations are an interesting instance of this tendency, whereas, in Baudelaire for example (often alleged to have been the greatest poet of smell), evocation of smells had been confined to a very limited range of association and valued primarily for this purpose, in Rimbaud's poetry they are more varied and are part of a complex experience of reality in which sensations are valued for their own sake rather than as a device in a recurring set of associations. A representative selection of examples provides an adequate demonstration.

(5~~63~~) 'Est - elle almée....'

(5~~64~~) 'Ouvriers'.

Le buffet est ouvert, et verse dans son ombre
Comme un flot de vin vieux, des parfums engageants....
C'est là qu'on trouverait....
.... les fleurs sèches
Dont le parfum se mêle à des parfums de fruits.

(555)

Comme un parfum de pain humant l'odeur de cire....
.... des senteurs de viande et d'étoffes moisies...

(556)

Ouvrez votre narine aux superbes nausées... .

(557)

La pierre sent toujours la terre maternelle..
... les pavés puant l'eau de lessive...

(558)

Sous les bosquets l'air évapore
L'odeur du soir fêté...

(559)

Je me traînais dans les ruelles puantes...

(560)

Un goût de cendres vole dans l'air, une
odeur de bois suant dans l'âtre, - les
fleurs rouies...

(561)

..... ce vent du Sud excitait toutes les
vilaines odeurs des jardins ravagés et des
prés desséchés....

(562)

- (555) 'Le Buffet'.
(556) 'Les Pavés à l'Eglise'.
(557) 'L'Orgie parissienne'.
(558) 'Les Premières Communions'.
(559) 'Bonne Pensée du matin'.
(560) 'Délires', II, (Une saison en Enfer).
(561) 'Phrases'.
(562) 'Ouvriers'.

The same desire for authenticity of atmosphere is to be seen in Rimbaud's references to other sense-impressions, to sounds

Des rentiers à brgnons soulignent tous les couacs
le chant des trombons

(563)

Un joli rire de cristal

(564)

Comme une mousse de campagne
Ton rire fou

(565)

Ils écoutent le bon pain cuire

(566)

Au bourdon farouche
De cent sales mouches

(567)

Quelles
Troupes d'oiseaux, ô ia io, ia io'

(568)

du
La calèche/cousin crie sur le sable

(569)

les eaux clapotantes

(570)

to taste (571)

Ton goût de framboise et de fraise

(571)

(563) 'A la Musique'

(564) 'Première Soirée'

(565) 'Les Reparties de Nina' (in this instance taste and sight are combined with sound)

(566) 'Les Effarés'

(567) 'Chanson de la plus haute tour'

(568) 'Bruxelles'

(569) 'Enfance', II

(570) 'Nocturne vulgaire' One well known instance of the appreciation of pleasurable sound (or a sound with pleasurable connotation) is to be found in Rimbaud's correspondence 'Et déjà le bruit saccade, sonore, délicieux des tombereaux sur les boulevards' (letter to Delahaye, June 1872)

(571) In addition to these and other examples one could refer to much of 'Comédie de la Soif'

saliv~~es~~
Reprises sur la lèvre

(572)

Quelque liqueur d'or, fade et qui fait suer

(573)

le pain trempé de pluie

(574)

Les "mazagr~~ans~~" fumèrent dans les estaminets

(575)

to tactile sensations

les nénuphars froissés

(576)

arrachant
Sa chaste robe noire autour de sa peau moite

(577)

Tu plongerais dans la luzerne
Ton blanc peignoir

(578)

tu te sentiras la joue égratignée.

(579)

Ces bons soirs de septembre où je sentais des gouttes
De rosée à mon front, comme un vin de vigueur

(580)

Enfer aux Délinquants que sa paume a frôlés

(581)

- (572) 'Les Chercheuses de Poux'
- (573) 'Larme'
- (574) 'Adieu', (Une Saison en Enfer)
- (575) 'Après le Déluge'
- (576) 'Ophélie'
- (577) 'Le Châtiment de Tartufe'
- (578) 'Les Reparties de Nina'
- (579) 'Rêve pour l'hiver'
- (580) 'Ma Bohème'
- (581) 'Les Douaniers'

la fraîcheur des latrines

(582)

Elles assoient l'enfant
Et dans ses lourds cheveux
Promènent leurs doigts

(583)

to visual sensations, it is interesting to note in this context the great many references to effects of lighting. In the more difficult poems such references have sometimes been interpreted as symbolic but there is every reason to suppose that Rimbaud was particularly susceptible to such effects as physical phenomena having an influence on his mood.

le ciel est d'un rouge d'enfer

(584)

. les cieux bruns.

(585)

Les cieux vert-chou

(586)

Mais le soleil éveille, à travers les feuillages
Les vieilles couleurs des vitraux irréguliers

(587)

L'azur et l'onde communient
Je sors. Si un rayon me blesse
Je succomberai sur la mousse

(588)

ciel bleu-turquin

(589)

- (582) 'Les Poètes de sept ans'
- (583) 'Les Chercheuses de Poux'
- (584) 'Bal des pendus'
- (585) 'Oraison du soir'
- (586) 'Mes Petites Amoureuses'
- (587) 'Les Premières Communions'
- (588) 'Bannières de mai'
- (589) 'Jeune Ménage'.

Les cieux glacés de rouge

(590)

au ciel gris de chaleur

(591)

au ciel taché de feu et de boue

(592)

la mélancolique lessive d'or du couchant

(593)

le jour mat produit par ce ciel
immuablement gris

(594)

certains ciels ont affiné mon optique

(595)

There is no doubt of course that there is an element of literary parody in some of these skylscapes. In 'Soir historique' Rimbaud actually speaks of 'les chromatismes légendaires, sur le couchant'. However their sheer variety inclines one to the view that most, at any rate, must have some basis in real physical sensation. These evocations of effects of lighting are, thus, merely one aspect of a more general acuteness of visual perception spanning Rimbaud's entire career.

Ce sont des médaillons argentés, noirs et blancs,
De la nacre et du jais aux reflets scintillants

(596)

Comme d'un cercueil vert en fer blanc, une tête
De femme à cheveux bruns fortement pommadés

(597)

- (590) 'Michel et Christine'
- (591) 'Mémoire'
- (592) 'Adieu', (Une Saison en Enfer)
- (593) 'Enfance', IV
- (594) 'Villes'
- (595) 'Guerre'
- (596) 'Les Etrences des orphellius'
- (597) 'Vénus anadyomène'

- Je regardai, couleur de cire,
Un petit rayon buissonnier
Papillonner dans son sourire...

(598)

... un badigeon d'eau bleue et de lait caillé....
L'essaim des feuilles d'or entoure la maison.....

(599)

(600)

Des yeux hébétés à la façon de la nuit
d'été, rouges et noirs, tricolores, d'acier piqué
d'étoiles d'or.....

(601)

Un envol de pigeons écarlates tonne autour
de ma pensée.

(602)

... le sable rose et orange qu'a lavé
le ciel vineux...

(603)

References to more than one of the five senses are often combined to telling effect, for instance tactile and visual sensations : 'un velours de pêche rose et blanc' (604) or aural and visual sensations : 'les branches et la pluie se jettent à la croisée de la bibliothèque' (605) .

Of course, there are many kinds of sensations other than those experienced through the five senses, including digestive, motor, respiratory and sexual sensations. These other aspects of the world of sensation find a place in Rimbaud's poetry :

-
- (598) 'Première Soirée'.
 - (599) 'Les Premières Communions'.
 - (600) 'Enfance', II.
 - (601) 'Parade'.
 - (602) 'Vies', I.
 - (603) 'Métropolitain'.
 - (604) 'La Maline'.
 - (605) 'Enfance', IV.

Bien^{que} le roi vent^u suât...

(606)

... les bourgeois poussifs qu'étranglent les chaleurs...

(607)

Je ne dis pas un mot : je regarde toujours
La chair de leurs cous blancs brodés de mèches folles .
Je suis, sous le corsage et les frêles atours,
Le dos divin après la courbe des épaules.

J'ai bientôt déniché la bottine, le bas...
- Je reconstruis les corps, brûlé de belles fièvres...
- Et je sens les baisers qui me viennent aux lèvres...

(608)

Je me tourne, ayant bu trente ou quarante chopes,
Et me recueille, pour lâcher l'âcre besoin :
Doux comme le Seigneur du cèdre et des hysopes,
Je pisse vers les cieux bruns, très haut et très loin

(609)

..... il se sent l'estomac écoeuré...

(610)

..... Elle s'agite, cambre
Les reins et d'une main ouvre le rideau bleu
Pour amener un peu la fraîcheur de la chambre
Sous le drap, vers son ventre et sa poitrine en feu...

(611)

L'air marin brûlera mes poumons...

(612)

Naturally the highest incidence of sexual references is to be found in the three sonnets collected under the title Les Stupra which are principally notable for their dead-pan humour stemming from the serious style and the care for scientific observation...

-
- (606) 'Le Forgeron'.
(607) 'A la Musique'.
(608) Idem.
(609) 'Oraison du Soir'.
(610) 'Accroupissements'.
(611) 'Les Premières Communions'.
(612) 'Mauvais Sang'.

One highly controversial kind of allusion to sensation is that which relates to the effect of drugs. It is generally impossible to say which of the Illuminations (and indeed some of the other poems) reflect hallucinatory sensations induced by drugs. There is one exception to this - 'Matinée d'ivresse' - where Rimbaud actually refers to 'le temps des Assassins'. This state of intoxication seems to have been characterised by what Rimbaud calls the 'fanfare' of experiences leading to 'une débandade de parfums', but this magic is bought at the price of suffering, itself implying a form of masochistic satisfaction : 'Chevalet féérique!'

This drug-induced experience is merely a variant of one of the most typical ways in which sensations appear in Rimbaud's poetry : as cumulative sequences or 'epiphanies' in which the reader becomes involved and drawn up, as in another world. The technique had already been begun in humble poems like 'Roman' and 'Au Cabaret Vert' and further developed in 'Le Bateau ivre' where the 'meaning' of the poem is really a formulation of a sensation of immersion in a torrent of experiences (mostly visual sensation) to seek a tabula rasa and a new freedom. This cumulative technique, which has doubtless influenced poets like Saint-John Perse, is frequently employed in the Illuminations. Sensations may, therefore, in themselves lead to desirable emotional experiences or even to 'spiritual' intuition. Moreover, it is worth remarking that even in poems with a clearly symbolic or even allegorical function the world of sensation remains one of Rimbaud's principal resources. In 'Mémoire' the situation of the poet in a boat on the river is described with detailed allusion to sense-impressions but concludes with two lines which give the poem a symbolic meaning the opposite of that contained in 'Le Bateau ivre' :

Mon canot, toujours fixe, et sa chaîne tirée
 Au fond du cet oeil d'eau sans bords, - à quelle boue?

Even more strikingly 'Aube' reveals the extent to which Rimbaud is concerned with 'La vie sensationnelle' even when his manner is more specifically allegorical or 'symbolic'. It is an attempt to formulate in poetry the experience of one of the precious moments when the 'voyant' or 'illuminé' is overwhelmed by an intense though short-lived pantheistic ecstasy and not merely the desire for it.

* * * * *

As in the case of the other great poet's of contemporary reality Corbière's 'impressionism' which will be discussed in Part Two, Chapter Four, is doubtless linked to his appreciation of the importance of the non-rational parts of the

sensibility (613) and particularly sensation, though none of Corbière's commentators have studied this latter aspect of his work. All the five senses received the attention of the poet : taste : 'Jette le vin, garde la lie' (614), 'les fruits mal secs' (615), 'ton petit foie gras, truffé' (616), 'De l'absinthe et ta lèvre écume' (617), smell : 'Parmi des sentiers de lilas...' (618),

Coeur de parfum, montant arôme
Qui nous embaume...

(619)

touch : 'Par tes cheveux au vent fouettée...' (620), 'J'aime... la brise/
Quand ça frise' (621), 'Dis pourquoi... venir nous lécher comme un chien...'

(622)

A moi ma Chair-de-poule!....
Quand ta chair fraîche colle
Contre mon cuir lépreux!

(623)

sound .

Dis pourquoi...
A notre palpitante oreille
Parler bas... et ne dire rien?

(624)

Va donc, balancier souï affolé dans ma tête!
Bats en branle ce bon tam-tam, chaudron fêlé
Qui rend la voix de femme ainsi qu'une sonnette,
Qu'un coucou!... quelquefois : un moucheron ailé...

(625)

(613) c.f. Angelet, La Poétique de Tristan Corbière (p.121): 'Désordre concerté tendant à une restitution de la vie affective: telle est la phrase de Corbière.'

(614) O.C., p.708.

(615) Idem.

(616) Ibid., p.709.

(617) Idem.

(618) Ibid., p.707.

(619) Ibid., p. 725.

(620) Ibid., p.720.

(621) Ibid., p.722.

(622) Ibid., pp.732-33.

(623) Ibid., p.716.

(624) Ibid., pp.732-33.

(625) Ibid., p.768.

..... le clapotis bas de l'eau morte et lourde,
 Chuchote un gros baiser sous sa carène sourde...
 Le long des quais déserts où grouillait un chaos
 S'étend le calme plat...

Quelques vagues échos....
 Quelque novice seul, reste mélancolique,
 Se chante son pays avec une musique....
 De loin en loin, répond le jappement hagard,
 Intermittent, d'un chien de bord qui fait le quart,
 Oublié sur le pont...

(626)

sight :

La lune plaque en métal clair
 Les découpures du vert sombre...

(617)

Parmi les yeux du bras flottant qui luit en plaque,
 Le ciel miraté semble une immense flaque...

(628)

The poet, much like Laforgue, is more concerned with absence of colour than with the brighter parts of the palette. . 'le soleil manque de ton' (629), 'cette mer incolore' (630), 'le soleil se fait sombre' (631).

As well as a wealth of reference to the five senses, of which we have given but a handful of examples above, there is in Corbière's poetry, as one would expect of a careful reader of Baudelaire, an awareness of more complex sensations (already to be seen in the second example of sound above), respiratory, muscular and so on .

Ton poumon cicatrisé hume
 Des miasmes...

(632)

-
- (626) Ibid., p. 818.
 (627) Ibid., p. 735.
 (628) Ibid., p. 818.
 (629) Ibid., p. 705.
 (630) Ibid., p. 720.
 (631) Ibid., p. 721.
 (632) Ibid., p. 709.

De l'élan, - avec une entorse...

(633)

Je ris comme une fille
Et sens mal aux cheveux...

(634)

On pâme d'horreur...

(635)

Insomnie, es-tu l'Hystérie...
Es-tu l'orgue de barbarie...

(636)

Thus Corbière's preoccupations with his own predicament and with word-play as an act of rebellion did not prevent him from alluding, though rather less frequently, to a world of sensation comparable to that evoked by Verlaine, Rimbaud and Laforgue.

* * * * *

As we have more than once suggested above one of the most important consequences of the exploration of the world of sensation was the necessary development of a new poetic language and, in particular, a form of poetic impressionism. Barrès assessed the phenomenon in 1884 with perception, if a little exaggeration :

..... nous atteignons à supprimer toute composition dans l'oeuvre d'art et à rendre les sensations bout à bout ou mêlées telles qu'elles se présentent au poète, juxtaposées par les associations les plus bizarres, selon le tempérament individuel, les habitudes...

(637)

(633) Ibid., p.709.

(634) Ibid., p.716.

(635) Ibid., p.721.

(636) Ibid., p.733.

(637) Les Taches d'encre, I, 1, November 1884, pp.16-17.

Interestingly his assessment was corroborated by an establishment critic who may still be read with considerable profit. Writing in 1888 of the very period under discussion in this thesis Jules Lemaitre described with trepidation the emergence of .

.... une poésie sans pensée, à la fois primitive et subtile, qui n'exprime point des suites d'idées liées entre elles (comme fait la poésie classique) ni le monde physique dans la rigueur de ses contours (comme fait la poésie parnassienne), mais des états d'esprit où nous ne nous distinguons pas bien des choses, où les sensations sont si étroitement unies aux sentiments, où ceux-ci naissent si rapidement et si naturellement de celles-là qu'il nous suffit de noter nos sensations au hasard et comme elles se présentent pour exprimer par là même les émotions qu'elles éveillent successivement dans notre âme...

(638)

Lemaitre goes further than Barrès by grasping the evolution from impressionism to synthesis intrinsic in the union of sentiment and sensation. Both poetic impressionism and synthesis will be discussed in the final chapter of this part.

(639) 'M. Paul Verlaine et les poètes symbolistes et décadents', La Revue Bleue, January 1888, p.5.

P A R T T W O

CHAPTER THREE

The Impact of Contemporary Speech

It has already been shown that the treatment of new, modern or contemporary subjects, in the work of the best poets, often entailed a new and original approach to the language of poetry. Examples of this have been seen, for instance, in the case of Baudelaire's pioneering use of images drawn from everyday 'unpoetic' reality, in the modernity and ordinariness of the vocabulary and imagery of some of the cénacle poets, in the contrastive techniques employed in ironic cultural allusion, and in the treatment of many of the contemporary subjects discussed in the last chapter. In the present chapter and the next this question of the development of a new poetic language will be discussed in greater detail.

The term 'contemporary speech' is employed in this chapter to embrace a number of distinct but related concepts. Naturally most poetry is a reflexion of contemporary speech in the widest sense and we have restricted our investigation to the following areas. Most obviously the term may be applied to vocabulary related to 'new' phenomena belonging to a specific era. In the period under discussion this is particularly true of scientific and technical terminology. Indeed it is possible to identify in many registers of late nineteenth-century French a general trend

towards a greater particularisation of vocabulary under the influence of the scientific revolution Poetry was by no means exempt from this process Some of the poets making innovations in the introduction of contemporary speech saw their principal objective as 'popularisation' This led to frequent use of slang terms - often a technique of considerable vitality when the slang in question is in widespread use but on other occasions an affected and not always happy imitation of the slang employed by only small sections of society with which the poets were not necessarily very familiar This is often the case with Richépin's Gueux

Under the heading contemporary speech we shall also include the 'standard' spoken French of the late nineteenth century where this may be held to differ from the normal poetic language previously employed This involves vocabulary, syntax and above all, phrasing It is more significant than superficial 'popularisation',

(a) The Particularisation of Poetic Language in the Age of Science and Materialism

The impact of the terminologies of science and technology is most obviously to be seen in poetry dealing with those very subjects, such as were discussed in the last chapter (Sections (b), (c) and (d)) To the extent that in such poetry this impact would seem to be inevitable, it is of less interest than when it is to be seen in other forms of poetry where its presence is clearly the result of either a conscious, and often surprising, aesthetic decision on the part of the poet or, occasionally, an indication simply of the all-pervading influence of the momentous changes to which both life and language were subject in the age of science Yet even in 'scientific' poetry itself

the presence of scientific language only appears inevitable with the benefit of hindsight and the precise productions of the scientific poets of the second half of the century. The Romantics, for the most part, following the example of their eighteenth-century predecessors had struggled manfully, through the techniques of periphrasis and abstraction, to adapt the new subjects to the traditional non-particular language of French poetry. This is nowhere better illustrated than in the imprecision, hyperbole and pseudo-erudition of Hugo - facts which did not escape the attention of the Parnassians (1)

Moreover the existence of scientific poetry employing precise terminology must have encouraged poets working in other genres to incorporate such vocabulary into their work. This was for a variety of motives: the desire to seem modern, to seem erudite, to employ yet another weapon in the challenge to poetic convention, to make ironic contrasts and cultural allusions.

The impact of the language of the scientific age upon poetry which was not specifically scientific was an extremely widespread phenomenon in the two decades after 1870. Some examples have already been noted above in the examination of the cénacles.

One fact that cannot be emphasised too strongly is that a large proportion of the audiences and participants in the cénacles were students, many of them students of the sciences and, in particular, of medicine. In the 1880's (and possibly earlier) one of the cafés most frequented by young writers was the Café de l'École de Médecine. It is known, for instance, that the

(1) cf H. J. Hunt, The Epic in Nineteenth-Century France, p. 323

editorial staff of Lutèce met there regularly on Saturdays (2)
 (Much of the ironic humour, the drinking-song rhythms, the playful use of scientific terminology of the poetry of the 1870 s and 1880 s is to be attributed to the composition of these audiences)

This tendency, which should be regarded as an extension of the particularisation and images directes of the Parnassians (who had themselves sought for poetry the accuracy and impersonal authority of science) is abundantly evident in much of the minor poetry of the period besides that of poets already quoted

Goudeau's work illustrates the connection between decadence and the intrusion of particularised language into poetry The preoccupation with prostitution is one of several things he has in common with decadence of which he may be considered to be a representative - in part at least He refers on one occasion to that 'decadent' hero of the generation of 1870 - Schopenhauer (3) More especially, he indulges in the creation of the kind of atmosphere so dear to the decadents and uses language of which they would have approved to do it

Des parfums féminins se mêlaient dans la chambre
 A l'arôme troublant des cigares fumés
 Vagues parfums d'iris, d'ylang-ylang et d'ambre,
 Et de grains de sérail, autrefois consumés
 Mon oreille tintait aux souvenirs d'orgie,
 Et le marteau d'acier de la céphalagie
 Poussait dans mon cerveau des rêves innommés . (4)

(2) J Ajalbert, 'Lutèce', La Basoche, 2 February 1886

(3) Les Fleurs du Bitume, p 46

(4) Ibid , p 110

On a more detailed level one may note the use of the technical medical term, a phenomenon of the poetry of this period upon which we have had cause to remark several times, which here has a comic effect. This example typifies the coalescence of modernity (the modern setting is made explicit from the reference to 'cigares'), the obsession with variety and acuteness of sensation, detailed notation and the specific influence of the scientific spirit upon poetic language.

Despite his double career there was little cross-fertilisation between poetry and science in the work of Charles Cros. He wrote no scientific poetry as such and there is very little sign of any attempt to impress the reader with his scientific knowledge in his poetry at all. He seems to have adopted the healthy attitude that one career could offer a relaxation from the other. It is fair to regard the impact of scientific language upon his poetry in exactly the same light as that of almost any other poet and not as a special case. If there was any connection between his two careers it was his truly 'poetic' inability even to make money from inventions of genius !

Cros produced much quasi-pastoral poetry. This is sometimes marked by an unusual botanical precision not dissimilar from that of Rimbaud (5). In 'Les Quatre Saisons' we read :

Sous la glycine et le cytise,
Tous deux seuls, que faut-il qu'on dise ?

Similarly in 'Sonnet' (O.C., p. 87), the poet evokes

La libellule bleue effleurant les joncs verts ...

(5) See below.

In 'Sonnet' (O.C., p. 176, dedicated to Ulysse Rocq)

Dans les bois, les champs, corolles, ombelles
Entourent la femme ...

The same scientific precision is to be found in a description
of human eyes in 'Six Tercets' :

Aigues-marines, dans le transparent écrin
Des paupières, les yeux qu'un clair fluide baigne
Ont un voluptueux regard qui me dédaigne.

and in description of the man-made landscape :

A la paroi moussue un gros anneau s'oxide ... (6)

Corrects, le zinc et les ardoises
Des toits coupent le ciel normal ... (7)

Unaffected reference is made to technical terms from a
variety of fields :

J'y vois ces yeux qui, dans des tableaux encaustiques,
Sont, depuis Cléopâtre, encore grands ouverts ... (8)

Inscriptions cunéiformes,
Vous conteniez la vérité ... (9)

Scientific language also influences Cros's imagery :

Comme une liqueur subtile
Baignant l'horizon sans borne,
L'air qui du sol chaud distille
Fait trembloter le roc morne ... (10)

(6) Cros, Oeuvres Complètes, p. 77.

(7) Ibid., p. 108.

(8) Ibid., p. 87.

(9) Ibid., p. 175.

(10) Ibid., p. 63.

This can on occasion be quite startling, as for instance the astronomical images employed in the erotic poem 'Scherzo' (11) which amounts almost to a 'conceit':

A toi, comète vagabonde
Souvent attardée en chemin,
Laissant ta chevelure blonde
Flotter dans l'éther surhumain,

Qu'importent quelques astres pâles
Au ciel troublé de ma raison,
Quand tu viens à longs intervalles
Envelopper mon horizon ?

Je ne veux pas savoir quels pôles
Ta folle orbite a dépassés,
Tends-moi tes seins et tes épaules;
Que je les baise, c'est assez.

Cros's poetry appears, therefore, as the work of a man living in the late nineteenth century and aware of scientific culture but not necessarily of a scientist. Nowhere is this more interesting than when he evokes the positivist mentality (his own) attempting to come to grips with feelings and experiences which defy rational organisation.

Je ne sais plus faire d'ailleurs
Une si savante analyse,
Possédé de rêves meilleurs
Où ma raison se paralyse ... (12)

Rollinat's poetry was seen as essentially modern by his contemporaries. (In 1882 Barbey d'Aurevilly wrote of Rollinat: 'Et c'est ainsi que nous avons eu un poète moderne de plus!' (13)) As we suggested above, in retrospect, his work contains relatively few reflections of contemporary external reality. Apart from the spiritual anxiety, mental instability and morbid

(11) Ibid., pp. 85-86.

(12) Ibid., p. 104.

(13) Le Constitutionnel, 1st June 1882.

sensuality which his contemporaries saw as symptoms of the malaise of their age echoed in his poetry, what finally justifies the classification of Les Névroses as modernist verse are those allusions to scientific language with which we are presently concerned. The best account of Rollinat's attitude to contemporary reality was given by himself in 'Les Frissons' where the spirit of the age is epitomised as a frenetic shudder. In the third stanza quoted, Rollinat employs appropriate quasi-scientific language - almost ironically since it is science which is largely responsible for the prevalent spiritual disarray.

D'où vient que parfois, tout à coup,
L'angoisse te serre le cou ?
Quel problème insoluble et fou
 Te bouleverse,
Toi que la science a jauni,
Vieil athée âpre et racorni ?
-"C'est le frisson de l'Infini
 Qui me traverse !"

Le strident quintessencié,
Edgar Poe, net comme l'acier,
Dégage un frisson de sorcier
 Qui vous envoûte !
Delacroix donne à ce qu'il peint
Un frisson d'if et de sapin,
Et la musique de Chopin
 Frissonne toute

Les anémiques, les fiévreux,
Et les poitrinaires cireux,
Automates cadavéreux
 A la voix trouble,
Tous attendent avec effroi
Le retour de ce frisson froid
Et monotone qui décroît
 Et qui redouble

One of the main preoccupations of the poet of Les Névroses is death. Cold-blooded precise language both adds to the horror, from the reader's point of view, of some of the descriptions but also, one suspects, affords the poet some consolation for a very genuine fear by appearing to have intellectual control over what is really inevitable.

- Jusqu'à ce que l'infecte et mordante mixture
De sciure de bois, de son et de phénol
Saupoudre son corps froid, couleur de vitriol,
Dans le coffre du ver et de la pourriture. (14)

This same relentless positivist attitude is what, for Rollinat,
made Balzac one of the greatest writers of the nineteenth century
capturing both the spirit and the methodology of the age

D'un siècle froid, chercheur, hystérique et morose
Il a scruté le ventre et disséqué la main,
Et son oeuvre est un parc sensitif où la rose
Fait avec l'asphodèle un ténébreux hymen. (15)

Examples of the use of 'scientific' terminology abound in Rollinat's
work. Conscience is seen in its physiological context

Tant que l'Esprit n'est pas dissous,
Et que le sang bat les vertèbres,
Elle déchiffre nos Algèbres,
Et plonge au fond de nos remous.
La Conscience voit dans nous' - (16)

Much of the terminology is related to psychology and medicine including
the title of the collection Les Névroses and the titles of poems
within it such as 'La Céphalagie' and 'L'Hypocondriaque'. In 'Les
Reflets' the poet speaks of his 'oeil halluciné' Elsewhere
perfumes are described as 'doux asphyxieurs' ('Les Parfums')
'Les Martyrs' contains the Rimbaudian line

Et tu vendras ton corps attendu par l'ulcère ...

The subjects of 'Les Deux Poitrinaires' are described as 'chlorotiques'.

Yet the debt to scientific language is not limited to these areas.

'L'Introuvable' has an unusual description of the eyes of cats

Saurais-tu déchiffrer le vivant logogriphe
Qu'allume le phosphore au fond de leurs yeux verts ?

(14) 'Les Parfums'.

(15) 'Balzac'

(16) 'La Conscience'.

Even the poems contained in the section Les Refuges devoted to the simplicity of rural life are still marked by the same concern for positivist precision

La mousse aime le caillou dur,
La tour que la foudre électrise,
Le tronc noueux comme un fémur
Et le roc qui se gargarise
Au torrent du ravin obscur (17)

Sometimes a modern word is used simply to create a vivid image

Les yeux qui sont pour moi l'étoile au fond d'un puits,
Adorables falots mystiques et funèbres
Zébrant d'éclairs divins la poix de mes ténèbres. (18)

On other occasions the poet's object is the mild debunking of the poetic conventions of Romanticism

Dit par elle, mon nom devient une musique
C'est comme un tendre appel fait par un séraphin
Qui m'aimerait d'amour et qui serait phthisique ... (19)

Ô ma pauvre sagesse, en vain tu te dérobes
Au fluide rôdeur, âcre et mystérieux
Que pour magnétiser le passant curieux,
L'Inconnu féminin promène sous les robes '

Les robes ' où circule et s'est insinuée
La vie épidermique avec tous ses frissons,
Et qui, sur les trottoirs comme entre les buissons,
Passent avec des airs de barque et de nuée ' (20)

Conversely the use of such terminology can sometimes lead to a new kind of préciosité of which, one suspects, the poet was fully conscious, as for instance in 'Jalousie Féline' where the cat is referred to elliptically as 'la bête hydrophobe'.

Before leaving Rollinat's work it is worth re-emphasising the rôle such terminology has in establishing the poetry's modernity.

- (17) 'La Mousse'.
(18) 'Les Etoiles bleues'.
(19) 'La Voix'.
(20) 'Les Robes'.

Sometimes an entire poem such as 'L'Ange Pâle' is made to seem modern by the presence of just a couple of words, in this case 'chlorose' and 'narcotiques'. Neither of them were particularly recent words to the French language - indeed this is true of much of the terminology discussed in this chapter - but the introduction of specialised terms of this kind into poetry was symptomatic of the encroachment of the positivist age

* * * * *

Of the four major poets to whom special attention is being paid in this thesis, the least influenced by 'scientific' language was Verlaine. Nevertheless its impact is still to be seen in his work.

In Sagesse he turned his scorn upon the representatives of the new positivist age and made fun of both their methods and their language.

Petits amis qui s[^]utes nous prouver
Par A plus B que deux et deux font quatre, (21)

Precise technical terms are to be found in his poetry such as 'oaristys' (22), 'corolles' (23), 'lucioles' (24), 'vent hiémal' (25), 'albumine' (26), 'anthropophages' (27), 'lymphatiques incendiaires' (28), and the description of the two pairs of eyes as 'quatre points de phosphore' (29). Most interesting of all, however, is the application of precise, quasi-scientific notation to descriptive writing.

La lune plaquait ses teintes de zinc
Par angles obtus
Des bouts de fumée de cinq
Sortaient drus et noirs des hauts toits pointus (30)

-
- (21) Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes, p 250.
(22) Ibid., p 62
(23) Ibid , p. 73
(24) Idem
(25) Ibid , p 79
(26) Ibid , p 131.
(27) Ibid , p. 211
(28) Idem.
(29) Ibid , p 75
(30) Ibid , p 65.

Tandis qu'un éclair
 Brutal et sinistre
 Fend le ciel de bistre
 D'un long zigzag clair,

Et que chaque lame
 En bonds convulsifs
 Le long des récifs
 Va, vient, luit et clame, .. (31)

In the last example only the second line betrays a temptation
 to depart from total detachment to a more traditional emotive colouring

An examination of Verlaine's use of technical terms provides
 support for the view that apart from the periods when he was under
 the influence of Baudelaire or Rimbaud Verlaine had a deep antipathy,
 which was not just theoretical but temperamental, for many of the
 manifestations of the age of Science

* * * * *

(31) Ibid., p. 67.

The poem by Rimbaud that contains the highest density of specifically modern terms is, without doubt, 'Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs'. It is in discussing this poem that Professor Scarfe gives a distorted picture of Rimbaud's contribution to modernism (32). He suggests that Rimbaud's poem reflects none of the uneasiness in the presence of technological phenomena that we encounter in the work of great poets like Vigny, Hugo, Baudelaire or Tennyson and that one is at first tempted to see here a logical development of the ideas expressed in Du Camp's Les Chants Modernes.

From the linguistic point of view we see that Rimbaud had an intuition that the technological civilisation might provide a new experience for the poet. (Had he pursued this intuition) he would have been the first modern poet to reunite poetry and science, and to assume a new social function. But the irony behind Rimbaud's triumphant injunction to be 'modern' incapacitated him from being the first 'modern' poet in this sense and doomed him to the romanticism he despised.

Professor Scarfe is right to see in this poem a fundamental irony, but the scope of this irony should not be limited. For surely Rimbaud's attitude to the traditional 'pastoral' vocabulary of poetry is just as disapproving. Raymond Poullhart has said of this poem that it condenses 'en une synthèse prodigieuse, tout l'herbier parnassien, pour s'en moquer ...' (33). A reasonable interpretation of this poem is that Rimbaud is concerned with destroying all the old rhetoric of poetry of which Du Camp's attempts are, for him, but one more laughable example. Anyone who has had the misfortune to read Les Chants Modernes would surely share this opinion. Professor Scarfe seems to suggest that to make science the subject of poetry would lead to perhaps the most original and important form of modernism in poetry. Had Rimbaud done this in the way recommended by Du Camp he certainly would not have been doomed to Romanticism, but instead he would have gone even further back in time to the eighteenth-century encyclopaedic poets. Such an interpretation of Professor Scarfe's remarks is reinforced when we recall his 'modernistic' evaluation of

(32) Francis Scarfe, 'A stylistic interpretation of Rimbaud', pp. 169-170

(33) Poullhart, Le Romantisme, III, p. 218

Chénier is his valuable book on that poet (34) It is true that the 'complete' modern poet has to describe life in an age of technology, but this does not mean that all the processes of technology have to be detailed and its terminology rigidly adhered to Rather the poet must treat technology in as much as it affects the experiences of everyday life and so doing make use of new terminology, but not in the naïve way Du Camp advised.

Rimbaud did not hesitate to use specifically modern vocabulary for its evocative effects

Les monitors et les voiliers des Hanses .. (35)

Sur cent Solognes longues comme un railway (36)

La Juliette, ça rappelle l'Henriette,
Charmante station du chemin de fer ... (37)

The language of commerce which Rimbaud mocked in 'Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs' is, nevertheless, used in its rightful place

Porteurs de blés flamands et de cotons anglais . (38)

Nous la voulons ' Industriels, princes, sénats . (39)

It is worth remarking that sometimes the poet's vocabulary is not just 'modernistic' in the sense that its use represents an innovation and an attempt to get to grips with contemporary reality but also in a strictly chronological sense Reference to Bloch and von Wartburg's etymological dictionary reveals that 'square'

(34) André Chénier, p 93.

(35) 'Le Bateau ivre'; c f p 189.

(36) 'Michel et Christine'.

(37) 'Bruxelles'.

(38) 'Le Bateau ivre'; c f p 189.

(39) 'Qu'est-ce pour nous, mon coeur'

was not in use until 1836, that 'chope' dates only from 1845, in which year the new Alsatian bars and breweries were introduced to Paris, and that 'bock' is not found until 1855 in the writing of the Goncourt brothers.

Rimbaud's poetry is notable for the use of fairly precise technical terms, usually for ironic, humorous effect and often to deflate the Romantic vision of things. This is especially true of medical and anatomical words e.g. 'omoplates', 'échine', 'ulcère à l'anūs' (40), 'fémurs', 'amours épileptiques' (41), and 'syphilitiques', 'convulsion', 'asphyxiant' (42). The poet's intention is not always to poke fun at the old poetic manner but is sometimes to express emotions like distaste or the sense of sterility, e.g. the use of medical terms in 'Les Assis' and the line

Des fleurs d'encre crachant des pollens en virgule
'Soleil et Chair' offers examples sufficient to show that this practice dates from very early in Rimbaud's poetic career and that it may be regarded, as we suggested above, as an extension of the Parnassianism which has been so evidently influential upon this underrated poem. Not only is there something akin to scientific precision in the references to nature (e.g. 'sève', 'écorce', 'néufars' - the spelling of this word reflects the Parnassian concern for etymology), but to words connected with modern science ('éter' - only used in French since 1834 -, 'germes') and industry ('creuset'), and most strikingly to medical and biological science in particular ('foetus', 'embryons' and the daringly 'antipoetic' 'vulve'). This poem, so often discussed as a piece of neo-classical bric-à-brac, is thus

(40) 'Vénus Anadyomène'.

(41) 'Les Assis'

(42) 'L'Orgie parisienne'

to be attached to the modern age not only by its subject - the contrast between the age of rationalism and the primitive spontaneity of ancient times - but by its vocabulary. That it demonstrates a healthy receptivity to a variety of linguistic registers is further illustrated by the use of a 'low term', for which only Baudelaire provided any previous authority 'rabougrî'. 'Ophélie' employs the precise botanical term 'corolle' (first used in 1749 in a scientific treatise) in the midst of what might have been an ethereal fantasy but which is in fact a description of great clarity and detail 'Bal des pendus', despite a superficial closeness to popular ballad, has a reference to 'leurs pâles vertèbres' Here the link with Parnassianism is obvious since this is one of several allusions to Gautier's 'Bûchers et Tombeaux' (43) In 'Les Assis' from which one or two examples have already been cited, the poet makes concerted use of dispassionate, precise terminology to dehumanise the victims of his satire or, perhaps more accurately, to demonstrate the degree of self-dehumanisation for which they are responsible Once again biology furnishes the largest number of terms, but other sciences are not neglected 'rachitiques', 'sinciput', 'ossature', 'percaliser', 'omoplates', 'entonnoir', 'libellules', 'amygdales' It is interesting to note that in this poem of pseudo-scientific detachment (in which one suspects the hurt adolescent poet turns his knowledge against those who behave as his intellectual superiors) reference is made to a popular term 'caboches' which serves as a perfect foil to scientific erudition '

(43) Émaux et Camées

Scientific terminology is one of the devices employed in that withering attack on the feminine sex, 'Mes Petites Amoureuses' 'hydrolat lacrymal', 'omoplates'. The anti-Romantic effect is, obviously, perfectly in accord with the violent outburst of a misogynist. Part of Milotus's discomfort in 'Accroupissements' is specifically identified as 'une migraine'. In 'Les Pauvres à l'église' the atmosphere of almost hysterical despair is heightened in the reference to 'ces épileptiques'. The grand satirical tirade which constitutes 'L'Orgie parisienne' makes ample use of technical terminology 'cataplasmes', 'convulsion', 'asphyxiant', 'syphilitiques', 'ulcère'-in the allegorical portrayal of moral degradation. The use of technical terms in 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie' is part of the poet's technique of parody (the starting point of which are Romantic and Parnassian evocations of types of female beauty) 'diptères', 'hectaires', 'décanteuses', 'pandiculations'. Irony of a different kind, this time in the service of anti-Christian invective causes Rimbaud to employ scientific words in 'L'Homme juste' to cast doubt upon the miracles surrounding Jesus's death 'bolides', 'astres lactés', 'essaims d'astéroïdes'.

Generally there is a lower incidence of the use of technical terminology in the so-called Derniers Vers, in Une Saison en Enfer and in the Illuminations than in the earlier poems (Rimbaud's development is thus curiously similar to that of Laforgue as it will be outlined in the final part of this thesis.) Nevertheless it is still a feature of his work. On one occasion an allusion to the matter-of-fact language of science even horrifies, this is the image of surgical dissection over which the poet lingers in 'Honte'.

Tant que la lame n'aura
Pas coupé cette cervelle,
Ce paquet blanc, vert et gras

In 'Veillées', II, there is a curious reference to the language of science, apparently as part of an hallucinatory amalgam 'une succession psychologique de coupes de frises, de bandes atmosphériques et d'accidences géologiques' The enigmatic 'H' contains an allusion to 'hydrogène clarteux' We have already noted the use of technical terms in 'Mouvement'

It is worth looking at one poem in more detail in order to understand more clearly some of the possible functions of particularisation and precision

Many of Rimbaud's early poems are far more complex than is often supposed - indeed more complex than some of the Illuminations One such poem is 'Vénus Anadyomène' The most obvious approach to the poem is psychological the reader is presented with an outstanding example of the poet's misogyny or, more precisely, the adolescent's inability to come to terms with the opposite sex through a feeling of basic insecurity stemming from his difficult relationship with his mother No one would probably dispute this. Insecurity and frustration commonly find an outlet in abuse On one level the poem is thus, clearly, an antecedent of 'Mes Petites Amoureuses' But there is much more to it than that For instance account must be taken of a network of cultural allusion which begins with the title - 'Venus emerging from the waves' This was one of the basic plastic avatars of the Aphrodite-myth, to be found in classical literature and art itself, in Renaissance painting (most obviously of course in Botticelli's celebrated picture) and most recently in Parnassian poetry. Although Leconte de Lisle's 'Vénus de Milo' had not concentrated on the marine Venus it was nevertheless one of the variants of the goddess's beauty which had been attractively evoked, before being put to one side, in that poem In a general sense the present writer is convinced

that one of Rimbaud's purposes in 'Vénus Anadyomène' is parody - of Leconte de Lisle's famous poem, of other Parnassian poems like it, and of the artistic tradition of which they were the culmination. The assault on this tradition is rounded off with the reference to the tattooed inscription Clara Venus. It is possible that the parody element of the poem had been prompted by a 'challenge' from within the Parnassian ranks. In a dizain in Le Parnasse Contemporain of 1869 beginning with the line

Les dieux sont morts Pourquoi faut-il qu'on les insulte ?

Coppée had, half-humourously, cast doubt upon the ability of young poets and artists to evoke anatomical beauty as classical artists had done and particularly female beauty, in the lines

Pourquoi faut-il enfin qu'un obscur bandagiste
Pose un vésicatoire à Vénus accroupie (44)

The cultural allusion in the poem also takes the form of straightforward imitation, in this case of the poem 'Les Autres malsains' from the collection Vignes folles by the unjustly neglected Glatigny. The

- (44) Le Parnasse Contemporain, II, p. 230. Suzanne Bernard and Antoine Adam both misquote this dizain, the tenth of the Promenades et Intérieurs, by stating that these are the last two lines. Both have presumably followed the example of another critic who omitted the points de suspension. The end of the poem is actually more sweeping in its condemnation.

Pourquoi faut-il enfin qu'un impur bandagiste
Donne à l'Hercule antique un infâme soutien,
Des bas Leperdriel à Phoebus Pythien,
Et contre la beauté tournant sa rage impie,
Pose un vésicatoire à Vénus accroupie ?

Coppée's poem, of course, anticipates the ironic tonal contrast of Rimbaud's piece.

description of the prostitute in Glatigny's poem has many details (even expressions) in common with 'Vénus Anadyomène' including a tattoo (though in this case on the arms and, more prosaically, confined to the names Pierre and Lolotte (45)) What Glatigny's poem lacked was the satirical association of the whore with Venus. It is this association which provides the most important key to Rimbaud's poem - it is an indication of the degree of his disillusionment with reality.

'Vénus Anadyomène' should almost certainly be regarded as a pendant to poems like 'Soleil et Chair', 'Sensation' and 'Aube' where there is a pantheistic assimilation of womanhood with the beauty of nature. 'Soleil et Chair' is too often dismissed as a well-written emulation of the Parnassians having little fundamental connection with the poet's true feelings. In fact it, and other 'primitivist' poems, reflect a heartfelt longing for the beauty of the hypothetical golden age brought about by profound dissatisfaction with modern, everyday reality in Charleville. The repulsive distortion of Venus represented as the whore, derived partly from literary reminiscence (e.g. Glatigny) and partly from smutty schoolboy gossip or even personal observation, becomes symbolic of the crassness of reality in general, and of the adolescent poet's complexes in the face of real women in particular.

The stylistic intention in the poem now becomes obvious. On the one hand the poet's careful 'warts and all' realism is in deliberate contrast to the idealisation implicit in the artistic tradition he is parodying. More particularly this realism, with its use of precise terms, is the poet's way of turning detached and ruthless positivism

(45) For details see the notes in both the Adam and Bernard editions

against the very age which produced it The modern age has
 destroyed idealisations, the poem is the adolescent's revenge
 both upon his age and upon those who encouraged him to hold
 illusions in the first place

In a vision remarkably similar to paintings by that other
 pitiless misogynist Degas, the poet 'modernises' the image of
 the marine Venus by depicting a decrepit prostitute emerging from a
 green tin bathtub The detail is absolutely authentic - bathtubs
 at this time were made of tin and almost always coloured green.
 The positivist notation allows powerful contrast with pagan vitality
 and naturalness the bathtub is compared to a coffin, instead of the
 sea this Venus emerges from a metallic artifact and her hair is
 'pommadés' The ill-repaired ravages of time are described by the
 precise, technical term 'déficits' The description in the second
 stanza is not that of an erotic poet or of an idealising artist but
 of an anatomist and characterised by careful notation

Puis le col gras et gris, les larges omoplates
 Qui saillent, le dos court qui rentre et qui ressort,
 Puis les rondeurs des reins semblent prendre l'essor,
 La graisse sous la peau paraît en feuilles plates

The third stanza continues in the same vein introducing a detail
 repellent to another of the senses 'le tout sent un goût horrible
 étranagement' The suspicion that the poet is making fun of the
 very positivism he is employing is confirmed
 .. on remarque surtout
 Des singularités qu'il faut voir à la loupe .

This is a perfect imitation of the style of the popular scientific
 journal (or of a teacher). The opening line of the last stanza with
 its reference to the implausible tattoo leaves the reader in no doubt
 that despite the careful realist style, the poem is a vengeful fantasy
 The last line of the poem reverts to scientific precision and technical
 terminology with the information that this whore is adorned with
 'un ulcère à l'anus'

In Corbière's case the impact of specialized language is similar to that of popularisms and may be seen as an aspect of the move away from generalization towards particularity of vocabulary. Corbière, like Rimbaud and Laforgue, does not hesitate to use technical terms in his poetry. The most obvious example is the large number of terms connected with the life of the sea: 'beaupré', 'bâton', 'border', 'bonsoir', 'brick', 'brigantine', 'brise alizée', 'amatelotter', 'anspock', 'caboteur', 'calfater', 'carénor', 'cotre', 'dock', 'élarguer', 'foc', 'hune', 'louvoyer', 'poudrein', 'vigie', and many others. However, one also finds many technical or precise terms unconnected with the sea: 'papier-Joseph', 'blen per ruguler', 'indigo', 'artichaut', 'éclis', 'cruc', 'ergot', 'cucurbitace', 'phthisie', 'poumon cicatrisé' to give but a few examples. Here the motive may be the desire for realism and authenticity, the reflection of a hard, methodical era, it may well be that particularity of vocabulary is one of the best weapons against both the gross sentimentality and the pomposity of the Romantics, and the worst of classicism.

It should not be forgotten that in his quest for precise expressiveness Corbière also employed archaisms and neologisms, the first may have stressed his links with the poets of the Middle Ages and his Breton background, but the second were primarily another way of attacking established poetic tradition and are justly celebrated: 'ruolzer', 'clyso-pomper', 'grazieller'.

Nevertheless Corbière's allusions to popular and everyday speech are of more significance than those to technical terms (or neologisms). Yet it is worth looking at two or three examples

of the uses he finds for technical terminology.

Look of precision such as 'chlorose' and 'mancenillier' add a brutal dimension to the poet's vision of the literary world of Paris. The apparent simplicity and spontaneity of style, the imitation of popular songs is seen only to be the cloak of an intelligent, sensitive and educated man.

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

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

"La rose au rosier, Dondaire!"
- On a le pied fait à sa chaîne.
"La roseau rosier". . - Trop tard! -

"La rose au rosier"...- Nature!
- On est essayeur, pédicure,
Ou quelque'autre chose dans l'art! (16)

The plea for naturalness and the probable desire to return to his rightful setting in Brittany are expressed as by an outsider contemplating the situation of 'le Naïf'. This detachment is in perfect accord with the 'hardness' implicit in the technical terms. The poet has become his own specimen.

The use of a technical terminology assists the poet in debunking the Romantic vision (alas too often true) of the consumptive poet and in making fun of his own impending death:

(16) Oeuvres Complètes, pp. 706-07.

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

(47)

Similarly in 'Pauvre Garçon' we find the line

Serait-il mort de chic, de boire, ou de phthisie...

Reference to the methods of science is a way of lending ironic distance to the poet's lyricism.

Plus tard, tu colleras sur papier les pensées,
 Fleurs d'herboriste, mais autrefois ramassées.....

(48)

The theme of the young girl at the piano, which still held Romantic overtones for poets like Verlaine and Laforgue, is completely transformed by Corbière who makes it the symbol of his own poetry - a mixture of the utterly modern, detached and technical, of true lyricism, irony and buffoonery:

La dent de ton Épard, râtelier sonore,
 Et scie et broie à cru, sous son tic-tac nerveux,
 La gamme de tes dents, autre clavier sonore..
 Touches qui ne vont pas aux cordes des cheveux!

- Cauchemar de meunier, ta : Réverie agile!
 - Grattage, ton : Premier amour à quatre mains!
 Ô femme transposée en Morceau difficile,
 Tes croches sans douleur n'ont pas d'accents humains!

Déchiffre au clavecin cet accord de la lrc,
 Télégraphe à musique, il pourra le traduire:
 Cri, d'or, dur, sec, qui plaque et casse - Plangorer...

(49)

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- (47) Ibid., p. 731
 (48) Ibid., p. 765.
 (49) Ibid., p. 765.

(6) Popularisation and the Influence of Everyday Speech

The introduction of aspects of the various registers of everyday speech into French poetry is not a phenomenon separate from that discussed in the previous section. Both trends are symptomatic of a desire to expand and liberate the poetic medium and, more especially, of a concern for authenticity intended to make poetry the adequate formulation of the experiences of modern and ephemeral reality in an age when 'abstract' and 'universal' values had been to some extent supposedly discredited. Of course, what this often meant was the fulfilment of a profound, if not always comprehended, desire to capture (or make 'universal') those elusive experiences which Frenchmen of the second half of the nineteenth century knew to be their own rather than those of another age or culture.

* * *

It is interesting to consider for a moment an area of overlap between the two phenomena discussed in this chapter. This is the "matter of factness" of language which is a feature both of the scientific register and of the language of commerce, materialism and practical affairs generally. This is to be found in both the minor and major poetry of the period. In Rollinat's 'Le Magasin de Suicide' the language of commerce creates a superbly ironic effect.

- "Nous avons l'arme à feu, le rasoir très coupant,
La foudre à bon marche, l'asphyxiant chimique
(Et l'on a, je vous jure, une étrange mimique
Quand on s'est mis au cou cette corde quipend'),

"Les poisons de la fleur, de l'herbe et du serpent,
Le curare indien, la mouche anatomique,
Le perfide nectar au de noix vomique
Qui fait qu'on se tortille et qu'on meurt en rampant

"Tous ces engins de mort et d'autres que je passe,
Nous les garantissons' Mais, dit-il, a voix basse,
Bien qu'ils soient aujourd'hui d'un emploi consacré,

"Il en est encore un, le meilleur et le pire,
Que vous enseigneront pour un prix modéré
Mademoiselle Pieuvre et Madame Vampire"

Rimbaud uses much the same technique, though in a more profound and comprehensive way, in 'Solde' where the whole of human activity and aspiration is identified and put up for sale in a bitter condemnation of modern society and an account of the poet's own disillusionment.

. A vendre les Corps sans prix, hors de toute
race, de tout monde, de tout sexe, de toute
descendance' Les richesses jaillissant à chaque
démarche' Solde de diamants sans contrôle!

A vendre l'anarchie pour les masses,
la satisfaction irrépressible pour les amateurs
supérieurs, la mort atroce pour les fidèles et les
amours'

A vendre les habitations et les migrations,
sports, féeries et comforts (sic) parfaits, et le
bruit, le mouvement et l'avenir qu'ils font!

A vendre les applications de calcul et les
sautes d'harmonie inouïs. Les trouvailles et les termes
non soupçonnés, possession immédiate

A vendre les Corps, les voix, l'immense opulence
inquestionable, ce qu'on ne vendra jamais Les
vendeurs ne sont pas à bout de solde' Les
voyageurs n'ont pas à vendre leur commission
de si tôt'

In 'Révolte' Cros employs the language of materialist logic, even mathematical argument, (with its repeated 'à force de' and 'puisque') in a perfectly balanced effect utilising also modern and popular speech

of a more general kind ('keepsakes', 'Ça m'irrite') to lend humour and unusual interest to what is basically a lover's compliment and a hackneyed, poetic theme

Absurde et ridicule à force d'être rose,
A force d'être blande, à force de cheveux
Blonds, ondes, crépelés, à force d'avoir bleus
Les yeux, saphirs trop vains de leur métempsycose

Absurde, puisqu'on n'en peut pas parler en prose,
Ridicule, puisqu'on n'en a jamais vu deux,
Sauf, peut-être, dans les keepsakes pageux.
Dépasser le réel ainsi, c'est de la pose

C'en est même obsédant, puisque le vert des bois
Prend un ton d'émeraude impossible en peinture
S'il sert de fond à ces cheveux contre nature

Et ces blancheurs de peau sont cause quelquefois
Qu'on perdrait tout respect des blancheurs que le rite
Classique admet les lys, la neige Ça m'irrite'

Rimbaud adopts a similar style, that of discursive argument, in these lines from 'Ce qu'on dit au poète ?'

En somme, une Fleur, Romarin
Ou lys, vive ou morte, vaut-elle
Un excrément d'oiseau marin?

or in the repeated 'etc ' of 'Age d'Or' which epitomises the feeling of banality and monotony, a simple device to destroy the Romantic vision

Another aspect of this area of overlap is the careful notation of the specifications of artifacts in the style of magazines or sales catalogues In much more recent times this technique was developed almost ad absurdum by Ian Fleming in his James Bond novels It is an important feature of a poem such as Rimbaud's 'Oraison du Soir' where the poet is clearly cocking a snook at

poetic convention, and making fun of the poetry of 'ordinary' life as ~~represented~~^{by} the pastoral tradition and more recently by poets like Coppée. The poem is characterised by dead-pan seriousness and exactitude. The poet is not satisfied with relating the fact that he has downed a pleasant 'jar of ale' and smoked his pipe, but instead specifies that he was ~~scated~~^{scated}.

Empoignant une chope à fortes cannelures,
L'hypogastre et le col cambrés, une Gambier
Aux dents..

This precision paves the way for the ultra-realistic images which follow

Tels que les excréments chauds d'un vieux colombier,
Mille Rêves en moi font de douces brûlures.
Puis par instants mon coeur triste est comme un aubier
Qu'ensanglante l'or jeune et sombre des coulures .

and for the climax of the poem

Doux comme le Seigneur du cèdre et des hysopes,
Je pisse vers les cieux bruns, très haut et très loin,
Avec l'assentiment des grands héliotropes.

But the poet's aim is not simply parody, nor is he just the adolescent out to shock. The effect of the matter-of-fact 'Je pisse' after the Biblical 'Seigneur du cèdre et des hysopes' is not just comical. The whole point of the poem is a pagan (the 'héliotropes' are symbolic of the sun - the ultimate god of pagans) eulogy of naturalness, pleasure and reality of which poetic convention has given us little idea - hence the exaggerated exactitude and scatology.

* * * * *

In more general terms the impact of popular and everyday speech upon poetry after 1870 manifests itself in a variety of ways in vocabulary, in syntax, in imagery and what we have called phrasing. The latter we consider to be the most important since it affects the

very rhythm of poetry Phrasing involves word-order, line division and punctuation and, sometimes, the value attached to rhyme, simply by virtue of the fact that to borrow the phrasing normally used in everyday speech into poetry would dislocate the previously accepted poetic language in which 'unnatural' phrasing (such as inversions and displacements to bring a word into the rhyming position) was commonplace 'Popular and everyday speech' embraces a number of distinct registers including slang but extending to the ordinary **F**rend of an educated man but which would nevertheless often have been considered 'unpoetic' before the second half of the nineteenth century and indeed by many critics and poets afterwards

Its influence is to be seen in the work of minor and major poets alike after 1870 In the case of the latter, particularly, it was an ingredient in a reappraisal of poetic language generally and was to play a part in the creation of works of great originality and beauty

* * * * *

The most striking thing about La Chanson des Gueux for the modern reader, and one of the reasons for its success when it appeared is the poet's use of popular language - or to be more precise argot. For the later editions of the work Richepin produced a glossary of nearly three hundred of the slang terms used in the poems That all this was something of a catch-penny novelty is obvious from the fact that the volume contains such exercises as 'Sonnet bigorne - Argot classique' and 'Autre Sonnet bigorne - Argot moderne', the text of the latter is reproduced below

J'ai fait chibis J'avais la frousse
Des préfetanciers de Pantin.
A Pantin, mince de potin'
On y connaît ma gargarousse,

Ma fiole, mon pif qui retrousse,
Mes calots de mec au gratin
Après mon dernier barbotin
J'ai flasqué du poivre à la rousse.

Elle ira de turne en garne,
De Menilmuche à Montparne,
Sans pouvoir remoucher mon gniasse

Je me camoufle en pélican
J'ai du pellard à la tignasse
Vive la lampagne du cam'

(50)

There are traces however of a more interesting attempt to capture
the flavour of everyday speech

J'ai le coeur en marmelade. .

(51)

Words such as 'bedon', 'peton', and 'menotte' are to be found in
familiar speech and are not slang Similarly there are examples of
genuine popular syntax 'que pour ceux qui a de quoi'

Generally, nevertheless, Benjamin Crémieux's judgement on Richepin
is a fair one

S'il est permis de se demander si le temps respectera
l'oeuvre de ce vrai poète, c'est que la forme de son
oeuvre est loin d'avoir l'originalité du contenu.
Jean Richepin est resté toute sa vie un disciple de
Hugo et de Banville, il n'a pas trouvé une forme
personnelle

(52)

(50) La Chanson des Gueux (1902 edition), p. 85.

(51) Ibid, p 237.

(52) Quoted in H. Sutton, The Life and Work of Jean Richepin,
p 109 .

Besides humour, irony and popular song-forms Cros's poetic language is notable for the introduction of the ~~rhythm~~ and flavour of genuine everyday middle-class speech. In this respect his work is more advanced than that of Richepin's 'poésie populacière'. In 'Lendemain' 'réciproque' is the perfect functional, educated adjective in an evocation of the end of love.

Puis les baisers perdent leurs charmes,
Ayant duré quelques saisons
Les réciproques trahisons
Font qu'on se quitte un jour, sans larmes

He continues the Baudelairean practice of introducing the most ordinary aspects of everyday reality into his comparisons.

Comme un appartement vide aux sales plafonds,
Aux murs nus, écorchés par les clous des peintures,
D'où sont démanagés les meubles, les teintures,
Où le sol est jonché de paille et de chiffons.
Ainsi, dévasté par les destins, noirs bouffons,
Mon esprit s'est rempli d'échos, de clartés dures. .

(53)

His work manifests a basic tension between nostalgia and idealism on the one hand and a practical concern for the future and an ^{in modern life} ~~absorption~~ on the other. In order to epitomise the latter he selects images of a crass ugliness.

Monde jaloux de ma vie embaumée,
Enfer d'engrais, de charbon et de cuir,
Je hais tes biens promis, sale fumée .

(54)

Occasionally Méral succeeded in introducing the rhythm of everyday speech into his verse, the result is considerably more authentic than many similar attempts by other poets of the period

(53) Oeuvres Complètes, p 135.

(54) Ibid , p 115 .

and may be counted as another example of the move away from the specifically 'poetic' register

La robe à guimpe avec les manches à gigot'
C'est bien cela L'on est mise comme un fagot,
Gauche, tout engoncée, on est 'la Demoiselle
A marier' Monsieur Scribe dîne chez elle
On porte les cheveux en bandeaux sur la tempe,
En coques au sommet On a l'air d'une estampe
De Tony Johannot ou de Devéria.
Ma tante était ainsi quand on la maria
On a le sein caché sous la robe montante
Mais la bottine puce est toujours irritante,
Même la jupe courte est un raffinement.

(55)

His life-long friend Valade was perhaps less successful in giving a more supple and spontaneous feel to the rhythm and word-order of this poetry but he did enliven his poetry with images directes drawn from everyday life

Car des plateaux de limonade,
Stimulant le zèle amorti,
Font éclater la sérénade
En un frénétique tutti

(56)

As well as the evocation of the material and social reality of his times echoes of ordinary conversational speech contribute towards the modernity of Bourget's Edel .

Un, deux, trois Oui' c'est bien trois heures. .Dans la nuit,
Qu'il est plaintif, ce cri de l'heure qui s'enfuit'
J'ai, pour mieux l'écouter mourir, posé ma plume,
Et voici qu'à ce son fatidique une brume
De rêves douloureux m'enveloppe, et j'entends
Passer sur moi le souffle affroyable du temps

(57)

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- (55) Poèmes de Paris, p 30.
(56) Poésies posthumes, p 23.
(57) Edel, Poésies, II p 1.

Hier au soir, première au Théâtre-Français,
 Par un pressentiment singulier, je pensais
 Y retrouver Edel, que je n'ai rencontrée
 Rien que deux fois, depuis la première soirée. (58)
 Dès huit heures, j'étais debout à mon flautoil.

Plus de travail L'Amour est un haschisch trop fort,
 Mais si délicieux pour l'âme qu'il endort!
 L'autre jour, en prenant ma plume pour écrire
 Je ne sais quel billet, je me suis mis à rire,
 Mon encre avait gélé dans l'encrier fermé
 - Hier, concert, demain, dîner, bal costume,
 Promenades au bois, théâtre, - je me jette,
 Comme toujours, à corps perdu, de fête en fête (59)

Here probably the most striking result of following the phrasing of everyday speech is enjambement between lines 4 and 5, and 5 and 6, in the first example, between lines 2 and 3 and 3 and 4 in the second example, between lines 3 and 4 in the third example The enjambement in the last two examples is directly involved with a locution from everyday educated speech

. je pensais y retrouver Edel que je n'ai rencontrée rien que deux fois .

It is in such moments that Bourget comes closest to the 'langue inventée' which he felt was necessary for modernist poetry

Even as early as Les Tristesses there are indications of a more intimate and familiar poetic language in Rodenbach's work than in *that of* most of his predecessors These slight innovations may not have been without importnace in the evolution of French poetry in the 1880s A couple of examples will suffice to illustrate this change of tone .

Nous allions deux à deux le long des terrains vagues
 Où des enfants criaient en enfilant des bagues
 Sur les chevaux de bois qu'un vieux cheval poussait

(58) Ibid , p 19.

(59) Ibid , p 26.

Dans tous les cabarets la foule se pressait,
 Et, sous le jaune éclat d'un vieux quinquet qui brille,
 L'orgue de Barbarie au quadrille.
 C'était le soir: le ciel fleurissait à son tour,
 Et la nuit descendait plus belle que le jour!....

(60)

Si vous trouvez trop de blondins,
 C'est ainsi que je les appelle,
 Trahissant par des cris badins
 Leur adorable ribambelle.....

(61)

The first example is of a sotto voce, almost suburban realism reminiscent of Sainte-Beuve and devoid of rhetorical posture. The second goes further in its use of the familiar term 'ribambelle', a word which was to enter Laforgue's poetic vocabulary.

The poetic output of Laurent Tailhade commenced with the pre-Symbolist mystery and decadent penchant of liturgical decor of Le Jardin des Rêves of 1880. Soon the poet began to alternate this production with the vividly satirical poems collected in Au pays du mufle of 1891 and definitively in Poèmes aristophanesques of 1904. The dating of Tailhade's satirical poems is extremely difficult, though it is known that many were written long before their publication in volume-form. His satire is based closely on classical models and his language in many respects is conventional but the poetry nevertheless has a very modernistic tone as the following lines from 'Musée du Louvre' amply demonstrate, again the technique is of mundane images directes and ironic contrast :

Cinq heures. Les gardiens en manteaux verts, joyeux
 De s'évader enfin d'au-milieu des chefs-d'oeuvre,
 Expulsent les bourgeois qu'ahurit la manoeuvre,
 Et les rouges Yankees écarquillant leurs yeux.

(60) Les Tristesses, p. 30.
 (61) Ibid., p. 75.

Ces voyageurs ont des waterproofs d'un gris jaune
Avec des brodequins en allés en bateau,
Devant Rubens, devant Rembrandt, devant Watteau,
Ils s'arrêtent, pour consulter le Guide Joanne.

(62)

Yet Tailhade kept his satirical verse and his lyric poetry -
collected in the Poèmes élégiaques - completely segregated. It was
as though he never overcame a Parnassian prejudice against the treatment
of contemporary reality in serious poetry.

André Gill's poetry, much of which had been recited in the
cénacles, was published in 1880 under the title La Muse à Bibi.
Mention has already been made of his crucial role in the formation
of the whole bohemian movement in the 1870s and 1880s and of the importance
of his work as a link between developments in painting and in poetry
as manifested in a poem like 'Impressionnisme', of his equation of
such allegedly 'Symbolist' preoccupations as synaesthesia with
impressionism and his evaluation of Verlaine, which he shared with
Ajalbert, as an impressionist poet.

The acceptance of a far greater variety of language into poetry is
the starting-point of Gill's work. It is central to his interest in
modernistic and impressionistic subjects. Gill himself, in the piece
which prefaces his collection, makes particular mention of the role
of everyday speech :

Muse, il faut être de son temps
Ou n'être pas. La poésie
Des vieux pontifes est moisie,
Les vers pompeux sont embêtants...
Pour qu'on entende tes harangues,
Braille-les dans l'argot du jour,
Pourquoi pas? Tu dois tour à tour
Débagouler toutes les langues...

(62) Poèmes aristophanesques .

The specific rejection of pomposity and the plea for a wider range of poetic registers made Gill very much part of the mainstream of poetic evolution in France after 1870, on the level of intention, if not always of practice, it is possible to draw parallels between his work and that of major poets such as Rimbaud and Verlaine. A wide range of contemporary subjects is treated in the three sections of the collection in a language appropriate to the milieux evoked : Ouverture, Intermède, Finale Panaché. In 'Carrefour' a saltimbanque attracts a varied crowd, in 'Fillettes' the urchin girls of Paris are described, in 'La Crèmerie' breakfast in a working class district is described; 'Croquis' is a more ambitious panorama evoking the plight of a hungry old man who passes by a 'bal de barrière', through a happy crowd and past chic cafés filled with fashionably dressed well-to-do customers, past the grand hotels and railway stations where he picks up cigar butts and other debris left by the rich. The social message of the collection is particularly obvious in this poem. The combination of sexual licence, humour, praise of alcohol and attacks on social injustice together with departures from poetic convention is typical of the anti-establishment poetry of the period. Other subjects include the daily life of a laundrywoman in 'Pour la blanchisseuse', a carnival and ball in 'La Casque', a circus in 'A toi, vicomte', apprentice prostitutes in 'Jeunes Gueuses', the world of high finance, banking and master criminals in 'Paternelle', the pleasures of a day off work in 'Dimanches de Pauvres' and a number of landscapes such as 'La Neige' and 'Le Couchant'.

Something of the poet's political affiliations is to be discerned in 'Idylle' which recounts in atmospheric terms time spent with a lover in a garden which was to be the scene of violence and bloodshed during

the repression of the Commune. The happy times remembered by the poet actually took place under the Commune, political and personal harmony are placed side by side. The tone of nostalgic simplicity would seem to owe a good deal to Verlaine :

Ô cher temps envolé!.. Quand la grille fermée,
 Nous allions tous les deux dans l'ombre parfumée
 Seuls maîtres des lilas, le doux silence....Rien
 Que ma voix qui fredonne au menuet ancien,
 Et votre jeune rire égréné sous les arbres....

(63)

The closeness of the subject-matter of Gill's poetry to that of the Impressionist painters is very marked in poems such as 'Le Moulin de la Galette', (though his concentration on less pleasant aspects is an indication that the spirit of Decadence is already present in the 1870s):

Tel, au printemps, un vieux miché
 Parade en galante toilette,
 Tel, en haut des Buttes perché,
 Rit le Moulin de la Galette.

De fanfreluches de haut goût
 Pavoisant son aile inutile
 Au genre de graines qu'il moud,
 Il domine l'énorme ville,

Et par mille sentiers rians
 Regarde en ribambelles folles,
 Accourir ses jeunes clients
 De Montmartre et Batignolles.

C'est le rendez-vous des volants,
 En tulle rose, des casquettes
 A six étages, des bas blancs,
 L'assaut des guenilles coquettes.

Un orchestre d'estropiés
 Donne le branle à cette foule:
 On saute, on s'écrase les pieds,
 On chante, on se hurle, on se soûle,

(63) op. cit., pp. 40-41.

On se pince le gras des reins,
 Les rondes, tournoyant fougueuses,
 A perdre haleine vont leurs trains..
 C'est le beau temps des jeunes gueuses!

Après la danse, on trouve, autour
 Du bal, un choix d'escarpolettes
 Pour secher la sueur d'amour,
 On engloutit force galettes...

Et quand un père désolé
 Vous allonge une énorme gifle
 Au retour, on a rigolé
 C'est le principal, - et l'on siffle...

(64)

The humour, the irony, the play on words combined with the use of popular and familiar speech in this poem suggests parallels with the work of Corbière and Laforgue. Gill did not, however, go as far as those poets in the introduction of speech rhythms into poetry, (nor as far as Verlaine in evoking confused mental and sensual experiences). Nevertheless his poetry remains of some interest as one of the best surviving examples of the work produced in the same milieu in which Verlaine and Rimbaud moved in Paris and of the later cénacles and is indicative of the widespread new attitude to poetic language inseparable from an interest in new subjects.

* * * * *

This attitude is of great importance in the work of the three major poets to be discussed now and in the work of Laforgue. A realisation that it exists, assists considerably in an appreciation of the originality of their poetry.

(64) Ibid., pp. 48-50.

With Verlaine

As one might expect contemporary speech is treated in a manner not unlike that of Rimbaud as it will shortly be described. As far as vocabulary is concerned, one can say that generally Verlaine is less adventurous than the younger poet and certainly less 'excremental', though this element is not entirely missing from his work. He was quick to make use of vocabulary drawn from popular or familiar speech and occasionally, almost as a 'tour de force' one finds a demonstration of how far he has gone along the path of popularisation of poetic vocabulary :

J'CRACH' pas sur Paris, c'est rien chouett'!
 Mais comm' j'ai une dm' de poèt',
 Tous les dimanch's j'sors de ma boît'
 Et j'm'en vais avec ma compagne
 A la campagne.

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.

Ell' met sa rob' de la Rein' Blanch'
 Moi, J'emport' ma pip' la plus blanch',
 J'ai pas d'chemis', mais j'mets des manch's,
 Car il faut bien qu'l'éléganc' règne
 A la campagne.

Nous arrivons, vrai, c'est très batt'!
 Des écaill's d'huitr's comm' chez Baratt'
 Et des cocott's qui vont à patt's,
 Car on est tout comme chez soi
 A la camp - quai!

Mais j'vois qu'ma machin' vous em..terre,
 Fait's-moi signe et j'vous obtempère,
 D'autant qu'j'demand' pas mieux qu' de m'taire...
 Faut pas se gêner plus qu'au baigne,
 A la campagne.

(65)

Vous souvient-il, cocodette un peu mûre
 Qui gobergez vos flemmes de bourgeoise,
 De temps joli quand, gamine un peu sure
 Tu m'écoutais, blanc-bec fou qui dégoise?

Gardates-vous fidèle la mémoire
 Ô grasse en des jerseys de poulx-de-soie,
 De t'être plu jadis à mon grimoire,
 Cour par écrit, postale petite oye?

(66)

The whole group of poems entitled Autres Vieux Coppées (67) is in a popular style which Coppée himself could probably not have emulated, - at least his own work contains nothing as near to authentic popular speech even though these are mere party-pieces. Sometimes they contain moments of genuine humour which can still be appreciated.

Ah merde alors, j'aim' mieux l'café d'Suèd' que la Suède
 Elle'mêm' oùsque c'est la mêm' chose - un peu plus raide
 Peut-êt' qu'en hiver dans c'te Franc' (que j'chie un peu
 Mon N'veu, d'ailleurs)....

(68)

Such poems are, however, little more than elaborate jokes. Of much more significance and interest is the general impact of contemporary everyday speech upon Verlaine's poetry.

Verlaine's poetic vocabulary is open to modern and everyday words which, like those utilised by other poets examined in this chapter, would previously have been excluded from serious poetry - 'foux col', 'pantoufles', 'coryza' (69), 'harmonicas', 'pollas', 'cargaisons de bois, de houille' (70), 'sorbets et confitures' (71), 'briquet', 'culotte' (72), 'photographe' (73), 'poteaux du télégraphe' (74), 'du thé fumant' (75), 'omnibus', 'club', 'brûle-gueule', 'bitume' (76), 'piston' (77).

(66) Ibid., p. 484.

(67) Ibid., p. 298-301.

(68) Ibid., p. 300.

(69) Ibid., p. 77.

(70) Ibid., p. 85.

(71) Ibid., p. 114.

(72) Ibid., p. 114.

(73) Ibid., p. 126.

(74) Ibid., p. 146.

(75) Ibid., p. 151.

(76) Ibid., p. 152.

(77) Ibid., p. 200.

On occasion such lexical items can enliven what would otherwise be
a hackneyed subject

Ou bien, humble héros, martyr de la consigne,
Au fond d'une tranchée obscure ou d'un talus
Rouler, le crâne ouvert par quelque éclat d'obus

(78)

Verlaine freely incorporates familiar words and expressions
into his poetry 'rabougris' (79), 'l'autre aussi faisait la
sucrée' (80), 'Il faut pas de milieu' - l'adorer à genoux ' (81),
'filou' (82), 'ribambelle' (83)

His images are sometimes drawn from the ~~sonic~~ world of 'crass'
reality

Ses meurtriers ongles d'agate,
Coupants et clairs comme un rasoir

(84)

Ces cantiques d'eau tiède où se baigne le coeur,
Tout en amidonnant ces guimpes amoureuses

(85)

Baiser'
Vif accompagnement sur le clavier des dents
Des doux refrains qu'Amour chante

(86)

The most important impact of all is that which affects phrasing
and rhythm Reflections of contemporary speech of this kind are
part and parcel of Verlaine's effort to create a more flexible
poetic language in which he could formulate as expressively,

(78) Ibid , p 21.

(79) Ibid , p 67.

(80) Ibid , p 74.

(81) Ibid , p 77.

(82) Ibid , p 287.

(83) Ibid , p 385.

(84) Ibid , p 74.

(85) Ibid , p 75.

(86) Ibid , p 82.

spontaneously and authentically as possible, his feelings and thought patterns. In this respect three things are of particular note the use of 'Ça', 'On' and 'Qu'est-ce que', their special importance is that they are not reserved for obviously 'familiar' or 'popular' poetry :

Ah! vraiment c'est triste, ah! vraiment ça finit trop mal

(87)

hier, on parlait de choses et d'autres,
Et mes yeux allaient recherchant les vôtres,

(88)

Qu'est-ce que c'est que ce berceau soudain
Qui lentement derlote mon pauvre être?

(89)

In fact there is a technique to be found in Verlaine which does not seem to have been noted by previous critics and which consists of lending poetry which is in many respects decidedly non-familiar something of the spontaneity of everyday speech by partially adopting a rhythm akin to that of everyday speech in a poem that is otherwise relatively rhetorical in expression. Sometimes this involves the inclusion of one or more entire lines having such a rhythm, on other occasions it may be a question of an element of familiar speech affecting the rhythm or feel of part of a single line that is in other respects quite removed from popular speech. As an example of the first type mentioned above (the inclusion of whole lines) we may take La Bonne Chanson, X, which opens as follows

(87) 'sonnet boiteux' (Jadis et Naguère) here a spontaneous expression of anger.

(88) La Bonne Chanson, XIII

(89) Ariettes ou liées, V, (Romances sans paroles)- stresses the poet's bewilderment.

Quinze longs jours encore et plus de six semaines
Déjà

This opening creates an atmosphere of immediacy and sincerity derived very largely from the familiar tone employed and which is sufficiently convincing to retain the reader's sympathy even though the rest of the poem returns to the traditional modes of poetic rhetoric typified by the opening line of the second stanza .

Oh' l'absence' le moins clément de tous les maux'

Examples in fact abound even in lines which are juxtaposed ,

Non, certes' joyeux, mais très calme en somme
Bien que je déplore en ces mois néfastes . .

('Birds in the night' . Romances sans Paroles)

Of the second type the example using 'Qu'est-ce que c'est que ' (from Ariettes oubliées, V) quoted above will suffice Here there is, in fact, a marked contrast between the very heavy popular locution that opens the line and the rather unexpected and unusual 'berceau soudain' However, once again, the force of the familiar rhythm carries the reader who shares the poet's bewilderment An awareness of this provides another insight into how Verlaine arrives at the immediacy which so many readers find in some of his best poetry.

The adoption of the rhythms and phrasing of everyday speech, whether or not it involves the precise technique just discussed, is one of the most characteristic features of Verlaine's poetry It is evident in the intimate, conversational style of even the early poems ,

Ayant poussé la porte étroite qui chancelle,
Je me suis promené dans le petit jardin
Rien n'a changé J'ai tout revu

(90)

It is this conversational tone mingled with language more readily associated with poetic 'propriety' which accounts for the freshness of a poem like 'Mon Rêve familier'

Je fais souvent le rêve étrange et pénétrant
D'une femme inconnue, et que j'aime, et qui m'aime
Et qui n'est, chaque fois, ni tout à fait la même
Ni tout à fait une autre, et m'aime et me comprend

Car elle me comprend, et mon cœur transparent
Pour elle seule, hélas, cesse d'être un problème
Pour elle seule, et les moiteurs de mon front blême,
Elle seule les sait rafraîchir, en pleurant

The main mechanism behind the success of these lines is the pattern of repetition which reproduces both the poet's thought-patterns and an aspect of ordinary speech (The matter-of-fact 'cesse d'être un problème' is also instrumental in giving the poem a familiar 'feel') This apparent carelessness actually contributes to the rhythmic fascination and harmony of the poem

Other examples abound, both of a simple, apparently spontaneous style

C'est plutôt le sabbat du second Faust que l'autre

(91)

Tout en chantant sur le mode mineur
L'amour vainqueur et la vie opportune
Ils n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur

(92)

Pierrot, qui n'a rien d'un Clitandre

(93)

Je ne me suis pas consolé
Bien que mon cœur s'en soit allé

(94)

(91) Ibid , p 71.

(92) Ibid , p 107.

(93) Ibid , p 107.

(94) Ibid , p 195.

Ce qu'il faut à tout prix qui règne et qui demeure,
Ce n'est pas la méchanceté, c'est la bonté . . .

(95)

Je ne vois plus rien,
Je perds ma mémoire... .

(96)

Ce fut une banale et terrible aventure
Elle quitta de nuit l'hôtel Une voiture
Attendait. Lui dedans Ils restèrent six mois
Sans que personne sût où ni comment . . .

(97)

and of lines which are almost entirely conversational and reproduce
the patterns of the spoken language including interjections, logically
unnecessary repetitions, expletives and dubious syntax

Le Printemps avait bien un peu
Contribué, si ma mémoire
Est bonne, à brouiller notre jeu

(98)

Tout se comporte-t-il là-bas comme il te plaît,
Ta perruche, ton chat, ton chien?

(99)

Il faut, voyez-vous, nous pardonner les choses..

(100)

Vous ne m'aimiez pas, l'affaire est conclue .

(101)

Qu'en dis-tu, voyageur, des pays et des gares?

(102)

Vous voilà, vous voilà, pauvres bonnes pensées'

(103)

-
- (95) Ibid , p 245.
(96) Ibid., p 279.
(97) Ibid , p 393.
(98) Ibid , p 112.
(99) Ibid , p 117.
(100) Ibid , p 193.
(101) Ibid , p 202.
(102) Ibid , p 243.
(103) Ibid , p 283 .

Il est l'entrain, il est tout, quoi'

(104)

Sinon pervers et scélérats
Tout à fait, un peu d'innocence
En moins, pour toi sauver, du moins,
Quelque ombre de décence

(105)

Je le crois bien qu'ils l'ont la pleine plénitude'

(106)

Ça, c'est un richard qu'on emporte
A l'établissement thermal

(107)

Zut, merde, nom de Dieu' Ça me rend tout ronchon
D'fair' quand j'croysais tout fait, cor'un'blagu' pour Ponchon

(108)

Rompons! Ce que j'ai dit je ne le reprends pas.

(109)

Je n'ai pas de chance en femmes .

(110)

A mon âge, je sais, il faut rester tranquille..

(111)

* * * * *

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- (104) Ibid , p 429.
(105) Ibid , p 511.
(106) Ibid , p 522.
(107) Ibid., p 544.
(108) Ibid , p 545.
(109) Ibid , p 682.
(110) Ibid., p 726.
(111) Ibid , p 787.

One fact which emerges clearly from a study of the place of contemporary speech in Verlaine's poetry is that there is very little he undertook in this regard after he had met Rimbaud that he had not already begun to attempt in the earlier poems.

Some of Rimbaud's verse poetry, does, of course, owe a great deal to both the Romantic and Parnassian traditions but his own innovations in the 'popularisation' of language are a sign of an independence and original spirit and are evident even in an early poem like 'Le Forgeron'. The momentum and style of the poem are dominated by the grandiose rhetoric of an historical or epic poem. There is little doubt as to who was the major inspiration of this early work. The opening lines could hardly be more Hugoesque .

Le bras sur un marteau gigantesque, effrayant
D'ivresse et de grandeur, le front vaste, riant
Comme un clairon d'airain, avec toute sa bouche,
.....

Yet as the poem develops we realise that the language is vulgar in a way that Hugo, despite his interest in local colour, would hardly have considered acceptable in poetry :

Nous dorerons ton Louvre en donnant nos gros sous!
Et tu te souleras, tu feras belle fête,
- Et ces Messieurs riront, les reins sur notre tête!
Non. Ces saletés-là datent de nos papas!
Oh! Le peuple n'est plus une putain. **Trois** pas
Et, tous, nous avons mis ta Bastille en poussière.
Cette bête suait du sang à chaque pierre
Et c'était dégoûtant, la Bastille debout
Avec ses murs lépreux qui nous racontaient tout....

Significantly the use of popularisms is not limited to the speech of the blacksmith, examples, admittedly less extreme, are to be found in the words of the narrator :

Et prenant ce gros-là dans son regard farouche

and

Bien que le roi ventru suât, le Forgeron
Terrible lui jeta le bonnet rouge au front (112)

Rimbaud's use of everyday speech is all the more interesting because it is the product of an open-minded attitude to this register of language and is not to be attributed to one simple motivation (e.g. the desire to shock). This aspect of his work has tended to be overlooked because of the presence of 'vulgarity' of another kind. Rimbaud has more than once been dubbed the poet of excrement - and not without justification. We do not intend to examine this area of his vocabulary in any detail since in itself it was not particularly original - it was part of the révolté's stock in trade. There is no doubt, however, that Rimbaud's 'excremental' vocabulary is linked with the 'vulgarisms' of a more general nature by a hatred for the establishment in both literature and society. Yet the very mildness of much of this vocabulary means that it cannot be accounted for, entirely, by the desire to write anti-bourgeois invective. It is surely not unreasonable to suppose that a good deal of this vulgarisation of language in poetry results from an appreciation of the aesthetic value of modernism and from an extension of Baudelaire's 'prosaisme'. Needless to say the introduction of vocabulary previously held to be taboo makes possible ironic contrasts of a powerful kind :

Elle passa sa nuit sainte dans les latrines. (113)

(112) The italics throughout the quotations from 'Le Forgeron' are our own.

(113) 'Les Premières Communions'.

Often the motive for introducing everyday speech seems simply to be the desire for spontaneity, for a poetic mode that would adequately express feelings about the experiences of everyday life. Thus we find such varied words and phrases as 'chope' (114), 'bock' (115), 'limonade' (116), 'tartines de beurre' (117), 'jambon à moitié froide' (118), 'breloques à chiffres' (119), 'clubs d'épiciers retraités' (120), 'harmonica' (121), 'vingt gueules gueulant' (122), 'gamines' (123), 'l'homme en ribote' (124), 'lupanars' (125), 'marmots' (126), 'macache' (127). The Romantic poet, or for that matter almost any French poet, in the case of the first five examples, would normally have chosen a general word for food or drink perhaps qualifying it with an adjective suggesting that the repast was homely, wholesome or simple, but Rimbaud realises that a detailed reference is more evocative. Similarly, though here we have a departure from traditional hyperbole rather than a detailed reference, the poet describes the serving girl in Au Cabaret-Vert as 'la fille aux tétons énormes'. Even in Baudelaire we might have expected an adjective like 'provocants'. Rimbaud chooses the scarcely respectful noun and adjective and succeeds in conveying a remarkable feeling of sincerity and 'joie de vivre'.

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- (114) 'Oraison du soir' and elsewhere.
 - (115) 'Roman'.
 - (116) Idem.
 - (117) 'Au Cabaret-Vert'.
 - (118) Idem.
 - (119) 'A la Musique'.
 - (120) Idem.
 - (121) 'Les Chercheuses de Poux'.
 - (122) 'Les Pauvres à l'Eglise'.
 - (123) Idem.
 - (124) Idem.
 - (125) 'L'Orgie parisienne...'.
 - (126) 'Les Premières Communions'.
 - (127) 'Les Douaniers'.

Mundane remarks and attention to everyday detail create a particular atmosphere and aesthetic, usually ironic, distance

Tous les cent ans on rend ces granges respectables
Par un badigeon d'eau bleue et de lait caillé...

(128)

..... pommadé sur un guéridon d'acajou,
Il lisait une Bible à la tranche vert-chou

(129)

Sometimes this use of precise everyday speech highlights a moving contrast

Quand pour quelque médianoche,
Façonné comme une brioche
On sort le pain

(130)

This quality of creating atmosphere is true even of the excremental vocabulary. Thus we read

Qu'attiédit puamment leur souffle....

(131)

and

Tels que les excréments chauds d'un vieux colombier,
.....

(132)

Even

Je pisse vers les cieux bruns, très haut et très loin

(133)

- (128) 'Les Premières Communions'.
- (129) 'Les Poètes de Sept Ans'.
- (130) 'Les Effarés'.
- (131) 'Les Pauvres à l'Eglise'.
- (132) 'Oraison du Soir'.
- (133) Idem.

has a certain pantheistic charm about it, as does 'une vache fientera, fière' (134), expressing the poet's awareness of being at one with nature. On the other hand much of 'Les Remembrances du vieillard idiot' seems to be intended to do nothing other than shock the bourgeois - this is particularly true of the vignette describing the master urinating.

Occasionally it is not so much in order to create atmosphere but more to make use of a single vivid image that Rimbaud has recourse to everyday speech

..... les crachats rouges de la mitraille

(135)

and

Des lichens de soleil et des morves d'azur.

(136)

Some of Rimbaud's images are of a Laforguan banality

Mes étoiles au ciel avaient un doux frou-frou.....

(137)

In the above example the everyday image is part of the reduction of grand nature to the level of the artifact and, furthermore, one which entails synesthesia! Like Laforgue, Rimbaud follows the post-Baudelairean fashion for the désacralisation of solar imagery

....la mélancolique lessive d'or du couchant.....

(138)

(134) Les Reparties de Nina.

(135) 'Le Mal'.

(136) 'Le Bateau ivre'.

(137) 'Ma Bohème'.

(138) 'Enfance', IV (Illuminations).

Occasionally his images are of a crude acuité which surpasses even that of Laforgue and Corbière.

Oh! Le moucheron enivré à la pissotière
de l'auberge, amoureux de la Courrache, et que
dissout un rayon!

(139)

Within this one sentence much irony is derived from the contrast between the 'pissotière' and the 'rayon' and between the 'anti-poetic' subject-matter and the poetic inversion.

The popularisation of language in Rimbaud's poetry is not, of course, limited to vocabulary and images. The poet was, more than most, responsible of the introduction of the rhythms of everyday speech into poetry and the development of a colloquial authenticity. Examples of this innovation are numerous and are again to be found even in an early poem like 'Le Forgeron' where the speech of the blacksmith seems more authentic than in poems by Hugo on which it was no doubt modelled .

Or tu sais bien, Monsieur, nous chantions tra la la...

On nous faisait flamber nos taudis dans la nuit,
Nos petits y faisaient un gâteau fort bien cuit....
Oh! je ne me plains. Je te dis mes bêtises....

The second example is notable for its thoroughly authentic combination of black humour, everyday vocabulary ('bêtises') and the rhythms of ordinary speech. In 'Les Reparties de Nina' odd examples are to be found in the body of the text e.g.

Dix-sept ans! Tu seras heureuse!

(139) 'Délires' II (Une Saison en Enfer).

and

Et ça sentira le laitage

but the most striking example occurs at the end of the poem where
Nina's prosaic

Et mon bureau?

crushes the young poet with romantic pastoral visions. For the
most part, however, the motive for using popular speech seems
simply to be the desire for spontaneity and directness of expression
which nevertheless implies a challenge to poetic convention:

Ils sont blottis, pas un ne bouge.....

(140)

On n'est pas sérieux, quand on a dix-sept ans...

(141)

L'Hiver, nous irons dans un petit wagon rose

Avec des coussins bleus.

Nous serons bien.....

(142)

Je ramassais un plat de je ne sais quel met
Belge, et je m'épatais dans mon immense chaise

(143)

Oh! là là! que d'amours splendides j'ai rêvées!

(144)

Vraiment, c'est bête, ces églises des villages.....

(145)

Zut alors, si le soleil quitte ces bords!

(146)

- (140) 'Les Effarés'.
 (141) 'Roman'.
 (142) 'Rêvé pour l'hiver'.
 (143) 'La Maline'.
 (144) 'Ma Bohème'.
 (145) 'Les Premières Communions'.
 (146) 'Michel et Christine'.

Tout plein, c'est un fouillis de vieilles vieilleries...

(147)

Veux-tu finir?

.... Oh! c'est encor mieux!....

Monsieur, j'ai deux mots à te dire...

(148)

Par de ça, les ancien ! Depo ez les ballots!

(149)

Mais, vrai, j'ai trop pleuré! les Aubes sont navrantes ..

(150)

Celle-là, ce n'est pas un baiser qui l'épure!

(151)

Je me suis dit : laisse,

Et qu'on ne te voie...

(152)

Drôle de ménage!

(153)

Et ça me fait pleurer sur mon ventre, ô stupide,
Et bien rire, l'espoir fameux de ton pardon!
Je suis maudit, tu sais! je suis souf, fou, livide,
Ce que tu veux! Mais va te coucher, voyons donc,
Juste! Je ne veux rien à ton cerveau torpide...
Ô Justes, nous chierons dans vos ventres de grès!

(154)

Sometimes the flavour of everyday speech is combined with an amusing

jeu de mots and a cultural allusion :

Je suis réellement d'outre-tombe, et pas de
commotions.

(155)

-
- (147) 'Le Buffet'.
 (148) 'Première Soirée'.
 (149) 'Les Douaniers'.
 (150) 'Le Bateau ivre'.
 (151) 'Au Cabaret-Vert', the verb 'épure' was Ardennais dialect.
 (152) 'Chanson de la plus haute tour'.
 (153) 'Délires' I (Une Saison en Enfer).
 (154) 'L'Homme Juste'.
 (155) 'Vies' III (Illuminations).

Only a relatively small number of Rimbaud's poems are consistently in the colloquial style. Mostly it is just one stylistic element within a particular poem. This can result in curious amalgams as in the following example whose abstract rhetoric is blended with familiarity.

- Ma camarade, mendicante, enfant monstre! Comme ça t'est égal, ces malheureuses et ces manoeuvres, et mes embarras. Attache-toi à nous avec ta voix impossible, ta voix! unique flatteur de ce vil désespoir.

(156)

'Mes Petites Amoureuses' is a remarkable pot-pourri of the

different aspects of the modernistic poetic language. The use of technical terms such as 'hydrolac lacrymal' and 'implantes'

has already been noted. In addition the poet employs

vocabulary items that are utterly mundane and sometimes specifically

modern: 'des oeufs à la coque' 'Vos osoutchoucs', 'ta bandoline';

familiar vocabulary. 'J'ai dégueule', 'Plaquez de fouffes

(Ardenne dialect)', 'ratée', 'Vous creverez', locutions having

the construction and rhythm of ordinary speech:

Descends ici, que je fouette....

Hop donc! voyez-moi ballerine-

Pour un moment!..

and a chorus which has baffled the commentators:

Blancs de lune particulières

Aux pialats ronds,

Entrechoquez vos genouillères

Mes laiderons!

(156) 'Phrases', (Illuminations).

Antoine Adam and others seem unaware that 'lunes' was, and still is, current French slang for 'culs' and hence that 'pielats' is almost certainly a slang word for buttocks (and not a neologism by Rimbaud) meaning that part of the anatomy which feels the cold ('se pieler') because it is not accustomed to being bare. This is an image of gartered (another mundane detail) thighs (or, from the rear, of rounded buttocks) slapping together not of knocking knees.....

* * * * *

This whole aspect of Rimbaud's poetic practice, the impact of modern and everyday speech, has certainly been somewhat neglected because of the attention paid to the more 'impenetrable' style of his difficult poetry, particularly in Illuminations ; however directness, though not necessarily simplicity, of expression is probably the common intention of both styles.

* * * * *

Corbière was more daring than Baudelaire and certainly more than Hugo in that process, already begun in the first half of the century, of extending the scope of French poetic vocabulary and challenging the notion of propriety. He, much more than the author of Les Contemplations, had the right to say 'J'ai mis un bonnet rouge au vieux dictionnaire' (157). In this regard he would appear to have anticipated Rimbaud (for much of Gens de mer and Arrer may have been written as early as 1865) and the minor 'realist' poet after 1870.

He did not hesitate to introduce vocabulary of a startling modernity or ordinariness :

(157) Hugo, Les Contemplations I, vii. (Réponse à un Acte d'Accusation).

Drôle en ma sauce jaune
De chic et de mépris
Que les bottes vernies
Pleuvent du paradis
Avec des parapluies...

(158)

Sur le railway du Pindé est la ligne, la forme;
Aux fils du télégraphe. - on en suit quatre, ou long;
A chaque pieu, la rime - exemple : chloroforme.
- Chaque vers est un fil, et la rime un jalor.
- Télégramme sacré - 20 mots. - Vite à mon aide....

(159)

Déchiffre au clavier cet accord de ma lyre;
Télégraphe à musique, il pourra le traduire...

(160)

TROP PLEIN de l'existence, et Torchon neuf qu'on passe
Au CATÉ DE LA VIE, à chaque assiette grasse!

(161)

.....le douanier
.....ils sont la déclament sur ma malle
Lasciate speranza, mes cigares dedans!
- O Mignon!...ils ont tut éclos mon linge sale
Pour le passer au bleu...

(162)

..... Capitaine Bambine
De remorqueur havana à l'Amable Proserpine.....

(163)

Il se mit devant son armoire à glace
(Chez le photographe il n'eut pas fait mieux)....

(164)

De l'absinthe! et ta lèvre écume.....

(165)

-
- (158) O.C., p. 714.
(159) Ibid., p. 718.
(160) Ibid., p. 765.
(161) Ibid., p. 771.
(162) Ibid., p. 781.
(163) Ibid., p. 833.
(164) Ibid., p. 885.
(165) Ibid., p. 709.

Such a list could be greatly extended. The poet showed the same readiness to introduce familiar and popular vocabulary, including the Parisian langue verte and sailor's slang, as he did the vocabulary of everyday modern life. Christian Angelet saw the invasion of the literary language by the spoken language, already begun rather timidly by Bauelaire and Gautier, as reaching 'une sorte d'apogée' with Les Amours Jaunes.

(166) Corbière probably had three motives for the massive injection of the spoken language into his poetry; a desire for realism when he was evoking popular characters; the quest for an effective substitute for the general term, so that the oral quality and authenticity of a word or phrase would lead to greater expressiveness; finally, he saw in this technique another method of 'dépoétisation'. One is faced with considerable problems in determining both the authenticity and degree of 'grass-ness' of many of the popular and slang terms employed by Corbière. To what extent are his popularisms different from those strange hybrids - half-authentic, half-literary - found in the work of the poètes naturalistes? All the available evidence based on contemporary dictionaries of slang suggests that Corbière's popularisms were indeed used, quite normally, in the milieux which he describes. A comprehensive list of such terms would be very long indeed, Angelet has a selection whose authenticity is beyond dispute together with their modern 'standard' French equivalent or definition

-a:

(166) C. Angelet, La Poétique de Tristan Corbière, p.33.

rafalé qui a subi des revers de fortune
 s'affaler . se laisser tomber
 bosse partie de plaisir ou de débauche
 grippe-jésus . gendarme
 maturin . matelot

(the above are maritime slang).

cayenne cimetière
 macaron : huissier
 persil . prostitution
 râleur marchandeur
 soiffer boire outre mesure, désirer vivement
 patiner se livrer a des attouchements trop libres
 pochard ivrogne
 traînée prostituée
 calicot commis
 mastroquet débiteur de vin
 dégaine contenance ridicule

(the above terms are in more general use).

In Parisian poems, such as 'Idylle coupée', and maritime poems, such as 'Le Bossu Bitor', the use of slang terms serves to heighten the realism of the scenes evoked. In 'Le Novice en partance et sentimental', 'Bambine', 'Cap'taine Ledoux' and other poems they occur in the speech of the characters. The latter technique does not, therefore in itself mark any great advance on say Hugo, who had also permitted a degree of authenticity in the speech of the characters in his narrative poems. What is astonishing is that such terms are also used by Corbière in many of his other poems, where the vocabulary is clearly that of the poet himself and is not merely employed to add local colour through authentic utterances on the part of his characters. In this regard Corbière holds a unique position 'nul poète, entre Villon et Richopin, n'a fait un tel emploi des mots du ruisseau' (167)

Corbière's use of slang is so striking that it seems to have deflected the attention of the critics - even those as thorough as Angelet - away from the poet's use of familiar expressions and words. Even if it was not very accurate, slang had found its way into the verse of the realist poets

and undoubtedly had a certain 'gimmick' value. Everyday familiar speech is more durable and its introduction into poetry on a large scale of far more significance than that of slang. Slang appears, in fact, merely as one extreme of the unprecedented range of Corbière's vocabulary. The basic register he employed was that of everyday speech with occasional sallies into the traditional language of French poetry or, in the opposite direction, into popularisms and slang. A list of familiar terms employed by Corbière would be extremely long. We give here some examples from just the first twenty pages or so of Les Amours Jaunes 'brocher un travail', 'une drôlesse', 'un raccroc', 'repasser a la ritournelle', 'une ficelle', (in the sense of a trick), 'un nom à tout casser', 'une catin', 'la veine' (in the sense of luck), 'une fille de joie', 'un blagueur', 'un drôle de pistolet', 'de pacotille', 'raté', 'une tête-de-turc', 'une pantin', 'la gueule', 'un estafier', 'la calotte des cieux', 'un lupanar', 'avoir mal aux cheveux', 'un cuistre', 'faire un trou à la lune'.

The use of both popularisms and familiar terms is to be seen partly as a way of making the language of poetry more 'alive' and more ordinary. This unpretentious tone is already to be detected in the dedicatory poem which introduces Les Amours Jaunes

Un poète ayant rimé...
Vit sa Muse dépourvue
De marraine

(168)

Corbière's willingness to refer to modern everyday life as one of the central inspirations of his poetry is also evident in his use of images

Et me plante sans gêne
 Dans le plat du hasard,
 Comme un couteau sans gaine
 Dans un plat d'épinard.

(169)

L'Incompris couche avec sa pose,
 Sous le zinc d'un mancenillier...

(170)

Cinq-cent millième Prométhée,
 Au roc de carton peint rivé.

(171)

En fumée elle est donc chargée
 L'éternité, la traversée
 Qui fit de Vous ma soeur d'un jour
 Ma soeur d'amour!...

(172)

J'aime la petite pluie
 Qui s'essuie
 D'un torchon de bleu troué!

(173)

Rose.....
 Feuille où pondent les journalistes
 Un fait divers,
 Papier-Joseph, croquis d'artistes
 - Chiffres ou vers - ...
 Rose-mousseuse, sur toi pousse
 Souvent la mousse
 D l'A1....Du BOCK plus souvent
 - A 30 Cent.

(174)

.....Et ce cygne
 Sous le couteau du cuisinier:
 - Chénier - ...

(175)

Je suis la Pipe d'un poète,
 Sa nourrice, et : j'endors sa Bête

(176)

(169) Ibid., p. 715.

(170) Ibid., p. 706.

(171) Ibid., p. 709.

(172) Ibid., p. 720.

(173) Ibid., p. 722.

(174) Ibid., p. 725.

(175) Ibid., p. 732 .

(176) Ibid., p. 734 .

Un camélia jaune....
Amour mort, tombe de ma boutonnière...

(177)

Je sais rouler une amourette
En cigarette...

(178)

Si mon cigare,
Viatique et phare,
Point ne t'égare...

(179)

- Le Christ avait au moins son éponge d'absinthe...

(180)

Dans ton éternité sais-tu la barbarie
De mon orgue infernal, orgue de Barbarie?

(181)

La dent de ton Grand, ratelier osancore...

(182)

.....la foi transportant la montagne -
Sur un bel ébal-jour, chez une tante à moi..

(183)

L'Ombilic du jour filant
Son macaroni brûlant...

(184)

.....TUPEU.....
Saint de la Veine ou du guignon,
Il tient sa Roulette-de-chance...

(185)

Vois aux cieux le grand rond de cuivre rouge luire,
Immense casserole où le Bon Dieu fait cuire
La manne....

(186)

(177) Ibid., p. 737.

(178) Ibid., p. 746.

(179) Ibid., p. 748.

(180) Ibid., p. 749.

(181) Ibid., p. 756.

(182) Ibid., p. 765.

(183) Ibid., p. 783.

(184) Ibid., p. 784.

(185) Ibid., p. 798.

(186) Ibid., p. 887.

Corbière's quest for expressiveness and dissatisfaction with the poetic resources at his disposal is evident in the presentation and typography of his poems: repeated exclamation marks, frequent question marks, points de suspension, dashes, italics, capitals of varying sizes. One of his typographical innovations is very precisely connected with the evocation of contemporary reality and a variant of everyday language. This takes the form of the imitation of price lists, café signs and so on which were one of the visual aspects of the material - and materialistic - reality in which the poet found himself:

Un poète ayant rimé
IMPRIMÉ (imitation of postal handstamp)
(187)

CI-GIT! La nudeur-d'attentat le hante...
(Gravestone inscription)
(188)

De l'Al...Du BOCK plus souvent
- A 30 Cent.
(189)

..... Torchon neuf qu'on passe
Au CAFE DE LA VIE, à chaque assiette grasse!
(190)

- C'est au boulevard excentrique,
Au - BON RETOUR DU CHAMP DU NORD -
(191)

Pour vingt sous : L'Océan! L'Océan! L'Océan!
(192)

(187) Ibid., p. 703.
(188) Ibid., p. 721.
(189) Ibid., p. 725.
(190) Ibid., p. 771.
(191) Ibid., p. 776.
(192) Ibid., p. 833.

Il a bien effacé son T.F. de forçot

(193)

Place S.V.P. Provinciaux
de Paris & Parisiens de
Carcassonne!.....

Pour les autres : 7f.50

Va mon livre & ne
me reviens plus.

(194)

Je pore aux doyantures

Où je lis : DEFENDU

DE POSER DES ORDURES -

Ronde comme un pendu!

(195)

English spoken ? - Espagnole ?..

Batignolle ?..

(196)

Perhaps more than any other poets discussed in this thesis Corbière introduced into his work the rhythms and word order of everyday speech. Sonnenfeld has spoken of the poet's 'préoccupations des sonorités du langage parlé' and states that his poetry is 'dans sa plus grande partie, d'ordre oral, bien qu'elle soit écrite'. (197) There are, of course, some veritable tours de force of this kind :

Tienr, c'est l'cap'tain' Ledoux!... et quel bon vent vous pousse?

- Un bon frâis, m'am' Galmiche, à fair'plier mon pouce .

R'laches en avarie, en rade, avec mon lougre ...

-Auguss'! on se hiss' pas comm' ça desur les g'noux

Des cap'tain's!.. - Eh, laissez, l'chérubin! c'est à vous?

- Mon portrait crache hein?... - Ah...

Ah! l'vilain p'tit bougre.

(198)

(193) Ibid., p. 825.

(194) Ibid., p. 914.

(195) Ibid., p. 715.

(196) Ibid., p. 722.

(197) L'Oeuvre poétique de Tristan Corbière, p.157.

(198) O.C., p. 834.

These are of less interest than the countless examples, of a less obvious but clear nature, found throughout Corbière's work. The conversational manner is not restricted to poems where there is a 'speaker' nor even to those dealing with a comic situation but is to be detected in even the most serious poems:

Ça monte et c'est lourd - Allons, Hue!

(199)

Que nous sommes-nous donc fait l'un à l'autre?
- Rien... - Peut-être alors que c'est pour cela,
Quel a commencé - Pas moi, bon apôtre!
Après, quel dira : c'est donc toi - voilà!

(200)

Est-il mort?... Ah! - c'était du reste, un garçon drôle.
Aurait-il donc trop pris au sérieux son rôle?
Sans me le dire... au moins. - Car il est mort, de quoi?...

(201)

-Toi que l'on compare à la femme...
- Pourquoi? - Pour ton âge? ou ton âme
De caillou cuit?... - Ça fait rêver...
- Et tu t'en fais rire à crever! ...

(202)

Dors : il pèse peu, ton faux d'immortelles;
Ils ne viendront pas, tes amis les ours,
Jeter leur pavé sur tes demoiselles...

(203)

C'est toujours trop vrai ces mensonges-là!

(204)

Et vos noms, je les vois collés partout...

(205)

(199) Ibid., p. 779.

(200) Ibid., p. 728.

(201) Ibid., p. 739.

(202) Ibid., p. 785.

(203) Ibid., p. 850. It is interesting to note that even here in the Rondels the poet remains close to contemporary speech, in this instance by holding back the subject until after the verb.

(204) Ibid., p. 729.

(205) Ibid., p. 811.

Repetition, so much a feature of everyday speech, is very common in Les Amours Jaunes ; a poem such as 'Au vieux Roscoff' is really repetition and amplification of images contained in condensed form in the very first stanza.

* * * * *

The impact of the various forms of contemporary speech upon the language of poetry was an important influence upon and ingredient in, the development of a new poetic language more suited to the formulation of experiences derived from contemporary reality than the resources offered by previous poetic tradition. This whole development is the subject of the next chapter.

PART TWOChapter FourUNE LANGUE INVENTÉE ...

- (a) The treatment of contemporary reality and the search for a new poetic language.

There is no doubt that the idea that the poetic treatment of modern and ephemeral reality was inextricably linked with the search for a new poetic language (1) had been grasped by the 1870s and even earlier. One aspect of this realisation was clearly the increasing reference to contemporary speech discussed in the last chapter. Another rather superficial symptom of this desire to renovate poetic language in the modern age was the widespread creation of neologisms. This was a natural extension of that expansion of poetic vocabulary which had been begun on a small scale by the Romantics and had become one of the most important features of Parnassianism. It was, as we have noted, perhaps the most distinctive stylistic characteristic of the Decadent movement. It was also entirely appropriate in an age which had constantly to create new terms for machines, inventions, substances and processes in the realms of science and technology. Moreover, modern means of travel had increased the extent of contamination and mutual borrowing between languages. Other even more important indications are to be found in the theoretical and critical statements of a variety of writers.

- (1) By poetic language, in this chapter and throughout this thesis, we mean simply the totality of the resources - vocabulary, imagery, metre, rhythm, rhyme and other effects - out of which the poet forges the 'formal construction' which is the poem, through which he expresses or formulates his experience, his ideas or his 'message'. The means by which one instance of the use of poetic language is more successful than another is, despite generations of literary scholarship, still far from clear. J.-P. Richard has noted this problem: 'C'est que nous manquons encore les instruments - et d'abord une phonétique de la suggestion, une stylistique structurale - qui nous permettraient d'en parler sérieusement.' (Onze Etudes sur la poésie moderne, p.11).

In the preface to Edel, published in 1878, Bourget combined the ideas of suppleness, flexibility, modernity and psychological insight in his remarkable description of a poem, so he believed, yet to be written : 'se passant de nos jours absolument impossible à un autre moment de l'histoire... et pour l'écrire une langue inventée, un vers fouillé, palpitant, nerveux....' Ironically, he probably did not know that already Verlaine, Rimbaud and Corbière had developed such a language, nor that it was to be a young friend, Laforgue, who would develop it further still by being the principal pioneer in the introduction of free verse into French poetry.

Bourget acknowledged that Baudelaire had gone a considerable way towards finding such a language. Perhaps the relationship between modernity and the quest for a new poetic language had been best expressed by Baudelaire, on the threshold of our period in 1862, in the preface, addressed to Arsène Houssaye, of Le Spleen de Paris where for 'la description de la vie moderne' he sought :

.... le miracle d'une prose poétique... assez souple
et assez heurtée pour s'adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l'âme,
aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience...
C'est surtout de la fréquentation des villes énormes, c'est du
croisement de leurs innombrables rapports que naît cet idéal
obsédant.

Gautier had spoken in his 'Notice' to Les Fleurs du Mal of the need for a new language to express the complex spectacle of a glorious civilisation entering upon its period of decadence in the mid nineteenth century, although his opinion was that Baudelaire had already found it. Barbey d'Aurevilly had seen the connection between modernity and language in the same light . 'Baudelaire et Poe... étaient enfin la poésie du spleen, des nerfs et du frisson, dans une vieille civilisation matérialiste et dépravée... (2). Verlaine's appreciation of Sainte-Beuve and Baudelaire (in the article 'Charles Baudelaire') was based on their peculiarly incisive and expressive poetry derived from the relationship between their work and modernity, involving, in the case of Baudelaire at least, the formulation of specifically modern sensations. In 'Art Poétique', where the concern is with the ephemeral, he describes a poetic medium capable of formulating transitory experience and matching it in its elusive qualities :

C'est des beaux yeux derrière des voiles,
C'est le grand jour tremblant de midi...
Que ton vers soit la bonne aventure
Eparse au vent crispé du matin
Qui va fleurant la menthe et le thym,
Et tout le reste est littérature.

(2) Quoted in A.E. Carter, Baudelaire et la critique française, p.50.

Rimbaud's quest for the new language is closely related to a conception of modernity . This relationship is central to his poetics and involves the totality of sensation and consciousness as well as mystical intuition .

Cette langue sera de l'âme pour l'âme, résumant tout, parfums, sons, couleurs, de la pensée accrochant la pensée et tirant. Le poète définirait la quantité d'inconnu s'éveillant en son temps dans l'âme universelle. il donnerait plus - que la formule de sa pensée, que la notation de sa marche au Progrès! Enormité devenant norme, absorbée par tous, il serait vraiment un multiplicateur de progrès! Cet avenir sera matérialiste... La poésie ne rythmera plus l'action, elle sera en avant

Corbière's realisation that traditional poetic practice was inadequate for the formulation of experiences of modern life is manifested in typically ironic fashion in 'I Sonnet avec la manière d'en servir' where what he sees as the boring regularity of Parnassian verse is satirised by reference to the modern age with which their verse is completely out of touch .

Sur le railway du Pinde est la ligne, la forme,
Aux fils du télégraphe : - on en suit quatre, en long,
A chaque pieu, la rime - exemple . chloroforme

The search for the new poetic language having the qualities of flexibility and apparent spontaneity necessary for the formulation of the ephemeral continued throughout the 1880s and into the 1890s and is evident in the pronouncements of poets like ~~Retté~~, Kahn ~~Vielé~~-Griffin and Mockel discussed below. It was also central to the mature Laforgue's poetic theory and practice.

The striving towards the new poetic language was one positive aspect of the widespread dissatisfaction with the existing poetic medium which was regarded by the young poets after 1870 as lacking those qualities of spontaneity, sincerity, naivete, fluidity and psychological 'accuracy' which the essential immediacy of contemporary reality would demand. Instead they sought, in the words of one of them .

...une poésie initiale, impliquant plus de sincérité dans l'émotion, plus de naïveté et plus de mélodie à la fois dans l'expression, le rejet de toute rhétorique vaine et apprêtée.. Toute cette oeuvre (Raynaud is speaking of Verlaine and the decadents) peut se résumer à ceci . perception plus immédiate de la vie, expression plus nerveuse et plus concise des phénomènes...

(3)

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- (3) E. Raynaud, 'Monsieur Jules Lemaitre et les poètes décadents', Le Décadent, February 1888.

Verlaine, by whom poetry that did not have the same qualities was pejoratively labelled 'littérature', put the matter succinctly in an earlier stanza of 'Art Poétique' .

Prends l'éloquence et tords-lui son cou!

Rimbaud's dismissal of poetic tradition was nothing if not comprehensive :

D'Ennius à Théroldus, de Théroldus à Casimir Delavigne,
tout est prose rimée, un jeu, avachissement et gloire
d'innombrables générations idiotes....

Worst of all is French rhetoric, associated above all, by Rimbaud, with the Romantics .

Ô les nuits! Ô Rolla, Ô Namouna, Ô la Coupe!
Tout est français, c'est-à-dire haïssable au
suprême degré....

But in the poetry of Paris Rimbaud sees grounds for hope, no doubt on the basis of Baudelaire's example; for what he attacks is 'français pas parisien'. Did he see there the possibility of a return to the state of affairs when poetry and life were integrated, when there was no schism between the poet and society? . 'Toute poésie antique aboutit à la poésie grecque, vie harmonieuse....' Corbière's scathing attack on his predecessors in 'Un jeune qui s'en va' is only a little less comprehensive. Laforgue was to be preoccupied with the need for a poetic language having the fluid qualities of music, dream and Impressionist painting and a freshness which could only be achieved by a partial rejection of existing rules and tradition.

The strength of this dissatisfaction has to be understood in relation not only to the literary tradition with which the young poets were familiar but also to their own education. Until Duruy's reforms of 1875 rhetoric - mostly Latin-based rhetoric - was the main item in the French educational programmes. Pupils en rhétorique were required to write with the utmost logic and clarity on well-known subjects remote from their individual experience of their own times such as the Serpent's speech to Eve, Nero's remorse the night after his act of matricide or Oedipus's deliberation before gouging his eyes out. Confirmation of the effects of such an education on the previous generations who had accepted it have been admirably summarised by Daniel Moïnet. One need not fear exaggeration of the situation from such a noteworthy custodian of 'la clarté française' :

Tous les esprits sont façonnés par la rhétorique C'est-à-dire que tout écrivain prend l'habitude de ne pas écrire exactement comme il pense ou surtout comme il sent Il ne lui suffit jamais de se comprendre, il se propose d'être compris, et même d'être compris le plus clairement et le plus aisément possible Lamartine, Victor Hugo, tous nos romantiques, tous nos Parnassiens, presque tous les écrivains (à moins qu'ils ne soient sur le chemin de la folie, comme Gérard de Nerval) obéissent à ce souci de logique démonstrative Une méditation de Lamartine, un poème de Victor Hugo sont composés à peu près comme un sermon de Bossuet

(4)

An examination of the French poetic tradition before the vital work of transition undertaken by Baudelaire (5) often reveals, as one would expect in the light of the above, an avoidance of the contemporary in both subject-matter and vocabulary in favour of fixed, relatively static subjects reflected in fixed rules of prosody and restrictions on vocabulary and tone matched by a predilection for abstractions, ideas and exposition The average reader of poetry in France until the late nineteenth century (and possibly later) expected to be 'elevated' by what he read Poetry's task was to enshrine basic ideas and emotions in a form which was both clear and memorable (Alain for example, saw the function of Voltaire's verse as principally mnemonic (6)) This may seem a gross generalisation, and there are numerous obvious exceptions, but it is largely substantiated by, for instance, the correspondence and the articles in French newspapers and periodicals of wide circulation in the latter part of the century when the 'Decadent' and 'Symbolic' controversies were raging (7) It was an expectation which dated from at least the birth of classicism and with which most poets had complied. The qualities which were most dominant in French poetry for more than two centuries were discursive

(4) D Mornet, Histoire de la littérature et de la pensée françaises contemporaines

(5) The tradition remained immensely influential throughout the century.

(6) Vingt leçons sur les beaux-arts, p 94

(7) See, for example, the extracts collected by J Lethève in Impressionnistes et Symbolistes devant la presse It is also worth recalling Anatole France's opinion as late as 1886 'Lamartine est le plus grand de nos poètes comme il en est le plus simple'. (Observation on Moréas's manifesto published in Le Temps 26 September 1886) In 1885 a dismayed reader wrote to Lutèce on the appearance of Laforgue's Complaintes 'Quelles étranges machines vous avez publiées (sic) dans votre numéro d'aujourd'hui' Je parle des vers cet animal de Verlaine, en publiant ses poètes maudits, aura fait plus de fous que Gagne et l'Unitéide Si ça continue, il suffira dans six ans 1° de n'avoir rien à dire, 2° de le dire en mauvais vers et en vers faux, 3° d'écrire comme un javanais pour être poète de génie' (Letter from Harauourt, March, 1885)

clarity, non-particularisation and grandeur. Such qualities are in themselves admirable and, indeed, essential to certain poetic genres such as epic or didactic poetry. Yet they are not those which one associates most readily with lyric poetry (8). This is often specific, intimate, personal and rooted in a world of moods and feelings sometimes far removed from the dictates of logic, in which weakness may play quite as large a part as grandeur. Nor, for similar reasons, are they the qualities best suited to the formulation of many experiences of contemporary reality. By virtue of being located in the present, subjects may lack the cachet of grandeur and permanence possessed by themes drawn from history or mythology, the excitement of broad and compelling visions of the future. The present is necessarily specific and immediate, frequently elusive and ill-defined, it may also seem mundane simply because it is familiar. Before the mid nineteenth century poetry was often a compensation for, rather than a reflection of, the true environment of the poet and his readers. (This compensation or antidote has remained as important as ever since then, but as we saw in Part Two, Chapter One, it now frequently takes its place alongside contemporary reality with which it co-exists in a state of tension.)

Looking again at the ~~kinds~~ of contemporary subjects examined in Part Two, Chapter Two, the potential shortcomings of the poetic traditions are clear enough. This is true even of those categories to which the traditional medium could be most easily adapted. There was something incongruous about writing poetry attacking the social and political establishment if that verse was itself entirely in accord with the rules and proprieties with which the literary establishment had encumbered poetry, for that reason Rimbaud's dissatisfaction gains an authenticity lacking even in Hugo. In the realm of modern thought Sully-Prudhomme's careful dissection of the uncertainty and scepticism of nineteenth-century man is less convincing, because of the order and neatness of its exposition, than poetry by Rimbaud and Verlaine which actually formulates torment and anxiety, it is also less convincing.

- (8) Even Will Moore, as persuasive as ever in his French Classical Literature admits this after appearing for a moment to offer the opposite argument

(that there is an) absence of great poetry in the literature of French classicism. This is a widely prevalent view and one object of this chapter ('The Pursuit of Poetry') is to challenge it as ~~being~~ both erroneous and confused. But suppose they (the French classical writers) had found a way of poetic expression that was intellectual rather than emotional, ornate rather than unadorned, human rather than individual, then would it not be stupid for us to say all that is not real poetry?

(op cit, p 31)

than the irony and wry humour of Laforgue or even the cénacle poets. The 'feel' of the age of technology is much better conveyed through the almost confused excitement of, for example, Rimbaud's 'Mouvement' than in the discursive rhetoric of the progressistes. Vigny, Hugo, and even Villiers as late as the 1860s, conveyed next to nothing of the actual experiences and sensations of travel in the modern world in their railway poems, this was left to poets like Verlaine, Rimbaud, Corbière and Laforgue who evoked the strange blend of excitement, rootlessness and dazzlement by rapid sequences of ephemeral sensations which is an essential part of travel. The Romantics and Parnassians were superbly equipped to produce poetic expositions of the idea of the evils of the modern city and its encroachment upon rural life, but to the formulation of the experience of city life itself, with its hustle and bustle, its crowds, its continual changes and rebuilding, they contributed little, Sainte-Beuve apart this whole genre was virtually a new field for Baudelaire and the poets who followed him. The poetry of everyday life could seem pompous, wooden or, worse still, patronising in the hands of well-intentioned poets like Manuel or Coppée. Even a poem such as Nouveau's 'La Rencontre' with its promising everyday café setting is spoilt by an undue reliance on traditional rhetoric, one could attribute this uniquely to the poet's wish to play the troubadour were it not for the fact that this style is commonplace throughout much of his work

J'aimais vos yeux, où sans effroi
Battent les ailes de votre Ame,
Qui font se baisser ceux du roi
Mieux que les siens ceux d'une femme.....

The very rationality of the discursive style previously favoured by French poets made it a difficult vehicle for the formulation of those non-rational experiences which are labelled sensations. Much progress had nevertheless been made by the Romantics and the Parnassians but they still tended to comment rather than formulate; the evanescence, even vagueness, of sensorial experience necessitated a poetic medium of great fluidity and flexibility of which poets like Verlaine were to prove themselves supreme masters. To take another example from Nouveau, when he wished to evoke the beauty of Valentine's body his instinctive reaction was to utilise the plastic, marmoreal techniques thoroughly developed by the Parnassians rather than to attempt to evoke the more ephemeral and elusive realities of sexual attraction :

Voici le bras plein qui s'allonge,
Voici, comme on les voit en songe,
Les deux petites mains d'Eros,
Le bassin immense, les hanches,
Et les adorablement blanches
Et fermes fesses de Paros....

(9)

A similar poem provides evidence of another important point. Although the introduction of specifically contemporary speech into poetry was a major advance and did render French poetry more capable of treating contemporary reality it was not always in itself sufficient to offset the continuing influence of inappropriate traditional forms of expression :

Le nez aquilin est la marque
D'une âme prompte à la fureur,
Le sien serait donc d'un monarque
Ou d'une fille d'empereur...

Ho, ça! Monsieur, prenez bien garde
A tous ces mots que vous jetez,
Son oreille fine les garde
Longtemps, comme des vérités....

Esquissons sous sa nuque brune
Son cou qui semble... oh! yes indeed!
La Tour d'ivoire, sous la lune
Qui baigne la Tour de David....

(10)

A review of the categories of contemporary subjects discussed in this thesis reveals one crucial tendency. So long as the poet observed modernity 'from the outside', as a commentator, the old poetic rhetoric was sufficient, but as soon as the poet was concerned with his own direct participation in the vicissitudes and flux of modern life new means had to be found to cope with this transition from modernity to immediacy.

(10) 'Le Portrait' *ibid.*, p.575.

(b) From Modernity to Immediacy . The Development of Poetic Impressionism

The subject of this section is the development of poetic impressionism (11) as one response to the situation examined above. Baudelaire's identification of modernity with 'le transitoire' and 'le fugace' was to be borne out, for instance, in Verlaine's impressionistic descriptions of modern industrial Belgium or Rimbaud's use of an impressionistic style in his visions of modern urban civilisation in the Illuminations. Laforgue was to confirm Baudelaire's idea, both in theory and practice, with his equation of the modern and ephemeral.

Clearly the connection between modernism and impressionism is a close one (seen by art historians studying the period after 1860 as a straightforward progression). A possible brief classification of modernism as the use of a particular subject-matter and of impressionism (12) as a means of poetic expression, if convenient, is not entirely accurate. The rigid division between form and subject, manner and matter has been shown as fallacious by modern criticism. In fact, as one would expect, the relation between modernism and impressionism is more complex than that between 'matter' and 'manner' in the sense in which those terms were once accepted. On the one hand we have shown how modernist poetry may make use of contemporary speech. The use of contemporary vocabulary, expressions and speech patterns affects the tone, the style and, in the case of speech patterns, the rhythm of poetry. Thus this particular source of inspiration influences much more than just the 'subject' of a poem. Similarly the term impressionism implies more than a poetic style or technique. It may

(11) A detailed definition of what constitutes poetic impressionism is given below.

(12) Naturally there is no question of the actual transferring of the precise technical procedures of one art to another (as opponents of the idea of poetic impressionism sometimes suggest). But this should not discourage the employment of a term which is both more precise and more useful than a term like Symbolism. Even when the grounds for describing a particular poem as impressionistic are strong and invite comparisons on quite a detailed level with pictorial Impressionism, one cannot forget the basic difference between the two art forms. Borel has put the position very well in his edition of Verlaine's poetry where he is able to refer to 'Notes brèves juxtaposées, touches de couleur ou de lumière, ce sont là les vrais éléments constitutifs du poème, comme, sur la toile où Monet ou Pissarro les dispose, c'est le bleu et non la robe ou le ciel, le rouge et non le toit, l'ocre et non le mur qui constituent le tableau indépendant désormais de son sujet. ...) whilst maintaining nevertheless that 'Poésie n'est pas peinture et la poésie de Verlaine n'est aucunement une transposition dans l'ordre du langage de l'art des peintres impressionistes' (Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes, pp.183-84) Poetic impressionism is rather the use of poetic resources in a system of notation which bears roughly the same relation to the traditional poetic medium as pictorial Impressionism does to academic painting and which is directed in both cases toward greater immediacy and spontaneity.

indicate also the choice of particular subjects, or, perhaps, more properly, the choice of particular aspects of subjects. The word impressionism itself gives the clue in as much as impressionist poetry deals, obviously, with 'impressions'. By 'impressions' one usually means a fairly immediate physiological or mental 'assessment' of phenomena, as opposed to the assessment or evaluation that one would ~~make~~ after a more thorough application of the intellectual faculty. The term 'impression' has become so imbued with this sense of being immediate, or even provisional, that a phrase such as 'the roof gave the impression of being red' automatically suggests that in fact the roof was another colour.

Thus modernism and impressionism may be seen sometimes to share the same functions. Modernism in as much as it makes use of contemporary everyday speech may make poetry more immediate, may, at least in appearance, make it seem less intellectualised. Impressionism manifests some of the qualities of modernism by evoking the most immediate and therefore acutely contemporary aspects of subjects. The common ground between modernism and impressionism lies in their use of contemporary reality.

It is obvious that the more naive or superficial forms of modernism do not necessitate the use of an impressionistic technique. The old poetic rhetoric - or at least, the old rhetoric with the addition of new vocabulary and images - could describe contemporary objects, people or events, for instance, in the poetry of Auguste Barbier. However, in what appears as an inevitable historical process, French poets who had at first interested themselves in modern subjects came to seek the evocation of complex patterns of modern subjects, which is often tantamount to saying the 'feel' or the atmosphere of modern life itself in its totality. Involved in this quest for the evocation of contemporary life was, of course, the growing awareness of the qualities of the 'present' in art as opposed to those of the past or the future, and of the problems posed by its use. The essential quality of the 'present' is without doubt its 'immediacy'. The transition from modernist to impressionist poetry reflects the compression of the duration of the 'present' from the notion of an extensive and vague period such as 'the age in which we live' to a single moment; it also reflects the direct involvement of the poet in contemporary reality as opposed to the detachment of the commentator.

An interesting confirmation of this process - which was one of the initial ideas in our study - has been provided in Linda Nochlin's Realism where one reads .

The 'instantaneity' of the Impressionists is 'contemporaneity' taken to its ultimate limits. 'Now', 'today', 'the present', had become 'this very moment', 'this instant'. No doubt photography helped to create this identification of the contemporary with the instantaneous. But in a deeper sense, the image of the random, the changing, the impermanent and unstable seemed closer to the experienced qualities of present-day reality than the imagery of the stable, the balanced, the harmonious.

(13)

Looking at the threshold of our period one finds relevant comments from an artist whose theoretical statements are often derided. Gustave Courbet in his second realist manifesto published in December 1861 in the Courrier du Dimanche (14) held that any epoch should be reproduced only by those artists who have lived in it, that the artists of one century are radically incompetent to reproduce the things of a preceding or future century. In fact he maintained that true art could in no way concern itself with reproducing the past or future. This prohibition to paint nymphs, angels or scenes from classical and biblical antiquity and even national history, which so annoyed many of his fellow artists, was founded on the belief that the artist should concern himself only with those things that he knew through his own experience. The realist movement to which Courbet belonged owed much to one aspect of contemporary positivist thought : the belief that the world is the sum of observable experience and that our knowledge is confined to the data of experience. Of the past and future Courbet said that these could only be the product of the imagination. They were of necessity idealisations in which the true artist should have no interest. Whatever we may think of Courbet's ideas in general, his understanding of the imaginary nature of subjects drawn from the past or future is of use in distinguishing the very different problems posed by the ~~use~~ use of the present. (15) The subjects drawn from the past or future are created in the mind of the artist by the use of the imaginative or intellectual faculty. These subjects, because they have been conceived of from the very start in intellectualised terms, are readily comprehensible and easy to handle. On the other hand, subjects drawn

(13) Nochlin, op.cit., p.28.

(14) Reproduced in C. Léger, Courbet.

(15) We are well aware that Courbet's classification of the past and future as pure idealisations and some deductions based on this classification do not take into account several factors. First, we have not mentioned the role of creative memory. The human memory is sufficiently powerful for an artist to recreate an experience from his own past with complete authenticity. Second it is just possible for an artist to transfer genuine experience into a past or future setting without unduly stifling the freshness or immediacy of the experience. However the transferred material remains, despite its disguises, art inspired by contemporary reality. Third we have equated the terms 'imaginary' and 'intellectualised'. This suggests that only sensory experiences are spontaneous and immediate. This is of course to over-look the role of the

from the present should be the product of the artist's experience, which means that the artist's knowledge of the present is derived initially from sense-data. Any completely successful attempt to get to grips with that which is truly contemporary implies the ability to express what is received as 'raw material' through sensation as opposed to what is imaginary or intellectualised. It implies the ability to comprehend that which is in a state of transition as opposed to the pre-conceived and therefore comparatively static notion. The present is elusive, confused, and above all rooted in the life of sensation, the exploration of the profundity and complexity of contemporary reality as opposed to the mere description of modern objects did necessitate the use of a poetic language able to evoke sensation. This is an impressionistic language.

Impressionism seeks to express sensations (or impressions). Its primary function is not to describe objects, events, ideas or even emotions (i.e. in the sense of fully conscious attitudes such as 'jealousy'). Impressionism is concerned with feelings about life, i.e. with physiological and mental experience at a subrational or pre-rational level. Impressionist art is, thus, concerned entirely with genuine experience. This is why contemporary reality is a uniquely fruitful source of inspiration for impressionist art. (16)

15 (contd) sub-conscious. The latter is a source of spontaneous images and analogies suggested by the sub-conscious, plays an important part in the development of impressionist poetry. However, in practice the sub-conscious is frequently stimulated by an experience derived from contemporary reality. It would also be difficult to relate the workings of the sub-conscious to the past or future as opposed to the present, except in as much as these workings are involved with creative memory. (This idea was taken as one possible conclusion by Jean-Paul Weber in his Genèse de l'oeuvre poétique where he claims all true art is based on the (usually) unconscious recollection of childhood experiences, or in other words all art is the product of unconscious creative memory. An opinion which shows under the influence of Freud and Adler, perhaps too great an emphasis on the importance of childhood in artistic creation.)

(16) Impressionist poetry is rooted in reality but this does not mean that it can never be 'interiorised'. Indeed one of the most significant branches of literary impressionism has explored the workings of the consciousness at the sub-intellectual or 'raw material' level. The term 'stream of consciousness technique' has been applied to this particular aspect of impressionism, e.g. in the works of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and Marcel Proust. C.f. M. Praz. Mnemosyne, p. 189: 'The technique of the stream of consciousness... is related to impressionism in painting ...') In the great majority of cases the consciousness is shown coming to terms with sense-data. The perplexing and intriguing intermingling of present sensual experiences with remembered experiences has been particularly popular with writers and poets. Impressionist poetry, however, is never 'interiorised' in the same way as Romantic poetry. It does not seek to give an exposition, in ordered rhetoric, of the attitudes of the 'moi', to recount personal misfortunes or aspirations. Even when the subject of an impressionist poem does not seem to be 'la vie sensationnelle' it should always be 'la vie immédiate'. Its primary function should always be to express, not to comment. The sub-rational workings of the consciousness have now become such an established subject of literature that Salinger was able to take the result of a confused mental process for the title of his best novel (The Catcher in the Rye).

We have spoken of an 'impressionistic poetic language' and we should now explain what we see as the relationship between impressionism and poetic language as a preliminary to the discussion of the whole concept of poetic impressionism and the specific qualities of the new poetic language it implies.

Susanne Langer and R.G. Collingwood (17) see all art as 'language'. This language is not speech and differs fundamentally from it. However, art like speech makes use of symbols of a widely accepted currency and it is for this reason that Susanne Langer and others have been able to describe art like speech as 'language'. Art is a non-discursive language the purpose of which is the expression and usually the communication of feelings which cannot be comprehended or communicated in rational terms. Speech on the other hand is the language of discourse the purpose of which is rational communication. Aestheticians who accept this particular definition of art (nowadays the vast majority) have wisely pointed out the special vulnerability of poetry to misinterpretation by poet, critic and reader alike. Poetry like all forms of art is a language different from speech but the poet has for his artist's materials words, that is the symbols used by discursive speech. Not surprisingly there has been considerable confusion between rhymed discourse and true poetry. Tęodor de Wyzęwa in the passage quoted in our introduction to this thesis claimed that until the middle of the nineteenth century there had been nothing but rhymed discourse in France. This, of course, is a gross exaggeration and in a sense it is not possible to talk of a new poetic language. The language of true poetry always obeys the same principles. By a new poetic language we mean the development of techniques and attitudes which enables the poet to realise more consistently the full potential of poetry as language - as an expressive rather than a rational vehicle. True poets have always been able to do this but, especially in France, their successes have been limited by the misguided imposition of strict rules and conventions in the use of vocabulary, imagery, phrasing and verse forms. Thus the new poetic language involves a more flexible attitude to the discursive elements of the poem as well as to the non-discursive or 'musical' elements.

(17) See especially Susanne Langer, Philosophy in a New Key and Problems of Art and R.G. Collingwood, The Principles of Art.

At first sight a more flexible attitude towards 'discursive' elements such as vocabulary and other forms of speech might seem to be of little importance if the distinctive qualities of poetry are non-discursive. However, the innovations in the speech forms of impressionist verse are all directed towards greater flexibility, and involve the introduction of more spontaneous, more 'popular' and, therefore, more affective forms at the expense of the strict logic of the conventional language of French poetry. The introduction of facets of everyday speech (discussed in the last chapter) into poetry therefore plays an important role in the development of more expressive poetry along with innovations in versification and sound patterns. Obviously, to the extent that the other aspects of poetic impressionism which we shall be examining tend to minimize the role of the rational faculty they contribute to a clearer differentiation between poetry and discourse.

* * * * *

Before examining the transition from 'modernity' to 'immediacy' and the development of poetic impressionism, it is necessary to list some of those features, affecting both subject-matter and poetic language, which it is possible to associate most consistently with impressionism in poetry. Naturally not all of them will be necessarily present in any particular impressionistic poem, but some of them at least will be. Nor do all of them, when on their own always imply impressionism. Nevertheless, it is such features taken together which provide the best definition of poetic impressionism.

(1) The intention to formulate experience felt at a sensual or, at least, non-rational level :

Of the subject areas examined in Part Two, Chapter Two the likeliest to appeal to the impressionist poet are everyday reality, the world of sensation and speed and travel because immediacy spontaneity and elusiveness are qualities frequently to be found in them.

(11) The attempt to do this as directly as possible without the obvious interference of the intellect :

This does not mean that impressionist poets are 'primitivists' in the pejorative sense of that term. In most cases all their rational powers of selection and organisation are brought into play to provide poetry with the apparent qualities of freshness, spontaneity, directness. (A failure to understand this has affected some critical judgements of Verlaine and Corbière.)

(111) The consequent end of the intrusion of the moi :

This applies only to the moi as the reflective, rational ingredient frequently interjected into descriptive writing in the Romantics. Poets were

to find a way of reconciling this reflective element with impressionistic verse through their development, via impressionism, of synthetic masterpieces. (Such an example will be seen in the final part of this thesis in Laforgue's 'Solo de Lune'.) The mere mention of the first person pronoun does not imply the kind of interjection we have in mind here.

(iv) The abandonment of traditional rules for the sake of vividness and immediacy and the subordination of form to the natural qualities and rhythms of the experience being formulated.

This lay behind the development of both free verse and poetic prose and is the essence of Bourget's quest for 'une langue inventée'. Perhaps the most important sign of this 'quest' was ^{the} assault of poets after 1870 (the process had been begun before) on the heavily-hammered rhyme ~~the~~ through enjambement, through the replacement of rhyme with assonance, through the use of identical rhyme, through the use of internal rhymes, through the moving of the point of natural stress from the final syllable of the line to other positions, sometimes at the central caesura but sometimes in positions of no metrical significance at all in traditional prosody. Metre could now match the flow of thought, speech or sensation without artificial stresses or divisions.

(v) Concentration on the elusive aspects of a subject, of an experience :

To the extent that they wanted to 'fix' a fleeting moment for future contemplation impressionist artists in the plastic arts and in literature were often just as interested in universals as most other artists, but the moment they sought to pin down appealed to them precisely for its ephemeral qualities. This is the opposite of classicism which seeks and emphasises the elements of stability, order and monumentality in a subject.

(vi) Synecdoche or the formulation of a complex subject or experience through attention to epitome :

Similes, allegories and symbols are sometimes almost equated with what one might call 'epitome'. It is perhaps in this relation between epitome and symbol that one finds the common ground between Symbolism and impressionism. It would be as well to explain this point at length. As an example we might say that in a painting or a poem a tree with browning leaves is a symbol of the decline and decay that is an inevitable part of the cycle of nature. The tree is part of the process it symbolises or in other words it epitomises it. Epitome might be defined as a particularly striking example of a phenomenon or occasionally as a salient feature of

a more complex phenomenon. One might consider that while classical literature uses archetypes (epitomes sanctioned by long usage?) the artist of contemporary reality has to take new images and invest them with archetypal meaning by using them as epitomes. Baudelaire had made effective use of epitome as part of his modernist approach, perhaps the most famous was the swan - the epitome as well as the symbol of all those exiled in modern urban civilisation in 'Le Cygne'. As an example of the latter one might recall the tinkling pianos that occur so regularly in the poetry of Laforgue. The pianos symbolise dreary Sunday afternoons because the noise of them being played was a salient feature in the poet's experience of such afternoons. They are at one and the same time an impression and a symbol. When Rimbaud seeks to express the malaise which he, as a poet aware of primitive beauty, experiences in the midst of hypocritical and suffocating modern society he did not choose an allegory like Baudelaire's albatros but as we have seen he expressed his feeling by describing and contrasting the nature and desires of the bourgeois with his own. In 'A la Musique' he concentrates on the salient features which best epitomise or symbolise the bourgeoisie and those thoughts and desire which best represent his own primitivism. When such salient features are accumulated, and sensations expressed, the total result is what could be happily called 'atmosphere'. This term, when it is considered, means little more than the complexity of feelings about life that we experience in a particular place at a particular time. In other words it is precisely that phenomenon in human experience which it is most difficult to express in discursive language.

(vii) Lack of definition :

Concentration on salient features (epitomes) is counterbalanced by a lack of definition in the rest of an impressionistic evocation. Formal connections between phenomena and contextualising elements are often minimal or even non-existent.

(viii) Qualities of 'objects' tend to occur before the reader knows what the object is, e.g. 'la blancheur éclatante de sa robe' :

It is interesting to note that this is one of the few aspects of impressionistic style which is found fairly regularly in Mallarmé's poetry :

Tu sais, ma passion, que, pourpre et déjà mure
Chaque grenade éclate et d'abeilles murmure....

(ix) ~~Sentence~~ ^{note} or period structure is often reduced to individual juxtaposed units of sense impressions :

There is an obvious parallel here with Impressionist techniques of picture-making and, in particular, with pointillisme. Bourget had seen this disintegrating tendency as a symptom of what he thought of as 'decadent' style

le style de décadence est celui où l'unité du livre se décompose pour laisser la place à l'indépendance de la phrase, et la phrase pour laisser la place à l'indépendance du mot. Les exemples foisonnent dans la littérature actuelle qui corroborent cette féconde hypothèse...

(x) Dislocation of normal word-order :

This may reproduce the disorder or randomness of sensual perception and pre-rational mental processes. However, it may serve other non-impressionistic purposes. In Mallarmé's poetry it is sometimes a hermetic device designed to delay comprehension of the 'meaning' of a poem until its other qualities have been appreciated or a way of giving the flexibility necessary for the creation of autonomous (i.e. independent from discursive function) phonic patterns.

(xi) Reduction or elimination of verbs and conjunctions in favour of a markedly nominal style .

This recreates the cumulative effect of a sequence of impressions as in Verlaine's 'Walcourt' or Rimbaud's 'Dimanche' ('Jeunesse' I).

(xii) Decreased importance of simile

This is one obvious result of the interest in the qualities of a transitory subject for their own sake. Comparisons are rare in Rimbaud's Illuminations.

(xiii) Use of speech, where appropriate, likely to form part of the environment evoked (e.g. Corbière's 'Soneto a Napoli') :

This increases the spontaneity and directness of an impressionistic description.

(xiv) Repetition

This is one instance of an important difference between impressionistic techniques in the plastic arts (in which repetition plays no part) and poetry. It is a useful reminder that precise technical parallels are not as significant or as meaningful as a similarity of attitude. A simple (but usually unmentioned) distinction between poetic and pictorial impressions is frequently the difference in the duration of the experience being formulated and the time it takes for this formulation to be communicated. Most Impressionist paintings are concerned with the experience of a few moments (not, however, usually of a single moment - that is one reason why Impressionist paintings are not

photographic) whereas generally the experiences evoked in impressionist poetry lasted longer. Likewise it takes longer to read a poem than it does to receive the first visual impact of a picture. Hence repetition, which is an aspect both of ordinary speech and of the stream of consciousness, may be a legitimate and vitally important ingredient in impressionist poetry.

* * * * *

In considering the transition from modernity to immediacy as one of the central preoccupations of poetry after 1870 it is useful to make comparisons with painting of the same period. This is not just because the parallel is revealing - as indeed it is - but because the example of painting was readily apparent to the poets who cannot have ignored it.

The impact of the new age was such that even those artists working in traditional fields like history painting became dissatisfied with their former manner. History painting proper converted itself into the genre painting of past events. It could even be said that there was only one factor which distinguished the Realist movement from the host of painters who were now adopting realistic techniques and that was the Realists' insistence on contemporaneity. Champfleury, influenced surely by Baudelaire, maintained that the serious representation of present-day people, the derbies, the black dress-coats, the polished shoes or the peasants' clogs had a far greater interest than the bric-à-brac inherited from the past (18). Castagnary in his Salon review of 1863 praised those whom he called 'naturalistes' for putting the artist back into the midst of his era with the mission of reflecting it (19). Bazille writing to his parents on the eve of the 1866 Salon informed them that he had chosen the modern era because it was the one he understood best, the one that he found most alive, and added that this would be why he would be rejected' (20). Zola in his Salon review of 1868 called Monet, Bazille and Renoir 'les Actualistes' and praised them for their love of modern life and their success at interpreting it in painting. (21)

(18) Quoted in Nochlin, Realism, p. 28

(19) Idem

(20) Idem

(21) O.C., XII, pp. 870-874

There is no doubt that the success of the Realists in both the novel and in painting encouraged poets like Coppée and Manuel to treat modern life and particularly the life of the humble masses in their work. Yet by the time they produced their volumes the values of Realism had already become acceptable to a large section of the public. Realism in art, stylistically at least, (22) was fairly respectable by 1870. No sooner had the public become reconciled to the Realist movement than another much more significant change began to take place - one which was to have the most far-reaching consequences for the whole development of art, including both painting and poetry. This was, of course, the birth of Impressionism. It is our belief that Impressionism developed organically out of the modernist movement in painting, that, as Linda Nochlin puts it, 'the "instantaneity" of the Impressionists is "contemporaneity" taken to its ultimate limits'. There is in some of the most significant Realist paintings, as for instance Monet's Execution of the Emperor Maximilian an emphasis on the temporal fragment as the basic unit of perceived experience which is accompanied by an elimination or a diminution of traditional moral, metaphysical and "psychological" values. Monet's efforts are devoted to depicting faithfully what an observer would actually have seen at the moment of the execution and this accounts for the accusations of callousness which were levelled at him. Intrigued by the problems posed by the evocation of a 'temporal fragment' the Impressionists proper sought more and more challenging subjects, it is not to be wondered at that they saw in the play of light on land or water the most alluring subject, for it was the most impermanent and elusive, but they did not abandon the painting of obviously modern subjects nor should it be forgotten that an Impressionist landscape is itself a vision of a strictly contemporary reality. With late Realism, Monet and the Impressionists, a new and different set of phenomena - principally modern life and nature seen for itself - viewed in a new and different way demanding novel modes of composition and notation, became the occasion for picture-making. So it came to be, as in poetry, that the old categories of reality and the old ways of embodying them were questioned simultaneously.

(22) The reception of Courbet's Enterrement à Ornans illustrates the sensitivity of the public with regard to certain subjects and this continued until 1870 and beyond

This important conception of the transition from modernism to Impressionism has been challenged, though admittedly by a critic with a special axe to grind concerning Zola's misunderstanding of Impressionism.

Lilian Furst has written that 'the Impressionists were neither specially concerned with modernity nor even strikingly original in this respect. (23) Our argument, of course, admits the lack of originality for it is our contention that pictorial Impressionism was a new approach to the thematic preoccupations already implicit in Realism, but we would challenge the claim that modernity was not a special concern of the Impressionists. If this were so why did painters like Monet frequently incorporate modernist motifs such as factory chimneys and railway bridges in even their 'pure' landscapes when a slight change in the angle of vision

(23) Lilian R. Furst, 'Zola's art criticism', p. 170 See Bibliography.

would have omitted them? (24) Why were the painters eager to combine the modern with the plein air approach in settings like the beach, the picnic and the racecourse? For the Impressionists plein air painting

- (24) Among examples in Monet's work which spring to mind are Westminster (1871), where steam tugs are depicted, Argentueil (1874) where smoking factory chimneys may be observed in the background. Monet was clearly fascinated by the notion of 'modernised' landscape as Le Train dans la neige (1875) demonstrates. This interest never entirely left him, as late as 1902 he produced his very modernistic Waterloo Bridge. Monet was by no means alone in this endeavour. Leaving aside pictures where modern phenomena are obviously the central interest, such as Signac's paintings of gasometers at Clichy or Seurat's Banlieue, it is perhaps surprising how many well-known Impressionist landscapes contain modernist motifs. Even Manet's picture of Monet working on his boat (1874) has factory chimneys in the background. Renoir's La Seine à Asnières (1879) actually depicts a train crossing the railway bridge in the top right background. Gauguin's La Seine au pont d'Iéna (1875) has steam tugs and his La Neige dans la rue Carcel (1883) shows factory chimneys in the left background. Pissarro's L'Île Lacroix (1888) has a factory chimney in the top right background. Even Cézanne's Le Village de L'Estaque et la mer (1878-1883) uses two factory chimneys as the main element of verticality. A well-known study for Van Gogh's La Maison de Vincent à Arles (1888) shows a train crossing a bridge in the centre right.

was a way of stressing the immediacy of both their subjects and their way of recording them. It would be wrong, moreover, to suggest (25) that the Impressionists' concern was with the observation of 'the play of colour and of light' as though this excluded other interests. In Monet's Quai du Louvre (26) or Renoir's Pont Neuf (27) there is no intriguing incident or anecdote to distract one's attention from the view as an active totality. The human figures are summarised in a few strokes and dots of pigment scarcely more detailed than stick figures. Yet these urban landscapes, despite their lack of commentary or incident are not unfeeling or remote. They are far from being mere exercises in pure form or demonstrations of a theory of colour or light. All the variety, movement, colour and particular character of contemporary Parisian street life is presented in them. It is, in fact, their raison d'être.

This love of the 'instant fugitif' had, of course, been introduced into French art by Constantin Guys, Daumier and others and developed by the painters associated with Impressionism and most strikingly by Degas. He, in particular, appreciated that if apparent spontaneity were to be lent to such painting, subjects would have to be shown as they are encountered in life - from odd angles, cut into by other objects or even by the frame of the picture (as an equivalent of the limit of one's vision). The initial inspiration may have been spontaneous and the final effect may be one of spontaneity but the creation of this effect requires great artistic skill and judgment. Degas like Verlaine in his 'poésie immédiate' is a painstaking artist, not a mindless reproducer of sensation. Degas's drawing is always too exquisitely perfect for this accusation to be levelled at him, though it has occasionally been levelled at Verlaine. The painters who were most likely to be so accused were those who did not merely cut into the forms of subjects but those, like Monet and Renoir, who, in their desire to paint the acutely transitory effects of light, 'dissolved' form in a flood of light and colour. Renoir's La Grenouillère is a ready example. The human figures are rendered by two brush strokes for the legs and a pink oval for the face

(25) Lillian R. Furst, alt cit.

(26) Painted c 1866.

(27) Painted in 1872

The idea of 'contemporaneity' is absolutely essential to Impressionism. It is obvious, as we have already remarked, that a truly contemporary experience derived from external reality (28) is known and appreciated by the senses and not primarily by the intellect. It is the function of the intellect, at the expense of freshness and immediacy, to put the confused world of 'sensations brutes' in order. Impressionism in both painting and poetry made this function much less apparent and attempted to formulate in art immediate experiences.

The transition from the realist treatment of contemporary reality to an impressionistic mode of expression in poetry is more difficult to demonstrate than the process we have seen at work in the painting of the period. It is not improbable that, to some extent, Verlaine, Rimbaud and Laforgue were influenced directly by the Impressionist painters' work or ideas in making the transition from poetic modernism to poetic impressionism and that this transition is less organic than in the case of painting. On the other hand all these poets, and others too, were familiar with the work of modernist poets and poets interested in the 'transcription' of external reality such as the disciples of the Parnasse. Moreover all had been practitioners of poetic modernism themselves which is of great significance. Certainly these poets could have arrived at a form of poetic impressionism of their own accord, the likely role of the Impressionist movement in painting, where it had any, was that of catalyst.

One obvious criticism of the pattern we are suggesting for this particular development in French poetry from the middle of the century onwards is that if there were a transition from modernism to impressionism then why is it that so much of the poetry of contemporary reality written in the late 1870s and even the 1880s and 1890s falls into the modernist rather than the impressionist category? This is a serious question which requires a number of answers

(28) Just as immediate internal mental or physical sensation is apprehended not by the intellect but by some other facet of the consciousness.

The two great pioneers of poetic impressionism were Verlaine and Rimbaud but although their key works were produced in the early 1870s it was not until at least a decade later that these became known to more than a handful of admirers. As late as 1882 Bourget classed Verlaine among the poetae minores and it was only in 1883 that his reputation began to grow amongst the young poets of the day. Ignorance and speculation about Rimbaud continued even into the 1890s, and this was encouraged by the attribution to him of a number of spurious poems in various reviews. It is not idle to see in the movement called Symbolism the combination of the discovery of the work of Verlaine and Rimbaud and the tutorship of Mallarmé. The value of the movement of 1886 lay in little more than the publishing of developments that had occurred at least a dozen years before.

The continued and spectacular success of Naturalism in the realm of prose fiction no doubt provided an example which poets sought to emulate. It was an example with which many poets must have been far more familiar than that of pictorial Impressionism and certainly that of the work of Verlaine and Rimbaud.

To some extent the transition from modernism to impressionism may also be regarded as a yardstick of the quality of the poetry of contemporary reality. The straightforward description of modernity in verse was a relatively simple enterprise but the evocation of atmosphere, of sensation, of immediate experience was a task requiring true poetic genius. It is no wonder that a number of poets took the easier road, they were incapable of doing anything else.

Lastly, as many problems of literature and art show, a neat chronological development of any innovation is rarely found. Pissarro still painted pictures using a Realist technique after he had shown himself a master of both the Impressionist and Neo-Impressionist styles. The last twenty years of Verlaine's career mark a decline and return to conventional forms of expression rather than the fulfilment of the experiments of the early 1870s. What is true of the work of an individual artist is even truer of a movement or a period. One has no reason to expect important changes to take the form

of a steady advance. (29)

Nevertheless a clear transition there is and it is worth considering this further. In this connection much may be learned both from a consideration of a development in the treatment of certain 'subjects' in the work of a particular poet (and even, on occasion, from a study of successive versions of the same poem). Particular attention will therefore be paid to this evolution in the discussion that follows.

An interesting example of such development is furnished by Verlaine's treatment of the modern urban landscape. Between poems such as 'Croquis parisien' and 'Nocturne parisien' in Poèmes saturniens and 'Charleroi' and 'Streets', II in Romances sans paroles there has been an obvious move towards a more impressionistic language. All the poems are distinguished by acute observation and there is no change in this respect between the earlier poems and the later. However, one immediately striking difference is that whereas the earlier poems mixed observation with direct references to the poet's attitudes, opinions and general knowledge the latter are either absent from or only latent in the pieces from Romances sans paroles. In 'Croquis parisien' the successful, atmospheric evocation of Paris in the first two stanzas seems primarily intended to build up to the contrast (perhaps not untouched by ironic humour) made in the final stanza between modernity and the Parnassian vision of classical Greece.

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.

Similarly 'Nocturne parisien' provides the poet with an opportunity to display his erudition by making contrasts between the Seine and the Tiber,

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- (29) Modernism is not the only factor involved in opening up the world of sensation and transitory experience to the artist in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the case of painting the influence of the Romantics, despite the limitations of the changes they had wrought, was not unimportant especially with regard to a freer attitude to form and colour. In poetry there was a Primitivist tradition of great significance, which had helped to destroy the artistic and social restraints that had so long prevailed. Nor should the influence of oriental art and philosophy be overlooked.

the Guadalquivir, the Pactol, the Bosphorus, the Rhine, the Nile, the Ganges and so on. A description of the sound of a barrel-organ brings in a rather flat-footed reference to Rossini. Paris is not described through its immediate impact upon the poet's sensibility alone but by reference to mythology

Et la nuit terne arrive, et Vénus se balance
- Sinistre trinité' De l'ombre dures portes'
Mané - Thécel - Pharès des illusions mortes' ...
L'Homme, espèce d'Oreste à qui manque une Électre .

'Nocturne parisien' is, as the poet himself informs us, a discursive meditation upon Paris as a city of sinister gloom and untimely death

Sous tes ponts qu'environne une vapeur malsaine
Bien des corps ont passés, morts, horribles, pourris,
Dont les âmes avaient pour meurtrier Paris.
Mais tu n'en traînes pas, en tes ondes glacées,
Autant que ton aspect m'inspire de pensées'

Not surprisingly the youthful Verlaine drew liberally upon the rhetoric of the Romantics, already to be noted in the lines just cited, in the exposition of his meditation

Pensée, espoir serein, ambition sublime,
Tout, jusqu'au souvenir, tout s'envole, tout fuit,
Et l'on est seul avec Paris, l'Onde et la Nuit'

Most imposing of all is the fourteen-line peroration, beginning 'Sinistre trinité'', with its exclamation marks, its abstract nouns ('malheur', 'douleur', 'fatalité', 'horreurs', 'terreurs', 'Ténèbres'), its highly charged adjectives ('dures', 'mortes', 'terribles', 'ivre', 'creux', 'affreux', 'jalouses', 'sourde', 'profonde', 'fardés'), its use of capital letters ('Goules', 'Homme', 'Ver', 'Ténèbres', 'Eau') and its references to mythology. Turning to the poems from Romances sans paroles we find that most traces of the old rhetoric have disappeared. 'Streets', II is simply the evocation of a surprising visual experience

O la rivière dans la rue'

The exclamation mark survives as a device but its function has changed from that of emphatic declamation to an indication of astonishment. The poem is almost exclusively devoted to the poet's visual experience of an aspect of the modern urban landscape. The notion of surprise makes this a more immediate formulation of contemporary reality than the reflective and meditative visions of modernity in 'Croquis parisien' and 'Nocturne parisien'. Doubtless the main device by which this surprise is conveyed is the absence of a verb in the first three lines. The reader is momentarily confronted by the same unexplained sight as the poet and deprived of the contextualising element of a verb or a temporal conjunction. The remaining nine lines represent a falling away from the immediacy and freshness of the initial vision as the poet expands his description

Perhaps this is the main reason (and not the fact that the poem is 'objective description' devoid of obvious emotional connotation) that some readers do not find the poem altogether successful. There are merely hints of emotional overtones 'les faubourgs pacifiés' which seems to indicate the poet's own contentment on these forays into unknown London in the company of Rimbaud. Perhaps the most interesting contrast with 'Nocturne parisien' is between another of these hints 'l'eau jaune comme une morte' and the whole expansive theme of death of the earlier poem now condensed into a few words. In 'Charleroi' the exclamation marks likewise recur but once again they are not a method of emphasis in rhetorical declamation but, with one exception, rather indications of the impact of sense-impressions upon the poet. The one exception, the penultimate stanza, has been discussed above in Part Two, Chapter Two. Similarly the question marks are intended as signs of the poet's genuine bewilderment, again at sense-impressions not yet subjected to the analytical faculty. The rapid succession of images, made to seem even more impressionistic by the four-syllable lines, is in marked contrast to the carefully ordered evocations of modernity in the Poèmes saturniens. This, as we have stated already, is a vision of the industrial age seen by a railway traveller stressing, through the very speed of perception, the essential and necessary immediacy of the impressionistic formulation of modernity. Once more the poet's 'message', his opinions and attitudes, are merely hinted at, being subordinated to the overriding intention of a spontaneous and immediate evocation of his sensations. On the subject of speed and travel it is useful to contrast the seventh poem of La Bonne Chanson with poems like 'Charleroi' and 'Walcourt'. The originality of 'Le paysage dans le cadre des portières ..' should not be underestimated but in that poem Verlaine was still in the middle of the transition to the new poetic language. The description is detailed and discursive, making ample use of precise verbs. There is a retrogressive Vignyesque or Hugolian image in the eighth and ninth lines

Tout le bruit que feraient mille chaînes au bout
Desquelles hurleraient mille géants qu'on fouette ...

Yet Verlaine seems to be aware of the demands for innovation made by the contemporaneity of his subject in the daring enjambement between these very same lines. Similarly the idealised and conventionalised picture which is the other term of the contrast in the poem

..... puisque j'ai dans les yeux
 La blanche vision qui fait mon coeur joyeux,
 Puisque la douce voix pour moi murmure encore,
 Puisque le Nom si beau, si noble et si sonore
 Se mêle ...
 Au rythme du wagon brutal ..

should not be allowed to detract from the daring aesthetic which underlies the evocation of subjects drawn from modern ephemeral reality in the first half of this underrated piece. In contrast to the opening description of La Bonne Chanson, VII, 'Walcourt' and 'Charleroi' recreate the experiences of a train journey without the fact that the poet is on a train even being made especially explicit. Everything is conveyed through the rapid succession of images and through the fast rocking rhythm of the four-syllable lines. This is particularly true of 'Walcourt' which does not contain a single verb. In case the reader were left in any doubt each poem contains a brief indication but these are almost superfluous to the formulation of sensation which is entirely successful

Gares prochaines ...
 ('Walcourt')
 Des gares tonnent ..
 Ou Charleroi ?
 ('Charleroi')

Thus Verlaine clearly progressed from the descriptive treatment of the various aspects of contemporary reality to a more spontaneous, immediate and, thereby, expressive formulation of sense-impressions themselves. Efforts in the best of the poems in Romances sans paroles are made towards the intensification of a short-lived experience rather than an expansion of its temporal context through comparisons, reflections and meditations. This transition also affected, of course, Verlaine's treatment of aspects of ephemeral reality other than modernity proper. With regard to the world of sensation it is sufficient to compare a poem like 'Il Bacio' with the celebrated opening poem of Romances sans paroles. The earlier poem anticipates a number of images found in 'C'est l'extase langoureuse' yet whereas the later poem is concerned entirely with the poet's confused and fleeting sensations and feelings, 'Il Bacio' contains several obtrusive cultural allusions (to Luigi Arditi, Goethe, Will, Rhenish wine and the Middle Ages). The earlier poem is only lifted out of its conventionality by one strikingly humorous (almost Corbièresque) line

Vif accompagnement sur le clavier des dents

Some suggestions have already been made concerning the possibility that this transition may be connected with Verlaine's relations with the Impressionist painters (30) It will be useful to reconsider these for a moment. It is usually acknowledged that he must have met Degas, Monet, Manet, Renoir and possibly others of the front-rank Impressionists but the lack of any other substantial evidence in the form of critical statements, or even in his correspondence, has inclined the more cautious students of his work to a provisional scepticism about the whole possibility of the influence of pictorial Impressionism upon his poetry. How far this is also the product of a more general reluctance to take seriously the question of the relationship between different art-forms it is difficult to assess. There are some points to be made in favour of the hypothesis which even the increasingly numerous and persuasive protagonists of the theory have either omitted or failed to state with sufficient forcefulness. The first of these is fairly obvious and concerns the absence of support in Verlaine's non-poetic writings with the implied conclusion that the evidence is therefore merely (always a dangerous word) circumstantial. The fact is that literary influences upon Verlaine have always been admitted - those of Sainte-Beuve, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, Baudelaire, Hugo, Gautier, the Parnassians and some of his contemporaries including Valade, Mérat, Glatigny, Coppée and, of course Rimbaud, would hardly be challenged - and yet there is scarcely more support in his non-poetic writings for the influence of these poets upon his work than there is for that of the Impressionist painters. The truth is that Verlaine displays a remarkable reticence in giving any information which could be construed as evidence for particular influences of almost any kind upon his work. He is not, of course, alone in this. the problem is probably even more acute in the case of Rimbaud, Mallarmé and Corbière for instance. To this extent, therefore, the reluctance on the part of critics to admit the influence of pictorial Impressionism could be regarded as the result of a 'prejudice' whereas literary influences (even when unsupported by evidence outside the poems themselves) may be accepted and discussed in great detail because one is working within a single medium, that of words, the same cannot be allowed of the influence of paint on canvas upon words on paper. The basic absurdity of seeking to establish detailed links between the technical procedures of Impressionist painting with those of Verlaine's poetry has already been noted at the beginning of this section, but it is extremely doubtful if anyone has ever suggested this (with the possible exception of Hatzfeld who has pushed the notion of the relationship between the arts to the point of eccentricity) This necessary reservation

(30) See Part One, Chapter Two (b) and Part Two, Chapter Two (f).

still leaves much which could be fruitfully discussed, including questions which are completely unaffected by the different techniques of the two art-forms, such as the choice of subjects. A ready example is furnished by the series of poems most often mentioned in connection with Verlaine's impressionism - the 'Paysages belges'. Although Verlaine had expressed an interest in modernity as early as the article on Baudelaire in 1865, his references to contemporary reality had tended more often to take the form of a Coppéesque treatment of everyday life rather than a more specific modernism. With the 'Paysages belges' his orientation becomes decidedly modernistic in a way precisely paralleled by the selection of motifs in Impressionist painting of exactly the same period 'guinguettes claires', 'cris des métaux', 'chevaux de bois', 'piston vainqueur', 'horizons de forges rouges', 'gares prochaines', 'un demi-jour de lampes', 'les wagons', 'le train' Moreover one is more justified in seeing the influence of painting in his work than in the case of most poets, given a lifelong interest (together with some practical ability) in the plastic arts. Indeed few things would be more natural than for the poet to apply lessons he had learned from reflections on painting to his own art. The evidence for Verlaine's interest in pictorial art is overwhelming the use of the titles 'Eaux-fortes', 'Croquis Parisien', 'Marine', 'Effet de Nuit', 'Paysages Tristes', 'Soleils Couchants', and so on, show that it was already abundantly present at the time of writing the 'Poèmes Saturniens'. The association between the 'Fêtes Galantes' and eighteenth-century painting is obvious, close, and has been many times commented on. Titles in 'Romances sans Paroles' confirm the continuation of the interest 'Paysages Belges', 'Simple Fresques', 'Aquarelles' as does the use of technical terms such as 'la fuite ... verdâtre et rose'. Even at this facile level the demonstration is convincing and could be applied to the later collections. As late as 1893 Verlaine was to write poems, entitled 'Impression de printemps', and 'Demi-Teintes'. The point we wish to make is simply this there are no a priori grounds for treating the evidence of many literary influences (which usually goes unchallenged) upon the poet as any less circumstantial, just because they are literary, than that of painting in which he had a proven interest and with which he was sufficiently familiar to have made comparisons and to have considered relationships between the two art-forms. (31)

(31) It may not be inappropriate to recall that one of the most passionate of Verlaine's friendships after 1880 was for a painter, Cazals

Secondly, it is not strictly true to say, as is sometimes claimed, that Verlaine's only substantiated connections with, or interest in, Impressionism are the occasions on which he mentions the groups portrait by Fantin-Latour (Coin de table). In any event his excitement at being painted and being treated as a member of the avant-garde is evident and should not be underestimated as a likely stimulus to the poet's curiosity about the work and ideas of the young painters into whose circle he had thereby been introduced. We have already noted Verlaine's references to contemporary French painters in his correspondence from England. A 'Vieux Coppée' (32) dating from the summer of 1873 shows an intimate acquaintance with the milieu of those involved in the plastic arts, combining mentions of Carjat (the celebrated photographer, and like Nadar, an associate of the Impressionists), the Barbizon school which the Impressionists acknowledged as the precursor of their own still unnamed little group (some of them continued to paint in the forest at Barbizon), and of his friend and compagnon de bohème, Andre Gill. Verlaine dedicated the sonnet 'La Pucelle' (included in Jadis et Naguère but already published in Le Parnasse Contemporain in 1871) to Robert Caze whose salon was one of the most celebrated meeting and talking places for progressive young painters and Verlaine may be presumed to have had an interest in their company (33). In Les Mémoires d'un veuf, Verlaine recalls his association, even as early as the period of the Parnasse contemporain, with painters like Manet and Bazille. Later, in 1884, he described Manet's portrait of Mallarmé in terms appreciative of that painter's sense of modernity and immediacy

Manet a peint Mallarmé dans une attitude et à un âge immémoriaux en dépit des cigare et veston qu'affectionnait pour ses portraits d'hommes le grand artiste moderniste, si intuitif et si fin ... Ingres eût-il mieux fait que Manet? Non' (34)

(32) 'Les écrevisses ont mangé mon coeur qui saigne', O.P.C., p. 297.

(33) Late in his career he was to demonstrate an interest in the work of painters such as Redon (the recipient of one of the Epigrammes), Puvis de Chavannes (for whom he wrote one of the Dédicaces) and Gauguin. Félicien Rops was to be one of his illustrators.

(34) Oeuvres en Prose Complètes, p. 636.

Thirdly, it is not the case that influences between literary and artistic movements are necessarily effected by their most representative figures. Forain and Gill, for instance, were far likelier to be contacts with Impressionist theories for Verlaine than major painters like Monet for the very good reason, that quite apart from the fact that they were close friends of Verlaine, they were writers as well as artists. Similarly, Fantin-Latour, although unadventurous as a painter, made his studio a focal point in the embryonic period of Impressionism where painters and writers could mingle.

Finally, contrary to what is sometimes supposed, the idea of Verlaine's impressionism is not a new one. It was current in Verlaine's own lifetime. More than once the establishment critic Jules Lemaitre spoke of the impressionnisme of some of the younger poets in his articles in La Revue Bleue in the 1880s and was to come to see Verlaine as their foremost representative. (35) Some of the poets themselves made the same attribution. Gill paid Verlaine the compliment of imitation and Ajalbert the double compliment of imitation and dedication in their volumes of verse. Gill (with the possible and controversial exception of Rimbaud) is surely the first imitator of Verlaine in 'Impressionnisme' and other poems possibly written as early as the mid-1870s and certainly no later than 1878-79. (36) Ajalbert's dedications and imitations occur in the two collections of vers impressionnistes Sur le vif and Sur les talus, both first published in 1886. In 1888 Raynaud called Verlaine 'le paysagiste éminent, l'impressionniste subtil' in an article in Le Décadent, comparing him, somewhat surprisingly, with Daubigny, Courbet and Corot. (37)

- (35) See especially his article 'M. Paul Verlaine et les poètes symbolistes et décadents', La Revue Bleue, June 1885, pp. 738-44
- (36) P. Stephan is surely wrong in an interesting article already referred to ('Paul Verlaine and Guy-Valvor') to see the poem 'Raquettes et volants', which did not appear until 1883, as the earliest imitation of Verlaine.
- (37) 'M. Jules Lemaitre et les poètes décadents', Le Décadent, February 1888.

The idea of Verlaine's 'impressionism' has a much longer history, therefore, than the fifty years since the publication of his correspondence including the letter to Blémond of 5th October 1872 containing the now famous description of Romances sans Paroles as 'une série d'impressions vagues, tristes et gaies . . '

Reference has already been made (in the discussion of the part played by the world of sensation in Verlaine's poetry) to a number of instances where the poet's treatment of colour and light seems to invite comparisons with pictorial Impressionism. The point may be considered further in connection with a poem like 'Bruxelles - Simples Fresques', I.

This short 'urban' poem of twelve seven-syllable lines is particularly remarkable for its pictorial qualities. Verlaine concerns himself very much here with impressions of light and colour and he certainly had the art of painting in mind when he set about the writing of this poem. 'La fuite' in the first line is a term borrowed from painting and refers to the far distance in a picture. The word also suggests, however, the elusive and ethereal quality of the light and colour. In this poem we see a reflection of the ephemeral nature of Impressionism. We are presented with a picture of Brussels as seen on a Summer evening with the sun, peeping through the tops of the trees as it sinks towards the horizon, where the pink and green light glows on hills and houses. The poet is fascinated by the quality of this light, the effect of which he tries hard to express

. un demi-jour de lampes
Qui vient brouiller toute chose.

Verlaine's preference for misty, Northern climes is illustrated here and this is another aspect of his character and art which allied him to the Impressionists. Although the Impressionists came to attempt to paint the most dazzling luminous effects their art has been seen as, initially, a Northern reaction to the art of the Mediterranean with its traditionally hard lines and emphasis on accurate drawing. (Some art critics regard Impressionism to be at its best in depicting the relatively misty light of the Seine basin.)

The ephemeral and elusive aspects of the subject are emphasised in the ninth and tenth lines

Triste à peine tant s'effacent
Ces apparences d'automne ...

The poet's interest in colour is almost as great as his interest in defining the quality of the light. Thus we read of 'la fuite ... verdâtre et rose' and of 'l'or' which 'tout doucement s'ensanglante'. Although the latter image may owe something to Baudelaire the interest in colour seems spontaneous enough. The point at which Verlaine comes closest to the intention of the Impressionist painters is in his fascination with the ability of light to dissolve solid objects

La fuite est verdâtre et rose
Des collines et des rampes ...

Un demi-jour de lampes
Qui vient brouiller toute chose ..

L'or, sur les humbles abîmes
..... s'ensanglante ...

Des petits arbres sans cimes ...

..... .. tant s'effacent
Ces apparences

But, of course, Verlaine is not a painter and he does not have to limit himself to visual impressions, the creation of atmosphere is achieved by reference to other senses

... .. quelque oiseau faible chante
and also

..... l'air monotone

Thus the visual and aural impressions are complementary, combining in a total effect which both encourages and reflects the poet's state of 'rêverie'. Despite the coalescence between the mood of the poet and external phenomena the function of this poem is not primarily 'symbolic'. Verlaine shows too great an interest in detailing the effects of light and colour for this to be so.

Parts of Verlaine's poetry may be held to exemplify many of the features of impressionistic poetry listed on pp. 662 - 666 and the closeness between this 'new' language and the treatment of subjects drawn from contemporary reality.

Like the other great poets of contemporary reality and the Impressionist painters, Verlaine made frequent successful use of epitome . the rain in 'Ariettes oubliées', III, the piano in 'Ariettes oubliées', V, the wooden fairground horses in 'Bruxelles - Chevaux de bois', insipid, dusty whiteness in Sagesse, III, xvi. The first of these examples demonstrates Verlaine's ability to match epitome drawn from reality with an epitome or dominante in sound. The opening stanza consists of plaintive vowel sounds which hesitate between the open and closed form. This incantatory effect (nevertheless rooted in material reality) is not allowed to be interrupted, the second line has no rhyme since Verlaine wanted nothing to detract from his basic coloration.

The association between impressionistic techniques and contemporary subjects is doubtless best illustrated by certain of the Romances sans Paroles but it is quite possible to see it in earlier poems. One such poem is La Bonne Chanson, XVI, an evocation of the modern city already examined in Part Two, Chapter Two. All that remains of the alexandrine are twelve-syllable lines with a discreet and unemphasised rhyme. The central caesura is respected only in the first, second and penultimate lines. In all the others a natural reading would glide from the sixth to the seventh syllables without pausing. Rather like Rimbaud's 'Au Cabaret-Vert' the piece is nearer to rhythmic prose than traditional verse. Indeed its style has much in common with the prose style of the Goncourts: absence of main verbs, simple juxtaposition of nouns in a sequence of brief impressions which follow one another as on a screen. At first sight it appears to be without structure, there is no reason why the sequence of impressions should stop at the point it does, it could have been extended indefinitely. Verlaine has seen, however, that immediacy may be the reward of brevity (38) and so brings the sequence to a close with an ending which would have done justice to a troubadour.

Turning to the Romances sans Paroles the most obvious examples of the link between contemporary subjects and impressionism are to be found in the 'Paysages belges'. In 'Charleroi' the rhythm is a perfect formulation of the poet's impressions, and rather than detailed description of the industrial landscape he concentrates on epitomes. In the first stanza the sentences are spread over two lines but this does not prevent them from having a jerky, abrupt rhythm matching the hammering noises of an industrial town (and the imaginary activities of the kobolds). After that the sentences become shorter - consisting only of subject and verb, even verbs are eliminated in the third stanza. Verlaine retains words which are vivid

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- (38) When Raynaud described the young poets whose principal interest was 'perception plus immédiate de la vie', he added that 'la forme la plus ordinaire de leurs poèmes est le sonnet, s'appropriant merveilleusement au rendu de toute émotion - l'intensité étant en raison inverse de la durée'.
 ('M. Jules Lemaitre et les poètes décadents', Le Décadent, February 1888.)

(evoking sounds and colours) but dispenses with 'logical' and 'grammatical' words of neutral value. The use of epitome is particularly successful in the first stanza where the black colour (and the dark vowels) evoke the desolation of an industrial region. In the second stanza the wind blowing across the plain finds its equivalent in the piercing, whistling sonorities. In the third stanza blazing furnaces against a black horizon are evoked in notation fashion. The whole noise of a railway station is contained in these lines, in the fourth stanza.

Des gares tonnent,
Les yeux s'étonnent ...

The poet's concern throughout is with the salient noises, colours and smell of an industrial region at work, with no time for extraneous comment or elaboration.

Jacques Robichez (39) speaks of the 'deux aspects opposés de la Belgique Jordaens et Verhaeren' that are presented in 'Walcourt' and 'Charleroi'. It is indeed true the former is filled with a sense of 'joie de vivre' that occasionally enlivens the work of the Dutch and Flemish genre painters. Like Rimbaud's 'Au Cabaret-Vert', 'Walcourt' is so direct that little comment and certainly no exegesis is called for

This is without doubt one of Verlaine's most revolutionary poems, the series of impressions lacks even the limited connecting devices that are to be found in 'Charleroi' - the most obvious feature is the total absence of verbs in the poem. Paradoxically this has not produced a series of static visions for the lively rhythm of the poem provides a sense of mobility and the adjectives selected have an intrinsic quality of activity and movement

~~Textes insignés~~
Des francs buveurs'

Guinguettes claires,
Bières, clameurs
Servantes chères
A tous fumeurs'

Gares prochaines
Gais chemins grands ...
Quelles aubaines
Bons juifs errants'

One has the impression that the rhythm of this poem and that of others in Paysages belges may be based on the rocking rhythm of a train in motion.

(39) In Verlaine, Oeuvres Poétiques, (Garnier ed), p. 589.

One feels that the various descriptive details of the poem may have been presented as a rapidly passing sequence to the poet during a train journey.

Briques et tuiles

 Houblons et vignes
 ...
 Guinguettes claires

 Gares prochaines

The things and activities described by the poet are without exception presented in a happy light. Objects which in themselves might be considered as neutral are a cause for joy because of the associations evoked in the poet's mind. 'Briques et tuiles', for example, are associated with the notion of peaceful and pretty love-nests. In another mood the poet might have associated them with the bourgeois happiness from which he was excluded and consequently resented them. The sheer accumulation of impressions guarantees the overall effect of 'joie de vivre' and recalls many fine Impressionist paintings of café scenes

Bières, clameurs,
 Servantes chères
 A tous fumants

The use of verse, rather than poetic prose, is a positive contribution to the impressionistic effect. The bouncing rhythm fills 'Walcourt' with a sense of bustle and excitement which exactly suits the subject. Perhaps the most important gain is the use of rhyme which is valuable in giving cohesion and harmony to the juxtaposed elements. More generally the masterly control of poetic resources is what lies at the base of Verlaine's apparent spontaneity and naïveté, it is an effect for which he doubtless had to work very hard.

* * * * *

It is perhaps more difficult to chart transitions of any kind in Rimbaud's short and hectic poetic career than in the case of most other poets. Although many critics seem to tackle his work on the assumption that there is clear-cut progression of some sort (for instance, up to and then away from hallucinatory poetry) there is very little support for such an assumption. One only needs to consider the diversity of form, style and subject within the Illuminations to come to the conclusion that Rimbaud was still in the process of experimentation of various kinds. Indeed, in some ways the Illuminations are almost as uneven as the Romances sans paroles. Looking at the earlier poetry there is an advance between poems of a relatively straightforward descriptive discursive type (e.g. 'A la musique', 'Vénus Anadyomène', 'Première Soirée', 'Le Dormeur du Val', 'Les Pauvres à l'Eglise') and more difficult pieces involving a greater dislocation of the logical pattern of discourse and a free-ranging,

'impressionistic' harvesting of images (e.g. 'Mes petites amoureuses' and 'Les Mains de Jeanne-Marie') which anticipates the apparent free, spontaneous association of some of the Derniers Vers and Illuminations. Moreover, Rimbaud had expounded an aesthetic based on expressive and immediate rather than discursive poetry in one of his earliest poems, 'Sensation'. Despite this complicated situation, we should like, however, to suggest a three-stage pattern of evolution in very general terms from the careful description in conventional language of everyday reality in the earliest poems to something akin to impressionistic notation in some of the Illuminations.

This pattern will be best understood by taking an example from each stage, 'Les Etrennes des Orphelins', 'Au Cabaret-vert' and 'Dimanche' ('Jeunesse', I). The first of these is quite obviously to be related to the genre of sentimental realism prevalent in some fiction and painting of the period and brought into poetry notably by Coppée in Les Intimités of 1868 and earlier in his Poésies (of 1854-59) where one poem 'Les Enfants trouvées' served as a direct model for Rimbaud. Nevertheless this is an astonishing piece of verse for a fifteen-year-old and arguably superior to most of Coppée's own work. In particular one notices the successful evocation of atmosphere and emotion through physical description

Or les petits enfants, sous le rideau flottant,
Parlent bas comme on fait dans une nuit obscure.

The best of the poem is characterised by an attention to detail of this kind

La chambre est pleine d'ombre, on entend vaguement
De deux enfants le triste et doux chuchotement.
Leur front se penche, encore alourdi par le rêve,
Sous le long rideau blanc qui tremble et se soulève ...
- Au dehors les oiseaux se rapprochent frileux,
Leur aile s'engourdit sous le ton gris des cieux ..
- Puis, la chambre est glacée ... on voit traîner à terre,
Epars autour des lits, des vêtements de deuil ...

Un grand feu pétillait, clair, dans la cheminée,
Toute la vieille chambre était illuminée,
Et les reflets vermeils, sortis du grand foyer,
Sur les meubles vernis aimaient à tournoyer .

Rimbaud was, of course, indebted to other poets for some of his images and lines. Apart from Coppée one finds reminiscences of Hugo, Baudelaire and Banville. Unfortunately reminiscence of another, now deservedly forgotten, poet, J. Reboul, is a reminder of the major shortcoming of the poem - its excessive sentimentality. There is a pandering to the tastes of the poet's prospective audience which would be unforgiveable in an older poet (Rimbaud is further absolved by the closeness of the subject to his own unhappy childhood)

Votre coeur l'a compris - ces enfants sont sans mère
Plus de mère au logis' - et le père est bien loin' ...

Maintenant, les petits sommeillent tristement
Vous diriez, à les voir, qu'ils pleurent en dormant,
Tant leurs yeux sont gonflés et leur souffle pénible'
Les tout petits enfants ont le coeur si sensible'
- Mais l'ange des berceaux vient essuyer leurs yeux,
Et dans ce lourd sommeil mêt un rêve joyeux ...

The sentimental evocation of the pains and joys (for instance the description of 'ce matin des étrennes') of everyday reality in 'Les Etrennes des Orphelins' gives way in 'Au Cabaret-Vert', as we have already seen to a desentimentalised formulation of everyday sensual pleasure in a deliberately prosaic style aimed at recreating the freshness and spontaneity of experience. In the earlier poem the temporal as well as the emotional range had been expanded by nostalgia for past happiness (actually recreated in the poem) and tenuous hope for the future. In 'Au Cabaret-Vert' the poet's attention is devoted to a few instants of pleasure located very precisely by the poet in time and place in the title

Au Cabaret-Vert, cinq heures du soir

Nevertheless the poem is still constructed as a clearly defined sequence. It uses literary devices (e.g. the past historic and the inversion in the last line -) and for all its relative spontaneity has still quite clearly been submitted to the ordering process of the intellect. (To this extent one could relate it to the harder, more sharply delineated style of paintings like Manet's Le Bon Bock than to the more spontaneous technique of rapid notation found in Impressionism proper.) 'Au Cabaret-Vert' is nonetheless an important advance in the direction of poetic impressionism more fully realised in 'Dimanche'. The brevity of notation in this poem has in fact been the major cause of the difficulties apparently experienced in its comprehension. Suzanne Bernard, for instance, usually one of the most sensible Rimbaudian exegetes, has, to our mind, misread the poem, she is not alone. We would

propose the following exegesis, the poem is an evocation of the activities of Sunday in the modern suburban age schoolwork ('les calculs') is left to one side as religious observance ('l'inévitable descente du ciel') takes its place, perusal of family albums or possibly museums ('la visite des souvenirs') is another obligatory Sunday occupation along with piano lessons ('la séance des rythmes'), a horse is taken for its Sunday exercise or actually run in a race in the stunted and besmirched urban landscape (presumably, one guesses from the word 'turf', in London), the Sunday press with its news of faits divers ('Une misérable femme de drame' etc.) and adventure literature are popular pastimes, 'les desperadoes' would either be characters in the latter or possibly more likely, the children playing at being pirates or bandits these same children on walks by the river must be careful to moderate their language - even if they do like to pretend that they are uncouth outlaws - in the presence of adults. Nor is there anything particularly 'sybilline' about the last sentence of the poem. Of course there are difficulties if one wrongly assumes that 'les masses' is a term borrowed from physics (thus compounding the over-serious interpretation of 'calculs') but it is quite obviously used in the sense of the greater part of the population as in 'les masses laborieuses' (Robert) In plain language the schoolchildren - and the poet is recollecting the days when he was one of them - recommence their studies when Sunday is over and work resumes its normal and time-absorbing position in the lives of ordinary people. The rapidity of the sequence of images, the relative lack of formal connection between them and the absence of explanation and comment are all features of impressionistic style present in this poem. The first sentence is an excellent example of the replacement of normal discourse by a markedly nominal style. There is only one, rather weak, verb in the sentence. The nouns 'descente', 'visite', 'séance' and 'demeure' all avoid what would most probably be verbal constructions in normal discourse. So does the adverbial phrase 'de côté'. Similarly in the fourth there is a miracle of concision and immediacy in 'après l'orage, l'ivresse et les blessures'.

One can identify a similar transition (not always so obviously in three stages) across a variety of themes in Rimbaud's poetry. In this connection it is interesting to consider the critical attitude towards hypocritical bourgeois society expressed with descriptive clarity in 'A la Musique' in contrast with the later impressionistic account of the corrupt materialist age in parts of the Villes poems. Again there is a striking and more obvious instance of change in the treatment of the modern city between 'L'Orgie parisienne' and 'Bruxelles'. The rhetorical grandeur and power of the first of these two poems invites comparison with Leconte de Lisle's 'Le Sacre de Paris' and the Victor Hugo of 'Les Châtiments'. Such rhetoric is not inappropriate in this condemnation of the bloody suppression

of the Commune by the Versaillais through a description of the Paris of 1871. Yet to some extent the poem is also close to the Baudelairean exposé of Parisian vice, and may thus be considered more generally as a poem of the modern city. The sense is surely not that the suppression of the Commune was a uniquely vicious act but that the most abhorrent feature of the events was a return to the previous status quo, orgies and all, of a Paris controlled by a corrupt, materialistic bourgeois régime. The poem is distinguished by the violence and the vigour of its imagery but although it is not expressed in the language of normal discourse it does clearly belong to the declamatory tradition of French verse (even on the most superficial level with its personifications, frequent 'ô's, and capital letters and so on) rather than to the new poetic language which stressed the immediacy of emotion and sensation. 'Bruxelles' is also a highly unusual evocation of the modern city but of a completely different kind. Here the poet formulates his personally and immediately experienced feeling of joyful freedom through a series of impressions and associations as he surveys the Boulevard du Régent. The vexed question of the date of composition (July 1872 or July 1873) need not affect this fundamental attitude which could equally well reflect the poet's happiness with Verlaine prior to their departure for England or his relief at escaping death in the lovers' tiff a year later, although our own inclination is very much towards an 1872 date since this accords with points in our own exegesis. This series of unexplained, swiftly passing, impressions, but especially the associations to which they give rise, provides more cause for genuine difficulty of comprehension than 'Dimanche'. Indeed, 'Bruxelles' is very close to the more inscrutable poems of the Illuminations. It illustrates well one aspect of a point to be developed later - the relationship of impressionism to synthesis. Nevertheless, it is possible to arrive at some kind of understanding of the poem, which is necessary to a proper appreciation of the complexity of the possible patterns arising out of the linked techniques of poetic impressionism and unexplained, apparently spontaneous association. The opening description of ornamental gardens leading up to an imposing neo-classical civic building against a blue July sky appears to have suggested a mental picture of a Roman temple (to Jupiter the sky-god) in North Africa. Such a picture could easily arise in the mind of someone with Rimbaud's awareness of classical culture. Moreover, 'Sahara' would recommend itself by its musicality - suggesting as it does a feeling of expansiveness. (40) The

(40) c.f. Verlaine's 'Malines'.

second stanza is much more difficult than the first. One wonders if even the syntax here has been properly understood. It has generally been assumed that 'du soleil' is an adjectival phrase qualifying 'sapin' which on the face of it is the most straightforward interpretation. Yet one should not discard the possibility that Rimbaud, by an admittedly daring departure from normal word order, is suggesting that 'du soleil' is dependent upon 'enclos'. If this new reading of the stanza is correct then the poet is making a contrast between the pagan sun-filled image of the first stanza (appropriate in relation to his efforts to make Verlaine a 'fils du soleil') and the enclosed, sheltered 'garden' assimilated with 'Cage de la petite veuve'. The source of the image may be a newspaper kiosk in a shaded part of the boulevard (referred to again in the third stanza) operated by a saleswoman. Rimbaud seems again to move from visual impression to mental association and in this instance the most appropriate association is surely with Verlaine's abandoned wife Mathilde ('la petite veuve') and not Verlaine himself. This accords well with a July 1872 date of composition. The stanza would refer to the abandoned security of the conjugal home, likened to this spot sheltered from the sun (which had been equated with pagan beauty in the opening stanza). The end of the second stanza marks a return to immediate sense-impressions in the form of the onomatopoeic allusion to the song of the birds. The third stanza continues the series of impressions hand in hand with mental associations, in this case a development of the previous one. The sedate bourgeois homes are not only a feature of the Belgian capital but another reminder of the Verlaine-Mathilde relationship alluded to in 'anciennes passions' (41). The probable initial spontaneity of the poet's equation of impressions and association is suggested by the use of the Ardennais expression 'les fesses des rosiers'. Of course, this idiom has the additional result of introducing the hint of female sexual attributes expanded in 'rosiers, balcon [rosiers, bas le con ?] ombreux et très bas de la Juliette' (42) and later in the poem. Again one is tempted to see some architectural feature of the Boulevard du Régent as the starting-point of this complex association. Juliette, the archetypal representative of passionate, romantic womanhood, will be the subject of a surprising and at first sight incomprehensible comparison in the fourth stanza. Contrary to the judgment of most of the commentators, including Suzanne Bernard, we feel that Gengoux's oft-dismissed suggestion that the

(41) Mathilde is 'Folle par affection'

(42) Further sexual associations may occur because of the slang use of 'balcon' for breasts.

Juliette-Henriette reference is inspired by Banville's 'La Voie lactée' is indeed correct. For one thing (a point often passed over) there can be no doubt that Rimbaud was very familiar with the poem, for there are references to it elsewhere in his work, for instance, in 'Les Etrennes des Orphelins'. From a general type of female beauty Rimbaud moves to a specifically French one, Henriette (heroine of Les Femmes savantes). The reason why no-one has yet traced a railway station with anything like the name Henriette is almost certainly that it does not, and never did, exist. (43) Henriette here means woman (possibly a particular woman, either a further reference to Mathilde, or to a whore whose services Rimbaud and Verlaine had enjoyed) as an ephemeral source of pleasure, a place for a temporary halt (such as the phase of Verlaine's settled existence with Mathilde), something delightful and charming but to be passed through (with the sexual connotation that phrase implies) like a railway station on the journey through life. Rimbaud thus gives a wider significance, through a totally unexpected association, to the fascination he and Verlaine felt for railway travel and particularly railway stations, as we indicated in Part Two, Chapter Two. That this is indeed the sense of 'charmante station du chemin de fer' is made more probable by a sexual interpretation of the rest of the stanza. This in the present writer's view refers, on one level, to the bijou which lies at the heart of the mons veneris like the fruit at the bottom of an orchard and which might be surrounded by the blue-black wisps of that other toison to which Baudelaire had once referred as though by a host of protecting yet alluring demons. This seems to be one instance where the sexual psychology of Rimbaud so frequently referred to in entirely inappropriate circumstances should have been brought into consideration.

Thus the first four stanzas are concerned, by association, with a contrast between the delights of neo-pagan freedom presently enjoyed by Rimbaud and Verlaine in their enjoyment of Brussels and the confining pleasures of marriage and heterosexual relationships previously enjoyed by Verlaine and possibly even Rimbaud himself. This contrast develops organically, however, out of a series of impressions of modern life. The fourth stanza represented a remarkable telescoping of sexual associations with an aspect of the Belgian adventure - railway travel. In particular the last line of the fourth stanza acts as the articulation of the relationship between

(43) Even if it did it would not invalidate our exegesis but simply provide another point of articulation.

impressionism (although not in this case drawn directly from the Boulevard du Régent) and association since not only does it possibly have the sexual connotation outlined above but quite obviously refers to the blue smoke hovering in the air around the entrance to the hangar of a railway station. The reader is thus presented with an image combining an impression of modernity with a more 'universal' association.

The remaining three stanzas are primarily concerned with the poet's immediate impressions of the Boulevard du Régent whilst associations are of lesser importance. The poet's attention is drawn to a woman street singer (whom Rimbaud fancies is high) on a bench under the green light of the trees - that miniature paradise where one shelters when there is a sudden downpour. This is near the open window of the dining room of a pensionnat with mahogany furniture (see Ce qu'on dit au poète ..., stanza 19, for the explanation of 'guyanaise') with the further 'tropical' connotation of pet birds whose chattering is heard together with that of children. Next Rimbaud's eye wanders to the residence of the fastidious Duke Charles d'Arenberg providing a suggestion of an attitude contrary to the spirit of joy and freedom with which the Boulevard is otherwise pervaded a quest for ostentation epitomised in Rimbaud's mind by over-neat box-wood garden borders and poison put down to kill troublesome snails. But it is the sun which continues to dominate all. It is tempting to regard the last line of the penultimate stanza as an unfavourable comment upon the sumptuousness of d'Arenberg's house but the recurrence of the same words in 'Est-elle-almée' in an unironic context (incidentally another argument for a July 1872 date for 'Bruxelles') would seem to suggest that it is instead an introduction to the final stanza and that it is a genuine comment upon the impact of this series of impressions of the modern urban scene upon the poet's sensibility. One is surprised that the last stanza has been singled out for its obscurity, apart from one point it is probably the least difficult part of the poem and in some ways, the least original. For this concluding remark is a summary in something close to discursive terms of the poet's attitude, a neo-Romantic intrusion of the moi. The one area of uncertainty is whether the quietness and stillness of the Boulevard marks a transition from daylight to nighttime in the city (scarcely likely since there is no reason to suppose that it would be completely quiet at night and in any case difficult to reconcile with the previous suggestions of strong sunlight unless the last stanza is intended as a contrastive impression relating to another, nocturnal stroll down the Boulevard), or provides a hint that the poet has been describing a Sunday scene (quite possible but still not a solution in itself as it does not get round the fact that regardless of the day described the previous stanzas

are clearly not devoid of 'mouvement' nor are they 'muet') or, finally whether they relate in some way to poetic vision rather than reality. The latter seems to us to be by far the best exegesis. Rimbaud is no longer evoking his individual experiences of the Boulevard but telling the reader that he has crystallised them in a poetic construct formulating the intensity of a simple experience of unadulterated joy having all the potentiality of particular scenes and activities ('Réunion des scènes infinie') but transcending them. He is in a privileged state of contemplative awe and further attention to details is superfluous.

Whereas 'L'Orgie parisienne', even without its relevance to particular historical events, would have been concerned with social and moral values lending it a broader context than mere transitory experience, 'Bruxelles' is devoted to the formulation of an entirely personal état d'âme derived from a series of immediate impressions and the associations these generate. This difference of treatment of the modern city is naturally reflected in even the more obvious aspects of form and language in the poems. 'L'Orgie parisienne' is of a length (nineteen stanzas) not normally suited to the evocation of fleeting experience. (Although Laforgue was to reconcile impressionism with the long poem.) The full power of the rolling alexandrine is employed in building up crescendo-like moments

Ouvrez votre narine aux superbes nausées'

The horrifying picture is built out of a series of unusual but rationally comprehensible and logically linked images. 'Bruxelles' is a much shorter poem though still of a sufficient length to enable the construction of a network of associations. The decasyllabic line is less likely to be bombastic than the alexandrine and is made to seem even less so here because of enjambements (Stanza 1, lines 1 and 2, Stanza 2, lines 1 and 2, 3 and 4, Stanza 3 lines 4 and 4, and Stanza 6 lines 1 and 2, 3 and 4). There are no obvious links between the images which are not immediately comprehensible in any rational sense. They have the apparent disordered spontaneity of actual impressions. Nominal, non-verbal style is again a feature of poetic impressionism in 'Bruxelles'. The opening two-line description does not contain a verb, the second stanza only has one verb - the weak 'ont', the third stanza has no verb at all, the second half of the fifth stanza is a description without a verb, as are the first three lines of the final stanza. It is interesting to note that one of the two stanzas which makes more extensive use of verbal construction - Stanza 4 - is the only stanza in the poem which does not draw directly on impressions derived from the Boulevard du Régent. It is here that remembered experience and association have the greatest importance. The sixth stanza is in some ways the

beginning of the more discursive message at the end of the poem - a commentary upon the poet's feeling of ineffable joy set off by a contrast with the fastidious artificiality of d'Aremberg's residence. It is not surprising, therefore, that it should contain more verbs than any other stanza in the poem.

In considering the work of Rimbaud it is not inappropriate to recall that this same transition could play a part in poetry drawing its inspiration largely from his own inner anxieties but relating these to such experiences as travel. The longing for a new life, expressed in allegorical fashion in 'Le Bateau ivre' and in more discursive, almost neo-Romantic, terms in the 'penitent' sections of Une Saison en Enfer, was to be formulated with perfect concision in 'Départ'. The poem contains only a single verb, the sense being conveyed by nouns and by the use of past participles in the repetition 'Assez vu - Assez eu - Assez connu'. Not only is the idea of hope for the future perfectly expressed but it takes its force from the contrast with the feeling of satiety with all the superficial experiences, the sounds, sight and scents of cities by day and by night, that a restless life has to offer and which the voyant has deluded himself into thinking might provide food for visions

Assez vu La vision s'est rencontrée à tous les airs.
Assez eu Rumeurs des villes, le soir, et au soleil, et toujours
Assez connu. Les arrêts de la vie. - O Rumeurs et Visions!
Départ dans l'affection et le bruit neufs'

As in the case of Verlaine it is possible to talk of the closeness of Rimbaud's work to certain aspects of pictorial Impressionism. It is worth remarking that both the colorisme and the perspective of certain of Rimbaud's descriptions are remarkably reminiscent of Impressionist painting. This is possibly coincidence - they may be symptoms of a freer attitude to the notation of sensual experience - but Rimbaud had seen the works of Turner, had access to the work and ideas of Forain and Nouveau and had seen Impressionist paintings proper both in London and in Fantin-Latour's studio, and indeed, via Verlaine, was open to all the same influences as the poet of Romances sans Paroles. Examples of Impressionist perspective are to be found in 'Après le Déluge'

... la mer étagée là-haut comme sur
les gravures . .

in 'Villes' (XVII).

... les canaux pendus derrière les
chalets ..

in 'Adieu'

.. Notre barque élevée dans les brumes
immobiles ...

and 'Phrases'

Le haut étang fume continuellement ...

His colorisme was a feature of even early poems such as 'Le Dormeur du Val'

Et la nuque baignant dans le frais cresson bleu ...

and continued to be so, as in 'Nocturne vulgaire'

Un vert et un bleu très foncés envahissent
l'image. Dételage aux environs d'une tache de gravier.

More generally luminous effects can have great importance in his work

In 'Marine' the play of light is the whole subject of the poem - even the coalescence of prow and plough, of sea and land develops in all probability from the poet's éblouissement by the bright sunlight and may not be a metaphor at all

Les chars d'argent et de cuivre -
Les proues d'acier et d'argent -
Battent l'écume, -
Soulèvent les souches des ronces.
Les courants de la lande,
Et les ornières immenses du reflux,
Filent circulairement vers l'est,
Vers les piliers de la forêt, -
Vers les fûts de la jetée,
Dont l'angle est heurté par des tourbillons de lumière

Indeed Rimbaud would seem almost to be making this explicit in the last line of the poem. It may well be that certain celebrated crisis points in other poems may have had a more literal origin than is sometimes supposed, that the poet's moods and emotions were peculiarly sensitive to the play of light (44)

Puis l'orage changea le ciel, jusqu'au soir ... (45)

Zut alors, si le soleil quitte ces bords!
Fuis, clair déluge! Voici l'ombre des routes ..
..... voici que mon esprit vole,
Après les ciels glacés de rouge, sous les
Nuages célestes qui courent et volent .. (46)

(44) A point he himself seems to be making in his comment 'Certains ciels ont affiné mon optique' ('Guerre').

(45) 'Larme'.

(46) 'Michel et Christine'

As in the case of Verlaine, Rimbaud's poetry provides many illustrations of the various elements in poetic impressionism listed above. It also demonstrates the close association between impressionistic techniques and the contemporary subjects examined in Part Two, Chapter Two.

In 'Phrases', for instance, an ~~ordinary~~ ^{workaday} landscape (possibly in the Ardennes) is evoked through a series of impressionistic notations largely formulating sense-impressions

Une matinée couverte, en Juillet. Un goût de cendres vole dans l'air, - une odeur de bois suant dans l'âtre, - les fleurs rouies, - le saccage des promenades, - la brume des canaux par les champs - pourquoi pas déjà les joujoux et l'encens?

In such a poem the intellect makes no obvious intervention in the way of comment or reflection. It is the impact of this grey landscape and the industries it supports upon the poet's sensibility which is the unique subject of the poem. What appears to be a reflection in the question which concludes the piece is more properly an almost Proustian association of sensations. The smell of burning coal and the mist remind the poet of December days and of Christmas with its gifts of toys and its incense-filled churches. In this way the poem, by association, alludes both to everyday life and to the modern industrial or agricultural landscape.

In the quest for a style which would enable him to evoke the sheer variety, swiftness, and acuité of his experiences of contemporary reality Rimbaud had already undertaken those metrical experiments which it would be pointless to discuss again in detail here since they have been examined with great care by others. Having progressively moved from experiments within the traditional framework, to vers libéré and then to vers libre he seems to have decided that the still greater freedom of poetic prose would provide him with the apparent immediacy of notation which is so characteristic of the Illuminations.

We have already noted how the same style, incorporated within vers libre had been used to render a fleeting and confusing transitory effect - of light - in 'Marine'. Imprecision and the inability to analyse are at the very opposite extreme to the precepts and practice of classicism and there would be a marked incongruity in attempting to formulate such an experience within the ordered and balanced metrical structure which Rimbaud borrowed from his predecessors in his earliest poems. This lack of definition is, as we have suggested, a frequent feature of impressionistic style. This may lead to difficulty from the reader's point of view in

comprehending the 'meaning' of a particular poem as in the case of 'Bruxelles', already examined, where the varied activities and sights of a large modern city, together with the associations they provoke, are evoked in a dazzling sequence forming what it has become fashionable to call an epiphany. The reduction of formal logical structure to a series of juxtaposed units of sense-impressions involving the removal of articulating features such as precise verbs is an important aspect of Rimbaud's style, a tendency already noted in connection with 'Dimanche' ('Jeunesse' I)

The circus was to be one form of popular entertainment which fascinated the Impressionist painters as well as poets like Laforgue. Rimbaud's 'Ornières' may be included among important works of the period treating this theme (as also may 'Enfance', III). It is remarkable for its impressionistic style including a long verbless sequence

... Défilé de fêeries. En effet des chars chargés d'animaux de bois doré, de mâts et de toiles bariolées, au grand galop de vingt chevaux de cirque tachetés, et les enfants et les hommes sur leurs bêtes les plus étonnantes, - vingt véhicules, bossés, pavoisés et fleuris comme des carrosses anciens ou de contes, plein d'enfants attifés pour une pastorale suburbaine .

The variety and movement of the scene before the poet is well conveyed by the nominal constructions which do not allow time to ponder on connections and relationships. There is, however, in keeping with Rimbaud's practice in his impressionistic poems (as already seen) an association - on this occasion the comparison with 'carrosses anciens'. It is interesting to note, nonetheless, that formal similes are most uncommon in the Illuminations whereas 'comme' was one of the most frequent words in Baudelaire's vocabulary. It is indeed the case that similes detract from pure impressionism. In this instance it is symptomatic of a surprising concern for precision evident also in the repeated exact number 'vingt'. This question of exactitude will be reconsidered, with reference to 'Nocturne vulgaire' and 'Les Ponts'. Before concluding these brief remarks on 'Ornières' it should not be overlooked that Rimbaud consciously locates this impressionistic vision of everyday entertainment in the modern age through the adjective 'suburbaine' which lends a distinctly and deliberately mundane flavour to what is at moments a rather mysterious poem.

The interplay of immediacy and mystery, of reality and dream, is one form of impressionistic imprecision in Rimbaud's poetry which has caused particular problems of exegesis. An excellent example is furnished by 'Nocturne vulgaire' which could be regarded with some justification as an

hallucinatory dream sequence. It is not inconceivable that the poet is recounting an actually experienced journey in a carriage and that the poem is a more hermetic version of the theme treated later by Laforgue in 'Solo de lune', nothing is certain, however. It seems just as likely that the poet's experience is limited to reflections prompted by the flickering flames in a fireplace. Curiously, the central section of the poem is close to the Mallarméan world of the artificial décor of modern life. Rimbaud describes this with precision 'glaces convexes', 'panneaux bombés', 'sophas contournés'. Whilst in a sense such exactitude may seem to be contrary to the rapid notation techniques normally associated with impressionistic style, it does, in fact, correspond closely to a basic intention of much Impressionist painting. This was the desire for scientific accuracy. The optical authenticity for which painters like Signac and Seurat claimed to strive was only an exaggeration of what had all along been one of the tenets of pictorial Impressionism. Academic painting was attacked for its lack of accuracy more than anything else. It is in this way particularly that the movements in both painting and poetry after 1870 are clearly to be seen as extensions of developments in Realism and Naturalism. Authenticity ~~was~~ the quality most eagerly sought in doctrinal statements by poets like Bourget and Raynaud. This exactitude is particularly evident in 'Nocturne vulgaire' in the description of visual impressions

... et dans un défaut en haut de
la glace de droite tournoient les blêmes
figures lunaires, feuilles, seins,
- Un vert et un bleu très foncés
envahissent l'image. Dételage aux environs
d'une tache de gravier ...

The precision of part of the descriptive evocation in 'Les Ponts' is even more probably to be attributed to the desire for scientific accuracy. This seems particularly appropriate in a poem inspired by the monuments of modern technological achievement. The precision is largely confined to the description of the interlacing metallic shapes of the bridges

... Un bizarre dessin de ponts,
ceux-ci droits, ceux-là bombés,
d'autres descendant ou obliquant
en angles sur les premiers, et ces
figures se renouvelant dans les
autres circuits éclairés du canal,
mais tous tellement longs et légers
que les rives, chargées de dômes,
s'abaissent et s'amoindrissent.

Despite the concern for detail the total effect is still one of bewilderment at such a dazzling pattern. For one thing the pattern is looked at for its

own sake without any comment or the elaboration of a wider context. The use of the present participles enables the poet to avoid breaking the sequence of impressions with main verbs and relative pronouns, so that the reader has the sensation of following the poet's eye as it encounters the bridges. Before the description of the bridges there is a description of the lighting which helps to explain the later part of the poem

Des ciels gris de cristal ...

This note, exact enough in itself, is an indication that the scene (almost certainly in London) the poet is describing is swathed in fog. Hence the lack of wider visual context to the pattern of bridges may simply be a result of the actual restrictions upon what the poet could see. This naturally occurring 'mystery' is heightened by Rimbaud who incorporates what was probably a deliberate anachronism into his description

Quelques-uns de ces ponts sont encore
chargés de mesures.

The apparently mysterious or even hallucinatory reference to musicians almost certainly has a basis in reality. What Rimbaud has witnessed is a military band in a public procession - an almost obligatory experience for a visitor to London. The air of mystery is provided entirely by the partially obscuring fog which prevents a total and connected description of the scene. The ending of the poem, like that of 'Marine' (and of the titles of many Impressionist paintings) is an explicit declaration that what the poet has evoked was a particular atmospheric effect which has now ceased with a change of light.

- Un rayon blanc, tombant du haut
du ciel, anéantit cette comédie.

'Les Ponts' is an example of the combination of two preoccupations of pictorial Impressionism (usually found combined in the paintings themselves) the modern urban landscape and the play of light in the atmosphere peculiar to large cities. The poet's interest is limited to the formulation of his sense of wonder and mild confusion at the sights he has before him. The poem is largely without commentary, interjection or structured development other than that dictated by the order of the poet's experiences and the sweep of his vision. The imprecision of the later part of the poem results entirely from the very nature of the experience. Formulated in all their immediacy, without explanation, they are imprecise.

It is possible to see in Rimbaud's literary works and in his correspondence the basis of an impressionistic poetics. The connection between sensation, spontaneity and metrical freedom and flexibility is apparent in his declaration

in Une Saison en Enfer ('Alchimie du Verbe')

.. avec des rythmes instinctifs, je me flattai
d'inventer un verbe poétique accessible ... à tous
les sens ..

He realised that one consequence of writing such poetry could be that in discursive terms it would appear incomprehensible. His loathing for the establishment was such that, despite the penitent tone of Une Saison en Enfer, this must have seemed an added advantage. In 'Alchimie du Verbe', the poet's declaration, 'Je réservais la traduction', may be an ironic reflection on what he temporarily thought of as his former folly but in 'Parade' he makes the same claim unabashed

J'ai seul la clef de cette parade sauvage.

It is perhaps the context of Rimbaud's impressionism that one should consider the process of dérèglement to which he referred in the famous letter to Izambard of May 1871. It was an attempt to rid himself of preconceptions, of the ordering of sensual experiences and subconscious suggestions by the intellect. The aim was to arrive at an authentic, undistorted, primitive state of consciousness quite at odds with the self he had known hitherto. This brought him close to a Romantic conception of inspiration and the consequent sufferings of the artist for which the compensation was originality, the discovery of the unknown

Il s'agit d'arriver à l'inconnu par le dérèglement de tous les sens ..
C'est faux de dire Je pense On devrait dire On ~~me~~ pense ... JE
est un autre. Tant pis pour le bois qui se trouve violon .

Yet as we shall suggest below, this did not preclude a concern for artistic harmony and synthesis into which the freshness of his vision, of his impressions would be incorporated.

* * * * *

In Corbière's and Laforgue's work, too, there is even more obvious evidence of the same evolution from the careful description of contemporary reality to a style even better suited to the evocation of the ephemeral nature of that same reality. Interestingly, in Corbière's case, this change coincides with the poet's move to Paris where he seems to have been almost overwhelmed by the speed, crowds and endless activity of urban life. It is sufficient to contrast even a successful descriptive passage from 'Le Bossu Bitor'

Une porte s'ouvrit C'est la table allumée,
Silhouettes grouillant à travers la fumée
Les amateurs beuglant, ronflant, trinquant, rendus

with the fleeting sequence of impressions and associations in 'Paris'

Courage' On fait queue . Un planton
Vous pousse à la chaîne - derrière' -
.. Incendie éteint sans lumière,
Des seaux passent, vides ou non -

Such examples as the latter are particularly striking instances of the close links between aspects of specifically modern life and the development of an impressionistic style

Christian Angelet has written that Corbière's poetry 'vise à reproduire la sensation intacte, le brisé de la vie de tous les jours. Contre le 'fameux style coulant, cher au bourgeois', 'il adopte un phrasé aux arêtes tranchantes, rude, mais terriblement expressif . qui seul peut prétendre restituer la conscience dans ses discordances profondes' (47) Description is relatively uncommon in Corbière's mature poetry, he prefers to recreate the atmosphere of a particular situation and its effects upon his sensibility through a few rapid strokes as in 'Paris'. Free association, rather than the intellectual ordering essential to description proper, provides the coherence of such lines. The second stanza, in the example above, begins with a straightforward evocation of a crowd waiting for a bus. The naïve provincial does not realise that queuing is normal procedure and attempts to board the bus without waiting his turn, a guard pushes him back into line. The poet's mind immediately likens this neatly regimented line to a chain of people passing buckets to put out a fire, this comparison then leads to the image of the extinguished fire as a symbol of the poet's solitude in Paris

(47) La Poétique de Tristan Corbière, p 17

which is, of course, intimately linked to the starting-point of the stanza - the poet's inability to accustom himself to the ways of the capital. A similar process is to be seen at work in the very next poem of Les Amours Jaunes

Là vivre à coups de fouet' - passer
En fiacre, en correctionnelle (48)

The provincial lives 'à coups de fouet' in Paris, this expression suggests the image of the coachman whipping his horse - an action going on all day around the poet, the expression 'passer en fiacre' then immediately suggests 'passer en correctionnelle' - a common enough consequence of a failure to adapt to the rules of this febrile existence'. With such examples in mind Tristan Tzara said of Corbière's poetry that 'elle met à nu la conscience de poète saisie à l'état naissant' (49)

Something close to though not identical with the stream of consciousness technique is to be seen in the poet's use of the interior monologue

Que me veux-tu donc, femme trois fois fille?
Moi qui te croyais un si bon enfant'
- De l'amour? . - Allons cherche, apporte, pille'
M'aimer aussi, toi' . moi qui t'aimais tant

Oh' je t'aimais comme un lézard qui pèle
Aime le rayon qui cuit son sommeil
L'Amour entre nous vient battre de l'aile
- Eh' qu'il s'ôte de devant mon soleil!

Mon amour à moi, n'aime pas qu'on l'aime,
Mendiant, il a peur d'être écouté . .
C'est un lazzarone enfin, un bohème,
Déjeunant de jeune et de liberté

- Curiosité, bibelot, bricole? ..
C'est possible il est rare - et c'est son bien -
Mais un bibelot cassé se recolle
Et lui, décollé, ne vaudra plus rien' .

Va, n'enfonçons pas la porte entr'ouverte
Sur un paradis déjà trop rendu'
Et gardons à la pomme, jadis verte,
Sa peau, sous son fard de fruit défendu.

(48) Ibid., p. 705

(49) T. Tzara, 'Tristan Corbière ou les limites du cri', p. 96 Quoted by Sonnenfeld

Que nous sommes-nous donc fait l'un à l'autre?
 - Rien - Peut-être alors que c'est pour cela,
 - Quel a commencé? - Pas moi, bon apôtre!
 Après, quel dira c'est donc tout - voilà!
 - Tous les deux, sans doute - Et toi, sois bien sûre
 Que c'est encor moi le plus attrapé
 Car si, par erreur, ou par aventure,
 Tu ne me trompais je serais trompé!
 Appelons cela l'amitié calmée,
 Puisque l'amour veut mettre son holà
 N'y croyons pas trop, chère mal-aimée
 - C'est toujours trop vrai ces mensonges-là! -
 Nous pourrons, au moins, ne pas nous maudire
 - Si ça t'est égal - le quart-d'heure après.
 Si nous en mourons - ce sera de rire . .
 Moi qui l'aimais tant ton rire si frais' (50)

Obviously there is far more order and design than in true stream of consciousness writing, the requirements of rhythm and rhyme would in themselves dictate this. Nevertheless poems like 'A une Camarade' (51) do have a markedly spontaneous flavour in no small part derived from the poet's conversational manner. This is Romantic interiorisation completely refurbished through an awareness of immediacy, ordinary reality and, above all, everyday speech

Corbière has been seen by some critics as a practitioner of automatic writing. In particular André Breton considered that 'Litanie du sommeil' was an example of poetry dictated by a subconscious force (52). It is probably true that Corbière came closer than any of his predecessors to this ultimate form of 'mental' impressionism. Certainly in the case of 'Litanie du sommeil' this is entirely appropriate where the poet is evoking the experiences of dream and the mental incoherence of the insomniac. Another example of near-automatism is to be seen in 'Le Douanier' where the poet appears to succumb to the temptation of following the suggestions of the rhyme

Tout se trouvait en toi bonne femme cynique,
 Brantôme, Anacréon, Barème et le portique,
 Poète trop senti pour être poétique' .
 - Tout sorcier, sage-femme et briquet phosphorique,
 Rose-des-vents, sacré gui, lierre bacchique,
 Thermomètre à l'alcool, coucou droit à musique,
 Oracle, écho, docteur, almanach, empirique,
 Cure voltaïrien, huître politique
 - Sphinx d'assiette d'un sou, douanier, ton souvenir
 Lisait le bordereau même de l'avenir . (53)

(50) O C , pp 728-29

(51) See also 'Sonnet à Sir Bob', 'Déclin' and 'Bonsoir'

(52) A Breton, Anthologie de l'humour noir, pp 163-64

(53) O C., p. 839

However, apart from the obvious fact that writing in more or less regular verse militates against true automatism there are many other signs of organisation in such examples, for instance the opening series of images in 'Litanie du sommeil' are linked by the common theme of escape.

That Corbière should have been considered as a precursor of the so-called automatism of the Surrealists is an indication of how successful he was in his deliberately artistic intention to appear spontaneous. As Pierre-Olivier Walzer has said 'En fait, rien de plus conscient et de plus volontaire que le primesaut de Corbière'. (54) Where manuscript versions of Corbière's poems have survived (55) these show that the genesis of his work was a slow and careful process involving many discarded variants. Changes are always made in the direction of the colloquial, humorous and spontaneous tone normally associated with him. His brother-in-law Aimé Vacher has recounted something of the poet's method

Il venait me montrer des brouillons de poèmes. Je les trouvais charmants et lui disais de les laisser ainsi 'Ça' c'est bon pour les philistins', répondait-il, et il changeait tout à ne plus rien reconnaître. (56)

His own peculiar 'style tranchant' broke up both classical regularity and the harmonious sway of Romantic lyricism. The end product is a poetry, as Walzer has noted, (57) which achieves the classlessness sought by Corbière in the way he lived. Like all the other great poets of contemporary reality (in varying degrees) he 'polit ses vers pour leur donner l'apparence de l'inachevé, du spontané'. (58)

The impact of the discovery of pictorial Impressionism upon the evolution of Laforgue's poetry will be discussed in the final part of this thesis. It will be valuable for the moment to compare an example of his early realist manner from the unpublished poems with an impressionistic piece from Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté

(54) O.C , p 683.

(55) e.g. 'Le Douanier', 'Rapsodie du Sourd'

(56) Jean Vacher-Corbière, Portrait de famille, Tristan Corbière, p 47

(57) O.C , p. 683

(58) Idem.

Sur le trottoir flambant d'étalages criards,
 Midi lâchait l'essaim des pâles ouvrières
 Qui trottaient, en cheveux, par bandes familières,
 Sondant les messieurs bien de leurs luisants regards

J'allais, au spleen lointain de quelque orgue pleurard,
 Le long des arbres nus aux langueurs printanières . (59)

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

Oh' ces ribambelles
 D'ombrelles' .
 Oh' cett' Nature
 En déconfiture' (60)

The first extract is a by no means unsuccessful evocation of the modern urban scene but it is expressed in carefully descriptive terms and is, in fact, primarily the background to a Romantic meditation

- Certes j'ai du génie,
 Car j'ai trop épuisé l'angoisse de la vie'
 Mais - si je meurs ce soir, demain, qui le saura?

The second example is distinguished by the spontaneity of the impressionistic style evident not only in the rapidity of the images, the nominal style and the lack of formal connections but in the use of popular pronunciation ('Vl'à', 'Cett') and vocabulary ('grabuges', 'ribambelles') and the everyday (if unpleasant') image in the first line of our quotation

Corbière and Laforgue provide interesting examples of the second kind of development of which we spoke above, that is to say between successive versions of the 'same' poem In the case of Corbière's 'I Sonnet' it will perhaps be useful to place these versions side by side

(59) Poésies Complètes, p. 455 ('Les Boulevards')

(60) Ibid , p 200 ('Aquarelle en cinq minutes')

I SONNET

AVEC LA MANIÈRE DE S'EN SERVIR

SONNET

Réglons notre papier et formons
bien nos lettres

Vers filés à la main et d'un
pied uniforme,
Emboitant bien le pas, par
quatre en peloton,
Qu'en marquant la césure, un
des quatre s'endorme
Ça peut dormir debout comme
soldats de plomb

Sur le railway du Pinde est la
ligne, la forme,
Aux fils du télégraphe - on
en suit quatre, en long,
A chaque pieu, la rime -
exemple chloroforme
- Chaque vers est un fil, et
la rime un jalon

- Télégramme sacré - 20 mots -
Vite à mon aide
(Sonnet - c'est un sonnet -) ô
Muse d'Archimède'
- La preuve d'un sonnet est par
l'addition

- Je pose 4 et 4 = 8' Alors je
procède,
En posant 3 et 3' - Tenons
Pégase raide
'Ô lyre' Ô délire' Ô " -
Sonnet - Attention'

Je vais faire un sonnet, des vers
en uniforme
Emboitant bien le pas, par quatre,
en peloton
Sur du papier réglé, pour conserver
la forme
Je sais ranger les vers et les
soldats de plomb

Je vais faire un sonnet, jadis,
sans que je dorme,
J'ai mis des dominos en file, tout
au long
J'ai suivi mainte allée épinglée où
chaque orme
Rêvait être de zinc et posait en
jalon

Je vais faire un sonnet, et toi,
viens à mon aide,
Que ton compas m'inspire, ô muse
d'Archimède,
Car l'âme d'un sonnet c'est une
addition

1, 2, 3, 4, et puis 4 8 - je
procède
Ensuite 3 par 3 - tenons Pégase
raide,
Ô lyre' ô délire' oh' assez'
attention

Both versions employ references to modern everyday life
'du papier réglé', 'les soldats de plomb', 'dominos en file' and so on
Those in the definitive version are even more distinctly modernistic
'le railway du Pinde', 'fils du télégraphe', 'chaque pieu', 'chloroforme',
'télégramme 20 mots' The increased attention to modernity goes
hand in hand with a more marked departure from poetic tradition The
title is rendered more ironic by the addition of the numeral and the
sub-title (The 'original' title was probably just Sonnet) The irony
is strengthened by the introduction of the idea of sleep in the first two
stanzas From the start the style is less discursive The preliminary
'Je vais faire un sonnet' is replaced by a nominal construction placing the
reader in media res

Vers filés à la main

The apparent spontaneity of the poem is heightened by the introduction
of the colloquial 'Ça' all the more effective because it is linked with
the new ironic theme of lead soldiers sleeping on duty like poor poetry -
and its readers' The second stanza is the most altered of the four and
one may particularly note the elimination of the fourfold 'je' and the
careful verbal construction in favour of a more immediate and less

articulated structure epitomised by one of Corbière's favourite devices, the use of dashes. The result is a loss of instant comprehensibility but a much more incisive and swift sequence of images. In the third stanza the 'Je vais faire' construction again disappears with the dashes taking most of the syntactical strain. The idea of brevity and speed in

- Télégramme sacré - 20 mots ...

is supported by the change to

- Vite à mon aide

in place of 'viens'. The first half of the deliberately rhetorical second line in the original third stanza is replaced by the repetition of the word 'sonnet' (which occurs yet again in the next line) and thus reflects the spontaneity of the stream of consciousness and of colloquial speech, in both of which repetition is a distinctive feature. The substitution of 'la preuve' for 'Car l'âme' is not only a further instance of a move away from a more discursive style, complete with conjunctions, but reinforces Corbière's references to the hard materialistic age of science and mathematics. The last stanza is remarkable for the importance Corbière attached to punctuation signs and typographical devices. The original version was already closer to Corbière's definitive style than the previous three stanzas. It even made use of dashes, but in the published version Corbière adds still two more as well as rearranging and supplementing exclamation marks (used to draw attention to ironic and humorous points rather than as a bombastic device) and incorporating an 'equals' sign. The net result is to come closer to something like the note-form of mathematical language and, at the same time, to create the apparent immediacy of the sequence of images through his mind.

All in all these changes provide ample support for Aimé-Vacher's comment on Corbière's poetic procedure quoted *above*.

Excellent examples of the transition from modernism to impressionism (and then to synthesis) are furnished by a comparison of some of Laforgue's Derniers Vers with their immediate antecedents in Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté. 'Solo de lune' is analysed in this way in *Part Three, Chapter Four*.

* * * * *

It is in the context of the development of poetic impressionism that the young poets' interest in spontaneity, discussed in Part Two, Chapter One, is seen to be most important. Both in the period itself and in the

work of modern critics there has been a clear understanding that poetic impressionism was based upon the opposition between the spontaneous response to experience and the previous tendency towards analysis, rational discourse and idealisation. That most interesting commentator, Jules Lemaitre, wrote in 1885 of this change which he saw pervading several forms of literature and art. It is instructive to note that he correctly finds a place for Parnassianism in this, only the last word in the remark quoted reduces the accuracy of his assessment. This seems to betoken a confusion between decadence with its interest in rare and exquisite sensation and impressionism proper with its more general preoccupation with sensual experience.

Et l'on voit aussi comment le naturalisme, et la poésie parnassienne, et l'impressionnisme s'appellent et s'engendrent. Quand on renonce à ce qui avait été presque le tout de la littérature classique et de la littérature romanesque, à la peinture de la vie^{du} monde et à l'idéalisation de l'homme, que reste-t-il que la sensation, l'impression pittoresque et sensuelle? L'art nouveau se réduit peut-être à cette recherche inventive de la sensation rare. (61)

Given his obvious concern that this movement might mark a decline in French civilisation it is not surprising that he should turn the terminology of the young poets against them in remarks like the following, when he speaks of

vers purement inintelligibles, où le poète a voulu exprimer l'inexprimable et 'suggérer' des sensations et des sentiments. (62)

The greatest French historian of the rational achievement of the Enlightenment has highlighted, with considerable perspicacity, the same movement which he, misleadingly, equated with Symbolism. Nevertheless if one accepts Symbolism as a loose chronological term (referring to the period c. 1870-1890) the judgement is accurate enough.

(61) 'La Jeunesse sous le Second Empire et sous la Troisième République', La Revue Bleue, June 1885, pp. 742-43

(62) Ibid., p. 743

la poésie symboliste avait réagi contre cette logique classique A cet ordre intellectuel elle a tenté de substituer un ordre intuitif et suggestif On n'a plus besoin de comprendre un enchaînement, on sent l'accord des impressions Peu à peu l'antique et l'impérieuse tradition de la clarté par l'ordre se trouvait non pas condamnée mais refoulée vers les genres oratoires, démonstratifs et didactiques Une tentative hardie allait être faite pour créer des formes littéraires absolument étrangères à la logique intellectualiste (63)

* * * * *

The lure of impressionistic style is evident in both the minor and major poetry after 1870 In some cases there is even a clear link with pictorial Impressionism, in others it is at least possible to draw interesting parallels and analogies One common feature of both poetry and painting was a heightened interest in landscape and this is particularly important in the case of some of the minor poets even where the impact of other aspects of Impressionism is felt less strongly Nevertheless the development of poetic impressionism generally is like other phenomena examined in this thesis, to be seen in minor as well as major poetry, the minor poetry, in this regard as in others, provides many examples of the widespread attachment to the treatment of contemporary reality of which a couple will have to suffice for our present purposes

Ajalbert's name has been remembered mainly on account of his lively and informative Mémoires en vrac but he was, in the 1880s, considered to be a poet of no small talent His best collection was Sur le vif, subtitled Vers impressionnistes, of 1886 These poems provide a striking example of the influence of contemporary painting, especially that of Raffaelli, Pissarro, Guillaumin, Seurat and Signac who, along with Ajalbert, frequented Robert Caze's salon The collection was prefaced by a letter from Caze which contains some interesting remarks One of these stresses the immediacy and involvement in real experience that are necessary ingredients in an impressionistic art

De la première à la dernière page de votre manuscrit,
l'impressionnisme, la chose vécue, vue, observée, immédiatement
fixée sur le papier, j'allais écrire sur la toile (64)

(63) D Mornet, Histoire de la littérature et de la pensée françaises contemporaines

(64) op cit , p 6

Another remark concerns Ajalbert's realisation that an impressionist art is a suggestive art, its purpose is not simply to describe but to express the associations provoked by the awareness of an object

Vous vous rendez compte, par exemple, que la vue d'une fleur, l'odeur d'un parfum après avoir été constatées peuvent faire à naître dans l'imagination des idées se rapportant à la fleur ou au parfum (65)

The poems themselves cover the whole range of subjects treated by the Impressionist painters. The collection is divided into three sections Paris, Banlieues and Provinces. Ajalbert remarked that his initial inspiration had come from one of Raffaelli's pastels

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. tout l'envahissement de la malade civilisation dans la malade campagne suburbaine (66)

The poet is not always aware of modernity and the latter's encroachment upon nature as one would expect but generally he keeps to his brief In 'Sonnet Nuptial' there is an attempt to adopt a markedly impressionistic technique

Robe blanche - habit noir - couronne d'oranger,
Corbeilles et trousseaux - l'Église - la Mairie -
Beau-père, guilleret - belle-mère, attendrie -
Et votre fleur s'effeuille au lit d'un étranger (67)

and again in 'Sage-Femme'

Fin de rire' Et les enseignes peintes,
Portants les mots 'Maison d'Accouchement'
Dansent aux yeux des fillettes enceintes (68)

Descriptive passages such as the following from 'Pâtisserie' are quite successful

Fleurs d'hiver, fleurs de givre aux claires devantures
Des bouquets de fumée aux faites des toitures ..
Du brouillard obscurcit les horizons gelés,
Un irritant parfum sort des pâtisseries,
La neige tourbillonne en blanches sucreries,
Sur les arbres, d'où les oiseaux sont exiles

(65) Ibid , p 7

(66) Ibid , pp 6-7

(67) Ibid , p 13

(68) Ibid , p 15

Le bon mitron a mis aux ventres des galettes
 Des abricots trop verts ou des poires trop blettes,
 Que lorgent les passants, d'un humide coup d'oeil,
 Et des babas pleurent leur rhum aux clartés vives
 Des gaz, les pourlèchent de leurs langues actives,
 Puis, se dressent les grands gâteaux, dans leur orgueil (69)

There are a number of other interesting poems in Paris. 'Square' is a vivid evocation of the activities of the Square des Batignolles children playing and teasing their mothers, soldiers, nannies, road-sweepers, prostitutes and murmured conversations on park benches Although not as all-pervading as in some other poems vice rears its ugly head in Paris

Midî, voici sonner l'heure des ouvrières
 Le soleil cuit l'asphalte mou sur les trottoirs
 C'est l'heure où, sur l'étain vulgaire des comptoirs,
 Luisent les verres pleins d'absinthes meurtrières (70)

In Banlieues the poem entitled 'Lumière crue' is a deliberate attempt to emulate the Impressionists' treatment of light and colour Women seen in passing boats are likened to a bouquet of flowers and described as follows

Des cheveux blonds - ainsi que de molles avoines,
 Des lèvres teintes dans le sang lourd des pivoines,
 Les roses d'une joue en feu - coquelicots,
 Des bas étrangement rouges, des lys candides,
 Les jupons empesés - et des flots splendides
 Avec les noeuds de cravates des calicots. (71)

Despite Caze's statement to the contrary, Ajaibert normally contented himself with description, only in the occasional poem does one find a balanced synthesis of sensation and emotion in the successful evocation of atmosphere

Dans l'assoupissement des brumes de l'hiver,
 Sous l'implacable froid, les guinguettes gelées
 Balancent au vent leurs enseignes désolées
 C'est un poisson de zinc au bout d'un fil de fer,
 Avec un grincement aigu de girouette,
 Ou le bruit que fait sur le sable une brouette
 La maison de campagne a ses volets fermés,
 Du givre pend au nez d'une Vénus de plâtre
 Qu'entourent, en dansant, des amours enrhumés,
 Dans une ronde triste, au lieu d'être folâtre.

(69) Ibid , pp 21-22

(70) Ibid , p 81

(71) Ibid , p 104.

La porte s'ankylose et la rouille a mordu
Les barreaux et de la grille où grimpe un maigre lierre
Et, depuis très longtemps, la sonnette a perdu
Les souvenirs des coups d'une main familière (72)

One poem in Provinces is of particular interest, 'Départ' is a good description of the bustle of a railway station filled with holiday-makers dressed in fashionable clothes. The poem is marred by an appallingly bad description of a locomotive which could have come straight out of Vigny or even Weustenraad

.. . avec son grand oeil rond,
(La lanterne pareille à l'oeil unique au front
Des Cyclopes) . . .

Edmond de Goncourt was enthusiastic about Sur le vif 'Que c'est vivant, que c'est moderne, que c'est parisien . ' (73) Today the reader is more aware of Ajalbert's shortcomings and his lack of technical adventure but the collection remains an extremely important indication of the pervasive influence of pictorial Impressionism upon literature and poetry in particular and of the association of Verlaine's work with Impressionism.

This association had already been made, as we remarked earlier, by André Gill. It is worth returning for a moment to his poem 'Impressionnisme'

Je vais parfois revoir, tout seul, un petit coin
Obscur du boulevard Montparnasse, témoin
De mon premier amour pour une "fleurs-et-plumes"
Aux cheveux d'or C'est dans ce lieu que nous nous plumes

Aussi me produit-il un effet singulier
Il me semble que mon âme est comme un clavier,
Et que le doigt furtif du souvenir la frôle.
Pareil au bruit du vent dans les feuilles d'un saule,
Il s'en dégage un son lumineusement doux,
- Une espèce de la bémol, qui serait roux.

The ultimate intention of the poem may be to provide a humorous parody of poetic innovations of the time but it nevertheless expresses very well the basic sensual confusion or intoxication which is common both to pictorial Impressionism and to the work of poets like Verlaine.

(72) Ibid , p. 110 The debt to Verlaine, to whom the poem is dedicated, is obvious

(73) Quoted in Mémoires en vrac, pp 126-27

An obsessive memory is compared with a tactile sensation, then with the combined visual and aural sensations of the wind rustling leaves (74) and finally with a sound having the qualities of both light and colour

The confusion of vague elusive emotion and an intermingling of sense impressions is highly reminiscent of many well-known passages in Verlaine - particularly those where the poet projects his feelings into the phenomena around him

la lumière est tiède
Et danse, du sol au firmament clair (75)

l'extase
D'une lune rose et grise
Et la mandoline jase
Parmi les frissons de brise (76)

This consideration is a reminder of the closeness of poetic impressionism to the development of those syntheses which are the subject of the next section

(74) A favourite Verlainian image

C'est tous les frissons des bois
Parmi l'étreinte des brises

(75) La Bonne Chanson, XXI

(76) 'Mandoline', Fêtes Galantes For an even closer imitation of Verlaine by Gill, compare parts of 'Idylle' (written December 1871) with 'Après Trois Ans' Gill's poem may also, incidentally, have influenced Rimbaud's 'Le Bateau ivre' with its reference to the exile of the communards on prison ships

Et la tourmente avec ses plaintes éternelles
Déchaînées, apportant du fond des mers cruelles
Le rôle des pontons

(c) From Impressionism to Synthesis

It was inevitable that there should be a reaction on the part of the poets themselves against their newly discovered freedom, spontaneity and immediacy, like all basically good qualities, could be taken to excess. The formulation of ephemeral reality had to be balanced against more traditional poetic values such as emotional and intellectual depth, harmony of structure and sound. Properly balanced it would lead to the enrichment of artistic unity.

Great poetry is rarely concerned simply with the notation or the evocation of external reality. However difficult the subject and however accomplished the poet's evocation of it, a poem which is purely realistic or impressionistic may not be fully satisfying. Fortunately poetic impressionism usually involves, as a result of its very nature, an extension into a more complex art-form which we have chosen to call synthesis. Because the most transitory aspects of contemporary reality cannot be grasped by the intellect alone, but by the much more subjective world of the sensations and emotions, the artist or the poet who turns to this source of inspiration must, almost of necessity, reflect his own sensibility in the work which results. Thus the best Impressionist paintings and the best poems of contemporary reality are a synthesis of subject and object, of the artist's sensibility and the reality around him.

It might be possible in rather crude terms to distinguish three types of poetic synthesis. The first is what we would like to call formal synthesis. In this instance it is not the relationship between the artist's feelings and reality that is in question but simply the integrity and indivisibility of the poem as a structure. Thus Mallarmé's sonnets may be synthetic in the sense that, through syntactical innovations, the interweaving of images and the holding back of the 'resolution' of the sequence of images until the very end of the poem, they are only comprehensible as single units. Moreover they incorporate an unsurpassed number of phonic balances and relationships which further help to bind them together. (77) The second type of synthesis is basically that

(77) A definition of a formally synthetic poem was given by Retté during the period of the Symbolists' striving after harmony and the total art form 'un poème dont les différentes parties se répondent entre elles et chantent des variations autour d'un thème représentatif d'une idée centrale' ('Chroniques', L'Ermitage, 15th May, 1892)

outlined in the preamble between sense-data, the poet's emotions, his beliefs, his spiritual intentions, his thoughts, his memories and external reality. The third type is simply the combination of the other two: the achievement of 'thematic' synthesis within formal synthesis.

Synthetic art develops out of impressionistic art as organically as impressionism develops out of modernism. The involvement of the artist's total sensibility necessitates it. To some extent even formal synthesis may be related to the treatment of contemporary reality. Laforgue in the Derniers Vers discovered a formal coherence based in part on the repetitions, leit-motifs and mots-clé which naturally occur in the workings of the consciousness as it comes to terms with contemporary reality. The Mallarmean formal synthesis, despite the opinion of Chisholm who sees in his poetry a stream of consciousness technique, is, on the other hand, related to the treatment of contemporary reality only inasmuch as it may owe something to the example of the Impressionist painters who developed their own technique to cope with the problems posed by painting the most elusive aspects of reality. It was not, for the most part, put to the same purpose by Mallarmé.

Perhaps the best approach to the concept of poetic synthesis is that made by the poets writing after 1870 themselves through the work and ideas of Baudelaire with which they were very well acquainted and which was a challenge and a model for them.

Baudelaire had seen the task of the artist and poet as the creation of syntheses, synthesis of artist and subject, synthesis of form and subject and synthesis of harmonic structure. Presiding over the synthesising process are the intellect and the imagination. He thus put into theoretical terms much that the poets after 1870 would ~~strive~~ to achieve. The famous opening of the unfinished essay on L'Art philosophique summarises to an extent all three forms of synthesis (which in any event overlap considerably) but especially the first: 'Qu'est-ce que l'art pur suivant la conception moderne? C'est créer une magie suggestive contenant à la fois l'objet et le sujet, le monde extérieur à l'artiste et l'artiste lui-même' (78)

It has already been suggested in the chapter devoted to Baudelaire that this type of synthesis is seen as the matching of the artist's 'passions particulières' to the relative beauty of a subject through the exercise of naïveté. Most of the minor poets of contemporary reality of the period 1870-1900 failed to balance the ingredients of this synthesis usually by giving too much prominence to 'le monde extérieur à l'artiste' under the influence of Naturalism. This emphasis was no doubt a reaction against the introspection of Romanticism but was in turn reacted against by the poetry of the Symbolists, who rightly condemned straightforward description in poetry, and similarly in the field of painting by the Post-Impressionists. For them the notation of sensation ceased to be a sufficient end in itself (it probably never had been for the best poets and painters after 1870) and was replaced, in theory at least, by a concern for the unity and harmony of the finished work and the relationship between these and the artist's emotions and spiritual intuition. The successful balance between the artist's feelings, sensations and reaction to a subject and the subject itself is one of the hallmarks of the great poets of contemporary reality including Baudelaire himself.

Of course the Baudelairean conception of the aesthetic of synthesis is not applicable in its entirety to all the synthetic poems written after 1870. For instance, the spiritual dimension is largely absent from Corbière's work and of a very unusual kind in Laforgue's (79) but the basic principles hold true. As with poetic impressionism, an examination of synthetic poetry is considerably assisted by reference to painting of the period. Such reference leads one to the controversial question of the relationship between Impressionism and Symbolism.

To what extent are we really justified in talking of a parallel between poetry and painting after 1870? Michel Décaudin has dismissed the notion of any serious relationship between pictorial Impressionism and the poetry of the Symbolist period. His article 'Poésie impressionniste et Poésie symboliste' despite its brevity and one surprising factual error (80)

(79) i.e. his theory of the Unconscious

(80) Corbière is resurrected from the grave to supervise the publication of 'A la mémoire de Zulma' in Panurge in 1883 under the title 'Elégie impressionniste'. The fact that the editors of the review should have chosen this title is nonetheless interesting

nevertheless provides a useful starting-point for a discussion of this question. Monsieur Décaudin himself provides a summary of his argument: 'Les deux esthétiques ne sont pas parentes. L'une s'attache au réel, fixe l'éphémère, l'autre est tournée vers l'absolu, "le rêve et l'idéal".' (81) We would agree that this statement could be fairly applied to certain works but these would be representative only of the extremes of the two movements. We believe that there is another transition in the poetry and the painting of this period which is both as crucial and as organic as the transition from modernism to impressionism and this is the development from impressionism to what we have called synthetic art.

Superficially pictorial Impressionism appears as nothing other than the objective notation of external reality making use of discoveries concerning 'mélange optique' to make this notation all the more convincing. In practice, however, most Impressionist paintings offer far more than this. It has already been remarked that Monet's and Renoir's paintings of modern life are more than mere exercises in the transcription of light and colour. From its very inception the Impressionist movement showed itself supremely adept at the recreation of atmosphere. It has become a common-place of art criticism to say that the Impressionists succeeded in evolving the whole range of sensual experience and not just the visual conception of an object. There is a characteristic of the movement which is rarely commented on and that is what we call, for want of a better term, 'physiological subjectivity'. This notion is present in the term Impressionism itself. The artist gives his impression of a subject, shows us what impression the subject has made on him. In popular parlance at least the word has this sense of a personal evaluation and it is apposite to use it in this sense here. It is remarkable that the work of the Impressionists, who were familiar with photography and inspired by it, resembles so little the objective version of external reality one sees in photographs. Monet's paintings of Rouen cathedral are not photographic although the artist's intention in observing his subject at different hours of the day would seem to be scientific in the extreme. In fact, the painter relates the

(81) 'Poésie impressionniste et poésie symboliste', p. 142.

impact made on his total sensibility by the subject and the sunlight (82)

The Impressionist artist took as his starting-point the accurate visual reproduction of a subject but through the insistence on physiological subjectivity moved into the whole realm of sensual experience and from there to the recreation of atmosphere which involved an emotive evaluation. It was possible to give a variety of emphases to the different aspect of this enterprise. The development from Impressionism to Post-Impressionism really hinges on the amount of attention given to the emotive aspect. From paintings by Sisley which are virtually devoid of anything but objective intention one may move to works by Van Gogh, the Fauves, Gauguin (83) and even Chirico (84) where the emotive intention is paramount - but all may remain a vision of contemporary reality. This process is an organic one and can be seen at work in the course of the career of an individual artist like Monet. (85) In particular it involves the discovery of the emotive value of colour which the Impressionists had definitively liberated from its former role as an adjunct of drawing

It is remarkable, given the reluctance of critics since to see any close correlation between Impressionism and Symbolism, how sympathetic the poets were to the work of their colleagues in the plastic arts. Very few writers associated with the Symbolist movement actually challenged the alliance between the two. Camille Mauclair was one of the few to do so in an article in the Mercure de France f 1894:

- (82) Similarly the strange proportions of some of the figures and furniture in early Cézanne paintings may be accounted for in terms of an effort to capture the immediacy and disorder of the visual sensation despite his preoccupations with structure
- (83) This is true of most of Gauguin's early work but only of occasional works of the mature period such as Riders on the beach of 1902 (Folkwang Museum, Essen). Gauguin's preoccupations in the later years were frequently of a formal kind. (See K. Clark, Landscape into Art, p. 145)
- (84) e.g. Place d'Italie of 1912.
- (85) Jean Lorrain astutely described this tendency in Monet's later paintings 'Monet a peint dix fois ce Bassin des nymphéas, à toutes les heures du jour et dans l'enchantement de leurs diverses lumières c'est l'horaire du rêve et de la réalité' (Quoted by Julliard, Jean Lorrain, p. 245.)

Les impressionnistes sont les naturalistes de l'art, et je ne comprends nullement que les poètes actuels leur soient tendres, eux qui éreintent la reproduction de la nature de Zola (86)

It is worth remarking on two points here. First Mauclair's attack is directed primarily against Pissarro whose rustic realism irritated him by its simplicity (87) and elsewhere in the article he expresses his appreciation of Monet. In other words he detested the visually objective variant of Impressionism but was able to appreciate the work of Monet with its physiological subjectivity and emotive connotations. Second, Mauclair was to become within the space of a very few years a staunch advocate of Impressionism, it is largely on his work as a historian of the Impressionist movement that his reputation rests. Eight years before Mauclair's article Wyzewa had shown more perspicacity in his essay 'L'Art Wagnérien' in which he did not hesitate to include the Impressionist painters among those artists who had set themselves the task of recreating 'La vie totale de l'Univers, c'est-à-dire de l'Ame où se joue le drame varié que nous appelons l'Univers'. (88) Wyzewa is able to mention the work of the Impressionists in the same breath as Symbolist idealism, in an article specifically concerned with criticising purely descriptive art, because he held that those painters had introduced an emotional factor into their art (89). Many similar examples could be cited. Both Stuart Merrill and Mallarmé himself wrote to Edouard Dujardin to praise him for the impressionistic quality of his Les Lauriers sont coupés even though the latter belonged to the mainstream of 'Wagnerian' Symbolism. (90)

The Symbolists' appreciation of Impressionism and their sense of fellow-feeling for it is to be explained by their recognition of what it was in its highest form - synthetic art. At its best Impressionism and Post-Impressionism is a synthesis, in varying proportions, of the visual qualities of strictly contemporary and frequently transitory subjects with

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- (86) 'Lettre sur la peinture', July 1894, p. 271. The italics are Mauclair's
 - (87) The intellectualism of Symbolism is apparent here. See below.
 - (88) Published by the Revue wagnérienne as part of Nos Maîtres in 1886.
 - (89) This was in accord with his own view of poetry 'la poésie est une musique verbale destinée à traduire des émotions'. ('Poésie', La Revue Indépendante, June 1887)
 - (90) Letter of Mallarmé to Dujardin of 8th October 1897 and of Merrill to Dujardin of 1st May, 1888

the sensual and emotive responses evoked in the artist by the subject. The Symbolists themselves were obsessed by the idea of synthesis, Mallarmé primarily as a formal conception but others in a more general sense. Paul Adam, dissatisfied with the hyper-naturalism of the Goncourts, wished to create a new synthesis in which modern life would play its part but to which would be added 'les fantômes du rêve, de l'hallucination, du souvenir, les évocations imaginaires, parce que cela se trouve dans la vie et là fait .. ' (91) For some of this realisation was associated with the dream of a total art form In 1886 Wyzewa wrote

.. comme la vie n'est point des sensations, ni des notions, ni des émotions, mais une série enchevêtrée de ces modes divers, les divers arts doivent tendre à un Art total, unissant tous les signes artistiques pour recréer toute la Vie. (92)

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The same process of transition from an objective variant of impressionism to a form of synthesis already suggested in the case of painting is to be found in the work of the poets. Rimbaud and Verlaine attempted the direct evocation of sensual experience in their work but moved on to poetry combining all the levels of consciousness and feeling with sensation. Admittedly Verlaine tended to go backward rather than forward but a poem like 'L'Echelonnement des haies' is an admirable example of the fusion between an impressionistic evocation of a scene and a religious experience. Rimbaud's later poetry, and especially the Illuminations, is notable for its fusion of all types of experience, including hallucination, into a synthesis held together solely by the intrinsic power of that experience.

Yet there was a marked reaction in the Symbolist movement against some of the values of Impressionism and this can be seen primarily as an attempt to 'rehabilitate' the intellect, the world of ideas and 'ideals'

Mauclair in the article already cited equated Symbolism with intellect and this is the main reason why he found Pissarro's 'naïveté' so hard to stomach. In a statement of faith he says

(91) Article in Le Symboliste quoted in Pouillart, Le Romantisme, III, p. 151

(92) 'Une Critique', La Revue Indépendante, November 1886

Je suis pour les artistes intellectuels qui me passionnent,
qui me brisent, qui me rênouvellent, qui m'augmentent spirituellement . (93)

and as for the Impressionists

Ces peintres ne savent pas dessiner un personnage, ils accrochent
l'oeil avec des tons, et n'ont pas de style. Leur intellectualité
est comique (94)

G.-Albert Aurier even though he recognised that the Impressionists had
achieved a kind of synthesis

Le but visé, c'est encore l'imitation de la matière, non plus
peut-être avec sa forme propre, sa couleur propre, mais avec sa
forme perçue, avec sa couleur perçue, c'est la traduction de la
sensation instantanée, avec toutes les déformations d'une rapide
synthèse subjective.

still preferred what he called 'l'art idéiste' or 'l'art symboliste'. (95)

In this whole enterprise one detects a version of the angelic
temptation - in this instance a desire to create an ideal world in art,
with very little connection or no connection at all with the world of
everyday reality, that would rival God's creation.

Barrès provided a good summary of the new ideas, as he interpreted
them, in his article 'L'Esthétique de demain. L'Art suggestif' in a Dutch
review in 1886.

.. (Le sage) renoncera à ce monde connu, aux apparences actuelles
qui l'entourent ... il changera son mode de créer, et au-dessus de
l'univers présent, il bâtera un univers nouveau, et jouissant sans
limite, il sera l'artiste, l'extraordinaire ménétrier qui retient
et gouverne la danse idéale des choses. (96)

Mallarmé remains the most outstanding example of a poet who sought to
create this 'danse idéale des choses' to show in his works 'le triomphe,
sur la nature incohérente, de l'ordre et de l'unité créés par l'esprit ... (97)

It is because of his need to create this ideal world free from the
dictates of chance that Mallarmé largely rejected impressionism in his
work and instead sought to formulate essences

(93) 'Lettre sur la peinture', p 272.

(94) Ibid , p. 271 Pissarro's paintings are said to reflect 'une
intellectualité de métayer'.

(95) 'Le Symbolisme en peinture', Mercure de France, March 1894.

(96) De Nieuwe Gids, January 1886, quoted in Pouillart, Le Romantisme, III,
pp. 147-48

(97) M Raymond, De Baudelaire au Surréalisme, p 127

A quoi bon la merveille de transposer un fait de nature en sa
presque disparition vibratoire selon le jeu de la parole
cependant, si ce n'est pour qu'en émane, sans la gêne d'un
proche ou concret rappel, la notion pure (98)

Of this attitude Marcel Raymond has written that 'à la conquête de cette
domination sur 'le hasard', Mallarmé, comme on sait, a consacré - j'allais
écrire a sacrifié - sa vie Tentation terriblement dangereuse, qui peut
mener à une impasse' (99)

In the plastic arts as well as in literature and criticism there was
of course, a strong reaction against Impressionism which spreads through
a variety of movements but which can be reduced to types - the desire for
a return to a more formal, 'classical' art (of which the geometric
preoccupations of Cézanne are an example) and the desire to make art more
'spiritual', the reflection of ideas and metaphysical intuitions Redon,
for example, castigated the Impressionists as 'vrais parasites de l'objet'
and claimed that his own intention was to introduce into his work
'la lumière de la spiritualité'. (100)

Symbolism may rightly be regarded as a necessary corrective to the
excessive naturalism of many writers and artists but most of the great
masterpieces which are usually loosely attributed to the Symbolist
movement, those of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine and even of Mallarmé,
were produced long before the intellectualist reaction of the late 1880s
Symbolism, in one sense, may be regarded as the recognition by generally
inferior poets of their already existing achievements The work produced
by the members of the Symbolist movement proper is generally disappointing
and falls far short of the propaganda

Of the reaction in painting Fritz Novotny writes

(98) Mallarmé, Oeuvres Complètes, 'Pléiade', p 368

(99) Raymond, loc. cit.

(100) Quoted in Décaudin, 'Poésie impressionniste et poésie symboliste',
p. 141.

It repudiates more or less radically the representation of the merely visible . its formal correlate is the anti-naturalistic decorative form, in short all that characterizes Symbolism and Expressionism. It resumes and rehabilitates already familiar concepts of art, for example, the deliberate painting of ideas or of a romantic attitude A mode of conception that still existed beside Naturalism had merely assumed a new shape in these cases, and even its form of expression is often hardly new (101)

Nigel Gosling has described it as 'an escapist art' seeing in this 'at once its weakness and its strength At its worst it is anaemic, adolescent, sentimental, mannered and coy' (102)

As for Symbolist poetry Margaret Gilman in her celebrated article 'From Imagination to Immediacy in French Poetry' dismisses the whole phenomenon in eleven lines

The symbolist school claimed to derive much of its doctrine from Mallarmé But in practice, instead of Mallarmé's bold ventures onto 'les plus purs glaciers de l'Esthétique', the majority of the symbolists contented themselves with relatively timid excursions from everyday reality into the well-travelled realms of mythology and legend Too often, as Marcel Raymond has said 'On vit . un poète qui voulait "suggérer le mystère" se détourner des mystères réels pour en inventer d'autres, par dilettantisme, par goût de l'objet précieux et énigmatique' Poetry comes down from the transcendental level to the literary one, and we have not so much a disintegration of the imagination as a dilution of it So I am leaving the symbolists aside .. (103)

Symbolism considered as the movement whose origins are to be found around the years 1885-86 was an extremely short-lived phenomenon probably as relatively unimportant as the Symbolist movement in painting Reactions against it came very quickly. As early as 1888 Jules Renard attacked the mythological bric-à-brac of the poets

Faunes, vous avez eu votre temps, c'est maintenant avec l'arbre que le poète veut s'entretenir. (104)

* * * * *

(101) 'The Reaction against Impressionism from the artistic point of view', p 101
 (102) 'A Symbolist knock-out', (Observer Review, 11th June, 1972)
 (103) art cit , p 37
 (104) Quoted in Poullliart, Le Romantisme, III, p. 170

The incorporation of elements of the poet's perception of external contemporary reality into a poetic synthesis is a feature of both the minor and major poetry after 1870 but whereas it tends to be characteristic of the latter it is an exception in the work of the poetae minores. Naturally many poems have already been quoted in other contexts in this thesis in which the reader will have detected the synthesising process at work (Some of the poems cited now are in no sense more synthetic than others which were discussed earlier.) Indeed it is a process which may be observed throughout the 1870s and 1880s even though it was most talked about after the birth of the Symbolist movement in the mid-1880s.

At the beginning of our period even Cros's light erotic poetry may be characterised by a pleasing synthesis of sensation and emotion

Dans le parc, les oiseaux se querellent entre eux.
Après la promenade en de sombres allées,
On rentre, on mange ensemble, et tant de voix mêlées
N'empêchent pas les doux regards, furtifs, heureux

Et la chambre drapée en tulle vaporeux
Rose de la lueur des veilleuses voilées,
Où ne sonnent jamais les heures désolées' .
Parfums persuadeurs qui montent du lit creux' ..

Elle vient, et se livre à mes bras, toute fraîche
D'avoir senti passer l'air solennel du soir
Sur son corps opulent, sous les plis du peignoir.

A bas peignoir! Le lit embaume Ô fleur de pêche
Des épaules, des seins frissonnants et peureux' .
Dans le parc les oiseaux se font l'amour entre eux (105)

Sexual desire is much better evoked through this use of objective correlatives drawn from motifs of modern everyday life - a stroll in the park (which coincides with a mood of despair matched by the dark lighting and the bickering birds), a reconciliation over dinner, the artificial decor and perfumes of the bedroom - than it was by reference to Parnassian ideals of statuesque beauty or Romantic allusions to an inappropriate nature. It is useful in this light to compare Cros's poem with Nouveau's O.C., p. 577/ quoted above

(105) O.C., p. 125. ('Soir éternel').

In the case of Moréas himself his rejection of modernism after 1884 was almost complete but odd exceptions show how strong its influence had been

Le gaz pleure dans la brume,
Le gaz pleure, tel un oeil.
- Ah' prenons, prenons le deuil
De tout cela que nous eûmes.

L'averse bat le bitume,
Telle la lame l'écueil.
- Et l'on lève le cercueil
De tout cela que nous fûmes.

Ô n'allons pas, pauvre soeur,
Comme un enfant qui s'entête,
Dans l'horreur de la tempête

Rêver encor de douceur,
De douceur et de guirlandes,
- L'hiver fauche sur les landes. (106)

The flicker and splutter of the gas lamp is the epitome of the modern urban reality in which the poet finds himself. It has a rhythmic and emotive value and function which match the mood of melancholy and induces a bitter and resisted nostalgia in the poet for the lost joy of youth in the countryside. The poem is far from perfect. It would be better without the decadent image of the coffin but the coalescence of mood and modern setting is finely achieved.

A similar effect is to be seen in the work of one of the several poets of the period who ^{met} a tragically early death. All the work of the unjustly maligned Mikhaël was published posthumously in the Oeuvres of 1890, most of his poetry was written between 1884 and 1887. His poems are uneven but at their best succeed in expressing the mood of the poet through a scene drawn from contemporary reality. In the evocation of the sense of mystery, in the personification of abstract emotions such as peace and sadness Mikhaël is close to the Symbolists but his inspiration is much more obviously rooted in reality than theirs, of mythology there is relatively little use. The opening of 'Effet de soir' is typical in indicating the poet's orientation in the reality around him.

Cette nuit, au-dessus des quais silencieux,
Plane un calme lugubre et glacial d'automne
Nul vent. Les becs de gaz en file monotone
Luisent au fond de leur halo, comme des yeux. (107)

(106) 'Nevermore', (Les Cantilènes)

(107) Oeuvres, p. 15.

The poem provides several examples of the synthesis of the poet's emotions with external reality

Mes yeux vont demi-clos des becs de gaz trembleurs
 Au fleuve où leur lueur fantastique s'immerge,
 Et je songe en voyant fuir le long de la berge
 Tous ces reflets tombés dans l'eau, comme des pleurs,
 Que, dans un coin lointain des cieux mélancoliques,
 Peut-être quelque Dieu des temps anciens, hanté
 Par l'implacable ennui de son Éternité,
 Pleure ces larmes d'or dans les eaux métalliques (108)

Even in one of his most Symbolist poems, 'Paysage', the moods and longings of the poet confronted by the evening landscape are expressed through a series of analogies with external reality, although there is a self-conscious reference to the terminology of Symbolism in the last stanza the poem never degenerates into a mere exercise in fashionable pastiche

Voici la bonne paix obscure
 D'un étrange soir automnal
 Le crépuscule transfigure
 Les toits gris et le ciel banal.
 Et chaque ligne se découpe
 Sur le velours épais des soirs
 Un dôme au loin est une coupe
 Qui plonge sur des coussins noirs.
 Tandis que splendide et bizarre
 Un seul coin étoilé des cieux
 Est un écran de métal rare
 Piqué de fleurons précieux,
 Et comme une noble orchidée
 Sur un sol pur de viles fleurs
 Dans l'esprit lavé de l'idée
 S'ouvre un rêve aux calmes couleurs.

There is something slightly paradoxical in the fact that Kahn, who was one of the leading pioneers and propagandists of the poetic form best suited to the formulation of immediate and transitory experiences, should have reflected contemporary reality so little in his poetry. On closer examination the situation is less surprising. He was to contrast his essentially musical and formal conception of vers libre with Laforgue's psychological or impressionistic conception (109). Dreamy, quasi-mythical settings, the solar imagery of Mallarmé and, perhaps above all, elements of a colourful exoticism derived from his years of military service in

(108) Ibid , p 16

(109) c f Part Four, Chapter Five.

North Africa (110) provide the fabric of his poetry. Yet a poet who was Laforgue's closest friend and an admirer of the Impressionist painters could hardly be expected to make no reference at all to modernity. Thus it is that in Les Palais nomades an awareness of contemporary reality is clearly shown in one or two uncharacteristic moments. It is no coincidence that these are among the finest passages in the collection. A sense of the past irretrievably lost, of scarcely definable anxiety and frustration are associated with objective correlatives drawn from the modern reality outside the poet in a synthetic evocation of mood. At such times his 'musicality' seems less artificial, seems to correspond to a genuine creative impulse and to operate within a poetic unity

Fatalités, âmes trop brèves,
 Efforts perdus,
 Fruits corrompus
 Par des tares vieilles de rêves

 L'angoisse se réveille aux mornes solitudes,
 Les pins sur les côtes ont d'âpres attitudes,
 Dans le vent qui se traîne, oh' quelles lassitudes' .

 Ce fut aux fièvres dernières
 Un souvenir
 Sans avenir,
 Sans étoiles en ses tanières.

 Des bruits incohérents s'échappent du faubourg,
 Ils dansent en banals enclos et si balourds ..
 Un train vibre, éloigné, comme un lointain tambour.

 Où sont vos âmes des années?
 Les volontés,
 Chevaux domptés,
 Bronze aux fontaines surannées?

 Encore un jour, encore une heure, oh' plus de temps, oh' plus d'espace
 Les vieux ont dit pourtant, que jeunesse se passe,
 Demain, premiers rayons, une nouvelle impasse. (111)

In Le Livre d'images of 1897 one finds something close to Laforgue's evocations of clowns and to the work of Toulouse-Lautrec in 'Affiche pour un music-hall'

(110) For the influence of Africa see J. C. Ireson, L'Oeuvre poétique de Gustave Kahn, p. 22.
 (111) 'Thèmes et variations', III

De sa robe rouge,
de ses lèvres rouges et sa face trop pâle,
le front doré d'hélianthes,
son corsalet de sang éclaboussé de fleurs,
de fleurs-lèvres, de fleurs-parfums, de fleurs-fièvres,
aux doigts un bouquet grêle,
violente,
elle appelle, pourprée comme un soleil blessé,
les passants vers les clowns pâles.

Les clowns pâles qu'on a tant battus,
roulés, fardés, parés, rossés,
les clowns à la fierté accrue,
car leurs robes brocées d'un jeu de cartes
c'est la chronique de leur vie dès leur berceau.
Le dieu hasard, dans ses hardes,
crève de sa tête folle un cerceau.

Et c'est un pauvre homme, le plus pauvre du monde,
dont on perçoit la face pâle comme de mort
soudaine et de bref tunnelice,
tandis que les cuivres et la robe rouge
attirent un peu d'or
de leur appel strident et complice.

In this instance the synthesis is of another kind. It consists of an amalgam of an evocative plastic description of an aspect of modern everyday life - a form of popular entertainment - and a philosophical reflection on the nature of the human condition. The clown becomes the archetypal victim of fate and circumstance. Such rehabilitations of poésie philosophique are far from unsuccessful and seemed to present a vital and viable alternative to the medium utilised by the Romantics and Parnassians.

The synthesis aimed at by René Ghil is of a different order. It is customary to make fun of his theory of instrumentation verbale; but to attack Ghil on this score is also to attack Mallarmé who not only provided an Avant-Dire for Ghil's Traité du Verbe, in which the theory was outlined in 1886, but who had undertaken a roughly analogous study in his own Mots anglais of 1877. The idea of correspondences between sensations expressed by Paul Valéry and by Rimbaud in his 'Voyelles' is based on sound psychological and physiological evidence. The correlation between sounds and emotions may yet prove to be a field of scientific enquiry offering much of use of the literary critic. It was not on this issue that Ghil and Mallarmé parted company (112) but on the question

(112) In conversation with Ghil, Mallarmé maintained that society would be saved by a few men dedicated to the rediscovery of 'l'Éden oublié' asserting 'Non Ghil l'on ne peut se passer d'Éden' to which Ghil replied 'Je crois que si cher maître'. These words marked the end of their friendship (Recounted in H. Nicolas, Mallarmé et le symbolisme, p. 84)

Cros and Rollinat - were the most influential but even now virtually forgotten poets like Grandmougin (36) may have left their mark, his 'La Chanson des Mouches' which is close to the song-form of many of Laforgue's Complaintes and is fortunately lacking in any of the horrendous suppurative references one finds in the work of Rollinat

Zon' Zon' La vieille ménagère
 Cueille les prunes dans son clos,
 Zon' Zon' Notre troupe légère
 Bruit au logis en repos'

(36) He had contributed poems to the third Parnasse Contemporain

of primitivism Ghil preferred to think in terms of a new era being ushered in by scientific and social progress To this extent he is almost an anachronistic figure whose opinions were better suited to the heyday of positivism Both 'instrumentisme' and the attachment to scientific progress may be related to Ghil's two underlying quests for a synthetic art-form and for an art that would reflect life As early as 1885 one finds him writing in a way that makes a break with Mallarmé inevitable

Nous sommes amants de la vie . Plein de l'horreur du
Rêve sans plein air, sans sèves et sans sueurs, je
viens m'enrôler au grand Travail du Réalisme, - du
Vrai, - ouvrier plus ou moins capable, mais ouvrier
L'impressionisme (sic) est l'écriture du Réalisme (113)

'Instrumentisme' was a methodical form of impressionism, receiving its sanction from science, which would thus be able to reflect life more accurately and, because of the knowledge of the interrelationship of the senses, would be able to construct a new synthetic poetry at one and the same time, 'éloquente, sculpturale, picturale et musicale' (114)

With his new armoury Ghil set about writing the epic of modern Man Unfortunately his creative energy was inferior to his ability to concoct theories and he had tendencies to take these theories to ridiculous lengths These two failings had the unfortunate result of making his voluminous life's work virtually unreadable (115) Moreover his modernism is far easier to detect in his pronouncements than in his poetry At his best he occasionally foreshadows the epic style of Saint-John Perse The following is typical of his work which remains primarily of interest as a reaction against the Symbolist rejection of contemporary reality, however misguided the form of that reaction may have been in practice

La Ville au loin monte des vœux immolateurs
Par les vitres en haut, la Ville, aux Yeux - à perte
du sang pauvre qui heurte aux roideurs de l'aorte'
monte haut des quadratures de pierre, et lourd
le temps de dômes, ainsi qu'enserrant le rêve
lourd-arrêté vers l'elliptique expansion
de ses Fatalités
et est plus haute sur les voies
lointaines de ses rais qui tournoient, la Tour'

(113) Légendes d'âmes et de sangs, quoted in Pouillart, Le Romantisme, III, p 158

(114) Quoted by Pouillart, op cit , p 159

(115) c f H J. Hunt, The Epic in Nineteenth-Century France, pp 402-03

Autant qu'elle, la Ville' montera, qui porte
 les haines de longtemps, la Haine, ah' alentour -
 tandis qu'aux arêtes et vitres de la Ville
 massant et quadratures lourdes de pierre, et
 ses dômes enserrant les Têtes, le vêpre est
 lingual et huant silencieusement, - Haine, ah' glaive
 alentour, de sinistres gladiolants et
 appelant tout le désir qui s'exaspère aux
 cinq sens élémentaires .

Monte - pierre et lumière, haut' la Ville, à perte
 du soleil irréel qui tressaille aux senteurs
 mêlées, des hétaires et des lutteurs'
 mais mouvante de Nuits où des Instigateurs
 agitant le remous des âmes d'étéres
 travaille le dessein qu'on ne sait, qui peut-être

(La parole qui se répète est un marteau

sous quoi

les énergies dans la gangue entrent en soi)

peut-être aura été le lourd vouloir, où naître
 d'un poing qu'ils énervaient vers les hauts détenteurs
 de l'Or, le geste de détente de ton être'

Oh' lors, qu'il serait doux, ô rendre lourd

(couleurs

qui vont lent s'éteignant), le dormir des douleurs
 de la tête meut en éparres ouverte
 à l'épaule d'Amie, ô rendre lourd l'amour
 de deux pauvres de vie en qui de l'espoir sourd

Les vieilles voix sont aux sens des hommes Et, Elles
 et la Proie et la Ruse, - le savent' d'avoir
 en leur Baiser la perversion du lent devoir
 qu'elles n'ont pas rempli, qui s'est d'aigu sourire
 regardant les sommeils vidés de leur empire
 mué en le destin des nuits de leurs aisselles
 de donner à respirer entre leurs seins, la
 chute, et la haine' (116)

Here the modern city becomes associated with biological life and
 is compared to a living organism Fittingly through this synthesis
 based on Ghil's evolutionary beliefs the city becomes the scene for the
 procreation of new life through love but it contains the traces of the old
 enmities, hatred and deceptions which the triumph of human progress should
 overcome but by which it continues to be threatened

* * * * *

(116) 'La Ville au loin', (Le Voeu de vivre)

There is in Mallarmé's mature work a degree of synthesis between form and subject rarely equalled by other poets, though this could be said to be the result of the total subordination of subject to form rather than the creation of a formal dynamism to meet the expressive needs of the poet. What one scarcely finds in the mature works is poetry offering a synthesis of emotion, impressions, the qualities of the object and the poet's reflections, in which all these elements remain visible. Such poetry was, however, written in the early years. Of 'Renouveau' (1862) he wrote to Cazalis: 'C'est un genre assez nouveau que cette poésie où les effets matériels du sang, des nerfs sont analysés et mêlés aux effets moraux, de l'esprit, de l'âme. Quand la composition est bien harmonisée et que l'oeuvre n'est ni trop physique ni trop spirituelle, elle peut représenter quelque chose.' (Correspondance, I, pp. 30-31). Already in this poem one sees Mallarmé moving towards the aesthetic of suggestion, sensual images are used to evoke emotions - or more properly an état d'âme the impact of the 'printemps maladif' upon the poet's sensibility. Yet the sensations are images and one senses that the 'narrative structure' of the walk on a spring day is a fiction, that the sensations as such have no reality in actual experience. The result is not altogether successful and remains too obviously indebted to Baudelaire. Of the early poems 'Apparition' is a more accomplished evocation of mood. 'L'Après-Midi d'un Faune' is one of the small number of the later poems which achieves a synthesis of mood and sensation but there the poet is at one remove from the experiences evoked and thus the emotional element in the synthesis is relatively unimportant. His poetry would be governed not by the poet's experience of contemporary reality in all its immediacy but by the intellect and the quest for relationships.

Mais la littérature a quelque chose de plus intellectuel que cela (Zola's evocation of life and sensation) les choses existent, nous n'avons pas à les créer nous n'avons qu'à en saisir les rapports, et ce sont les fils de ces rapports qui forment les vers et les orchestres. (117)

But the elimination of reality is an arduous enterprise which taxes the poet almost beyond endurance and which in the end cannot guarantee the success after which Mallarmé strove - the celebration of a human activity safe from 'le hasard'.

* * * * *

(117) Oeuvres Complètes, 'Pléiade', p. 871.

Probably ever since Amiel's most famous dictum (118) attained universal currency, critics have with near unanimity borrowed it to praise Verlaine for his evocation of mood through landscape. There is something ironic in this fact given the widespread reluctance to accord the epithet 'great' to Verlaine on the grounds that unlike some other poets of the Symbolist period (and for all his acknowledged metrical and 'musical' genius) his work is concerned with mere sensation or emotion. Yet it is precisely this 'empathy' with landscape (in any case a feature of Romantic and even Parnassian poetry) which is sometimes considered to be the hallmark of Symbolism (119). The truth is, of course, that it is the lack of intellectual difficulty in Verlaine's poetry combined with the absence of any doctrine of metaphysical quest (other than an unfashionable Catholicism) which has brought about this situation. It is arguable, however, that the wholesale adoption of 'mysticism' and 'idealism' into poetry from the mid 1880s onwards was often rather superficial and not always fortunate. The Verlainian synthesis may be less pretentious but it is often more successful than that of the Symbolists after 1885. The synthesising process may be seen in other poems but evocations of landscape are the commonest instance of the incorporation of elements of ephemeral reality into synthesis.

The synthesis of mood with a specifically modern landscape occurs on several occasions in poems ^{notable} written after the Romances sans Paroles. One especially striking example is 'Sonnet Boiteux', (Jadis et Naguère), written in 1873 as a recollection of the poet's stay in London in 1872-73 with Rimbaud already discussed above. The two poets had led a life of great disorder and hardship at this time which seems in retrospect to have lost any compensating excitement for Verlaine. The apocalyptic language is close to that of the Illuminations and suggests a common vision of the modern city on the part of Verlaine and Rimbaud. The opening stanza refers to the wretched condition of the two poets, possibly implying a comparison with the urban poor generally, but using the image of the dying animal seeing its own life-blood flow away before its eyes. Thus the colour red, which as we have noted occurs in Rimbaud's descriptions of London, is introduced. Blood and mud lie at the basis of the recurring

(118) 'Un paysage est un état d'âme'

(119) For instance by Michaud

images of red and black mud in such descriptions London is noisy, smoky, dirty It is like a Biblical city due for punishment from heaven The gas lamps are aflame The inn-signs are vermillion and thus both correspond to the dominante of red The latter are a temptation to the poets and a drag on their resources which only increases their wretchedness and their closeness to death The third stanza is devoted to an evocation of the cacophony which bombards the poet's ears We have earlier remarked on the similarity of this poetic description of the sounds and colours of London with the prose descriptions given in Verlaine's letters to Lepelletier The sprawling violence of London, to be contrasted to the douceur of the French cities he knew is the objective correlative of the despair of a man buffeted by circumstances The poem closes with a fittingly desperate cry for vengeance against the city which seems certain to destroy the poet

Non vraiment c'est trop un martyre sans espérance,
Non vraiment cela finit trop mal, vraiment c'est triste
Où le feu du ciel sur cette ville de la Bible'

The rhetorical outburst, even allowing for a possible allusion to the title of Hugo's famous poem, seems authentic in its context It is a violent response to a surrounding, threatening violence which is conveyed through references to the sights and sounds of the city The thirteen-syllable lines, the variety of coupes, the partial elimination of rhyme (extremely rare in Verlaine) and the consequent lack of stability or a 'resolution' to the poem are the perfect expression of desperation at a plight to which there seemed no solution

It is difficult to construct anything which might justifiably be called Verlaine's poetic theory - Eleonore Zimmermann's elaboration of a 'système' is not altogether convincing Nevertheless, there are one or two pronouncements (to which attention has not always been paid) which have a bearing on the Verlainian synthesis The combination of epitome, the evocation of elusive 'mood' and spiritual intuition appears to be the yardstick employed by Verlaine for judging sculpture in Épigrammes, XVI, 111

. . aussi, j'adore
Peut-être mieux, de vrai' ce précis Incertain,
Et c'est pourquoi de tous nos modernes encore
Je préfère, robuste et mystique, Rodin

In the fragments of the lectures delivered by Verlaine on contemporary poetry in Brussels and Charleroi there is an illuminating contrast between his own endeavours to imbue subjects with the poet's personality and the intellectual and 'pure' nature of the Mallarmean synthesis

D'aucuns, parmi ces jeunes gens, voulaient plus de profondeur, d'intellectualité, dans la poésie, et ceux-la relevaient surtout de Stéphane Mallarmé, l'esprit pur dans la forme impeccable, d'autres s'avisèrent d'admettre la naïveté, l'expansion de l'humble artiste qui vous parle .. (120)

* * * * *

The irrationality, the disorder, the spontaneous sequences and the hallucinatory elements to be found in Rimbaud's work, and most especially the Illuminations, would seem to leave little room for synthetic ambition. Nevertheless, although it is true that there is nothing akin to the 'indivisible' patterns of sounds and images found in Mallarmé there is synthesis of other kinds

In the famous letter to Paul Demeny (121) Rimbaud had insisted on the spontaneity of his inspiration

Car JE est un autre Si le cuivre s'éveille clairon, il n'y a rien de sa faute Cela m'est évident j'assiste à l'éclosion de ma pensée je la regarde, je l'écoute je lance un coup d'archet la symphonie fait son remuement dans les profondeurs, ou vient d'un bond sur la scène

Moreover, perhaps the best of recent criticism has tended to move away from reconstructions of Rimbaud's reading lists in the occult and other, surely peripheral activities to an appreciation of the spontaneous and fresh quality of his inspiration and, in particular, to a correlation between this and the fact that Rimbaud was only an adolescent at the time of writing his poetry. Thus C A Hackett writes

His poems rise from the 'profondeurs', from the tumultuous and undisciplined forces of the unconscious mind, from the forgotten depths of childhood Rimbaud's unique achievement is to have expressed in mature and beautifully articulated language the experiences of childhood while he was actually experiencing them (122)

Rimbaud's desire for spontaneity can be regarded as a reaction against rationalism in general and against the restraints and rhetorical preoccupations traditional to French Poetry in particular (123) This reaction reached its

(120) Oeuvres en Prose Complètes, p 890

(121) 15th May, 1871 'Pléiade', O C , p. 250

(122) C A Hackett An Anthology of Modern French Poetry, p xxvii See also C A Hackett's Rimbaud L'enfant and C Chadwick's Études sur Rimbaud

(123) c.f Rimbaud on Musset 'Musset est quatorze fois exécration pour nous tout est français, c'est-à-dire haïssable au suprême degré 'Pléiade', O C., p 253

climax in the Illuminations Yet this kind of poetry, like all impressionist art at its best, becomes synthetic Highly developed formal synthesis in Rimbaud is uncommon but his work is emotively synthetic Even in an early poem like 'Au Cabaret-Vert' various details are brought together to give a synthetic formulation of happiness and this synthesising process is even more marked in 'Le Bateau ivre' and the Illuminations where according to Raymond Pouillart the poet 'pousse au fond . son penchant pour l'image synthétique'. (124) Jean-Marie Carré was right to single out Rimbaud's synthetic intention as the key-stone of his work

Il éprouvait . . le besoin d'accorder la musique et la peinture, les arts du dessin et les arts du rythme, de trouver ce langage poétique qui interessât à la fois tous les sens, qui fût 'de l'âme pour l'âme qui resumât 'tout, parfum, sons, couleurs ' (125)

In Rimbaud's poetry we find what C Day Lewis called 'that unifying force - the intensity of feeling which alone .. can take the place of poetic reason in fusing together and controlling the images of pure perception' (126)

Rimbaud seems to have arrived at roughly the same position as Bergson in Le Rire when he writes

Enfin, pour tout dire, nous ne voyons pas les choses mêmes, nous nous bornons, le plus souvent, à lire des étiquettes collées sur elles. Cette tendance, issue du besoin, c'est encore accentuée sous l'influence du langage (127)

He wanted to see or feel reality as it really is, not as our intellect has disguised it, and to achieve this he attempted to upset the labelling process Perhaps Rimbaud's one aesthetic 'error' was in his quest for spontaneity of imagery and insight into true reality, to come to prefer hallucination to the already sufficiently spontaneous world of 'sensations brutes' But one only has to recall the intellectual and discursive conception of poetry which existed in France when he wrote, to understand the violence of his reaction and his attempts at 'le dérèglement de tous les sens' which should more properly have been a 'dérèglement de la raison'.

(124) Pouillart, Le Romantisme, p. 222

(125) La Vie aventureuse de J.-A. Rimbaud, p 80

(126) Quoted in E Sewell, The Structure of Poetry, p 118

(127) Quoted in A Cresson, Bergson Sa vie, son oeuvre, p 146

His 'poetic theory' makes it clear that this freshly experienced reality was to be part of a synthesis. One such statement is to be found in the Illuminations themselves ('Jeunesse', IV)

Ta mémoire et tes sens ne seront que la nourriture
de ton impulsion créatrice

This can only be interpreted as meaning that Rimbaud caused elements drawn from immediate reality and from memory to cluster around an initial creative intuition. The Rimbaudian synthesis would include metaphysical insight, thought, sensation and emotion moulded into a new language which would even reflect the forward march of mankind, the age of progress.

Cette langue sera de l'âme pour l'âme résumant tout,
parfums, sons, couleurs, de la pensée accrochant la pensée et
tirant. Le poète définirait la quantité d'inconnu s'éveillant
en son temps dans l'âme universelle. Il donnerait plus -
que la formule de sa pensée, que la notation de sa marche
au Progrès' (128)

Such declarations would lead one to assume that Rimbaud's poetic synthesis would be of great complexity and variety. Sometimes this is the case. In 'Enfance', I, for instance, all kinds of sensation, suggestions, even geographical allusions came together in a rich tapestry which Louis Hautecœur described as an anticipation of Gauguin (129). As in the case of Verlaine, however, the basis of the synthesis may be very simple or naïve. 'L'Eternité' is an obvious example. An effect of light - an impressionistic subject par excellence - is assimilated with a spiritual experience, an intuition of eternity. The sea and the sky have become one, inseparable and indistinguishable.

Elle est retrouvée
Quoi? - L'Eternité
C'est la mer allée
Avec le soleil

Concision of expression enables Rimbaud to introduce into the synthesis the stock Romantic theme of escape from the strictures of normal bourgeois society without destroying the apparent naïvete of the poem.

Des humains suffrages,
Des communs élans
Là tu te dégages
Et voles selon

(128) Letter to Demy, 15th May, 1871

(129) Peinture et Littérature

The Romantic and Parnassian theme of nature as the only true source of obligation and 'ethical' insight (which accords with Rimbaud's neo-paganism) is similarly introduced

Puisque de vous seules,
Braises de satin,
Le Devoir s'exhale
Sans qu'on dise enfin

It is the very loss of self-interest, the certainty of the suffering of the individual in his immersion in nature's way, an oriental resignation and passivity which seems to be the appeal of this vision of eternity

Là pas d'espérance,
Nul orietur
Science avec patience,
Le supplice est sûr

Synthesis is one aspect of the experiments directed towards the creation of a new poetic language described in 'Alchimie du Verbe'. The formulation of atmosphere and mood - scarcely possible using only the resources of discursive language (hence 'inexprimable') - is presented as the outcome of a methodical process relying on synaesthesia and the interrelationship of the senses and an understanding of the emotive and 'musical' value of phonemes

J'inventai la couleur des voyelles' -
A noir, E blanc, I rouge, O bleu, U vert -
Je réglai la forme et le mouvement de chaque
consonne, et avec des rythmes instinctifs,
je me flattai d'inventer un verbe poétique
accessible, un jour ou l'autre, à tous les
sens Ce fut d'abord une étude J'écrivais
des silences, des nuits, je notais l'inexprimable
Je fixais des vertiges

The allusion to the over-discussed sonnet 'Voyelles' need not delay us long. The poem appears to be based on nothing more scientific than Rimbaud's own personal emotive associations. It is none the less valid for that as a poem but not as a major statement of poetic theory. To interpret it as systematic poetics was a mistake made long ago by René Ghil to the detriment of his own poetry, it has been emulated by many critics since. The present writer's opinion is that there may even be an element of fumisme in the poem evident in the third and fourth lines

A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes
Qui bombinent autour des puanteurs cruelles

Such an image is entirely in accord with the jokes and provocative antics of those groups like the cercle zutique which flourished in the years preceding the 'official' existence of the decadent movement. A similar 'decadent' image occurs in the seventh line

I, pourpres, sang craché .

These distasteful intrusions are the only part played by everyday reality in this particular poetic synthesis

A more interesting example is furnished by Rimbaud in 'Alchimie du Verbe' where a version of 'Larme' is quoted in full as the first illustration of the experiments he has been describing. We have already had occasion to comment on this poem in another context but it will be useful to reconsider it as an instance of synthetic poetry. That the basic theme is the unquenched thirst for knowledge and a resulting melancholy difficult to define has already been suggested. This theme and mood are formulated through images of a cocoon-like isolation in what purports to be a summer mist which is contrasted with a flashback sequence to a winter landscape. Both seasons prevent the poet from drinking, in summer the dry sands soak up the water, in winter it turns to ice. Thus the poem involves an obvious symbolism but one which utilises images drawn from identifiable, concrete reality, these have an atmospheric and plastic, as well as a symbolic, function.

cette bruyère
Entourée de tendres bois de noisetiers,
Dans un brouillard d'après-midi tiède et vert
- Ormeaux sans voix, gazon sans fleurs, ciel couvert'
- Un orage vint chasser le ciel. Au soir
L'eau des bois se perdait sur les sables vierges

This is more evidently the case in the more comprehensive synthesis of the version of May 1872 which includes the references to the poet's immediate condition as a railway traveller. Like Verlaine the poet formulates his mood and underlying predicament through a landscape (both in summer and winter, both static and moving) also, like Verlaine, he does not hesitate to give the emotional context of the poem both in the title and, in the version quoted in 'Alchimie du Verbe', in the last line.

Pleurant, je voyais de l'or - et ne pus boire -

The authenticity of the evocation of this état d'âme stems partly from the references to reality, partly from an obvious sense of confusion and imprecision communicated through the interrogatives and the lack of logical commentary. Yet this authenticity is not the result of genuine unadulterated spontaneity, Rimbaud has not settled for a purely impressionistic form, instead it is a carefully and beautifully calculated effect. Metrical devices play an important part in creating apparent spontaneity. Following Verlaine's example, Rimbaud uses the hendecasyllabic line (itself possessing an intrinsic indecisiveness), demonstrates great flexibility in the placing of coupes and freedom in employing enjambements. He is more daring than his elder in replacing rhyme with assonance. The

end result is a flowing prose-like rhythm which seems to follow the chain of sensations, thoughts and associations experienced by the poet. Nevertheless, in place of those traditional poetic resources he has abandoned Rimbaud, has developed another kind of verbal music (relating to the 'Voyelles' sonnet) which may even have dictated the choice of a particular proper name in the appropriately dark sonority loin oiseaux villageoises bois noisetiers boire Oise voix soir noirs gares bois mares boire. This is the closest that Rimbaud came to the intricately wrought phonic patterns of Mallarmé. But his synthesis relies much more heavily than Mallarmé's upon the continuing presence of external ephemeral reality - even something as mundane as railway travel - in the formulation of mood and possibly metaphysical frustration.

* * * * *

Synthesis in the midst of apparent spontaneity could also be considered a characteristic of Corbière's poetry. The desire for unity is to be seen in a general way in the architecture of Les Amours Jaunes. Recent research has shown beyond doubt that the poet 'avait minutieusement composé son recueil' (130). The transition from the anguish of the Parisian poems to the total liberation of the Rondels, through various gradations, is achieved with remarkable skill.

On a more detailed level, synthesis between subject and object, between external reality and emotion is one of the keystones of Corbière's work, with the partial exception of some of the earlier more descriptive poems. In the first sonnet of 'Paris' there is a total synthesis of the poet's impressions of the sights and sounds of Paris, and particularly his experiences in trying to board a bus, with his emotional bewilderment and with the workings of his mind - the mental associations prompted by external reality.

In one poem at least, 'Soneto a Napoli', Corbière achieved a formal synthesis quite as indivisible as any of Mallarmé's, though entirely different

(130) Rousselot, Tristan Corbière, p. 40. See Sonnenfeld, L'Oeuvre poétique de Tristan Corbière, pp. 52-60 for a full discussion and a refutation of the contrary view.

in character In Corbière's sonnet all the elements are welded together through an astonishing play on the various meanings of words, through delaying the 'resolution' of an image ('cornard'/'Diavolo') until the last stanza and above all through the dynamism of the poet's impressionistic evocation of contemporary reality superimposed upon the poet's emotional predicament summed up in the one word 'Pulcinella', but also suggested in the whole distasteful attitude to love

Thus although Corbière deliberately set out to produce an 'unfinished' poetry with all the jagged edges showing this did not preclude poetic synthesis, moreover this synthesis was related to what might, at first, be considered a disintegrating force - his humour 'l'unité repose souvent sur le jeu des connexions de mots ou d'images' (131) No one has better described Corbière's achievement as a synthetic poet than Jean Rousselot

Tristan n'est jamais 'extérieur', qu'il raconte un naufrage ou fasse le portrait d'un douanier, sa démarche par bonds, éllipses, fulgurances, images spontanées qui ne s'embarassent point d'une justification, le mène bien au delà de la scène de genre, du bonhomme qui pose, il passe à travers, il découvre le dedans, le dessous ce que la rhétorique officielle est incapable de nous montrer, paralysée par son souci analytique et de la mise en forme Poète de l'âme, de ses replis, de ses cassures, il réussit cette même percée des apparences, unit d'un seul coup d'aile la perception affective au frémissement indéfinissable qui court sous la surface élucidée de la conscience (132)

* * * * *

Such is the complexity of the culmination of the evolution we have been discussing in this chapter that it is difficult to attach to it an adequate label, it is the attempt to express those feelings that occur when 'inner reality' - the poet's total individual consciousness and not merely his intellect - is in contact with the transient phenomena of external reality (Occasionally this inner reality is treated in near isolation from the reality outside it, but this latter procedure is so difficult and demanding that perhaps only Mallarmé consistently produced masterpieces centred almost exclusively on mental experience) To a very

(131) O C , p 685

(132) Tristian Corbière, pp 77-78 ,

great extent this reaction which takes into account the subtlest workings of the poet's consciousness in all their immediacy developed out of or at least ran parallel with the poetry expressing the pleasures of life or straightforward enthusiasm for modernity (133) This latter poetry already implied a separation from discursive rhetoric and a move away from ideas to sensations and elusive experiences The influence of these two reactions was sufficient not only to produce a whole new attitude towards style in poetry and the disassociation of poetry from versified oratory but in particular to challenge the less fruitful aspects of poetic modernism and especially the naive modernism of the object already scorned in the 1850s by Baudelaire and in remarkable fashion by Fernand Desnoyers who, in a thinly veiled attack on Du Camp, had pointed out that if our ancestors had equated the treatment of the latest gadgets and discoveries with realism we should have had epic poems on the candle and novels and paintings about the potato (134) Likewise, already in the 1850s the importance of the individual's reaction to external reality as opposed to pure representation had been stressed by Duranty 'réalisme signifie expression franche et complète des individualités, ce qu'il attaque, c'est justement la convention, l'imitation, toute espèce d'école' (135) What was original after 1870 was that for the first time on a large scale such precepts were being put into practice in poetry The growing familiarity with Baudelaire, experiments in the pictorial arts, a philosophical background which stressed the transitoriness of phenomena, a political and social situation which encouraged a carpe diem attitude to life and the treatment of the present day by the Naturalists must all have played their part. (As in all probability did the influence of Oriental art and ideas which again stressed the notion of transitoriness)

To the extent that the present writer sees the poetry of total consciousness as a logical extension, via impressionism, of the poetry of

- (133) In the case of Rimbaud and Verlaine, for instance, the two reactions would seem to be parallel Rimbaud's 'Sensation' which evokes a peculiarly intense spiritual experience arising out of a contact with nature actually precedes simple joie de vivre poems like 'Roman', on the other hand his later poetry is more concerned with inner reality and the total consciousness in all its confusion.
- (134) 'Du Réalisme' in L'Artiste, 9 December 1855, pp 197-200
- (135) In the first number of Réalisme, 15 November 1856 Interestingly, with the substitution of 'symbolisme' for 'réalisme', Duranty's statement could be transferred more or less en bloc to a Symbolist manifesto

everyday reality he must part company with almost every account of the development of poetry after 1870. Even Pierre Reboul, whose splendid little book on Laforgue has provided such a mine of information on the period 1870-1887, sees poetic modernism limited to the 1870s because this was a time when everyone had 'perdu ses clefs' (136). Monsieur Reboul speaks of the new poetry that was to replace modernism, 'Peu avant la naissance, de l'École symboliste, alors que Mallarmé écrit, que Rimbaud a paru et que Verlaine anticipe lui aussi sur l'avenir, il est presque nécessaire qu'un jeune homme pauvre, s'initiant à la littérature, subisse les prestiges réunis du naturalisme et du modernisme' (137). But was the future which is in question here much more than the tardy recognition of the achievements of the years 1870-1887 and of their great precursor Baudelaire? For our part, poetic developments after 1880 are best considered as a refinement of modernism not as a reaction against it, even though the latter opinion was shared by some poets at the time. Seen in this light the story of French poetry in the 1870s and 1880s begins to look more like a case of a good number of poets having found at least some keys for the first time. No serious dent had been made in the classical-rhetorical traditions of French poetry until the writing of Les Fleurs du Mal. Even then it is arguable that Baudelaire sometimes seemed ill at ease in assimilating his new subject-matter, and the well-known qualification that Rimbaud added to his praise of Baudelaire seems to some extent justified. By the 1870s some poets were beginning to approach contemporary reality with at least as much confidence as Baudelaire and certainly with less regard for poetic conventions.

Monsieur Reboul seems to suggest that Rimbaud and Verlaine were heralding the 'Symbolist' future and a departure from modernism. It should be remembered, however, that both poets wrote their masterpieces in the early 1870s. Their work is a product both of those influences at work around 1870, which have already been discussed, and of the discovery of Baudelaire. It was Baudelaire's modernism which, according to Pierre Reboul's own testimony, was above all else valued by the poets of the years 1870-1880. (138) We would suggest that at their best poets like Rimbaud and

(136) Reboul, Laforgue, p 17

(137) Ibid , p 37.

(138) Reboul, Laforgue, p 37.

Verlaine were modernists of a kind and that their work marks not so much a new attitude towards symbols as a more highly developed technique in the expression and formulation of experience derived from contemporary reality. Laforgue appears as a more easily explicable product of the modernism of the 1870s from which he had time to learn. Rimbaud's impatience and innovating genius lay at the root of what, in retrospect, has the appearance of a literary short-cut taken by himself and Verlaine, although Verlaine's familiarity with the ideas of the new school of painters may in the end have been decisive. All the major poets of the period 1870-1887 arrived at new poetic forms which may be likened to Impressionism and Synthetism in painting. The principle advance of this poetry on the achievements of Baudelaire was the realisation that a more flexible poetic language would be necessary to meet the requirements, already grasped by Baudelaire, of a spontaneous, immediate and yet synthetic approach to experience.

It is easy to forget just how stringent were the rules of versification recommended by the poetic establishment even as late as the period under discussion. Banville who was generally sympathetic to young poets and who was himself to join the modernist camp illustrates well the strong attachment to traditional prosody in his review of Bouchor's second collection Les Chansons de l'Amour et de la Mer. 'Certes, voila de la grande, saine et robuste poésie. Mon coeur de vieux romantique saigne bien un peu quand je vois là-dedans MOUR au singulier rimer avec VELOURS, et TREVE sans S avec SOULEVES.' (139). Contrasted with such attitudes was the conviction on the part of a writer like Bourget that modernism should be the concern of his fellow poets but that its essence would lie in a new poetic language yet to be formulated and the qualities of which would be a subtlety and flexibility to match the psychology of the age. Bourget's words are worth repeating:

ce phénix encore à trouver malgré tant d'efforts et de
si heureux le poème moderne - Qui, un poème se passant de
nos jours absolument impossible à un autre moment de l'histoire
de nos moeurs un poème en bottines vernies et en habit noir
et pour l'écrire une langue inventée, un vers fouillé, palpitant,
nerveux, souple à la pensée comme le gant à la main (140)

(139) Quoted in Goudeau, Dix ans de Bohème, p 40

(140) Preface to Edel, p 1.

Bourget probably had Baudelaire in mind when he referred to 'tant d'efforts et de si heureux' - as well he might considering his unacknowledged borrowing from Baudelaire in the remark on modern costume. It is significant that even the creator of Les Fleurs du Mal obviously falls short in Bourget's view of the new poetic ideal he is seeking. The new flexibility was conspicuously absent from Bourget's own verse but it is to be doubted that he possessed the poetic ability to see through such an innovation even though he had the perception to see the necessity for it. It is arguable that the quest for the new language, and its discovery, is the central feature of poetic enterprise in France throughout the whole of the period under discussion. Visible in the declaration of the 'Vivants' that the whole French poetic manner was outmoded, in Rimbaud's dismissal of the versified prose that had passed for poetry in France up to his own day, in the younger generation's admiration for the sinuosity and apparent spontaneity of the poetic medium forged by Verlaine (141) the movement became crystallised in the late 1880s around the issue of free verse. The link between free verse and the desire to reproduce something of the immediacy of the poet's personal experience is clear in many declarations of the pioneers of the new form. Retté in Cloches en la nuit and Kahn in Les Palais nomades (142) set out explicitly to convey the patterns and detours of their thoughts through a mixture of regular and free verse. Vielé-Griffin had much the same intention in Joies, stressing in the preface the need for spontaneity and freedom from conventions (143). The latter's essays in the Entretiens politiques et littéraires during 1890 make it clear that he saw in free verse a rhythmic system which relied on the musical cadence determined by the poet's inner emotions and not on some intellectually determined principle like syllabic count (144). In 1888 Mockel had spoken of the guiding principle of 'le rythme intérieur' (145).

- (141) See, for example, Kahn, Symbolistes et décadents. His remarks were originally published in La Revue indépendante in 1888.
- (142) The apparent disorder and spontaneity of Cloches en la nuit is discussed in Kenneth Cornell's Adophe Retté, pp 29-42.
- (143) See J. de Cours, Francis Vielé-Griffin, p 8.
- (144) See K. Cornell, The Symbolist Movement, p 92.
- (145) With reference to Séverin's volume Le Lys. See La Wallonie, III, p 137.

Kahn eventually provided one of the most straightforward definitions of free verse in the preface to the 1897 edition of his Premiers poèmes 'L'unité du vers peut se définir encore un fragment le plus court possible figurant un arrêt de voix et un arrêt de sens' (146) Without ever joining the ranks of the verslibristes Verlaine had come close to this ideal as had, to some extent, Corbière Rimbaud was to embrace free verse itself - a feat only acknowledged much later At the very beginning of the period of the discussions surrounding free verse Laforgue had already completed some of the masterpieces of the new form Almost from the beginning of the period 1870-1887 great poetry may usually be distinguished by the use of a poetic language characterised by spontaneity and flexibility, this remained true throughout the period and indeed afterwards Much of what is best in both the theories and practice of the poets of the Symbolist movement after 1886 lies in the recognition of earlier achievements or, at the very least, the independent realisation that remarkable similar innovations were necessary It is highly doubtful that Mallarmé's greatness can be related to this emphasis on a poetic language reflecting the immediate workings of the consciousness though such an attribution has been made by both his contemporaries and by respected critics since (147) That such an attribution should have been made may in itself be an indication of the importance of the general trend The response of the major poets of the period to the need for a new poetic language has been discussed above and Laforgue's particular ambition will be dealt with in the final part of the thesis Such a response was a necessary prerequisite for the basically synthetic poetic masterpieces of the period.

It is in the years after 1870 that a poetry which takes into account the reality external to the poet, all the levels of the poet's consciousness and the interplay between reality and this consciousness is at last fully realised The need to create some kind of synthesis of subject and object, of sensation and emotion, of description and dream is fundamental to the period The proportions of the ingredients of the synthesis vary greatly, the great poets writing before 1886-1887 were, with the exception of Mallarmé, generally loathe to minimise the place of identifiable external

(146) Kahn, Premiers poèmes, p 26

(147) Mallarmé was accepted by the decadents as a 'sensationniste' (according to Barrès quoted in Martino, Parnasse et Symbolisme, p 146) A R Chisholm has spoken of his poetry as the reflection of 'the unceasing stream of time along which his consciousness was moving' See Mallarmé's Grand Oeuvre, p 121

reality in their poetry - or at least the part played by sensation, the poets writing during and after the establishment of the Symbolist movement by Moréas and others, reacting against what they considered to be the dangers of Naturalism, stressed the role of dream or often, to be more precise, fantasy. Sometimes the latter was emphasised so strongly that the other elements of the synthesis disappeared almost entirely. It is probable that this imbalance accounts for the fact that relatively little of the poetry associated with the years of the 'triumph' of Symbolism can be considered great at all. The understanding that such poetry left out of account reference to sensation and reality may explain the direction taken by much modern French poetry and the very short-lived success of Symbolism.

Dissatisfaction with poetry of contemporary reality which largely limited itself to description and the desire to forge a link between internal and external reality is clearly visible even in the work of poets who had not yet evolved a language of sufficient subtlety to perform the operation with entire success. Examples of such poetry are not only interesting manifestations of a transitional phase in the development of the poetry of contemporary reality but also illustrate well just how necessary a new poetic medium was. That is not to say that the poetry is necessarily bad but that it falls short of greatness. The work of Mikhaél is a case in point. A poem like 'Crépuscule pluvieux' is a far from unsuccessful attempt to correlate the poet's mood with external contemporary reality but is hampered by the inflexibility of the versification and by reliance on the general abstract vocabulary of the emotions: 'ennui', 'amour', 'souvenirs', 'horreur', 'mélancolique', 'mystérieusement'. Such feelings are best expressed through suggestion rather than direct statement, through a judicious choice of images and rhythms. Suitable images are usually to be found in the reality of the poet's situation at the time of experiencing the état d'âme. Mikhaél has realised this but fails to make fullest use of his insight.

L'ennui descend sur moi comme un brouillard d'automne
Que le soir épaissit de moment en moment,
Un ennui lourd, accru mystérieusement,
Qui m'opprime de nuit épaisse et monotone

Pourtant nul glorieux amour ne m'a blessé,
Et c'est sans regretter les heures envolées
Que je revois au loin, vagues formes voilées,
Mes souvenirs errants au jardin du passé

Et pourtant, maintenant, dans l'horreur languissante
 D'un soir de pluie et dans la lente obscurité,
 Je sens mon coeur que nul amour n'a déserté
 Mélancolique ainsi qu'une chambre d'absente (148)

The attempt to capture the atmosphere of contemporary reality and to give primary attention to the poet's feelings and sensations and not to his ideas could, however, lead to bad or, at the very least, inconsequential poetry in less talented hands. The now forgotten poetry of Jean Floux who was one of the poets most admired at the gatherings of the 'Hydropathes' provides examples in plenty. The prologue to his collection Les Maîtresses, entitled 'A mon esprit' is an apology to his intellect for neglecting it in his verse.

Aussi, ce premier livre, éclos en un caprice,
 Fait de sensations, de rires et de pleurs,
 Renferme seulement mon paradis factice,
 Peuplé de papillons, de femmes et de fleurs
 J'ai mis trop mon coeur et pas assez de toi (149)

In the light of the poems which follow the apology seems scarcely necessary. Floux's evocations of the spirit of modern life are flat-footed in the extreme, being based entirely on direct statement of the most banal kind. Of the subtle world of sensation there is no trace.

Bâtitseur dors en paix fier de ton oeuvre sage
 Ton immeuble est debout, et de la cave au toit,
 L'ascenseur hissera, jusqu'au cinquième étage,
 Les gens bien habillés qui logeront chez toi

Sous l'escalier moelleux gronde un calorifère,
 Exhalant l'âme rouge et chaude du charbon
 Ta maison neuve est bien celle que l'on préfère
 Du Louvre à l'Opéra Sois Fier ton oeuvre est bon (150)

Given the prevailing atmosphere of light-hearted buffoonery at the meetings of the 'Hydropathes' it is surprising that Floux did not make more use of humour or of ordinary everyday speech. The latter, in as much as it was present in both the real social setting of a poet and in his own thought patterns, became an increasingly important part of some synthetic poetry after 1870. Much of Corbière's and Laforgue's poetry represents in this respect a development of that mixture of the 'poetic' and everyday registers of language already found in the work of Baudelaire. It is highly probable, as we have suggested, that the gatherings of young

(148) Oeuvres d'Ephraïm Mikhaël

(149) Quoted in R. de Casteras, Avant le Chat-Noir, Les Hydropathes, p. 115

(150) Ibid., p. 117. The poem is 'La Maison Neuve'

writers were largely responsible for the spread of this technique

In retrospect this complex reaction to contemporary reality appears as a modification of certain aspects of modernism and Naturalism in poetry the interest in spontaneous experience, in transient reality, in sensation, the awareness of a distinctly modern temperament characterised by elusive feelings, the realisation that all types of speech could find a place in verse, the dissatisfaction with the bald statement of ideas All these insights were modified through the use of a poetic language appropriate to them and could thus be incorporated into a new synthesis It is probably such a process that Remy de Gourmont had in mind in one of his most perspicacious statements 'Le symbolisme ne fut d'abord qu'une modification des parties nobles du naturalisme' (151)

It is hoped that the movement examined so far in this thesis and, in particular, the transition which has been treated in this chapter will be brought into sharper focus by a more detailed (and consecutive) discussion of the work of a single poet The development of the ideas and of the poetry of Jules Laforgue is in many ways the best illustration of, and commentary upon, the whole subject of this thesis We shall endeavour to show the relationship between a marked interest in the poetic treatment of contemporary reality and the artistic and intellectual environment of the 1870s and 1880s, and the extent of this particular poet's fascination with contemporary subjects and contemporary language and the evolution of this fascination into a concern for poetic impressionism and, as a direct consequence, for poetry as synthesis

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(151) Lettres à l'Amazone, p 180.

Again this reaction too is reflected in the general artistic activity of the period The development of a synthesis of the artist's sensations, feelings ideas and the qualities of the subject is to be seen, in varying degrees in the late paintings by Monet, where the subject and its impact on the artist's sensations is still paramount, in the paintings of Van Gogh's mature period, where the artist's emotions begin to overshadow other aspects, in the paintings of Gauguin where an idea or intuition becomes more important than sensation or even emotion

LAFORGUE - A CASE HISTORYCHAPTER ONETHE SITUATION OF LAFORGUE

To some extent Laforgue is in the inverse position of Poe as regards his status in France and the Anglo-Saxon countries. Poe from the time of Baudelaire onwards, and particularly through the offices of Mallarmé and Valéry, has enjoyed a reputation in France which English-speaking readers find difficult to understand.(1) Conversely, until very recently, Laforgue's status in France (2) has compared unfavourably with the posthumous fame he has long enjoyed in Britain and the United States. Marie-Jeanne Durry expressed pleasurable surprise at this latter phenomenon: 'Les anglo-saxons l'ont adopté et lui consacrent des thèses!'(3) Only four significant studies of Laforgue have been produced by universitaires in France: those by Ruchon, Guichard, Reboul and Madame Durry herself.(4) Of these the earliest, by François Ruchon, remains the most substantial and is still indispensable, although all the others, and especially Reboul's, have been exceedingly useful. Even Kahn has had a weightier tome in French devoted to him, though this is again, somewhat ironically, by an Englishman.(5) The charges of emotional immaturity, of excessive word-play and lack of respect for the French language have apparently registered not only with a large part of the poetry-reading public in France but with academics too. There have been, from the start, flurries of interest in Laforgue inside France, with long periods of neglect. During such periods his name has been kept in the manuals, and some of his poems in the anthologies, by virtue of his inclusion among the décadents, of whom he has often been said to be the best representative. In 1947 Guy Michaud attempted to rescue Laforgue from this Backwater by classifying him, to all intents and purposes, as a

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- (1) Aldous Huxley saw Poe as the epitome of 'vulgarity in literature'.
 (2) Laforgue has still not received the accolade of an edition in the 'Pléiade' series nor, for that matter, in the 'Classiques Garnier'.
 (3) Jules Laforgue, p.12.
 (4) See bibliography for details.
 (5) Professor J.C.Ireson. See bibliography.

Symbolist in his Message poétique du Symbolisme; this may well have been the beginning of the reappraisal of Laforgue in France which has slowly been gathering momentum since. The question of Laforgue's position vis-à-vis the Symbolists and the decadent movement is one to which we shall return at the end of this thesis. Laforgue has been seen as the victim of his historical situation: born too soon to profit from Symbolism and also too early for Surrealism.(6) His reputation has also suffered a blow, all the more serious because of the prestige of his critic, from Marcel Raymond who declares: 'On croit apercevoir une trop subtile intelligence se dépenser en vain à mimer les mouvements de l'inconscient.' (7) But the true reason for Laforgue's relative neglect is nothing to do with chronology nor with the judgements of individual critics; it springs from the essence of his poetry itself. His attack on the primacy of the intellect, on academicism in art and literature, his apparent lack of seriousness and his ironic humour all go against those grains of préciosité and pomposity which the French have been so reluctant to eradicate from their poetry. Indeed it has been remarked that irony as a form of literary expression has been little considered or understood in France.(8) Laforgue's work is nearer to the self-critical and self-mocking attitude found in much English and German literature.(9)

However French and Anglo-Saxon critics alike now seem to consider that Laforgue has been undervalued.(10) Certainly if one looks to the period immediately after 1885 as the moment of crystallisation in the development of French poetry (normally referred to as Symbolism) in the latter half of the nineteenth century then one must look above all to the poetry of Laforgue, for he is by far the most outstanding poet of those years.(11) The one largely original and vitally important achievement of the period was the

- (6) D.Grojnowski, 'La Poétique de Laforgue', p.254.
 (7) M.Raymond, De Baudelaire au Surréalisme, p.62.
 (8) H.Peyre, 'Laforgue among the Symbolists', p.45.
 (9) e.g. the poetry of Heine or Eliot and the criticism of Friedrich Schlegel.
 (10) See L.Guichard, Jules Laforgue et ses poésies, p.21: 'Peut-être de sa génération sera-t-il le seul à survivre'; C.A.Hackett, An Anthology of Modern French poetry, p.248
 (11) With the exception of Mallarmé who really belongs to an earlier generation.

final liberation of French verse from the rigours of the alexandrine; no one had a greater part in this than Laforgue. He shared too in the other major endeavour of the poets of 1885-95: the recognition of the greatness of Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé and even Rimbaud, with whose work he unfortunately had little opportunity to become acquainted.

The tragic circumstances of his death, and the subsequent long periods of neglect punctuated with moments of renewed interest, have led to a deplorable situation regarding the collection and careful study of his writings. Laforgue's letters to Bourget have never been released; his manuscripts have been irresponsibly dispersed; many seem to have been lost; the seventh volume of the so-called Oeuvres Complètes being published by Mercure de France has been ready for the presses for more than two decades but, at the time of writing, has still not appeared - this is the volume devoted to his crucial art criticism. It is an astonishing fact that Pascal Pia's labour of love in preparing his edition of the Poésies complètes of 1970 was still able to bring to light sixty-six hitherto unpublished poems.(12)

Not only is Laforgue the greatest poet of the Symbolist generation of 1885-95 he is also an outstanding example of so many of those tendencies of the two decades after the Franco-Prussian War that have been examined in various forms in the earlier parts of this thesis. Laforgue would merit more attention than he has received purely as an ^{intellectual} case history let alone as a poet. It is to the many discernible influences in his work that we must now turn.

(12) See, for an account of this sad story, J.L. Debaue, 'A propos des manuscrits de Jules Laforgue'.

CHAPTER TWO

Laforgue's intellectual and artistic environment

It is arguable that Laforgue's greatest achievement as a poet - the creation of a synthetic poem embracing all the levels of the poet's experience and consciousness and the aspects of the reality external to him - is in no small way to be attributed to the scope of his knowledge and appreciation not only of literature but of art and philosophy. It was not just a question of knowledge, however, for Laforgue showed a reluctance to jettison ideas he came across, preferring to find some grand scheme which would permit them to coexist. One thing which particularly struck his companions at the beginning of his career was his ability to draw analogies.(13) The evolution of Laforgue's poetry is marked by the ever closer integration of those many diverse elements he still held valid and by the reduction in the number of direct references to them. Out of the many influences he had felt he ended by forming a highly personalised amalgam.

Literary influences.

Laforgue's reading in nineteenth-century French verse was vast, spanning the full range of expression and celebrity, from Hugo to the latest cabaret chansonniers of the Left Bank.

Sainte-Beuve's Joseph Delorme is one of those strange books whose influence seems to simmer beneath the surface of literary history for generations without ever attaining public acclaim or certain immortality.(14) From the author of Volupté Laforgue drew encouragement for his lyricism based on genuine experience, for his acuteness of observation and for his inclination to use a language nearer to everyday speech than that of the grand Romantics.(15) In Musset he admired the mixture of lyrical confession

(13) See article by Kahn in Revue bleue, November 1901.

(14) c.f. A.G. Lehmann, Sainte-Beuve, pp.71-72.

(15) See L. Guichard, Jules Laforgue et ses poésies, p.33, P.Reboul, Laforgue, pp.38-40 and p.42, and Lehmann, Sainte-Beuve, p.66.

and playful humour.(16) In Vigny he found a fellow pessimist much in vogue with the Symbolist generation for that very quality. Certainly the tone of Le Sanglot is reminiscent of Vigny's Les Destinées in its earnestness.(17) Lastly, of the Romantics, Hugo made his presence felt to the young Laforgue to the extent that some brief notes gathered in the Mélanges posthumes are devoted to him. Laforgue saw in Hugo two of those apparently contradictory qualities which were to become features of his own poetry; the prophetic and apocalyptic vision attempting to embrace the sum of all things and, at the other extreme, the kind of popular simplicity to be found in 'Le Cantique de Bethphagé' or the Chansons. As Pierre Reboul has remarked: 'il y avait entre eux (Hugo and Laforgue) plus de parenté qu'il ne semble et la vision hugolienne se transmute aisément en vision laforguienne'.(18) A poem like 'Eclair de gouffre' shows the influence of Hugo not only in its title but in several of its lines:

J'étais sur une tour au milieu des étoiles!
 Soudain, coup de vertige. Un éclair où, sans voiles,
 Je sondais grelottant d'effarement, de peur,
 L'énigme du Cosmos dans toute sa stupeur!
 Tout est-il seul? Où suis-je? Où va ce bloc qui roule
 Et m'emporte? - Et je puis mourir! mourir, partir,
 Sans rien savoir! Parlez! O rage, et le temps coule
 Sans retour! Arrêtez! arrêtez! et jouir?
 Car j'ignore tout, moi! Mon heure est là peut-être:
 Je ne sais pas! J'étais dans la nuit, puis je nais.
 Pourquoi? D'où l'univers? Où va-t-il? Car le prêtre
 N'est qu'un homme. On ne sait rien! Montre-toi, parais,
 Dieu, témoin éternel! Parle, pourquoi la vie?
 Tout se tait! Oh! l'espace est sans cœur! Un moment!
 Astres! Je ne veux pas mourir! J'ai du génie!
 Ah! redevenir rien irrévocablement!

(19)

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- (16) One of Bourget's ambitions in his first two volumes of verse had been to be the Musset of the new age. For Laforgue and Musset see Reboul, op.cit., p.40 and François Ruchon, Jules Laforgue, p.20.
 (17) See W. Ramsey, Jules Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance, p.43.
 (18) Reboul, op.cit., p.40.
 (19) Le Sanglot de la Terre, Pia edition, p.349.

One would not, however, find lines in Hugo with the half-comic tone of:

Astres! Je ne veux pas mourir! j'ai du génie!

Nor are there many visions of such desolation as Laforgue's 'bloc qui roule' in 'l'espace....sans cœur'. One thing which Laforgue did not inherit from Hugo was the older poet's fundamental optimism or his belief in progress either on a human or a cosmic level.(20) Laforgue was also well aware of Hugo's monumental rhetoric:

L'ennui de ces périodiques pavés roulés du Sinai coutmuier,
trois cents cinquante pages de gros papier, en gros caracteres-
tout en vers- et cet air. Il n'y a pas de raison pour que ça
finisse. L'orgue continue tant que la partition de la matière
visible est ouvert à ses yeux de vivant et tant qu'il y a du vent
pour les tuyaux.

(21)

From the Romantics in general Laforgue inherited one pole of his ironic manner, the sincere lyrical expression of his anguish and pessimism; he also found an inkling of the counter-balance, the opposite pole, the lighter, almost popular tone of some Musset, Sainte-Beuve and even Hugo. Both aspects, and particularly the latter, were to be reinforced by his reading of later poets.

Like Rimbaud and Mallarmé, Laforgue owed a considerable and often unacknowledged debt to the Parnassians, or to be more precise the poets associated with the Parnasse, especially Madame Ackermann, Cazalis, Sully-Prudhomme and Leconte de Lisle.(22) For Laforgue the Parnassians were the spokesmen of the philosophical despair of their age, a despair more modern than Vigny's pessimism because of its roots in the sciences of which the young poet was such an avid student. All these poets were frequently read by Laforgue during the formative years of the composition of Le Sanglot de la Terre. From Madame Ackermann, who then enjoyed considerable success, he acquired the belief that positivist science showed the truly gloomy picture of Man's

(20) Laforgue did believe that the Unconscious worked through the evolutionary process, but this work was of inscrutable purpose.

(21) Fragment on La Fin de Satan, Mélanges posthumes, p.130.

(22) i.e. the philosophical poets. We do not recall a single reference to the work of Heredia, whose preoccupations were with form rather than ideas, in the whole of Laforgue's writings and correspondence; though he does refer to Gautier and Banville.

situation in the universe together with a certain woolly-minded comfort stemming from the view that the laws of the universe were ultimately beyond our comprehension and therefore quasi-divine.(23) He may also have become aware of the importance of Pascal through reading her works. Léon Guichard has written of the influence of Leconte de Lisle in shaping Laforgue's 'Buddhism' (24) but mention should also be made of Cazalis in this respect. Kahn wrote of his first meeting with Laforgue: 'nous échangeâmes des idées, il me montra des Bouddhismes à travers Cazalis.'(25) Though Laforgue shared many of Leconte de Lisle's philosophical attitudes he did not accept his antiquarianism and in an amusing letter to Kahn remarked: 'J'ai vu l'autre jour Leconte de Lisle en omnibus avec des gants.'(26) Of course, he was also soon to abandon the existing rules of prosody and thereby open an unbridgeable gulf between his poetry and that of the Parnassians. He was nearer to Sully-Prudhomme than almost any of the poets so far mentioned in the vision of the world hurtling through a meaningless cosmos and at the same time evolving towards its own destruction. Le Sanglot de la Terre has many reminiscences of Sully-Prudhomme's poetry particularly in La Justice. Lines like these from 'Sonnet pour éventail'(27) show the imprint of Sully-Prudhomme's influence:

Juste le temps de voir que tout est mal sur terre,
Que c'est en vain qu'on cherche un coeur à l'univers,
Qu'il faut se résigner à l'immense mystère,
Et que, sanglot perdu, lueur aux cieux déserts,
Plu qui fronce un instant sur l'infini des mers,
L'homme entre deux néants n'est qu'un jour de misère.
(28)

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- (23) Madame Ackermann's vague pantheism and her feeling that this life is scarcely more than a dream have much in common with Laforgue's belief that individuality was subordinate to the workings of the Unconscious.
- (24) Jules Laforgue et ses poésies, pp.54-55. Laforgue's 'Buddhism' went beyond mere intellectual concern; for months he existed on two eggs and a glass of water a day.
- (25) Article in Revue Bleue, November 1901.
- (26) Lettres à un ami, p.27.
- (27) This poem is one of the few in Le Sanglot which can fairly be described as the unrelieved exposition of a pessimistic philosophy. Only the title, an ironic reference to poésie galante brings a touch of humour and this was a late amendment, the original title being 'Misère'.
- (28) c.f. Sully-Prudhomme: Je cherche un coeur à l'univers
et tu ne m'en dis pas la place...
(La Justice, 'Première Veille', Poésies 1878-1879, p.69).

Pierre Reboul has suggested that Laforgue's debt to Sully-Prudhomme is greater than mere textual borrowings: 'il lui doit bien plus. Le Sanglot est en quelque sorte La justice(sic) amputée de sa fin kantienne, réduite à sa première partie darwinienne et pessimiste.'(29)

Despite his debt to this quartet of Parnassians they were, even for the Laforgue of Le Sanglot, merely a point de départ. In describing the composition of Le Sanglot in a passage preserved in the Mélanges posthumes he refers to these very same poets: 'Leconte de Lisle pas assez humain, trop élevé au sens bourgeois, Cazalis trop dilettante, Mme Ackermann pas assez artiste, pas assez fouillée, Sully-Prudhomme trop froid, trop technique...' (30) Already we have the suggestions of a poetry that would be thought out to its last detail but at the same time be closer to everyday reality and the rhythms of life. Totally absent from the work of the Parnassians was an ingredient essential to Laforgue - humour. Nevertheless they are probably the principal poetic antecedents of the 'serious' aspect of his poetry; through their example he may well have decided that his poetry would among other things be a reflection of his readings in philosophy.

More important than any of the poets so far discussed in eventually forming Laforgue's manner was the figure who cast his shadow over the whole generation - Baudelaire. We have had already occasion to discuss Laforgue's penetrating remarks on Baudelaire.(31) Little more need be said here except to recapitulate on Laforgue's realisation that Baudelaire had arrived at one of the most fundamental changes in the poetic medium in France in his mixing of tones, in his blending of the traditionally 'poetic' with the non-declamatory, of the deepest lyricism with the mundane image. To some extent this was reflected in Le Sanglot de la Terre but there Laforgue was still partly under the influence of Hugolian verbosity.(32) Towards the end of 1882 (33) Laforgue was re-reading Les Fleurs du Mal which became one of his

(29) Laforgue, p.50. Sully's 'Epilogue' was 'j'ai conquis l'horizon sur l'ombre et sur le doute' ('La Justice' p.255).

(30) Mélanges posthumes, p.8. The fragment seems to date from 1880.

(31) In Part One, Chapter One.

(32) 'Le verbalisme du Sanglot tient en partie à l'influence du dernier Hugo...' (Reboul, Laforgue, p.48).

(33) i.e. when most of Le Sanglot had already been written. For a discussion of the dates of Laforgue's early poetry see Reboul, op.cit., pp.41-45.

'bibles'. The influence of Baudelaire is to be seen throughout the development of Laforgue's poetry from the modernism of Le Sanglot, and in an increasingly profound sense, to the end of Laforgue's tragically short career; it is to be seen in his greatest poem 'L'Hiver qui vient'. References to Baudelaire are frequent in his correspondence as are reminiscences in his verse.

Doubtless Laforgue's voracious reading habits would have brought him to the study of Baudelaire in any case, but a catalyst in the young poet's appreciation of the value of Les Fleurs du Mal was his friendship with Bourget. The role of the minor modernist poets of the 1870s and early 1880s in general with regard to Laforgue's poetic development must now be discussed.

Laforgue's contact with the modernist poets of the period, and with the cénacles in which they recited their work, was not only an additional encouragement to his modernism to hold alongside the example of Baudelaire, it was also chiefly in this contact that he found the counter-balance for the serious aspect of his poetry - a counter-balance of popular manner and humour. The resulting juxtaposition is the essence of his irony and it produced contrasts and calculated incongruities more daring and more striking than those of even Baudelaire.

Laforgue's correspondence and other biographical information show that he was not only intimately familiar with the poetry of the minor modernist poets as it appeared in volume form but read the periodicals (34) associated with the cénacles when he was in Germany and, when he was able, attended the gatherings in person.(35) The more important of these poets - Bourget, Richepin,

(34) If 'periodical' is not too exalted a name for a broadsheet like Le Chat Noir.

(35) For Laforgue's careful attention to new volumes of modernist verse see Lettres à un ami, p.21. For his reading of periodicals like L'Hydropathe, Le Chat Noir and La Vie Moderne see Oeuvres Complètes, IV, p.198 and Lettres à un ami, p.32 and p.48. There are numerous other references to these and other similar periodicals. Kahn several times related Laforgue's enthusiasm for the cabaret gatherings and performances which he attended e.g. in his articles in the Revue Bleue of November 1901 and in Les Nouvelles Littéraires of December 1921; indeed Kahn first met Laforgue at a meeting of the 'Hydropathes'. For Laforgue's attendance at cabaret, mime and popular theatre after his return to Paris in 1887 see H.M.Block, 'Laforgue and the theatre', pp.78-79.

La noire araignée
 Demeure éloignée
 d'ici:
 Un balai fidele
 Prend constamment d'elle
 Souci!

Pendant le bal, tout ce qu'on aime
 Se trouve au bahut mal fermé,
 Le beurre en mottes; et la crème,
 Et le miel, régal embaumé!

Les plaisirs du monde
 Sont pour notre ronde
 Aisés:
 Longues rêveries,
 Danse et sucreries
 Baisers!

Quand par la fenêtre on nous chasse,
 Non essaims effarés et prompts
 Tourment un instant dans l'espace,
 Et par la porte nous rentrons.

Zon! Zon! tout repose!
 La cuisine est close:
 Disons
 Par bandes errantes
 Mille susurrantes
 Chansons!

(37)

Laforgue's admiration for Bourget is well known and never wavered. From the start of their association he exclaimed 'si quelqu'un a du genie parmi nos poètes, c'est Bourget.' (38) It was to Bourget that he dedicated the Complaintes in a poem containing the compliment:

Puissent mes feuilleteurs du quai,
 En rentrant, se r'intoxiquer
 De vos AVEUX, ô pur poète!

As late as 1884 Laforgue still spoke of Bourget as 'le premier écrivain de la génération nouvelle'. (39) There is no reason to suppose that Laforgue's affection or admiration for Bourget was ever diminished except in as much as his own poetic development soon outstripped that of the poet of Edel and that Bourget's preoccupations shifted to domains other than poetry. Although their paths were to diverge in this way Bourget's influence on Laforgue was

(37) Nouvelles Poesies.

(38) Quoted by M.J.Durry, Jules Laforgue, p.24.

(39) Idem.

permanent. From Bourget, Laforgue may have received the most important and decisive sanction for his modernism; without doubt it was from Bourget that he took his predilection for one variant of modernism - decadence.(40) The modernism of an age of scepticism, of feverish intellect and sensibility is one form of Laforgue's treatment of contemporary reality. Laforgue responded to Bourget's essentially delicate temperament which matched his own. For all his biting humour Laforgue never lost a certain gentle lyricism which was also to be found in Bourget's early poetry. Laforgue, unlike Rimbaud for instance, is rarely given to sustained scatological reference. Through Bourget he was first introduced to English poetry, to the Lake poets (from whom something of Bourget's delicate lyrical manner in La Vie Inquiète may have been derived), to Shelley and Tennyson.(41) The importance of this first real contact with a metrical system unlike anything in French verse is not to be overlooked. It may have been the beginning of the concern with poetry in English which was to culminate in the translations from Whitman. There is also a broad similarity of themes between the poetry of Bourget and Laforgue. The male-female eternal conflict was an element in the former's verse enlarged on by Laforgue, regrettably almost ad nauseam. Bourget's despondency or, more precisely, his à quoi bonisme is reflected in the younger poet's work; fortunately in neither case did it actually damage the creative impulse, indeed it makes a refreshing change from Hugolian self-assurance. The situation of both Laforgue and Bourget is strikingly similar in another respect, both were pious adolescents who lost their faith and were consequently plunged into spiritual anguish, eventually resolved in the case of Bourget and even, in a different way, in the case of Laforgue.(42) The themes of religious despair, of separation from society, of a vocation so demanding as to be tantamount to martyrdom are all present in the work of both poets.(43) Finally, and not of least importance, it seems

(40) See Reboul, Laforgue, pp.76-77.

(41) See W. Ramsey, Jules Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance, p.10 and p.104, and Reboul, *op.cit.*, p.35.

(42) The one being re-converted to Catholicism the other finding a somewhat illogical comfort in submission to the Unconscious. In a letter of March 1884 Laforgue claimed that his philosophy of the Unconscious gave him the calm and stability of 'un humble catholique'. (Lettres à un ami, p.59).

(43) See Reboul, Laforgue, p.56.

that it was Bourget who first introduced Laforgue to the work of the Impressionists.(44) Bourget's great failing as a poet, as has already been remarked, was his inability to find the new poetic medium which he knew was necessary for the successful treatment of contemporary reality and here Laforgue was to succeed beyond the bounds of Bourget's imagination.

Of actual textual echoes of Bourget's poetry in the collections later than Le Sanglot there are very few; this is not the case, however, with Richepin whose Chanson des Gueux was immensely influential on the form and themes of the Complaintes. There are numerous references to Richepin in Laforgue's correspondence, most of them enthusiastic. But in a letter of January 1884 he revealed that he had become disillusioned with Richepin whom he now regards as the kind of writer who goes along with any fashion.(45) This was an accurate enough assessment of the writer whose masterpiece remained the Chanson des Gueux which should only have been a starting-point. Richepin was content to exploit the notoriety he had obtained with increasingly anodine works. Perhaps his imprisonment really did act as a deterrent and thereby crippled a promising literary career. Nevertheless for much of the period of the composition of the Complaintes(46) Laforgue was reading the Gueux. The theme of the barrel-organ which is found in 'Complainte de l'orgue de barbarie' and in 'Autre Complainte de L'orgue de barbarie' occurs in two poems in La Chanson des Gueux: 'Variations de printemps sur l'orgue de Barbarie' and 'Variations d'automne sur l'orgue de Barbarie'(47) which punctuate the section of the Gueux entitled Les Quatre Saisons much in the same way as Laforgue's two 'Complaintes' punctuate his collection like a leitmotiv. There is also the same preoccupation with the seasons, though not as systematic as that in Richepin's Les Quatre Saisons, reflected in 'Complainte des printemps' and 'Complainte de l'automne monotone'. Perhaps as striking as these coincidences in the presence in the same section of La Chanson des Gueux of none other than Pierrot, but in a very

(44) Ibid., p.117.
(45) Letter 8 of Lettres à un ami.
(46) The Complaintes appear to have been written from 1882 to the beginning of 1884. Delays in publication, however, enabled Laforgue to make extensive retouches right into 1885.
(47) La Chanson des Gueux. 1902 edition, p.112 and p.132.

different guise, in 'Ballade pour les pauvres petits pierrots' where starving babies dressed in white are likened to the pitiful clown. In the Complaintes Pierrot takes on symbolic value as the representative of humanity scarcely comprehending the role demanded of it by the Unconscious in facing life and, in particular, the problem of sexual relationships. There is an intellectual complexity in Laforgue's treatment of the clown-like figure entirely absent from Richépin's poem. Indeed this is a difference which may be generally applied to their poetry. Yet when Richépin writes:

J'ai passé plusieurs hivers
A lire en jargons divers
Plus d'un philosophe.
Ils sont de noir habillés,
Et leurs esprits sont taillés
Dans la même étoffe.

(48)

he is close to Laforgue's playful references to philosophy and learning:

Puis, fou devant ce ciel qui toujours nous bouda,
Je rêvais de prêcher la fin, nom d'un Bouddha!

(49)

The overall similarity in form between a number of the Complaintes and some of the poems in La Chanson des Gueux may be gauged from a comparison between 'Les Vrais Gueux', from which an extract is given below, and 'Complainte de l'oubli des morts' :

Qui qu'est gueux?
C'est-il nous
Ou ben ceux
Qu'a des sous?

Pour les avoir, quell'misère
Ah! les pauv's gens, que j'les plains
Souvent c'est nous que j'sons pleins
Et c'est eux qu' leu vent' se serre.

Qui qu'est gueux?
C'est-il nous
Ou ben ceux
Qu'a des sous?...

(50)

(48) Ibid., pp.220-221.

(49) 'Préludes autobiographiques'.

(50) La Chanson des Gueux, 1902 edition, p.36.

The pseudo-popular song was doubtless Richepin's most successful manner but it was used for only a small part of his volume despite its title; for the most part he contented himself with entire poems in pedestrian regular verse. Laforgue's Complaintes even when they are not original in form at least have some claim to originality of theme. Richepin's poems are mostly an extension of the sub-Naturalist style evolved by Coppee. In the best of Richepin, nevertheless, we see something of the tone of Laforgue's Complaintes, the treatment of ultra-serious subjects, in Richepin's case dire poverty and social injustice, in a humorous way. On the merits of his influence on Laforgue alone Richepin does not deserve to be entirely forgotten by literary historians.(51)

Another of the stalwarts of the cenacles with whom Laforgue was well acquainted was Charles Cros. Marie-Jeanne Durry considers that of all the poets Laforgue encountered at the meetings of the 'Hydropathes' in 1879 his was the most lasting influence. Laforgue did not tire of Cros as he did Richepin. In 1885 he wrote: 'Ce qui reste à côté de tout ça, c'est le Coffret de santal.' Cros's manner, not unlike Richepin's in some respects, was the vehicle for a personal statement, of which there is little trace in Richepin, but which is fundamental to Laforgue's poetry. A poem like 'Brave Homme'(52) has a melancholy edge to its humour when read in the context of other poems Cros recited at the 'Hydropathes' such as 'Avenir':

(51) For the influence of Richepin on Laforgue's poetry before the Complaintes see Reboul, Laforgue, p.45, where it is stated that 'Farce éphémère' is modelled on Richepin's 'Bonjour Monsieur'.

(52) See above, pp. 169-70.

Les coquelicots noirs et les bleuets fanés
 Dans le foin capiteux qui réjouit l'étable,
 La lettre jaunie où mon aieul respectable
 A mon aieule fit des serments surannés,

La tabatière où mon grand-oncle a mis le nez,
 Le trictrac incrus sur la petite table
 Me ravissent. Ainsi dans un temps supputable
 Mes vers vous raviront, vous qui n'êtes pas nés.

Or, je suis très vivant. Le vent qui vient m'envoie
 Une odeur d'aubépine en fleur et de lilas,
 Le bruit de mes baisers couvre le bruit des glas.

O lecteurs à venir, qui vivez dans la joie
 Des seize ans, des lilas et des premiers baisers,
 Vos amours font jouir mes os décomposés

(53)

The influence of Cros's realist poems on the very early poetry of Laforgue is obvious. All three poems by Laforgue entitled 'Intérieur'(54) may be related to Cros's poem of the same name.(55) It is significant that one of these appeared in La Guêpe(56) to which Laforgue had contributed an enthusiastic review of Le Coffret de santal:

On vient de se lever. Les sueurs de la nuit
 Montent des lits défauts dans l'atmosphère chaude.
 Monsieur prend dans son coin son bain de pied sans bruit;
 La femme, en cheveux, hume un bas, qu'elle ravaude,
 Tandis qu'assis par terre - oh! le vilain méchant!
 Toto sauce de poing un vieux débris d'écuelle.
 Gémît, piaille, renifle et, tout en pleurnichant,
 Fait des bulles de morve et suce une chandelle.

(57)

One must be grateful that Laforgue so quickly found his way to more original and pleasing ways of treating contemporary reality in verse! Laforgue saw in Cros's poetry not only an inclination to treat everyday reality, a moving personal lyricism and a humorous, popular form of expression but also something of his own philosophical preoccupations in, for instance, 'Sonnet métaphysique':

Dans ces cycles, si grands que l'âme s'en effraie,
 L'impulsion première en mouvements voulus
 S'exerce. Mais plus loin la Loi ne règne plus:
 La nébuleuse est, comme au hasard, déchirée.

Le monde contingent où notre âme se fraie
 Peniblement la route au pays des élus,
 Comme au delà du ciel ces tourbillons velus
 S'agite discordant dans la valse sacrée.

(53) Cros, Oeuvres Complètes, p.133.

(54) Pia edition, p.318, p.381 and p.384.

(55) Cros, O.C., p.139.

(56) 4 September, 1879.

(57) Pia edition, p.318.

Et puis en pénétrant dans le cycle suivant,
 Monde que n'atteint pas la loupe de savant,
 Tout-puissante on voit régner la Loi première.

Et sous le front qu'en vain bat le grêle et le vent,
 Les mondes de l'idée échangeant leur lumière
 Tournent équilibrés dans un rythme vivant.

(58)

Laforgue's contact with poems like 'Brave Homme' and 'Chanson des sculpteurs' (59) was simultaneous with his acquaintance, through his brother Émile, with studio songs(60) and with cabaret performance of poetry in general. The role of the cénacles has been discussed by Laforgue's biographers (61) but nowhere has the whole influence of popular entertainment been better summarised than by Haskell M. Block in 'Laforgue and the Theatre'(62) which describes his enthusiasm for the performances of the café fumistes, with their mixture of acrobatic clowning,(63) topical satire, improvisation, song and dance; Block says: 'The caprice and verve of the cabaret poets, along with their oral style with its easy refrains, lively repetitions, and colloquial and slang diction, must have made a profound impression on the young Laforgue. Cabaret performance is clearly at the root of both his lyric and dramatic art.'(64) We are also reminded of the poet's avid attendance at circuses, music-hall and boulevard theatre.(65)

With two possible exceptions, Laforgue owed more to the poets already examined than to the major poets of the period 1870-87.

Although one of his closest friends, Kahn, had penetrated Mallarmé's inner circle and Laforgue was well aware of the work of the master of the Rue de Rome he does not seem to have much in common with the older poet. Mallarmé's rejection of reality has no poetic counterpart in Laforgue, neither does his hermeticism, even though Laforgue was accused of writing incomprehensible poetry in his lifetime. There is no doubt from the many references in his

(58) Cros, Oeuvres Complètes, p.136.

(59) See above, p. 170.

(60) Durry, Jules Laforgue, p.107.

(61) Ibid., pp.105-06 and Guichard, Jules Laforgue et ses poésies, p.136

(62) Details in Bibliography.

(63) On the subject of 'clowning' it is interesting to note that the image of the clown was a feature of some of the poetry recited at the cénacles e.g. Goudeau's monologues. See Casteras, Avant le Chat-Noir, Les Hydropathes, p.76. But there were several other sources; see M.-J. Durry, Jules Laforgue, pp.109-111

(64) op.cit., p.78.

(65) The influence of the cabaret performers on Laforgue may not have been wholly beneficial; Reboul has suggested that they, along with Hugo, are to blame for the exclamatory style of much of Le Sanglot. (Laforgue, p.48.)

correspondence that Laforgue greatly admired Mallarmé, whom he knew personally, but the path he chose was a different one. There is an obvious parallel on the most superficial thematic level between Laforgue's Salomé and Pan et Syrinx and Mallarmé's Hérodiade and L'Après-Midi d'un Faune but no more than that. The following line is an example of several in other works by Laforgue which may show the influence of Mallarmé (in the use of the word 'expire') but could equally well be an echo of Verlaine:

Un relent énervant expire d'un mouchoir.
(66)

The closest link between Mallarmé and Laforgue is to be seen in the untypical early prose poems 'Plainte d'automne' and 'Frisson d'hiver' (67) Laforgue himself wrote how he was struck by the evocative power of the latter, especially of the lines:

'il n'y a plus de champs et les rues sont vides, je te
parlerai de nos meubles....'
(68)

This concludes the very brief catalogue of affinities between the poets. It would be very misleading to place any literal significance to Laforgue's claim in December 1881: 'je deviens (comme forme) kahnesque et mallarméen'. (69) In the context it is quite clear that Laforgue has simply found an amusing and fashionable way of telling Charles Henry that he is abandoning the style of rhetorical statement he has been employing in Le Sanglot in favour of something more adventurous and less traditional. He is referring to the style he has in mind for the Complaintes; there can be few volumes of poetry less like Mallarmé. (70)

Laforgue did not mention Rimbaud until 1885 and seems to have known nothing of his work until the publication of Verlaine's Poètes maudits. It was only after reading the Illuminations in La Vogue that he wrote the notes on

(66) 'Sieste Éternelle' (June 1882). Cited by Reboul in Laforgue, p.47.

(67) Both were written at Tournon in 1864.

(68) For Laforgue's appreciation of Mallarmé see, for example, his letter to Kahn of 27 January 1881.

(69) Oeuvres Complètes, IV, p.66.

(70) We disagree with R.G.Cohn, 'Laforgue and Mallarmé', who sees more extensive parallels between the two poets.

Rimbaud preserved in the Mélanges posthumes.(71) All this makes nonsense of Warren Ramsey's hint regarding the influence of Rimbaud in the poems of Le Sanglot.(72) Not only is this impossible but it is exceedingly unlikely that there is any trace of Rimbaud's influence in the Complaintes! The influence of Rimbaud may well have contributed however to the metrical innovations of the Derniers Vers. Laforgue paid Rimbaud the highest possible compliment when he called him 'le seul isomère de Baudelaire'.(73) In Rimbaud's Illuminations he saw an endeavour remarkably close to his own in the Derniers Vers: the creation of an apparently spontaneous poetry which would nevertheless depend on the careful use of the poet's resources:

Jamais de strophes, de facture, de rimes. Tout est dans la richesse inouïe du pouvoir de confession, et l'inépuisable imprévu des images toujours adéquates...Ce n'est qu'à la troisième lecture qu'on se dit: Tiens, mais ce sont des quatrains quelconques, des rimes platement alternées,(sic) les rimes ne sont ni riches ni pauvres; nul effet de césures, nulle(sic) combinaisons de féminines et de masculines. ...Une poésie n'est pas un sentiment que l'on communique tel que conçu avant la plume... (74)

The revelation of the Illuminations, together with the act of translating Whitman's Leaves of Grass, may well have provided the final fillip to the meditation on art and poetry and years of experiment which led to the Derniers Vers.

The influence of the poet responsible for disseminating the work of Rimbaud was more longstanding. Pierre Reboul has suggested that when Laforgue announced the change in his form at the end of 1881 it was to neither Kahn nor Mallarmé that he really turned but to Verlaine(75). 'Spleen des nuits de juillet' is reminiscent of the Romances sans paroles or the more fluid of the Poèmes Saturniens:

Les jardins de rosiers mouillés de clair de lune
Font des rumeurs de soie, aux langueurs des jets d'eau
Ruisselant frais sur les rondeurs vertes des dos
Contournés de tritons aspergeant un Neptune. (76)

(71) Les Poètes maudits was published in book-form in April 1884; the article on Rimbaud had appeared in Lutèce at the end of 1883. The Illuminations were published in La Vogue in May and June.

(72) Jules Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance, pp.60-61.

(73) Mélanges Posthumes, p.129.

(74) Ibid., pp.129-30.

(75) Reboul, Laforgue, pp.46-47.

(76) Poésies Complètes (Pia), p.354.

This must remain conjecture; but after June 1883 there can be no doubt of Laforgue's awareness of Verlaine for it was then that he noted in his agenda: 'Quel vrai poète - c'est bien celui dont je me rapproche le plus - négligence absolue de la forme, plaintes d'enfant.'(77) Later references confirm Laforgue's continued enthusiasm for Verlaine in whom he found an ingenuous but masterful manner, a wealth of supple rhythms and a register even closer to conversation than that of Baudelaire.(78) Rimbaud and Verlaine included Laforgue among their heirs but from Mallarmé he inherited very little.

But what of Corbière? Laforgue was accused of being his plagiarist or at least his disciple. One of his recent biographers has supported the charge: 'The poet protested, but a glance at his letter is enough to show that he had time, and his first book (79) proves that he took occasion, to profit from the novel idiom that Corbière brought into French verse.'(80) This statement is not however substantiated by Warren Ramsey. What is the evidence? Verlaine's article on Corbière, later published in the volume of Poètes maudits, first appeared in Lutèce in August and September 1883. At the very beginning of 1884 Laforgue sent the manuscript of the Complaintes to Vanier (81). Even allowing for the possibility that Laforgue had read Verlaine's article as soon as it could have been sent to him in Germany it is scarcely credible that he could have, or would have, rewritten the Complaintes in the space of little more than three months. As it happens Laforgue's correspondence suggests that he was not able to read Verlaine's article until he received the volume of Poètes maudits in the middle of 1884. There is another factor to be borne in mind at this stage; Kahn claimed that he had introduced Laforgue to the work of Corbière three years before Verlaine had revealed the Breton poet to the public. (82)

(77) Quoted by Durry, Jules Laforgue, p.108.

(78) Idem. For a discussion of the influence of Verlaine on the Fleurs de Bonne Volonté see Guichard, Jules Laforgue et ses poésies, p.124.

(79) Les Complaintes.

(80) Ramsey, Jules Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance, p.95.

(81) See Pascal Pia's edition of the Poésies Complètes, p.18. Since writing the above J.L.Debauve has proved conclusively (Laforgue en son temps pp.40-41 and 66) that Corbière could not have influenced the Complaintes in any significant way.

(82) Durry, Jules Laforgue, p.109.

Kahn has achieved a certain notoriety for bold claims of this kind which would alone cast doubts upon its credibility. Moreover, if this were true one may ask why it is that Corbière appears to be one of the few modern poets in the French language who is nowhere mentioned in his correspondence from Laforgue.

One very minor figure remains to be mentioned in the roll of French poets who may have played a part in Jules Laforgue's poetic evolution: Marie Krysinska. Her position has already been discussed (83) it only remains to be stated here that Laforgue was a regular reader of both Le Chat Noir and La Vie Moderne during his stay in Germany; it was in these periodicals that Krysinska published what she was to claim as pioneering contributions to the development of free verse. Laforgue admired her 'sensibilité artiste à fond original' whilst regretting her tendency to indulge in rhetoric.(84) In all probability Krysinska's work did suggest to him, the outward form of free verse, though this suggestion was later supplemented by Rimbaud. As to the substance of his poems in free verse he owes her nothing.

From the grand Romantics and the philosophical poets of the Parnasse Laforgue took his seriousness of subject; in the cabaret poets he found his humorous manner; in Baudelaire, Bourget and some of the minor poets there was encouragement for his modernism; in Saint-Beuve, Musset, Baudelaire and Verlaine he perceived the value of a poetic register close to conversation; in Baudelaire he saw the successful use of ironic contrast; in Rimbaud and Verlaine there lay before him the example of a spontaneous impressionistic style. It is clear that all the ingredients of the Laforguean synthesis were present even without the highly hypothetical intervention of Corbière.

Two foreign poets, Heine and Walt Whitman, may be discussed in relation to Laforgue's poetry. The former was one of Laforgue's favourite poets as early as 1879 as we learn from 'Épicurisme': 'Je prends Sainte-Beuve et Théophile Gautier, Banville

(83) Part One, Chapter Two(a).

(84) Quoted in Reboul, Laforgue, p.183. From a letter first published in L'Art Moderne, 25 March 1888, p.99. For other references to the poetess see Oeuvres Complètes, V, p.27 and p.38.

et Baudelaire, Leconte, Heine, enfin, qu'aux plus grands je préfère.'(85)

Pierre Reboul has spoken of the attractions of Heine for Laforgue: 'son humour, sa fantaisie, ses fautes de goût'.(86) An aspect of his poetry which ~~has~~ ^{been} referred to is his fondness, or at least concern, for drizzly autumnal settings which was also to be so typical of Laforgue:

Verdrossnen Sinn im kalten Herzen hegend,
Reis ich verdriesslich durch die kalte Welt,
Zu Ende geht der Herbst, ein Nebel halt
Feuchteingehüllt die abgestorbne Gegend.

Die Winde pfeifen, hin und her bewegend
Das rote Laub, das von den Bäumen fällt,
Es seufzt der Wald, es deampft das kahle Feld,
Nun kommt das Schlimmsts noch, es regent.
(87)

In the course of 1886 Laforgue decided to improve his English which was already good enough for him to have appreciated Shelley and Tennyson in the early days of his friendship with Bourget and for him to have read and probably translated pieces of Shakespeare. With the likely assistance of his instructress and future wife Leah Lee he set about translating poems by Whitman. By the summer of 1886 he had already had translations of a very high quality published in La Vogue.(88) Whitman's poetry itself with its many pieces consisting of a series of impressions set down in rapid succession (89) would have reinforced Laforgue's intuitions regarding the implementation of an impressionistic technique in verse. But more important than this was the act of translating and the kind of translation Laforgue undertook. Nowhere has the rôle played by this task been more succinctly or wisely grasped than in Reboul's study of Laforgue:

Ces excellentes traductions...important plus qu'il ne paraît: Laforgue y découvre le vers libre sans le faire exprès, presque en meme temps qu'il l'invente à proprement parler. Sa traduction est en effet juxtalinéaire. A l'intérieur de ces 'vers' nécessairement inégaux, il provoque l'impression de poésie par des artifices phoniques et par l'élaboration d'une mélodie. La subsistance éventuelle de la poésie dans certaines traductions pose

(85) Pia edition p.319. The poem was first published in La Guêpe, 18 September 1879.

(86) Reboul, Laforgue, p.40. Heine had become fashionable in France with the publication of the translation by Mérat and Valade of Intermezzo in 1868.

(87) Neue Gedichte, Neuer Frühling.

(88) Ten translations appeared in La Vogue in June and July 1886.

(89) See P.Mansell Jones, The Background of Modern French Poetry, p.144.

un problème esthétique important. Quoi qu'il en soit, il suffisait à Laforgue de traduire de la même façon des poèmes écrits en vers français pour inventer le vers libre. C'est bien ce qu'il fait, puisqu'il transpose avec soin les Fleurs de bonne volonté dans les Derniers vers.
(90)

Laforgue's contacts with the modernist movement of the 1870s and 1880s were made not only through his reading and hearing of poetry, and his attendance at various forms of popular entertainment, but also, not surprisingly, through his direct acquaintance with the Naturalist novel. Léon Guichard is quite wrong in his (unsupported) claim that Laforgue's attitude to Naturalism was unfavourable.(91) There is no common ground between him and certain Symbolists on this issue. Henri Peyre has put the basic position well: 'We may, however, bearing in mind André Breton's contention that the true poetry of that age is to be found in the Naturalists rather than in the self-conscious and ethereal Symbolists, praise Laforgue for having heeded the common life of the French capital and the everyday speech of ordinary men.'(92) Laforgue's correspondence bristles with references to the novelists associated with Naturalism - all of them favourable. What is clear is that Laforgue regretted his early attempts to transplant Naturalism, almost unaltered, into verse. It suffices only to read again 'Intérieur' to see the validity of this judgement. But the basic modernism of Naturalism remained an aspect of his poetry till the end. The novelist whom Laforgue most admired among the Naturalists was Huysmans - not the Huysmans of A rebours, which was published late in his poetic career, but of the novels like En Ménage. Laforgue's review of En Ménage appeared in the Magazin für die Literatur des In- und Auslandes in 1881 (93). His enthusiasm for the novel is easy to appreciate when one considers the similarities between his own aesthetic, outlined in his

(90) Laforgue, p.166. For examples of the translations from Whitman see below.

(91) Jules Laforgue et ses poésies, p.35. Guichard did not have the benefit of Laforgue's early poetry, only discovered since, in his assessment of the impact of Naturalism on Laforgue; nor does he seem to have been aware of Laforgue's article on Huysmans though this was republished in November 1948, in time for him to have made use of it.

(92) 'Laforgue among the Symbolists', p.47.

(93) 28 May. It was republished in Olive Jacobs's 'Une page oubliée de Jules Laforgue', as already stated, in 1948.

notes on Impressionism, and that outlined by Cyprien, one of the main characters in the novel. In Laforgue's own words: 'Un des personnages de son roman nous expose des théories d'art, aussi justes, à notre avis, que remarquables, à propos de ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui, la modernité.' (94) Cyprien describes the new beauties of the modern industrial landscape whose tone is created by factory chimneys and gasometers. Just as these are contrasted favourably with the traditional pastoral landscape so too are the modern women of Paris, factory girls and milliners, preferred to the Venuses of Classicism and the Renaissance. The modernism and the interest in the visual arts he found in Huysmans (Huysmans, as we have seen, was a first-rate art critic and one of the earliest apologists of the Impressionists; Cyprien is an artist) Laforgue also found in the work of the Goncourts, whose work is again often mentioned in his correspondence. (95) From them he may also have acquired elements of their écriture artiste which at its worst may have led to the occasional self-conscious stylistic endeavours in Le Sanglot but at its best may have been one of the germs of his own impressionistic style.

This survey of literary influences on Laforgue is not intended to be comprehensive but it is hoped that it has been sufficient to show the extent to which Laforgue's work may be regarded as the culmination of many of the literary tendencies described earlier in this thesis. Laforgue's interest was not, however, limited to literature; he was at least as passionately devoted to philosophy and to art.

Philosophical Influences

Laforgue seems to have lost his religious faith at some time in 1879; this occurrence appears to have resulted not from any particular experience but rather from a general feeling that orthodox religion was futile and irrelevant after the momentous discoveries of modern science. In this respect Laforgue was typical of the anxious and disillusioned young intellectuals of the period - a victim

(94) Ibid, p.463.

(95) e.g. Letter to Henry of December 1881, Oeuvres Complètes, IV, p.67.

of the changing world-picture:

O Dimanches bannis
De l'Infini
Au-delà du microscope et du télescope....

(96)

The heavens for Laforgue were no longer the abode of God but simply the infinite cosmos in a state of perpetual evolution - a cycle involving the birth, growth, death and redistribution of matter - from which the Earth was in no way exempt:

Les temps sont révolus! Morte à jamais, la Terre,
Après un dernier râle (où tremblait un sanglot!)
Dans le silence noir du calme sans écho,
Flotte ainsi qu'une épave énorme et solitaire...

(97)

Laforgue derived his vision of the cosmos, in all probability, from Charles Cros and Camille Flammarion.(98)

In a spiritual vacuum the young poet turned eagerly to philosophy for solutions and consolation. Philosophy was of the utmost importance in his life and much of his poetry:

Primo: mes grandes angoisses métaphysiques
Sont passées à l'état de chagrins domestiques...

(99)

Quite naturally Laforgue turned to the predominant new philosophy of the day and attended Taine's lectures.

Laforgue attended Taine's lectures in 1880-81(100) and was at one and the same time fascinated and repulsed by Taine's aesthetics. He found the latter's determinism extreme; it did not take sufficient account of the uniqueness of every great work of art, of the individuality of the artist or of the concept of genius.(101) In this he was in the good company of Flaubert and the Goncourts who, for all their devotion to scientific accuracy and method, had criticised Taine's inflexible application of determinism to artistic creation. If in one

(96) Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté, XI, Pia edition, p.207.

(97) 'Marche funèbre pour la mort de la Terre', (Le Sanglot de la Terre), Pia edition, p.338.

(98) See our Introduction. For the influence of Cros's astronomical investigations on Laforgue see P.Reboul, 'La Genèse du ciel laforguien'.

(99) c.f. F.Ruchon, Jules Laforgue, p.43: 'Ses méditations philosophiques... étaient...le grand centre d'intérêt de sa vie...'

(100) This course of lectures was later published as the Philosophie de l'Art.

(101) On the importance of genius, for example, Mélanges posthumes, p.155.

sense Laforgue found Taine's aesthetics extreme, in another he was to level the charge of inconsistency. The fact of evolution was an essential feature of determinist philosophy, yet paradoxically Taine set up Greek art as an ideal, an absolute standard, to which all other forms of artistic endeavour were to be compared - and to be compared unfavourably. Laforgue resented the excessive Hellenism of Taine and Renan, considering that men who spoke so often of evolution should be more aware of the self-renewing potentialities of art. Laforgue's own aesthetic of the ephemeral developed as a reaction against Taine's somewhat illogical predilection for stable forms. Some of the most important reflections collected in the Mélanges posthumes begin with a reference to Taine's aesthetic which the young poet proceeds to refute. Consider his reaction to Taine's dismissal of costume:

Le Vêtement. - - Taine: Esthétique : " Il est clair que l'habit à la mode est un caractère fort secondaire; il change tous les deux ans ou tout au moins tous les dix ans. Il en est de même du vêtement pris en général, c'est un dehors et un décor, on peut l'ôter en un tour de main ". - Et après! c'est un dehors, ce dehors m'importe à moi, peintre, autant que votre dedans, psychologue. Puis, ce dehors, ce décor (même en notre temps submergé, paralysé par la confection, c'est la physionomie, le geste, le beau, l'intéressant de mes personnages (V.Taine, Italie, sur le pantalon et le corset). Il y a des façons de porter ce costume quel qu'il soit, toutes les modes se valant. On peut l'ôter en un tour de main? Où prenez-vous le tour de main? Je vois des gens habillés avec d'innombrables nuances selon le rang, la pose, le caractère individuel, l'heure, l'occupation. Je ne vois que des gens habillés. La toilette qu'on ôte en un tour de main est aussi précieuse que celle qu'on se greffe, la coupe de la barbe, des cheveux; le soin des ongles et des pieds, la toilette de la peau, la toilette du geste, les manières, l'allure sont une toilette aussi.

Une bonne aquarelle d'Eugène Lamé, un salon de Nittis, tous les Hollandais, un bar de Manet, m'intéressent autant, moi, cœur humain à œil d'artiste, autant qu'une fête de Veronese ou toute autre œuvre où il y a plus souci du corps humain dans ses "Caractères stables". "

(102)

Another of the reflections is significantly entitled 'Variété de l'Idéal' and includes an attack on Taine's concept of ideal beauty in the course of which Laforgue suggests that there is no absolute standard by which the stability of a Poussin landscape should be preferred to a Monet, or Vergil and Pindar to Baudelaire or Shelley; his response to Taine's notion that a morally beneficial

work of art is superior to one which has 'un caractère malfaisant' is equally emphatic: 'Eh bien, en art, non. C'est tout un, c'est égal'. Likewise he rejects the dictum: 'le beau c'est la santé'; he insists that great artists and great art are far removed from the ideal of physical and moral equilibrium, citing as examples Dante, Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Delacroix and Balzac. He concludes that 'Le Beau idéal...est une légende d'esprits médiocres et perpétués par l'autorité des médiocres,' (103) But the young poet's reaction to Taine was surely not entirely negative, for in his ideas he found an insistence on the quest for originality in art even if it were balanced by an excessive regard for the accomplishments of the past: 'Il faut faire autrement que nos ancêtres et louer ce que nos ancêtres ont fait'. (104) Pierre Reboul has remarked how attractive Taine's definition of the distinctive qualities of an artist must have been to Laforgue: 'C'est la sensibilité délicate, la sympathie vibrante, la reproduction intérieure et involontaire des choses, la subite et originale compréhension de leur caractère dominant et de toutes les harmonies environnantes.' (105) In general terms Laforgue must have appreciated Taine's awareness of living in a decadent age, even though he did not agree with him in extending this decadence, in the sense of decline in quality, to contemporary art. He also adopted the basic determinist view that an artist should be true to his milieu. (106) As for Taine's determinism outside the sphere of art Laforgue must have found it a good deal less satisfactory than the interpretation he himself made of the philosophies of Hartmann and Spencer in which he could see a rôle - the essential rôle - of the individual, and in the sphere of art, of genius. The individual was the instrument through which the Unconscious sought ever more conscious expression, or, alternatively, the instrument by which evolution could be directed.

Laforgue's reaction to the thought of Taine, and for that matter of Renan, may be seen as an attempt to reconcile beauty and truth, art and science, without

(103) The discussion is to be found in Mélanges posthumes, pp.151-156.

(104) Taine's preface to La Princesse de Clèves, quoted by Reboul, Laforgue, p.77. The preface dates from 1878.

(105) Taine, Philosophie de l'Art. II, p.331; quoted by Reboul, Laforgue, p.78. One may note here the closeness of Taine's aesthetic to that of Baudelaire as we described it in Part One, Chapter One.

(106) 'Chaque homme est selon son moment dans le temps, son milieu de race et de condition sociale, son moment d'évolution individuelle, un certain clavier sur lequel le monde extérieur joue d'une certaine façon.' (Mélanges posthumes, p.141)

falling into the trap of Taine's naive moral didacticism. But, imbued with evolutionary thought, Laforgue was more consistent than Taine or Renan in the rejection of ideal beauty. He attempts to 'save' art by seeing beauty as a relative and ever-changing phenomenon characterised by originality, by accuracy in the representation of the individual consciousness and by power of impact or 'acuité'. (107)

What Laforgue learned from Baudelaire, Bourget and Taine about the importance of sensation in the human consciousness may well have been reinforced by his friendship with Charles Henry, a figure not of the stature of Taine or Schopenhauer or any of the other philosophers who influenced the poet but whose research work and ideas may be more important in Laforgue's development than is sometimes supposed. Henry led a not undistinguished career as both a scientist and a littérateur, becoming director of the laboratory of the physiology of sensations of the École des Hautes Études. A former assistant of Claude Bernard he was for several years an even closer friend of Laforgue than Kahn. During every vacation from Germany Laforgue spent some time at Henry's country cottage; at such times Laforgue would doubtless be intrigued by Henry's latest scientific interests and probably the relationship between these and literature. (108)

Not only contemporary French thinkers influenced Laforgue. The author of the Pensées is several times referred to in his poetry and other writings. For Laforgue, as for Madame Ackermann and most of the intellectuels of the period, Pascal was primarily a pessimist. From him Laforgue no doubt also acquired something of his vision of infinite space which of course supported the cosmologies of Flammarion and Charles Cros.

(107) See respectively: letter to Marie Laforgue of May 1883: 'J'écris de petits poèmes de fantaisie, n'ayant qu'un but: faire de l'original à tout prix. (O.C., V, p.20); remarks on observing the 'unconscious' at work such as 'Épier les instincts avec autant que possible absence de calcul, de volonté, de peur de les faire dévier de leur nature, de les influencer.' (Entre-temps politiques et littéraires, IV, p.49); references in Mélanges Posthumes p.143, to the 'yeux aigus' of the Impressionists and to the 'ivresse sensorielle' which one experiences when first confronted with an Impressionist painting.

(108) Henry's published works included Sensations et énergie, Mémoire et habitude, Loi d'Evolution et la Sensation musicale and Esthétique des Formes.

Perhaps Laforgue's most important philosophical interests, however, lay outside French thought altogether. From Spinoza, whom he read frequently (109), he acquired the groundwork of a deterministic philosophy of cosmic dimensions in the Dutchman's theory of universal necessity upon which it was easy, and logical, for him to place the massive pessimistic constructions of Schopenhauer's theory of the Will and Hartmann's philosophy of the Unconscious. It would be foolish to see the young Laforgue receiving a sudden revelation from any of these philosophers that life was bad. Our own opinion is that his reading of their work should be seen in the context of his loss of faith but not as the cause of it. Laforgue attributed his loss of faith to the discoveries of science and to the hubbub of modern life which seemed to drown the ringing call of the church bells; he did not attribute it to his philosophical readings.(110) In the two German thinkers in particular, but also from Spinoza, he saw three main attractions: a pessimistic despair akin to his own, the elevation of art as a serene pleasure allowing relief from the domination of the Will (111) and finally an encouragement to contemplation and asceticism (112). Schopenhauer's pessimism requires little elucidation here; perpetually aware of suffering in the world and of human cruelty he led the life of a contemplative with only his cat for company. Life itself he saw as the source of all evil and for him the ultimate reality was Will or, more precisely, the Will to Live. (113) The Will, seeking to make itself objective through individuals and seeking to reintegrate itself, was a source of insatiable desires, restlessness and torment. It is surely not too far-fetched to link Laforgue's reading of Schopenhauer (114) with his

(109) See letters to Henry of 30 December 1881 and 15 January 1882 and letter to Ephrussi of 13 January 1882.

(110) See, for instance, 'Farce Éphémère', 'Noël Sceptique', and 'Complainte des cloches'.

(111) Laforgue, of course, held the artist to be the honoured mouthpiece of the Unconscious; he did not see art as a flight from the world essence. What is in question here is simply the high status given by both Laforgue and Schopenhauer in a world in which little else has meaning. Schopenhauer's views would seem to make him one of the exponents of 'aesthetic emotion' and ultimately of 'poésie pure'.

(112) It is noteworthy that Laforgue was an enthusiastic reader of the Imitation of Christ (Oeuvres complètes, IV, p.160). One also recalls the period of five or six months when Laforgue lived on eggs and water and disciplined himself to spend many hours each day in the Bibliothèque nationale!

(113) See The World as Will and Idea, I, pp.349-532.

(114) Laforgue had read Schopenhauer in German, almost certainly after he had gone to Berlin. (See M.Collie, Laforgue, p.10). Whereas the poet had read Hartmann's magnum opus in Nolen's translation while he was still in Paris

own personal experience. From a very early date he seems to equate the unconscious and tyrannical Will with the reproductive urge - a force which dominates our lives without offering any consolation or having any rational justification. What is the point of birth if it merely leads to a life of suffering and anguish? More specifically the Will, seen in the guise of the reproductive urge, is a merciless tyrant. Having given birth to eleven children, Laforgue's mother died in April 1877, three months after her twelfth pregnancy had ended in miscarriage. Herein lies much of Laforgue's suspicious attitude towards women, which he also shares with the frosty old bachelor of Frankfurt; they are the alluring instruments through which the Will performs its unconscious purpose in the world. They are also its victims. Not only was Schopenhauer's vision of the world remarkably similar to one aspect of Laforgue's vision but the two 'solutions' he offered were those put into practice by the young poet also - the first temporarily, the second permanently - these being ascetic contemplation and artistic creation and appreciation. Most obviously Schopenhauer's presentation of the contemplative life as a refuge from the Will is reflected in Laforgue's buddhist experiments in self-denial and in his penchant for meditation on the state of the universe, but there is a sense in which it is also reflected in his poetic theory and practice. This, as far as we know, has not been noted by any of Laforgue's biographers and apologists. It cannot be idle to compare Schopenhauer's idea that the annihilation of personal will leads to the objective contemplation of the operations of the Universal Will with Laforgue's endeavour to suppress intellectual prejudice and preconception in observing and presenting the Unconscious at work, in writing, in part at least, a poetry of sensation and 'pre-rational' experience.(115) Laforgue was more intimately acquainted with the work of one of Schopenhauer's disciples than with that of the master himself.

(114) cont'd.. c.1879-1880, it is clear that he later read it in the original German for his notes on Schelling begin with a quotation from Hartmann in his own translation from the German.

(115) v.supra, note 107.

During the Winter of 1880-81 Laforgue had begun to read Edouard von Hartmann's Philosophie der Unbewussten which had been translated into French in 1877 by Nolen. For a period he seems to have carried this book around with him and constantly meditated upon its message. This in itself was no mean feat with a massive two-volume work of over one thousand pages. In simplistic terms Hartmann perpetuates Schopenhauer's world vision but stresses more clearly than in the work of the master that the force which governs all men's lives is unconscious. In such a situation Man's only hope is to strive after a state of nirvana, attainable in the last analysis only through the collective suicide of the human race. This conclusion to a section of Hartmann's work is the main reason for the low esteem in which it has been held by many philosophers since. It has been said that this grotesque denouement 'has provoked merriment in widely scattered camps'.(116) Hartmann's thought does differ from Schopenhauer's in some respects. Hartmann claimed that one of his motives in writing the work had been to rehabilitate reason put in a false and subordinate position by the author of Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung. In this respect Hartmann's unconscious Absolute is akin to Fichte's Absolute in which Will and Reason were combined; in Schopenhauer's thought Will alone constitutes the Absolute. Though the emphasis is different it would be fair to say that according to Fichte, Schopenhauer and Hartmann the Unconscious works its way towards consciousness in the minds of individuals. For Fichte this process was not a cause for despair, indeed the extension of his thought which saw the Absolute working through the life of the community is the basis of his cheerful and fervent patriotism. For Schopenhauer the process was the source of nothing but misery. For Hartmann the picture is marginally less black. Reason can bring Man to the quest for nirvana by destroying the three illusions fostered by the Will: that happiness will be possible for the individual in this life, that there will be happiness in a hereafter and that one day the human race, as a group, will attain happiness on the Earth. Through the destruction of these

(116) W. Ramsey, Jules Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance, p.84. In contrast, Schopenhauer had rejected suicide as a solution to the problems of the human condition.

three illusions Reason will lead men to true self-knowledge and eventually to a spectacular kind of mass suicide. Warren Ramsey's claim that Laforgue saw in Hartmann's work 'optimistic solutions to pessimistic problems' (117) is based on the third part of the German's book in which it is suggested that whilst awaiting nirvana men should go about improving the lot of their fellows. To the present writer this seems but a very tenuous glimmer in what is at times an almost Célinesque vision of darkness; we prefer to see Laforgue's final position as, in part, a result of the amalgamation of the influences of Hartmann and of a philosopher outside the German tradition - Herbert Spencer. We shall return to this point presently. What is of importance in Laforgue's attachment to the philosophy of Hartmann is, not surprisingly, what it revealed to him concerning the possible role of the Unconscious. Careful distinction must be made between two different forms of the latter phenomenon in Hartmann's work - and in Laforgue's too. For Hartmann the Unconscious was primarily a metaphysical concept, an Absolute. At the time of the Fall the Absolute, the Unconscious, will return to its primitive blessed state of wholeness. This metaphysical, not to say metaphorical, train of thought is present to a lesser extent in the ideas of Laforgue. He, like Hartmann, saw the Unconscious as a world essence:

Le dernier divin, le principe mystique universel révélé dans la
Philosophie de l'Inconscient de Hartmann, le seul divin
 minutieusement présent et veillant partout, le seul infaillible -
 de par son inconscience -, le seul vraiment et sereinement
 infini, le seul que l'homme n'ait pas créé à son image.
 (118)

Two things, beyond this, seem to have fascinated Laforgue in the notion of the Unconscious; first that it was perpetually at work, causing change and development in all aspects of human life including art - it therefore provided a metaphysical base for the evolutionary process; secondly that it added a new and profound dimension to the workings of the mind. The Unconscious as a psychological

(117) Ibid., p.82.

(118) Mélanges posthumes, pp.201-02.

rather than a metaphysical phenomenon also has a place in Hartmann's thinking.(119)
 He spoke of the irrational parts of the human mind, of the dividedness of
 apparent individuality. His conception of wit as a 'flash', something suggested
 spontaneously from a realm beyond rational control attracted the notice of Freud,
 as, incidentally, his vision of the Unconscious as a world essence may have
 attracted Jung. Hartmann's main interest in such phenomena is that they give
 access to the Unconscious as an Absolute. Laforgue seems to have been more
 interested in unconscious (and probably subconscious) 'experience' in its own
right:

La rage de vouloir se connaître, de plonger sous sa culture
 consciente vers...notre inconscient domaine. Et c'étaient des
 épiements pas à pas, en écartant les branches, les broussailles
 des taillis, sans bruit, pour ne pas effaroucher ces lapins qui
 jouent au clair de lune, se croyant seuls. Je me sens si pauvre,
 si connu tel que je me connais moi, Laforgue, en relation avec le
 monde extérieur. Et j'ai des mines riches, des gisements, des
 mondes sous-marins, qui fermentent inconnus. Ah! c'est là que je
 voudrais vivre, c'est là que je voudrais mourir! Des fleurs
 étranges qui tourment comme des têtes de cire de coiffeurs
 lentement sur leur tige, des pierreries féeriques comme celles où
 dort Galatée de Moreau surveillée par Polyphème, des coraux
 heureux sans rêve, des lianes de rubis, des floraisons subtiles
 où l'oeil de la conscience n'a pas porté la hache et le feu.
 (120)

These splendid words were inspired by a quotation from Johann Richter in Hartmann's
 book. Despite Hartmann's and his own concern with the metaphysical implications
 of the Unconscious the latter is still for Laforgue:

'Les forêts vierges de la vie' (121)

This aspect of Laforgue's thought will be further discussed with reference to his
 impressionism later in this chapter. (122)

Warren Ramsey enlarged the picture of Laforgue's philosophical interests
 when he uncovered fourteen pages of notes for an unpublished essay on Schelling.

(119) As it had in the work of many earlier thinkers; c.f. the place given by
 Descartes to innate ideas, the mysterious role given to 'amour-propre' by
 La Rochefoucauld, Kant's notion of unconscious ideas in his Anthropology
 and Schopenhauer's reference to the unconscious rumination of the mind.

(120) Entretiens politiques et littéraires, IV, p.49.

(121) Mélanges posthumes, p.201.

(122) It is amusing to note the extent to which Hartmann's thought influenced
 even Laforgue's personal life. Daniel Grojnowski reminds us that Laforgue
 'décidant d'épouser la femme de sa vie...se grise de "l'ivresse d'avoir
 obéi à l'inconscient".' ('La poésie de Laforgue' p.259).

On this basis he has convincingly argued for the decisive influence of Schelling's ideas on the poet. (123) Whether Schelling's influence was decisive is not perhaps a question which is capable of solution, nor possibly does it need one. What is irrefutable is that in Schelling's thought he found yet further confirmation of several of the ideas he had already culled from, or formulated as a result of, his other reading. The high status given to art by Schopenhauer had already been attributed to it by Schelling for he treated 'art as in some way sacred, a quasi-religious rite, or at least on a par with religion as one of the absolute forms of mind'. (124) Schelling's thought can also, when viewed in a very simplified way, be regarded as close to the middle path between subjective idealism and determinism taken by Laforgue. Although the idealists offered an explanation of genius and inspiration they tended to judge art by the standard of a fixed ideal; the determinists, on the other hand, take account of change through environment and circumstance but for all their documentary thoroughness tell us nothing about the nature of genius. Schelling had left Fichte's camp because of the insufficient attention paid by the latter to nature, and his work may be considered as a reconciliation between the subject and the object, between the mind and external reality. Schelling thus appears as another 'source', alongside Baudelaire, for the synthesis of subject and object in Laforgue's poetry. Schelling's version of this synthesis also provides his explanation of genius: the artist intuitively makes correspondences between outside objects and the inner reality of his unconscious which is a reflection of the Absolute. (125)

This may well have inspired Laforgue's dictum:

L'objet et le sujet sont donc irremédiablement mouvants...
 Les éclairs d'identité entre le sujet et l'objet, c'est le
 propre du génie.

(126)

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- (123) Jules Laforgue and the Ironical Inheritance, pp.88-91.
 (124) A.G. Lehmann, The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, p.105.
 (125) See A. Bausola, Saggi sulla Filosofia di Schelling, pp.69-75, and
 H.J. Sandkühler, F.W.J. Schelling, pp.81-87.
 (126) Mélanges posthumes. p.141.

Schelling identified the thinking subject with the object (which incidentally provided a 'proof' of transcendental reality accepted by Laforgue, for if we can conceive of the transcendental then it must exist) and this is close to Laforgue's aesthetic of the ephemeral. The ideal is none other than that glimpsed by the individual artist at a given moment of evolution. The ideal may exist outside and independently of men, but, for human purposes at least, it must always appear ephemeral, that fragment of the eternal becoming visible in a transitory setting, revealed through a particular individual.

One feature of the work of all the German philosophers in whom Laforgue was interested was the way, to a varying degree, their ideas provided a speculative foundation for the scientific theories emanating from England concerning the process of biological evolution.(127) A synthesis of modern scientific discoveries and the philosophies which had revealed the Unconscious was the essence of the young poet's celebrated Idumean night, at the end of 1883, when he grasped: '...L'Esthétique nouvelle, une esthétique qui s'accorde avec l'Inconscient de Hartmann, le transformisme de Darwin, les travaux de Helmholtz'. (128) The twin influence of evolution and the Unconscious as

(127) It is surprising, given his predilection for philosophies of change, that Laforgue did not pay more attention to the work of Hegel who is mentioned several times in his poetry.

(128) O.C., V, pp. 60-61. Almost every book on Laforgue cites this remark and explains the references to Hartmann and Darwin. Few, if any, have attempted to explain the relationship between Laforgue's ideas and the scientific discoveries made by Helmholtz. The most likely books to have influenced Laforgue in this regard, possibly indirectly, were the following translations: 'L'Optique et la Peinture' (Lecture included in the collection Principes scientifiques des Beaux-Arts by E.W. Bruke), published in 1878; 'Causes physiologiques de l'harmonie musicale' (Essay in P. Blaserna's collection Le Son et la musique...), published in 1877; the monumental Théorie physiologique de la musique, published in two volumes in 1868 and 1874. The present writer has spoken of the 'indirect' influence of these works for he strongly suspects here the role of Charles Henry as intermediary; this was Henry's own field of research. Helmholtz's work would also have been known to Laforgue through Taine's lectures.

From Helmholtz, one of the most celebrated and respected scientists of the century, Laforgue would have acquired an understanding that the apparently clear and stable objects of both optic and acoustic perception - shape, colour, tone and harmony, - were in fact an intellectual or rational reorganisation, or even distortion, of a number of different and fluctuating sensations. Helmholtz's name appears to be nowhere mentioned in Laforgue's writings except in the remark already quoted but surely the following passage from the Mélanges posthumes is a reference to the German's work:

Essentiellement l'oeil ne doit connaître que les vibrations lumineuses, comme le nerf acoustique ne connaît que les vibrations sonores. C'est parce que l'oeil, après avoir commencé par s'approprier, raffiner et systématiser les

concepts discredited bourgeois belief in stable society and replaced it with a belief in a fundamental reality beneath the external pattern of society. This fundamental reality, the Unconscious, could be expressed through an art which did not merely seek the reflection or realistic reproduction of superficial detail. Yet there was nothing in Darwinism to suggest a direction or purpose to evolution, and the solution offered by Hartmann was nothing other than a rejection of the life force itself. Two other factors have to be considered in order to understand how Laforgue could make out of these schemes of thought a raison d'être for artistic creation, and indeed for life itself.

The first of these factors is the influence of the work of Herbert Spencer who is several times mentioned in Laforgue's writings (129). In terms somewhat reminiscent of Teilhard de Chardin, Spencer created a synthetic philosophy of which the basic principle was the fact of evolution. Spencer's System of Synthetic Philosophy had opened with a discussion of the limits of human reason in the course of which he had referred to an independent reality which he called 'The Unknowable'. This, as we have already suggested, was one of the first foreign philosophical ideas to be associated with the rehabilitation of metaphysics in France after 1870(130): although, because of its very nature,

(128) cont'd:

facultés tactiles a vécu et s'est instruit, s'est entretenu dans l'illusion par les siècles d'oeuvres dessinées que son évolution comme organe des vibrations lumineuses s'est si retardée relativement à celle de l'oreille par exemple, et est encore dans la couleur une intelligence rudimentaire, et que tandis que l'oreille en général analyse aisément les harmoniques, comme un prisme auditif, l'oeil voit synthétiquement et grossièrement seulement la lumière et n'a que vagues pouvoirs de la décomposer dans les spectacles de la nature malgré ses trois fibrilles de Young qui sont les facettes du prisme. Donc un oeil naturel (ou raffiné puisque, pour cet organe, avant d'aller, il faut redevenir primitif en se débarrassant des illusions tactiles), un oeil naturel oublie les illusions tactiles et sa commode langue morte; le dessin-contour et n'agit que dans sa faculté de sensibilité prismatique. Il arrive à voir la réalité dans l'atmosphère vivante des formes, décomposée, réfractée, réfléchie par les êtres et les choses, en incessantes variations. Telle est cette première caractéristique de l'oeil impressionniste. (Op.cit., pp.135-36).

(129) e.g. in the notes on Schelling.

(130) c.f. Part Two, Chapter Two(b).

'The Unknowable' plays little part in Spencer's subsequent writings the Englishman's recognition of a transcendental concept not too far removed from that of the Unconscious was bound to render the rest of his work all the more palatable for Laforgue. But the essential idea in all of Spencer's work is the omnipresence of the evolutionary process in inert and living matter, in biological development, even in social structures and interaction. According to Spencer there were two principles of the universal evolutionary process counter-balancing one another. The first was a tendency towards complexity and the differentiation of individual species and phenomena, the second was a process of reintegration of these now more complex unities. It is in the second of these two principles that we would see the principle philosophical source of optimism in Laforgue's work and life. Having fully recognised the implications of evolution Spencer had, with compelling logic, given a scientific justification for human social activity, for ethical and aesthetic development as a response between men to the process of the eternal becoming. (131)

The second of the two factors to be borne in mind in explaining Laforgue's success in finding a modus vivendi is simply his basic temperament. His friendliness, his quickness to smile, at himself as well as others, and above all his tremendous intellectual curiosity are all qualities one does not expect to find in a true pessimist.(132) From all the writers he had read, literary and philosophical, he took predominantly that which was positive, that which helped him as an artist by opening up new subjects and revealing new attitudes. All his reading was a process of trying to come to terms with life and reality, not trying to evade them. Basically Laforgue was concerned with living and creating. Interpretations which indicate otherwise have allowed themselves the dubious benefit of hindsight. As long ago as 1924 François Ruchon had

(131) Spencer's view of art attributes more importance to reason than Laforgue's but it is possible to reconcile his view of art as the expression, by the rational mind, of interior intuitive rhythms and emotions with Laforgue's own carefully artistic approach to the expression of the Unconscious.

(132) When all is said and done perhaps the best statement of Laforgue's working philosophy for everyday life is the one he himself gave, as early as 1879, in 'Epicureisme' :

cont'd.....

warned against such views: 'Ceux qui l'ont connu à Berlin, sont loin de le représenter comme un rêveur émacié et alangui. Finissons en une fois pour toute avec cette absurde légende de poète phthisique.' (133) D.J. Abraham has recently spoken in terms of Laforgue's fundamental attachment to reality (134) which marks him off from the other Symbolists. (135) The philosophical position

(132) continued....

Je suis heureux gratis! - Il est bon ici-bas
 De faire, s'il se peut, son paradis, en cas
 Que celui de là-haut soit une balançoire,
 Comme il est, après tout, bien permis de le croire.
 S'il en est un, tant mieux! Ce n'est qu'au paradis
 Que l'on pourrait aller, vivant comme je vis.
 Je ne suis pas obèse, et je vais à merveille;
 Je ne quitte mon lit que lorsque je m'éveille;
 Je déjeune et je sors. Je parcours sans façon
 Dessins, livres, journaux, autour de l'Odéon
 Puis je passe la Seine, en flânant, je regarde
 Près d'un chien quelque aveugle à la voix nasillarde.
 Je m'arrête, et je trouve un plaisir tout nouveau,
 Contre l'angle d'une arche, à voir se briser l'eau,
 À suivre en ses détours, balayé dans l'espace,
 Le panache fumeux d'un remorqueur qui passe.
 Et puis j'ai des jardins, comme le Luxembourg,
 Où, si le cœur m'en dit, je m'en vais faire un tour.
 Je possède un musée unique dans le monde,
 Où je puis promener mon humeur vagabonde
 De Memling à Rubens, de Phidias à Watteau,
 Un musée où l'on trouve et du piètre et du beau,
 Des naïfs, des mignards, des païens, des mystiques,
 Et des bras renaissance à des torses antiques!
 À la bibliothèque ensuite, je me rends.
 - C'est la plus belle au monde! -- Asseyons-nous.

Je prends

Sainte-Beuve et Théo, Banville et Baudelaire,
 Leconte, Heine, enfin, qu'aux plus grands je préfère.
 "Ce bouffon de génie", a dit Schopenhauer,
 Qui sanglote et sourit, mais d'un sourire amer!
 Puis je reflâne encor devant chaque vitrine.

Bientôt la nuit descend; tout Paris s'illumine;
 Et mon bonheur, enfin, est complet, si je vais
 M'asseoir à ton parterre, ô Théâtre-Français!

(133) Jules Laforgue, pp.35-36.

(134) His flight into an imaginary lunar landscape was short-lived.

(135) In 'L'Héritage Jules Laforgue'. Abraham refers to R. Champigny's contrast between Laforgue's view and Mallarmé's attitude which 'never advanced further than a Greek mistrust of time', made in his article 'Situation of Laforgue'.

at which Laforgue arrived was a justification for action and artistic creation. He accepted that at the basis of all existence there is a Life Force, the rôle of which is to promote change. Although the purpose of this change is the satisfaction of needs beyond our control it is effected through things and people who should see the powerful internal urges they sometimes experience as manifestations of this rôle and accept them. As these urges seek satisfaction in objective reality they lead to the development of our intelligence in the construction of a world-picture which will serve as guide to action. This intelligence is limited in application, however, because of its tendency to deal in rough and ready categories. Laforgue refutes the recognition of scientific method, by the positivists and determinists, as the only true road to knowledge and puts art in its place. It is the artist's function to reveal through his comprehension of the Unconscious the workings of the Life Force. For this reason an artist cannot allow himself to be bound by illusory inherited 'truths' and ideals; he must destroy this essentially intellectual inherited vision and see things anew, as the Impressionists have done. The poet, as other artists, must modify his language to express what it is his true purpose to express - the operations of the Unconscious. The principle involved in fulfilling both aims will be the dissolution of the accepted intellectualised vision of reality into smaller constituents, into logically unconnected impressions. Though as we shall see, when we reopen this question, Laforgue does not stop at this initial renewal of vision through disintegration, the necessity for which had been revealed to him through his philosophical reading, but moved on to a new synthesis of these elements.(136)

Both dissolution and synthesis were features of the work of the artists who most influenced him - the Impressionists. The role of the plastic arts in shaping Laforgue's poetic practice is at least as important as that of philosophy or literature.

(136) The return from initial 'disintegration' to synthesis was, as we have seen, one of the principles of evolution noted by Spencer.

Artistic Influences

From the outset of his literary career Laforgue had been very much concerned with the plastic arts; his first important piece of writing was an essay on Watteau, unfortunately now lost. (137) His brother Émile was undergoing formal training as an artist during the years of Laforgue's poetic apprenticeship; Laforgue himself was a talented draughtsman and might well have made a success in his brother's chosen profession. The scope of the young poet's interests was wide. As well as the essay on Watteau he contributed to the Gazette des Beaux-Arts and to the Chronique des Arts et de la Curiosité, between 1882 and 1886, articles on German painting, on individual artists - notably Menzel and Klinger, a review of Ephrussi's book on Durer and an article on polychrome sculpture. The latter was a subject dear to his heart, for it represented a manifestation of the ephemeral in an art-form usually upheld as exclusively devoted to universal and stable values. He chided men like Taine and Renan for discussing classical sculpture with a respectful not to say funereal air completely inappropriate when one recalled that the Greeks painted their statues and other sculpted work. (138) Laforgue saw the place of the ephemeral in art above all in the painting of the Impressionist movement; it is to the influence of the latter on the young poet-critic that the remarks which follow are devoted.

There has been no shortage of critics willing to draw parallels between Laforgue's poetry and the painting of the Impressionists. In 1924 François Ruchon spoke of Laforgue's work as 'Le miroir d'une époque avide d'art, éblouie par l'épanouissement magnifique de l'Impressionnisme'. (139) In 1927 John Charpentier was even more specific: 'Un impressionniste, l'égal, lyriquement, des peintres qu'il aimait le plus, voilà ce qu'il ambitionnait d'être, et ce que révèlent qu'il était déjà ses Derniers vers....' (140) In 1953 Warren Ramsey wrote, in similar vein: 'If it were equitable to borrow a painter's term for a

(137) M. Collie, Laforgue, pp.23-24.

(138) See, for example, Mélanges posthumes, pp.146-47, 159-60 and 168-69.

(139) F. Ruchon, Jules Laforgue, p.10.

(140) J. Charpentier, Le Symbolisme, p.93.

man of letters, Laforgue might be described as an Impressionist, for he set out, like Manet and Degas, Renoir and Seurat, to capture the beauty of the commonplace under ever-changing light.'(141) Even more recently it has been suggested that Laforgue was 'a poet who was not only sensitive enough to respond to Impressionist paintings at a time they were scarcely known, but who also understood both the philosophical implications of the new art, and its significance for the poet.'(142)

One of the most crucial events of Laforgue's life was his contact with a large number of some of the finest Impressionist paintings in the collection of Charles Ephrussi; this was rich in works by Sisley, Monet, Renoir, Degas, Manet, Morisot and Pissarro. Laforgue seems already to have known of the Impressionists, through the offices of Bourget, Kahn and possibly his brother, by the end of 1880. His awareness of their work was as yet vague for in a letter to Kahn of 9 January 1881 he asks if his correspondent knows of a landscapist called Pissaro(sic). Soon afterwards, however, Bourget heard that Ephrussi required an intelligent young secretary to help him in the final stages of his work on Durer. Bourget secured the part-time post for Laforgue who, by the summer of 1881, was spending every morning at work in Ephrussi's studio. Ephrussi became Laforgue's true initiator to modern painting and introduced him not only to the splendours of their work but to Manet, Renoir and others in person.(143) Thanks to Ephrussi, Laforgue was to become a practising art critic for the Gazette des Beaux-Arts but of greater importance than this was simply the chance to work among so many fine, revolutionary paintings. Writing from Berlin at the end of the same year Laforgue recounted the pleasure that this had given; he points specifically to the connection between modernity and Impressionism which had so struck him: 'De Sisley, la Seine avec poteaux télégraphiques et ciel de printemps'.(144)

(141) W. Ramsey, Jules Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance, p.12.

(142) Collie and L'Heureux's introduction to their edition of the Derniers Vers, p.5.

(143) See Reboul, Laforgue, p.61. and W. Ramsey, Jules Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance, p.37.

(144) O.C., IV, pp.40-44.

Laforque was to introduce telegraph poles and other aspects of the specifically modern landscape into his poetry as he was to strive after the vibrancy of the Impressionists in his later verse. These aspects of Laforque's verse were apparent even to contemporary reviewers. The review in La République Française of the Complaintes spoke of Laforque's 'impressionnisme', of 'la formule nette et vive de l'observation contemporaine...' (145) The Revue Contemporaine described the same collection as 'plus moderne modernisant' (146) and the Revue Moderniste saw one of Laforque's objectives as 's'exprimer dans une langue plus parlée'.(147)

In 1882 Laforque was in danger of abandoning poetry; he had become dissatisfied with what he considered to be the traditional rhetorical medium he had been using. Art, and especially Impressionism, saved him from this calamity. To his philosophical reading he added his meditations on contemporary painting and evolved a working aesthetic. Impressionism became his way of reconciling art with the fact of ceaseless evolution, with Hartmann's Unconscious, for he now realised that the only ideal beauty possible was an ephemeral one. This did not cause him dismay. Rather his theory elevated the individual artist to a position of unparalleled importance. For only the individual's perception of a given moment of reality in the evolutionary process had validity; it was the individual's contribution to Man's knowledge of the Unconscious. But this is only true if the artist allows himself to see the truth, to rely on his own immediate experience. The Impressionists have taught us this lesson, have taught us to see afresh, to abandon intellectual preconceptions, the habits of education and civilisation and to see again with the eyes of a primitive savage. The work of Helmholtz has shown that we invent or distort what we see. This interference of the rational process is an affront to the Unconscious. We must try to see things as they really are:

(145) The reviewer in this case, however, was Laforque himself! (The review appeared 31 August 1885).

(146) 1-25 September 1885, in the 'chapitre critique', pp.108-09. The reviewer was Charles Vignier.

(147) No.8 of 30 September 1885. The name of the reviewer is not known.

L'Impressionniste est un peintre moderniste qui, doué d'une sensibilité d'oeil hors du commun, oubliant les tableaux amassés par les siècles dans les musées, oubliant l'éducation optique de l'école (dessin et perspective, couleurs), à force de vivre et de voir franchement et primitivement dans les spectacles lumineux en plein air....est parvenue à se refaire un oeil naturel, à voir naturellement et à peindre naïvement comme il voit.

(148)

Laforgue's 'Idumean night' dates from the same period as his writings on Impressionism. It was Impressionist painting which made that revelation possible. His appreciation of Impressionism went beyond the concept of the ephemeral; indeed he realised that a painting executed in fifteen minutes could never reflect a strictly momentary truth (149), but he saw the creation of atmosphere as a way of giving the sense of life and movement inherent in a brief but not actually momentary experience. Not unconnected with this was his vital realisation that Impressionism offered a blend of subjectivism and realism - a synthesis between subject and object (150).

He tried in his poetry to recapture the mobile processes of thought and sensation in their relation to all aspects of reality the way an Impressionist painter attempted to recapture the process of vision. It is to Laforgue's poetry that we must now turn.

(148) Mélanges posthumes, pp.133-34.

(149) Ibid., p.139.

(150) Ibid., p.141: 'Les éclairs d'identité entre le sujet et l'objet, c'est le propre du génie.'

CHAPTER THREEThe subject-matter of Laforgue's poetry

Laforgue's poetry, like Corbière's, is in one sense close to the Romanticism against which it seems to rebel. It recounts the anxieties and doubts of a highly sensitive individual but it only, or very largely, does so from behind the ironic mask. The true 'rire en pleurs' is probably based more in torment than in humour. Laforgue not only rejected the unmitigated sentiment of Romantic lyricism but also its didacticism. His poetry makes no moral judgements but is intended simply as the authentic and individual account of one man's experiences and intuitions. This was in keeping with the aesthetic of the ephemeral, as we have already seen it, and with the poet's impatience with Taine's theory that socially beneficial art was preferable to art which was not. Michael Collie has said that the Laforgue of the Derniers Vers, at least, is that

very modern figure who lets the weaknesses of his own personality be the lens through which a faithful credible view is achieved. In moral art the limitations of personality weaken the impact of the work; in art which is taking care not to be moral, but has a different ambition, in this case impressionistic, a character who is sensitive even in an anaemic way is taken to be a greater guarantee of authenticity than his more heroic predecessors.

(151)

Similarly D.J. Abraham has spoken of 'son honnêteté, son désir de ne rien dissimuler, voire sa sincérité' which he sees as surpassing that of Corbière, Verlaine or Lautréamont.(152) Laforgue himself wrote:

Et que je sois absous pour mon âme sincère,
Comme le fut Phryné pour son sincère nu...

(153)

(151) M.Collie, Laforgue, p.91.

(152) D.J. Abraham, 'L'Héritage Jules Laforgue', p.56.

(153) 'Avis, je vous prie' (L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune)

Thus in Laforgue's poetry we find that degree of personal involvement which we have suggested is an essential feature of the great poetry of contemporary reality, being, on occasion, both cause and result of the act of treating that contemporary reality. (154)

All the recurring themes of Laforgue's poetry - the certainty of death, the insignificance of Man in the vast processes of cosmic evolution, the basic malentendu of the male-female relationship and the quest for an impossible love - are presented as part of a ceaselessly changing reality knowable only through the particular, immediate experiences of an individual, not primarily as universal truths, though this to the reader they may seem to be.

Whilst it may be obvious that the themes of the transience of life and of perpetual evolution intrinsically partake of the ephemeral this is not so clearly the case with the male-female relationship. The latter is one of the most original and certainly persistent themes of Laforgue's poetry. (155) Yet it does accord with the 'impressionistic' intention of Laforgue's poetry. Jean Cassou has seen woman in Laforgue's work as the most acute representation of the 'instant'. (156) For the poet woman was the instrument of the darker side of the Unconscious whose function was to allure the male through superficial and distinctly ephemeral charms in order to aid in the preservation of the species. Both male and female were dispensable once this function had been performed, the female sometimes dying in the process. In a letter of 1882 Laforgue summed up the ambiguous and deceptive nature of love when he called it 'cette force éternellement charmante et sale et ridicule...' (157) The superficial charms of woman have led to the whole romantic myth, to the treatment of women as 'enfants gâtées', a situation which has made Laforgue's dream impossible: 'Comment voulez-vous, après des siècles de ce régime, qu'elles nous traitent en frères?' (158)

(154) See Introduction.

(155) As we have remarked the poet found confirmation of his view of woman in the work of Schopenhauer. This theme is reiterated to the point of being irritating in Laforgue's poetry; its disproportionate importance in his work is one of the least fortunate results of his premature death.

(156) J.Cassou, 'Laforgue et l'Impressionnisme'.

(157) Quoted by Ruchon, Jules Laforgue, p.48.

(158) Ibid., p.49. The source is a fragment from the album of Mme.van Rysselberghs.

Woman for Laforgue is one more aspect, perhaps the most striking, of the ephemeral reality which he makes the thematic material of his poetry.

(a) Modernity and everyday life

Modernity was one of the first aspects of ephemeral reality to attract Laforgue and to the last it was to remain an ingredient in his poetry. Pierre Reboul believes that the following lines from Bourget's Edel are a reference to Laforgue:

Il est jeune, il est pauvre, il est malade...
 il n'est guère exalté
 Que par un mot, pour lui divin: Modernité...
 Il sait tout, il voit tout. Il est fou de notre art
 Si compliqué, si fait d'outrance et de névrose.
 (159)

This accords perfectly with Laforgue's plan for the Sanglot, preserved in the Mélanges posthumes, which appears to date from the autumn of 1880:

MES LIVRES. - Oeuvre de littérature et oeuvre de prophéties des temps modernes.
 Un volume de vers que j'appelle philosophiques...Deux ans de solitude dans les bibliothèques, sans amour, sans amis, la peur de la mort...Et alors je fais naïvement ce livre...l'histoire, le journal d'un parisien(sic) de 1880, qui souffre, doute et arrive au néant, et cela dans le décor parisien, les couchants, la Seine, les averses, les pavés gras, les Jablochhoff, et cela dans une langue d'artiste, fouillée et moderne, sans souci des codes du goût, sans craintes du cru, du forcene, des dévergondages, du grotesque...où je concentrerai toute la misère, toute l'ordure de la planète...les orgues de Barbame de Paris, le carnaval, les Olympes, la Morgue, le musée Dupuytren, l'hôpital, l'amour, l'alcool...
 (160)

At first sight the prophetic and philosophical ambitions might not seem entirely compatible with the detailed contemporary setting but here Laforgue was following in the footsteps of the Baudelaire of the Tableaux parisiens. Jean Cassou has vividly described Laforgue's use of the particular as an illustration of the cosmic:

L'énormité cosmique réduite à l'actuel, à l'actualité, à notre grouillante, vociférante, publicitaire, industrielle, urbaine, parisienne, névropathique, terriblement moderne actualité...La musique des sphères transposée en ronds enfantins sur paroles style Chat-Noir....
 Dans l'giron
 Du patron
 On y danse, on y danse...
 (161)

(159) Laforgue, p.39.
 (160) Mélanges Posthumes, pp.7-8.
 (161) J.Cassou, 'Laforgue et l'Impressionisme', p.113.

When Kahn first encountered Laforgue the latter's 'literary baggage' included sketches of street scenes as well as the expected art-historical studies, sonnets and philosophical reflections. Some of these sketches have survived and would not be amiss in a volume of Laforgue prose poems:

Noel! Noël! à Paris! Triste et froid, le vent souffle, chantent les cloches, vers le ciel pluvieux et noir; mais l'incessant va-et-vient des piétons dans la boue des trottoirs, l'éternel roulement des pesants omnibus et des fiacres éreintés, le tapage des cafés et des restaurants, les cris des marchands de bel' Valence! tout l'enfer du boulevard couvre le voix des cloches solitaires.

(162)

SOIR DE PRINTEMPS SUR LES BOULEVARDS.-- Un soir de printemps sur un banc, grands boulevards, près des Variétés. Un café ruisselant de gaz. Une cocotte toute en rouge allant de bock en bock. Au premier, tout sombre, recueilli, des lampes, des tables, des crânes penchés, un cabinet de lecture. Au second, éblouissement du gaz, toutes les fenêtres ouvertes, des fleurs, des parfums, un bal. On n'entend pas la musique dans le grand bruit qui monte de la chaussée grouillante de piétons et de fiacres avec les passages qui devorent et vomissent sans cesse du monde et la criée du programme devant le peristyle des Variétés. -- Mais on voit danser, le long de ces dix fenêtres, des hommes en frac noir, devant blanc, tournant en cadence, tenant une femme bleue, rose, lilas, blanche, la tenant à peine embrassée, très correctement, on les voit passer, repasser sérieux, sans rire (on n'entend pas la musique qui les fait danser). Un groupe de souteneurs passe; l'un dit: "Mon cher, elle a fait dix francs." -- Aux Variétés, une cohue sort pour l'entr'acte; et toujours l'enfer du boulevard, les fiacres, les cafés, le gaz, les vitrines, toujours des passants. Ces cocottes qui passent sous les clartés crues des cafés. -- Pres de moi un kiosque de journaux -- deux femmes causent; l'une dit: "Pour sûr, elle ne passera pas la nuit, et son môme qui a donné la gale au mien." Les omnibus chargés des deux sexes tous ayant leur cœur, leur soucis, leur fanges. En haut les étoiles douces et éternelles.

(163)

During the spring and summer of 1880 Kahn and Laforgue took long walks in the industrial suburbs of Paris under the influence of the Naturalist novels of the period. This enterprise was as deliberate as the excursions into 'unknown' London of that other pair of poets avid for modernity - Rimbaud and Verlaine. Laforgue almost always took a book on aesthetics or philosophy with him on the walks and was quick to see the landscape in literary or artistic terms, as the review of Huysmans's En Menage and remarks in his letters, such as the following, demonstrate:

(162) Textes inédits. (Connaissance), I, p.13.

(163) Mélanges posthumes, pp.32-33.

Quand j'ai spleen, je vais dans les banlieues tristes
 écouter les orgues de barbarie et contempler des tableaux
 d'après Guillemet et Raphaëlli (sic)

(164)

As in the case of Verlaine, and possibly Rimbaud too, this appreciation of modernity was not entirely enthusiastic, sometimes it made all too clear to the poet his personal plight, and aroused nostalgia for the security and affection of family life, as he confessed to his sister, Marie

Je me promenais seul, regardant les foules endimanchées
 rentrer, les tramways qu'on prenait d'assaut Et des
 détails qui me faisaient sentir plus fortement encore
 ma solitude, une femme endimanchée, sortant d'une
 boulangerie, tenait à deux mains sur une serviette un
 rôti fuman, repas de famille

(165)

But later in the same letter he revealed that this experience 'devenait une sorte de jouissance d'artiste' (166) The perpetual fascination with modern life manifest throughout Laforgue's correspondence and the sketches and prose poems is no less visible in the verse poetry

Marie-Jeanne Durry, herself a poet, has given a fine evocation of Laforgue's poetic universe and the place occupied in it by everyday reality

Les bibliothèques, les boulevards, la lumière falote du
 gaz, les cafés où les dames du comptoir ont des regards
 ternes, les rosses résignées des fiacres, les omnibus,
 - et ce dernier omnibus qu'on attend à minuit avec on ne
 sait quel espoir de le rater pour qu'on puisse traîner
 plus longtemps dehors, les garnis grelottants, où l'abri
 cherche dans des chambres feutrées, les dimanches où l'on
 n'a rien à faire, où l'on écrit parce qu'on n'a rien à
 faire, les après-midi flanées, les gares, les poteaux
 télégraphiques, les réverbères, les flaques, les faubourgs,
 les banlieues, les terrains vagues, les viscosités d'
 aquarium pleines d'une vie pétrifiée ou aqueuse, foétale,
 vibratile, toujours sourde, aveugle, les eaux où passent
 de vieux bateaux, des péniches, des radeaux, où souvent
 pas une barque ne passe, les berges où l'on erre en se
 racontant des paraboles réalistes et orphelines, les places
 dominicales, provinciales, vides, les rues mornes, les
 rues bruyantes, les cloches, les pianos de pensionnaires,

(164) Lettres a un ami, p 36.

(165) O C, IV, p 6.

(166) Idem.

les orgues de barbarie et parfois le son d'un coq. Les crépuscules, l'automne, monotonement, dans un vent de plus en plus froid et mouillé, de plus en plus noir l'hiver qui vient. Un couple y glisse, non pas un couple en vérité ce qui voudrait être un couple, deux ombres qui ont besoin l'une de l'autre, qui se guettant, qui s'attendent, qui se cherchent, qui se tendent les bras, mais pas en même temps, et elle fuit, il fuit, dans son frac et sous son claque. Il est seul, éreinté toussant, dans l'averse, Sûr d'aller sa vie entier/Malheureux comme les pierres Il fait semblant de rire, ou, follement, se met à danser sous la pluie le pas du Critérium de la Certitude humaine. Là-haut un soleil vautre dans son sang, et surtout une lune de gel abandonnée parmi des déserts stellaires, qui se fige et tourbillonne dans un cerveau hanté de philosophies nihilistes Rares sont les places lumineuses, les frelons bourdonnent, les tiges d'ombelles et subitement, dans un univers où l'art et la nature ne font qu'un, une envie de vastes toiles limpides dans lesquelles on pourra se baigner le gris retombe, de pluie, de brume et d'ennui

(167)

Laforque's poetry provides a good instance of the impossibility of entirely separating the effects of the treatment of contemporary reality on form and thematic material The use of the popular song idiom in the Complaintes, for example, developed as much out of the nature of Laforque's poetic universe as out of any formal intention The very idea of writing the Complaintes seems to have originated while the poet was at an open air

'fête parisienne' (168) It was not to be expected that the popular song used or collected by poets like Nerval, intent on preserving the cultural heritage of the French provinces, should be the one utilised by Laforque but that rather it should be 'la chanson de peuple . la chanson des rues

airs de carrefour, moulus dans les cours par les orgues de barbarie, chansons sentimentales, comme on peut les entendre au milieu des balançoires, des faiseurs de caramel, des odeurs de quinquet, et des glapissements des montreurs de la place d'Enfer ' (169)

The place of modernity in Laforque's poetry springs naturally from his æsthetic thinking which, as was already pointed out seventy years ago, sees art basically as a source of pleasure If one of the true purposes

(167) M J Durry, Jules Laforque, pp 10-11.

(168) See L Guichard, Jules Laforque et ses poésies, p 137.

(169) Ibid, pp 137-38 .

of art is the giving of pleasure then modernist art is the most successful, for such works 'ont été conçues à notre image, elles portent la marque de nos goûts, de nos préjugés, de nos modes. Ce sont les seules dont nous puissions avoir une intelligence parfaite. Elles nous causent plaisir immédiat. Nous ne jouissons des autres qu'après raisonnement ' (170) Modernity in art gives the greatest pleasure because it is a source of immediacy, an element to which one does not have to apply one's intellect. Laforque wrote 'une bonne aquarelle d'Eugène Lamy un bar de Manet, m'intéressent autant, moi, cœur humain à œil d'artiste, autant qu'une fête de Veronèse ou toute autre œuvre où il y a plus souci de corps humain dans ses caractères stables ' (171) He also claimed to prefer 'telle grisette de Paris' to the Ludovici Juno (172) He extended the definition of 'plein air' to embrace the notion of depicting people or objects in their authentic modern setting. 'la peinture des êtres et des choses dans leur atmosphère paysage, salons à la bougie ou simples intérieurs, rues coulisses éclairées au gaz, usines, halles hôpitaux, etc ' (173) By the same token he wanted to see modernism in that most stable of art-forms - sculpture

Gros gagnerait des sommes et des sommes sans déroger s'il se mettait à regarder les rues modernes et à faire des cires, des cires, des cires ' Des grues, bustes ou en pied, des garçons de café, des pious-pious, des bébés et des jockeys ' et des danseuses ' et du paysage bas-relief, des chiffonnières, des tas et des tas de jolies choses que j'entrevois et dont je n'ai jamais compris qu'il ne fût pas tenté. Allez! qu'il s'y mette à la fin des fins ' je vous assure que je suis très fort en propagande

(174)

In all these remarks it is evident that Laforque is thinking primarily of the advantages of modernism as far as the response of the art-lover is concerned. He is thinking of modernism in terms of an aesthetic of appreciation rather than creation - even to the extent, in the letter to

(170) M. Dufour, Étude sur l'Esthétique de Jules Laforque, p 9.

(171) Mélanges posthumes, p 51.

(172) Ibid, p 61.

(173) Ibid., p 143.

(174) Letter to Henry of April 1884, O C, V, p 76.

Henry just cited, of anticipating financial success for modernist works of art' His main attack on Taine is concerned with the latter's appreciation and classification of art which elicits the impassioned response 'Un peu plus de piété L'art n'est point un devoir de rhétorique d'écolier, c'est toute la vie ' (175)

Important though the value of modernism in the communication between artist and public may be it is even more crucial in the act of artistic creation itself Doubtless the distinction between the creation and evaluation of art was never clearly felt by Laforgue and this led him to undervalue the place of modernism in the former process The real significance of the immediacy of modernist art is not that it obviates the need for the public to exercise its rational faculty in deriving pleasure from art but rather that, in presenting the artist with an essentially ephemeral subject, it prohibited or at least minimised the possibility of producing in art material which might just as easily have been communicated through the stable and logical forms of discourse Laforgue was aware of the advantages of modernism in the act of artistic creation, but a suggestion that he may frequently have confused this with evaluation is to be seen in the fact that he uses the very same phrase to describe adherence to the three traditional 'rules' of painting - drawing, perspective and studio lighting - as he had to describe Taine's false evaluation of art, these three 'procédés de langues mortes' are 'un devoir d'écolier' (176)

Like Baudelaire and all other great poets of modernity Laforgue's sound æsthetic insight enabled him to avoid the pitfall of 'describing' the patently modern - locomotives, telegraphy, the stock exchange etc (177) - to the exclusion of the broader aspects of contemporary reality Laforgue was far more concerned with the peculiar value of the transitory reality

(175) Mélanges posthumes, p 160

(176) Ibid , p 134.

(177) Yet all these aspects of modernity, among many others, are to be found in Laforgue's poetry

known to the individual artist (and appreciated by his fellows in the art-loving public) than with the celebration in art of the signs of human progress in which he did not in any case believe, at least not in the sense current in his day. For this reason it is strange that the reality depicted by Laforgue in his poetry should be thought of as exclusively Parisian, for, after all, most of his poetic career was spent in Germany. Of course the whole of the Sanglot was written while he was in Paris and many of the Complaintes were conceived during the same period, nostalgia for Paris certainly played its part in some of the later poems, but the fact remains that insufficient attention has been paid to the inspiration of Germany in his poetry. Most striking of all, the 'Dimanches' poems were all inspired by his monotonous existence during the German court's visit to Baden-Baden and Coblenz. The entry of the Agenda for 12 May 1883 recounts the sound of the Sunday afternoon piano lessons overheard in Baden-Baden. In June 1882 he wrote to inform Madame Müllezer that he was lodged near the English chapel in Coblenz from which emanated the dreary sounds of Sunday litanies and organ music and where he could see the 'colonie anglaise de Coblenz entre autres un pensionnat de young ladies en toilettes exquis, tout plissées et bouillonnées, adorablement maigres et plates. ' (178) Elements of the German landscape are to be discerned in the poems, the 'forêt d'automne' in 'Complainte de l'orgue de barbarie' is probably the Brandenburg forest, the setting of 'Complainte du soir des comices agricoles', and especially the 'deux royaux cors de chasse', was probably inspired by Baden-Baden, there is a reference to the statuary in the gardens of the imperial palace at Baden-Baden in 'Complainte de Lord Pierrot', Pierre Reboul further suggests that 'les lacs de la Havel dorlotent son voilier dans leurs plus riches rades et le vent esquiné de tous des

paysages tendres soufflait sur Potsdam La fenê[^]tre des formalités nup-
tiales s'ouvrait sur un paysage allemand (179) Laforgue, then is
consistent in drawing his inspiration, in part at least, from the reality
immediately surrounding him, if there are fewer references to Germany
than to Paris in Laforgue's poetry that is principally because the period
in Germany coincided with the time he was moving away from precise refer-
ence to subtler ways of reflecting contemporary reality

The role of modern reality in Laforgue's poetry was determined by the philosophy of the Unconscious and by his æsthetic of pleasure in both of which the place of immediacy was paramount. Moreover, there is no doubt that these were more important than any other consideration, but there is one other factor which should at least be borne in mind, this lies not in the realm of philosophy or æsthetics but in politics. Socialism and anarchism were popular creeds among the young writers of the 1880s and 1890s and social concern may be added to the list of the poet's motives for treating contemporary reality.

Ce sera contre Dieu la clameur fraternelle (180)

Et d'abord les trois quarts crient, 'Pas de quoi manger!'

Et sont pour l'autre quart un perpétuel danger (181)

[illegible]

The scope of Laforgue's treatment of modernity and everyday reality is, if anything, even wider than that of Baudelaire, to whom it owes, nonetheless, a considerable amount

The favourite setting is the urban landscape, notably that of Paris, but the provinces are not forgotten, nor for that matter the German spa towns. The Paris evoked is the Paris of gaslight, posters, boarding

(179) P Reboul, Laforgue, p 107 Reboul has promised a study of the place of Germany in Laforgue's poetry which would certainly be most welcome

(180) 'L'Impossible', *Poésies Complètes* (Pia edition), p. 352.

(181) 'Litanies de misère, Poésies Complètes (Pia edition), p 236.

schools and all the trappings of modern bourgeois civilisation.

... ce Paris, jardin
Obtus et chic, avec son bourgeois de Jourdain
A rêveurs, ses vitraux fardés, ses vieux dimanches
Dans les quartiers tannés où regardent des branches
Par dessus les murs des pensionnats, et ses
Ciels trop poignants à qui l'Angélus fait assez'

(182)

Gaz, haillons d'affiches
Feu les casinos,
Cercueils des pianos
Ah' mortels postiches

(183)

The poet shares Baudelaire's predilection for autumn and sunset, the city is several times described at these times.

Quel couchant douloureux nous avons eu ce soir'
Dans les arbres pleurait un vent de désespoir,
Abattant du bois mort dans les feuilles rouillées .
La Terre a fait son temps, ses reins n'en peuvent plus
Et ses pauvres enfants, grêles, chauves et blêmes
D'avoir trop médité les éternels problèmes,
Grelottants et voûtés sous le poids des foulards
Au gaz jaune et mourant des brumex boulevards,
D'un oeil vide et muet contemplant leurs absinthes,
Riant amèrement, quand des femmes enceintes
Défilent, étalant leurs ventres et leurs seins

(184)

'La Première Nuit' seems to be a not unsuccessful reflection of Baudelaire's

'Crépuscule du soir'

Voici venir le soir doux au vieillard lubrique
Mon chat Mürr, accroupi comme un sphinx héraldique,

Contemple inquiet de sa prunelle fantastique
Monter à l'horizon la lune cholorotique.

C'est l'heure où l'enfant prie, où Paris-Lupanar
Jette sur le pavé de chaque boulevard
Les filles aux seins froids qui sous le gaz blafard
Vaguent flairant de l'oeil un mâle de hasard

Moi, près de mon chat Mürr, je rêve à ma fenêtre
Je songe aux enfants qui partout viennent de naître,
Je songe à tous les morts enterrés d'aujourd'hui

Et je me figure être au fond du cimetière
Et me mets à la place en entrant dans leur bière
De ceux qui vont passer là leur premier nuit

(185)

(182) 'Préludes autobiographiques', Ibid , p 30.

(183) 'Complainte de l'orgue de barbarie', Ibid , p 50.

(184) 'Couchant d'hiver', Ibid , p 357.

(185) 'Poésies Complètes', p 332

Another poem evoking the nocturnal urban landscape in Baudelairean terms,

'Recueillement du soir', is even more comprehensive in its vision than

Baudelaire's 'Crépuscule' including such detailed vignettes as

L'orgie hurle, concerts, lumières, fleurs splendides,
Les pains dans les plats d'or s'étaient, bien groupés,
Les fruits dans les cristaux dressent leurs pyramides,
On mesure de l'œil les larges canapés
(186)

More successful are plastic descriptions of some originality

Tout s'allume' beuglants, salons, tripots et bouges,
Et le pharmacien sur le blême trottoir
Fait s'épandre les lacs des bocaux verts ou rouges (sic)
Phares lointains de ceux qui s'en iront ce soir
(187)

The urban landscape of Laforgue's poetry clearly belongs to an industrial and technological age

Les Usines, cent goulots fumants vers les ciels
(188)

Oh, dans les bruines, toutes mes cheminées '
D'usines

La rouille ronge en leurs spleens kilométriques
Les fils télégraphiques des grandes routes
(189)

Not surprisingly there is no room for 'la grande nature' The reader is presented with the same debilitated or incongruous urban nature as he finds in the city poetry of Baudelaire or Rimbaud

C'est le trottoir avec ses arbres rabougris
(190)

les fontaines
Où tournent les phalènes
Des Nuits Elyseennes
(191)

C'est l'heure calme et triste où les chauves-souris
Dérangent dans l'air bleu les valse des moustiques
(192)

(186) Ibid., p 433.

(187) Idem

(188) 'Petites misères d'octobre, Poésies Complètes, p 224.

(189) 'L'Hiver qui vient', Poésies Complètes, pp 279-80.

(190) 'Dans la rue', Ibid., p 446.

(191) 'Complainte des printemps', Ibid, p 63.

(192) 'Recueillement du soir', Ibid, p 52.

Les moineaux des vieux toits pépient à ma fenêtre,
Ils me regardent dîner, sans faim, à la carte .

(193)

^
O mon beau chat frileux .
Combien passâmes-nous des ces spléniques jours
A rêver face à face en ma chambre bien close .

(194)

la chouette s'en va miaulant dans les gouttières

(195)

- un lion vient se camper, superbe '
Fier, solitaire, alors, songeant à sa lionne,
Dans sa cage à Paris exposée aux badauds
Et qu'un bourgeois taquine avec son parapluie .

(196)

The modern city is in a perpetual state of movement as men go about
their business

L'omnibus s'ébranle, Clinc, clinc, clinc
Pour chaque voyageur (Mystérieux système')

(197)

This essentially commercial hubbub is one of the principal themes evoked
in the splendid panorama of the 'Grande complainte de la ville de Paris',
the only one of the Complaintes written in prose

Bonnes gens qui m'écoutes (sic), c'est Paris, Charenton
compris Dépôt, sans garantie de l'humanité, des
ennuis les plus comme il faut et d'occasion Facilités
de paiement, mais de l'argent De l'argent, bonne (sic)
gens '

Et ça se ravitaile, import et export, par vingt gares
et douanes Que tristes, sous la pluie, les trains de
marchandise ' A vous, dieux, chasublerie, ameublements
d'église, dragées pour baptêmes Amour, à toi, des
maisons d'or aux hospices dont les langes et les loques
feront le papier des billets doux à monogrammes Enchères,
experts Avances sur titres cotés ou non cotés

Just as in Baudelaire this panorama is the backdrop for the adventures
of the epics of modern life 'Guitare' , for instance, recounts the death,
funeral and burial of a 'fière et fine mondaine,/ Chef-d'oeuvre unique de
Paris' (199) Now she waltzes in the most expensive clothes, enjoying

(193) 'Complainte d'un certain dimanche', Ibid , p 52 .

(194) 'A la mémoire d'une chatte naine que j'avais', Ibid , p 410 .

(195) 'La Chanson des morts', Ibid , p 375 .

(196) 'Soleil Couchant', Ibid , p 385

(197) 'Les Humbles', Ibid., p 382 .

(198) Ibid , pp 115-116 .

(199) Ibid , pp 321-324 .

wealth, beauty and celebrity but

Un jour qui n'est pas loin viendra!...
 En votre plus beau drap de toile de Hollande
 Vos gais héritiers vous coudront.
 Puis dans votre cercueil...
 Conduit par un cocher ivre encor de la veille,
 Vous insultant pour un retard...

The church bells ring and the organ blares 'mais Paris n'entend rien. Dans sa fureur muette...' The friends who have gathered in the church do not heed the truth of death and bodily corruption, in their frivolity they are more intent on comparing their efforts at reconciling mourning dress with fashion. They do not seem to realise that all the pleasures of life are irrevocably lost in death:

Néant, Néant! Adieu chaudes nuits de septembre,
 Sur les terrasses d'orangers;
 Jours d'hiver près du feu faisant douce la chambre,
 Matins d'avril frais et légers.
 Chiffons, bals, fleurs, passions, fantaisie,
 Bouts de spleen devant l'océan,
 Torrent béni des mille ivresses de la vie...

All the stages of growth from the innocent child to the beautiful but worldly woman end in horrifying scenes of decomposition and the loneliness of the grave. A loneliness all the more poignant because life carries on as before; nature, art, fashion, the opera, the whole social whirl.

The inhabitants of the city who play out their parts in the drama of modern life are seen in all their diversity. The working classes are presented, in the early poems, in a manner which owes much to Coppée:

Il est minuit. - Ils sont sous les grands marronniers.
 Lasticot, caporal dans les carabiniers,
 Le coupe-choux au flanc, le shako sur l'oreille,
 Fier comme un Dumanet! - A ses côtés, vermeille
 Comme une pomme à cidre, exhalant une odeur
 D'ail et de vieux fricot, son gros oeil gros rêveur,
 Est assise Justine, actuellement bonne
 Chez Monsieur Coquardeau, Trois, place Tiquetonne.
 (200)

The condition of the urban poor is contrasted with that of the complacent bourgeois in tones which reflect the influence of socialism:

Dans l'estomac des gueux la faim met son galop.
 Ici tout est cossu. Toinon lève la table
 Après avoir donné les miettes à Jacquot.
 Madame fait la caisse avec un air capable.
 Lui, content et repu, filet déboutonné,

(200) 'Idylle', *Ibid.*, p.379. This poem is at least made more palatable by an undercurrent of irony rarely found in Coppée.

Songeant que seul le vice amène la misère
Et qu'on est vertueux si l'on a bien diné,
Tourne placidement ses pouces - et digère.

(201)

On les voit chaque jour, filles-mères, souillons,
Béquillards mendiants aux porches des églises,
Gueux qui vont se vêtir à la halle aux haillons,
Crispant leurs pieds bleuis aux morsures des bises;
Mômes pieds nus, morveux, bohèmes loqueteux,
Peintres crottés, ratés, rêveurs humanitaires...

(202)

Le jour vient des paris sur un cheval de course,
Discute un nouveau pantalon
Ou flatte de sa main gantée après la Bourse
Poitrail de femme ou d'étalon

Et la nuit.....

Vautre son corps poussif sur quelque fille nue,
Aux baisers puant le vin bleu...

(203)

La vieille fille, seule en sa mansarde étroite
Fait glapir sur le feu les restes d'un diner.

Un aveugle courbé sous le poids de son orgue
Où dorment nos sanglots d'idéale douleur,
Rentre et, grognant, va voir en passant à la Morgue
Si l'on a repêché sa garce de malheur...

(204)

Their work, including the most modern occupations, is not forgotten; the bus conductor is the 'hero' of 'Les Humbles':

Képi, pantalon bleu, veston court, collet droit
Brodé de fils d'argent. - Les gros sous qu'il reçoit
Vont dans un sac de cuir qu'il porte en bandoulière...

(205)

More original than the vision of urban society in the early poems is Laforgue's masterful evocation of the life-style of the bourgeois residential districts - in Germany as well as in France - and of their inhabitants on holiday as well as at home. It is this atmosphere, devoid of obvious political prejudice, that the poet recreated in the work of the mature period. He was probably the first poet to do this.

(201) 'Intérieur', Ibid., p.381. See also the last stanza of 'Soleil Couchant', p.386, where 'mon gros propriétaire' is described in identical terms.

(202) Ibid., p.387. This untitled poem has an epigram from Chamfort: 'La société peut se diviser en gens qui ont plus de dîners que d'appétits et en gens qui ont plus d'appétits que de dîners.'

(203) 'Oh! je sais qu'en ce siècle...', Ibid., p.390.

(204) 'Recueillement du soir', Ibid., p.434.

(205) Ibid., p.382.

Les pianos, les pianos. dans les quartiers aisés!...
 Ces enfants, à quoi rêvent-elles,
 Dans les ennuis des ritournelles?...
 Défaire et refaire ses tresses,
 Broder d'éternels canevas...
 Mon Dieu, à quoi donc rêvent-elles?
 A des Roland, à des dentelles?...
 Il viendra!.....
brodent-elles,
 Pour un oncle à dot, des bretelles?...
 Aussi, bientôt, se joueront-elles
 De plus exactes ritournelles.

'- Saül oreiller!
 Mur familial!...

Que ne suis-je morte à la messe!
 Ô mois, ô linges, ô repas!'

(206)

Modern existence is no less of a 'dead end' for men as it is for women:

Puis fête, puis travail, fête...travail...toujours...

(207)

Although the 'train-train' of a woman's life is 'pavoisé d'estime et de
 chiffons'(208) their hopes and aspirations are founded on the most deceptive
 kind of popular 'romantic' literature:

Romans pour les quais,
 Photos élegiaques
 Escarpins, vieux claques,
 D'un coup de balai!

- 'Oh! j'ai peur, nous avons perdu la route;
 Paul, ce bois est mal famé! chut, écoute...'

(209)

Yet modern urban civilisation is not characterised solely by tedium or
 social injustice. Happiness is to be found (fragile though it may be) sometimes
 despite the nature of nineteenth-century existence, sometimes because of it. In
 'Les Amoureux' politics epitomises the mundane processes of everyday life from
 which the lovers manage temporarily^{to} extricate themselves; but they too are
 subject to the same laws of transience:

Seuls, dans leur nid, palais de bambous,
 Loin des plages, du spleen, du tapage des gares
 Et des clubs d'électeurs aux stupides bagarres,
 Ils s'adorent, depuis Avril...
 ...au dehors déjà le vent d'automne...

(206) 'Complainte des pianos qu'on entend dans les quartiers aisés', Ibid., pp.46-48.

(207) 'Crépuscule de dimanche d'été', Ibid., p.356.

(208) 'Complainte des pianos qu'on entend dans les quartiers aisés', Ibid., p.47.

(209) 'Complainte de l'orgue de barbarie', Ibid., p.50.

Emporte sous le ciel par les brumes salées,
 Les feuilles d'or des bois et les placards moroses
 Jaunes, bleus, verts, fielleux, écarlates ou roses,
 Des candidats noyés par l'averse et l'oubli.

(210)

Occasionally Parisian society in all its diversity is viewed with an envious eye by the poet who regards himself as an outsider:

Tout poudroie au soleil, l'air sent bon le printemps.
 Les femmes vont au Bois sous leurs ombrelles claires.
 Chiens, bourgeois et voyous, chacun a ses affaires.
 Tout marche.....
 Dans les jardins publics Guignol parle aux enfants
 Aux tremblants crescendos des concerts militaires....
 Seul, j'erre à travers tout, la lèvre appesantie...

(211)

Yet the poet too appreciates the delights of Paris and has for himself a place there when he allows the mask of pessimism to drop:

Je suis heureux gratis! - Il est bon ici-bas...
Je parcours sans façon
 Dessins, livres, journaux, autour de l'Odéon...
j'ai des jardins, comme le Luxembourg...
 Je possède un musée unique dans le monde...
 Et mon bonheur, enfin, est complet, si je vais
 M'asseoir à ton parterre, ô Théâtre-Français!

(212)

Hop! le train siffle et vous cahote!
 Là-bas, c'est Paris enchanté,
 Où tout l'hiver on se dorlote:
 C'est l'Opéra, les fleurs, le thé,
 O folles de mondanité
 Allons! Rouvrez les persiennes
 De l'hôtel morne et déserté!
 Revenez-nous, Parisiennes!

(213)

+++++

The provincial life of France - and even of Belgium - has its place in Laforque's poetic universe. It does not represent a relatively healthy and invigorating alternative to Parisian decadence - such as one finds in Corbière's Breton poems - but merely an extension of the tedium and meaninglessness of the life of the city. There is only a hint of nostalgia in the poet's evocation of Tarbes which occurs in a poem with the simple message that 'tout est routine':

(210) Ibid., p.437.

(211) 'Bouffée de printemps', Ibid., p.406.

(212) 'Epicurisme', Ibid., pp.319-20.

(213) 'Ballade de retour', Ibid., p.347.

Un couvent dans ma ville natale
Douce de vingt mille âmes à peine,
Entre le lycée et la préfecture
Et vis-à-vis la cathédrale,
Avec ces anonymes en robes grises,
Dans la prière, le ménage, les travaux de couture;
Et que cela suffise...

(214)

The Sunday church bells of Liège ring out with as little effect as those of
Paris:

Petits et gros, clochers en fête,
De l'hôpital à l'Évêché,
Dans ce bon ciel endimanché,
Se carillonnent et s'entêtent...

(215)

Nor does the countryside offer bucolic compensations:

Des paysans penchés par degrés s'assoupissent,
Plongés dans l'hébetude, et le regard pareil
A ceux des boeufs repus ruminant au soleil...

(216)

+++++

It is in Germany that probably the most typical Laforgian creations are
set - the poems evoking dreary Sundays, with church bells, tinkling pianos,
young ladies dressed in white to whom the poet cannot have access. These are
the product of a solitude even greater than that he had known for a time in
Paris:

Les nasillardes cloches des dimanches
A l'étranger,
Me font que j'ai de la vache enragée
Pour jusqu'à la nuit, sur la planche;
Je regarde passer des tas de robes blanches.

La jeune fille au joli paroissien
Rentre au logis;
Son corps se sent l'âme fort reblanchie,
Et, raide, dit qu'il appartient
A une tout autre race que le mien!

Ma chair, ô Soeur, a bien mal à son âme.
Oh! ton piano
Me recommence! et ton coeur s'y annonce
En ritournelles si infâmes,
Et ta chair, sur quoi j'ai des droits! s'y pâme....

Que je te les tordrais avec plaisir,
Ce coeur, ce corps!
Et te dirais leur fait! et puis encore
La manière de s'en servir!
Si tu voulais ensuite m'approfondir...

(217)

(214) Derniers Vers, XII.
(215) 'Complainte des cloches'.
(216) 'Intérieur', Poésies Complètes, p.384.
(217) 'Dimanches', Poésies Complètes, pp.231-32.

The faded and insipid landscape recurrent in Laforgue's poetry is presumably

German:

C'était un très-au vent d'octobre paysage,
Que découpe, aujourd'hui dimanche, la fenêtre,
Avec sa jalousie en travers, hors d'usage,
Où sèche, depuis quand! une paire de guêtres
Tachant de deux mals blancs ce glabre paysage...
(218)

Germany like Paris can become the detailed setting for a miniature epic:

Le ciel pleut sans but, sans que rien l'émeuve,
Il pleut, il pleut, bergère! sur le fleuve...
Le fleuve a son repos dominical;
Pas un chaland, en amont, en aval.
Les Vêpres carillonnent sur la ville,
Les berges sont désertes, sans idylles.
Passe un pensionnat (ô pauvres chairs!)
Plusieurs ont déjà leurs manchons d'hiver.
Une qui n'a ni manchon, ni fourrures
Fait, tout en gris, une pauvre figure.
Et la voilà qui s'échappe des rangs,
Et court! ô mon Dieu, qu'est-ce qu'il lui prend?
Et elle va se jeter dans le fleuve.
Pas un batelier, pas un chien Terr' Neuve.
Le crépuscule vient; le petit port
Allume ses feux. (Ah! connu, l'décor!).
La pluie continue à mouiller le fleuve,
Le ciel pleut sans but, sans que rien l'émeuve.
(219)

+ + + + +

Irrespective of setting Laforgue's poetry is filled with a wealth of objective correlatives derived from everyday reality. Damp tobacco becomes the epitome of boredom, loneliness and even spiritual anxiety.

Je m'ennuie, natal! je m'ennuie,
Sans cause bien appréciable,
Que bloqué pas les boues, les dimanches, les pluies,
En d'humides tabacs ne valant pas le diable...
(220)

The most mundane details of daily existence add to the tissue of authenticity and strengthen the message 'Ah! que la Vie est quotidienne' (221):

-
- (218) 'Complainte d'un autre dimanche', Ibid., p.54.
(219) 'Dimanches', Ibid., p.215.
(220) 'Dimanches', Ibid., p.218.
(221) 'Complaintes sur certains ennuis', Ibid., p.86.

La tisane bout, noyant mon feu...
 - Allons, fumons une pipette de tabac,
 En feuilletant un de ces vieux almanachs
 En rêvant de la petite qui unirait
 Aux charmes de l'ceillet ceux du chardonneret.
 - Voici l'oeuf à la coque et la lampe du soir...
 Vous fumez dans vos bocks,
 Vous soldez quelque idylle...

(222)
 (223)
 (224)

The poet's pastimes contribute towards this same atmosphere; visits to open-air concerts:

L'orchestre du jardin jouait ce 'si tu m'aimes'...

to the fair:

J'errais par la banlieue en fête, un soir d'été.
 Et, triste d'avoir vu cette femelle enceinte
 Glapissant aux quinquets devant sa toile peinte,
 Près des chevaux de bois je m'étais arrêté.

(226)

and, strangest of all, to the aquarium, which led Laforgue to include references to the submarine world in which he saw a parallel of pre-natal existence:

.....un plongeur
 Aux mouvants bosquets des savanes sous-marines...
 Donc Je m'en vais flottant aux orgues sous-marins,
 Par les coraux, les oeufs, les bras verts, les écrins...
 Adieu, forêts d'aquarium...

(227)
 (228)
 (229)

The poet's essentially rootless existence in Paris and Germany is reflected in the reference to hotels, end of season activities at resorts, tourism:

- Et moi, je suis dans ce lit cru
 De chambre d'hôtel, fade chambre...

(230)

-
- (222) 'Complainte de l'automne monotone', Ibis., pp.65-66.
 (223) 'Complainte d'une convalescence en mai', Ibid., p.125.
 (224) 'Complainte de l'oubli des morts', Ibid., p.104.
 (225) 'Complaintes des blackboulés', Ibid., p.79.
 (226) 'Hue, carcan!', Ibid., p.442.
 (227) 'Préludes autobiographiques', Ibid., p.30
 (228) Idem., p.33.
 (229) 'Complainte du foetus du poète', Ibid., p.55
 (230) 'Complainte des grands pins dans une villa abandonnée', Ibid., p.99,

uncovered by nineteenth-century science and referred to in the poems thus become an explanation, or one explanation, of the aesthetic behind the poems and of the important place of contemporary reality in their thematic material.

The tension between the modern and the primitive is not as acutely felt in Laforgue's poetry as in that of Baudelaire, Rimbaud or Corbière but it is still of considerable importance and it is openly declared. The existence of Man and his misery is seen to be, in the light of evolutionary thought, a mere quirk without significance:

La vie éclot au fond des mers des premiers âges,
Monades, vibrions, polypiers, coquillages...
Enfin paraît un jour, grêle, blême d'effroi,
L'homme au front vers l'azur, le grand maudit, le roi.
Il voit le mal de tout, sans but!...
La faim, l'amour, l'espoir, (.....) La maladie,
Puis la mort, c'est toujours la même comédie.

(236)

O Justice, divine essence,
Pourquoi les méchants impunis,
Les justes par le sort flétris
Et la misère et l'opulence?

(237)

Science has robbed Man of the sole remedy for his desperate situation - faith; with that life had been bearable. In 'Certes, ce siècle est grand!...' the poet catalogues the achievements of his age: the telescope, the microscope, undersea cables, the extraction of minerals, urbanisation, industrialisation, balloon flights, electric power, railways, the boring of tunnels, modern armaments, gas, photography, exquisite perfumes and fabrics, distillation, art and literature. But what is the net result of this progress?

Jamais l'Homme pourtant n'a tant pleuré. La Terre
Meurt de se savoir seule ainsi dans l'Infini,
Et trouvant tout menteur depuis qu'elle est sans Père
Ne sait plus que ce mot: lamasabacktani.

Ah! l'homme n'a qu'un jour; que lui font la science,
La santé, le bien-être, et les arts superflus,
Si l'au-delà suprême est clos à l'espérance?
Et quel but à sa vie alors qu'on ne croit plus?

(238)

(236) 'Litanies de misère', Ibid., pp.325-56.

(237) 'Litanies nocturnes', Ibid., p.430.

(238) Ibid., p.388.

Laforge's refutation of progress is in accord with the Parnassianism of Leconte de Lisle but instead of looking longingly back at an age of pantheism the poet contemplates a return to the period that was anathema for his predecessor:

Oh n'est-ce pas mon Christ, mieux valait l'esclavage,
Les terreurs et la Lèpre et la mort sans linceul,
Et sous un ciel de plomb l'éternel Moyen-Age,
Avec la certitude au moins qu'on n'est pas seul!
(239)

The poet longs to be rid of his intellectual sophistication which has brought him the knowledge of his purposeless life and certain doom:

.....délivrez-nous de la Pensée,
Lèpre originelle, ivresse insensée...
(240)

The simplest solution, the acceptance of everyday routine, is not possible for him though he appreciates its value:

...la prière, le ménage, les travaux de couture;
Et que cela suffise...
(241)

Exotic daydreaming provides a temporary escape:

Je fume au nez des dieux de fines cigarettes...
Et j'entre au paradis, fleuri de rêves clairs
Où l'on voit se mêler en valse fantastiques
Des éléphants en rut à des chœurs de moustiques.
(242)

The poet is attracted by a startlingly modern version of the primitive - the life of a cowboy in the Wild West:

Oh là-bas, m'y scalper de mon cerveau d'Europe!
Piaffer, redevenir une vierge antilope,
Sans littérature, un gars de proie, citoyen
Du hasard et sifflant l'argot californien!
(243)

Generally the solutions sought, or desired, are more radical; a return to the ape-like condition of Man's prehistoric past:

Oh! devant la lune en son plein...
Fous, nous renverser sur les reins,
Riant, battant des mains!
(244)

(239) Ibid., p.389.
(240) 'Complainte propitiatoire à l'Inconscient', Ibid., p.36.
(241) 'Derniers Vers', XII, Ibid., p.311.
(242) 'La Cigarette', Ibid., p.333.
(243) 'Albums', Ibid., p.219.
(244) 'Complainte des nostalgies préhistoriques', Ibid., pp.69-70.

or the return to the ultimate primitive state, nothingness, which offers the only certainty of rest:

Ô gouffre aspire-moi! Néant, repos divin... (245)

This is contemplated not only for the poet but for the whole Earth and the solar system. The Earth cannot go back to its only period of happiness:

...aux temps où la planète à la dérive
En ses langes de vapeurs primitives
Ne savait rien d'rien. (246)

instead it must be annihilated, or rather become again a quantity of amorphous, lifeless matter

.....la Terre...
Aura son dénouement obscur et solitaire
Perdu dans la splendeur du calme souverain! (247)

as must the sun:

Après tant de couchants dans la pourpre et la gloire,
Tu seras en risée aux étoiles sans coeur,
Astre jaune et grêle, flamboyante écumoire! (248)

(b) The World of Sensation

In Laforgue's poetry as in that of his most illustrious immediate predecessors - Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Verlaine - a richness of allusion, in both quantity and variety, to the experiences of the senses goes hand in hand with a generally receptive attitude towards contemporary reality.

The only study known to the present writer devoted to the place of sensation in Laforgue's poetry occurs in the chapter in Ruchon's monograph entitled 'Paysage intérieur de Laforgue'. (249) The remarks made in that chapter are in serious need of revision. The senses of taste and touch are almost totally ignored and the sense of smell is said to play an extremely insignificant role, comparable to that played in Mallarmé's poetry. Far

(245) Poem without title, Ibid., p.396.
(246) 'Le Chauves-Souris', Ibid., p.270.
(247) 'Prière supreme', Ibid., p.417. See also 'Marche funèbre pour la mort de la Terre', pp.338-40.
(248) 'Encore à cet astre', Ibid., p.334.
(249) F. Ruchon, Jules Laforgue, pp.131-39.

from this being the case there are literally scores of references to the sense of smell and the other two neglected senses in the poems. Ruchon also described Laforgue's treatment of colour as his particular aptitude, but this remark needs careful qualification. It is true that the senses of taste and touch and smell occur more frequently in images than those of vision and hearing which are mostly treated in their direct contact with reality rather than in the transmuted form of imagery. But this is also, to some extent, true of Baudelaire's poetry. In both cases the basic attitude of receptiveness towards sensual experience is the most important consideration.

There is an extremely interesting reference to the sense of taste in 'Complainte des nostalgies préhistoriques', interesting not only because of its vividness but because of the link between untrammelled sensual experience and the primitive condition:

Dégringolant une vallée,
Heurter, dans des coquelicots,
Une enfant bestiale et brûlée
Qui suce, en blaguant les échos,
De juteux abricots.
Livrer aux langueurs des soirées...
Poursécher ses lèvres sucrées... (250)

The sexual connotations apparent here are stronger in other references to the sense of taste:

- Oh! raffale
- Moi le corps
Des salives
Corrosives
Dont mes flancs
Vont bëlant! (251)

Sucer la chair d'un coeur élu,
Adorer de souffrants organes... (252)

There are references employing and extending one of Baudelaire's most powerful and least pleasant images:

Ô lait divin! potion assurément cordiale
A vomir les gamelles de nos aujourd'hui! (253)

(250) Poésies Complètes, p.69.

(251) 'L'Eternel quiquopro', Ibid., p.212.

(252) 'Célibat, célibat, tout n'est que célibat', Ibid., p.221.

(253) 'Impossibilité de l'Infini en hosties', Ibid, m.p.228.

Mon Coeur est un désert altéré, bien que soûl
De ce vin revomi, l'universel dégoût. (254)

Sometimes unpleasant tastes are evoked outside images as a part of Laforgue's realism:

Toto sauce du poing un vieux débris d'écuelle
Gémit, piaille, renifle et, tout en pleurnichant,
Fait des bulles de morve et suce une chandelle. (255)

Several allusions to taste show that Laforgue was also capable of appreciating the sensation as something pleasurable; this is equally true of allusions in both image and direct form:

Et pourtant, le bœni grand bol de lait de ferme
Que me serait un baiser sur sa bouche ferme! (256)

Leurs cognacs d'Absolu, leurs pâtes d'Intrinsèque!
(257)

Le soir, j'aime, repu de choucroute au gratin,
Voir, en fumant ma pipe à fourneau de faïence,
Mousser la bière ambrée aux bords des brocs d'étain.
(258)

References to the sense of touch are about as numerous as those to the sense of taste, and quite as vivid:

Plonger mon front dans l'eau des mers, aux matinées,
Torrides..... (259)

Le peignoir sur la chair de poule après le bain...
(260)

- Elles, coudes nus dans les fruits... (261)

.....chaudes nuits de septembre
Sur les terrasses d'orangers;
Jours d'hiver près du feu faisant douce la chambre,
Matins d'avril frais et légers. (262)

Votre corps recevra goutte à goutte la pluie
Qui fera vos restes plus mous... (263)

A decidedly Baudelairean reminiscence is evident in the tactile sensation evoked in the poem dedicated to the memory of the poet's cat.

Lissant ton poil soyeux de ta langue âpre et rose...
(264)

(254) 'Complainte-Litanies de mon Sacré-Coeur', Ibid., p.120.

(255) 'Intérieur', Ibid., p.318.

(256) 'Complainte d'une convalescence en mai', Ibid., p.125.

(257) 'Dimanches', Ibid., p.218.

(258) 'Ce qu'aime le gros Fritz', Ibid., p.383.

(259) 'Complainte d'une convalescence en mai', Ibid., p.125.

(260) 'Les linges, le cygne', Ibid., p.171.

(261) 'Complainte des grands pins dans une villa abandonnée', Ibid., p.99.

(262) 'Guitare', Ibid., p.322.

(263) Idem.

(264) 'A la mémoire d'une chatte naine que j'avais', Ibid., p.410.

Tactile sensations are also associated with sex:

Il la baise à la temps...
Il l'endort avec des caresses tristes... (265)

Mes caresses, naïvement serties,
Mourront, de ta gorge aux vierges hosties,
Aux amandes de tes seins! (266)

Despite Ruchon's dismissal, olfactory sensations in Laforgue's poetry are frequent and varied, both pleasant and unpleasant, ranging from the Baudelairean horror of the image of inner viciousness:

J'ai mille oiseaux de mer d'un gris pâle,
Qui nichent au haut de ma belle âme...
Or, ils salissent tout de charognes...
Quand la fiancée ouvrira la porte...
Et que l'odeur de charogn's soit forte!... (267)

or the merely insipid:

.....fadeur d'hôpital du même lit... (268)

to the pleasant perfumes of nature:

La brise...elle sent ce soir un peu la menthe. (269)

Dans l'odeur, les verdure, les eaux des beaux mois!... (270)

.....des sentiers
Qu'embaument de trois mois les fleurs d'abricotiers... (271)

O bouquets d'oranger cuirassés de satin... (272)

Sometimes the perfumes of nature are associated with odours representing the stability, or the monotony, of church and home:

Et passez layettes et collerettes et robes blanches
Dans un frou-frou de lavande et de thym
Vers l'encens et les brioches!... (273)

Certain sounds recur throughout Laforgue's poetry: church bells, organs, pianos, barrel-organs, and to a lesser extent, hunting horns and the sound of distant fairs. All these sounds have a symbolic function; church bells and organs represent the noisy but vain struggle of Catholicism against the rising

(265) 'Sur une defunte', Ibid., p.308.

(266) 'Complainte du pauvre Chevalier-Errant', Ibid., p.73.

(267) 'Romance', Ibid., p.201.

(268) 'Complainte du sage de Paris', Ibid., p.126.

(269) 'Nuage', Ibid., p.370.

(270) 'Pierrots', Ibid., p.150.

(271) 'Petites miseres de juillet', Ibid., p.202.

(272) 'Pétition', Ibid., p.290.

(273) 'Dimanches', Ibid., p.284.

tide of unbelief; pianos evoke the monotony of Sunday afternoons and in particular the mundane existence to which young ladies of the bourgeoisie are doomed and which is foreshadowed in the routine of their obligatory piano lessons; the barrel-organ and the noises of the fairground are associated with the working classes and endowed with a pathetic quality, pathetic because they represented for the poet a flimsy and ephemeral quest for happiness in the face of social injustice and ultimately of cosmic indifference but also because they reminded the poet of his own solitude; the hunting horns are a feature of the atmosphere of autumn when the sun (and life) are hunted and put to death.(274) Another sound of autumn which recurs in the poems is that of the wind:

Car le vent je l'connais,
Il est de mes amis... (275)

For the poet the wind symbolised his sense of exile, his impotence and aimlessness:

Toute l'incompréhensible, l'insaisissable désolation d'exil
des automnes de ma vie qui me sont restés sur le coeur, crève
dans le vent qu'on entend aujourd'hui. Rien, que je ne sache,
ne comblerait la dévastation que ce vent a balayée en moi...
Je ne sais rien, je ne suis bon à rien, je n'ai pas de but...
(276)

All these sounds have one thing in common: they are not purely symbolic.

They were all actually part of the fabric of the reality in which the poet found himself; all were sensual experiences found by the poet, empirically, to have emotional repercussions. These most striking and emotionally charged aspects of reality are, then, epitomes: symbols found within immediately experienced reality and presented in that context:

Noël! Noël! j'entends les cloches dans la nuit...
Ô Souvenirs, chantez! tout mon orgueil s'enfuit...
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...
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.

(277)

(274) It is also likely that the hunt has sexual connotations. See below.

(275) 'Le brave, brave automne', Poésies Complètes, p.233.

(276) Inédits de Laforgue, II, p.33. (First published in the Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires, No.18, September 1891, as one of the 'Ennuis non rimés'.

(277) 'Noël sceptique', Poésies Complètes, p.327.

Les pianos, les pianos, dans les quartiers aisés!
Premiers soirs, sans pardessus, chaste flânerie,
Aux complaints des nerfs incompris ou brisés... (278)

Plages, chemins de fer, ciels, bois morts,
Bateaux croupis dans les feuilles d'or...
De trop poignants cors
M'ont hallalisé ces chers décors... (279)

Je ne tiens que des mois, des journées et des heures...
l'âme du Vent gargouille au fond des cheminées... (280)

An exhaustive study of aural sensations in Laforgue's poetry would be a monumental task. Time has not been found here, for example, to mention the wealth of allusions to music, and particularly musical instruments, in the poems which contain references to drums, trumpets, cornets, violins, flutes and bagpipes(!!) as well as the more celebrated pianos, organs and barrel-organs. Sounds probably played the most important part in both Laforgue's impressionism and synthetism. (281)

Vision also, of course, is extremely important in Laforgue's poetry as one would expect of an outstanding art critic and a poet who prided himself on having 'l'oeil artiste'. His work is so full of the products of acute visual observation that there is little point in giving here more than two or three representative examples:

Un beau cheval galope, à flottante crinière
Sur la plaque d'étain que notre homme a poli
Ce matin même encore avec du tripoli
Et qui de son emploi fort pittoresque insigne
Orne ses pectoraux d'un air tout-à-fait digne.
A cette plaque pend un sifflet. Sur le zinc
Vite il boit... (282)

C'était un très-au vent d'octobre paysage,
Que découpe, aujourd'hui dimanche, la fenêtre,
Avec sa jalousie en travers, hors d'usage,
Où sèche, depuis quand! une paire de guêtres
Tachants de deux mals blancs ce glabre paysage.

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- (278) 'Complainte des pianos qu'on entend dans les quartiers aisés', Ibid., p.46.
(279) 'Complainte de l'automne monotone', Ibid., p.65.
(280) 'Dimanches', Ibid., p.222.
(281) See the discussion of Laforgue's impressionism and synthetism below.
(282) 'Les Humbles', Poésies Complètes, p.382.

Un couchant mal bâti suppurant du livide;
 Le coin d'une buanderie aux tuiles sales...
 Cinq arbres en proie à de mesquines rafales
 Qui marbrent ce ciel crû de bandages livides. (283)

Ce soir un soleil fichu gît au haut du coteau
 Gît sur le flanc, dans les genêts, sur son manteau,
 Un soleil blanc comme un crachat d'estaminet
 Sur une litière de jaunes genêts
 De jaunes genêts d'automne... (284)

Ruchon is misleading in talking of Laforgue's ability as a colourist as one of the most striking features of his poetry. Whilst the range of colours referred to in the poems is fairly extensive - and even this much less so than in the poetry of Verlaine for example - careful analysis shows that, beyond a very restricted number of favourite colours, most colours, even some of the commonest such as red, are mentioned only a handful of times in all Laforgue's two hundred and fifty poems. Ruchon gives a distorted picture by taking as one of his main examples a deliberate and almost unique tour de force in colour notation: 'Rosace en vitrail' :

Ah! quel riche trésor l'artiste Amour étale!
 Orangés sulfureux, or roux, roses meurtris,
 Blancs de cold-cream; et la splendeur orientale
 Des verts, des lilas noirs et des jaunes pourris!
 L'alcool, les cuivres chauds des alambics; les bières,
 Gamme de blonds; les ors liquides et vermillés,
 Les verts laiteux, les blancs, les bleus incendiaires,
 L'opale des crachats et le plomb des reveils... (285)

By far the commonest evocation of 'colour' in Laforgue's poetry are concerned with whiteness ('blanc', 'pâle', 'reblanchi', 'albe', 'lait caillé', 'lait de chaux', 'blême' etc.), the next most common being blacks and greys ('noir', 'gris', 'gris-perle', 'gris pâle' etc.) Ruchon is perfectly correct when he speaks of 'la notation constante des teintes grisâillées et tristes des temps de brume et de pluie, des paysages d'automne.' (286) This is Laforgue's true glory as a colourist; the creation of the pervading atmosphere of his poetic universe through a small range of 'colours' equivalent to the recurring sounds

(283) 'Complainte d'un autre dimanche', Ibid., p.54.

(284) 'L'Hiver qui vient', Ibid., p.279.

(285) Ibid., p.344. The one other such attempt is the remarkable 'Couchant d'hiver', Ibid., p.357.

(286) 'Jules Laforgue', p.134.

already mentioned. Only two other colours occur at all frequently in the poems. Blue is largely confined to its role as a near automatic epithet with eyes and sky. Violet has symbolic significance, particularly in the 'Pierrot' poems, being equated by the poet with mourning. The poet's predilection for the ephemeral splendours of sunset - which he has in common with the Mallarmes and which he, like them, sees as the symbol of the death of all things (287) - would lead the reader to expect a vast range of colours in the range of reds. This is not the case for the poet circumvents straightforward colour by an often startling extension of the Baudelairean blood imagery:

Et il gît là, comme une glande arrachée dans un cou...
(288)

Laforque also follows Baudelaire's example in introducing into his poetry allusions to sensual experience beyond the five basic senses; complex sensations, respiratory functions, sexual sensations, pain:

Le frisson du Vae soli! gargouille en mes moelles...
(289)

Ô tocsins,
Des coeurs dans le roulis des empilements de coussins....
(290)

Un relent énervant expire d'un mouchoir
Et promène sur mes lèvres sa chevelure
Et comme un piano voisin rêve en mesure,
Je tournoie au concert rythmé des encensoirs... (291)

Trouve, tels les ballons, l'Irrespirable Noir...
(292)
Le vent s'époumonne... (293)

Vent esquiné de toux des paysages tendres... (294)

(287) c.f. Hamlet, p.34: 'Hamlet, fourbu d'insomnie et de stupides exaltations, avait senti la vaste peine du crépuscule le circonvenir pour l'étrangler..'

(288) 'L'Hiver qui vient'.

(289) 'Perrots', Poésies Complètes, p.151.

(290) 'Complainte du pauvre Chevalier-Errant', Ibid., p.74.

(291) 'Sieste éternelle', Ibid., p.364.

(292) 'Complainte du sage de Paris', Ibid., p.127.

(293) 'Complainte de l'automne monotone', Ibid., p.63.

(294) 'Complainte de l'ange incurable', Ibid., p.67.

Et votre clitoris qui vous tordait pâmée
 En de longs spasmes de langueur... (295)

La femme hurle aux nuits, se tord et mord ses draps...
 (296)

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Modernity, everyday life and the life of sensation have a very large part in the thematic material of Laforgue's poetry. A constant awareness of contemporary reality was at least as important in determining some of the most crucial elements of his poetic language.

(295) 'Guitare', Ibid., p.323.

(296) 'Litanies de misère', Ibid., p. 325.

CHAPTER FOUR

Laforque's poetic language

In one sense Laforque's poetry can be divided into two periods: the 'rhetorical' period up to and including the poems later collected as Le Sanglot, and a second period beginning with the Complaintes marked by a determination to dispense with traditional forms of expression. The poet was aware himself of the divide; in March 1882 he wrote: 'L'envie de pousser des cris sublimes aux oreilles de mes contemporains...m'est passée' (297); in May of the same year: '...à cette époque je voulais être éloquent, et cela me donne aujourd'hui sur les nerfs' (298); and in July: 'Quand on veut dire, exposer, démontrer quelque chose il y a la prose...' (299). Laforque was harsher than many of his subsequent critics in judging his early poetry; Ruchon, for one, had a high regard for Le Sanglot. As regards the cumulative effect of the cosmic lamentations in these poems the poet was right in seeing that he had been 'stupide de faire la grosse voix et de jouer de l'éloquence'. However even these poems offer a leaven for Sullyesque eloquence in the form of images crues, references to contemporary reality and reflections of the spoken language:

Maig non! n'en parlons plus! c'est vraiment trop risible!
Et j'ai montré le poing à l'azur insensible!
Qui m'avait donc grisé de tant d'espoirs menteurs?
(300)

Oui, ce monde est bien plat; quant à l'autre, somettes...
(301)

In many individual poems of the early period one already perceives the beginning of the quest for an original poetic medium based partly on apparent spontaneity, humour, popular song and everyday speech. One is therefore justified in looking at Laforque's poetic output as a whole in assessing the impact of the treatment of contemporary reality on his language, whilst maintaining an awareness of a developing rather than static process. From the Complaintes onwards the Grand Style was gone forever, by increasingly employing the more revolutionary devices already present in his earlier poetry and by using new ones - notably a move away from logical patterns of development towards free association and a kind of poetic impressionism, and ultimately,

(297) Oeuvres Complètes, IV, p.128.

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

(299) Ibid., p.182.

(300) 'Farce éphémère', Poèmes Complètes, p.329.

(301) 'La Cigarette', Ibid., p.333.

from this, to synthetism - the poet strove for the freedom which alone would permit him to be an adequate mirror of his experiences of transitory reality, an adequate artistic servant of the Unconscious.

(a) Vocabulary

The guiding principle behind Laforgue's choice of words was accuracy of expression. There is little evidence in his poetry of any attempt to make the 'sound-look' function of words independent of their function as signs. So intent was the poet on communicating the truths of his experience with the maximum degree of efficacy that he not only used and mixed vocabulary from all registers of the French language as it existed but felt it necessary to coin neologisms. (302) Thus Laforgue adhered neither to the tradition of rhetorical grandeur and propriety nor to the Symbolist endeavour to restrict immediacy of meaning in the name of musicality. On one level experiences and ideas would seem to dictate the choice of his vocabulary, but it is clear from the notes on Rimbaud (303) that he had a keen appreciation of the value of words in themselves in the generation of poetry; without doubt he acknowledged the place of spontaneous inspiration, of chance, of the fantasies of rhyme - all of which was in accord with his role as the mouth-piece of the Unconscious. However it is just as certain that of these spontaneously suggested words he retained only those which he believed conveyed his 'meaning' more clearly than other words, arrived at rationally, might have done. For Laforgue every experience, every truth was a unique and transitory phenomenon requiring an expression exactly suited to it; slang, vulgarisms, latinisms, foreign words, technical terms from science and philosophy, neologisms and, above all, the vocabulary of modern and everyday life have their place in his poetry. The variety of Laforgue's vocabulary is not, of course, solely to be explained in terms of the quest for

(302) A comprehensive list of neologisms, derivations, latinisms, archaisms, etc., is given in F. Ruchon, Jules Laforgue, pp.153-160.

(303) See above.

accuracy at the level of the individual word but also in terms of the seeking a after contrastive effects. The mixing of registers is as much a source of irony and humour in Laforgue's poetry as it is in Corbière's.

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Laforgue's use of technical terms was criticised by Ruchon and by Remy de Gourmont before him. (304) Neither was very helpful in explaining Laforgue's motives; these certainly amount to more than perversity, or another form of decadent bourgeois-baiting. In Part Two, Chapter Two, it was suggested that the late nineteenth century was a period of increasing specialisation in the sciences - and the consequent alienation of the interested amateur. This brought with it a tremendous increase in the use of specialised terminology. The inclusion of a great quantity of technical terms in Laforgue's poetry is thus partly modernistic in intention, or at least in result, for it is a way of reflecting one linguistic aspect of the intellectual environment of the 1880s. More than this, it reflects the poet's own disillusionment with the solutions offered by most science and philosophy to some of the basic problems of existence: the imminence and certainty of death, the absurdity of love and procreation. The poet treats his terminology irreverently. This is the absolutely crucial factor in assessing its role in his poetry. Sully-Prudhomme, and others, used technical terms in deadly earnest as a way of bringing about what they held to be the essential reconciliation of poetry and science. Laforgue used them to suggest the vanity of all human knowledge; his terminology is offered as jargon. Philosophical terms used to name ultimate and consoling truths have no more connection with eternal reality than the passing comforts of food and drink:

Leurs cognacs d'Absolu, leurs pâtés d'Intrinsèque!...

(305)

It is true that as Laforgue grew less interested in writing poetry conveying

(304) See F. Ruchon, Jules Laforgue, p.60, and Remy de Gourmont, Esthétique de la langue française, p.21.

(305) 'Dimanches' Poésies Complètes, p.218. Other terms borrowed from philosophy include: 'métaphysique', 'virtuel', 'velleite', 'cosmogonie', 'Maïa', 'nirvana', 'Metempsychose', 'transcendental', 'immanent', 'ésotérique'.

his intellectual predicament and more concerned with the experiences of his total sensibility he dispensed with technical terms. Present in very considerable quantities in the Complaintes and even more so in the Imitation, they are almost entirely absent from the Derniers Vers. The Derniers Vers are also, however, less aggressively ironic. The juxtaposition of technical terms with popularisms or with aspects of everyday reality is one of the recurring devices of the irony of the collections before the Derniers Vers.

The number of such technical terms is even greater than in Rimbaud's poetry. In the poems written before the Complaintes one encounters such words as 'hypertrophie', 'phtisique', 'hypertrophique', 'mandibules', 'se volatiliser', 'tuberculose', 'se cicatriser' etc. In the Complaintes themselves one finds: 'lymphatique', 'corrosif', 'madrépore', 'albumine', 'mucus', 'chrysalide', 'réflexe', 'syncope', 'plasma', 'Lexicon', 'chimies', 'végétal', 'scaphandre', 'étamine' and many others; in the Imitation: 'agrégat inorganique', 's'inoculer', 'encéphale', 'léthargie', 'fébrifuge', 'hypogée', 'ophtalmique', 'thermomètre', 'spectroscope', 'foetus', 'gelatine', 'polypier', 'cautériser', 'coaguler', 'ausculter', 'prunt', 'hydrocéphale', 'cellule', 'fibroïne', 'muqueuse', 'pliocène', 'syrupeux', 'hypocondre' etc. In the Fleurs de bonne Volonté the frequency of such terms is considerably less than in either the Complaintes or the Imitation, a fact which is not altogether surprising when one considers the substantial amount of material in the Fleurs which was to be reshaped and incorporated in the Derniers Vers. Nevertheless such terms are not entirely absent: 'pubertés', 'fossile', 'abcès', 'corrosif', 'microbes', 'syncope', 'mammifère', among others, are to be found. The word 'hypocondrie' in Derniers Vers, X, is one of the rare examples of such usage in Laforgue's last collection. The preponderance of medical and biological terminology may be accounted for in two ways. First it is doubtless a reflection of the environment of the left-bank cénacles and cafés where a high proportion of the 'audience' was made up of medical students as is attested

by references in the chansons of Léon Xanrof and other leading performers of the time. Second, in Laforgue's poetry as in that of Rimbaud, there is a quasi-Rabelaisian tendency to deflate human pomposity and presumption by offering reminders of Man's physical nature:

Oyez, au physique comme au moral,
Ne suis qu'une colonie de cellules
De racrocs; et ce sieur que j'intitule
Moi, n'est, dit-on, qu'un polypier fatal! (306)

If Laforgue's use of technical terms has caught the eye and the critics' attention, his willingness to incorporate the vocabulary of everyday and modern life into his poetry is of greater significance for this reflects more than an intellectual consideration. It is an indication of the poet's intention to recreate in his poetry the very fabric of his experience of contemporary reality. Not only are such words and expressions more significant, they are more numerous than technical terms. In the poems written before the Complaintes one finds: 'nager dans le bleu', 'tuer le temps', 'un accès de trois minutes', 'son ulster' (307), 'le cold-cream', 'Les lèchefrites', 'prendre froid', 'les casinos', 'avoir vingt ans' (308) 'le sifflot d'un train', 'du jambon de Mayence' and many others. Occasionally the poet succeeds in conveying an aspect of modern existence through the accumulation of everyday vocabulary:

Maisons, horloges, clochers, foules,
Milliards d'échos à mon appel
Scandé d'un tic-tac éternel
L'orchestre fou des choses roule.

Et chaque soir,
C'est la musique
Hypertrophique
Des remontoirs!

Allez coucous, réveils, pendules,
Bataillons d'insectes d'acier,
Jouez sans fin des mandibules
Dans un concert très-familier.

(309)

(306) 'Ballade', Ibid., p.229.

(307) This word occurs in 'Ballade de retour', written in September 1880. Bloch and von Wartburg's Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française suggests the date 'vers 1872' for the entry of the word into French.

(308) In the sense of 'to be in one's prime', 'in the bloom of youth'. Laforgue applies it to horses which may not be altogether appropriate!

(309) 'La Complainte des montres', Poésies Complètes, p.368.

The frequency is much higher still in the Complaintes themselves; among a host of such items of vocabulary are to be found: 'mes feuilleteurs du quai', 'ivre-mort', 'les pensionnats', 'le frou-frou', 'des bretelles', 'des dortoirs', 'le train-train', 'orgue de barbarie', 'photos', 'dodo', 'le levain', 'passe-port', 'la tisane', 'chemins de fer', 'usines', 'blackboulés', 'théière', 'lavabo', 's'endimancher', 'bitume', 'chambre d'hôtel', 'bocks', 'grand-papa', 'souï', 'bail', 'loteries', 'abonnements', 'd'occasion', 'facilités de paiement', 'gares', 'douanes', 'dragées pour baptêmes', 'tramways', 'le ruolz', 'les banlieues', 'au prix de fabrique', 'cigarettes', 'voyages circulaires à prix réduits', 'machines cylindriques', 'chronomètres', 'prendre le thé', 'l'oeuf à la coque'. The same vocabulary also occurs in the Imitation, a fact which may at first seem surprising as the collection appears to indicate an escape from everyday reality to a lunar setting. This is a superficial judgement. The Imitation is not divorced from contemporary reality. The poet takes to the roofs of the city to observe the moon; the city, which is referred to several times, is always present as an implied contrast with serene lunar sterility. The world of everyday reality accompanies the poet on his excursion and this is reflected in his vocabulary which contains such words and expressions as 'ambulance', 'édredon', 'cold-cream', 'dandyisme', 'capitaliste', 'dortoirs', 'pourboires', 'hôtel garni', 'tuyaux d'usines', 'pot-au-feu', 'baccarats', 'bureaucraties', 'd'occasion', 'tremper une mouillette dans son café au lait', 'cachemire'. The Fleurs de Bonne Volonté are no exception to the practice already outlined; if anything they are even closer to everyday speech than the earlier collections. Many of the examples of speech rhythms in Laforgue's poetry cited later in this chapter are taken from the Fleurs. As regards vocabulary one is no less impressed by the impact of contemporary reality: 'album', 'Grands Hôtels', 'diplômes', 'polkas', 'tabacs', 'du whisky', 'La Loi de Lynch', 'Mormons', 'Icebergs', 'gare', 'steamer', 'gamelles', 'des divans rembourrés d'eiders', 'les lampions', 'fermer boutique', 'achalandant', 'les trains manqués', 'l'Express pour Bénarès', 'photographie', 'le suffrage universel', 'touristes', 'balançoires'. That the

use of vocabulary connected with everyday life and with modernity was of greater importance to Laforgue than technical terminology is clear from its continuation in the Derniers Vers where one finds 'Messageries du Levant', 'cheminées d'usines', 'un crachat d'estaminet', 'ambulances', 'les fils télégraphiques', 'toitures des faubourgs', 'thé', 'petits-fours', 'statistiques sanitaires', 'livrés à la grosse', 'photographie', 'transfusion', 'compresses', 'potion'.

In addition to vocabulary drawn from everyday life the poet introduced slang and popularisms into his work. Attempts to evoke the language of the bas peuple in the poems are relatively uncommon despite the example of Richepin and the cabaret chansonniers. The vast majority of the popularisms found in Laforgue's poetry would have been part of the ordinary middle-class speech of his day - though a part considered taboo by poets only a generation before and by many in his own day. In this respect Laforgue's attitude to popular speech was more subtle and rewarding than that of the author of the Chanson des gueux. Occasionally the poet does seek to imitate aspects of working-class speech and more particularly idiosyncracies of syntax and pronunciation:

- Rien! je suis t'il malheureux.... (310)
- Je te vas dire... (311)
- On tira z'à la courte paille... (312)

The last example is not unheard even in more elevated circles and such an expression as

- Y a pas de port... (313)

is definitely on the borderline between middle-class and working-class speech. For the most part, however, as already stated, Laforgue's popularisms would certainly have been found in the educated speech of the day and notably in that of the students and intellectuals who were his companions - and, perhaps most important of all, in his own speech. To this extent the introduction

(310) Ibid., p.71.
(311) Ibid., p.155.
(312) Ibid., p.256.
(313) Ibid., p.297.

of popularisms into his verse made his poetry a more accurate mirror of his thought processes as well as of the conversations going on around him. In the early poems one finds 'pas de quoi manger', 'piètre', 'crever', 'beugler', 'tu y perds ton latin', 'bafouiller', 'jabot', 'béquillard', 'catin', 'se gaver', 'ventru', 'mais zut!', 'saoul', 'n'avoir pas même un radis' etc. In the Complaintes the tendency is even more marked: 'bouquin', 'ébaubi', 'vivotter', 's'amener', 'pimbèche'(sic), 'fichu', 'esquinté', 'siroter', 's'emballer', 's'en donner une fière bosse', 'pinter', 'mirobolant', 'haridelle', 'flûtant', 'un fier répertoire d'attaques', in the Imitation likewise: 'flanquer un coup', 'camper', 'ce n'est pas pour des prunes', 'faire un four', 's'esquinter', Again in the Fleurs the poet does not hesitate to use words and expressions like 'vivotter', 'jobardise', 'cancans', 'gars', 'ficher le camp', 'blaguer', 'deux sous de jupe', 'avoir la vache enragée', 'joujou', 'rater le train', 'décrocher ta timbale', 'terre-à-terre', 's'en garuler', 'fourbu', 'toquades', 'c'est du toc'. The process is continued in the Derniers Vers: 's'amener', 'me faire le fou', 'la crevaisson', 'rosse', 'beugler', 'ribambelles', 'bastringue', 'feux de paille'.

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In all about fifty of Laforgue's poems contain technical terms from science or philosophy. More than twice that number include popularisms and a similar quantity use words or expressions derived directly from modern life and ordinary speech.

Of even more interest than the isolated study of vocabulary is the examination of the part played by contemporary reality in Laforgue's imagery.

(b) Imagery.

Critics have pointed to the banality of Laforgue's images in the early poems (314) and to the abstract and 'moral' nature of his imagery in his work

(314) e.g. P.Reboul, Laforgue, p.194, who cites images such as 'l'horloge comme un glas, sonne l'heure' from Le Sanglot.

generally (315); whilst the same critics have also stressed the importance of images in his poetry, they have failed to show clearly that Laforgue was a creator of original and effective images and to indicate the nature of this originality. Ruchon was right to see deliberate and exaggerated attempts to create new images in Laforgue's poetry and to condemn these as Laforgue's less successful experiments. These latter 'délibérément "en dehors du répertoire français", souvent forcées artificielles et recherchées...ne sont pas les meilleures...' (316):

Et vous, fleurs fixes! mandragores à visages,
Cactus obéliscals aux fruits en sarcophages,
Forêts de cierges massifs, parcs de polypiers,
Palmiers de corail blanc aux résines d'acier!
Lys marmoréens à sourires hystériques... (317)

Fortunately Laforgue was able to find a source of imagery that was neither hackneyed, nor abstract, nor yet forced; this was everyday reality and modernity:

En voulant mettre un peu d'ordre dans ce tiroir... (318)

O Robe de Mama, ô Jupe de Maman... (319)

Mon coeur...
C'est un feu d'artifice hélas! qu'avant la fête,
A noyé sans retour l'averse qui s'embête... (320)

Sois l'édredon
Du Grand-Pardon... (321)

Et toi, là-bas, pot-au-feu, pauvre Terre!... (322)

Tu veux te tremper un matin en moi,
Comme on trempe, en levant le petit doigt,
Dans son café au lait une mouillette!... (323)

(315) e.g. F. Ruchon, Jules Laforgue, p.170: 'Laforgue a l'image morale et abstraite. Il dira des étoiles qu'elles sont indubitables et chimériques..'

(316) Ibid., p.16 .The Laforgue quotation is to be found in Mélanges Posthumes,

(317) 'Climat, faune et flore de la lune'. p.23.

(318) Poésies Complètes(Pia), p.30.

(319) Ibid., p.33.

(320) Ibid., p.120.

(321) Ibid., p.138.

(322) Ibid., p.139.

(323) Ibid., p.155.

- Hôtel garni
De l'infini... (324)
- Le couchant de sang est taché
Comme un tablier de boucher... (325)
- ...l'Infini reste sourd comme un pot... (326)
- Un soleil blanc comme un crachat d'estaminet... (327)
- Mon coeur est vieux d'un tas de lettres déchirées... (328)
- De petits nuages d'un rose de confiserie... (329)
- La Nature, fade
Usine de sève... (330)
- Mais l'Infini est là, gare de trains ratés... (331)
- Quoi! la vie est unique, et toi, sous ce scaphandre,
Tu te racontes sans fin... (332)

Imagery, like vocabulary, was for Laforgue to be employed in the cause of accuracy and power of expression of real experiences; he was preoccupied with the quest for 'images adéquates'(333); where his images are not absolutely clear this is to be accounted for by the inadequacies of the linguistic resources available to him, not by any desire to make his images suggestive in the sense of being inexplicit or hermetic. Late in his short career Laforgue realised that one solution to the problems of poetic expression lay not so much in the acuteness of individual images but in the relationship of a series of images. This point will be further discussed in our remarks on synthesis in Laforgue's poetry. It is arguable that the image became the essence of poetry for Laforgue; certainly one would have expected a great reluctance to dispense partially with rhyme, and to some extent with metre, had he not seen poetry as basically imagistic.

(c) Phrasing

It is possible to introduce vocabulary and images drawn from everyday modern reality into poetry without affecting rhythm or, if the doses so introduced are small enough, the tone of verse. But the doses in Laforgue's

(324) Ibid., p.176.

(325) Ibid., p.101.

(326) Ibid., p.242.

(327) Ibid., p.279.

(328) Ibid., p.244.

(329) Ibid., p.297.

(330) Ibid., p. 38.

(331) Ibid., p.226.

(332) Ibid., p. 54.

(333) Quoted in P.Reboul. Laforgue, p.194.

poetry are large and in any event he extended the incursions of everyday speech into his verse beyond the limits of vocabulary and imagery to rhythms and word order.

Examples have already been noted of Laforgue's imitation of forms of popular pronunciation:

Rien! je suis t'il malhûreux... (334)

Y a pas de port... (335)

Syntax as well as pronunciation is in question in these examples and even where pronunciation is normal Laforgue willingly introduces elements of popular syntax:

A plis d'ordre domique à lesquels nous rampons... (336)

...Je fais pas de mal... (337)

Et suis pas qu'un grand coeur pour elle... (338)

Alla décrocher une lame,
Qu'on lui avait fait cadeau avec l'étui... (339)

Examples of the rhythm of everyday speech abound in Laforgue's poetry:

Ah! qu'est-ce que je fais, ici, dans cette chambre!
Des vers. Et puis, après? ô sordide limace!
Quoi! la vie est unique, et toi, sous ce scaphandre,
Tu te racontes sans fin, et tu te ressasses!
Seras-tu donc toujours un qui garde la chambre?... (340)

J'aurai un: 'Ah ça, mais, nous avons De Quoi vivre!
'C'était donc sérieux?' (341)

Que fais-tu, mariée là-bas,
En province? (342)

C'est de PHOEBOS! - Ah! pas besoin de commentaires... (343)

...Et concluent aux plus folles phrases
Par des: 'Mon Dieu, n'insistons pas?' (344)

(334) Poésies Complètes.p.71

(335) Ibid.,p.297.

(336) Ibid.,p.170.

(337) Ibid.,p.159.

(338) Ibid.,p.198.

(339) Ibid.,p.107.

(340) Ibid.,p.54.

(341) Ibid.,p.85.

(342) Ibid.,p.100.

(343) Ibid.,p.136.

(344) Ibid.,p.147.

Hé! pas choisi
 D'y naître, et hommes;
 Mais nous y sommes,
 Tenons-nous y! (345)

Te dirai-je au moins que depuis des nuits je pleure,
 Et que mes parents ont bien peur que je n'en meure?... (346)

Non, c'est d'aller faire les fous
 Dans des histoires fraternelles! (347)

'Mais ce beau collier? hein, je l'emporte?
 'Il ne lui sert de rien, pauvre fille...' (348)

'Tu me demandes pourquoi toi et non un autre,
 'Ah, laisse, c'est bien toi et non un autre.
 'J'en suis sûre comme du vide insensé de mon coeur... (349)

Significantly such examples are confined largely to the work of the mature Laforque, that is to say from the Complaintes onwards. There is no question of pastiche of the 'naturalist' poets as there was in the earlier poetry; there the poet's departure from accepted poetic rhetoric took the form of a deliberately popular rather than ordinary register of speech. In so doing he was clearly following the example of Coppée and Richepin:

Rencontrant un jour le Christ,
 Pierrot de loin lui a fait: psitt!
 Venez-ça; et' vous fatalist'?
 Pourriez-vous m' concilier un peu
 Comment l'homme est libre et responsable,
 Si tout c' qui s' fait est prévu d' Dieu?

Et voici que not' Seigneur Jésus,
 Tout pâle, il lui a répondu:
 " Ça ne serait pas de refus,

"Mais... votre conduite accuse
 "Un coeur que le malheur amuse,
 "Et puis vous êtes sans excuse,

"Pire que le méchant soldat
 "Romain qui m' molesta
 "Quand j'étais su' l'Golgotha.

"Dieu, qui voit tout, apprécie
 "Vot' conduite envers le Messie,
 "Que vous lui montez une scie.

"En enfer, et sans façon,
 "Vous irez, triste polisson,
 "Et ce s'ra un' bonne leçon."

Et il lui tourna les talons.
 Mais Pierrot dit: "T'en sais pas long,
 Car t'as déplacé la question." (350)

(345) Ibid., p.182.

(346) Ibid., p.194.

(347) Ibid., p.198.

(348) Ibid., p.201.

(349) Ibid., p.304.

(350) 'Complainte du libre arbitre', Ibid., p.366.

Laforgue eventually opted for a language that was more truly representative of milieu and of his time than the slang of the 'gueux'.

Laforgue has been described as attacking sentence structure and the normal rules of syntax (351), all of which is true. What has not been clearly stated is the relationship between this aspect of his style and his use of the constructions and rhythms of ordinary speech. Dislocation, the suppression of logical connections, unnecessary repetitions (352) are all features of the normal spoken language and they serve precisely the same purpose as such devices in Laforgue's poetry - the intensification of expression and affective value. Reboul, with his usual perspicacity, remarks on this aspect of Laforgue's style (though he too fails to make the comparison with the spoken language): 'Il écrit je palpite d'exil, parce qu'il lui faut juxtaposer les mots exil et palpite, et que d'aucune façon correcte il ne produirait la même impression.' (353)

The variety of language in his verse, the jarring incongruity of serious subject with a light everyday tone are part of the mechanism of that irony and humour which have received more attention than any other aspects of his poetic language. (354)

(351) See P.Reboul, Laforgue, pp.190-92. Ruchon usefully analysed the peculiarities of Laforgue's syntax under such headings as: Suppression des termes de relation, Incidentes, Nouveaux Verbes pronominaux, Construction de l'infinitif après n'importe quel verbe. (Jules Laforgue, pp.173-79).

(352) Ruchon recognised repetition as one of the key techniques of Laforgue's style (in prose at least): 'Y-a-t-il un type de phrase laforguien? Oui, et l'on pourrait l'appeler la phrase à reprise.' (Jules Laforgue, p.164). He did not, however, state that this was a facet of everyday speech.

(353) P.Reboul, Laforgue, p.191.

(354) Particularly from a constant stream of American Ph.D. students, one of whom has actually produced a thesis entitled Yet another study of Laforgue's irony.

(d) Irony, Humour and Cultural Allusion

Laforgue's irony is best thought of in terms of detachment: detachment from emotion and sentiment, detachment from ideas, detachment from life. Paradoxically this detachment is expressed through frequent reference to reality and the use of ordinary speech. He is never tempted by Parnassian 'escapism' or by Mallarmean hermeticism. This paradox is at the hub of his ironic manner. There is a perpetual state of conflict between Laforgue's sentimentality and his intelligence, seen most obviously of course in his treatment of the male-female relationship, in his need for love which is always at loggerheads with his awareness of the biological trap. Moreover, Laforgue, in keeping with many of his generation, was deeply suspicious of the sentimental excesses of the Romantics and consequently reluctant to display his own emotions. His feelings are subjected to analysis and become almost part of a game:

Bref, j'allais me donner d'un 'Je vous aime'
 Quand je m'avisai non sans peine
 Que d'abord je ne me possédais pas bien moi-même. (355)

One is reminded of Flaubert's confession that he used to look at himself weeping in the mirror. (356) Laforgue avoided the manner of the pure lyric poets, which he probably considered to be outmoded in any case. Any return to the Romantic adulation of the moi would have been extremely difficult for one so unsure of the reality of self:

Pauvre, pâle et piètre individu
 Qui ne croit à son Moi qu'à ses moments perdus... (357)

Despite his avid reading of philosophy Laforgue ridiculed the jargon and the over-subtlety of philosophers; he would not allow his individual intelligence to be subjugated by anything, not even the philosophies he most admired. In Salomé one finds a decidedly disrespectful reference to the three fundamental principles of the thought of his beloved Hartmann:

(355) Poésies Complètes, p.284.

(356) In Flaubert's case Romanticism was a permanent temptation against which he used irony and objectivity as weapons.

(357) Poésies Complètes. p.284.

Et d'autres clowns jouèrent l'Idée, la Volonté, l'Inconscient.
 L'Idée bavardait sur tout, la Volonté donnait de la tête contre
 les décors, l'Inconscient faisait de grands gestes mystérieux
 comme un qui en sait au fond plus long qu'il n'en peut dire
 encore. Cette Trinité avait d'ailleurs un seul et même refrain:

Ô Chanaan
 Du bon Néant!
 Néant, la Mecque,
 Des bibliothèques!

Elle obtint un succès de fou rire. (358)

Irony was a way for Laforgue, torn by emotions and ideas, to come to support life by standing at a distance from it, by seeing it was 'un jeu de fantoches éphémères' (359). Irony enabled him to replace the emotional declamation of Le Sanglot with calm and resignation:

Jonglons avec les entités,
 Pierrot s'agite et Tout le mène!
 Laissez faire, laissez passer;
 Laissez passer et laissez faire;
 Le semblable, c'est le contraire. (360)

Laforgue's irony, like any other, depends on 'stating' the opposite to what one knows to be the truth. In his case this always takes the form of turning very real anguish or profound emotion into a cause for genuine if only momentary laughter on the part of the reader - and doubtless the poet too. Sometimes this process depends almost entirely on the expression of a serious predicament in the most ordinary language:

Allons, dernier des poètes,
 Toujours enfermé, tu te rendras malade!
 Vois, il fait beau temps, tout le monde est dehors,
 Va donc acheter deux sous d'ellébore,
 Ça te fera une petite promenade. (361)

In this example one may see an ironic version of the Romantic theme of the introspection and solitude of the poet and his consequent longing for the solace of human company and refreshing nature; the brilliant stroke of inserting the sinister 'ellébore' where it is least expected also makes this poem an ironic version of the Baudelairean theme of self-intoxication.

(358) Salomé, Oeuvres complètes, III, pp.161-62.

(359) Ruchon, Jules Laforgue, p.146. Some of our remarks are based on pp.143-47 of this work.

(360) Poésies Complètes, p.84.

(361) Ibid., p.286.

Occasionally Laforgue's manner becomes almost wholly humorous and the serious undercurrent is largely forgotten:

C'est l'île; Éden entouré d'eau de tous côtés!...
 Je viens de galoper avec mon Astarté
 A l'aube des mers; on fait sécher nos cavales.
 Des veuves de Titans délaçant nos sandales,
 Eventent nos tresses rousses, et je reprends
 Mon Sceptre tout écaillé d'émaux effarants!
 On est gai, ce matin. Depuis une semaine
 Ces lents brouillards plongeaient mes sujets dans la peine,
 Tout soupirants après un beau jour de soleil
 Pour qu'on prit la photographie de Mon Orteil...

Ma mie a deux yeux diaphanes...
 Sa chair est lumineuse et sent la neige, exprès
 Pour que mon front pesant y soit toujours as frais...
 Bref, c'est au bas mot, une femme accomplie... (362)

The humour here depends on a mixture of parody, improbability, and the unexpected introduction of the modern and everyday. The Eldorado theme of the Romantics and of Baudelaire, the mythical setting and plastic images of the Parnasse are parodied - as is, unwittingly, the dream world soon to become a feature of the poetry of the Symbolists. The improbability of the poet's dream is humorous in its very exaggeration: his total power and wealth. The acts of subservience made to a Nero or to a despotic pope are given a striking modern equivalent in the photographing of the poet's big toe. Even the theme of simple love which the poet himself contrasts with the earlier dream of Neronian tyranny is not intended seriously but is yet another stock literary theme to be parodied by the use of hyper-practical and everyday language: 'Sa chair,...sent la neige, exprès pour que mon front pesant soit toujours au frais....Bref, c'est, au bas mot, une femme accomplie...'

Cultural allusion is, in Laforgue's poetry as in Corbière's, another device which contributes towards irony and humour. References to literature, religion, philosophy and science abound in Laforgue's poetry from the Complaintes up to the Fleurs but play a much smaller part in the Derniers Vers where the poet comes closest to lyricism. Human learning is treated as an object of fun, though for the serious reason that given the shortness of human life and Man's impotence before the dark powers of the cosmos it can

only be vanity. Examples of cultural allusion have already just been quoted in the passage from Salomé and in the lines where the poet plans to purchase 'deux sous d'ellébore'. The poet's approach is almost always to deflate intellectual pomposity by juxtaposing such allusions, as in the examples referred to, with the most mundane and prosaic utterances:

Ô Robe de Maïa, ô Jupe de Maman... (363)

Je rêvais de prêcher la fin, nom d'un Bouddha! (364)

-Vie ou Néant! choisir. Ah! quelle discipline!
Que n'est-il un Eden entre ces deux usines? (365)

Disloque tes pudeurs, à bas les lignes!
En costume blanc, je ferai le cygne,
Après nous le Déluge, ô ma Leda! (366)

Laforgue thus reflected in his poetry the eclectic spirit of modern Man, the mingling of new ideas with reminiscences of traditional culture, the genuine desire for moral and intellectual certainty disguised by cynicism and humour. Only Corbière before him, at least in modern times, had attempted the same blend of wit, cultural allusion and half-quotation with the material of lyric poetry - emotional and spiritual questioning. Laforgue, like Corbière, is 'cocasse' but erudite and full of word-play.

(e) Versification

The whole question of the versification of Laforgue's poetry was comprehensively examined by Ruchon; only a few general remarks need be made here.

Laforgue began his career by writing conventional alexandrines. There is not a single significant metrical experiment in the whole of the Sanglot. The poet soon realised that there was an incongruity between his decidedly modern and ironic picture of the world and a verse-form which had been found

(363) Ibid., p.33.

(364) Ibid., p.32.

(365) Ibid., p.42.

(366) Ibid., p.83.

suitable by Racine and the Romantics - in other words a form based on declamation and self-assurance. The fact that Baudelaire before him and Valéry after him were able to use the alexandrine with a minimum of declamation does not affect Laforgue's basic disquiet. In any event he too was never to relinquish entirely the alexandrine, not even in the Derniers Vers where one finds many twelve-syllable lines. His quest for a new poetic medium was reflected in the letter to Henry in November 1881 in which he claimed he was becoming 'kahnesque et mallarméen'. This last statement is not in any way to be interpreted literally. We have already suggested that this was nothing other than a clever way of saying he was trying to find an alternative to discursive rhetoric. Any increased suggestiveness in the poetry contemporary with this letter would seem to stem rather from the example of Verlaine. The poet was, however, obviously set on experiment. This he undertook in the Complaintes. The alexandrine was still the commonest line but few poems were written entirely in alexandrines; he preferred to use more than one metre in a poem. There is a great variety of stanza structure. Similarly the poet seems to employ almost every combination of coupes. He frequently rhymes for the ear but not for the eye. All these innovations justify the Complaintes and the Fleurs de Bonne Volonté being classified as vers libérés. One may suggest, however, that the lasting positive lessons of these collections were not metrical at all but connected with poetic tone - the development of the ironic manner, the use of popular songs and the considerable use made of the vocabulary, images and rhythms of everyday speech. It cannot be said that Laforgue's vers libres grew out of his vers libérés but rather as a result of the poet's realisation that even a liberated regular metre was too confining. In the 'Complainte du soir des comices agricoles' we see him struggling to fit what is really a fifteen syllable line into a poem using, partly, alexandrines:

Deux royaux cors de chasse ont encore un duo
 Aux échos
 Quelques fusees reniflent s'étouffer là-haut!

Even the third line quoted here might not have required syntactical innovation had the poet not been confined to twelve syllables. Kahn was right when he said of the vers libre: 'Laforgue s'inquiétait de donner la sensation même, la vérité plus stricte, plus lachée ... avec le plus d'acuité possible et le plus d'accent personnel, comme parlé'. (367) He contrasted this attitude with his own, which was primarily concerned with musicality and innovation in stanza constructions. Free verse for Laforgue was an unbridled means of expression; ironically this often does not prevent his verse from being more 'melodious' than Kahn's! Laforgue's translations of the blunt-speaking Whitman offered just such an example of the expressive use of free verse and one from which he soon profited in the Derniers Vers:

C'est moi, femme, je vois mon chemin;
Je suis austère, âpre, immense inébranlable, mais je t'aime;
Allons, je ne blesse pas plus qu'il ne faut,
Je verse de l'essence qui engendrera des garçons et des
filles dignes de ces États-Unis; j'y vais d'un muscle
rude et attentionné.

(368)

Étoile crucifiée, vendue, par des traîtres,
Étoile palpitante sur un pays de mort, héroïque pays...
Aussi sûrement que le vaisseau de tout, la Terre elle-même,
Produit d'un incendie de mort et du tumultueux chaos,
Se dégageant de ses spasmes de rage et de ses déjections...

(369)

The determining of the length of a line by the unit of thought, the use of repetition and alliteration and, in the second example, a tendency to dispense with verbs, were all to be feature of the free verse employed in the Derniers Vers.

What then in conclusion, lies behind Laforgue's eventual adoption of free verse? It satisfied his desire for originality without hampering lyricism as the experiments in the Complaintes had sometimes done. It conformed with Laforgue's aesthetic of the ephemeral; it was the perfect instrument for evoking the great variety of 'rhythms' inherent in the experiences of sensation and of the inner consciousness and of the interaction between the two. By being so well suited to this task free verse became an aid to analysis, to the

(367) Preface to Kahn's Premiers Poèmes.

(368) Reproduced in Ramsey, Jules Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance, p.152.

(369) Ibid., p.153. Professor Ireson thinks that Laforgue's translations of Whitman had no influence on his development of the vers libre at all (See L'Oeuvre poétique de Gustave Kahn, p.86). But the circumstantial evidence alone is too great to warrant such an assumption.

accuracy of expression with which he had been so preoccupied. Most important of all free verse enabled him, through an impressionistic style, to create patterns of relation, systems of echo and recapitulation, that made possible the construction of synthetic harmonies. Dujardin, like Kahn, may have been right when he said: 'Tandis que je parlais expression musicale, Laforgue répondait expression psychologique' (370), but true musicality in poetry lies in the creation of an equivalence of otherwise inexpressible experience. This Laforgue achieved.

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(f) Impressionism

Laforgue's most significant experiments in versification were thus directed towards the expression of his experience in all its transience and immediacy which called for a form of poetic impressionism. (371) Not only would impressionism be the best expressive medium available to him it was also likely to stir the reader from the drowsiness of educated complacency, to see and feel afresh and thus to respond to the experience the poet wished to formulate. --It was this aspect of Impressionist painting which appealed to him almost as much as any other: 'Il aimait, dans les toiles des Impressionnistes, qu'elles fussent aiguës et piquassent l'homme assoupi.' (372) This lay behind his exposition of an aesthetic based on 'la distraction, le nouveau, la série des minutieux et subtils coups de fouet, le mouvement'. (373) Poetry in conformity with such an aesthetic would of necessity dispense with the rational and logical processes of discursive speech in the interests of directness. One modern critic has interpreted Laforgue's innovations in just such a light: 'Laforgue, détruisant l'armature qui coordonne la vie intérieure et le monde extérieur, tente de traduire l'emotion telle qu'il l'a ressentie avec l'incohérence du fait vécu.' (374) This whole attitude is linked to the most significant form of Laforgue's primitivism: the quest for a new vision unprejudiced by the

(370) Quoted in M.-J. Durry, Jules Laforgue, p.143.

(371) c.f. C.A. Hackett, An Anthology of modern French Poetry, p.226.

(372) P. Reboul, Laforgue, p.74.

(373) Mélanges posthumes, p.176.

(374) D.Grojnowski, 'La Poétique de Laforgue', p.257. Ruchon had seen parallels between Symbolism and Impressionism in this attitude to the nature of reality. (Jules Laforgue, p.217).

assumptions of education and centuries of 'official' art: 'L'Impressionniste est un peintre...qui...oubliant les tableaux amassés par les siècles dans les musées, oubliant l'éducation... à force de vivre et de voir franchement et primitivement...est parvenu à se refaire un oeil naturel...à peindre naïvement.' (375) In a letter^{to} Klinger of June 1883 he saw his own training as an art critic as something that could not be learnt from books and museums but 'en cherchant à voir clair dans la nature en regardant...comme un homme préhistorique, l'eau du Rhin, les ciels, les prairies, les foules, et les rues...' (376) Laforgue felt that if artists would rid themselves of inherited assumptions the public would soon learn to recognise true art: 'Plus de beau officiel, le public sans guide apprendra à voir par lui-même et ira naturellement aux peintres qui l'intéressent d'une façon moderne, vivante...' (377) His approach to art is thus anti-intellectual. He reproached Cros for being 'trop compliqué' and Mallarmé for making his poetry 'raisonné, consciente'. One of his most famous lines takes the form of an anti-intellectual battle-cry:

Aux armes citoyens! Il n'y a plus de raison (378) --

The discovery of the new form of poetry, beginning with the Complaintes and leading remarkably quickly to the Derniers Vers, was made via Laforgue's increasing regard for Impressionist painting of which he made a sustained study at the very period of his poetic reorientation. Impressionism as an art-form had the great advantage of being in keeping with what he could accept as the true state of the human condition; the artist, to reflect this condition, had to apply his skill to the task of formulating on canvas the experience of a single ephemeral moment. This seemingly unserious activity in no way made the Impressionist the inferior of his predecessors, rather it

(375) Mélanges posthumes, p.134.

(376) Oeuvres Complètes, V, p.30.

(377) Mélanges posthumes, p.144.

(378) 'Simple Agonie'

Elsewhere he made his position quite explicit: 'Aujourd'hui, tout préconiser...la culture excessive... de la raison, de la logique, de la conscience. La culture bénie de l'avenir est la déculture, la mise en jachère. Nous allons à la dessication: squelettes de cuir, à lunettes, rationalistes anatomiques. Retournons...vers...l'Inconscient.' (Éd. de la Connaissance, II, p.64).

was an assertion of the artist's importance, for he was better equipped to know this kind of truth than anyone else. Thus Laforgue found a way of reconciling determinism with creative individuality, a solution which provided him with the impetus to write his poetry.

As early as December 1880 he had been thinking in terms of the artist's own individual sensation of the world; he hoped to evoke this same sensation in a series of essays on great painters which he was never to write.(379) The word 'sensation' is deliberate and accords completely with his references to the empirical aesthetic of the Complaintes (380) : the whole of Laforgue's art is based on feeling and experienced reality. He seems to have been peculiarly sensitive to physical sensations, easily bewildered by movement, colour and light. The rich world of sensation in his poetry, examined above, is based on this sensitivity which is apparent in his other writings:

Des valets, des lumières, de larges escaliers blancs, des glaces. - Des glaces, de larges escaliers blancs, des lumières, des valets. Je n'ai pas encore eu un moment pour réfléchir.
(381)

Le sifflet des interminables trains de marchandises qui filent le long du Rhin me transperce de désespoir de la tête aux pieds.
(382)

Un soir de printemps sur un banc, grands boulevards, près des Variétés. Un café ruisselant de gaz. Une cocotte toute en rouge allant de bock en bock...
(383)

Des sensations infinitésimales le son du trop (sic) d'un certain cheval sur un certain pavé de la place en province - Jadis - tout jadis il se le rappelait, s'en martellant le cerveau. Et ce trot disait le train-train grêle de la vie et des existences.
(384)

As may be seen in the last example cited Laforgue saw an almost Proustian correlation between sensation, emotion and remembered experience. His impressionism, probably from the very start, contained within itself the

(379) Lettres à un ami, p.22.

(380) Oeuvres Complètes, V, p.131.

(381) Oeuvres Complètes, IV, p.26.

(382) Oeuvres Complètes, V, p.142.

(383) Mélanges posthumes, p.32.

(384) Unpublished fragment (of a novel?) brought to light by Debauxe in 'A propos des manuscrits de Jules Laforgue'. p.666.

elements of a synthetic art, the nature of which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Impressionism in Laforgue's poetry takes the form of the seemingly swift and unordered notation of sensations just as it did in Rimbaud or Verlaine (though an examination of the successive stages of the evolution of his poems in manuscript shows just how much careful artistic effort went into this apparent immediacy and that he no more than his predecessors was a practitioner of automatic writing!) or of the chain of experiences and thoughts provoked by a particular sensation, or of the creation of atmosphere through the accumulation of sensations. Even in the poems written before the Complaintes there are occasional signs of these tendencies:

Il doit être minuit. Minuit moins cinq. On dort...
(385)

Képi, pantalon bleu, veston court, collet droit...
(386)

Je contemple mon feu. J'étouffe un bâillement.
Le vent pleure. La pluie à ma vitre ruiselle.
Un piano voisin joue une ritournelle.
Comme la vie est triste et coule lentement.
Je songe à notre Terre, atome d'un moment... (387)

Tout poudroie au soleil, l'air sent bon le printemps.
Les femmes vont au Bois sous leurs ombrelles claires.
Chien, bourgeois et voyous, chacun a ses affaires.
Tout marche. Les chevaux de fiacre 'ont vingt ans'...
(388)

Usually in these early poems the poet cannot long sustain this kind of writing and returns to traditional rhetoric. After his familiarity with pictorial Impressionism he felt able to construct whole poems based on impressions:

Ah! la belle pleine Lune,
Grosse comme une fortune!

La retraite sonne au loin,
Un passant, monsieur l'adjoint;

Un clavecin joue en face,
Un chat traverse la place:

(385) Poésies Complètes (Pla), p.414.

(386) Ibid., p.382.

(387) Ibid., p.409.

(388) Ibid., p.406.

La province qui s'endort!
Plaquant un dernier accord,

Le piano clôt sa fenêtre.
Quelle heure peut-il bien être?

Calme Lune, quel exil!
Faut-il dire: ainsi soit-il?

Lune, ô dilettante Lune,
A tous les climats commune,

Tu vis hier le Missouri,
Et les remparts de Paris,

Les fiords bleus de la Norvège,
Les pôles, les mers que sais-je?

Lune heureuse! ainsi tu vois,
A cette heure, le convoi

De son voyage de noce! ,
Ils sont partis pour L'Ecosse.

Quel panneau, si, cet hiver,
Elle eût pris au mot mes vers!

Lune, vagabonde Lune,
Faisons cause et moeurs communes?
Ô riches nuits! je me meurs,
Le province dans le coeur!

Et la lune a, bonne vieille,
De coton dans les oreilles.

(389)

One of Laforgue's greatest tours de force of this genre is the celebrated 'Complainte variations sur le mot "falot, falotte"' which consists entirely of the sensations and thoughts of, in all probability, a coach ride at night, the rhythm of which is itself brilliantly conveyed by the trotting regularity of the leitmotiv 'falot, falotte'; the inexorable progress of the poet's journey takes in an ever-changing sequence of sights and sounds and thoughts upon the nightly round of human activities:

Falot, falotte!
Sous l'aigre averse qui clapote.
Un chien aboie aux feux-follets,
Et puis se noie, taiaut, taiaut!
La Lune, voyant ces ballets,
Rit à Pierrot!
Falot! falot!

Falot, falotte!
Un train perdu, dans la nuit, stoppe
Par les avalanches bloqué;
Il siffle au loin! et les petriots
Croient ouïr les méchants hoquets
D'un grand crapaud!
Falot, falot!...

Falot, falotte!
 Sous sa lanterne qui tremblotte,
 Le fermier dans son potager
 S'en vient cueillir des escargots,
 Et c'est une étoile au berger
 Revant là-haut!
 Falot, falot!...

Falot, falotte!
 Un chiffonnier va sous sa hotte;
 Un réverbère près d'un mur
 Où se cogne un vague soulaud,
 Qui l'embrasse comme un pur,
 Avec des mots!
 Falot, falot!...

(390)

'Complainte des Pianos qu'on entend dans les quartiers aisés' is a good example of the basic impressionistic technique of the Complaintes which could perhaps best be described as kaleidoscopic. Sounds, as was suggested in the section devoted to sensation in Laforgue's poetry, are perhaps the most important element in the impressions upon which he draws. Here he brings into his verse the sound of the street, the cries, the songs of the children and the young girls and, above all, those recurring pianos. His use of sound may be exactly paralleled with the use of colour and light in contemporary paintings of street scenes - a technique characterised by the variety and fluctuation of sense impressions. This poem is also fine example of Laforgue's symbolic use of reality, his attachment to epitome. The pianos, the young girls taking an evening stroll, the boarding schools, the suburban homes epitomise first of all an existence of bourgeois stability, free from intellectual questioning and moral anguish, in which he can have no share and which is vaguely reminiscent of the happiness evoked in the early unpublished poem 'Bouffée de printemps' from which the poet was likewise excluded:

Seul, j'erre à travers tout, la lèvre appesantie
 Comme d'une nausée immense de la vie. (391)

But the distaste for life - as it is presented here - is stronger in the Complainte than the idea of exclusion, so that the same aspects of reality

(390) Ibid., pp.111-112.

(391) Ibid., p.406.

epitomise not just a social milieu to which the poet cannot belong but everything that was routine, mechanical and predetermined in life in general. The metronome -regulated piano playing 'cette éternelle valse de Chopin usée comme l'amour'(392) is even more representative of the 'train-train grêle de la vie et des existences' than the trotting horse in the unpublished fragment quoted a moment ago. The various elements in the poem although kaleidoscopic in effect are carefully ordered and balanced, though not at this stage integrated into a full synthesis. The structure of the poem depends on a three-part pattern of the activities of the street, the poet's reflections and the girls' singing which is repeated five times. The tonal balance of the poem is achieved by an unabrasive mingling of slang and everyday speech with standard poetic rhetoric, and of gentle irony with a deep despair. Similarly the moral 'purpose' of the poem is achieved through a balance, this time between the superficial attractions of life-for a woman's existence is at least 'pavoise d'estime et de chiffons' - and the underlying tragedy of existence dictated by 'exactes ritournelles', the demands of the Unconscious against which the individual is powerless and which condemns the young girls to a life of 'linges' and 'repas'.

A less complicated impressionistic piece is to be found in the Fleurs de Bonne Volonté but it was a poem which Laforgue was, by all accounts reluctant to discard (393) :

Oh! oh! le temps se gâte,
L'orage n'est pas loin,
Voilà que l'on se hâte
De rentrer les fous!...
L'abcès perce!
Vl'à l'averse!
O grabuges
Des déluges!...

Oh! ces ribambelles
D'ombrelles!...

Oh! cett' Nature
En déconfiture!...

- (392) Mélanges posthumes, p.30. Laforgue had himself remarked on his view of life as a kaleidoscope, with particular emphasis on its drearier aspects. (Oeuvres Complètes, IV, p.157).
- (393) J.L. Debauxe, Laforgue en son temps, p.51.

Sur ma fenêtre,
 Un fuchsia
 A l'air paria,
 Se sent renaître...

(394)

The poet was rightly pleased with this masterpiece of concision and short telling images. Impressionism plays a vital part in the Derniers Vers but there it is one component in a poetic synthesis, so that in 'Solo de lune', for example, the poet's impressions of his night journey 'sur l'impériale de la diligence' are more closely integrated with his total sensibility and mental processes. Impressions drawn from the workings of the consciousness were already a feature of Laforgue's poetic universe at the time of writing the Complaintes, as may be seen in the 'Falot, falotte' poem. Such experiences are vividly evoked in another poem in the same collection:

Instincts-levants souriant par les fentes,
 Méditations un doigt à la tempe,
 Souvenirs clignotant comme des lampes...

(395)

Such a reflection leads, of course, to the sensitive issue of the relationship between Laforgue's impressionism - particularly his mental impressionism - and his theories regarding the Unconscious. A.G. Lehmann has pointed to the deficiencies and inconsistencies of Laforgue's application of the theory of the Unconscious to the realm of art and aesthetics - not without considerable justification.(396) However, he renders his argument a little misleading by paying Laforgue an unmerited compliment, that the poet did not generally confuse the Unconscious as a metaphysical principle with the Unconscious as a psychological entity, that he saw it clearly in the former sense. To Laforgue's preoccupation with a metaphysical Unconscious he attributed the shortcomings of his arguments. The Unconscious is in a constant state of evolution towards consciousness, the artist who helps in this process cannot allow himself to be

(394) 'Aquarelle en cinq minutes', Poésies Complètes, p.200.

(395) 'Complainte du pauvre Chevalier-Errant', Ibid., p.73. Without doubt the poem which most fully exploits the stream of consciousness technique is 'Solo de lune'.

(396) The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, pp.115-20.

hindered by anything static - rules, conventions. Works of art must of necessity decrease in value with the passing of time and eventually disappear from circulation. Lehmann makes the telling remark that had Laforgue really believed all this to the letter then he would logically have held his own Hamlet to be superior to Shakespeare's, which is manifestly not the case, as may be deduced from the poet's many references to Shakespeare's play. (But Laforgue was not entirely inconsistent, for in writing his own Hamlet he demonstrated his need to personalise and modernise the Shakespearian archetype. In this respect he was repeating the same process carried out by Shakespeare himself, though the latter's source was insufficiently known to be regarded as an archetype.) For Laforgue the real value of the Unconscious in art is, despite Lehmann's claim, as a psychological entity. There was confusion in Laforgue's mind just as there seems to have been, to a lesser extent, in Hartmann's. There is little doubt that in some of his most important utterances Laforgue uses the concept of the Unconscious to refer to sensation and the non-rational mind:

'L'Afrique intérieure' de notre inconscient domaine...(397)

Il est un domaine qui, on le sait, vient d'ouvrir à la science
les forêts vierges de la vie, c'est l'atmosphère occulte de
l'être, l'inconscience.... (398)

Répéter les instincts avec autant que possible absence de calcul,
de volonté, de peur de les faire dévier de leur nature, de les
influencer. (399)

The same respect for the non-rational, which for an artist matters more than his opinions as to its origins, is suggested in Hartmann's own book:

l'homme de génie reçoit ses impressions ou plutôt les subit
sans les avoir voulues... (400)

L'invention et la réalisation du Beau dérivent de processus
inconscients... (401)

(397) Entretiens politiques et littéraires, IV, 1892, p.49.

(398) Mélanges posthumes, p.201.

(399) Entretiens politiques et littéraires, IV, p.49.

(400) Philosophie de l'Inconscient, (Nolen's translation), I, p.307.

(401) *Ibid.*, p.321. Lehmann, himself, quotes both extracts.

Laforgue's application of the Unconscious to aesthetics did bring inconsistencies in its wake but what mattered most was its effect on Laforgue's poetic practice; for him it justified innovation, the discarding of convention and it presented an alternative to intellectualism and outright determinism. Most important of all it opened a whole new realm of experience for the poet's exploration and constituted another step towards a poetry of the total sensibility as opposed to the intellect alone. In practice Laforgue was no less well aware than Lehmann that in 'spying out' sensations one necessarily transforms them. Nowhere in Laforgue's work do we find the excesses of instrumentisme, or even less of sustained onomatopoeia. Susanne Langer, whose work appeared too late to influence Lehmann's book, has shown that art is concerned with finding equivalents of sensation and emotion not with naïve imitation. This Laforgue did, whatever may have been wrong with his poetic theory.

This utilisation of non-rational experience brought Laforgue into the same camp as all the other great poets of contemporary reality discussed in this thesis. He himself had appreciated this aspect of Rimbaud's work. Poullliart has spoken of the oscillation between the conscious and subconscious realism of experience as one of the hallmarks of Laforgue's poetry.(402) Certainly one finds the use of a spontaneously suggested image giving rise to a series of associations which becomes the framework of the images in a poem:

.....une paire de guêtres
 Tachant de deux mals blancs ce glabre paysage.
 Un couchant mal bâti suppurant du livide;
 Le coin d'une buanderie aux tuiles sales;
 En plein, le Val-de-Grâce, comme un qui préside;
 Cinq arbres en proie à de mesquines rafales
 Qui marbrent ce ciel cru de bandages livides. (403)

It would be interesting to know, though not perhaps ultimately important, which of the blood, pus and bandages images was the start of the series, also what experience may lie at the origin of the initial image. Jean-Pierre Richard would find Laforgue a worthy object of study. If anything

(402) Le Romantisme, III, p.233; c.f. P. Reboul, Laforgue, p.192.

(403) 'Complainte d'un autre dimanche'.

Laforque was to indulge even more willingly in free association and the use 'spontaneous' images in the Derniers Vers than in the earlier collections; to this extent, as we have seen, Kahn and later commentators were justified in talking of the psychological motivation for his vers libre which was a tool of expression rather than pure 'musicality'. (404)

(g) Synthesis

The desire to achieve a kind of synthesis, on a fairly superficial level, is apparent in one of the most distinctively Laforquian procedures: the coining of neologisms based on combinations of existing words. This synthesis has as its aim the expression of two, or more, ideas with the maximum amount of concision: usually it is a form of ironic juxtaposition taken to the ultimate extreme - the actual interlocking of words: 'hontes sangsuelles', 'violuptés', 'éternullité'. However, this technique is primarily of interest as a symptom of a synthetising approach; poetic synthesis in Laforque's case as in those of most of the other major poets treated in this thesis is above-all-a fusion of subject, and object, of the poet's thoughts and feelings with the reality around him, of form and 'content'. It is in this light that one should regard his frequent references to dream: 'Je rêve de la poésie qui ne dise rien mais qui soit les bouts de rêveries sans suite' (405); 'Une poésie ne doit pas être une description exacte...mais noyée de rêve' (406); poetry should be a 'divagation d'images comme dans le rêve et l'extase inconsciente' (407); 'Je songe à une poésie qui serait de la psychologie dans une forme de rêve'. (408)

(404) Jean Péres in his 'Anticipations des principes de la psycho-analyse dans l'oeuvre d'un poète français' (in the respected professional review Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique) supported our view that Laforque was an innovator in the field of psychology and that his interest in the Unconscious is to be seen primarily in this light. Péres saw several anticipations of Freudian psycho-analysis in Laforque's work: the importance of childhood experience and the continuation of its effects into adult life, nostalgia for the pre-natal condition, a sketch of the oedipus complex and a general awareness of the role of the subconscious life of the mind. He drew most of his examples from Hamlet.

(405) Letter to Madame Mullezer of July, 1882.

(406) Letter to Marie Laforque, May 1883.

(407) Mélanges posthumes, p.139.

(408) Oeuvres Complètes, IV, p.66.

Psychology in the form of a dream is a vague formula but which has rightly been seen as Laforgue's way of explaining his desire to 'express the total apprehension of his sensibility: his total awareness, both physically and intellectually, of the world in which he lived, as well as the feeling to which this understanding gave rise'. (409) The emphasis on 'reve' presupposes a greatly reduced place for rational discourse in poetry, for ideas per se. T.S. Eliot, as early as 1930, had described the Laforguean synthesis, but gave perhaps too much importance to thought and not enough to sensation: 'the pattern is given by what goes on within the mind, rather than by the exterior events which provoke the mental activity and play of thought and feeling'. (410) The reference to dream is also a reminder that one element of the synthesis would be the 'Afrique intérieure', the poet's unconscious domain; in allowing this free play to the meanderings of his mind he was anticipating the 'honesty' of the 'stream of consciousness' novelists. In the Derniers Vers, the apparent freedom with which associations and feelings were woven together without the obvious interference of logic was the fruition of all the verbal experiment of the earlier collections.

A number of factors were doubtless involved in Laforgue's reaching the final achievement of the Derniers Vers: the availability, in a single volume, of poetry by Verlaine, Mallarmé and Rimbaud in the first issue of La Vogue, the possibility that he had read a manuscript copy of the Illuminations, the translation of the poems by Whitman, the crucial discussions with Kahn in June 1886 in which he talked of the possibility of free-verse poetry whose form would be determined not by preconception or imposition but which would be derived naturally from the subject itself (411), the revival of his musical interests through his meeting with Dujardin and Wyzewa. All these revelations were a confirmation of the ideas upon which he had been meditating since at least the beginning of 1881:

(409) Collie and L'Heureux edition of Derniers Vers, p.6.

(410) Criterion, January, 1930; the remark applies also to Donne and Corbière. Quoted in H. Peyre, 'Laforgue among the Symbolists', p.41.

(411) Lettres à un ami, p.192 and p.221.

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Je songe à une poésie qui serait de la psychologie dans une forme de rêve, avec des fleurs, de vent, d'inextricables symphonies avec une phrase (un sujet) mélodique dont le dessin reparaît de temps en temps. (412)

and which he saw in Impressionist painting:

...tout est obtenu par mille touches menues dansantes en tout sens comme des pailles de couleurs - en concurrence vitale pour l'impression d'ensemble. Plus de mélodie isolée, le tout est une symphonie qui est la vie vivante et vibrante, comme 'les voix de la forêt' des théories de Wagner.... (413)

The Laforguan synthesis is first of all a fusion of themes and experiences, juxtaposed like dashes of colour in an Impressionist painting rather than joined through logical interrelationships; primarily it is the dynamism, the authenticity of the 'subject' that provides the coherence of the poem. For Laforgue there was doubtless some metaphysical intuition that authenticity in art would automatically bring a degree of harmony as it would be a reflection of the cosmic search for harmonious union within the Unconscious:

L'Inconscient, loi du monde, est la grande voix mélodique, résultante de la symphonie des consciences de races et d'individus. (414)

Formal harmony there is in Laforgue just as there is in Impressionist painting; it is the subtle choice and arrangement of mental, emotional and physical sensations executed in such a way as to interfere as little as possible with the lyrical qualities of the subject. The Mallarméan synthesis was a beautifully constructed spider's web, a pattern drawn in on itself through a multitude of relationships. The Laforguan synthesis is also indivisible but it looks outward on to reality and has the same flowing characteristics as the stream of consciousness. Like real experience the Laforguan synthesis has points de repère in the form of recurring words and feelings - the musical analogy to

(412) Oeuvres complètes, IV, p.66.

(413) Mélanges posthumes, p.137.

(414) Ibid., pp.137-38.

which Laforgue had referred in the letter to Henry - but this technique in common with the synthesis in general is not a reproduction of reality it is a carefully composed expressive poetic equivalent, the fruit of years of labour and constant rewriting.

An examination of 'L'Hiver qui vient' may provide some indication of our interpretation of Laforgue's synthetic poetry in practice. This poem is one of the richest in the Derniers Vers which is doubtless a consequence of its being an introduction to, and a résumé of, the poems that follow. Most of the themes of the Derniers Vers are present in it: ironical self-analysis, the desire for an intellectual certainty that the poet knows to be impossible, the detached Flaubertian observation of everyday life as the self-deceiving bourgeois feels able to lead it, the poet's anguish at being set apart from other men even though he recognises the futility of their lives, the poet's vision of the meaninglessness of life, love and procreation which is made apparent in the autumnal death of the sun, itself a symbol of the ultimate death of all-creatures. This is, in fact, the whole of Laforgue's poetic universe seen within the microcosm of a single poem. These same themes had previously been expressed in the Sullyesque rhetoric of the Sanglot or in the aggressively ironic and over-original Complaintes; now they were to be formulated in a new synthetic lyricism. Out of what realms of experience is this synthesis constructed?

On one level the reader is presented with a nature poem. The cycle of the seasons and the consequent physical changes wrought in nature - together, of course, with the philosophical reflections this process evokes - has been a theme of European poets since classical times. Here the summer landscape is shown as invaded by the autumn rains which rust the trees and destroy the gossamer webs of the spiders; the once green leaves have turned brown and fallen to the damp ground to be trodden underfoot like so much compost; the autumn wind blows more leaves into the pond and the clouds across the sky; the expiring sun casts its rays on the yellowing broom. No less traditional,

from a thematic point of view is the transition from the natural to the pastoral; 'travaux...agricoles', 'Adieu vendanges, et adieu tous les paniers...'. But Laforgue's humanisation of nature extends far beyond the pastoral to something very nearly new in French poetry; modern, urban nature. It is modernity which sets the whole tone of the poem. Indeed it is not trees at all which are mentioned as the first aspects of the landscape to be swathed in wind and rain but 'toutes mes cheminées!...D'usines...'. It is not grand nature nor even bucolic delights from which the lovers find themselves exiled by the weather, but the urbanised nature of public parks; 'tous les bancs sont mouillés...'. The Laforguean synthesis is not a carefully cut gem isolated from time but is firmly rooted in contemporary reality; 'des spectacles agricoles', 'un crâchet d'estaminet', 'ornières des chars...montant en... rails', 'ambulances pour les soldats loin de France', 'les fils télégraphiques des grandes routes', 'lainages, caoutchoucs, pharmacie', 'toitures des faubourgs, lampes, estampes, thé, petits-fours', 'mystère hebdomadaire des statistiques sanitaires dans les journaux', Nature and modernity, and the invasion of the former by the latter, thus constitute the major source of the sense impressions and plastic images of the poem, but there are many other elements in the synthesis, even on a thematic level.

Cultural allusion, more discreet than in the earlier poetry, is of great importance. There are references to, or reminiscences of, literature, art, mythology and history. The only writer to whom clear reference is made in the text is Cervantes, in the image 'don quichottesques rails' but only slightly less obvious is an indirect reference to Flaubert in 'spectacles agricoles'. There may be some (probably unconscious) references to Huysmans's En Ménage.

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(415) See below.

The whole picture of autumn may be regarded as an ironical recollection of Romantic poems of autumn. There is, however, one French poet who has influenced 'L'Hiver qui vient' in a detailed way and that is Baudelaire. As we remarked earlier in this thesis (416) 'L'Hiver qui vient' is to some extent a rewriting of 'Chant d'automne'. As this fact has not been stressed by any of the critics it may be worth digressing for a moment to examine the similarities. Baudelaire's poem, like Laforgue's, has three related themes: autumn, death and love. In both poems love (417) is seen as insignificant before the certainty of death manifest in the turning of the seasons. The presence of death is quite clearly evoked in both poems and not left to conjecture; in Laforgue through the imagery of sunset: 'il gît là, comme une glande arrachée', in Baudelaire through a series of images - the cold shadows, the scaffold, the coffin - and eventually through explicit statement: 'La tombe attend; elle est avide!' More important still are parallels in the actual imagery used. Autumn is seen as a fading of light in both poems, and its predominant colour is yellow (perhaps a common ancestor in Sainte-Beuve here?). The poet in 'L'Hiver qui vient' surely acknowledges in 'échos de cognées' - the chopping of firewood - his debt to the extended image of Baudelaire:

J'entends déjà tomber avec des chocs funèbres
 Les bois retentissant sur le pavé des cours...
 J'écoute en frémissant chaque bûche qui tombe;
 L'échafaud qu'on bâtit n'a pas d'écho plus sourd...

The chopping of wood in gardens and courtyards is a reminder of a further fundamental similarity between the two poems; the approach of autumn is viewed by a city-dweller. Just as 'échos des cognées' may be regarded as a condensed version of the Baudelairean images so may 'blocus sentimental', in part at least, be seen as a reminiscence of:

Mon coeur ne sera plus qu'un bloc rouge et glacé.

(416) Part ~~One~~, Chapter ~~One~~.

(417) The theme of love and its ultimate futility is admittedly clearer in other poems in the Derniers Vers; recollections of Baudelaire are not limited to 'L'Hiver qui vient'. The close interrelationship of the poems in the collection should also be borne in mind. It is interesting to see a development of Baudelaire's polar images in Derniers Vers, IV.

One may well imagine the sound 'bloc' and the idea of lack of emotional stimulus leading, through association, to Laforgue's brilliant pun. Even an unconscious link between Baudelaire's 'soleil rayonnant sur la mer' and Laforgue's more ironical 'balcons des grèves devant l'océan de toitures des faubourgs' is not improbable. One could point to other details, perhaps none more striking than the fact that in both poems autumn is equated with sunset; the reader accepts the entirely unwarranted but poetically powerful suggestion that the sun does not rise in autumn! This is symbolic not logical reasoning. Laforgue's correspondence confirms his appreciation of Baudelaire as a poet of autumn: 'Mais comme il a compris l'automne...' (418) What he appreciated most was doubtless the older poet's realisation of the psychological and physical impact of autumn upon an acute sensibility like his own:

Tout l'hiver va rentrer dans mon être: colère,
Haine, frissons, horreur...(419)

but he was to suggest this complex état d'âme without recourse to a discursive statement of this kind.

The other cultural allusions are relatively few in number but all remarkably evocative: the 'paniers Watteau' which sum up the whole pastoral ideal of eighteenth-century art; the historical reference to the 'blocus' which justifies a whole series of military images; the superbly concise reference to the Midas legend in the one word 'Pactoles'.

Nature, modernity, cultural recollections are three of the thematic elements in the synthesis; there remain three others.

Remembered experience plays a role in the poem similar to that in the work of Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Verlaine. Here one finds reminiscences of childhood and adolescence in 'petit Chaperon Rouge', 'Les dortoirs du lycée' and in all probability in the 'transatlantiques bercails' and even the hunting horns. (420)

(418) Lettres à un ami, p.32.

(419) The version of 'L'Hiver qui vient' which appeared in La Vogue, which was slightly more rhetorical than the final version, actually refers to 'nette horreur'.

(420) Laforgue as a child had made the same transatlantic journey - in the opposite direction. There is the possibility of a Weberian link between 'bercail' and 'berceau' here! For the hunting horns see below. The religious allusions in the poem - 'La Toussaint, La Noël...triste antienne...' - may be regarded as references to the poet's childhood faith.

One of the central themes of the Derniers Vers as a whole is love and this is introduced in 'L'Hiver qui vient':

On ne peut plus s'asseoir, tous les bancs sont mouillés;
Crois-moi, c'est bien fini jusqu'à l'année prochaine...
Ah, nuées accourues des côtes de la Manche,
Vous nous avez gâté notre dernier dimanche...
Tous ces rameaux avaient encor leurs feuilles vertes...

Lastly there are the underlying thoughts of the poet. It is remarkable that these are suggested almost entirely through the creation of atmosphere, the choice of images and a subtle use of irony. Nowhere does the poet state his ideas. The sole surviving acknowledgement to the 'poésie philo' of Le Sanglot de la Terre is 'C'est la saison et la planète falote'.

All these thematic elements are held together, as they are in normal experience, through a process of seemingly spontaneous association. External reality creates a mood in the poet's mind which is reinforced by his attachment to certain epitomes of the season: the setting sun, the rusting trees, the scudding clouds, the chopping of wood, a tubercular cough, rubber boots, visits to the pharmacist and so on. Memories flood in, of his childhood and of his reading and cultural experience. Autumn is putting an end to the summer strolls of the lovers and this immediate poignancy leads the poet to a reflection on the whole nature of existence, the meaning of love, life and death. In all this he is a solitary figure unable to share in the easy happiness of the bourgeois around him. The whole is submerged, not in dream, but in a unifying atmosphere of the autumn season so complex that it could only be fully evoked in a work of art. Some idea of the way the poem achieves its remarkable coherence may be obtained by an examination of some of its key images.

The opening image of the poem is a pun. Punning in 'L'Hiver qui vient' is synthesis almost at the level of the word and, with the exception of 'don quichottesques', it takes over the function performed by neologisms in much of the earlier poetry. 'Blocus sentimental', based on the 'Blocus continental', provides the starting-point of a series of military images which in strict logic one would not expect to find in a poem about autumn but which in fact

becomes one of the unifying elements in the poem: 'Messageries du Levant', 'les patrouilles des nuées en déroute', 'les sommiers des ambulances pour les soldats loin de la France', 'des grandes routes où nul ne passe'. Still in the very first line 'Messageries du Levant' takes up the image of the blockade inasmuch as it may mean supply ships from the East but it also immediately introduces two key thematic elements of the poem: the ~~signe~~ in nature of the coming winter - the sun will no longer rise in the East with its previous vigour - and modern commercial civilisation, 'Messageries du Levant' being made through the brilliant stroke of using capital letters to appear as the name of a shipping line or a delivery company. The festivals referred to in line four are most obviously associated with winter but they serve also to evoke the theme of the poet's solitude, for they are the time when families are united. At a less conscious level, perhaps, they may represent the stable monotony of a Catholicism which offers no solution to the mystery of the cycle of nature.

The factory chimneys in lines five and six establish the modern, anti-Romantic nature of the landscape and the poet's feeling already hinted at in the first line; they are the first of a series of such phenomena: telegraph wires, rooftops, chemists' shops. It is worth remarking that Laforgue had always associated factories with images of sterility and unpleasantness:

-Vie ou Néant! choisir. Ah! quelle discipline!
Que n'est-il un Eden entre ces deux usines? (421)

L'Extase du soleil, peuh! La Nature, fade
Usine de sève aux lymphatiques parfums. (422)

Les Usines, cent goulots fumant very les ciels...
Les poulardes s'engraissent
Pour Noël. (423)

In his article on Huysmans's En Ménage Laforgue had referred approvingly to Cyprien's opinion that a landscape took its character from the factory chimneys on the sky-line. (424) In line ten is introduced the image of the hunting horns

(421) Poésies Complètes (Pla) p.42.

(422) Ibid., p.38.

(423) Ibid., p.224. Parts of this poem were remodelled for use in 'L'Hiver...'

(424) 'L'accent d'un paysage était... donné par les tuyaux d'usines qui s'élevaient au-dessus des arbres...' (En Ménage, p.125)

which has a double symbolic value; it is a reminder of the human condition: Man is perpetually at bay, doomed to be put to death; but it also has sexual connotations, especially in the earlier poems, where the 'hallali' is sounded not only just before the kill but before sexual union, the surrender of individuality to the biological process - 'la petite mort'. The horns like the great majority of Laforgue's images are epitomes as well as symbols. He associated them readily with dreary and solitary autumns, for he heard them every year while the Imperial court was in residence at Baden-Baden. It seems, moreover, that their impact on his sensibility goes back much further than this, into his childhood. In trying to explain the fundamental ennui of life he had written to Kahn: 'pour goûter cette chose, il faudrait chanter les refrains sur un air de cor de chasse que j'ai entendu dans mon enfance en province'.(425) The horns constitute the most obvious parallel with the Wagnerian leitmotiv, coming as they do as a recurring sign of the underlying theme of the poem, that the sun, the representative of us all, is being hunted to death. So they are to be heard in line twenty-four, in lines twenty-seven and twenty-eight, where the kill is sounded, in line thirty-two after it has been made, in lines fifty-four to sixty-one, where, their deed accomplished, their tune changes to a melancholy echo as they move northwards. Laforgue is sure enough of his lyrical powers to provide a verbal equivalent of the sound of the horns which is completely free from any desperate searching after effect. The image in line sixteen is a fine example of the economical use Laforgue made of legend in the Derniers Vers; the sun was once full of power, it turned wheatfields into gold just as Midas had turned the sands of the legendary river into gold. In line eighteen the poet bemoans the burial of this once great overseer of agricultural labour.(426) This thought immediately leads the poet to his extended evocation of the dying sun: it lies on its side, for its last rays

(425) Lettres a un ami, p.56.

(426) For a discussion of 'Spectacles agricoles' see the remarks below on textual variants.

have spread along the horizon making of the 'jaunes genêts d'automne' a deathbed. The sun is torn from its glory in the sky, without anyone to bring assistance; in that way line thirty-one - 'sans personne' - is a pun indicating that the sun has been dismembered or disgorged: 'un crachat d'estaminet' (line twenty-one), 'une glande arrachée dans un cou' (line thirty), but also its solitude and helplessness which mirror the poet's condition. Line twenty-one may be an unconscious recollection of the sentence from En Ménage, already cited, where the 'tuyaux d'usine...crachaient...des flocons de suie'. The almost romantic picture of the sun on its deathbed is made ironic by the crude, modernistic image of the 'crachat d'estaminet', by the familiar and disrespectful epithet 'fichu' and by the again crude violence of the 'glande arrachée' which reminds one of Laforgue's comparison of a sunset to a butcher's apron in 'Complainte sur certains temps déplacés'. Towards the end of the poem the images connected with modernity become more frequent as the poet applies the message of autumn to his own immediate position: the necessity of passing another winter in the bourgeois city which he associates with monotony - 'Tous les ans, tous les ans', 'lampes, estampes, thé, petits-fours' - and with cold, damp, death and disease:

La phtisie pulmonaire attristant le quartier,
Et toute la misère des grands centres...
...laines, caoutchoucs, pharmacie...

There may, again, be here a recollection of Huysmans's En Ménage: 'les quartiers poitrinaires et charmants...' (427) Some images not already discussed will be treated in our remarks on textual changes below.

The Laforguean synthesis is thus partly based on a system of interrelated themes and images of which the mechanism is (in appearance) spontaneous association. In practice, of course, the poet made a careful selection from the

The synthetising process is also operated on a more purely stylistic level. Laforgue frequently dispenses with the logical joins of syntax, employing an impressionistic style similar to that of Verlaine in some of the Paysages Belges, and of Rimbaud in some of ~~the~~ Illuminations. Verbs are suppressed, or minimised, as images and subjects are hurled forth in a single dynamic vision of autumn. In the opening six-line section of the poem there is not a single verb. The same technique is used again later in the poem in

Ô dégâts, ô nids, ô modestes jardins

and in the picture of winter in the city already referred to. The repetition of the device is itself conducive to unity. Repetition in general is indeed one of the most important techniques in the poem as well as being an authentic feature of mental life and of everyday speech: ——— ——— —

Oh, dans les bruines...
Il bruine;
Dans la forêt...
.....tous les bancs sont mouillés....
Tant les bancs sont mouillés, tant les bois sont rouillés...
Dans la forêt mouillée...
Oh, tombée de la pluie!...
Voici venir les pluies d'une patience d'ange...
.....tant les bois sont rouillés...
.....la rouille envahit les masses
La rouille ronge...
Les fils télégraphiques...

These repetitions of words are also repetitions of themes, so that all the above groups repeat the same objective correlative of the rain which is, for that matter, suggested in other lines too:

Ah, nuées...
 Vous nous avez gâté notre dernier dimanche...
les toiles d'araignées.
 Ploient sous les gouttes d'eau...

The technique of repetition is also involved in Laforgue's minimising of verb constructions; where a verb is used it is frequently the verb 'être' :

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C'est l'Hiver bien connu...
c'est la saison bien connue, cette fois...
 C'est la saison, c'est la saison...
 C'est la saison, c'est la saison, adieu vendanges!...
 C'est la toux dans les dortoirs...
 C'est la tisane sans le foyer...
 C'est la saison, oh déchirements! c'est la saison!

It would be pointless to give further examples since the whole poem is built upon such repetitions and one would need to quote the entire text.

Rhyme and assonance have a similar function. There are very few lines in the poem which do not end in either. Lines fourteen, eighteen, twenty-five, thirty-one, sixty-one and eighty-two appear to be the only exceptions. On closer examination it will be seen that the first four of these are involved in internal rhyme:

Dans la forêt mouillée, les toiles d'araignées...
 Où êtes-vous ensevelis?
 Ce soir un soleil fichu git au haut du coteau...
 Qu'il revienne...
 Ô triste antienne, es-tu fini!...
 Et il frissonne, sans personne!...

Internal rhyme and assonance are frequent in the poem. A text in which rhyme and assonance words were printed in red with a system of symbols to show which sounds rhymed with which would show clearly that far from Laforgue dispensing with rhyme in his vers libre he used it more densely than ever before. To take but one example 'nuit' at the end of line two is in assonance with 'usines' at the end of line six but it also has an internal rhyme with 'pluie' in line two itself just as 'usines' has an internal rhyme with the fourth syllable of line five - 'bruines'. But rhyme is no longer the 'clou d'or' at the end of a line for Laforgue - his use of internal rhyme is itself an indication of this - rather it is another form of unifying repetition. Frequent enjambement and the often considerable distance between rhyming words (seven lines in the case of 'belles' - 'ribambelles') ensure a break from poetic convention and the uninterrupted flow of the poet's evocation of his experiences and consciousness. To return to lines sixty-one and eighty-two it will be seen that 'échos' could be held to be in assonance with 'cors' and 'Nord', which

leaves only line eighty-two in the entire poem without rhyme or assonance unless Laforgue's pronunciation of nasals was quite eccentric or unless one counts the rhyme of 'saison' with itself in the same line, but the rhythm does not incline one to such an opinion.

Again connected with ~~repetition~~ is the poet's use of alliteration. This is too evident to require more than one outstanding example here:

Ce soir un soleil fichu gît...
Gît sur le flanc, dans les genêts...
 Sur une litière de jaunes genêts
 De jaunes genêts...

The use of vers libres gave the poet the necessary freedom, for one intent on an authentic response to his consciousness, to write lines whose length was determined by the unit of thought, and 'stanzas' which represented thematic groupings of such thoughts. The oft-quoted definitions of vers libre in terms of breathing do not seem to be applicable here, either on the level of the individual line or of the stanza. A single breath would be sufficient for several lines on occasion (e.g. lines thirteen to fifteen) but not for the larger stanzas. The poet's freedom in length of line makes possible some splendid and deliberate effects which nonetheless in no way conflict with the apparently spontaneous flow of the poem. Thus the tremendous energetic outburst, so evocative of the sun over ripening fields :

'Soleils plenipotentiaires des travaux en blonds Pactoles' is brought down from sixteen-syllable glory to the matter-of-fact seven-syllable irony of

De spectacles agricoles

which, by casting doubt upon the reality of the sun's power, prepares the reader for the seven-syllable question accepting its death

Où êtes-vous ensevelis?

Similarly, immediately afterwards, the poet brilliantly conveys the ebbing life of the sun, with a discretion that would have baffled the Hugo of 'Les Djinns' by reducing the number of syllables in the line from thirteen to twelve, then twelve again, then from twelve to eleven:

Ce soir un soleil fichu gît au haut du coteau
 Gît sur le flanc, dans les genêts, sur son manteau,
 Un soleil blanc comme un crachat d'estaminet
 Sur une litière de jaunes genêts...

The effect is, of course, reinforced by the imagery but also by the fourfold cry of pain in 'au haut du coteau...manteau'.

The underlying modernity of this vision of autumn is brought home not only by the crudeness of the images ('crachat d'estaminet') but by the use of vocabulary drawn from familiar speech: 'fichu', 's'amène', 'rimbambelles' and by the adoption of the rhythms of everyday language:

Crois-moi, c'est bien fini jusqu'à l'année prochaine...

Et le vent, cette nuit, il en a fait de belles!

In this context the poet introduces odd elements from the poetic tradition which make for ironic contrast: the rhyming couplet in lines eleven to twelve, the use of the poetic word 'autan' in line eighty, the spelling of 'encor' in line forty-four.

The Laforguan synthesis is thus the result of careful craftsmanship directed towards apparent spontaneity. This painstaking care becomes even more apparent from an examination of changes the poet made in his text between the publication in La Vogue in August 1886 and the final version passed to Dujardin by Laforgue before his death. What is most striking in a comparison between the text in La Vogue and the final version is the number of additional images that have been incorporated into the latter. There are no less than ten, all but two of which make the relationship to the contemporary modern world in which the poet found himself clearer. The factory chimneys in lines five and six are an addition which sets the tone for much of the rest of the poem. The 'spectacles agricoles' are an addition, which by reference to Madame Bovary and his own 'Complainte du soir des comices agricoles', relates the sun's death to the whole futility of modern life. Line thirty-seven, absent from La Vogue, as well as being a splendid image brings with it all the connotations of modern travel in the single word 'rails', an idea extended by the addition of the word 'transatlantiques' to line thirty-nine.

The image of the ambulances was made clearer, and a rhyme added, by the incorporation of line fifty:

Pour les soldats loin de la France.

Line seventy-two, not in La Vogue, brought in an association of images, 'grèves' - 'océan', and made the location clearly the modern city with its 'Océan de toitures des faubourgs'. The pianos are a surprisingly late and almost affectionate addition to line seventy-five. The addition of line seventy-eight - 'Dans les journaux?' - provides the rhyme for the inserted pianos as well as intensifying the modernity of the 'mystère hebdomadaire des statistiques sanitaires'. Only two non-modernist images are added; the 'triste antienne' which reinforces the religious reference in line four and evokes the mystery of the sun's death (as well as providing a rhyme for 'Qu'il revienne') and the delightful 'paniers Watteau' which epitomises the pastoral ideal whilst at the same time recalling the delicacy and the ephemeral nature of the frail pleasures of love in Watteau's paintings.

Other changes have also been made which emphasise the contemporary setting of the poem; these affect the matter-of-fact tone of the poet's diction and maintain the distance from Romantic or classical rhetoric. In line fifteen the neutral and even ugly 'gouttes d'eau' replaces the pretty 'perles d'eau'. In line thirty-five the ironic tone is heightened by the inclusion of 'petit Chaperon Rouge' who in the La Vogue version had been a mere 'rhapsode'. In line forty-one the poet prefers the less declamatory and more inevitable 'Et le vent...' to 'Ah! le vent...'. The dead-pan irony of 'modestes jardinets' is preferred, in line forty-two to the 'pauvres jardinets' in the La Vogue version and the 'souffreteux jardinets' in the intervening manuscript version.(428) In line forty-six the more

(428) In the Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet. In 'Laforque's 'Derniers Vers': Some Textual and Critical Problems' R.R. Bolgar challenged the assumption that the version published by Dujardin was more in conformity with Laforque's wishes than the manuscript version. We do not accept his arguments. The fact that Dujardin's version is closer to the
cont'd/

colloquial 'qu'un bon vent vous emporte' has replaced 'que le vent vous emporte'. In line eighty-one Laforgue has added a rhyme and extended a fine everyday image by replacing 'du Temps' by 'que le Temps se tricote!'

In keeping with this same quest for a non rhetorical tone is the removal of some of the discursive elements in the La Vogue version. In the latter were inserted between the present lines fifty-three and fifty-four the following:

O Soleils,
Des soirs orangés, aux hallalis,
Aux ovations des royaux cors de chasse,
Que faites-vous ensevelis?

This was amended in the manuscript version to the less clumsy:

O Soleils des soirs tout orangés, aux hallalis,
Aux ovations des royaux cors de chasse
Où m'êtes-vous ensevelis?

(428) Cont'd.

Doucet manuscript version than to the version in La Vogue is itself some indication that Dujardin did attempt to base his editions on the best and latest variants available to him and that he may have had access to variants, either written or oral, of which we have no record. (We accept with Bolgar that the Doucet manuscript is later than the texts in La Vogue and La Revue Indépendante). We know that Laforgue entrusted the publication of the Derniers Vers to Dujardin. It is possible that some instructions were passed on by word of mouth or on marked up copies of the periodical texts. No obvious motive for Dujardin's alleged tampering with the Doucet version is suggested by Bolgar. In fact many of the changes are entirely in accord with Laforgue's own practice. The tendency to move away from certain colloquial constructions (as between the Doucet and the Dujardin versions) which Bolgar attributes to an alien hand (Dujardin's!) is in any case evident between the Doucet versions and Des Fleurs de bonne volonté. Nothing could be more plausible than to suppose that this process should continue to be developed by Laforgue who was becoming increasingly absorbed by the quest for synthetic harmony in his work, and less interested in more superficial and 'shocking' brands of originality.

Bolgar's refusal to recognise an evolution in Laforgue's poetry (he merely sees 'variety') and to attribute any significance to his contacts with pictorial impressionism do not incline one to trust his judgement. More astonishing still is his claim that there is no thematic unity in the Derniers Vers. All in all, and he admits as much himself, it is clear that Bolgar is moving towards a devaluation of Laforgue generally.

Eventually the poet decided that these lines were really a more rhetorical statement of what was already expressed in line Fifty-four. Laforgue has extracted the 'nette horreur' from line seventy-six, preferring, again, dead-pan irony to the more declamatory variety. Most significantly of all he has scrapped the 'explanatory' ending of the poem, a legacy from the days of the Sanglot:

Pour mes compatriotes,
Mais qu'on ne m'en demande pas la raison!...

and restricts the end of the poem to references to his function as an artist trying to formulate his experiences of contemporary reality.

There are also signs of the poet's efforts to increase the coherence and continuity of the poem. Line ten was added to provide an earlier statement of the hunting-horn motif (and a rhyme for 'prochaine'). Lines nineteen to twenty-three are a considerably expanded version of the image of the sun on its deathbed which brought with it a greater focus on the key event of the poem and an opportunity for successful repetition and alliteration. Originally there had been a repetition of the wet park benches image in a line inserted between the present lines forty and forty-one but set typographically on its own. The poet rightly omitted it sensing that it seemed more like the resolution than the recapitulation of an early theme and thus made the rest of the poem seem like an afterthought. Line seventy-one lost 'dites?' from its end to improve the flow of the poem and to provide the rhyme for 'rêve'.

Finally, if further proof were needed of the poet's meticulous concern, one finds him making quite small changes to rhythm and rhyme. It is worth remarking how many of the changes already mentioned were partly effected in order to increase the number of rhymes in the poem; clearly, on reflection, the poet had found rhyme to be more advantageous in free verse than he had first supposed. Line fourteen loses a 'toute' before 'Mouillée' which improves the rhythm and in fact makes of it two rhyming hexasyllabic lines

written as one On the level of truly minor changes 'plus' is
inserted in line forty-five to provide a more pleasing rhythm and in
line fifty-two the alliterative 'La rouille ronge' is preferred to
'Elle ronge'

+

'L'Hiver qui vient' is one of the great synthetic masterpieces of the poetry of contemporary reality. In it the poet formulates the essence of autumn and the modern world around him together with the complex of feelings, memories and other associations that this external reality has prompted in his sensibility. He does this by reference to images that may almost be regarded as epitomes as well as symbols: rain, wind, sunset, falling leaves, deserted roads, hunting horns, aspects of the modern landscape and of the city. The finished poem has that free-flowing and spontaneous quality that the poetry of contemporary reality may attain, with perhaps a few exceptions, only as the fruits of intensive labour at his craft.

* * * * *

In Part Two, Chapter Four we suggested that the evolution from modernism to synthetic poetry through impressionism could be seen, on occasion, in successive variants of the same poem. Although not in the strictest sense a comparison between different versions of the same poems it is extremely instructive to examine the development which lay behind Laforgue's Derniers Vers by looking back at their antecedents in Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté. Of course the Derniers Vers are not ~~simply~~ impressionistic versions of earlier realist poems. Laforgue had already arrived at a form of poetic impressionism in Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté and even in poems written before this. Indeed the Derniers Vers, if one were to generalise, are more indicative of an evolution towards synthetic poetry. Yet, as we have argued, synthesis may develop organically out of impressionism, and is often accompanied by,

and incorporates, a finely wrought impressionistic formulation of experience. It is no surprise to find that the Derniers Vers sometimes represent an advance, even in impressionistic terms, upon the earlier poems on which they are based. A revealing comparison may be made between one of Laforgue's finest poems, 'Solo de lune', and the earlier 'Arabesques de malheur' (reproduced here) on which it is partly based

Nous nous aimions comme deux fous,
On s'est quittés sans en parler.
(Un spleen me tenait exilé
Et ce spleen me venait de tout.)

Que ferons-nous, moi, de mon âme,
Elle de sa tendre jeunesse'
O vieillissante pécheresse,
Oh' que tu vas me rendre infâme'

Des ans vont passer là-dessus,
On durcira chacun pour soi,
Et plus d'une fois, je m'y vois,
On ragera «Si j'avais su!» ...

Oh' comme on fait claquer les portes,
Dans ce Grand Hôtel d'anonymes!
Touristes, couples légitimes,
Ma Destinée est demi-morte' ...

- Ses yeux disaient «Comprenez-vous'
«Comment ne comprenez-vous pas'»
Et nul n'a pu le premier pas,
On s'est séparés d'un air fou

Si on ne tombe pas d'un même
Ensemble à genoux, c'est factice,
C'est du toc. Voilà la justice
Selon moi, voilà comment j'aime.

The original poem is devoted entirely to the difficulties of the male-female relationship, the poet's anticipation of the 'inevitable' tedium of marriage and his consequent inability to progress with what might have been a match. Nevertheless this 'universal' situation is given a contemporary context by the modernist reference

Oh' comme on fait claquer les portes,
Dans ce Grand Hôtel d'anonymes'
Touristes, couples légitimes ...

and by the use of ordinary everyday expressions

Nous nous aimions comme deux fous .
C'est du toc .

In 'Solo de lune' the situation is much more obviously located in contemporary, transitory reality by being evoked through a series of impressions, memories and associations experienced by the poet seated on the open passenger 'deck' of a coach during an evening journey. The opening line sets the reflective yet uncompromisingly modernistic tone of the rest of the poem as the poet's thoughts and dreams arise elusively in his consciousness like cigarette smoke drifting skywards

Je fume, étalé, face au ciel ...

The jolting rhythm of the coach like the rapidly passing sequence of visual images

Ô routes, coteaux, ô fumées, ô vallons .

provokes an almost trance-like state in which the poet's mind is liberated both from emotion and from the constraints of the present to review impassively his memories like the spirit Ariel (which had been the subject of one of the finest lyrical prose extracts gathered in the Mélanges posthumes):

Ma carcasse est cahotée, mon âme danse
Comme un Ariel,
Sans miel, sans fiel, ma belle âme danse ...
Ma belle âme, ah' récapitulons.

The repetitions here are in perfect accord with the stream of consciousness aspect of impressions. The first stanza of 'Arabesques de Malheur' is now introduced in its entirety as a memory along with the other impressions with which the poet's consciousness is grappling. The addition of the matter of fact word 'Bon' not only heightens the emotional neutrality of the piece but turns the line into an impair. The feeling of rhythmic spontaneity is further increased by the fact that this addition detracts from the value of the rhyme 'fous' - 'tout' as a clou d'or. Stanzas 3 and 4 pursue this memory/reflection sequence, the first of them through reference to the earlier poem. This third stanza is based on Stanzas 5 and 6 of

'Arabesques de Malheur' The idea of inability to make the first move through a desire not to appear a fool by acting alone is rightly condensed into a single stanza combining both impressionistic economy and repetition.

The feeling of indecision, the unspoken desire of the woman for the man to take the initiative and the poet's later efforts to excuse his behaviour to himself are all expressed perfectly through the thrice repeated 'comprenez-vous?' made more effective by now being interrogative rather than exclamatory. This stanza thus echoes Laforgue's desire for a modern-style equal, unaffected and open relationship between the sexes. The fourth stanza takes up the hint of self-reproach in the final 'Comprenez-vous?' of the previous stanza in spontaneous and colloquial fashion ('je t'en conjure') again employing the repetition technique. The fifth stanza returns the poet from reflection and memory to immediate impressions and the coolness of the evening air which wraps around him like a cloak of melancholy in perfect harmony with his passing mood of regret. The rest of the stanza is perhaps the least impressionistic and innovative part of the poem. It represents a comment on the poet's emotions in the same way as the last stanza of Rimbaud's 'Bruxelles' each individual's sensibility is open to impressions and reflections which stimulate moods and this power of association is a way of transcending immediacy. There is thus a return to the trance-like calm of the opening stanza now made more positively serene by the poet's reflection on the magical nature of his experience. The next stanza continues the mood of reflection but is nonetheless remarkable for that. Its essence is an ironic meditation upon Lamartine's celebrated restatement of the perennial theme of the transience of love and life in 'Le Lac'

Aimons donc, aimons donc' de l'heure fugitive
 Hâtons-nous, jouissons'
 L'homme n'a point de port, le temps n'a point de rive,
 Il coule, et nous passons'

made to seem even more embracing than the Lamartinian model by bringing in the Biblical reference to the night sky

Les étoiles sont plus nombreuses que le sable
 and references to the other elemental forces of the sea and all-consuming death. Yet both the poet's own inclination to regret for the irretrievable

Accumulons l'irréparable'
Renchérissons sur notre sort'

and the Lamartinian original are debunked and brought down from the cosmic level by two startling devices First there is reference to a much more personal and crass consideration

... d'autres ont vu se baigner son corps ...

and then, at the end of the stanza, the popular locution

Y a pas de port ..

again indicative of both spontaneity of expression and of 'ordinariness'.

There is some irony in the fact that the reference to Lamartine's

time-worn conception of transience should be introduced in a poem

demonstrating true aesthetic understanding of the ephemeral. The

seventh stanza renews the use of material from 'Arabesques de Malheur'.

It is unusual in as much as the changes involve greater discursive

clarity than in the original where the third stanza although more

obviously referring to the future considerations of the poet's inaction

could also be a statement in style indirect libre of the poet's vision

of a possible marriage and its consequences and, therefore, the

reasons for his inaction This ambiguity is removed in 'Solo de lune'

by both possibilities being distinguished, the situation was an impasse

Des ans vont passer là-dessus,
On s'endurcira chacun pour soi,
Et bien souvent et déjà je m'y vois,
On se dira "Si j'avais su .."
Mais mariés de même, ne se fût-on pas dit
"Si j'avais su, si j'avais su' . " ?
Ah' rendez-vous maudit'
Ah' mon coeur sans issue' ...
Je me suis mal conduit.

This reworking strengthens the theme of self-questioning (in the rhythms of everyday speech) which was largely absent from 'Arabesques de malheur'

The eighth stanza is based on the second stanza of the original but

introduces it with a summarising nominal construction

Maniaques de bonheur . .

which conveys the idea that the two 'lovers' were too anxious for certain

happiness, not content to settle for the security and contentment of le train-train quotidien, the woman because of the romantic notions connected with youth, the poet because of the demands made by his 'âme' for a new-style open relationship. Now he is left with only his tormented soul for company. The ninth stanza is a recapitulation of the third and brings to an end for the moment the long reflection on the past. The final 'Ah!' has the same rhythmic effect as the 'Bon' at the end of the second stanza with the difference that it provides a double rhyme.

With the tenth and eleventh stanzas the reader is brought back to the poet's immediate rather than reflective experience of contemporary reality. The transcendent association of mood and impression, of dreams and reality is again a comfort to the poet. The landmarks associated with the industrial suburbs have passed by and the journey through open country with only the moon for guide coincides with a journey into the equally unstructured world of dreams. A glimpse of dark pine forests skirting the road prompts a rêverie of 'primitive' happiness between man and woman free from the pressures of nineteenth-century society in a period dominated by virile and open passion.

Oh' pour un soir d'enlèvement' ..
 Et c'est un beau couple d'amants,
 Qui gesticulent hors la loi

Nature's bedrooms ('propres et profondes') are to be contrasted with the depressing reality of modern hotel bedrooms mentioned in the next stanza.

Nul ne m'attend, je ne vais chez personne,
 Je n'ai que l'amitié des chambres d'hôtel

Earlier in the twelfth stanza there is a fresh reference to the poet's immediate impressions indicating that the pine forests have been left behind as the road takes a new turn and reminds the poet of his Ariel-like freedom. However, the thought of hotel bedrooms, already cited, makes a mockery of this freedom. These hotel bedrooms had occurred in 'Arabesques de Malheur' in an image of universal implication, in 'Solo de lune'

they become more clearly part of the poet's own particular experience. Stanzas thirteen and fourteen continue the return to immediate external reality and, in fact, constitute the most consistent example of its treatment in the poem. The first three lines of Stanza thirteen are a bridge between this immediate experience and the poet's reflections on the seemingly timeless world of dream into which his moonlit journey is drawing him. The remainder of the stanza is devoted entirely to details of the stop at the staging post and is notable for the concision of the description. The reference to 'juillet' suggests that 'Solo de lune' serves the function of a flash-back sequence in the Derniers Vers. It was these thoughts on a summer evening which prepared the poet for the autumnal world of the other poems (the world anticipated in Stanza fifteen). The images of Stanza fourteen appear to be much more important symbolically than those of the previous stanza. The presiding influence of the moon is alluded to again, Laforgue's treatment of the moon is of course one of the most persistent aspects of his désacralisation of the Romantic repertoire. In 'Solo de lune' the moon bears witness not to Romantic passion or the vague d'émotion but to uncertainty and even ineptitude. This incongruity is reinforced by references to mundane reality in the poem. In this stanza the moonlight is the starting-point of the highly condensed image of the second line

Noce de feux de Bengale noyant mon infortune ...

which would suggest that the moonlight blends with the light from the jogging coach-lamp to produce a magical luminosity which drives all thought of wasted opportunity and loneliness temporarily from the poet's mind. Yet the image is remarkable for the fact that this idea is expressed through words having the very sexual connotations that the poet feels are now being obliterated (the meaning of 'noce' is obvious and we know from the 'Complainte du Bon Chevalier-Errant' that 'feux de Bengale' is an expression used by Laforgue to suggest sexual intercourse). Other sense impressions - the flickering sequence of the shadows of the poplar trees and the murmuring

of the stream - play their part in this creation of a kind of hypnotic 'music' which erases the poet's memories

Dans ces inondations du fleuve du Léthé ...

The reference to 'Léthé', the river of death as well as forgetfulness, also anticipates the idea of transience in the following stanza and the reference to the fiancée's cough in the penultimate stanza.

The fifteenth stanza marks another move away from the impressions of immediate reality into meditation. The opening two lines

Ô solo de lune,
Vous défiez ma rhume ...

despite their obvious melodic appeal are a discursive statement, similar to the last line of the fifth stanza, of the poet's situation - this time a reflection upon his inability to translate the totality of this particular experience into poetry. This renewal of the stock theme of the poet's inadequacy before his subject has real value in this context since it is a comment upon the genuine complexity of the poet's experience. The return to impressions

Oh' cette nuit sur la route,
O Étoiles, ...

serves merely to introduce the Pascalian vision of infinitesimal Man and his doings in the face of the boundless universe

O Étoiles, vous êtes à faire peur,
Vous y êtes toutes' toutes'
O fugacité de cette heure ...

The poet wishes he could preserve the essence of this fleeting moment of joy and serenity for the rigours of autumn which will soon be upon him. The sixteenth stanza maintains this note of melancholy with a reiteration of the sensation of coolness (and an incidental homage to Baudelaire in the 'très' plus hyphen construction) which had been linked in the fifth stanza with melancholy. Here the poet turns, in the most compassionate section of the poem, to an imaginary picture of the woman, recapitulating the fourth stanza, whom he sees on a simultaneous night journey by the forest engaging in 'noces du clair de lune' of a less metaphorical kind as a cure for her

(pecuniary) 'infortune' brought about by the poet's failure to marry and support her. The 'beauté de l'heure' which will cause her to be careless about the cold will likewise be the mundane and conventional moment of physical passion in the moonlit forest to be contrasted to the feeling of spiritual intoxication evoked in Stanza fourteen. The colloquial phrase 'soigne-toi je t'en conjure' is now given a more poignant significance.

Oh' je ne veux plus entendre cette toux' ..

implying for the reader with the benefit of hindsight that, in this instance at least, the poet has in mind his own fiancée and the period when he had been hesitant at the thought of marrying her.

The final stanza, appropriately enough, returns after a gap of four stanzas to the basic source - 'Arabesques de Malheur' (or more precisely, its last two stanzas) - and the idea of not wanting to be the first to make a declaration of love or a proposal of marriage. The dream of what might have been.

J'eusse été le modèle des époux'

is no sooner uttered than it becomes the object of a mocking image drawn from crass reality (modelled on a conventional poetic compliment).

Comme le frou-frou de ta robe est le modèle des frou-frous

Moreover, this last line does much to undermine the earlier feeling of compassion by providing an ironic rhyme for 'toux'.

Almost all of the material and many of the lines of 'Arabesques de Malheur' are thus incorporated into 'Solo de lune' which is like a rich tapestry in contrast with an earlier sketch of a single theme. Without doubt the most important ingredient in the new richness and complexity of 'Solo de lune' is the particularisation of the theme of the sexual malentendu through the brilliant device of the coach journey which turns the discursive meditation upon the past into a 'slice of contemporary life' in the fullest sense - the poet's attempts to grapple with mobile and elusive experiences of all kinds sense-

impressions, thoughts, associations, rêveries. This making more contemporary and transitory a situation already having a clearly modern context is the most evident aspect of this particular example of transition, rather than straightforward stylistic changes showing an evolution towards poetic impressionism, with the obvious exception of the use of free verse, which is of paramount importance. The lines vary in length from three to seventeen syllables, and although there are many alexandrines or near-alexandrines, the poet has at his disposal a medium where expression can be more commensurate with experience than is the case with the uniformly octosyllabic lines of 'Arabesques de Malheur'. The fourth stanza is an excellent example of the advantages of this flexibility, the poet's thoughts attain a naturalness of sequence and duration which would otherwise probably have been impossible

Où est-elle-à cette heure?
 Peut-être qu'elle pleure ...
 Où est-elle à cette heure?
 Oh' du moins, soigne-toi, je t'en conjure'

An example of the impressionistic notation of detail with a minimum of formal connection and discursive comment is furnished in Stanza thirteen

Voici le relais,
 Où l'on allume les lanternes,
 Où l'on boit un verre de lait,
 Et fouette postillon,
 Dans le chant des grillons,
 Sous les étoiles de juillet

which also illustrates well the benefits of the variable free-verse line. Stanza fourteen is not dissimilar, it is dictated by stream of consciousness impressionism to such an extent that it does not contain a single main verb. An obvious instance of nominal style is already to be found in the opening stanza

O routes, coteaux, ô fumées, ô vallons ...

It is not difficult to see many other examples of features that may be associated with impressionistic style. The overriding effect of 'Solo de lune' is one of spontaneity and immediacy within a harmonious

and melodic unity This apparent spontaneity is created through the devices we have just mentioned, but also, obviously, through the several echoes of ordinary speech

Nous nous aimions comme deux fous ..

Oh' du moins, soigne-toi, je t'en conjure' ...

Y a pas de port ..

Elle va prendre mal, vu la beauté de l'heure'

We have spoken of apparent spontaneity deliberately, for there is not only the obvious internal evidence of painstaking artistic activity and also cultural allusion (the references to Shakespeare, Lamartine, the Bible and classical mythology) but also good reason to suppose that literacy reminiscence may have acted as a filter for direct experience. On several occasions Laforgue seems to recall passages from his favourite novel Huysmans's En Ménage (all of them noted in the Collie and L'Heureux edition of the Derniers Vers). This in no sense invalidates the argument that 'Solo de lune' is, in part at least, an impressionistic poem, for poetic impressionism is a highly developed artistic achievement aimed at the creation in the reader's sensibility of the sense of freshness, immediacy and spontaneity. As such it is one of the high points of Laforgue's art.

C O N C L U S I O N

The latter part of the nineteenth century saw an unprecedented awareness among French poets of the distinctive qualities of their own times. This awareness had its roots in the Romantics' relativist concept of history, art and literature. It had gathered momentum in the course of the century for the simple reason that the period was different and distinctive in a way that no other age had been since the Middle Ages. The initial reaction of the poets had been to use their poetry as a vehicle for social comment; in it they wrote, either optimistically or pessimistically, of the most striking phenomena of the new era: the Industrial Revolution, the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie, the rift between the artist and society at large. Barbier and Hugo were among the numerous poets to react in this way. One fruitful reaction was the creation of a poetry from which contemporary reality would be almost totally excluded and in which the reader would sometimes be invited to enter a primitive and happier world. The Parnassians, nevertheless, used the methods of modern science in the evocation of this world. This tension between the modern and the primitive ~~was~~ to be a notable feature of French poetry after 1870 and is particularly evident in the work of Rimbaud and Corbière.

Most of the poets who had treated contemporary reality in the earlier part of the century had contented themselves with the description of modern objects or conditions. Baudelaire was the first French poet to succeed in evoking the very fabric and mood of modern everyday life. In both his aesthetic theory and his poetic practice he established, to the benefit of his immediate successors, that the treatment of contemporary reality was not counter to the highest poetic achievement nor even to the quest for metaphysical truth. Eternal beauty, like absolute knowledge, was to be gained only through the treatment and observation of particular reality.

After 1870 numerous poets became convinced of the necessity of making modernity - which was the rallying cry of the period - the subject of their verse. Much of this poetry fell far short of the Baudelairean aesthetic and merely adopted the banal descriptive techniques of Naturalism. The distinction between minor and major poetry of contemporary reality after 1870 is, to a considerable extent, to be seen in terms of a move away from the description of modernity to the formulation of the more elusive aspects of contemporary reality which entailed the development of a new poetic language. The evolution of French painting in this same period from modernism and realism to Impressionism and then to Synthetic art (1) may be exactly paralleled in poetry. Yves Le Hir has written that from the 'Pléiade' until the nineteenth century French poetry was dominated by abstract rhetoric and that it was only in the nineteenth century itself that, under the influence of painting, the treatment of concrete and particular reality came to alter the traditional aesthetic. (2) One way to look at the movement examined in this thesis is as a reaction against abstraction. (3) No doubt the reason for the centuries old dominance of abstract subjects in French poetry was the thought that the most obvious alternative was descriptive poetry which did not seem a sufficiently intellectual, elevated and demanding genre for the serious poet. This thought may be held to be behind the achievement of Mallarmé, Valéry and others, in creating poésie pure as another alternative to discursive rhetoric.

The achievement of the great poets of contemporary reality after 1870 (and the best of their predecessors) was to find a form of non-abstract poetry that avoided the banality and facility of descriptive poetry. This they did through the very nature of the 'subjects' they chose. The poets' attempts to formulate their experience of reality, more or less as it happened, - their im-

(1) The term Synthetic art here is not used to refer to the Synthetist movement which did not always succeed in creating synthetic works of art.

(2) Le Hir, Rhétorique et Stylistique, pp.183-90.

(3) The reaction could be traced back to works like Les Orientales and unarguably attained one of its definitive forms with Parnassianism. The Parnassians, and to some extent Hugo, began the turning away from the almost exclusively abstract and intellectual preoccupations of French poetry since the seventeenth-century. Hugo's 'Extase', Leconte de Lisle's 'La Vérandah' and Heredia's 'La Sieste' are close to the achievements of Baudelaire and the poets of contemporary reality writing after 1870.

pressionism -, in due course required them to explore the world of sensation and the non-rational mind in all its subtlety and complexity and the relationship between sensation, emotion and intellect. They thus arrived at a synthesis of human experience which did not preclude metaphysical insight. The view that the great French poetry of the latter part of the nineteenth-century is a reaction against external reality (4) is erroneous. The reconciliation of external contemporary reality with the poet's sensibility is the hall-mark of much of the best poetry of the period 1870-1887. Perhaps only Mallarmé wrote great poetry which rejected the first of these two elements. Yet the route chosen by Mallarmé proved to be so arduous and the chances of success so slight that poets in the twentieth century, whilst admiring his efforts and example, have, for the most part, preferred the methods of the outstanding nineteenth-century poets of contemporary reality.

The most important advance made by poets after 1870 on the work of their greatest precursor, Baudelaire, was in the development of the new poetic language referred to above. The pomposity and logical structure of the traditional language of French poetry were destroyed in several ways. The treatment of contemporary reality had led to the introduction of everyday speech into poetry. In all probability it had first of all been valued for its modernity, but it made possible a great variety of tonal contrasts and it became a major ingredient in ~~the~~ ironic humour used notably by Corbière and Laforgue. Everyday speech is also, relatively speaking, spontaneous and affective rather than rational. Thus a step had been made in formulating the non-rational part of the poet's experience as well as in reflecting the reality around him in which a striking element would be the sounds of everyday conversation. Yet this was not sufficient for poets trying to grapple with the most transitory aspects of sensual, mental and emotive experience. The rules of traditional French prosody, largely obeyed by Baudelaire, proved to be an unacceptable imposition. Rimbaud in his experiments with free verse,

(4) For such a view see Cornell, The Symbolist Movement.

but more particularly in the totally free form of the Illuminations, Verlaine in his dazzling use of the vers impair and Laforgue in his free verse all, in varying degrees, added metrical innovation to the other changes that had been wrought in the language of French poetry. This new-found flexibility may be related to the idea of musicality so prominent in discussions of poetry, particularly in the latter part of the century. There was much confusion in the use of the term. For some, such as Kahn, musical poetry would be poetry which, having been freed from its discursive function to a large extent, could be primarily melodious. The poet who is not mainly concerned with 'meaning' can instead concentrate on creating 'musical' effect. This was not a very profound interpretation. Another view which characterises much better the achievement of the great poets of contemporary reality after 1870 was that poetry instead of making statements could, just like music, reflect those parts of human experience that cannot be expressed in discursive rhetoric. The intellect performed the same function in their poetry as in the composition of music, largely absent from the experience which forms the thematic material of the work it is reserved for the organisation of that material into art. For all their apparent spontaneity and immediacy the foremost poets of contemporary reality in late nineteenth-century France were careful and consummate artists.

As far as the major poets of contemporary reality after 1870 were concerned the challenge to the literary establishment which their work implies was inextricably bound up with a dissatisfaction with the society of their times so that their rebellion had psycho-social as well as aesthetic dimensions. The rapid changes in many domains which characterised the poets' environment in the second half of the nineteenth century in France could also occasionally arouse their enthusiasm, but even this can sometimes have an almost febrile, even desperate, quality. In either case they remained in the clearest possible way poets of the age. It was this very lack of underlying stability in the period which seemed to make the solidity and balance, not to say the occasional

pomp, of the traditional poetic language and storehouse of themes incongruous in the eyes of the poets after 1870. Thus their modernism is often used as a weapon to undermine, particularly through ironic juxtaposition, the poetry of the establishment. At other times their modernism is a reflection of an entirely constructive desire to be relevant, to be original and to open up the largely unexplored world of ephemeral experience to poetry. The treatment of contemporary reality is central to the work of all the major poets of the period 1870-1887 except Mallarmé.

Verlaine's work presents a clear example of the transition from poetic modernism to poetic synthesis via experiments with an impressionistic style. A clear but not chronologically neat transition, for the poet only rarely returned to the style he had developed in the Romances sans paroles and the best of Sagesse in his later years, contenting himself with unsubtle evocations of modernity or everyday life in his treatment of contemporary reality which is inferior to that found even in the early Poèmes saturniens. Leaving aside the general decline of the last years one may perceive a development from the Baudelairean modernity of the 'Nocturne parisien' to the uncompromising impressionism of 'Walcourt' and finally to the synthesis of impressions, emotion and spiritual intuition in poems like 'L'Échelonnement des haies' and 'L'Espoir luit...'. It is regrettable that Verlaine did not consider that poems such as the latter might generally be a finer expression of the spiritual truths he had come to know after his conversion than the largely discursive statements of faith which constitute so much of Sagesse. Even that collection thus represents, to a large extent, a falling away from the marvellous achievement of some of the Romances.

Like most great artists Rimbaud took what he considered to be the most valid aspects of the art of his day and added to them the vital ingredient of his own great originality. Like Baudelaire he transcended any of the groupings or schools into which he might have been placed. Nevertheless it remains useful to relate his work to the various aspects which must have appealed to him most. As we have remarked on several occasions, in the course of this

study, the young poet never totally rejected the work of the Parnassians, to them he owed, perhaps, his interest in primitivism and the notion that a state of ideal communion with nature characterised the condition of primitive man. His originality lay in feeling that a return to quasi-primitive state of being was possible through an art which liberated itself from what he saw as the corrupting influences of rationalism and the Christian bourgeois ethic, and instead concentrated on manifestations of the primitive in modern man in sensual and sub-conscious experience. Whereas Leconte de Lisle's preoccupation with the decadence of modern society had led him to shun modern subjects, Rimbaud saw in the example of Baudelaire, whom he greatly admired, a sanction for treating contemporary reality in poetry whilst maintaining a critical attitude towards the society of his day. Moreover, it was also clear from Baudelaire's example that the treatment of contemporary subjects could be an aid rather than a hindrance in the attempt to arrive at ultimate truths through poetry, for those windows into the primitive life - sensual and sub-conscious experience - were by their very nature essentially contemporary. From the Parnassians Rimbaud also inherited his emphasis on directness of expression and to them, as well as to Baudelaire, can be attributed his practice of taking 'objective correlatives' from concrete reality. It seems reasonable to suppose that these tendencies received a further powerful stimulus through his contact with the Impressionist and modernist circles in which he moved in Paris. Spontaneity, directness of expression and the concentration on immediate experience, whether it be a sensation or an aspect of the sub-conscious mind, are the characteristics of Rimbaud's poetry, they are also the characteristics of an impressionistic art.

Corbière's principal originality probably lay in finding a poetic manner suitable for the expression of the profoundest sentiments and anxieties, and the evocation of the experience of a deformed and almost moribund man who could not easily come to terms with love or life in general, whilst avoiding

the commercialised sentimentality of the Romantics that he so loathed.

Ironical humour provided the means and no doubt also a source of pleasure and amusement. But Corbière is no lightweight; his dedication to the craft of poetry could not be greater : 'Je rime, donc je vis...' (5). Not only did Corbière avoid Romantic sentimentality but he made reference to external reality as a source of objective correlatives without falling into the trap of mere description, this is surely the meaning behind his only recorded statement on aesthetic practice: 'On ne doit pas peindre ce que l'on voit . il faut peindre uniquement ce qu'on n'a jamais vu et qu'on ne verra jamais.' (6)

Corbière's poetic language broke new ground. He may even have been the first of the great innovators of the century, for some of his poetry predates that of Rimbaud and most of Verlaine's. Without ever quite attaining the greatness of Baudelaire he nevertheless went further than his predecessor in abandoning declamatory verse principally through his use of the interior monologue, the mixing of poetic registers, the wholesale adoption of everyday speech and the technique of humorous cultural allusion.

Laforgue's poetry provides the clearest example in nineteenth-century France of the development of the poetry of contemporary reality through the three stages we have suggested : modernism, impressionism and synthetism. In this respect it is worth noting that his career has recently been compared to that of Van Gogh (7). The poems of the Sanglot (and earlier) are the expression, in an orthodox style, of original ideas and an appreciation of the value of modernity in art; in this they may be likened to Van Gogh's early Dutch paintings. Then came a vital period of experimentation with the Complaintes involving the free use of colloquial expressions and the rhythms

(5) 'Le Poète contumace'.

(6) Corbière was talking to Lafenestre while the latter was executing a painting of some sheep: 'Vous les faites moins bien que Charles Jacque, qui les fait moins bien que Troyon, qui les faisait moins bien que la nature. On ne doit pas peindre...etc.' (O.C., p.686. Walzer comments 'Boutade, assurément mais qui peut expliquer la liberté révolutionnaire prise par le poète à l'égard des tabous de l'ancienne rhétorique').

(7) By Collie and L'Heureux in their edition of the Derniers Vers.

of popular song and of everyday speech itself. Similarly Van Gogh's early paintings at Arles distort perspective and liberate colour. Both artists freed themselves from academicism through a form of impressionistic art. In Laforgue's case this meant tampering with syntax, a partial abandonment of the alexandrine, suppression of words which served a grammatical but not an expressive function and the use of images as objective correlatives. In the Derniers Vers Laforgue achieved the synthesis of feeling with external reality in a coherent poetry based to a considerable extent on free association and made himself the first master of vers libre in France. The same achievement is to be seen in Van Gogh's Champ de blé aux corbeaux, and other paintings of the late period, where reality is as present as it ever was but where it is now thoroughly fused with the artist's feelings apparent in the emotive use of colour and in the nervous brush strokes. It is interesting to note that the desire for unity in the Derniers Vers is also to be seen in the relationship between one poem and another, the suggestion of themes that are only properly developed if one reads the entire collection.

The normal classification of nineteenth-century French poetry has been unjust to Laforgue. He is not a decadent, though some of his writing may be seen as a parody of decadence.(8) In any event the irony of his last manner is too mature for that label to be appropriate.(9) Nor is he a Symbolist if we mean by Symbolism the movement beginning in 1885-86. Laforgue's ideas were already largely developed before Mallarmé was made famous in 1884 by A rebours. What he does have in common with the Symbolists is a belief in the supreme value of art as the only answer to determinism and as a substitute for religion. The latter belief he shared with Mallarmé though not with all the younger Symbolists, some of whom became involved in the fin de siècle religious revival. His poetry is not concerned with mysteries and abstractions; it does not seek to establish correspondances or universal analogies. He

8) c.f. Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony, for a similar view.

9) c.f. C.A. Hackett, An Anthology of Modern French Poetry, p.247.

does not see poetic suggestion in terms of the suppression of particular reality and does not hesitate to name objects. His poetry is concerned with his own individual relationship with contemporary reality.

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Our assessment of the treatment of contemporary reality in the poetry of the period 1870-1887 may be considered to have implications for the picture of the evolution of French poetry for the whole of the post-Romantic period. Our schéma may be held to reflect both backwards and forwards in time.

It has been suggested in this study that it is at the very least quite as plausible to see Baudelaire as the precursor of a poetic genre treating modern and ephemeral reality as of Symbolism and more plausible to see the activities of the cénacles as relating to this genre than to Symbolism.(10) Just as these so-called origins of the Symbolist movement may be held to be equally the origins of the highly original poetry of contemporary reality developed after 1870 so too may twentieth-century French poetry be seen as the heir to the poetry of contemporary reality as well as to Symbolism. Indeed since most studies of the Symbolism of the decade beginning around 1885 speak of its importance for the future as a justification for the scrutiny it has received it may be as well to remind ourselves of the extent to which the poetry of contemporary reality has continued to be a vital and even dominant genre since 1887.

Both poetic theory and poetic practice since 1887 may be shown to ex-

- o) It is also possible to see Parnassianism as an important step on the road to the new poetry rather than as something totally rejected.

emphify this continuing importance. Symbolism was probably a necessary check to the sometimes excessive preoccupation with material reality in both naturalist prose and verse. Yet it, in turn, was soon reacted against. Within just a few years of Moreás's manifesto, Verhaeren was producing his epic evocations of urban life in the age of high technology in which social comment, emotional involvement and spiritual searching were combined with a successful formulation of aspects of the modern environment. In the realm of everyday life Jammes and Fort produced poetry equally rooted in reality, in Jammes's case that of the French provinces, in Fort's that of Paris. All these poets had recourse, on occasion, to impressionistic and apparently spontaneous forms thus perpetuating the link between modern and ephemeral subjects and new language already forged by poets of 1870-1887. After the turn of the century, the Unanimistes (11) not only built a whole genre and philosophy on the poetic treatment of the modern city but incidentally produced some of the best theoretical definitions of the poetry of contemporary reality:

L'expression immédiate s'oppose à l'expression discursive, qui consiste à offrir un enchaînement d'idées rationnel, et logique à propos de la réalité, une vue de l'esprit sur la réalité. La poésie unanimiste, au contraire, veut être un jaillissement spontané du réel et de l'âme. Entre la vie et nous, nous refusons d'interposer l'écran de la raison abstraite. Et nous n'essayons pas davantage de nous dérober par le symbole... (12)

It is interesting to note that one of the best poets of the group, Chennevière, was a self-confessed admirer of Rimbaud and Baudelaire. At almost the same time under the influence of the modernism of Cubist painters like Delaunay, Apollinaire created his own vision of the modern city and the technological age in poems like 'Zone'. Larbaud and Cendrars re-established the themes of speed and travel as important poetic subjects. After the 1914-18 war Fargue, Reverdy, Eluard and Aragon, like Milosz before them, all

(11) Much of Jouve's early poetry is self-consciously modernistic and deeply influenced by the Unanimistes.

(12) Jules Romains, interview in Le Figaro, 8 March 1911; the italics are his.

produced beautiful poetry thoroughly imbued with the atmosphere of modern Paris. Recent work on Jacob has demonstrated the extent to which his poetry is inspired by modern everyday reality. (13) Claudel several times, notably in Reflexions sur la poésie, spoke of the need for poetry to seek its inspiration in reality rather than pure imagination or fantasy. Poems like 'Ballade' (Feuilles de Saints) are rich in reference to the modern age. Moreover there are many declarations in Claudel's theoretical writing of the advantages of adapting the rhythms of everyday speech into poetry. (14) The primitivism and exoticism of Saint-John Perse has not precluded the treatment, albeit occasionally, of aspects of modern reality such as the train journey across Washington in 'Poème à l'Étrangère' (Éloges). Supervielle in pieces like 'La Pluie et les Tyrans' makes a profound commentary on aspects of the modern age in a gentle, everyday tone, sensing that this will be more effective than apostrophe. The use of registers of ordinary everyday speech to humorous effect has, of course, been one of the distinguishing features of poets such as Queneau and Prévert. Despite the esoteric preoccupations of some French poets since 1945 ordinary modern reality has kept an important place as a poetic theme. Char's evocations of Provence are reminiscent of the work of Jammes. Cadou and Reverdy have succeeded in formulating a feeling of mystery in their atmospheric formulation of the experience of everyday life. Ponge has even demonstrated a neo-Realist obsession with the minute details of the modern setting.

In very recent poetry one may still find the expression of feeling being made through reference to specifically modern phenomena such as modern means

(13) S.I. Lockerie, 'Realism and Fantasy in the Work of Max Jacob'.

(14) Claudel considered everyday speech to be the most influential factor upon his verset.

of travel, just as it had been by the poets of 1870-1887:

Boeing---Boeing---Boeing---
 Going going going
 Allant allant allant
 ailes tendues sur les vents
 les éclats dont des îles
 les fissures les fleuves

la neige - Dieu - la chaleur des viscères -
 la carcasse formée au hasard sur la terre
 tournoie...

(15)

One suspects that it is, more than anything else, the greatness of Valéry which has accounted for the interpretation of twentieth-century French verse as an evolution of Symbolism, just as the towering figure of Mallarmé has affected interpretations of the development of French poetry in the latter third of the nineteenth century. Yet Valéry's attitude to reality has not been as uncompromising as that of his master. The presence of sensually experienced reality is far more tangible in his verse than in most of Mallarmé. Indeed his particular admiration for 'L'Après-midi d'un Faune' is an indication of his inclination towards the poetic recreation of atmosphere and the use of plastic images of which 'Le Cimetière Marin' is the most celebrated instance.

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The rich and abundant twentieth-century inheritance of the poetry of contemporary reality is thus a further justification of the importance of studying the poetic treatment of the modern and the ephemeral in the crucial period 1870-1887. It is our belief that such a study provides both a useful and a necessary supplement to the schéma of poetic developments in France since Romanticism.

(15) Jean Pérol, 'Boeing', Ruptures.

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