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Imagery in French religious poetry in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Abstract of thesis.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the poetry of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by studying in particular its imagery. The study will differentiate between different styles of imagery and bring out the characteristics which the poets of this period shared. The first chapter is a definition of the image in general, pointing out its function as a means of comparison and a means of expressing the poet's experience. The different ways of using an image and the different types of imagery will be indicated. Finally I shall trace the differences in theories of the image in different periods, and indicate the special characteristics of baroque imagery.

In the second chapter I shall make a general study of the relation between art and religion, and the uses made of imagery in religious faith. The individuality of the writer of devotional literature produces an individual type of imagery, and the chapter concludes with an examination of imagery used in prose writing during the period to which this study is devoted. The third chapter is concerned with influences, firstly Biblical imagery and its influence on poets dealing with Biblical themes, and on the poetry of death and transience. I shall also try to define the differences between the Protestant and Catholic writer in his acceptance of Biblical imagery. Then I shall study the Italian influence. Since the similarity between religious and erotic imagery is often striking, the influence of love poetry,

especially the predominant Petrarchist style is an important factor to be considered. Then the use of classical mythology in imagery will be studied, and finally the signs of medieval survivals in imagery will be outlined.

The fourth chapter is in three parts. The first part examines extremely sensuous and picturesque imagery, firstly in its more gloomy aspects; poetry on the Day of Judgement, the afterlife, the Crucifixion. Then allegorical imagery and imagery of transient things will be studied. Imagery often becomes very vivid when required to translate intense emotion. On the other hand the optimistic outlook is expressed in the picturesque imagery describing the Virgin and Mary Magdalene. Imagery is often developed disproportionately and translated the individuality of the poet's vision of the world and his faith. The second part deals with antithetical and paradoxical images. The themes illustrated by antithesis are the contrasts between the flesh and the spirit, and the contradictions in life. Antithesis is also used to describe negatively things which are beyond the normal powers of description. Paradox is shown to be an integral part of Christian belief, especially in the themes of death and life, in dealing with the doctrine about Christ and the Virgin Mary, and the Holy Trinity, and life as a whole can be described in paradoxical terms. The last part deals with complexity in imagery, particularly symbolic images and images which are made to illustrate a large number of ideas. Some poets use imagery which is obscure, sometimes because the idea it expresses is difficult to grasp, sometimes to preserve the essential mystery

of the Christian faith. This obscurity is increased by confusion in language and abruptness of style. Often the imagery is obscure because the poet is too concerned with demonstration of his own erudition.

The fifth chapter will examine the function of the image within the poem. Firstly the image which is central to the poem is illustrated, then the poem which is made up of a series of connected images. The poet's individuality is demonstrated by the way in which he uses images. Then it is shown how images complement the idea and form an illustration of it. The image may also be the unifying element of the poem from the structural point of view, or it may simply be a form of decoration. Finally I shall point out what the poets themselves considered the function of poetry to be and how they approached the problem of style. The conclusion points out the general characteristics of the imagery of this period in relation to the poetry of Europe in general, and makes some attempt to explain why and in what way the poetry of this period makes a distinctive use of imagery.

Imagery in French Religious Poetry of the Late
Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries.

Ann Fairbairn

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Introduction

The major figures of the period covered by this study, poets as different in their aims and intentions as d'Aubigné and Malherbe, have long been known, even to the literary historian, but it is only during the last few years that serious attention has been paid to the minor poetry of the period, and, under the label 'baroque', much of the work of these lesser-known poets has been re-appraised. Many studies have been devoted to poets such as Sponde, Chassignet or La Ceppède. These poets all have one characteristic in common, that is the preoccupation with religious themes. Some poets - and one thinks immediately of Ronsard and d'Aubigné - concern themselves directly with the issue of the religious wars. Other poets, less immediately concerned with topical issues and controversies, seem to have written in order to rekindle a truly religious spirit in their contemporaries, or simply to express their own inner struggles. The interest in the connection between religion and literature is seen in the large number of translations of psalms made at this time, following the example of Marot and Bèze, by poets such as Desportes and Chassignet, or verse translations of other parts of the Bible such as the Song of Songs, or the Book of Job.

It is in their imagery that we see at the same time the originality of these poets and their reliance on traditional means of expression. They adapted the imagery of their

predecessors to the new themes, and combined them with the images which were a part of Christian mythology. It is in his imagery, moreover, that the poet is most revealing: his relationship with the world, the way he looks at objects, the way he forms ideas, are all illustrated by his use of imagery. As is to be expected the different personalities use imagery in different ways. In this period, on the other hand, the unity of faith and similarity of the literary tradition they relied upon can be seen in the repetition of many images. The study will concentrate on the work of D'Aubigné, Chassignet, Sponde and La Ceppède, within the context of lesser-known poets. In this way it will be seen how far certain images were part of a convention, or an atmosphere which influenced everyone writing in this period.

I shall begin this thesis with an attempt to reach a definition of imagery in general, what its function is, and how it is used by different poets particularly those of the period studied. The role of imagery within religious teaching and doctrine is an important factor to be considered when studying religious poetry, and indeed the whole connection between art and religion is interesting. In the second chapter this will be studied particularly within the context of prose writings of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries which deal with religious themes. More specific influences which might have produced certain trends in poetry will be considered in the third chapter: firstly the influence of the Bible,

secondly the current of Petrarchist imagery which runs through the sixteenth century, and finally the influence of medieval forms and classical allusions. In the fourth chapter the imagery itself is studied under three main headings: extremely vivid, sensuous imagery, the more stylized imagery based on antithesis and paradox, and the more complex and erudite imagery. Finally, the image will be studied in relation to the poem as a whole, to assess its importance for the individual poet, in an attempt to show how the image in this period is central to the poet's expression and also the mark of his personal reactions to religious themes.

I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Wilson, for his invaluable advice and encouragement.

Chapter I

Image as comparison.

For the purpose of this study I shall take 'imagery' as a general term, embracing all other terms such as 'metaphor', 'symbol', 'simile', in fact any figure of speech which provides description of a concept rather than simple statement of that concept. The commonest type of image is a picture made out of words, either a translation of ideas into material terms, or a description of material objects in words. An important element in imagery is that of comparison. A comparison may be implicit or explicit in the image. The poet may be ostensibly comparing two things - an emotion and an object, or two objects. Even though the poet may not state clearly that he is comparing two or more things, the reader is aware of it, as in this allegorical image from du Bellay's Antiquités:

D'un blanc oyseau l'aile bien emplumee
 Sembloit voler jusqu'au sejour des Dieux,
 Et dégoisant un chant melodieux
 Montoit au ciel avecques la fumee.
 De ce beau feu les rayons escartez
 Lançoient par tout mille et mille clartez,
 Quand le degout d'une pluie doree
 Le vint esteindre. (1)

There is a comparison between the sublimity of the phoenix rising to the skies and its destruction by the rain which extinguishes its fire, and the court of Rome which has become

(1) Du Bellay: Les Regrets suivis des Antiquités de Rome, Paris 1958, p.287.

corrupt after the apparent promise of the Counter-Reformation. The image therefore compares a mythological picture with an historical fact, illustrating his feelings about the events through the use of images. The image functions on two levels; first there is the description of the phoenix, and second there is the idea which it illustrates. The idea is not explicitly stated, but the reader, from his knowledge, can see it suggested in the image. In this sense the use of imagery corresponds to the function of the imagination in general, in that it brings to mind objects and experiences not immediately before it. Imagination creates a kind of vision, widens the way in which we look at things, presents them more completely, and also relates them to each other.

The two different uses of the image, to explain and to embellish, cannot be easily separated. In the lines from a sonnet by Ronsard,

Te regardant assise auprès de ta cousine
Belle comme une aurore, et toi comme un soleil, (1)

the imagery is mainly decorative, drawing pictures to add to the praises of the beautiful woman. In the following image from Maurice Scève the image explains Scève's desire for Délie:

O fusses-tu par ta froide nature
La Salamandre en mon feu résidente.
Tu y aurois delectable pâture
Et estaindrois ma passion ardente. (2)

- (1) Ronsard: Poésies Choiesies, ed. Nolhac, Paris 1959, p.133.
 (2) Maurice Scève: Délie in Schmidt: Poètes du XVIe Siècle, Paris 1953, p.141.

The image also sheds light on the difference between their two characters, she cold and he passionate, and the salamander is a symbolic solution of the problem. In the first image the dawn and the sun complicate the picture of the two girls. In the second the salamander arises naturally from the opposition between heat and cold, and sums up the dilemma clearly.

The use of imagery, particularly metaphor, in illustrating ideas can, then, be a simplification of abstract thought. The essential thing is that the image should appeal to the mind, perhaps through the medium of the senses, not as a logical argument, but in the same way as direct experience of the external world, different elements being perceived in the same instant.

It is not only as a translation of abstract ideas or emotions that metaphorical images are useful, however. It is a common procedure in describing anything to describe it in terms of something else, by using comparisons and analogies. Thus something beyond the bounds of one person's experience can be assimilated by the use of terms within his experience. This is not the only purpose of the poet. In using metaphor he brings together the object to be described and the metaphor in order to make the description more vivid, more acceptable, and as a way of ascribing value to it. Thus to say that a woman's hair is like gold is to make it more clear what her hair looks like, and to imply that it is beautiful, since gold is considered a good thing in itself, being both pleasant to look at and pleasurable to possess, and being in fact of supreme

value for the alchemist because of its perfection. The metaphors used are not necessarily impersonal and objective but may reflect the opinions of the poet. So when Ronsard wrote the poem Mignonne, allons voir si la rose, the image of the flower opening out and then dying, expressed in concrete terms the idea of the transience of beauty, in which he pointed a moral. The description of the rose with the plis de sa robe pourprée gives a picture of the shape and colour of the rose, and at the same time associates the rose with a girl, to whom the word robe would be more applicable. So when he talks about the rose, the girl is associated with the ideas he suggests about the rose. The beauty of the rose stands for the beauty of the girl also, and the sorrow at the fading of the rose stands for the sorrow at the fading of her beauty, and for the transience of all things. Since we accept the beauty of the rose, we are persuaded into accepting all these ideas connected with it, and to feel with Ronsard the regret at the transience of beauty, and the determination to enjoy it as fully as possible.

It may be that some images appear only to have the function of drawing a picture in words, as in the first definition. However, this cannot be an objective picture, as it describes something as seen or imagined by the artist, and is never an exact reproduction of the thing described. The object or scene appears coloured by the attitude or emotions of the poet, and in fact many images which appear to be purely descriptive, convey a great deal of emotion.

Imagery as a means of expression.

Having established that an image does not merely draw a picture, we must now consider the image as a certain way of using words descriptively. What must be considered is whether the image is simply a way of using words, or whether it is in fact a different way of thinking. Some people would of course assert that thought and the use of words cannot be separated. What I am concerned with here, however, is whether it can be said that an image is simply a way of suggesting ideas which could be expressed in more abstract terms, or whether an image presents concepts which could not otherwise be expressed. There is no one answer to this - there is great variation from one poet to another. One poet may use an image as a picture to illustrate an idea he has already expressed. Another poet obviously thinks through his images: his experience of the world may come to him through his senses and he communicates this by recreating these sensuous experiences. In general the poet does not proceed to deduce truth by logical argument; he wishes to present it as a convincing experience with all its immediacy. Hence the stress on the sensuous aspect of poetry; for Coleridge truth was revealed in sudden glimpses of sensuous imagery. The image is considered as a short cut to truth, more effective than logical reasoning. This is one reason why poetry is seen as a kind of divine revelation, the vision of truth. The truth revealed in these images is not objective truth, but subjective, personal concepts which are convincing when expressed in images, even though they might not be accepted

as eternal truths.

Moreover, the image, appealing to the senses as well as to the mind, has more persuasive power than simple statement of opinions or arguments. This brings me back to the point made earlier about the function of the imagination, which creates a wider vision. The image may present an experience not only in sensuous terms, thereby making it clearer, but it may bring together different aspects of experience, and present ideas in a more complex form than normal logical statements. This is the second way in which imagery differs from simple statement; it is in its greater complexity, the bringing together of different ideas. Day Lewis sees this as the most important element in the image:

Beneath the pleasure we receive from the verbal music,
the sensuous associations of a simile or a metaphor,
there lies the deeper pleasure of recognising an affinity.

(1)

This is what distinguishes many images from other types of statement, bringing together elements of different aspects of thought and experience and associating them. We have already seen that any description is coloured by the emotional attitude of the poet. This association may be between different objects, or objects, emotions and ideas. Ezra Pound defines the image as 'that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time'. (2) So that whereas the elements of the image may be diverse, and the ideas expressed complex, the

(1) Day Lewis: The Poetic Image, London 1947, p.35.

(2) Ezra Pound, quoted in Wellek and Warren: Theory of Literature, London 1963, p.187.

function of the image would be to make this complexity appear simple, and the image may be in fact a simplification, rather than a complication. Words are often used not as expressing one single idea, but as a means of suggesting various different ideas, brought out in the associations between one word and another. The use of the objects of the material world in imagery illustrates to a certain extent the inadequacy of words, one object being better able to call up a number of associations and so enrich the meaning of the poem. The poet may on the other hand require his words to be more precise, and so the metaphor may limit the vague meaning of the abstract term.

The image may be in a sense a simplification and in another a generalization, and these two elements are present in most imagery. Returning to the earlier distinction between imagery as decoration and as clarification, we see that imagery when decorative gives weight to a point already made, by taking examples from other fields of experience and relating them, thus complicating the point. On the other hand imagery, when clarifying an idea, takes examples from other aspects of experience which simplify the concepts involved and make them more comprehensible.

An image is a way of using words, but one which involves reference to a world of physical and sensuous experience. There is no need however to depend on purely sensuous images in order to make an idea clear. Ronsard's rose is acceptable because we can see its beauty and all the ideas which evelve from that

sight. But this image from Donne is equally acceptable because it refers to something which is as much a part of experience as a more concrete picture would be:

And though each spring do add to love new heate,
As princes do in times of action get
New taxes, and remit them not in peace,
No winter shall abate the springs increase. (1)

Uses of imagery.

I should like now to consider some images in order to see what the poet's procedure is. First Maurice Scève:

Tu me seras la Myrrhe incorruptible
Contre les vers de ma mortalité. (2)

In this image he is referring to the abstract ideas of life and death, and his feelings about them are revealed in the symbols, myrrhe incorruptible contrasting with vers, love as pure and magical, death as horrifying and degrading. Together they represent love overcoming death just as the myrrh could be used to embalm the dead body protecting it from corruption. The myrrh refers also to his mistress, his ideal, and again contrasts with the mundane facts of his own mortality. So the image reveals more than the simple fact that love overcomes death, it is the victory of the spiritual over the physical. These abstract ideas are all suggested in these two images which refer not to the concrete ideas of myrrh or worms, but the emotional and intellectual impression they make on the mind, and present ideas and emotions in very compact form.

Another very compact image is that of Claudel, in L'Esprit et l'Eau:

- (1) Donne: Loves Growth in Poems, London 1931, p.21.
(2) Maurice Scève: Délie in Schmidt: Poètes du XVIe Siècle, Paris 1953, p.201.

Où que je tourne la tête
 J'envisage l'immense octave de la Création. (1)

The use of the word octave expresses his ideas about the Creation; the word suggests music, and particularly harmonious, ordered music, implying that he finds a harmony, and order, in Creation, at the same time saying that it is made up of different elements, as the octave is made up of different notes. It is both suggestive of sound and of sight, the octave can be visualized as well as heard, something with a large span and yet within comprehension. The difference between these two images probably lies in the fact that the octave embodies these abstract ideas, but it is not really necessary to become fully conscious of them in order to appreciate the image. The octave of Creation is a descriptive phrase which stands independent of the abstract ideas lying behind it. The idea presents itself to the poet in the form of this image. In the image of Scève, the abstract ideas precede the image, which is formed to illustrate them and does not really become independent of them. When analysed, both these images offer a great deal of meaning, and suggest ideas which are very complex. Their force is not only that they make these comprehensible in sensuous terms, but also that they use concepts familiar to everyone, provoking a standard reaction, like horror of worms, and through them communicate an aspect of the poet's individual outlook on life.

If we accept that the purpose of a poem is to communicate experience by recreating it in the mind of the reader, the image can be a very powerful factor in poetry. Besides recreating

(1) Paul Claudel: Oeuvre Poétique, Paris 1957, p.240.

his experience, the poet can also give it greater depth and meaning by stressing its affinities. By making comparisons and connections, he makes the image into something which gives order to ideas, fits them into a pattern formed by the vision of the poet.

An image, therefore, may on one hand be a recreation of something which the poet wants the reader to see, like Wordsworth's daffodils, and through that picture perceive his feelings about the things seen and the way they affect him. Or the image may illustrate a concept like Ronsard's rose, presenting it with greater vividness and persuasive power. The imagery of a poem may bring to life a network of associations of ideas, feelings, and objects, which conveys a complete and complex experience and at the same time make this meaning more precise and individual.

Types of imagery.

The way imagery is used varies a great deal from one writer to another. Some writers find it easier to communicate through vivid sensuous imagery, others subordinate their imagery to the development of abstract ideas. In the period considered in this thesis both extremes are shown - d'Aubigné on one hand having a very visual imagination, and poets such as Spenser on the other hand using images almost as abstract terms. Those whose experiences make very strong impressions on the senses as well as the mind try to recreate their experiences through the use of images appealing to the senses. On the other hand some poets use images as symbols of abstract qualities to fit into a predetermined framework of ideas. The symbol suggests something beyond itself,

some higher reality; in this period the symbol is interchangeable for certain abstract ideas, losing part of its reality as an object. Although in Ronsard's poem the rose exists as a flower, it may easily become merely a symbol of beauty, or of love, in the work of other poets. The difference between the symbol and other kinds of imagery is that the symbol refers one immediately to a background of more abstract ideas. G.V. Jones shows the importance of the symbol when he says:

Myth and symbol are ultimately anthropomorphic ways of conceiving what is immeasurably greater than human knowledge can embrace, (1)

and the idea of symbolism is based on the theory that this world corresponds in some way to an invisible world, and refers back to it. Thus in Christian imagery the pelican becomes a symbol for Christ because the pelican on a lower level reminds the reader of the self-sacrifice, generosity and pity of Christ. In Experience into Words by D.W. Harding, it is shown how some images are subordinated to abstract values, and it is said:

Some allegory and personification have been so denatured that they amount to little more than an alternate form of abstract statement. (2)

Allegory is the use of visible objects to express immaterial facts, like the passions. C.S. Lewis differentiates allegory and symbol thus:

symbolism is a mode of thought, but allegory is a mode of expression, (3)

- (1) G.V. Jones: Christology and Myth in the New Testament, London 1956, pp.29-30.
- (2) D.W. Harding: Experience into Words, London 1963, p.73.
- (3) C.S. Lewis: Allegory of Love, New York 1956, p.48.

In the late nineteenth century of course the theory of symbolism is developed much more. For Mallarmé the word is a symbol for the idea it expresses - an idea more vast and unlimited than the word itself. Words should call up the invisible world of ideas beyond the world of the senses:

Je dis: une fleur! et, hors de l'oubli où ma voix relègue
aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d'autre que les
calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et suave,
l'absent de tous bouquets. (1)

The symbol refers one to the spiritual beauty lying behind material reality. However, in both concepts of symbolism the reality beyond the actual image is stressed, rather than the image itself.

Most imagery lies somewhere between the two extremes of the concrete and the abstract. The following image from Donne combines visual concepts with more abstract ones:

Whilst my Physicians by their love are grown
Cosmographers, and I their Map, who lie
Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown
That this is my South-west discovery
Per fretum febris, by these straits to die,
I joy, that in these straits, I see my West;
For, though their currents yield return to none,
What shall my West hurt me? As West and East
In all flat Maps (and I am one) are one,
So death doth touch the Resurrection. (2)

He uses the points of the compass which suggest abstract ideas also - west as death, east as birth, and south as heat, so that the south-west discovery is death by fever. The theme is resolved by the visual image of the map: for although on a flat

(1) Mallarmé: Divagations, Paris 1922, p.251.

(2) Donne: Hymne to God my God, in my Sicknesse, in Poems, London 1931, p.287.

map east and west may appear to lie opposite each other, they are in fact the same point, as death and resurrection are the same. The image is at the same time a clear picture and also depends on abstract, symbolic interpretation of the ideas of east and west.

Many images depend on associations which are not of the senses: for instance the opening line of one of du Bellay's sonnets:

Heureux qui, comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage, (1)
 where the reference to the legend of Ulysses enriches the theme of journey and homecoming with the associations of the legend. He uses the story of Ulysses to illustrate the point that although journeys may be useful and instructive, it is better to return home to one's family. This legend is perhaps not the most appropriate one to illustrate this theme, but the romantic associations of the legend contrast with the more humble aspirations of du Bellay. This type of imagery is not as obvious as visual images, but depends on the reader's knowledge of the literary heritage of the poet. In the same way writers referring to events or characters from the Bible can awaken a number of associations relevant to their themes. Christian images which have become symbols are those such as the Lamb, or the Bridegroom, which immediately suggest Christ, or the use of the serpent as a symbol of evil.

The importance attached to imagery.

Different types of imagery may be characteristic of different

(1) Du Bellay: Les Regrets suivis des Antiquités de Rome, Paris 1958, p.79.

periods. Certainly there is a variation in poetic theory from one age to another; what the function of the poem, and in particular the image, is, changes considerably. As the poetry studied in this thesis comes under the heading of 'baroque' for most critics, it would be interesting to see whether there is any way in which baroque imagery differs from classical imagery, for example. One can see how the theory of imagery has progressed, imagery being at first considered a mere decoration and later becoming the focal point of a poem. The Surrealists evidently believed that when the image came unconstrained from the subconscious it portrayed a more profound reality. For the poets of the nineteenth century the image became the mystical revelation. Modern poets seek above all new and striking images. Cleanth Brooks says of the image:

The imagery of a good poem must be 'functional' - it cannot afford to be merely decorative. (1)

For the poet of today the image is not something added on to the theme of the poem, it is the way in which experience is communicated in poetry. The idea is the image. Coleridge also was aware of the importance of the image, not only for decoration, but as expression of the poet's vision:

It has been before observed that the images, however beautiful, though faithfully copied from nature, and as accurately represented in words, do not of themselves characterize the poet. They become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion; or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion; or when they have the effect of reducing multitude to unity, or succession to an instant; or lastly, when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them, from the poet's own spirit. (2)

- (1) Cleanth Brooks: The Well-wrought Urn, New York 1947, p.219
 (2) S.T. Coleridge: Biographia Literaria, Vol. II, London 1907 p.16.

For him an image is only valid if it expresses the very personal nature of the poet's thought, and more particularly emotions.

Earlier theorists considered imagery to have a much more limited function. In the Encyclopedie, Marmontel defines the image in this way:

cette espèce de métaphore, qui, pour donner de la couleur à la pensée, et rendre un objet sensible s'il ne l'est pas, ou plus sensible s'il ne l'est pas assez, le peint sous les traits qui ne sont pas les siens, mais ceux d'un objet analogue. (1)

Here the image is seen as useful for clarification or explanation but not as being central to the poem. It supposes the ideas to be already formed, and the image a mere illustration.

Earlier writers see the image as at most an illustration of ideas:

La parure et non le corps de la poésie. (2)

In the early sixteenth century the image as such is not important from the theoretical point of view. There is a certain amount of discussion of the idea of the imagination, whose function in poetry is to make likenesses of things:

imagination concevant les Idées & formes de toutes choses.. pour après les représenter, décrire & imiter, (3)

and also to arrange and make patterns from the things perceived by the senses. The imagination had a limited rôle to perform in forming composite images from simple ones, in bringing to life objects from the memory, and so on. Probably for the poet imagery would come under the heading of elocution and be to a great extent a means of embellishing poetry. Comparison was

- (1) Quoted in M. Gilman: The Idea of Poetry in France, Cambridge Massachussets 1958, p.103.
- (2) Batteaux, quoted in M. Gilman: The Idea of Poetry in France, p.33.
- (3) Ronsard: Oeuvres Complètes, ed. F. Laumonier, Paris 1914, Vol. XIV, pp.12-13.

important however as the sang & veines of a poem, as for Ronsard, and for infusing life into the object started from. (1)

Just as the poets called 'baroque' were not conscious of having any common aims, neither had they any theory of the baroque image, but undoubtedly the image had for them a great deal of importance beyond that of decoration. An image could have the function of teaching by example, hence the images of Chassignet from which he drew moral lessons. Moreover, for religious poets the use of imagery to illustrate religious ideas endowed those images with a sacredness, so that they became ways of knowing and expressing the divine. Also, as I hope to show later, religion depends to a great extent on the fact that it is revealed through sacred images, rather than direct statement. Images are used not so much to clarify, as many poets of the time, including Walherbe, seemed to think they should, as to be sensuously and emotionally persuasive, and even shocking. As in Coleridge's definition the images appear modified by the predominant passion, which is a religious one.

Baroque imagery.

This passage from Theory of Literature shows the influence of religious fervour on baroque imagery.

In the baroque period, characteristic figures are the paradox, (the oxymoron, catachresis. These are Christian, mystical, pluralistic figures. Truth is complex. There are many modes of knowing, each with its own legitimacy. Some kinds of truths have to be stated by negation or calculated distortion. God can be spoken of anthropomorphically for he made men in his own image; but he

(1) See D.B. Wilson: Contraries in Sixteenth Century Scientific Writing in France, in Essays presented to G.M. Gardlestone, Newcastle 1960, p.363.

is also the transcendental Other. Hence in Baroque religion, truth about God may be expressed through couplings of contradictories or contraries, as in Vaughan's 'deep but dazzling darkness'. The Neo-Classical mind likes clear distinctions and rational progressions: metonymic movements from genus to species, or particular to species. But the Baroque mind invokes a universe at once of many worlds and of worlds all, in unpredictable ways, connected. (1)

Whether or not such a close link between baroque and religion is justifiable is not my concern here. What this passage does bring out is the idea of the different kinds of imagery - that advocated by Malherbe which should be clear, simple and comprehensible, and that of much of the poetry of this period which is confused, self-contradictory, and as we shall see later, highly coloured by the emotional conflicts and obsessions of the writer.

In this period, then, it would seem that although the apparent function of the image was to decorate, the poets of this study to a great extent used the image as a means of explanation through comparison. The theme being a religious one, the explanation becomes more complex in its attempts to bring across the essential mystery. At the same time these poets were concerned with convincing the reader of the truth of their propositions, so imagery must also be persuasive and highly emotional. Imagery is not used only to ornament, or to clarify the poet's thought, but as a means, often the only means, of communicating this thought.

Whatever the theories about imagery, or the variations in types of imagery from one period to another, the image always has an importance for the critic at least as great as the ideas

(1) Wellek and Warren: Theory of Literature, London 1963, p.198.

it illustrates. As has been shown in the first part of this chapter, the use of the image is one of the ways in which poetry differs from other types of language. The image reveals what the poet feels, the way in which he sees the world, and also expresses in more comprehensible terms his ideas. The image is the means of recreating vividly the experience of the poet. The more deeply the poet is committed to a belief about life or the more biased his outlook on the world, the more he depends on images to reveal this vision to his readers, and to persuade and convince them. This is true particularly of much of the imagery of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Imagery is used both in making ideas more complex, uniting disparate aspects of life, and in simplifying them to illustrate a system which was conceived of in simple terms: good and evil, God and man.

Chapter II

The aim of this chapter is to examine the ways in which religion depends on images in its teaching, and indeed the extent to which expression of religious belief is based on imagery, as defined in the preceeding chapter. Religion will also be examined in relation to art in general and poetry in particular in an attempt to discover whether religious belief is a suitable subject for art, and whether art is a proper medium for expressing religious ideas.

Art and theology.

It would be useful to examine in what ways art and theology are similar. Religion is an interpretation of reality, taken in the broadest possible sense, that is, it is a way of explaining the meaning behind the universe as a whole and also the particular life of each individual. Through religion man comes to terms with nature, with the world around him, and with the conditions of his own existence, with suffering and death. He learns to reconcile himself to death, hoping to find in it a new life. Explanations are given for existence, for the creation of all things, and the reasons why the world continues to exist. All this is within the control of God. Besides this, man is given a set of rules by which he may live his life among others-- the moral code has the authority of God behind it and teaches him how to behave towards other people, and the patterns into which his life should fit. Finally, religion gives him the satisfaction of a personal relationship with the creator of the universe; here he feels that although he is part of a large community,

in the eyes of God he is still an individual.

However, the explanations given to him are not of a logical, scientific type; they are imprecise, vague. They affirm the existence of God, but his nature is shown to be beyond the comprehension of man. So they are not propositions which are immediately acceptable. What is required is not understanding, but belief. The emphasis in Christianity is on faith. A reason for this may be found in the need for personal contact with God: religion must not be obvious and simple, but must make some demand on the believer. He must put some effort into his religion in order to achieve a feeling of unity with God. In any case, as yet no science could give a complete rational explanation of the causes of existence, and the only indications which we possess do not point to any simple solution, and give man no sense of purpose. Religion compensates for the insufficiency of that which we can ascertain by experience and logical reasoning. It superimposes an imaginative structure on that which is apparent, and gives a new dimension to life. The phenomena of the world can be given meaning by this superimposed pattern, by being woven into its structure and acquiring a new depth of significance. In the same way, each individual artist attempts to find some meaning in reality, at least within the framework of the work of art. As T.S. Eliot in Poetry and Drama says:

It is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order in reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness

and reconciliation. (1)

Art tries to give meaning to the world by means of patterns. Ordinary events may become meaningful as part of a work of art. Whereas science finds out the organic laws of existence, and philosophy makes abstractions of existence, art accepts life in its totality, and adds something to it when it makes it part of its pattern.

A.C. Bridge in Images of God claims that artistic expression is less precise yet more profound than normal logical expression, which could also be said about religious expression. Art, besides religion, can provide the link between the material and the transcendent, although the artist is not confined to one particular pattern or belief. This is not to say merely that theology is an art, or that all art is dedicated to a religious interpretation of life. Simply the methods by which they proceed is similar, and art seems to be one of the means by which religious feelings can find adequate expression. Many writers moreover are aware of the links between art and religion. Ronsard in the Abregé de l'Art Poétique had this to say about his conception of literature and religion.

Car la Poesie n'estoit au premier age qu'une theologie allegorique, pour faire entrer en cerveau des hommes grossiers, par fables plaisantes et colorees les secrets qu'ils ne pouvoient comprendre, quand trop ouvertement on descouvroit la verité. (2)

Ronsard's idea of theology is a mixture of pagan and Christian,

(1) T.S. Eliot: Poetry and Drama, London 1951, p.35.

(2) Ronsard: Oeuvres Complètes, ed. P. Laumonier, Paris 1914, vol. XIV, p.4.

in this instance mainly pagan. He gives as examples Orpheus and Homer, who learned what they knew from prophets, oracles and similar sources. It seems that Ronsard saw a similarity between poetic and prophetic utterances.

At the heart of religion lies incomprehensibility, the essential mystery which is partly, but not wholly, revealed to believers. Ayer said:

We are often told that the nature of God is a mystery which transcends the human understanding. But to say that something transcends the human understanding is to say that it is unintelligible. And what is unintelligible cannot significantly be described. (1)

It is unintelligible because it is not logical, it is a nonsensical concept in fact. The existence of God is a nonsensical idea simply because it cannot be verified, and so statements about God are of the same type as artistic statements, neither logically true nor false. So perhaps the only way of attempting to describe God is in artistic terms, which substitute images for an unintelligible reality, and suggest instead of describing. Art can contribute, appealing not to the reason, but to the less conscious part of man's mind, particularly in music. To a certain extent artists clothe their work in an air of mystery; they often suggest rather than explain. Artistic expression is the best, and often the only means of conveying this sense of mystery and incomprehensibility which religious belief contains.

Images in religious faith.

The use of metaphor is extended often to express some of the most basic ideas of Christianity. Ideas such as the nature

(1) A.J. Ayer: Language, Truth and Logic, London 1946, p.118.

of God himself, and man's life after death are incommunicable - no-one can form any certain idea about them. So the ideas must be presented in terms which suggest rather than define. To a certain extent every person has a different idea of God, depending on his own needs and feelings. To say that He is incomprehensible is probably true, but it is not always satisfying to place one's faith in an incomprehensible being. On the other hand, one may tend to think of Him as some sort of super-man; to form a picture of Him in human form. Here the image is that of a painter who tries to portray a figure who would call forth respect and love. He may be the personification of the Father, or of the Judge. The image of God changes with time - the God of the Old Testament is more of a stern judge than the God of the New Testament who is kinder and more merciful. But it seems inevitable that He should be given human attributes, even if these are merely an indication of His greatness, or that He should often be imagined in sensuous terms, although the mind realizes that He is beyond this. St Augustine can find only sensuous images to describe Him in his Confessions:

But what is it that I love in loving Thee? Not corporeal beauty nor the splendour of time, not the radiance of the light, so pleasant to our eyes; not the sweet melodies of song of all kinds nor the fragrant smell of flowers, ointments and spices; not manna and honey; not limbs pleasant to the embracements of flesh. I love not these things when I love my God; and yet, I love a certain kind of light, and sound and fragrance, a food, and embracement, in loving my God, who is the light, sound, fragrance, food and embracement of my inner man - where that light shineth unto my soul which no place can contain, where that soundeth which time snatcheth not away, where there is a fragrance which no breeze disperseth,

where there is a food which no eating can diminish, and where that clingeth which no satiety can sunder. This is what I love when I love my God. (1)

Life after death is unity with God and is therefore the moment when one discovers the nature of God. Heaven or hell may also be thought of as actual places; in heaven man can enjoy pleasures either of a different kind from those on earth, or of a more intense and lasting kind. Similarly, the torments of hell can be imagined in physical terms, or in purely spiritual terms. But again the image of an actual place is usually stronger in people's minds, especially in the period which we will be considering.

Both concepts are admitted to be beyond comprehension and definition, and therefore depend to a large extent on the power of certain descriptions, suggestions or comparisons which relate to human experience, but which are also recognized as being of a different nature, as in the passage quoted from St. Augustine.

The use of religion to explain facts such as the existence of the universe and of man himself, and the existence of good and evil, is much more poetic than rational. The story of the Creation is very unscientific; it is an imaginative explanation. The emphasis is on simplicity, the Creation of the world taking place in an orderly fashion according to the divine will, the story of the Garden of Eden with two characters. The images are particularly strong and even though they cannot withstand rational criticism, they still stand as symbols: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the serpent who represents

(1) St. Augustine: Confessions, Trans. Pilkington, Edinburgh 1876 Book X Ch. VI, p.243.

evil, the Garden of Eden as the happiness of innocence.

In the same way supposedly historical events, as in the life of Jesus, may be invested with a symbolic value. He is the person who brings man's salvation and the cross becomes a symbol of salvation. The idea of death and rebirth, death being necessary for rebirth, and the idea of sacrifice, are given shape in the events of the Crucifixion - the individual death and rebirth of every Christian. Here the concrete image of Christ on the cross, which contains all this, but is still a physical presence, is perhaps the most forceful of all the Church's images. G.V. Jones states the purpose of a religious myth as being something which reinforces through pictorial symbolism ideas which cannot be accepted in terms of simple statement. The symbol of the cross suggests to those who look at it not only the historical Crucifixion, but also the central themes of this faith, and all the emotional appeal of the death of Christ and man's personal suffering and ultimate salvation. In a sense Christ is himself the image of God, God made visible in order that man may grasp through Christ what God is like.

The actual sayings of Jesus have a picturesque quality because of the imagery he uses to convey his teaching. By revealing his message indirectly, he preserves the fundamental mystery of Christian truth, so that only those will understand who wish to understand. Here the language of Jesus is poetic - metaphorical, not explicit.

En verité, en verité je vous dis, si le grain de froment cheant en la terre ne meurt, il demeure seul: mais s'il meurt, il apporte beaucoup de fruict. (1)

(1) La Bible qui est toute la sainte escriture printed by Francois Estienne 1567 S. Jean XII:24. (Henceforward abbreviated as La Bible)

This type of imagery of death and rebirth is typical of the Biblical style, and also of much of the poetry to be studied in this thesis. The quotation shows how similar the language of Christ is to that of the poet who clothes his thought in imagery as a way of making statements more comprehensible and more vivid, and also more obscure and complex. This is more obvious in the use of paradoxical statements to express religious truth, paradoxes which can only be resolved in the understanding of religious doctrine: statements such as:

Qui aura gardé la vie, la perdra, et qui aura perdu sa vie pour l'amour de moy, la gardera. (1)

or statements which seem paradoxical since they attempt to describe the incomprehensible nature of God:

Most hidden and most near, the most beauteous and most strong, stable yet contained of none; unchangeable and yet changing all things. (2)

The actions of God are seen to be paradoxical, as in this extract from Sponde's Méditations:

couronner en fin de gloire ceux que t'ont présenté la couronne d'espines? donner du miel à ceux qui t'ont fait avaler du fiel et du vinaigre? (3)

or in the contradictoriness of Bèze's description:

Car, Seigneur, c'est toy qui frappes et qui guaris, qui menes au sepulchre et qui en ramenes. (4)

God and divine truth are so much beyond human comprehension that all attempts to describe them end in self-contradiction.

(1) La Bible, S. Matthieu X:39.

(2) St Augustine: Confessions, Edinburgh 1876, Book I. Ch. IV., p.4.

(3) Jean de Sponde: Méditations avec un Essai de Foèmes Chrétiens, Paris 1954, p.69. (Henceforward abbreviated as Sponde)

(4) Théodore de Bèze: Chrétiennes Méditations, Geneva 1582, p.22.

Similarly salvation can be expressed in terms of paradox - the terms life and death acquiring a double meaning through the Christian message. As the story of Christ depicts events which transcend what is normally possible, so belief transcends what is reasonably credible: the laws of nature and the laws of logic can only be broken by the creator of these laws. So it seems that paradox is an expression of the inadequacy of language used logically to define and describe. Poetic language is an attempt in some ways to compensate for the inadequacy of normal language - to suggest that which is beyond definition, using words which have greater evocative power, making one aware of some kind of connection between things apparently unconnected. Also for the Christian the necessity for a language which defines spiritual experiences is important, as spiritual experience is assumed to be a part of every Christian's life and easily understandable to him. So he will accept that the spiritual be expressed in human terms, since these are the only ones which it is possible to use, so long as there is in these metaphors an indication of something beyond human experience.

The individual writer and his use of religious imagery.

The poet may be concerned with human existence also and may be trying to interpret it in a religious way, in which case he will try to combine the framework of Christian belief, with its imagery and symbolism, with elements of the visible world and human experience, and thus give them a deeper significance. There is a complication here - use of imagery may depend to a large extent on the poet's conception of the world and its

relation to God. He may see the world as the glorious creation of God, or he may see it as evil, tempting man away from spiritual perfection. So the image taken from the earthly world may provide an analogy for the heavenly world, or it may be in conflict with the writer's idea of God, and serve as a contrast. God may be given very human characteristics, the human characteristics which the writer considers to be of value, which he wishes his God to embody.

It is however undeniable that the separation between the earthly and heavenly worlds cannot be made very clearly in people's minds, or even in religious doctrine. The Church depends on images either visual or poetic, to convey much of its teaching, and the individual also may form ideas about religion which bring it down to a very human level. The necessity for imagery or parables is made clear in this passage by Austin Farrar:

Because the primary subject of theological statements is, according to unbelievers, preposterous, and according to believers 'transcendent', the statements about Him cannot be anything but parables borrowed from the world of our more direct acquaintance. And since He is by supposition very different from those things or persons from which the parabolic material is borrowed, no parable of itself expresses Him truly, and every parable needs to be balanced by a different parable with a contrasting bias. (1)

Although there is a wealth of images illustrating religious teaching each individual may find new images to communicate his religious experience without affecting the universality of his faith. By finding new, fresh images he may illuminate another aspect of his religion and relate it in even more ways

(1) Austin Farrar: A Starting Point for the Philosophical Examination of Theological Belief, in Faith and Logic, ed. Basil Mitchell, London 1957, p.10.

to ordinary human experience. The poet can draw both from traditional images and his own individual experience, since religion is as much a personal experience as a belief shared between all the members of the Church. The experiences of St Theresa, for instance, are expressed in images which she feels appropriate, and which are comprehensible to everyone:

Celui qui veut s'adonner à l'oraison, doit se figurer qu'il entreprend de faire, dans un sol ingrat et couvert de ronces, un jardin dont la beauté charme les yeux du Seigneur. C'est le divin Maître lui-même qui, de sa main, arrache d'abord les mauvaises herbes, et en met de bonnes à leur place ... Nous devons les arroser avec le plus grand soin; alors, loin de se fletrir, elles porteront des fleurs dont le doux parfum attirera le divin Maître. Il visitera souvent cette âme, son jardin chéri, et il y prendra ses délices au milieu des vertus qui en sont les mystiques fleurs. (1)

This image is extended to describe different states of prayer, illustrated by the necessity to water the garden: at first all the labour coming from herself, but later God supplying all her needs. The analogy of the gardener implies the control which God has over her soul, which is no longer a part of herself, and she emphasizes the sweetness of virtue through the pleasant image of the fragrant flowers. Her images are often sensuous, as when she describes the raptures of divine love, which suggests more of a physical than a mental state:

Cette oraison et cette union laissent l'âme remplie d'une ineffable tendresse d'amour pour Dieu. Elle voudrait mourir, non de peine, mais de la douceur même des larmes qu'elle répand. (2)

The procedure of appealing to the understanding through the senses is found in the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius.

- (1) St Theresa: La Vie de Sainte Thérèse, Trans. Marcel Bonix, Paris 1857, p.131.
 (2) St Theresa: La Vie de Sainte Thérèse, p.156.

he encourages the reader to imagine the sweetness of heaven through the five senses, and also the horrors of hell in the same way. He appeals directly to the imagination, especially the visual imagination, to induce the religious state of mind by meditating on Christ's sufferings on the cross. François de Sales recommends the same procedure:

Quand vous seres arrivée devant vostre pere spirituel, imaginez-vous d'estre en la montagne de Calvaire sous les pieds de Jesus-Christ crucifié, duquel le sang pretieux distille de toutes partz pour vous laver de vos iniquités; car, bienque ce ne soit pas le propre sang du Sauveur, c'est néaumoins le merite de son sang respandu qui arrose abondamment les penitens autour des confessionnaux. (1)

François de Sales gives a symbolic quality to this image of flowing blood, which combines the physical and the spiritual. He tries throughout to paint pleasing pictures of the religious life, appealing to the senses also. Heavenly beauty is related to earthly beauty, it is degree which differentiates them. On the other hand, a writer such as Donne uses images describing the world in terms which stress the extent to which it is separate from God:

And though the Apostle would not say Morimur, that, whilst we are in the body we are dead, yet he says, Peregrinamur, whilst we are in the body, we are but in a pilgrimage, and we are absent from the Lord; he might have said dead, for this whole world is but an universal churchyard, but one common grave, and the life and motion that the greatest persons have in it, is but as the shaking of buried bodies in the grave, by an earthquake. (2)

When he speaks of God's relation to the world, it is to emphasize the world's inadequacy to reflect God truly, but yet the world

- (1) François de Sales: Introduction à la Vie Devote, in Oeuvres, Vol. III, Annency 1893, Book I. Ch. XIX., p.57.
(Henceforward abbreviated as François de Sales)
- (2) Donne: Poetry and Prose, Edinburgh 1938, p.459.

has no value in itself except to reflect God until man can see Him face to face. Although the visions of Francois de Sales and of Donne are contradictory, they are both typical of two different kinds of attitude both to be found in the religious prose and poetry of this period. Moreover both are aspects of what might be called the baroque style. It has already been mentioned in the preceding chapter that for many critics there is a link between religious preoccupation and the baroque style. The influence of the Counter-Reformation and the Reformation itself would seem to have stirred poets into expression of their religious convictions. In this period religion became a matter of violent controversy and religious questions were involved with the everyday life of the people in a more material way than before. Religion was no longer an established set of beliefs, there was doubt about the validity of the doctrines expounded by the Church, one sect was opposed to another, and so the poet lent his aid by illustrating his beliefs in his art. The baroque style in many ways is the best fitted to express religious opinions. The obsession with death and the passage of time should convince the reader of the necessity for concentrating on spiritual salvation. The use of paradox reflects the paradoxical nature of the Christian faith, belief in God being the only means of resolving these paradoxes. The importance of Christianity is faith, not reason, and faith is best expressed in the concrete vision rather than the rational argument. The tendency to exaggerate is also justified by the importance of the theme treated, and spirit of religious

enthusiasm which inspired these poets.

Imagery in prose writing.

This being the case, it would be natural that the same types of imagery should be used in prose as in poetry, and the images popular in prose are often found to be common in poetry also. Since many works were written around passages from the Bible, particularly the psalms, it was inevitable that they should be full of echoes of Biblical imagery. Among Protestant writers of this time a taste for Biblical imagery was an element of their style. The 'Meditations' of Jean de Sponde are of course full of such echoes. This passage is probably inspired by references to the exotic animals of the Bible who torment man:

Les Ours l'espiant sur les montagnes, les Lyons le guettent
aux forests, les Loups l'agassent jusques dans sa porte,
le Crocodile l'accoustume aux larmes, l'Hyaena apprend
mesme à parler pour le piper, et se dispose à l'outrager
jusques dans le Tombeau, les Serpens se tapissent sous
les plus belles fleurs, les fleurs pour l'amorcer, les
Serpens pour le mordre. (1)

This gives the feeling of the antagonism between man and the world and man's helplessness alone in the universe. It also illustrates the baroque taste for exaggeration. Théodore de Beze in his 'Chrestiennes Meditations' takes up the theme of the tree, familiar in the Bible:

Bref, je seray comme un bel arbre fruictier planté de ta
main en ta maison, enté sur ce franc olivier, levant au
ciel mes rameaux verdoyans et garnis de fruicts procedans
de la grace, qui m'arrousera tousjours au piéd, et
m'empeschera de craindre gellees, ni chaleurs, ni vents,
ni gresles, ni autres tempestes, desquelles mesme je
recueilleray nouvelles forces pour tant mieux fructifier, (2)

(1) Sponde, p.9.

(2) Théodore de Beze: Chrestiennes Meditations, Geneva 1582, p.25.

De Beze sees himself as the tree growing and bringing forth fruit.

Although the image is the same as that of François de Sales:

Le juste est comme un arbre qui est planté sur le cours des eaux, qui porte son fruit en son tems, parce que la charité arrouasant une ame, produit en elle les oeuvres vertueuses chacun en sa saison. (1)

it seems that de Bèze accepts the image more physically, with more emphasis and exaggeration. In the work of François de Sales a great deal of imagery is drawn from nature, especially the more pleasant and decorative aspects of nature - used not merely to decorate but to help the reader to understand.

O Philothée! imaginez-vous que comme l'abeille, ayant recueilly sur les fleurs la rosée du ciel et le suc plus exquis de la terre, et l'ayant reduit en miel, le porte dans sa ruche; ainsi le prestre, ayant pris sur l'autel le Sauveur du monde, vray Fils de Dieu, qui comme une rosée est descendu du ciel, et vray Fils de la Vierge qui comme fleur est sorti de la terre de nostre humanite, il le met en viande de suavité dedans vostre bouche, et dedans vostre corps. (2)

This image appeals very strongly to the senses while apparently explaining a difficult idea - it is perhaps to a large extent this sensuality which helps to put over the idea.

Another aspect of baroque style is the feeling of uncertainty and movement. The imagery which expresses this flux and movement is typical of writers concerned with the inconstancy of life and of men. In this passage from Sponde there is not one image but a number of images giving way to each other, all suggesting movement and confusion. There is much repetition, statement of the same idea in slightly different words:

D'où tant de fragilité? d'où tant d'inconstance? De la fragilité de ce roseau, de l'inconstance mesme de ce Folype.

(1) François de Sales, Book IV, Ch. I, p.123.

(2) François de Sales, Book II, Ch. XXI, p.121.

Je ne puis resoulder ce verre, je ne puis arrester ces torrens. Tout cest homme icy n'est que du vent qui va, qui vient, qui tourne, qui retourne, du vent certes, qui s'eslance en tourbillons qui lui saboulent le cerveau, qui l'emportent, qui le transportent, qui le poussent aux escueils d'un monde d'erreurs, aux gouffres d'une infinité de Charybdes, dont il ne reschappe que brisé! (1)

François de Sales also sees life as movement: he says of man:

et sa vie écoule sur cette terre comme les eaux flottant et ondoyant en une perpetuelle diversité de mouvements. (2)

This image in itself is much more harmonious; the inconstancy is made into one continual movement. He resolves the theme in one image whereas Sponde conveys his own feeling of confusion through the confusion of imagery. Du Vair is also concerned with the theme of change and passage of time in this image:

Toute terre est pays à l'homme sage, ou plutôt, nulle terre ne lui est pays. Son pays est le ciel où il aspire, passant ici-bas seulement comme par un pèlerinage, et s'arretant aux villes et aux provinces comme en des hôtelleries. (3)

This image is a very common one and contains above all the idea that life in itself is a thing of no account, just a passage to death. There is the same outlook as in the passage from Donne quoted earlier. The gloomy view of life and especially of man himself, is taken by Sponde in this description of the new-born child:

Ces osselets qui se roidiront peut estre à l'advenir sous la pesanteur du Ciel, se fracasseroient à la moindre cheute. (4)

These last images are typical of baroque writing in that they

- (1) Sponde, p.89.
- (2) François de Sales, Book IV, Ch. XIII, p.316.
- (3) Du Vair: La Philosophie Morale des Stoïques, éd. Michaut, Paris 1946, p.93.
- (4) Sponde, p.5.

result from meditation on death and the passage of time. But here also all kinds of attitude are possible. Du Vair accepts death almost without emotion:

La dernière goutte qui sort de la bouteille n'est pas celle qui la vuide, mais qui achève de la vider; et le dernier moment de nostre vie n'est pas celui qui fait la mort, mais seulement qui l'achève. (1)

The imagery of du Vair is more characteristic of a philosopher in that the images are more abstract - clearly examples illustrating concepts. Sponde's use of imagery is much more sensuous. He also uses more dramatic effects, calculated to strike fear into the heart of the reader:

Certes la fumée est montée en ses narines, et la flamme et les charbons ardans sortent de sa bouche. (2)

or

On a beau boucher ses oreilles, ceste bouche perce tout de sa voix, ceste voix entre jusqu'aux fonds du coeur, et se fait sentir de mille pointes acérées qu'elle descoche, elle tranche jusqu'au vif. (3)

As in the imagery of St Theresa quoted earlier, God is felt very physically. The imagery is persuasive like that of François de Sales, but in the opposite way, appealing to the senses through horror rather than pleasure.

Another essential feature of baroque style is the conflict expressed in imagery, through the juxtaposition of opposites, darkness and light for instance. This is frequent in Bèze's work

Celui qui a tiré tout de rien, peut-il être empêché de refaire son ouvrage? Celui qui des ténèbres a fait sortir la lumière, sauroit-il point ramener de la

(1) Du Vair: Traité de la Constance et Consolation, ed. Flack & Funck-Brentano, Paris 1915, p.95.

(2) Sponde, p.97.

(3) Sponde, p.90.

mort à la vie? (1)

The paradox is within man himself:

et qui s'est lavé pour retourner en l'ordure? pardon est-il fait pour pecher tant plus hardiment? la lumiere nous introduit-elle aux tenebres? Et quel meilleur exemple de tout ceci scauroit-on choisir que moy-mesme? (2)

For Sponde the contrast is between man and God:

Tout homme est coupable devant Toy, la pureté mesme n'est qu'ordure, la lumiere que tenebres. (3)

In all these examples from prose writers the imagery is used to explain, to convince, to emphasize and exaggerate, and also to bring out the fundamental paradoxes of Christianity. However, each image reflects the personal attitude towards his religion of the individual writer. Two main prevailing moods, optimistic and pessimistic, are apparent in the way the writer chooses his images from life. This image from François de Sales is one of the most common in the writing of this and earlier periods, and yet it can reflect many different moods.

Que le navire prenne telle route qu'on voudra, qu'il cingle au ponant ou levant, du midi ou septentrion, et quelque vent que ce soit qui le porte, jamais pourtant son aiguille meme ne regardera que sa belle étoile et le pôle. Que tout se renverse sens dessus dessous, je ne dis pas seulement autour de nous, mais je dis en nous; c'est a dire que notre âme soit triste, joyeuse, en douceur, en amertume, en paix, en trouble, en clarté, en tenebres, en tentations, en repos, en gout, en dégout, en secheresse, en tendreté; que le soleil la brule ou que la rosée la rafraichisse, ah! si faut-il pourtant qu'à jamais et toujours la pointe de notre coeur, notre esprit, notre volonté superieure, qui est notre boussole,

- (1) Théodore de Beze: Chretiennes Meditations, Geneva 1582, p.46.
 (2) Théodore de Beze: Chretiennes Meditations, p.51.
 (3) Sponde, p.122.

regarde incessamment et tende perpetuellement à l'amour de Dieu son Createur, son Sauveur, son unique et souverain bien. (1)

François de Sales himself brings in the typical images of the sun and the dew, and plays down the frightening stormy aspect, stressing the confidence one should feel in God's love. It is still typically baroque however in the wandering of the ship, the long string of adjectives, the uncertainty of life which contrasts with the one certainty, that of God.

What the artist does when using imagery is to look at the world in a biased kind of way. Religious feelings may give the artist a bias in a particular direction, but religious feelings are of diverse kinds, so there is a great deal of diversity in the way religious feelings are illustrated in imagery. Within one period however certain objects, or experiences are considered of more significance than others and in this study we will see various images repeating themselves over and over, as the preference for certain specific themes is expressed.

The last point to be made is that concerning the relation of the artist to the community. Collingwood in Principles of Art states that art must be prophetic: of the poet he says:

he tells the audience, at risk of their displeasure, the secrets of their own hearts. (2)

The artist often finds himself in a position not unlike that of a prophet or a teacher: someone who has a particular kind of vision which he must convey to others, a conviction that he sees things with greater clarity. The links between art and

(1) François de Sales, Book IV, Ch. XIII, p.317.

(2) R.G. Collingwood: Principles of Art, Oxford 1938, p.336.

religion in this period at least encourage the artist in this conviction, that there is some particular and important truth which must be revealed to the reader.

Chapter III

This chapter is concerned with the sources which could have had some influence on the poetry of this period, in particular those sources having a distinctive type of imagery from which these poets could have borrowed. Since the idea of originality is not important to poets of this period, it is natural that they should borrow images which they found beautiful and which illustrated their own themes, either taking them from well-known sources, or from the works of their contemporaries. Images were so much common property that it is difficult to pin down the sources which influenced each individual poem. However, several main influences are very obvious in the work of these poets.

Possible influences.

Some religious poetry dealt with general moral questions from a religious point of view, and some dealt more directly with themes taken from the Bible. One would expect that as they were influenced in their ideas and themes by the Bible, the language of the Bible would also have some influence on their poetry. The Protestants especially with their emphasis on the study of the actual text of the Bible would come very much under its influence. Translations of the Bible were common in this century, the earliest being that of Lefèvre d'Étaples in 1530. The Biblical spirit was most prevalent among the Protestants in the sixteenth century, due to this study of the Bible, and particularly the Old Testament, in which they found parallels between the adversities suffered by the Jews and the

promise of ultimate victory, and their own persecution. R.A. Sayce in his book on the French Biblical Epic in the seventeenth century has pointed out also the importance of the historians Josephus and Philo as sources of material. (1) It is difficult to ascertain to what extent writers did refer to the actual text of the Bible, whether in translation or the Vulgate, since much Biblical expression and imagery has become a matter of common usage, part of the cultural tradition and vocabulary of the people, and known even to the poet who did not refer to the original text. It must be remembered however that the translation and paraphrasing of passages from the Bible was common practice among poets, in particular the translation of psalms, which lent themselves to poetic style because of their rhetorical phrasing and use of imagery. In fact translations of the psalms corresponded little to the original spirit of the Bible. Most translations transformed the psalms, retaining only the framework of the original statements and images.

However, the sixteenth century was also the century of the Renaissance and the writers of the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries inherited a literary tradition which could not be ignored completely. Their style inevitably reflected that of their predecessors in some respects, in spite of the obvious differences. Wider reading of the ancients and influence of the Italians had introduced a pattern of imagery which remained in spite of the change in attitudes. The poet could not help being influenced not only by religious

(1) R.A. Sayce: The French Biblical Epic in the Seventeenth Century, Oxford 1955.

works, but by the poetic tradition of his predecessors. The imitation of Italian poets is most obvious in the translation of religious poems, such as the Laqrini de S. Pietro, by Tansillo or the imitation of Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered. However the imagery of Petrarchist love-poetry is easily adaptable to the expression of religious emotions.

Some critics see in the baroque style a survival of late medieval spirit, particularly in its more grotesque aspects, its fondness for allegory and its obsession with death. This is seen especially in the poems on death, although the influence of medieval allegory is to be found in writers such as d'Aubigné or some of the later Catholic poets. Many of the images and themes which could be ascribed to biblical influence were also common in the poetry of the Middle Ages.

Biblical influence.

Biblical influence can be seen in two ways: use of images which refer to events and scenes of the Bible, and those which repeat and elaborate on actual imagery used in the Bible. The most obvious is the use of the heavily symbolic and sometimes violent imagery of the Book of Revelation or the later books of the Old Testament. Again, the most familiar of the Biblical images are those taken from the New Testament, from the sayings of Christ. Many of his parables are composed of simple concrete images:

Il leur proposa une autre similitude, disant, le royaume
des cieux est semblable au grain de moutarde, qu'un
homme a prins & semé en son champ,
Qui est bien la plus petite de toutes les semences: mais
quand il est creu, il est plus grand que les autres

herbes: & devient arbre, tellement que les oiseaux du ciel y viennent, & font leurs nids en ses branches. (1)

The imagery of the Bible reflects the preoccupations of those for whom it was written - their everyday activities. The images tend to be pastoral ones, concerned with hills, grass, rain, corn - images of fruitfulness and fertility contrasting with those of sterility are common - Jesus compares the fruitful tree with the thorns and briars, or in the Song of Songs:

Tes dents sont comme un troupeau de brebis bien arengées, lesquelles montent du lavoire: & lesquelles toutes agnelent deux à la fois & n'y a nulle qui soit sterile entr'elles. (2)

The imagery used in the Song of Songs to convey pleasure and happiness speaks of fruit and flowers, jewels and spices. Other activities are reflected in the imagery of the Bible, for example:

Mes jours passent plus legerement que la navette du tisserand, & defaillent sans espoir. (3)

The concern of the shepherd for his flocks is also an image frequently used to describe the relationship between God and his people. This type of imagery one would not expect to be as acceptable to the poets of the sixteenth century who were farther removed from the primitive type of existence which depended greatly on the cultivation of the earth. Some of the images which arose naturally for the poets of the Bible from their experience of everyday life would not occur so naturally to the poets of this period.

(1) La Bible, S. Matthieu XIII: 31-32.

(2) La Bible, Cantique des Cantiques IV:2.

(3) La Bible, Job VII:6.

The Biblical images concerned with death, punishment and the end of the world are more striking. There is obsession with blood, suggesting guilt and vengeance, and with fire, the idea of fire burning away the unfruitful trees, leading to the idea of fire as purging the earth of its corruption.

Fourtant comme le flambeau du feu consume le chaume,
& la flamme friolle la paille: ainsi sera leur racine
comme pourriture, & leur germe montera comme poussiere:
car ils ont rejeté la Loy du Seigneur des batailles,
& ont blasphemé la parole du Saint d'Israel. (1)

The disruption of natural elements, earthquakes, sun loosing its light are also necessary elements for filling the reader with fear. The conjuring up of strange animals, and beautiful angels, adds the exotic element. The imagery of the Book of Revelation relies to a certain extent on the repetition of certain numbers which have special value, and certain symbolic objects, such as the tree of life, the books of life, the golden candlesticks. The image most used to characterize God is the symbol of light, which casts all other lights into darkness.

The reasons why Biblical influence was particularly marked in the work of Protestant poets have already been mentioned. This influence is most obvious in the work of d'Aubigné. The whole of Les Tragiques has a very Old Testament atmosphere about it. D'Aubigné feels the similarity between the position of the Protestants and the Israelites, chosen people of God. He had in common with many of the Old Testament prophets what he considered the duty to expose the iniquity of his fellow-

(1) La Bible, Isaie V:24.

countrymen, and to warn the wicked of the terrible fate which awaited them, God's inevitable vengeance. His final scene is that of the Apocalypse. The image of the wolf and the lamb is significant in this respect. The sheep, as in the Bible, represent the faithful, who are attacked by the wolves, representing the wicked or unbelievers.

Les roys, qui sont du peuple et les roys et les peres,
Du troupeau domestiq sont les loups sanguineires; (1)

or later

Chastie en ta douceur, punis en ta furie
L'escapade aux agneaux, des loups la boucherie. (2)

This theme is also bound up with that of Cain and Abel - symbols of the righteous and the wicked, the elect and the non-elect.

Que le premier bourreau et le premier martyre,
Le premier sang versé, on peut voir en eux deux,
L'estat des agneaux doux, des loups outrecuideux; (3)

Reference to events and characters from the Bible plays an important part in D'Aubigné's imagery. Catherine de Medicis is compared to Jezebel, and the Cardinal de Lorraine is called Achitophel. Besides Cain and Abel, the opposition of Jacob and Esau suggest to him the two factions fighting in France. D'Aubigné has a tendency to identify himself with David, not only David the poet, but also David the warrior:

Preste-moi, Verité, ta pastorale fronde,
Que j'enfonce dedans la pierre la plus ronde
Que je pourray choisir, et que ce caillou rond
Du vice Goliath s'enchasse dans le front. (4)

- (1) D'Aubigné: Les Tragiques, in Oeuvres IV, Paris 1877, p.35
(Henceforward abbreviated to Les Tragiques)
(2) Les Tragiques, p.67.
(3) Les Tragiques, p.244.
(4) Les Tragiques, p.72.

Although his imagery is in general more extravagant, and more elaborate than anything to be found in the Bible, there are many images which echo the spirit of the Bible. The last passage of Miseres is written in the style of a psalm, invoking God, lamenting his misfortunes and begging for the destruction of his enemies. One part is taken from Psalms LXXXIV: 4:

Les moineaux ont leurs nids, leurs nids les hirondelles;
On dressé quelque fuye aux simples colombelles;
Tout est mis a l'abri par le soin des mortels;
Et Dieu seul, immortel, n'a logis ni autels. (1)

There are other examples of phrases taken straight from the Bible: another line in this passage echoes Matthew XXI: 13

De la sainte maison la caverne aux brigands (2)

referring to the corruption of the Catholic church. Other Biblical phrases found in his poetry are those such as:

C'est cacher la chandelle en secret sous un tuy:
Qui ne s'explicque pas est barbare à autruy. (3)

The use of the Bible is perhaps a result of this close parallel he felt between contemporary events and the world of the Bible. Besides these obvious parallels, he also uses a great deal imagery which depends on the same themes as much of the imagery of the Bible - the images of growth and fertility:

Pour Néant nous semons, nous arrousons en vain,
Si l'esprit de vertu ne porte dans sa main
L'heureux accroissement. (4)

Another image of sowing and harvesting refers to the church:

C'est ainsi que seront gardez des inhumains,

- (1) Les Tragiques, p.68.
- (2) Les Tragiques, p.68.
- (3) Les Tragiques, p.169.
- (4) Les Tragiques, p.273.

Four resember l'Eglise encore quelques grains,
 Armez d'afflictions, grains que les mains divines
 Font naistre à la faveur des poignantes espines,
 Moisson de grand espoir; car c'est moisson de Dieu
 Qui la fera renaistre en son temps, en son lieu. (1)

The following passage from Jugement expresses damnation through images of sterility, again using the terms of sowing and harvesting:

Citez yvres de sang et de sang alterees,
 Qui avez soif de sang et de sang enyvrees,
 Vous sentirez de Dieu l'espouvantable main;
 Vos terres seront fer, et vostre ciel d'airain:
 Ciel qui au lieu de pluye envoye sang et poudre,
 Terre de qui les bleds n'attendent que le foudre.
 Vous ne semez que vent en steriles sillons,
 Vous n'y moissonnez que volants tounbillons.
 Qui à vos yeux pleurants, folle et vaine canaille,
 Meront pirouetter les esprits et la paille. (2)

This passage is also an example of his obsession with blood and fire. The first part suggests the description of the destruction of Babylon in the Book of Revelation. But all through the poem d'Aubigné repeats images of blood and fire. Much of his description of the Day of Judgement is taken from the bible. The reference to the Lamb of God, the sun and moon loosing their light, the crumbling of the mountains, the rivers of blood. Also he uses white as the colour to symbolize innocence, the good being dressed in white robes on the Day of Judgement.

Ils sont vestus de blanc et layez de pardon (3)

or in Les Feux:

- (1) Les Tragiques, p.214.
- (2) Les Tragiques, pp.281-2.
- (3) Les Tragiques, p. 295.

Les vainqueurs de Sion, qui, au prix de leur sang,
 Portant l'escharpe blanche, ont pris le caillou blanc. (1)

The image of the bride and bridegroom is also used to describe the martyrdom of Lady Jane Grey:

l'ame a bien d'autre gage
 De l'espoux qui lui donne un si haut mariage. (2)

or the last line of 'La Chambre Doree', as a symbol of the church:

"Vien"dict l'espouse, et nous avec l'espouse, "Vien". (3)

Another characteristic of Biblical style is the association of sin and uncleanness. D'Aubigné makes frequent use of the words impure and orduré to suggest sin and evil.

Car vous donnez tel lustre à vos noires ordures
 Qu'en fascinant vos yeux elles vous semblent pures. (4)

Another symbol of evil is the snake, which occurs frequently in the work of d'Aubigné:

De ce superbe mont les serpents sont au bas,
 La ruse du serpent conserve leurs Estats,
 Et le poison secret va destruisant la vie
 Qui, brave, s'opposoit contre la tyrannie. (5)

Even in his earlier love poems, d'Aubigné combines Biblical and pagan mythology, taking many images from the descriptions of the Apocalypse. The symbolism of fire and rebirth of spring is also used to express his conflict.

All these different types of Biblical influence are to be found to a lesser extent in other authors. The extent of

- (1) Les Tragiques, p.149.
- (2) Les Tragiques, p.163.
- (3) Les Tragiques, p.148.
- (4) Les Tragiques, p. 71.
- (5) Les Tragiques, p. 82.

the influence on d'Aubigné can be seen in comparison with other writers. Many images are borrowed from the Bible, but are assimilated into a style which is very different from that of the Bible itself. D'Aubigné in his use of imagery manages to retain some of the atmosphere of the Old Testament.

Whereas d'Aubigné refers to the Bible to illustrate a more contemporary theme, La Ceppède is dealing with the story of the Passion as told in the Bible. But although the theme is the same, the style is very different. Unlike the Protestants, he interprets the story in a very personal way. He is mainly interested in the Biblical themes because of their significance to his own life, and his emotional and intellectual involvement with them. His poems show knowledge of other parts of the Bible than those he deals with directly, and events of the Old Testament are parallel to and in a sense symbolic of the events of the New Testament. Poem XXXI in the first section makes a comparison between Rachel who died in giving birth to her son Benjamin, and Christ who when he died gave birth to the Church. In Poem XLVI he compares Judas betraying Jesus to Joseph's brothers who sold him to the merchants. Poem IV of the second part describes Peter's denial of Christ with a familiar Biblical image:

La plus constante foy, dont le mortel se vante,
N'est qu'un mouvant sablon. Pierre, enquis doucement
Au foyer, s'il n'est pas de la troupe suivante
De cet homme, s'ebranle, et nie impudement. (1)

(1) F. Ruchon: Essai sur la Vie et l'Oeuvre de Jean de la Ceppède, Geneva 1953, p.53. (Henceforward abbreviated as La Ceppède.)

The last three lines of this poem contain illustrations from the Old Testament:

Ainsi fut Goliath par un enfant batu,
Ainsi courba Judith l'ennemy de sa ville,
Ainsi fut Pharaon des mouches combatu. (1)

Another comparison is between Jesus and Isaac - Isaac who was to be a human sacrifice, and who carried the wood for his own funeral pyre, resembled Jesus in this respect, carrying his own cross:

Le voilà qu'on le meine au destiné supplice,
Ainsi le bon Isaac alloit portant son bois,
Sur lequel il devoit brusler en sacrifice. (2)

The theme of David and Goliath is again taken up to symbolize the struggle between Christ and Satan. La Ceppède also paraphrased some of the psalms of David. He remained faithful to the imagery of the Bible, but extended the image, going into more detail, where the original is more vague and general. Reflections of the style of the psalms can be found in his other poems, for instance:

Déliez nos liens, soulagez nos miseres,
Délivrez-nous des fers de l'éternel courroux,
Et combattez l'effort de nos forts adversaires. (3)

The conventional images are used also: the theme of the bridegroom referring to the liens of the preceding quotation:

Chers cordeaux, c'est par vous que cet Espoux maintient
Son Espouse, & par qui son amour favorable
La tire doucement, l'attache, & la soustient. (4)

- (1) La Ceppède, p.53.
- (2) La Ceppède, p.63.
- (3) La Ceppède, p.47.
- (4) La Ceppède, p.48.

or again, in a poem addressed to the faithful soul:

Belle, venez y donq, vostre Espoux le commande:
Et pour tant de bien-faits dont il veut vous benir,
Donnez-luy vostre coeur, c'est tout ce qu'il demande. (1)

Other familiar Biblical images are used: Christ is referred to as the good shepherd:

Pour le mauvais troupeau, voir livrer à la mort
Le bon Pasteur: (2)

The colour white, as for d'Aubigné, is a symbol of innocence:

Le blanc, pur, simple, égal, sans teinture et sans art
Figure l'innocence. Et ce Christ qui le porte
Égal, simple, innocent, vit sans tache, et sans fard. (3)

The poem XXIII of the third part associates the cross with other symbolic objects taken from the Bible.

Le pressoir de la Vigne en Calvaire est dressé,
Où ce fameux raisin ce pressoir a pressé,
Pour noyer dans son vin nos lethales Viperes.
L'eschele Israelite est posée en ce lieu,
Sur laquelle aujourd'huy s'appuyant l'homme-Dieu,
Nous fait jouir des biens qu'il a promis à nos Pères. (4)

Jacob's ladder is a familiar image, as is the use of the serpents as symbols of original sin. The wine-press is that mentioned in the Book of Revelation, and in the words of Christ in John XV, where he describes himself as the true vine.

La Ceppède's borrowings from the Bible are often these types of symbolic images which fit into his almost abstract framework of significance.

Imagery of death and transience.

The images of the transience of human life are similar in

- (1) La Ceppède, p.69.
- (2) La Ceppède, p.37.
- (3) La Ceppède, p.57.
- (4) La Ceppède, p.69.

most poetry of this period and similar to those of the Bible also. However this is not an indication so much of deliberate imitation as simply acceptance of conventional means of expression, using the most obvious comparisons. Chassignet makes great use of this type of imagery in expressing transience:

A beaucoup de danger est sujette la fleur;
 Ou l'on la foule auz piez, ou les vens la ternissent;
 Les rayons du soleil la brulent et rotissent,
 La beste la devore, et s'efueille en verdure. (1)

or this next passage which is a paraphrase of Isaiah XL:6.

Veus tu scavoir que s'est de ceste chair fragile?
 C'est de l'herbe et du foin à present verdoyant
 En cent plis recourbez flos sur flos ondoyant
 Où passera demain la tranchante faucille. (2)

He compares life also to dreams and shadows:

...le songe vain de l'ombrage d'une ombre (3)

This is an image which is found often in the Bible, as in Job VIII:9,

Car nous ne sommes que du jour d'hier, & sommes ignorans,
 d'autant que nos jours sont sur la terre comme l'ombre. (4)

Like many of his contemporaries, and poets of all ages, he uses frequently the image of the river, which is to be found in the Bible also:

Mes freres se sont desbordez comme un torrent: ils se
 sont escoulez comme le flot des fleuves. (5)

This type of imagery is common in the work of most poets of this period, for example Le Digne in La Magdeleine is here describing a woman's beauty:

- (1) Chassignet: Le Mespris de la Vie et Consolation contre la Mort, ed. Muller, Geneva 1953, p.96. (Henceforward abbreviated as Chassignet.)
- (2) Chassignet, p.113.
- (3) Chassignet, p.87.
- (4) La Bible, Job VIII:9.
- (5) La Bible, Job VI:15.

Et la beauté se perd en sa prompte alégresse,
Comme une ieune plante en sa premiere fleur. (1)

but here the image is more reminiscent of Ronsard than of the Biblical phrases like:

Les jours de l'homme sont comme l'herbe, & florit ainsi
comme la fleur du champ. (2)

Lazare de Selve describes man in these terms:

Pauvre feuille, ombre, cendre, et pauvre ver de terre, (3)
incorporating as many elements as possible, including the
reference to worms, which is also a popular theme with his
contemporaries, often connected with the fear of death as in
Sponde:

Et quel bien de la Mort? où la vermine ronge
Tous ces nerfs, tous ces os, (4)

This is another image which is found in the Bible, but is too
common to be cited as a direct influence. Occasionally there
are signs of more direct influence, as in Chassignet:

O mort, c'est fait de toy, il n'est plus memoire
Ton aiguillon est mort, (5)

or in his use of the story from Judges VI:5 of the soldiers
drinking from the stream, showing that the degenerate man
loves only earthly things.

Biblical influence on Protestant poets.

Much of the imagery which we have seen as being typical
of d'Aubigné is found also in other Protestant poets. For

- (1) Nicolas Le Digne: La Magdeleine et autres petites oeuvres
Sens 1610 p.9. (henceforward abbreviated as Le Digne:
La Magdeleine)
- (2) La Bible Psaumes CXCVIII:15.
- (3) Lazare de Selve: Les Oeuvres spirituelles, Paris 1620, p.24.
(henceforward abbreviated as Lazare de Selve)
- (4) Sponde, Connets sur la Mort XI, p.197.
- (5) Chassignet, p.100.

example there are the lines of Poupo in his Muse Chrestienne:

Que suis-ie de ma part fors un sac plein d'ordure,
 Pecheur fils de pecheur, et serpent de serpent. (1)

His defence of the true church uses the conventional imagery, references to Cain:

Engence de Cain desloyale & meurtriere,
 Qui d'espandre le sang ne te peus onc saoler. (2)

There is the same fascination with blood and the use of images of fertility and sterility:

Les sillons tourmentez assiduellement
 Du coudre & de la herbe, aportent le froment:
 Ceux qui sont à repos les herbes inutiles.
 Les Chrestiens, essartez par glaives & par feux,
 S'esgayent davant plus en germe fructueux.
 Ta paix ne leur vaut rien qu'a les rendre steriles. (3)

The imagery in his poetry is concerned to a great extent with vegetation, flowering, fruitfulness and barrenness, and also pastoral images, the shepherd and his sheep. The next poem is an example: he compares himself to a sterile tree, the fig-tree of the Bible. Also there is the use of the flower falling to suggest transience, and the leaf suggests the leaves worn by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Voila ma fleur tombee! ô dueil qui me surmonte,
 Et ores que les fruits se devoient presenter
 Je me trouve tout nu, & ne me voi rester,
 Qu'un fueillage inutile, dont ie couvre ma honte,
 Qu'aten-ie plus chetif, sinon qu'il me soit dit,
 Quand le Seigneur viendra, comme au figuier maudit,
 Si lui fecond en grace & riche en patience,
 Frenant pitié de moi, arbre steril & vain,
 Ne me donne culture, & vigueur de sa main,
 Afin de porter fruits dignes de repentance. (4)

(1) P. Poupo: La Muse Chrestienne, Paris 1585, p.4. (Henceforward abbreviated as Poupo.)

(2) Poupo, p.11.

(3) Poupo, p.12.

(4) Poupo, p.15.

In his Chant pastoral Rocquigny describes a country scene with shepherds going about their daily tasks, but these shepherds are also allegorical figures, reminding one of the shepherds who worshipped at Christ's birth, and also the flock of the faithful members of the Church. Fasteur suggests now not only a shepherd but also a Protestant minister. His attacks on the Jesuits refer back to the Old Testament.

Mais ces Monstres nouveaux, engeance de Loyole,
Non contens de la prendre en ces siècles malins,
Forcent à coups de voix, ès temples des Baalins,
Les peuples enchantez, d'en coiffer une Idole. (1)

Biblical influence on Catholic poets.

Catholic poets concentrated more on the death of Christ, the blood being a sacrifice which purified them of their crimes and granted them individual salvation:

Fuis que ie suis lavé dans ce baing salutaire,
Seigneur, regarde moy dans ce lieu solitaire,
Où s'arrose mon lit de larmes & de pleurs. (2)

The images of Christ as the lamb and the bridegroom reappear combined with this image in a poem by Loys Saunier:

Ce peuple camp heureux, qui marchoit sous l'enseigne
De la triple vertu, change ores de drapeau,
Et n'est plus guerroyant sur le divin coupeau,
Auquel le bon Agneau pour son espouse saigne: (3)

The theme of purification through the blood of Christ is found frequently in the poetry of Antoine Favre:

Que vois-je en ceste croix! la mort qui vivifie,
Les playes de mon Dieu, pour les miennes guerir,
Un sang pur, & naif, pour mon ame blanchir. (4)

- (1) Adrian de Rocquigny: La Muse Chrestienne, 1634, p.92.
(Henceforward abbreviated as Rocquigny)
- (2) Antoine de Nervèze: Les Poemes Spirituels, Paris 1606,
p.36. (Henceforward abbreviated as Nerveze)
- (3) Loys Saunier: Les Hieropoemes, Lyon 1584, p.60.
(Henceforward abbreviated as Saunier)
- (4) Antoine Favre: Les Entretiens Spirituels, Paris 1602, p.167.
(Henceforward abbreviated as Favre)

The imagery in which Christ is portrayed as the Bridegroom is used frequently by the more mystical poets. I have already quoted La Cepède, and these lines from Gabrielle de Coignard refer to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins:

Leurs lampes brusleront d'un feu continuel
Attendant le retour de l'epoux eternal. (1)

and this lyrical treatment by Hopil is reminiscent of the Song of Songs:

O beau lict de l'epoux plein d'oeillets et de lys. (2)

Contrast between Biblical influence on Protestants and Catholics.

The main difference between Catholic and Protestant poets is often a result of different themes and preoccupations. The Protestants obviously identified themselves much more with the Israelites of the Old Testament, God's chosen people, oppressed by unbelievers. On the other hand Catholic poets saw themselves much more as repentant sinners, redeemed by a personal union with God, seeing the sufferings of Christ as intimately connected with their lives, and identifying with figures like Mary Magdalene and St. Peter. Protestant poets seemed to be more influenced by the actual text of the Bible, and its historical content, and showed much more use of the pastoral type of imagery, and the apocalyptic vision of the Old Testament or Book of Revelation. Among the Catholics there is more of a tendency to take one particular theme or image and elaborate on it, and an image originally from the Bible may become unrecognizable in this process. The images most used are those suggesting transience

- (1) Gabrielle de Coignard: Oeuvres Chrestiennes, Tournon 1595, p.20. (Henceforward abbreviated as Coignard)
 (2) Claude Hopil: Les Divins Esblancemens d'Amour, Paris 1629, p.109. (Henceforward abbreviated as Hopil)

and the erotic theme of the Song of Songs may have had some influence on poetry expressing divine love.

Religious and erotic imagery.

The interconnection between religious and erotic imagery is apparent in many aspects of art. Images of fertility are often associated with religious observance. In the Song of Songs, sensual love is expressed often in imagery connected with fertility and cultivation. On the other hand Christianity depends to a large degree on the idea of love and this love is expressed in terms taken from love between man and woman. Christ as the Bridegroom is an example. More scope is given to this aspect by the fact that Christ can be imagined as a human figure, capable of experiencing and expressing human emotion. It is natural therefore that poets in trying to convey the relationship between man and God should rely heavily on the imagery of love poetry to express themselves.

In this particular period, many of the Catholic poets concerned themselves above all with the expression of the love between God and man as for instance Pierre de Croix:

Grand Dieu source de l'amour, mais plustost Amour mesme
Qui maintiens tout ce tout par accors amoureux. (1)

He also wrote a series of poems based on the Song of Songs which interpreted the work as an expression of divine love in terms of human love. Claude Hopil whom I have quoted earlier grew ecstatic before the incomprehensible mystery of the Holy Trinity, and his poetry is full of exclamations, of

(1) Pierre de Croix: Le Miroir de l'Amour Divin, Douay 1608 p. 3. (henceforward abbreviated to Pierre de Croix)

words such as amour, eslancemens, and pasmer. In less declamatory terms Gabrielle de Coignard also dedicated her poetry to expressing the love of God.

The use of expressions taken from love poetry suggests that the poet feels the relationship between man and God to be of the same sort as that between man and woman. It is above all a very personal relationship based on emotion. Many Protestant poets would feel that respect or fear were more appropriate ideas on which to base this relationship. Perhaps the Catholics also saw Christ and the Virgin Mary more as real people, more sympathetic to human emotion than the God of the Old Testament. It may be that they saw divine love as a different type of feeling from human love, and used erotic imagery as the nearest approximation to it, or perhaps they saw it as a more intense or refined type of love, a more perfect object of desire and a more intense ecstasy in union with God. Mystical writing, as in the work of St Theresa, is often very erotic in the use of imagery for this last reason. Some imagery is obviously using the language of erotic passions as a metaphor for religious passions, as in this quotation from Donne:

Take me to you, imprison mee, for I
 Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free,
 Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee. (1)

The reader is aware of the difference between erotic and religious passion, but the extremes of the metaphor suggest

(1) Donne: Poems, London 1931, p.254. Holy Sonnets XIV

the extremes of his emotion. On the other hand images may not be so obviously erotic, but may be equally applicable to human love and religious feeling, as in this quotation from Le Digne:

Charmereuse langueur de l'ouccur ravissante,
 Qui va liquifiant d'une force guissante
 Ces vives passions des plus rares desirs
 Desirable beauté de blanches les plus belles
 Ses yeux, le divin Object des celestes plaisirs,
 Ont ravi de l'Espoir les races inmortelles. (1)

The same applies to the next image from Crasshaw:

O what delight, when reveal'd life shall stand,
 And teach thy lips heav'n with his hand,
 In which thou now maist to thy wishes,
 Ecpe up thy consecrated kisses! (2)

This image is a result of the imagination of Christ as a human figure, and the emotion comes close to human love. This latter type of imagery is much more common in the poetry of this period; in general the concepts of human and elvish love were rather confused, and very little clear distinction was made. Griffin, in his article The rebirth motif in Ariippa d'Aubigné's 'Le Printemps' showed how the Platonic and Christian ideas of love were combined in d'Aubigné's early love poems. (3) The exaggerated respect that the poet showed towards the object of his affection in love poetry would bring the two ideas closer together, the woman becoming a goddess, and the God seen as a man.

Italian influence.

It was to be expected that these poets would adopt to a certain extent the style and imagery of their predecessors or contemporaries who wrote love poetry, even though in some cases

- (1) Le Digne: La Couronne de la Vierge Marie, Paris 1610 p.156. (henceforward abbreviated as Le Digne: La Couronne)
 (2) Crasshaw: The Poems, Oxford 1927, p.320.
 (3) H. Griffin: The rebirth motif in Ariippa d'Aubigné's 'Le Printemps' in French Studies LIX July 1965, pp.227-238.

they tried to show the contrast between the purity and sincerity of their intentions with the more sordid preoccupations of those they imitated. In fact many poets wrote both love poetry and religious poetry, Desportes and Malherbe being obvious examples, or even Ronsard himself. D'Aubigné and Sponde wrote love poetry which precedes and is less well-known than their religious works. Within the Petrarchist tradition a great deal of religious poetry was written in Italy. Les Larmes de St Pierre is an example. Many of the Christian sonnets of Desportes are inspired by Italian models. The love poetry of Petrarch himself was given a religious interpretation at this time; Malipiero in the Petrarca Spirituale had interpreted Laura as Mary, the figure of Love as Christ and Petrarch as the soul of the wanderer on earth. Petrarch himself had written some religious poetry. It was apparently usual for Italian poets to include in their volumes of love poetry a few poems of religious inspiration. This was not taken up in France until the later half of the sixteenth century. Du Bellay's L'Olive contains some religious verse but he was an exception in his period.

The themes which were preferred by the Italian poets were the birth and death of Christ, the praise of the Virgin Mary, the repentance of the sinner. Vianey (1) quotes a great number of volumes of Christian poetry, produced especially under the influence of the Counter-Reformation. Besides the themes already mentioned, poetry about Mary Magdalene was also popular.

(1) Vianey: Le Pétrarquisme en France au XVI^e Siècle, Montpellier 1909.

He mentions Fagani's La Lamentation de la Séraphique Madeleine, Filippi's Stances de la Madeleine au Christ, and Policretti's Madeline Convertie among others. This type of religious poetry is similar in many respects to love poetry: the poets address themselves to God, Christ, the Virgin or their own souls as they would to their mistress or to the God of Love.

Another possible influence on the poetry of this period is Tasso. Two poets who also wrote some religious poetry were imitators of Tasso in other respects. Nicolas de Montreux was the first French imitator of Tasso's Aminta with his play Athlette and Antoine de Nervèze wrote a novel taken from Jerusalem Delivered, which he called Hierusalem Assiégée. There is little to show however of the direct influence of Tasso on religious poetry. Joyce Simpson in her book on the influence of Tasso in France illustrates one of the stylistic tendencies of religious poetry of this period with a passage from Tasso about which she says:

Dans sa recherche d'un effet frappant, le Tasse rencherit trop sur l'expression, et tombe dans les jeux d'esprit qui caractérisent beaucoup de la poésie religieuse de son temps. (1)

Petrarchist imagery.

The imagery of love poetry has a tendency to become contrived when the poet is trying to demonstrate his cleverness. The images exaggerate and use surprise effects to reinforce the argument. The poet plays on words, using the same words to describe different effects:

(1) Joyce Simpson: Le Tasse, et la Littérature et l'Art Baroques en France, Paris 1962, p.35.

Et je meurs mille fois pour n'en mourir pas une (1)

The elaboration of the life-death theme became more and more complicated in religious poetry as in this quotation from Le Digne:

De ta mort O Sauveur, la vie a pris naissance,
Tu fis mourir la mort, lors que mourant pour nous,

...
Je puis vivre en mourant, ie meurs estant en vie. (2)

There is an established pattern of imagery which results in love poetry from the delight in exaggeration and playing with opposing ideas, the suffering and joy of love, the fire and the tears, heat and cold. The use of antithesis is very common, and leads to the separation between imagery and reality, comparisons being developed beyond all proportion. Here is a typical example of Petrarchist imagery from L'Olive:

Les chaulx soupirs de ma flamme incogne
Ne sont soupirs, et celz ne les veulx dire,
Fais bien un vent: car tant plus je soupire,
Moins de mon feu la chaleur diminue. (3)

This type of antithesis could find ample expression in religious motifs, as will be seen. Another characteristic of this type of poetry is the play on words which Desportes used when describing the tomb of Christ:

O secret que les sens ne scauroient bien entendre
Celuy qui comprend tout, et ne se peut comprendre,
Est clcs pour nos pechez dans un petit tombeau. (4)

This type of playing on words is very common in the poetry of d'Aubigné, or in Chassignet as shown here:

- (1) Ronsard, quoted in Vianey: Le Pétrarchisme en France au XVIIe Siècle, Montpellier 1909, p.260.
 (2) Le Digne: La Magdeleine, p.24.
 (3) Du Bellay: L'Olive, in Poésies, Paris 1954, p.102.
 (4) Desportes: Oeuvres, Paris 1858, p.508.

O mort, tu ne peux plus les fidelles destruire,
 La mort est morte auz bons, et si jadis ton mord
 Comme cil du serpent, ô miserable mort,
 Fust terrible et mortel, il ne scauroit plus nuire. (1)

The play on words links together the idea of death and the image of the serpent.

One common type of imagery in religious poetry was connected with the blood shed by Christ which inspired the sinner to repent, and to see in it symbols of salvation. Vianey also mentions the use of imagery such as has already been discussed in connection with Biblical imagery - life being like a flower, a tree which bears fruits of shame, regret and repentance, a dream, a shadow, or sometimes life is compared to the melting snow, or a ship at sea.

In the French poems concerned with Mary Magdalene we see the concentration on certain stereotyped aspects of female beauty. The portrayal of the Magdalene as a beautiful woman is perhaps more calculated to touch the sympathy and the imagination. The beauty of the scene where she weeps for her sins, or for the dead Christ, obviously appealed to a great many poets. An example of the long drawn-out imagery used to describe such a scene is found in the following passage from Les Perles, ou les Larmes de la Magdeleine by Cesar de Nostradame:

Farmi ces pleurs chacune gouttelle
 Qu'elle respand se transforme en perlette,
 Devient un corps clair, rond, plaisant et beau
 Au seul toucher seulement du tumbaue
 Le bord tressainct, d'une si sainte chose
 Change cest'eau & la metamorphose

(1) Chassignet, p.108.

Au mesme instant qu'elle tombe des yeux
 En blancs cailloux, petits & precieux
 Phoebus qui point, & l'aube colombine,
 Qui pas à pas, de fleur en fleur chemine
 Dedans des chars d'argent de rose & d'or
 Vont recueillant cest unique tresor:
 Fuis vont fondant ces pierrettes sacrees
 Aux bords Indois, où les Nymphes sacrees
 En les humant les serrerent soudain
 Dans leur escaille & dans leur petit sein. (1)

The poet here loses interest in the tears and is more concerned with the fanciful metamorphosis of tears into pearls. Loys Godet in his poems to the Magdalene is fascinated by her hair, and uses it as an image to contrast her past life with her present life of virtue:

Ces ondoyans cheveux qui tenoient enlassez
 Dans leurs nœuds crespelés amans insensez,
 Qui servoient de chaisnons pour captiver leurs ames,
 Je ne veux desormais qu'ils soient plus employez
 Que pour torcher mes yeux dans leurs larmes noyez
 Amortissans les feux des impudiques flammes. (2)

Nicolas Le Digne praises her beauty in terms appropriate to the praise of one's mistress:

Sa tresse amoureusement blonde,
 Luy couvrant l'épaule et le dos,
 Flotte jusqu'en terre, onde à onde,
 Comme une fontaine profonde
 Qui mollement contient ses flots. (3)

It is presumed that perfect virtue and purity is matched by perfect beauty, and to admire Mary for her physical attributes is not seen as being out of place. The idea of physical beauty as a reflection of spiritual beauty is not a new one.

- (1) Cesar de Nostradame: Les Perles, ou les Larmes de la magdeleine, Aix 1601, p.26. (Henceforward abbreviated as Cesar de Nostradame.)
- (2) Loys Godet: Le Sacré Helicon, Chalons 1608, p.14. (Henceforward abbreviated as Godet)
- (3) Le Digne: La Couronne, p.79.

In the next extract the love between Christ and Mary is expressed in very erotic imagery, as if her beauty was the cause of his love:

Si l'Epoux meurt d'amour, c'est l'amour de Marie,
Vierge amoureuse et belle, & mere des Amours,
qui le tient enflammé d'un feu bruslant tousjours,
De la vivante ardeur dedans le Ciel nourrie: (1)

Just as a poet may compare his mistress' eyes to stars which guide him through the storm, Le Digne is guided by the eyes of Mary, and arrives at the port of salvation. Her eyes and her hair are described also by Loya Saunier in one of his Hieropoemes, Les Beautés de Marie:

Chantez cest Beauté que le quart ciel honnore,
Des cheveux d'or filez de son chef blondissant,
Et cest argent duquel Diane au front croissant
Les deux astres benins d'un petit ciel decore: (2)

Les Larmes de St Pierre by Malherbe treats the theme of the repentant sinner which was so popular at the time. He pays little attention to the historical and biblical background and treats the theme in more abstract terms, concentrating on the emotions experienced by St Peter. The use of very contrived imagery is illustrated in this extract:

Voulant faire beaucoup, il ne peut davantage
Que soupirer tout bas, et se mettre au visage
Sur le feu de sa honte une cendre d'ennui. (3)

He describes St Peter's extreme emotion with typical Petrarchist imagery: the arrows fired from the eyes of the beloved wound him, but here the beloved is Christ:

- (1) Le Digne: La Couronne, p.156.
(2) Saunier, p.36.
(3) Malherbe: Oeuvres Poétiques, Paris 1863, p.48. (Henceforward abbreviated as Malherbe)

Les arcs qui de plus pres sa poitrine joignirent,
 Les traits qui plus avant dans le sein l'atteignirent,
 Ce fut quand du sauveur il se vit regardé;
 Ses yeux furent les arcs, les ocellades les fleches,
 qui percerent son âme, et remplirent de brèches
 Le rempart qu'il avoit si lâchement gardé. (1)

This is a piece of pure ornamentation, which contributes little to the understanding of the relation between Christ and St Peter, and avoids all mention of the religious implications. Malherbe also makes great use of antithesis and repetition:

En ces propos mourants ses complaints se meurent,
 Mais vivantes sans fin ses angoisses demeurent. (2)

The intensely stylized description and depicting of emotion is seen in the figure representing Dawn:

L'Aurore d'une main, en sortant de ses portes,
 Tient un vase de fleurs languissantes et mortes,
 Elle verse de l'autre une cruche de pleurs,
 Et d'un voile tissu de vapeur et d'orage,
 Couvrant ses creux d'or, découvre en son visage
 Tout ce qu'une âme sent de cruelles douleurs. (3)

This artificiality of expression results from love of decoration for its own sake, and over-simplification of thought and feeling.

Petrarchist imagery is used to more effect in the poetry of Gabrielle de Coignard. She uses the images of fire and arrows to describe the ecstasy of her love:

Perce moy l'estomach d'une amoureuse fleche,
 Brusle tous mes desirs d'un feu estincellant,
 Eleve mon esprit d'un desir excellent,
 Foudroye de ton bras l'obstacle qui l'empêche; (4)

Pierre de Croix also feels the agony and the joy of divine love and expresses it in the same terms:

- (1) Malherbe; p.48.
- (2) Malherbe, p.60.
- (3) Malherbe, p. 60.
- (4) Coignard, p.16.

Flame, toujours flammante au fond de sa poitrine,
 qui de feu de mon sang l'entretiens en vigueur,
 que douce est ton ardeur, pour le brazier vainqueur,
 qui de ses os brulans la soulève rutine! (1)

There are also the implications of purification involved with this: the flame which burns away the earthly part of man and whose pain is pleasant because it enables the spirit to free itself, and enter into communion with God. The mystical poets sought union with God even on earth, and found it in this feeling of ecstasy. They stressed also the paradoxical nature of their state and its uniqueness by relying on the conventional antithesis:

Je gèle dans le feu, je brule dans l'eau vive (2)

The same kind of expression is used to describe the virgin Mary, who was a symbol of divine love for the Catholic poets:

Un feu d'amour divin aux glaces de nos haines (3)

Similarly the tears of the repentant sinner had great significance for the poet - for the lover they showed the cruelty which he had to bear, but for the Christian they showed the pity for the cruelty suffered by Christ at the hands of man, and the regret for one's own sins. Antoine de Nervèze sees in the tears of repentance the hope of salvation:

Et puis que dans le ciel tu veux tant estimer
 Nos pleurs, je reduiray mes yeux en une mer,
 Dont ta grace rendra les tourmentes si calmes,
 Que i'y pourray voguer sous l'ayde de ton vent,
 Pour aller recueillir au celeste levant
 Le glorieux rinceau de tes divines palmes. (4)

(1) *Biens de Croix*, p.47.

(2) *Le Signe: La Madeleine*, p.15.

(3) *Avray: Les Œuvres saintes*, Rouen 1874, p.41. (hereafterward abbreviated as *Avray: Œuvres saintes*)

(4) *Nervèze*, p.1.

The tears have become a sea on which he sails - a rather strange image, illustrating the use of tears as an important symbol within the religious context, and also the exaggeration to which many poets were prone. As in love poetry, the themes of fire and tears are combined: the tears only serve to make the fire burn more strongly, and in this poem the tears are born from the furnace of a contrite heart:

Non, Seigneur, ces larmes recuittes
 Aux fourneaux des ames contrittes
 Et que distillent par les yeux:
 Sont riches ondes cristallines,
 Des Saphirs, des Topazes fines
 Et des diamants dans les Cieux. (1)

The tears are precious in themselves because of what they symbolize, the repentance which restores man to his state of innocence, and so the poet describes them as precious objects in the material sense. Again the decorative aspect is more appealing to the poet's imagination than the religious interpretation.

Although the basic images are often similar to those of love poetry, they are also very appropriate for expression of religious ideas, perhaps even more appropriate, since they are interpreted not in terms of reality, but as symbols of a greater truth.

Classical influence.

Another aspect to be considered is the influence of classical studies, whose particular effect on poetry of this period was the wealth of mythological allusion which poets

(1) Auvray: La Pourmenade de l'Ame devote en Calvaire, Rouen 1633, verses 28-29. (Henceforward abbreviated as Auvray: La Pourmenade)

used. Although this was considered by many of the religious poets as dangerous because it brought attention to pagan ideas, and although the Fléiade were accused of encouraging licentiousness, they themselves did not escape this influence. Gabrielle de Coignard admired the poetry of Ronsard but felt that he lacked the proper serious tone necessary for religious poetry. Many poets begin their volumes with poems attacking poetry dedicated to the gods of classical antiquity, or the unworthy themes of earthly love. This seems to have been more or less a conventional introduction to their works. Examples of poems of this type are the following dealing with love poetry:

Je ne veux point verser des fontaines de larmes
 Soupirant souz le ioug d'une ingrante beauté,
 En forger, idolatre, une divinité,
 Et pour voeux luy sacrer & mon coeur & mes carnes. (1)

This passage is from Pierre de Croix: the next is by Godet:

Ceste plume, ô Amants, dont ces lignes ie trace,
 Lorsque ie l'arrachay des aisles de l'Amour
 Estoit toute sanglante & on voyait autour
 Un feu qui la grilloit, ostant toute sa grace. (2)

This is the type of poetry from which he turned away to dedicate himself to a more worthy Muse. Auvray wants religious poets to compete with those of classical times:

Si Amphion charmoit les rochers et les bois
 Si aux fleuves Orphée a donné des oreilles
 Fourquoy (Poetes Chrestiens) d'une plus sainte voix
 Plus saints ne ferez vous de plus saintes merveilles? (3)

Loys Saunier is also concerned with combatting the influence of the poets of classical antiquity:

- (1) Pierre de Croix, p.1.
- (2) Godet, p.3.
- (3) Auvray: Ceuvres Sainctes, pp.1-2.

La bouche raje-miel des Edenois poètes,
 Doit ressembler à l'or du chevelu Phœbus
 Eslevant le troupeau des hommes pleins d'abus,
 Aussi bien que celui des celestes prophetes,
 L'escrivain Uranier en ses chansons parfaites,
 Doit tancer le complot des mores Melzebuts,
 Et ceux-là qui aux Pans vont consacrant leurs vœux
 Et du vray Jehoua chanter les saintes festes. (1)

However, as one might suspect from these quotations, especially those from Auvray and Saunier, the attack on pagan tradition betrays a taste for classical allusion. This is confirmed by reading the remainder of their poetry, and this is true of many other poets also. The habit of using mythological imagery does not seem incongruous to them in spite of what may be said in their prefaces. The poems of François Ferrin which are often moral rather than religious in tone, contain quotations of many examples of moral teaching from classical antiquity. Classical allusion is found to a certain extent in the poems of La Ceppède:

Son amour est si grand, son amour est si fort
 Qu'il attaque l'Enfer, qu'il terrasse la mort,
 Qu'il arrache à Pluton sa fidele Euridice. (2)

Rocquigny in his abuse uses not only Biblical but also mythological comparisons:

Ingrate Jezebel, maudite Proserpine (3)

Pastoral poetry.

In the later part of this period poets seemed to become more concerned with the depicting of the idyllic life of virtue and enjoying the love of God in tranquility. Descriptions of the beauties of nature often involved imagery including

(1) Saunier, p.9.

(2) La Ceppède, p.68.

(3) Rocquigny p.63.

reference to pagan gods:

L'Air est beau quand Junon ne fait ses eaux dissoudre: (1)
 In his Honnestes Poesies, Gody describes in allegorical terms a journey in search of peace, in which the traveller is called Amour divin. He is attacked by many other characters - Crainte, the band of Tristesses who fire arrows at him. He is tempted by Oisiveté, by earthly love, and Detraction, but guided by Patience he reaches the Rock of Providence where union with God brings him peace.

The poem is intended to show the vanity of earthly love and the joy of loving God, in spite of the difficulties encountered. The form of the poem, however, the use of allegory, the pastoral setting, the dark woods and fields of flowers, suggests the style of medieval and sixteenth century love poetry, or the seventeenth century pastoral poems and novels.

This type of description is found also in the work of Benjamin de la Villate, Songe et son Interpretation, the Garden of Eden containing a beautiful fountain and streams where nymphs bathe. His characters are a mixture of Biblical, mythological and allegorical. Two goddesses, one beautiful and one ugly appear, the ugly one promising glory to the virtuous man. He attacks the sins of the pagan gods and equates Cupid and the serpent.

Comme nous avons veu que ce fol Ciprien
 Et ce rusé serpent sont pareils en maintien,
 Tous deux enfans & nains, & tous deux sans prunelles
 portant tous deux arceaux emplumez es aisselles

(1) Auvray: Oeuvres Sainctes, p.38.

Et tous deux mesme voile, arc & carquois tous deux
Tous deux mesme flambeau, mesme trais hazardeux. (1)

He looks back in the Hermitage Chrestien to a rather pagan Golden Age of virtue and equality and recommends a life of solitude in the countryside:

Ou pres d'un charme, ou pres d'un saule ombreux
Dedans un pré parmy mille fleurettes
Pres d'un ruisseau frisant ses ondelettes. (2)

This countryside is almost that of Théophile where he courted his mistresses. For the hermit, as well as for the lover, the birds, the nymphs, Pan, the Sylvans sing to delight him:

Ces Nymphes leurs chefs coiffant
S'atissant
Et peignant leurs treces blondes
Assises dessus les ioncs
Es surions
Et sur les bords de leurs ondes
Animeront tous les flots
Sur le los
De ce solitaire hermitte
Elles doucement chantant
Invitant
L'univers à son merite. (3)

Medieval influence

Allegory is a stylistic device which is used frequently by writers of this period, and may suggest a survival of medieval literature. Certainly the didactic tone of much religious poetry combined with the use of allegory would make one think of the second part of the Roman de la Rose. In Les Tragiques d'Aubigné conducts his whole attack on the corruption of the law courts in allegorical terms, and many of the figures he depicts are very grotesque and described in unnecessary detail. Adrian de Rocquigny introduces his

(1) Benjamin de la Villate: Songe et son Interpretation avec un Hermitage Chrestien, Paris 1626, p.105

(Henceforward abbreviated as de la Villate)

(2) De la Villate, pp.29-30.

(3) De la Villate, p.106.

volume of poetry with a debate between Charity and Avarice which is very didactic and medieval in tone.

For the medieval poet allegory was a simplification, a means of expressing psychological or moral complexity in clear terms. It belonged to that type of imagery which uses visible pictures to express what is not visible, and thus make it more comprehensible. The first part of the Roman de la Rose translated love into allegorical terms so as to show clearly which characteristics most aid a hopeful lover, and which work against him. Allegory is also a feature of Petrarchist poetry. Petrarch described Love as a person, an outside force which was hostile to himself and inflicted suffering upon him.

The poets of this period still use allegory to represent moral problems - very often to portray two contrasting forces in life, such as virtue and vice, charity and avarice. These are represented by two figures who each point out the advantages to be gained by pursuing one way of life of another. Very often, however, the use of allegory is ornamental, as in the descriptions of Malherbe, where the allegorical figure or image enables the poet to add more decorative details to his narrative.

Another complication may come from the fact of Biblical influence. Here allegory as such is not used, but a great deal of symbolism of a mysterious kind is. The prophet describes strange scenes and happenings which then have to be interpreted in terms of ordinary life. Sometimes the imagery

of the poets of this period tends to take on this visionary, dream-like quality, as in Le Songe et son Interpretation or du Bellay's Le Songe. Allegory at times has a more bizarre and grotesque quality, as in the imagery of d'Aubigné. His allegorical figures become monstrous. Moreover, his tendency to think in terms of pictures, of concrete details, gives his allegorical figures more life on the human plane than on the abstract. They are caricatures of real people, certain characteristics being exaggerated, rather than personifications of abstract ideas.

Rousset (1) sees in the baroque style a survival from the fifteenth century. Although the Gothic spirit was submerged by the Renaissance it was still to be found in the works of late sixteenth century poets. This style is characterized by an obsession with death and physical horror, which was partly overshadowed by the more optimistic era of the Renaissance. It is true that some writers are obviously horrified by the physical side of death, particularly Sponde, d'Aubigné and even Chassignet, and the images of skeletons and decaying bodies are similar to those in Villon's poetry for example. However, both periods were periods of war and devastation in which it would be difficult for everyone to ignore the spectacle of death. D'Aubigné especially as a soldier would be familiar with scenes such as those dwelt upon in Les Tragiques.

(1) Jean Rousset: La Littérature de l'Age Baroque en France, Paris 1954.

One poem which is interesting for its medieval associations is a kind of modern version of the Ubi sunt theme. The form is now a sonnet, and its aim is to prove that

Mout est vain, réservé le Dieu de toute chose.

The whole atmosphere of the examples is very Renaissance, only the basic theme is medieval:

Où sont ces potentats de la perlée Indie,
Ces Cariens Mausols, ces dorez Phrygiens,
L'argenté Bracmanois, les tyrans Memphiens,
Le Croese infortuné de la riche Lydie, (1)

One element in the imagery of religious poetry of this time was a survival from the Middle Ages: this was the symbolic imagery which resulted from the superstition common in medieval times, and which was found in the bestiaries and lapidaries of this period. Mario Praz (2) sees emblemism as being linked with conceits as a popular form of art and literature in the seventeenth century. These symbols were linked with the Petrarchist tradition, many symbols being taken from Petrarchist conceits. Petrarch mentions for instance the salamander which survives in the middle of the fire, an image which is found occasionally in religious poetry.

The best known of these symbols are the Pelican and the Phoenix. Both are symbols of Christ. The Pelican was supposed to wound itself to save its children:

L'oiseau trop charitable, a soy mesme inhumain,
Flaye à grand coup de bec, le profond de son sein,
Pour conserver mourant les siens en leur naissance,
Mais le grand Roy des Roys des pieds, des mains, du flanc,

(1) Saunier, p.29.

(2) Mario Praz: Studies in Seventeenth Century Imagery, London 1939-47.

Flaie, fiché, cloué, a respandu son sang,
Four donner par sa mort, la vie à qui l'offence. (1)

The Phoenix symbolized the uniqueness of Christ - his death and resurrection.

Voici le vray Phenix qui soy-mesme s'engendre,
Non pour s'eterniser en ce mortel sejour,
Mais pour nous faire tous renaistre de sa cendre,
Il se vient embrazer au feu de son amour. (2)

In the Premiere Sepmaine of du Bartas a great deal of description is devoted to strange animals of this sort, and their supposed customs. However it is probable that du Bartas was influenced more by his reading of Pliny in his descriptions. Among other poets the Phoenix and the Pelican are the most common symbols. Pierre de Croix describes anthrax which was supposed to burn in water and grow cold in fire. Profane love makes his desires grow cold, but tears of holy repentance make them burn more strongly. The sunflower is another symbol, always turning its face towards the sun; the amaranth is used as a symbol of immortality and Benjamin de la Villate devotes a poem to the palm tree which always grows upwards in spite of the heavy weight which drags it down.

The literature of religion in the Middle Ages, as seen in examples quoted by G.R. Owst (3) contains many of the images which poets of this period use. For example the use of the image of the ship at sea is often found in medieval sermons. The image is worked out in detail and given many more symbolic meanings in the Middle Ages, whereas in this later period it is usually more vague and general, the sea symbolizing life, the ship the true faith, or the individual soul. The poetry

(1) Le Digne: La Magdeleine, p.10.

(2) Auvray: Oeuvres Saintes, p.72.

(3) G.R. Owst: Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, Cambridge 1933.

addressed to the Virgin, the praise of her beauty, imagery taken from the Song of Songs, the religious love-songs were familiar to the medieval audience.

The imagery of the Middle Ages was often symbolic and allegorical, that is to say of the most abstract and transparent type. A good image was worked out in great detail, embellished with symbolic meanings. The significance of numbers was of great importance - the seven deadly sins for example. The stories of the Bible were interpreted as being full of hidden meaning. Traces of this attitude are found in this period, as in the work of La Ceppède for instance, but it is generally found only in moderation.

The use of mythological images, and the medieval influence is not so important as the Biblical or Petrarchist themes. Classical allusions were only part of the ornamentation of the poetry, never closely linked with the themes. Pagan influence had little effect on the central images of religious poetry. There was no real conflict between pagan and Christian themes in the sixteenth century - both existed side by side as part of the cultural heritage. On the other hand, the images taken from the bestiaries had been part of the Christian tradition for so long that there was no conscious return to a medieval style; they were part of the conventional imagery of religious teaching. There is some survival of medieval forms, varying with the individual poet. The use of allegory by d'Aubigné or Du Bartas is simply a device which helps them to express their feelings with greater force. For most poets

allegory is a form of decoration, a convenient way of presenting abstract ideas in poetic form.

It is interesting to see, however, how Biblical imagery is woven into a poetry completely different in style. On one hand there is the simple, primitive, violent imagery of the Bible and on the other the stiff conventions of precious imagery, classical allusions, the contrived metaphors. It is difficult to draw a definite distinction between influence on Protestant and Catholic writers. Influence of the reading of the Bible may be more apparent in Protestant poets, not so much in the use of imagery, but in general tone. Where poetry was more personal, less concerned with the wider religious issues, and concentrated on a poet's intimate feelings there was little Biblical influence, and much more dependence on other influences, especially Petrarchist. Naturally not all religious poetry is written from sincere feeling, but may come from a desire to use a theme which is popular, and in these cases the poet may interest himself in the ornamentation of his poetry and the creation of effects, rather than in conveying religious ideas. Very often the type of imagery used varies with the particular theme treated. The obsession with death and the transience of human life depended on imagery which showed links with the Middle Ages and certain passages of the Bible, and on the other hand the reflection of the love of Christ and hope for individual salvation depended on the imagery of love poetry. In general, however, influence came more from a striving to emulate contemporaries and immediate

predecessors, and to adapt their images to religious themes, than from the Bible, or the distant past.

Chapter IV

Part I: Sensuous and Picturesque Imagery

To say that the poets of this period chose to express themselves in concrete, sensuous and very picturesque imagery does not mean that they used their poetry simply as a means of drawing pictures, ignoring abstract ideas. Of course most imagery is expression of abstract ideas in a more vivid form, and it is difficult to find imagery which does not refer to the material world. However there are differences in the extent to which a certain image may strike one through its actual physical presence. Some images are almost transparent, allowing the reader to see straight through them to a more abstract idea; others have a reality which forces one to see the image first and only afterwards to realize its full significance. On one hand the poet, trying to express a given experience, may choose to make it more abstract, subjecting it to the order of his mind, and on the other he may feel it with more imagination, and work it out in the terms of the pictures which it immediately suggests. The Christian religion is one which in itself presents not only abstract ideas, but also dramatic, concrete description of the life of Christ, the Creation, or the Apocalypse. The abstract and the concrete are woven together inextricably, even more for the Christian of the sixteenth century than for the Christian of today.

It is important to take into consideration such works as the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius in this respect; as has been pointed out, meditation on religious subjects included

imagining the events of the Bible as if one were present, the torments of hell and the pleasures of heaven with all five senses. This indicates the kind of way in which many people approached religion. Writers tried to stimulate the mind and the emotions by appealing to the senses. Many of the themes of religious poetry were capable of being imagined in visual terms - the martyrdom of the saints, the life of Christ and the Day of Judgement.

Sensuality in art, of itself, was condemned by the Reformed Church, and in theory by the Council of Trent. For the Protestants, the material world was sinful. On the other hand many Christians, especially Catholics, reconciled humanism with Christianity and made it possible to combine love of the world with love of God. God was reflected in the material world, as its creator. For many Christians the world was a series of images which reflected spiritual reality. This is connected with the Platonic view of the universe, where earthly beauty corresponds in some way to ideal beauty.

The motivation behind the use of very concrete imagery was probably varied. Imagery which reflected the propagandist attitude of the poet could become very sensually shocking. The creation of images of great visual impact would awaken and rouse the emotions of the reader and make him accept more completely the intellectual concept underlying the image. This sensuous imagery may also express the emotion which the poet himself feels, an emotion which goes beyond intellectual reasoning, and extremes of emotion may be expressed in very sensuous

language, and in imagery which exaggerates and distorts the vision of the material world in order to express these extremes of emotion. The love of the picturesque is another aspect of this, the history of all things connected with Christianity being made to seem more strange, more unique, and so given this very picturesque quality. A pleasure in the things of the material world may, as I have said, be partly expression of admiration for the God who created them. On the other hand the desire to describe natural objects may be a result of the feeling of the impermanence of all things. Beauty is described only to make one feel the bitterness of its loss.

Imagery and the afterlife.

The use of imagery to draw pictures, to enable the reader to witness certain events in imagination, is naturally typical of poetry on the themes of the Day of Judgement, the horrors of hell or the pleasures of heaven, or the Crucifixion. These images are also intended to provoke certain emotions, particularly those of fear or horror. Poets often draw pictures deliberately to shock or startle the reader. D'Aubigné for example felt that his poetry should describe subjects which were distasteful or horrific:

..les horribles charognes
Des sepulchres blanchis.. (1)

Although much of his violent imagery is Biblical in origin and tone, he felt a conscious need to break away from the style he considered to be typical of classical antiquity.

(1) Les Tragiques, p.71.

Ces ruisselets d'argent que les Grecs nous feignoient,
 Où leurs poetes vains beuvoient et se baignoient,
 Ne courent plus ici, mais les ondes si claires,
 Qui eurent les saphyres et les perles contraires,
 Sont rouges de nos morts; le doux bruit de leurs flots,
 Leur murmure plaisant, hurte contre les os. (1)

The effect of this imagery is heightened by the contrast between the idyllic picture typical of poets of antiquity, and the river of blood together with the ironic description of the sound of water washing over the bones. The horror of this image strikes the ear as well as the eye. He also uses images which appeal to the sense of smell, again in an attempt to disgust and horrify.

Cet Enfer nourrissoit en ses obscuritez
 Deux e prits que les Cieux formerent, despitez,
 Des pires excrements, des vapeurs inconnues
 Que l'haleine du bas exhale dans les nues. (2)

It is in the description of the Apocalypse that d'Aubigné can exercise his descriptive powers on an imaginary subject and fill the reader's heart with fear. His picture of heaven appeals to all the senses, sound, taste, sight and touch. However, images of pleasure and happiness always seem less convincing, and in any case are always less striking than those evoking torture and suffering. Michel Quillian in La Dernière Semaine tries also to create an atmosphere of harmony and enjoyment:

Ils flaireront, joyeux, la roze printaniere,
 Ils gouteront, contens, du Miel Hymettien,
 Ravis, ils entendront le luth du Cinthien. (3)

To find images which would suggest pleasurable emotions to the

(1) Les Tragiques, p.31.

(2) Les Tragiques, p.50.

(3) Michel Quillian: La Dernière Semaine, Rouen 1597, p.191.
 (Henceforward abbreviated as Quillian)

same degree for everyone is more difficult than to evoke pain or fear. However, the descriptions of hell given by d'Aubigné are more than adequate:

Voz yeux sont des charbons qui embrazent & fument,
Voz dents sont des cailloux qui en grinçant s'allument. (1)

The themes of fire and darkness occur in many different ways:

L'estang de soulfhre vif qui rebrusle sans cesse.
Les tenebres espais plus que la nuict espaisse: (2)

while in his description of the resurrection he creates the visual impression of dead bodies taking shape again in the earth or the sea.

Du Bartas also has a very concrete vision of the end of the world; this one image seems to sum up the whole horror:

La mer deviendra flame, et les seches baleines,
Horribles, mugleront sur les cuites arenes; (3)

Michel Quillian echoes this in his description of the end of the world:

Il me tira de force à la porte fumante
D'un grand champ allumé où le ciel degoutoit
En stincelles de feu où l'homme sanglotoit,
Les oyseaux soupiroyent, & par les mers profondes,
Les poissons respiroyent des plaintes vagabondes, (4)

However, it is in the details of his images that du Bartas reveals the richness of his visual imagination, as in this passage where the hand of God becomes a terrible reality:

... de l'autre poing il serre
L'espongeuse rondeur de l'exécrable terre;
La met dans le pressoir, et luy fait peu à peu
Regorger tous les flots que jadis elle a beu. (5)

(1) Les Tragiques, p.303.

(2) Les Tragiques, p.301.

(3) Du Bartas: The Works of Guillaume de Saluste, Sieur du Bartas, ed. Holmes, Lyons & Richter, Chapel Hill 1938, Vol. II, La Première Semaine, p.207. (Henceforward abbreviated as Du Bartas.)

(4) Quillian, p.22.

(5) Du Bartas, Vol. III, La Seconde Semaine, p.97.

Michel Quillian describes the horrors of hell like d'Aubigné, fitting the punishment to the crime, drawing here a rather humorous picture:

Dans une mer sans fond, de vivres toute pleine,
Nage l'homme glouton à la fumeuse haléine,
Au ventre non moins grand que quatre à cinq tonneaux
Plain de vent seulement, se roulant dans les eaux:
Comme un porc eschauffé qui non loin de son arde
Pour refroidir sa chaleur se veautre en la bauge; (1)

Imagery of violence may also be found in the descriptions of contemporary events. Both du Bartas and d'Aubigné described at great length the horrors of war, du Bartas referring to Biblical events, and d'Aubigné to battles he had witnessed. In both poems the same descriptions recur, detailed descriptions of the bodies of the wounded and dead.

Imagery and the Crucifixion.

Violent imagery was also to be found when poets concentrated on the description of a particular event - the death of Christ. Again the intention was to shock the reader into a feeling of pity and guilt. Abel d'Argent in his Semaine announces his desire to awaken the emotions of his reader:

Enflamme mes esprits de celestes fureurs,
Afin que le Lecteur qui parcourra ces carmes
Donne à ces pleurs ses pleurs, à ces larmes ses larmes. (2)

His description of the wounding of Christ is very anatomical, but in contrast the blood of Christ becomes a symbol of grace:

Un fantasque soldat sa lance brandissant
La plante dans le flanc du Fils du Tout Puissant,
La pointe penetrant jusques au pericarde
Traverse les boyaux alors que le sang se darde.

(1) Quillian, p.175.

(2) Abel d'Argent: La Semaine d'Argent, Sedan 1629, p.110.
(Henceforward abbreviated as D'Argent)

Par le passage ouverte et desja mi-gelé
 D'une eau comme argentine estoit pesle-meslé
 Doux signes du haut ciel Sacrements veritables
 Qui purgent nos esprits d'ordures detestables.
 Qui nettoyyent nos coeurs de l'immondicité, (1)

Auvray's description of the Crucifixion is even more horrific.

He has a vision of the scene, set on the mountain, where the
 crows

Laidement croassans, déchiroient par morceaux,
 Des corps suppliciez les entrailles puantes; (2)

Jesus himself is a horrifying figure:

Si crasseux, si sanglant, si meurtry, si difforme. (3)

and he goes on to give a detailed picture:

Toute sa face estoit de crachats enlaidie,
 S'achair en mille endroits estoit toute meurtrie,
 Sa croix de toutes parts pissoit les flots de sang,
 Ses pieds, ses mains, son chef, et sa bouche et son flanc,
 En jettoient des ruisseaux, les cruelles tortures
 Luy avoient tout demis les os de ses jointures,
 Sa peau sanglante estoit cousue avec ses os,
 Et son ventre attaché aux vertebres de dos
 Sans entrailles sembloit. (4)

Here details of physical description mingle with the exaggeration
 in the image of floods of blood. It is only the light which
 shines from his eyes that assures the poet that he is alive,
 though apparently dead. The at first realistic picture is
 later modified to make clearer the religious implications of
 the scene for the reader after he has received the first shock.

In such examples as these, the image is intended to be as
 concrete and striking as the events described. Any poet would

- (1) D'Argent, p.158.
 (2) Auvray: La Pourmenade.
 (3) Auvray: La Pourmenade.
 (4) Auvray: La Pourmenade.

have recourse to visual imagery. It is in the use of images to convey more abstract ideas that we can judge the extent to which a poet relies on concrete example, and forms his ideas with the aid of his senses. The symbolism of colours is an example: d'Aubigné uses colour not only as description but as expression of feeling. White is of course the colour of purity and innocence. Black is for d'Aubigné the symbol of evil, and red, suggesting blood, is the symbol of violence and especially God's punishment, and of anger. For Gabrielle de Coignard the reality of the Crucifixion is also symbolic. The blood of Christ is turned into baptismal water. For her, to imagine the Crucifixion is to remind her of the need for repentance.

Je voy le Sainct des Saincts sur la terre eslever,
 Je voy son sang bouillant où je me veux laver,
 Je voy son corps divin chargé de cicatrices: (1)

Here the physical reality is made more distant by her symbolic interpretation of the Crucifixion. For Cesar de Nostradame the Crucifixion means not only the tragedy of Christ's death, but also his own salvation. His appreciation of the symbolic significance of the Crucifixion causes him to choose images of beauty as well as horror. He takes a more beautiful object as an image of reality:

O cloux, mais diamans et rubis precieux. (2)

This type of image is not descriptive of the Crucifixion, but of what the poet feels about the Crucifixion.

(1) Coignard, p.45.

(2) Cesar de Nostradame, p.46.

Allegory

Allegory is a very popular form of presenting abstract ideas in a more or less visual form. D'Aubigné's use of allegory reveals his need to express himself in concrete terms: abstract virtues and vices become real people - the earth is a woman in a very literal sense in the next passage:

Cachez-vous sous ma robe en mes noires forests,
Et, au fond du malheur, que chacun de vous entre
Par deux fois, mes enfants, dans l'obscur de mon ventre. (1)

In another passage the sea is an old man, who is horrified by the dead bodies washed into the sea, but on discovering that they are martyrs welcomes and protects them. Both d'Aubigné and du Bartas make great use of allegory in depicting the vices of the world around them. Their personifications of evil are striking caricatures. On the other hand allegory can be an elegant decorative device, as in the personification of dawn, quoted on page 68, in the Larmes de St Pierre. Malherbe presents St Peter's emotions of sorrow and also adds to the picturesque quality of his poetry.

The theme of transience.

A frequent theme among poets of this period is that of transience, of the shortness and futility of life on earth and the inevitability of death. This theme is expressed in a number of images taken from nature - the flower, the cloud, the stream. This type of imagery is typical of Chassignet, among others:

Nostre vie est semblable à quelque espais nuage
Qui vole contremont, monstrant à sa grandeur

(1) Les Tragiques, p.38.

De durer longuement puis tout soudain l'ardeur
Des rayons du soleil la dissout et ravage. (1)

Sponde's sonnet Mais si faut-il mourir is a series of images of this sort, the breaking of a wave, the dying-out of a candle, following each other, each a different image suggesting the same idea of transience. Here one has the impression, however, that the images have become so conventionalized that the abstract idea is much more real than the visual image. Chassignet seems to be more aware of the reality of the examples he uses as images, as in the following passage:

Quand les arbres fruitiers au Printemps fleurissans,
Mettant hors de leurs troncs mille jetons fertiles,
C'est un signe evident que les courbes faucilles
Doivent tost retrancher les rameaux surcroissans. (2)

The example taken from nature is more complex, and shows a more than superficial interest in the processes of flowering, and a desire to draw more complicated parallels between a flowering tree and man's life.

A moral attitude to life, a disapproval for the way in which men lead their lives, may inspire the poet to choose examples which show in simple terms the folly of man's life. Chassignet uses examples taken from animal life to illustrate his ideas:

Où court ce pauvre ver qui travaille et tracasse
Ignorant de sa fin, las! comme les poissons
Sont surpris aus appas des trompeurs hameçons,
Et les simples oiseaus aus neus de la filâce, (3)

His pessimistic attitude to life leads him to take animal life as a parallel to that of man. The same image is found

- (1) Chassignet, p.94.
(2) Chassignet, p.102.
(3) Chassignet, p.54.

in B. de Montmeja's Ode de Printemps:

Les oiseaux qui leur ramage
Desgoisent dans un bocage,
Fendant qu'on leur tend des rets
Nous enseignent que liesse
Est la proie de tristesse
Dans les mondaines forests. (1)

Man's lack of foresight and judgement, the choice of pleasure rather than goodness leads him to his inevitable doom, at least in the opinion of Chassignet, and so he chooses examples of animals who are guided only by greed and instinct.

Nuisible est le plaisir du folastre poisson
Qui, frayant sous les eaux, en mordillant s'efforce
D'engloutir et manger la captieuse amorce,
Qui cache les crochets du mordant hameçon. (2)

The movements of the spider as it spins its web suggest the trap which man sets for himself in his purposeless activities.

Although his theory is questionable as far as the spider is concerned, the visual image expresses well Chassignet's theme of the futility of man's activities:

L'homme seul est celui entre tant d'animaux
Qui le plus a de vie, et le plus a de maux,
Semblable en son travail à l'araigne subtile,
Qui, filant, devidant, renouant et tournant
En ses propres filets se va emprisonnant,
Ourdissant et tramant un ouvrage inutile. (3)

The movement of life is not a continuous stream, but a complicated web constructed out of purposeless movements.

Imagery and emotion.

Occasionally poetry which has to convey extremes of emotion contains images which appeal forcefully to the senses. The poet needs to find a means of conveying the depth of his emotion.

- (1) B. de Montmeja: Ode de Printemps, in La Muse Chrestienne de P. Fouppe, p.77.
(2) Chassignet, p.115.
(3) Chassignet, p.69.

The feeling of self-disgust which Alphonse de Rambervillet wishes to convey is more than adequately expressed in this passage:

Car là! j'ay remangé plus que brutalement
 Les long-filans morceaux de mon vomissement
 J'ay las; me dégradant de l'humaine nature,
 Retourné au corps-mort, & plus qu'auparavant,
 J'ay reveauté mon corps dans le borbier puant,
 Semblable au Chien, au Loup & au Porc aim-ordure. (1)

D'Aubigné's hatred of Catherine de Medicis made him draw a picture of her which partly would be intended to incite hatred of her, but also partly must have seemed true; this attribution of supernatural powers of evil to the woman whom he felt to have ruined France.

Elle change en discord l'accord des elements,
 En paisible minuict on vit ses hurlemens,
 Ses sifflements, ses cris, alors que l'enragée
 Tourne-la terre en cendre et en sang l'eau changée; (2)

The expression of emotion in other people is always physical, he describes people's hair standing on end and the grincement de dents of anger.

Picturesque imagery: the Virgin and Mary Magdalene.

The more picturesque imagery and more lighthearted approach is found in the poetry dedicated to the Virgin Mary or Mary Magdalene. In the poetry to Mary Magdalene attention is focused on her hair and her tears. With the Virgin Mary symbols of purity are more frequent. These two saintly characters are described in such a way as to appeal to the aesthetic taste, stressing their beauty and comparing them to beautiful objects. Natural objects are used to symbolize

(1) Alphonse de Rambervillet: Les devots Blancemens du Poete Chrestien, Pont-à-Moisson 1603, p.40. (Henceforward abbreviated as Rambervillet)

(2) Les Tragiques, p.55.

the beauty of these spiritual beings. As the colour white symbolizes purity, flowers and pearls suggest this whiteness and purity to Nicolas Le Digne:

Le lyz passe en blancheur la Perle la plus franche,
Mais tu es, douce Vierge, et plus nette et plus blanche
Que la perle n'est blanche, et que le lyz n'est blanc. (1)

Other symbols of purity are mountain springs, milk, while her beauty is like the rose:

Tu es la fleur du ciel, et l'odorante Rose,
Qui du lustre esclatant du Pourpre le plus beau
De tes rares Beutez embellis toute chose. (2)

Not only is the sight of the rose beautiful, but its perfume as well. This sweet perfume suggests her sweetness and kindness towards man, for du Perron at least:

C'est cette myrrhe et fleurs et baume odorant
Qui rend de sa senteur nos âmes consolées,
C'est ce Jardin reclus suavement flairant,
C'est la Rose des champs et le Lis des vallées; (3)

In La Magdeleine Remi de Beauvais brings out in his imagery all the picturesque qualities of the story. We have already seen how poets made Magdeleine into the epitomy of the repentant sinner and the beautiful woman at the same time. Even in moments of great emotion her physical beauty is stressed:

Au bas de ce vallon à l'abry du rocher,
Où ses doigts despiteux ne cessent d'arracher
Ses cheveux aussi fins que filets d'araignées. (4)

Jesus himself does not escape this detailed analysis of his physical characteristics and exaggeration of decorative effects:

- (1) Le Digne: La Couronne, p.56.
- (2) Le Digne: La Couronne, p.57.
- (3) Du Perron: Cantique de la Vierge Marie in Penguin Book of French Verse, 2 ed. Brereton London 1958, p.141.
- (4) Remi de Beauvais: La Magdeleine, Tournay 1617, p.603.
(Henceforward abbreviated as Beauvais)

..et Jesus my-assis,
 My-couché, d'un maintien & d'un parler rassis,
 Mais divin, abreuvoit les ames aterées
 Au sucre doux-coulant de ses levres dorées,
 Levres, qui de leurs bords, ores serréz, couvroient
 Et ores, en parlant gravement, descouvroient
 Parmy le vermeillon, deux luisantes rangées
 De perles d'Orient dans sa bouche rangées. (1)

Images of sweetness are also found in illustration of the relationship between God and man, and particularly the grace of God:

Comme on veoit que l'abeille en succeant la rosée
 Sur l'esmail de la fleur qui en est arrosée,
 Change ceste liqueur en un miel doucereux:
 La grace de mon Dieu venant sur moy s'espandre
 Me lavera du tout, & me fera reprendre
 Ma naifve couleur, m'eslevant droit aux cieux. (2)

Disproportion in vivid imagery.

The relation of the image to the idea or emotion it illustrates is sometimes rather strained. The image in itself may be striking, and yet contribute little to the theme of the poem. A poet such as La Ceppède remains close to the abstract reality; and his images only occasionally become physical, as in this example quoted by Ruchon in his introduction to La Ceppède's poems:

Ma substance fondue au feu de mon martyre
 S'ecoule par mes yeux: Voy la donc et l'attire
 Comme le soleil va les vapeurs attirant. (3)

The image although basically a conventional Petrarchist comparison can present a more literal picture. The same is true of the next image:

..Sur son chef cette flame conduit
 Pour le cuire au fourneau de son Saint-Evangile (4)

- (1) Beauvais, p.132.
- (2) Godet, p.22.
- (3) La Ceppède, p.29.
- (4) La Ceppède, p.28.

On the other hand many poets remain even less close to the abstract idea, and their images reveal a fascination for sensuous experiences, the creation of vivid pictures. D'Aubigné frequently expresses himself in a very concrete image which is developed at great length. The most familiar images are those of the giant, or the mother with two children fighting at her breast in Miseres. Here the images are more real and striking through their visual impact than through the concepts they illustrate. His visual imagination is seen in his verbs especially; they are often verbs of action and movement. In the next passage the image is made rather comic by the verb, which turns one of d'Aubigné's more conventional comparisons into a very vivid picture:

La les agnelets de l'Eglise
Sautent au nez du loup romain. (1)

This passage describes the feelings of the mother about to devour her child:

La mere deffaisant, pitoyable et farousche,
Les liens de pitié avec ceux de sa couche,
Les entrailles d'amour, les filets de son flanc,
Les intestins bruslans par les tressauts du sang,
Les sens, l'humanité, le coeur esmeu qui tremble,
Tout cela se destord et se desmesle ensemble. (2)

The abstract qualities turn into physical ones, and in the last line come to life, twisting and turning.

Du Bartas is a poet who tends also to think in concrete terms. His greatest achievement seems to be in poetry which is purely descriptive, which relates things he sees or imagines. The drawback is that sometimes his very down-to-earth way of seeing things detracts from his attempt to write in a tragic

(1) Les Tragiques, p.22.

(2) Les Tragiques, p.44.

tone: he also describes the mother who devours her child:

... escoutte au moins les plaintes
De mon filz, qui bruiant dans ces boiaux ici,
D'un murmure confus te remonstre cecy. (1)

This fascination with visual, material imagery, in order to convey horror or delight in a particular scene, may cause the imagery to grow out of proportion. The lack of balance and moderation in the imagery may detract from the importance of the theme illustrated. In many cases the theme is so well-worn that the poet has difficulty in finding a means of embellishing it, and giving it an individual presentation. Some poets have an extremely concrete vision and sometimes incorporate scenes familiar to them but not quite appropriate to the theme, as with Durant in La Magdaliade where Magdeleine approaches Jesus:

Alors comme un Poussin pepiant fuit sous l'aile
De sa mere soudain que, clouquante, l'appelle,
Ainsi toute joyeuse elle va l'approchant (2)

Generally Chassignet strives to achieve a balance in his poems between the image, which is the example he uses, and the idea which it illustrates or which he appears to deduce from it. This is true of many of the poets of this period, especially La Ceppède, Lazare de Selve, or in the work of poets who meditate on aspects of Christ's passion, and the moralizing poetry of poets like Antoine Favre. The developments within the image itself are not decorative, but meant to correspond to development in the idea. Sometimes, however, the image takes on a life of its own, and overshadows the idea. This

(1) Du Bartas, Vol. III, La Seconde Semaine, p.433.

(2) F.E.A. Durant: La Magdaliade, ou Esquillon Spirituel, Loches 1608, p.41. (Henceforward abbreviated as Durant)

is more typical of poets like d'Aubigné and du Bartas, where the image is overdeveloped in relation to the idea. The following passage illustrates how the same thing happens occasionally in Chassignet's poetry:

Veus tu sçavoir que c'est de ceste chair fragile?
C'est de l'herbe et du foin à présent verdoyant,
En cent plis recourbez flos sur flos ondoyant,
Où passera demain la tranchante faucille. (1)

The conventional Biblical image is amplified in the third line, where it becomes a visual reality, breaking away from the abstract link between man's doomed flesh and the corn which is to be harvested. Another beautiful image is that of the ship:

Non de fer ny de plomb, mais d'odorantes pommes
Le vaisseau va charge; ainsi les jours d'hommes
Sont legers, non pesants, variables et vains,
Qui, laissant apres eux d'un peu de renommée
L'odeur en moins de rien comme fruit consommée
Passent legerement hors du coeur des humains. (2)

The image of the apples is meant to suggest the vanity of man's life, but the conjuring up of the fragrance of the apples is so pleasant an image that it contradicts the underlying idea, and the transience of life becomes a somehow more attractive and pleasing idea. Although Chassignet's poetry is generally rather abstract, not depending too much on imagery to express his ideas, not visual imagery at least, very often he creates images which are picturesque, or in the case of his physical descriptions, very disquieting: this is perhaps a result of his exact and analytical rather than emotional language.

(1) Chassignet, p.113.

(2) Chassignet, p.96-97.

The individual vision of the poet.

It is in their use of sensuous imagery that poets reveal their vision of the world and of life. For d'Aubigné the elements are human. They respond in their own way to human events. He sees nature as bound to God, expressing obedience to him:

..l'Univers arrêté
Adore en fremissant sa haute Majesté. (1)

Misdeeds on earth are replied to by thunder and darkness. For others the world is a creation of God which mirrors him, or rather is a kind of theatre where, as for d'Aubigné to some extent, nature provides a picturesque backcloth for René de Beauvais:

Qu'ay-ie veu? tous les Cieux peints de laide couleur
Tous les Anges plorer! tout le Monde en tenebres!
Tous les astres couvers de longz rideaux funebres. (2)

For d'Aubigné also images which refer to man himself tend to relegate him to the plane of animals: tigers, lions, wolves, serpents or sheep. Chassignet's images show a fascination with death, although his philosophy teaches him to accept death as a release from life, he seems at times to be haunted by the physical aspect of death. The image of the worm is introduced in great detail:

..le ver rougissant
Ses gloutons intestins de sa chair nourrissant
Jusqu'aus os descharné le devore et consomme! (3)

All his descriptions of dead bodies go into anatomical detail even where living people are concerned, he is interested in

- (1) Les Tragiques, p.121.
(2) Beauvais, p.554.
(3) Chassignet, p.110.

showing how prone they are to sickness, as in this passage:

Le pié, la main, l'espaule à la goutte est sujette,
 Les pòmmons à la tous, l'oreille à surdité,
 Le debile estomach à l'aigre crudité,
 De cent maus differens se tourmente la tète.
 Un ardent pleuresis nous pointelle le flanc,
 La flegme et la colere enveniment le sang
 De tranchée et de point le ventre se contriste. (1)

or again his disgust for the body:

..il n'est membre si sain
 Dez la plante des piés jusques au chef hautain
 D'ou ne sorte du corps quelque puante ordure. (2)

It would seem that Chassignet has a greater than normal interest in the physical aspects of man and his weaknesses. Many poets describe physical sufferings, but few go as far into the physiological details of the human anatomy as in this passage:

Tantost l'aspre gravelle espaissie en tes reins
 Te pince les boyaus de trenchante tenaille. (3)

He sees man's life as filled with sickness, which awakens in him a horror of physical existence. Besides this there is, as for many others, the feeling of perpetual movement onwards. This long description of the wind suggests a growing force, moving everything along with it:

Sur le commencement à grand peine respire
 Le vent debile et lent, puis venant escrouler
 Les fresnes et les pins, il fait au ciel voler
 Le sablon tournoyant au vuloir de son ire;
 De là plus furieus, il sappe, il heurte, il tire
 Le rocher contre val et fait en bas rouler
 Les arbres arrachez, tempester et bransler
 Des monstres mariniers le fluctueus empire; (4)

These poets all show in their images the discord they feel in life - a dissatisfaction with the conditions of existence in this world which leads them to insist on the value of the next. This is not true, however, of all the poets of this

- (1) Chassignet, p.105.
- (2) Chassignet, p.79.
- (3) Chassignet, p.30.
- (4) Chassignet, p.127.

period. There is a more optimistic strain, as we have seen in the poetry addressed to the Virgin and to Mary Magdalene, which takes images from the objects of beauty around them, and sees the beauty of this world as an image of the divine. Pierre de Chauls sees man himself as an image of God, a reflection of his divinity:

Un vil eschouillon de la divinite,
Un ruisseau derive de son eternite,
La forme, & le miroir de sa beaute divine. (1)

Poetry which stresses unity and harmony between God and the world dwells on the more pleasant aspects of nature. Gabrielis

de Colnard sees in the beauty of the scenery around her a

reason for praising God:

Ces jours se sont si doux en ce beau lieu champetre,
Voyant d'un fer tranchant fendre le long gueret,
Et enterrer le dieu jaunissant, pur et net,
Fuis le vent tout apres tout verdoyant renastre.
Mon bien, le grand plaisir de veoir sur l'herbe palastre
Les fraises pres de portant son aliguet,
Et le cornu better, qui marche tout seul
Au devant du tropheau, comme patron et maitre,
L'air est delictueux, sans dinges ni chaleurs
Un petit vent mollet fait odoyer les fleurs,
Les bois portent encore leur superbe couronne;
L'on ne voit point le rumeur d'un vulgaire babil,
Rien des oisietes le samage gentil;
L'on est l'eternel qui tous ces biens nous donne. (2)

The poem is a list of simple straightforward descriptions

without any special meaning except to draw a picture of calm order and harmony. She feels the continuity of nature and its dependence on God. A very similar theme is treated in

Pierre Ronsard's poem:

- (1) Pierre de Chauls, p. 4.
- (2) Colnard, p. 71.

Quand ie voi du matin les cieux estinceler
 Sous les premiers rayons du beau jour qui s'efueille;
 Et les pleurs cristalins dont l'Aurore vermeille
 Vient en ces plus doux mois les herbes emperler:
 Quand i'oi de toutes pars les bois rossignoler
 Et l'argent des ruisseaux tinter à mon oreille
 Quand ie voi mille fleurs de senteur nompareille
 Tapisser les chemins par où ie dois aller:
 Bref, quand ie voi l'espoir de la vie annuelle
 Que la terre nourrit d'une pluie mamuelle,
 Bleds, vins, fruits, & troupeaux presperer à souhait,
 Ne seroi-ie pas bien d'une ingrante nature
 Si ie n'aimois celui qui tant de biens me fait? (1)

Although the image here is more tortuous and the style more rhetorical than that of Gabrielle de Coignard, whose simple direct style makes more of an impression, the idea of the continuity of nature is similar. Poupo cannot resist decorating his description with words like pleurs cristalins, emperler, or l'argent des ruisseaux to accentuate the prettiness of the scenery around him.

The moral, didactic type of poetry seems to have predominated in the early part of this period, perhaps in reaction against the more light-hearted secular poetry, or perhaps under the influence of humanist studies, the reading of Seneca or the stoical writers of this period. In the latter part of the period the more personal, emotional poetry was predominant, concerned with expressing the love of God, and imagery became more sensuous and picturesque.

There are many types of imagery which could well come under the heading of concrete, visual imagery, which are taken from the experience of the senses, but which, being conceived of in pairs of opposites are better dealt with later. For instance,

(1) Poupo, p.13.

this passage from Antoine Favre makes a transition from the concrete to the abstract:

Plus en vient l'appetit, plus la salade est aigre,
 Ainsi d'aller à toy le desir me croistre,
 Fuis ta grace, à ma mort, la douce huile sera,
 Qui de ton fier courroux mattera la vinaigre. (1)

However, the expression of things invisible in terms of the visible is an important element in the imagery of this period and indicates a break away from the Petrarchist tradition to a certain extent. The interest in many poems is in things, dramatic scenes, picturesque tableaux, relying perhaps much more on real life experience and also on the influence of the Bible.

Vivid imagery is used, then, firstly to convey horror, as a means of persuading and convincing the reader, through fear in descriptions of the end of the world, and pity and guilt in the Crucifixion. Imagery also expresses regret for the beauty of the earth and of transient things, and also in this connection has perhaps the function of an example, pointing a moral with instances from the natural world. Imagery also expresses extreme emotion through violent, or distorted pictures of the world. Picturesque imagery is a means of praising, of beautifying certain aspects of religious belief. Some poets see the world in more sensuous terms; their use of imagery moreover reveals the distortion in their view of the world. The more pessimistic view of life is expressed in grotesque, or distorted images, trying to horrify the reader. A more optimistic religious faith is expressed in more beautiful, harmonious images which reflect the beauty of the natural world.

(1) Favre, p.17.

Part II: Antithesis and Paradox.

The idea that the word is formed of contrasts, of opposing forces, is a common one in the sixteenth century. Nicolas of Cusa set out the principle of uniting all contraries in God:

We, however, behold the opposites in the womb of the principle that unites them prior to their duality, that is before they were two things mutually opposed. (1)

Stability, equilibrium is achieved by balancing two opposites - the cycles of day and night, the combination of body and soul, the microcosm against the macrocosm. The stylistic devices of love poetry were adopted by writers of religious poetry, and one of the elements of Petrarchist style was the use of antithesis which is a typical feature of the religious poetry of this period. The form of poetry encouraged the use of antithesis to a certain extent: the sonnet with its pairs of equal lines tended towards a balance of different images or ideas. Often the same sort of contrasts existed in love and religious feeling: the struggle between life and death, in love poetry more metaphorical, and in religious poetry more literal, was a theme they had in common. Maurice Scève's poetry is full of this alternation between life and death:

...qui la veoit sans mourir, ne vit point:
Et qui est vif sans la sçavoir au Monde,
Est trop plus mort, que si Mort l'avoit point, (2)

The conflicts may be fundamental to the poet's attitude to life, or they may be merely decorative effects, part of a literary convention. This poem could equally well be a poem

(1) Quoted in H.O. Taylor: Philosophy and Science in the Sixteenth Century, New York 1962, p.42.

(2) Maurice Scève: Délie in Schmidt: Poètes du XVII^e Siècle, Paris 1953, p.156.

about the sorrows of love as the sorrow of a Christian:

Le soleil en un an acheve sa carriere,
 Et la lune en un mois termine sa lumiere,
 Tous les astres du ciel declinent en leur cours,
 Les nuicts vont succedans à la clarté des iours,
 Les saisons se font place, & toutes choses nees:
 S'escoulent par les loix qui leur sont ordonnees,
 Et ma peine, Seigneur, est reduite à tel point
 Qu'elle est tousiours entiere & ne decline point
 Comme si les decrets & les regles humaines
 S'alteroit en moy seul pour maintenir mes peines. (1)

The descriptions of the sun, moon, stars and seasons seem to overload the antithesis unduly and the result is to make one feel that the poet is concentrating on the exaggeration rather than the actual misery. Here the contrast is a device used for emphasis.

Paradox is not an unfamiliar element in poetry; one has only to think of Villon:

Je meurs de soif auprès de la fontaine

Maurice Scève used paradox to describe the effects of love:

Tout libre faict m'est esclave contraincte (2)

or to express his sufferings:

... le feu vif de ma lanterne morte. (3)

The use of antithesis or paradox contrasts with the use of sensuous imagery. As I have shown, concrete images illuminate aspects of thought, and at the same time reveal the author's feelings about the world around him, his relationship with material things. The use of antithesis, or contrasting images, shows a tendency to think in more abstract terms, and to arrange

(1) Nervèze, p.23.

(2) Maurice Scève: Délie in Schmidt: Poètes du XVIe Siècle, p.163.

(3) Maurice Scève: Délie in Schmidt: Poètes du XVIe Siècle, p.138.

experience in a systematic way. The imagery of opposites shows that the poet is no longer concerned with things as they are, but with categories of things. He is no longer using his perception of things around him, but is trying to fit his experience into a rigid pattern of ideas. D'Aubigné may communicate the feeling of opposition between earthly and spiritual things in an image which conveys visually and emotionally the struggle between flesh and spirit. Other poets, however, may rationalize this struggle and choose examples which illustrate the logical dilemma. So whereas d'Aubigné shows the earth as a person, reacting to the anger of God, who is also a human figure, Sponte takes the conventional opposites of light and dark to correspond to the struggle in himself between the material and spiritual impulses.

There is a distinction to be made between antithesis, the juxtaposition of contrasting images, and paradoxical images. Antithesis expresses a conflict, two opposing forces. Paradox in a sense represents the resolution of the conflict - two elements fused into one self-contradictory image. Here again, although paradox would seem to deny the ideal of order and logic, it is the result of a seeking after order. Paradox is a kind of inverted logic, it questions experience on rational grounds, and points out and preserves the inconsistencies, but for the Christian particularly this very lack of logic makes experience more valid. Paradox enables man to glimpse a superior kind of order beyond his own comprehension.

Religious faith can be reduced to a series of oppositions.

The conflicts which preoccupied religious poets were numerous. The main conflict within man himself is the conflict between the earthly part and the spiritual part. One part of him is flesh and belongs to the world, the other is spirit and aspires to God. This conflict is also expressed in his actions which could be either good or evil. Then there is the conflict between life and death, death which leads to another kind of life in contrast with the first kind. There is also the contrast between the transience of life and the eternity of the afterlife. This struggle between life and death is perhaps the most important theme for many poets, and the most paradoxical.

Another theme is that of the two different attitudes to life: that it is ridiculous, or that it is tragic. This is seen in the title to one of Jacques Grevin's volumes of poetry, La Gelodacrye, or the repetition in Chassignet or Montaigne among others of the theme of Heraclitus and Democritus: the tears and the laughter, summed up in these lines by Guy du Faur de Pibrac:

Ry, si tu veux, au ris de Democrite
 Puisque le monde est pure vanité,
 Mais quelquefois, touché d'humanité,
 Fleure nos maux des larmes d'Heraclite. (1)

or from Chassignet:

Quant je viens à penser à quelle vanité
 Par sa presumption l'homme se precipite,
 Je ne sçay si je dois feindre le Democrite,
 Riant des actions de nostre humanité.
 Mais las! quand j'apperçoy de quelle infirmité
 Nature a composé nostre cors decrepité,
 J'ay bien plus de sujet d'imiter Heraclite,
 Fleurant incessamment nostre infelicité. (2)

(1) Guy du Faur de Pibrac in H. La Maynardière: Poètes Chrétiens du XVI^e Siècle, Paris 1908, p.128.

(2) Chassignet, pp.80-81.

However, the poets of this period were much more inclined to take the tragic view than the comic.

Antithesis: the flesh and the spirit.

Sponde, in his Stances de la Mort brings out most of the basic conflicts felt by the Christian and expresses them in the usual images. His dependence on the abstract framework of ideas is seen in his repetition of words and a few basic, unadorned images. The struggle between death and life, flesh and spirit, is expressed in the conflicts of light and dark, fire and water. The whole poem depends on this series of conflicts. At first it is the image of light: his eyes are dazzled by the light of the flammeuse vie, but there are brighter lights, plus vives lumieres, and in order to appreciate this greater light one should close one's eyes to the light of this life. The conflict continues with this same image, and with that of fire and water:

Mais je sens dedans moy quelque chose qui gronde,
 qui fait contre le ciel le partisan du monde,
 qui noircist ses clartez d'un ombrage toffu:
 L'Esprit, qui n'est que feu, de ses desirs m'enflame,
 Et la Chair, qui n'est qu'eau, pleut des eaux sur ma flamme,
 Mais ces eaux-là pourtant n'esteignent point ce feu, (1)

Later he uses the image of light and darkness to show how man opposes the will of God:

He! que tastonnes-tu dans cette obscurité
 Où ta clarté, du vent de Dieu mesme allumee,
 Ne pousse que les flots d'une espaisse fumee,
 Et contraint a la mort son immortalité. (2)

D'Aubigné makes use of the light-darkness image also, but in a less abstract way:

Jesus est tousjours clair, mais lors son beau visage

(1) Sponde, p.182.

(2) Sponde, p.183.

Nous cache ses rayons si doux,
 Quand nos pechés fumans entre le ciel et nous,
 Les vices redoubléz enlevent un image
 Qui nourcít le Ciel de courroux. (1)

D'Aubigné makes the image more concrete by using sun and smoke rather than light and darkness. This theme of light and dark is common in all the poetry of this period. Henry Humbert, himself blind, treats the theme in this way:

Fuyez tenebres ennemis,
 De mes paupieres endormies,
 Je vois au regard qui reluit,
 De qui la pitié coustumiere
 Chasse avec ce peu de lumiere
 Toutes les ombres de la nuict. (2)

The same type of image may of course be applied to most aspects of religious conflict. Other standard antitheses are those between lightness and heaviness as in this example from d'Aubigné:

Toute vertu est née aux Cieux:
 Tout cela qui est vicieux
 Reconnoist la terre pour mere,
 Chacun son pareil elisant,
 Toute vertu est donc legere,
 Tout vice constant et pesant. (3)

The flesh and sin are heavy, pesant, while virtue and spirit are light like fire. Sponde also shows the different aspirations of the flesh and the spirit:

La Chair sent le doux fruit des voluptez presentes,
 L'Esprit ne semble avoir qu'un espoir des absentes,
 Et le fruit pour l'espoir ne se doit point changer. (4)

The conflict is now seen as an actual battle, in which God will intervene:

Ne crains point, mon Esprit, d'entrer en ceste lice,
 . . .
 Dieu t'armera de fer pour piler ce beau verre,

- (1) D'Aubigné: L'Hiver, Oeuvres Vol.IV, Paris 1877, p.299.
 (2) P. Leblanc: Henry Humbert Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance, XVIII, 1956, I, p.55.
 (3) D'Aubigné: Le Printemps, Oeuvres Vol. III, p.179.
 (4) Sponde, p.182.

Pour casser ce roseau; (1)

The last of the sonnets on death is also concerned with this intense conflict: the world, the flesh and the devil, against God's temple, hand and voice; in the two sets of images, the onde, effort & charme against the nef, appuy, oreille dormante, which God will give him.

Contradictions in life.

Life in itself has its contradictions and contains in it movement towards death, so that life and death are inextricably linked. Chassignet is concerned with life in its movement towards death.

Qu'est-ce de vostre vie? une bouteille molle,
Qui s'enfle dessus l'eau, quant le ciel fait plouvoir
Et se perd aussi tost comme elle se fait voir,
S'entre-brisant a l'heur d'un moindre bricole. (2)

Sponde in the same way sees life as growth and decay:

Voulez-vous voir ce trait qui si roide s'eslance
Dedans l'air qu'il poursuit au partir de la main?
Il monte, il monte, il part: mais hélas! tout soudain
Il retombe, il retombe, et perd sa violence. (3)

The conflict does not exist only outside of man, in the choices he has to make, but within himself, in his own attitudes. For d'Aubigné man himself is full of duplicity, presenting a virtuous exterior, but hiding a vicious nature.

Tels sont les monts cornus, qui (avaricieux)
Monstrent l'or aux enfers et les neiges aux cieux. (4)

or the illogical behaviour of the perverted:

Vous succez le poison et vous crachez le miel! (5)

- (1) Sponde, p.182.
- (2) Chassignet, p.47.
- (3) Sponde, p.194.
- (4) Les Tragiques, p.67.
- (5) Les Tragiques, p.174.

The poems on the Passion of Christ depend on antithesis to emphasize the magnanimity of the sacrifice he made: La Ceppède makes the contrast between the crown of thorns and the crown of glory:

Il a son tendre chef de ronces couronné
Pour ceindre vostre chef d'un brillant diademe. (1)

Auvray sees both the horror and the joy of the Crucifixion:

Crucifier un Dieu! pendre la Roy des Roys
O Justice, nuict, fiel, haine, guerre inhumaine,
O paix, miel, jour, amour, repos & douces loix. (2)

La Ceppède sees this joy in the resurrection, the elements expressing the contrasting moods:

Voicy le calme, apres tant de flots orageux,
Voicy les fleurs, apres la rigueur des gelées,
Le Ciel qui fut n'aguere et triste, et nuageux,
Escot rasseréné ses clartéz receleés. (3)

Contrasting images are also used to describe the pleasures of life, which are only a façade behind which the truth is less pleasant. For Gabrielle de Coignard they are ameres douceurs. Loys Godet describes the child chasing a butterfly which seems beautiful but is only a simple vermisseau. For Gody, life is passed entre fleur et pourriture.

Et tout ce que ie voy fleury
Est en cette saison riante
A la veille d'estre pourry. (4)

Comparison by opposition.

We have seen how the perspective of religion makes the Christian view things in different ways. The belief in an afterlife leads him to consider the pleasures of this world as

- (1) La Ceppède, p.69.
- (2) Auvray: La Pourmenade, Sonnets sur la passion VIII.
- (3) La Ceppède, p.104.
- (4) Gody; Les Honnestes Poesies, Paris 1632. p.5. (Henceforward abbreviated as Gody)

deceptive. The joy of his salvation makes him see the Crucifixion as both a tragedy and a reason for rejoicing. Sponde's gloomy outlook on life makes him see pleasures as sorrow:

Ses gays Printemps me sont des funestes Hyvers,
Le tracieux Zephir de son repos me semble
Un Aquilon de peine; (1)

Similarly Chassignet's outlook tends to lead to a deformation of life, seen from the point of view of death:

Nos libertez que laqs, que prisons et que chains,
Nostre aise que mal-aise et nostre ris que pleur. (2)

Sponde makes comparisons between this life and the after-life:

Beaux sejours, loin de l'oeil, pres de l'entendement,
Au prix de qui le Temps ne monte qu'un moment,
Au prix de qui le jour est un ombrage sombre, (3)

D'Aubigné makes use of the same type of imagery in his descriptions of heaven:

Les jeux, les passetemps et les esbats d'icy
N'estoient qu'amers chagrins, que colere et soucy
Et que gehennes, au prix de la joye eternelle. (4)

He stresses the contrast between heaven and earth in order to emphasize the perfection of heaven.

Les amours d'icy bas n'estoient rien que hair
Au prix des hauts amours dont la sainte armonie
Rend une ame de tous en un vouloir unie: (5)

or as Lazare de Selve says:

La vie n'est qu'une heure, un instant limité
Au pris de ce grand jour de l'immortalité. (6)

La Ceppédé uses antithesis as a descriptive device also, to describe by contrast what cannot be expressed adequately in

- (1) Sponde, p.181.
- (2) Chassignet, p.38.
- (3) Sponde, p.192.
- (4) Les Tragiques, p.305.
- (5) Les Tragiques, p.305.
- (6) Lazare de Selve, p.49.

images. He uses the image of light and dark; it is the light which seems dark beside the glory of Christ:

Les Planetes errans, les Astres arrestez,
Aux rayons de sa gloire eclipsent leurs clartez,
Comme au jour d'un flambeau les chandeles brunissent. (1)

Paradox in Christianity.

The inability to describe adequately the immensity of religious experience led to the use of antithesis: describing by contrast, and paradox: using contradictions to indicate the incomprehensibility of this experience. Paradoxical imagery also expresses the uncertainty man feels in the value of reason and knowledge as opposed to faith. Man cannot know anything for certain. The only certainty is in the Christian religion, which is a belief based to a great extent on paradox and apparently illogical events and statements. Many writers show the conflict between faith and reason which leads in poetry to the stressing of the irrational elements in the Christian faith to contrast more strongly with ideas which are simply rational. Only through faith can the mysteries of religion be grasped. Calvin placed little value on human reason. Du Bartas in the Triomphe de la Foy says:

Je sçay que j'entrepren une chose impossible
Je sçay que l'oeil humain en ceci rien ne voit,
Je sçay que la raison rien du tout n'ay connoit
Mais la FOY me rendra l'impossible possible. (2)

It was in order to make this impossible knowledge real that religious poets expressed themselves so much in paradoxical

(1) La Ceppède, p.120.

(2) Du Bartas, Vol. II, Triomphe de la Foy, p.133.

statements, and in the use of contrasting images showing the dual nature of man which is apparent in this very struggle between reason and faith. The resolution of the conflicts leads to a greater knowledge which transcends mere human reason.

Paradox is inherent in life, as poets such as Chassignet saw. Images taken from nature symbolize the contradictions of life:

Ainsi des ronces sort la rose delectable. (1)

or again:

Tu vois comme le grain sous la terre jetté
Doit meurir et pourrir paravant qu'il renaisse,
Et que son tuyau vert contre le ciel redresse
Les barbillons pointus de son espic cresté. (2)

It is through paradoxical situations that a conflict is resolved:

Et comme un médecin sçait tirer des poisons
Contre les maus futurs des remedes fort bons.
Ainsi de nostre mort procede nostre vie. (3)

Paradox: death and life.

It is this theme of death and life which gives rise to most paradox. The words 'death' and 'life' are filled with deeper meaning for the Christian, meanings which are illustrated in a passage like this from St John of the Cross:

Vivo sin vivir en mi,
Y de tal manera espero
Que muero porque no muero. (4)

This often led to a playing on words. Marguerite de Navarre is an early example of a religious poet whose poetry reflects contrasts between life and death, sin and goodness. How complex

(1) Chassignet, p.31.

(2) Chassignet, p.42.

(3) Chassignet, p.86.

(4) St John of the Cross in Penguin Book of Spanish Verse, ed. Cohen, London 1960, p.182.

the conflict can be seen in these lines from Jean Passerat:

Une amoureuse haine entre l'ame et le corps
Esmeut ce different, qui tourne en bons accords
Car pour monter au ciel, il faut descendre en terre. (1)

The struggle between the soul and the body is more complex because of the amoureuse hatred between them, and the harmony is achieved by their separation. This play on words reveals a different vision from that seen in visual images. In the examples quoted in the first part of the chapter images were used to express an intensity of emotion for which words were scarcely adequate. Here the word has more importance. There is nothing beyond the words, they themselves express the truth, the abstract ideas, but are divorced from physical reality. Paradox is only possible if one has an awareness of words rather than things.

Chassignet is very fond of using this kind of play on words, as in this description of the struggle with death:

Et si la mort qui met aus meurdres son esbat
L'affronte cors à cors, au milieu du combat,
Vaincue, elle la vaint, et l'abat, abatue. (2)

or again

...les plus mortelles playes
Le font estre immortel, (3)

Nicolas Le Digne also expresses the same idea:

Je puis vivre en mourant, ie meurs estant en vie,
Mais cette mort vivante est contre mon envie,
Car ie passe la vie en espoir de la mort. (4)

Sponde also depends to a great extent on the double meaning of words to express contrasts and their resolution. Arnaldo

- (1) Jean Passerat in La Maynardière: Poètes Chrétiens du XVIIe Siècle, Paris 1908, p.243.
 (2) Chassignet, p.55.
 (3) Chassignet, p.34.
 (4) Le Digne: La Magdeleine, p.24.

Pizzorusso in Les Stances de la Mort de Jean de Sponde (1) characterizés Sponde's poetry as being dominated by a 'baroque, dramatic fusion or simultaneous presence of opposites'. One of the most revealing of Sponde's images is the paradox in which he speaks of the tombeau du corps or of life being a tomb. The properties of death are attributed to life, since for a Christian, life is a kind of death compared to the afterlife. Death is being apart from God. How condensed Sponde's imagery can become is shown in the line:

Faisons, faisons naufrage et jettons nous au Port? (2)
 an image so conventional that his condensation seems to give it a fresh point, and brings out the whole paradox of death, which is a tragedy and also the beginning of happiness. La Ceppede uses the image of the transformation of the caterpillar into the butterfly to express the same paradox:

Le ver meurt dans son nid, et sa mort est suivie
 De la vie, qui va de sa mort renaissant, (3)

Auvray sees two paradoxes which contradict each other in the states of life and death:

La Rose meurt naissant: vous vivez au tombeau. (4)

The paradox of Christ and the Virgin.

The paradox of Christianity is embodied in Christ himself who was God and at the same time a man, in Mary who was a virgin and a mother, the death of Christ, which is the death of God, and the salvation of man which results from the crucifixion of Christ by men. Amadis Jaxyn says of Christ:

- (1) Arnaldo Pizzorusso: Les Stances de la Mort de Jean de Sponde, in Studi in onore de Carlo Pellegrini, Turin 1963.
- (2) Sponde, p.184.
- (3) La Ceppede, p.104.
- (4) Auvray: Oeuvres Saintes, p.43.

Vaincu tu fus vainqueur. (1)

The death of Christ is merged with the life-death theme, as for La Ceppède:

O comme tu sers bien, ô soleil, ce bon Maistre,
Tu fis naistre un beau jour la nuict qui le veit naistre
Et ce jour qu'il se meurt tu fais naistre une nuict. (2)

Pierre de Croix contrasts the actuality of his suffering with the actual spiritual good he is illustrating:

J'admire sa valeur en son infirmité
La beauté de sa grace en sa deformité,
En l'excez de ses maux son amour infinie, (3)

Antoine Favre sees the paradox of the situation where heaven becomes accessible to man:

Le Paradis si cher se donne à tel marché
Que le salut perdu se retrouve au peché,
Et le naufrage mesme est fait port d'assurance; (4)

Another paradox is the Immaculate Conception, which inspires poems about the Virgin, describing her in paradoxical imagery to stress the uniqueness of her purity:

La Vierge est une fontaine,
Qui parmy l'impureté,
Qui parmy la salleté
De nostre nature humaine,
Conserve sa netteté. (5)

The series of Chant Royal poems describes Mary using all the usual images, a rose among thorns, a sun rising at midnight,

La Cube ferme en la rondeur mobile (6)

or

De faux accords, un concert armonique (7)

- (1) Quoted in Vianey: Le Pétrararchisme en France au XVIe Siècle,
Montpellier 1909, p.307.
(2) La Ceppède, p.73.
(3) Pierre de Croix, p.120.
(4) Favre, p.11.
(5) Pierre de Marbeuf: Recueil de Vers, Rouen 1628, p.98.
(Henceforward abbreviated as Marbeuf)
(6) Auvray: Oeuvres Saintes, p.13.
(7) Auvray: Oeuvres Saintes, p.22.

or with more violent images:

L'entier Palais dans le brazier du monde. (1)

or

D'un sang infect, un corps aromatique. (2)

In the poems of Auvray the final paradox expresses his adoration of the Virgin as the single element of good in a corrupt world:

Par cette mer & ses vagues affreuses
 Le Monde immonde est portraict dans mes vers,
 L'hoste infernal des cavernes souffreuses
 La chair mutine, & nos vices divers;
 Ce sont les vents qui troublent l'Univers;
 L'ire de Dieu, la foudre justiciere,
 Et ce Concept, l'abisme et la fondriere
 qui engloutit nos humaines raisons,
 Mais pour la Vierge exempte de naufrage
 France, je chante en mes comparaisons
 L'Arbre immobile au milieu de l'orage. (3)

The Holy Trinity.

Hopil, like other religious poets, feels the conflicts between religion and life, but feels able to resolve them through his belief. He is most concerned with the mysteries of the Christian religion, particularly the Holy Trinity, which is at the same time one person and three:

L'homme n'est rien que nuit, & l'ange n'est qu'une ombre
 Au regard du Soleil qui estant trois en nombre
 N'est qu'un seul par amour, (4)

or

Il est un par essence, et par mystere trois. (5)

The light-dark image here becomes a paradox; the radiant darkness of the Christian mystery, obscurité tres-claire, or nuict, plus claire qu'un jour:

(1) Auvray: Oeuvres Saintes, p.27.

(2) Auvray: Oeuvres Saintes, p.7

(3) Auvray: Oeuvres Saintes, p.12.

(4) Hopil, p.2.9.

(5) Hopil, p.86.

Ces tenebres ne sont qu'une extreme lumiere
 Qui desrobe à nos yeux le divin throsne d'or
 De l'essence premiere. (1)

The position of the Christian is also paradoxical; he believes
 in what he cannot see:

Au rayon tenebreux où se cache l'Essence
 Dans l'obscurité clair où loge le silence,
 J'entrevois ces beaux trois,
 Lesquels estans nommez demeurent ineffables,
 Et ces Trois sont un Dieu que j'adore et ne vois
 Aux cachots admirables. (2)

The paradox of life.

The use of paradox is extended to express a judgement on
 the whole of life. Chassignet sees life as a harmony achieved
 from discordant elements:

Ce monde composé d'un discordant accort. (3)

The image itself is contradictory yet comprehensible. This
 type of paradoxical imagery is very much a literary convention.
 In the same way Nicolas Le Digne expressed his own uncertainty
 in paradoxical terms:

Je gele dans le feu, ie brusle dans l'eau vive,
 Le jour m'est une nuit, & le bien une mort. (4)

Auvray takes up the same theme, haunted by the constant
 contradictions of life:

Voir l'amour dans la haine, & le jour dans la nuit,
 Le feu dedans la glace, & le Ciel dans la terre!
 Le vivant dans la mort, le calme dans le bruit!
 Le vertu dans le vice, & la paix dans la guerre! (5)

This same confusion leads him to combine two opposing images
 to show how life is made up of two opposing forces:

- (1) Hopil, p.87.
- (2) Hopil, p.295.
- (3) Chassignet, p.27.
- (4) Le Digne: La Magdeleine, p.15.
- (5) Auvray: Oeuvres Saintes, p.39.

Ocean, non, un feu qui enflamme nos coeurs;
 Un feu, non un glaçon qui congèlie nos Ames;
 Car si c'estoit un feu d'où viennent ces froideurs?
 Et si c'est un glaçon, d'où procedent ces flames? (1)

Gody sees himself suffering at the inadequacy of the world,
 which cannot match his ideals:

Lors que le jour, ne t'estoit que tenebres,
 Les plus doux chants, des desaccords funebres,
 Le plus pur air, meslangé de poison,
 Le pas plus seur, un affreux precipice,
 Le mot plus franc, un estrange supplice
 Dieu! Quels malheurs, et quelles dures loix
 Une fois naistre, et mourir tant de fois. (2)

The poetry of Simon Goulart also reflects this confusion. He
 knows what is right, but feels unable to pursue it.

Je cours apres le monde et demeure tout court
 en suivant Jesus Christ quand volupté raisonne
 Je l'entends et j'oy point le soulas que me donne
 La douce voix de Christ qui apres moy accourt. (3)

The contradiction comes in leading a life without Christ:

Propos vains je profere et ne fay que chercher
 La vie dans la mort verité dans un songe.
 M'aimant sans aimer Dieu je me hais a mort
 Estant sage sans Christ je suis serf de mensonge
 Las Seigneur leve toy et brise ce DISCORD. (4)

In the world around them poets saw life itself as contradictory,
 always changing and even the pleasures it offers becoming
 distasteful after a time. The paradox is in the lives that
 men lead, knowing what is right, but deliberately choosing to
 do wrong. The writing of Montaigne also reflects the paradox
 of man's position in the world, and the existence which is
 beyond his grasp. There is no continuity in life, everything
 is changing.

(1) Auvray: Oeuvres Saintes, p.41.

(2) Gody, p.104.

(3) Quoted in Schmidt: Quelques Aspects de la Poésie Baroque
 Protestante, Revue des Sciences Humaines, 1954, p.385.

(4) Quoted in Schmidt: Quelques Aspects de la Poésie Baroque
 Protestante, p.385

Nous n'avons aucune communication à l'estre, parce que toute humaine nature est toujours au milieu, entre le naistre et le mourir, ne baillant dé soy qu'une obscure apparence et ombre, et une certaine et debile opinion. Et si, de fortune, vous fichez votre pensée à vouloir prendre son estre, ce sera ne plus ne moins que qui voudroit empoigner l'eau; car tant plus il serrera et pressera ce qui de sa nature coulâ par tout, tant plus il perdra ce qu'il vouloit tenir et empoigner. (1)

Most poets are aware of the conflicts within themselves, and in the life around them, but feel that these will be resolved by death. A few others are aware of the struggle which they must carry on within themselves in order to achieve peace. In the poetry of Sponde, for instance, there is the atmosphere of the alternating attractions of the flesh and the spirit. In his conflict there is a note of despair: the reality contrasts with the hope, the ideal which he may never reach:

Quelle plaine en l'Enfer de ces pointus encombres?
 Quel eau jour en la nuict de ces afireuses ombres?
 Quel doux largue au destroit de tant de vents battu? (2)

Minor poets like Goulart or Gody saw life as an illogical and self-contradictory nightmare in which they were trapped. For most writers, however, this conflict almost inevitably has as its aim the illustration of the superior harmony of the religious life. For Hopil, the paradox is the achievement of the impossible faith accomplishing what man alone is unable to do:

J'entrevoiy l'invisible en ce tenebreux lieu,
 Et je le voy sans yeux au sejour solitaire. (3)

If life on earth is seen as unstable and contradictory, this is only in contrast with the certainty and stability of the

- (1) Montaigne: Apologie de Raymond Sebon in Essais ed. A. Thibaudet, Paris 1950, p.679.
 (2) Sponde, p.182.
 (3) Hopil, p.193.

divine will.

A feeling of contrast and conflict is basic to the poetry of this period. The use of the stylistic devices of paradox and antithesis are partly expression of this, but the convention of this type of imagery encourages poets to express themselves in contrasting pairs of images. Christianity can easily be seen in the light of this conflict between two opposites. The images used are often very banal, the most popular being of course light and dark, fire and water. Paradox is essential to Christian belief, making the impossible seem possible. The death and life theme expressed in antithesis finds also expression in paradox, since for the Christian life and death are interchangeable terms. Applied to Christ and the Virgin Mary paradox stresses the miraculous and unique nature of their being. These figures of speech also express for many poets the state of confusion in which they live, the extremely pessimistic religious attitude to life. Paradox and antithesis are much more abstract terms of expression than other types of imagery studied in this thesis. They are much less striking visually and acquire their force rather through surprise, caused by plays on words and juggling with ideas. They try to present a biased attitude to life through a peculiar kind of justification which consists in creating a special form of logic.

Part III: Complexity in Imagery.

In the preceding passage it has been shown how a feeling of conflict in life gave rise to opposing pairs of images, and how the irrationality of life was expressed in paradox. On the whole, however, the basic attitude to life was very simple. The complexity often comes within the Christian faith itself, and particularly in its use of symbolism. The mysteries of the Christian faith are not explicable in rational terms but are made convincing by the use of series of analogies from other spheres of life. This often leads to complexity: knowledge in itself has no value, and the more one knows, the more chaotic the whole world seems. The world, lacking unity, becomes merely a series of pictures, images for reflecting God. God is the only basic pattern behind the universe. Du Bartas writes of the folly of trying to understand more of life than is possible for man:

Mais pouquoy, fols humains, allez-vous compassant
 Du compas de voz sens les faits du Tout-puissant?
 Quel superbe desir, mais plutost quelle rage
 Vous fait de Dieu sans Dieu deschiffrer tout l'ouvrage? (1)

In spite of this du Bartas, like many of his contemporaries, tried to find a pattern in the world, to fit the chaos into some kind of system. His own attempt to describe and explain the universe leaves one with the impression of a series of chaotic descriptions. Other poets build up complex structures of imagery, fitting experience into a system of analogies based on the framework of religion.

(1) Du Bartas, Vol. II, La Premiere Sepmaine, p.250.

Some writers were content perhaps to point out the incomprehensibility of God's purpose, and contrast the confusion of this world with the perfection of the next. A few, however, were concerned with ways of gaining more knowledge about the mysteries of the Christian religion, making them more clear, and relating the phenomena of the world around them to their belief. They could take images from other branches of science such as alchemy and astrology to increase their understanding. Erudition was very much the fashion in the early work of the Pléiade. A great deal of their imagery depended on a knowledge of classical antiquity for its appreciation, and traces of this style are still to be found in this later period. Classical allusion as a means of decoration is always much in use. Frequently the complexity of imagery, however, comes from the use of symbolism from which the poet tries to extract the maximum of significance.

Symbolic images.

Symbolism was often based on images taken from the Bible, particularly the symbols of colour and of numbers. La Ceppède within the Biblical context, finds a whole series of variations on the theme of whiteness.

Blanc est le vestement du grand Pere sans age,
 Blancs sont les courtisans de sa blanche maison,
 Blanc est de son esprit l'étincelant pennage:
 Blanche est de son agneau la brillante toison.
 Blanc est le crespé saint dont (pour son cher blason)
 Aux Noces de l'Agneau d'Espouse s'avantage.
 Blanc est or' le manteau dont par mesme raison
 Cet innocent Espous se pare en son nopçage. (1)

(1) La Ceppède, p.24.

He shows a great deal of knowledge about the Bible itself, comparing different events, explaining one occurrence by drawing analogies from different parts of the Bible. Whiteness is a general symbol of holiness, which also links up the different aspects of holiness, and images of Christ - the Lamb and the Bridegroom. In the same way his poem on the symbolic value of the number three brings together different passages from the narrative of Christ's life, to link it into a whole. At the same time the insistence on the importance of the number three adds importance to those particular historical events:

Trois fois il renoua sa priere enflamée,
 Que trois fois pour les siens il avoit intermis.
 Trois fois il fut revoir ses amis endormis,
 Tesmoins des trois vertus dont elle est animée.
 Trois amours en cet acte ont son ame allumée,
 Dont l'une l'a comme homme a trois craintes soubsmis:
 Les deux autres l'ont fait pour trois genres d'amis -
 Accorder que sa vie au bois fut consommée.
 Trois fois en cette engoisse il fut reconforté
 Par l'Ange, par qui fut a Marie apporté
 L'advis de sa naissance, ô Mystere ordinaire.
 O sainte Trinite, vous modelez ce front
 De la scene, où le Christ doit souffrir cet affront
 Sur vostre unique exemple au saint nombre ternaire. (1)

With La Ceppède the complexity comes from his own conception of the Christian mysteries, and also his desire to link up the events of the New Testament with the Old Testament, and with elements of classical mythology, drawing comparisons from every field of knowledge with which he is familiar. Frances L. Lawrence describes La Ceppède's approach thus:

Each scene of the Passion is a puzzling subject which La Ceppède portrays to the height of his ability and

(1) La Ceppède, p.39-40.

then wrings of its meaning by exploring its figural antecedents in the Old Testament and Greek myth, its exemplary character for our emulation, and its symbolism in the scene of salvation. It is essentially the same process which Saint Ignatius recommends after every application of the senses "to reflect in order to derive profit from such a spectacle". (1)

This, it seems to me, describes very well the way in which La Ceppède builds up his imagery. He also involves himself, as representing the individual Christian, in his narration of the events of the Crucifixion.

Ces crachats teints de sang, qui sur vos yeux distille
Les couvrent de borbier: ce borbier est utile
A mes yeux, que l'horreur des pechez rend affreux.
La salive, et la terre (ô Symbolique fange)
Ont bien guery l'Aveugle: et ce nouveau mélange
De sang, et de crachats guerira ce lepreux. (2)

His eyes correspond to those of Christ, and this dirt can cure him of his sins, just as the blind man and the leper were healed by Christ.

In the next poem the events of the Bible suggest a wider context to him: he sees these few events as symbolic of the whole Christian belief:

Cette nuict qui vous sert (race où tout mal abonde)
A prendre le Sauveur, figure l'autre nuict
De vos coeurs aveuglez, dont l'humeur furibonde.
Ce Soleil de justice injustement pcursuit.
Mais pourquoy cet amas de lanternes vous suit?
Cet Innocent sur qui vostre rage dishonde
Est (il vous l'a marqué) la lumière du monde;
Qui par l'espesseur des tenebres reluit.
Au moins pouviez vous bien ce prince entreprendre
Sans armes en plein jour, il est facile à prendre
Voire. Mais vous aimez cette infame façon.
Soit. Aussi convient elle à cet amour extreme
Du Christ, qui vray larron se desrobe à soy-mesme
Pour largement en Croix payer nostre rançon. (3)

- (1) Frances L. Lawrence: La Ceppède's Théorèmes and Ignatian Meditation, Comparative Literature 1965 No.2, p.158.
 (2) La Ceppède, p.59.
 (3) La Ceppède, pp.45-46.

There is a constant reference from the symbolic to the actual levels. The literal night is compared to the metaphorical darkness of men's hearts, and their actual injustice contrasts with the epitome of justice in Christ who is a sun among the darkness. This theme of darkness and light is developed to contrast the real lanterns with the spiritual light of Christ. As He is being treated as a thief, La Ceppède shows how this reality is also metaphorical, in that He steals Himself from Himself to pay the ransom of men's souls. He is continually jumping in this way from one level to another, and his poem moreover does not present a static point of view, but seems to develop with the movement of La Ceppède's own thought, at first horrified at the actual indignity of Christ, then finding the reasons on a symbolic level to make it comprehensible. The image tends to make the theme more abstract, to remove it from the presence of the events taking place. All Christ's actions have a great meaning for La Ceppède:

Tous vos faits, tous vos dits, ont un sens heroïque. (1)

He attempts to reveal all the subtle shades of significance which link the story of Christ and the entire Christian myth into a structural whole. He uses all the resources of metaphor. While describing the cords which bind Christ he plays on the contrast between the physical bonds and the spiritual ones, confusing the two levels of meaning in his imagery:

Or sus donc, serrez fort, liez fort, ô canaille,
Celuy qui vient à vous pour dénouer vos noeuds,
Tiraillez, travaillez, cestui-cy qui travaille,
Pour soulager les griefs de vos travaux peineux. (2)

(1) La Ceppède, p.39.

(2) La Ceppède, p.47.

The images he uses are often the conventional ones, but he draws much closer parallels than is usual, as in his comparison with the Phoenix:

L'Oyseau dont l'Arabie a fait si grande feste,
 Est de ce grand Heros le symbole asseuré.
 Le Phenix est tout seul: le Christ est figuré
 Seul libre entre les morts par son Royal Prophete.
 Le Phenix couraoureux se porte a sa defaite
 Sur du bois parfumé: l'Amour demesuré
 Fait que Christ a la mort sur ce bois enduré,
 Qui parfume le Ciel d'une odeur tres-parfaicte,
 De sa mouelle apres le Phenix rénaissant
 Enleve tout son bois, et l'emporte puissant
 Sur un Autel voisin des arenes brulées,
 Par sa divinité le Christ resuscitant,
 Sur l'azuré-larbris des voutes estoillées
 Eslevera son bois de rayons éclatant. (1)

He is not content with drawing one example to illustrate the analogy, but multiplies the ways in which the Phoenix can stand as a symbol of Christ.

Complexity within one image.

An example of one image being developed to involve a complexity of ideas is the poem by Lazare de Selve which adopts the theme of the ship. Here, however, the complexity arises from the attempt to draw out the analogy to the utmost. The imagery of La Ceppède's poem is based on what he considers to be truths about the Phoenix and about Christ. Lazare de Selve is using the image to paint an allegorical picture of the Church.

Ton Eglise, Seigneur, est le vaisseau sur mer,
 Tu es le vray Pilote, et provident et sage;
 La foy en est le mas, charité le cordage,
 Et l'ancre un saint espoir, qui nous vient amirer.
 Les Pasteurs, mattelots, ne cessent de ramer,
 Le monde est ceste mer toute enflée d'orage,
 Les erreurs sont les vents, la tempeste, et la rage,
 Et semble qu'elle soit en danger d'abysmer.

(1) La Ceppède, p. 105.

Mais toy, O vray Neptune, O tout puissant Aeole
 Avecques ton trident, la sainte Trinite.
 Appaise tous ces flots, et les change en bonace
 Et conduis ceste nef à ton havre de grace,
 A ce port bien-heureux de ta sainte cité. (1)

The abstract allegorical meanings are reminiscent of medieval sermons which are extended at length to include the maximum number of metaphorical elements from one example. The same applies to the following poem by Marbeuf:

L'oeil est dans un chasteau que ceignent les frontieres
 De ce petit valon clos de deux boulevars:
 Il a pour pont-levis les mouvantes paupieres,
 Le cil pour garde-corps, les sourcils pour rampars.
 Il comprend trois humeurs, l'aqueuse, la vitrée,
 Et celle de cristal qui nage entre les deux:
 Mais ce corps delicat ne peut souffrir l'entrée
 A cela que nature a fait de nebuleux,
 Six tuniques tenant nostre oeil en consistance,
 L'empêche de glisser parmy ses mouvemens,
 Et les tendons poreux apportent la substance
 Qui le garde, & nourrit tous ses compartimens.
 Quatre muscles sont droits, & deux autres obliques,
 Communicans à l'oeil sa prompte agilité,
 Mais par la liason qui joint les nerfs optiques
 Il est ferme tousiours dans sa mobilité.
 Bref, l'oeil mesurant tout d'une mesme mesure,
 A soy mesme inconneu, connoit tout l'univers,
 Et conçoit dans l'enclos de sa ronde figure
 Le rond et le carré, le droit et le travers.
 Toutesfois ce flambeau qui conduit nostre vie,
 De l'obscur de ce corps emprunte sa clarté;
 Nous serons donc ce corps, vous serez l'oeil, Marie,
 Qui prenez de l'impur vostre pure beauté. (2)

The first few lines are medieval and courtly in tone, treating the eye allegorically. He then takes a scientific attitude, relating the eye to the four humours, then describing it anatomically. He then approaches it philosophically, the eye, not perceiving itself, can see the whole universe, and returning again to the image of the sphere shows how it encompasses everything, this time in a geometrical sense.

(1) Lazare de Selve, p.9.

(2) Marbeuf, pp.95-96.

Finally he takes up the image of light and dark, the eye taking the light from the darkness of the body, and equating this with purity and impurity makes Mary the eye of the body of mankind. This central image, that the eye is Mary, is not revealed till the very end. The first part of the poem would seem to be merely an erudite digression on the theme of the eye, but all these images relate to the central theme. The beauty, perfection and complicated structure of the eye is symbolic of the role of the Virgin. There is a suggestion of the style of the Chant Royal in the line ferme toujours dans sa mobilité. He composes images within images in an attempt to weave every aspect of the eye into the symbolic structure of the poem. The complexity arises from the fact that the imagery is on two different levels. First the eye is the symbol for the Virgin, secondly a whole set of images describes the eye itself, vaguely suggesting some spiritual significance which is not confirmed until the end.

Another poem which tries to unite disparate elements is this next one, where the poet uses the image of a garden as a framework into which he can fit the traditional images connected with the Crucifixion. The complication comes from the contradiction between the objects he uses, and the images he attributes to them. Here again there is a medieval tone in the poem, in the use of allegory.

O jardin du Sauveur, qui a pour pallissades
 Les espines, les cloux, la lance, et les douleurs,
 Et l'angoisse, l'ennuy, les craintes, les frayeurs,
 Pour allées, destours, cabinets, pourmenades.

Four rossignol un ange, et pour ses serenades
 Un calice de mort, pour fontaines, des pleurs,
 L'oraison, pour parterre, et pour les belles fleurs,
 Des sueurs de pur sang, l'absynthe pour salades. (1)

Obscurity in imagery.

Another type of complication is when the poet takes his images from rather obscure realms of knowledge. In this poem La Ceppede draws his analogies from astrology:

Ce grand Soleil, qui de l'autre n'est qu'une flamme
 Par quatre des maisons du grand Cercle a passe.
 Par celle de la Vierge, ou neuf mois sa belle ame
 A de son corps égal l'organe compasse.
 Par celle du Verseau, quand son oeil a trasse
 Sa douleur par son pleur, en maint acte sans plasse,
 Par celle du Taureau, quand son corps terrasse
 S'est pour victime offert sur le gibet infame.
 Or à ce jour il entre en celle du Lion
 Ferruque de lumiere, il darde un milion
 De rayons flamboyans sur les deux Hemispheres,
 Et sa voix ruissante, et son fremissement
 Au sortir de la tombe espouvantent les feres,
 Et les rargent au joug de leur amandement. (2)

Christ is compared to the sun moving through four of the signs of the Zodiac: Virgo, Aquarius, Taurus and Leo. The first analogy comes in the comparison between the sun and Christ, who is the metaphorical light of the world. His life corresponds to the four signs of the Zodiac, his birth, his life of tears and innocence, his sacrifice, and his ultimate glory. The last sign corresponds to the sun perruqué de lumiere, suggesting Christ who resembles the lion, inspiring fear. This is another example of imagery which depends largely on abstract concepts. In the same way La Ceppede addresses God as an intelligible sphere whose centre is everywhere:

Intelligible sphere, il est indubitable

(1) Lazare de Selve, p.48.

(2) La Ceppede, p.106.

que ton centre est par tout, qu'a luy tout aboutit, (1)

and his prayer is that he should draw close to God:

Bonne luy tant d'Amour pour te faire adherance
Qu'il passe par de là tout humaine jugement,
Comme on ne peut juger de ta circonference. (2)

Extreme emotion is equated with something incomprehensible to the intellect. The image of the sphere is also used by Lazare de Selve:

Comme tout ce grand monde a forme circulaire,
Chasque partie aussi fait un cercle agissant;
Chacun des Elements, dedans l'autre passant,
Se tourne, retournant au repos de sa Sphere.
Le soleil rond se tourne en sa course ordinaire:
En rond la lune tourne, et forme son croissant;
Où chasque Ciel commence il revient finissant,
Ainsi que tous les corps du Monde elementaire
L'Ange se reflechit vers celui qui l'a fait,
Ce grand Tour, dont le Centre est par tout si parfait,
Et dont le cercle est tel qu'on ne le peut comprendre.
Homme contemple en toy deux cercles precieux,
L'ame, qui vient du Ciel, doit retourner aux Cieux:
Le corps, de cendre fait, doit retourner en cendre. (3)

Here the circles form an analogy with man's composition, and man is also a universe which moves in circles, while God is the great immeasurable circle. However, this poem lacks the emotional intensity of that of La Ceppède, and treats the theme in a more straightforward way.

These are all attempts to weave into a pattern given aspects of belief and to illustrate them by complex images. The links between the image and the idea are more complicated than is usual. Either the poet jumps constantly from one level to another, as in La Ceppède, or as in the poems of Lazare de Selve

(1) La Ceppède, p.108.

(2) La Ceppède, p.108.

(3) Lazare de Selve, p.1.

gradually builds up the image from a series of facts in order to present more convincing evidence in favour of the idea he is illustrating.

Expression of the incomprehensible,

The problem facing Hopil was to elucidate what for him was in essence incomprehensible. Knowledge of God, for La Ceppède also, is a mystery:

Aux Mysteres Divins la nûe sert tousjour,
Car elle tient un peu de la nuict, et du jour
Selon que plus ou mcins le Soleil la penetre.
Ainsi (comme à travers un nûage entre-ouvert)
Le Seigneur de Seigneurs manifeste son être,
Ny trop obscurément, ny trop à découvert. (1)

Hopil, in his attempts to express this same sense of mystery, becomes rather confused among his images of light and dark:

Abismé dans le sein de la Divinité,
Dans l'occulte secret de ceste Trinité
Cù je cherche à tastons l'unité bien-heureuse,
Pensant voir en ce lieu la lumiere et le jour,
Je voy dans un brouillats une flamme amoureuse
Par les yeux de l'amour. (2)

The confusion is in his own mind rather than in the imagery itself - this is obvious in these lines:

Seigneur, je veux avoir de vous la cognoissance
Par l'oeil mysterieux de la simple ignorance
Qui void qu'il ne void pas. (3)

Hence the images he uses also convey confusion in spite of their attempts to clarify the concept of the Holy Trinity:

Le verbe est un miroir, une tres pure glace
Où le pere Eternel voit Sa divine face
En ce fils ton epoux,
Tous deux se complaisant en ce regard fidelle,
Procède un . . . amour de complaisir tres-doux,
Amour essenciel que l'esprit on appelle. (4)

- (1) La Ceppède, p.118.
- (2) Hopil, p.84.
- (3) Hopil, p.90.
- (4) Hopil, p.17.

Confusion in language.

The very abstract nature of Sponde's thought causes him to write poetry which is functional, compressing a great deal of significance into a few words. Here the idea of death distorts his vision:

Mortels, qui des mortels avez pris vostre vie,
 Vie qui meurt encor dans le tombeau des Corps,
 Vous qui r'amoncelez vos tresors, des tresors
 De ceux dont par la mort la vie fust ravie. (1)

The repetition of the abstract words vie, mortels and tresors and also the inversion in the last line contribute to the appearance of complexity in this poem. It is formed from a series of words or phrases which contradict each other. Each word suggesting life is counterbalanced with another suggesting death, as in the tombeau du Corps. His obsession with death leads him back constantly to images and words referring to death. The same kind of confusion is apparent in the poetry of Hopil, but he insists on the idea of life, the true life which begins after death:

Dieu, non le Dieu des morts, mais des vivans se nomme,
 Il est veu des vivans, il n'est pas veu de l'homme
 En ce tombeau mouvant,
 Il verra dans le ciel ce grand Dieu de la vie.
 Appellé le Vivant,
 Par les yeux de Dieu mort, qui sa mort a ravie. (2)

The poetry of Auvray also illustrates the confusion which arises in poetry on the themes of death and life. The confusion is due simply to the repetition of the words mort and vie which make the basic idea seem more complicated:

Ainsi vivant la Mort a fait mourir la Vie;
 Et la Vie en mourant a fait mourir la Mort. (3)

(1) Sponde, p.187.

(2) Hopil, p.258.

(3) Auvray: Oeuvres Saintes, p.78.

Much of this confusion arises from the fact that many poets use 'death' and 'life' as interchangeable terms, each with a double meaning.

Abruptness of style.

Another aspect of the complexity which is found in Sponde's imagery is the poem Mais si faut-il mourir, where images follow each other without being clearly linked together, each coming back to the same idea of death, even using contrasting images to suggest the same idea. The images and their meaning are so close together that there is no need for any explanation. The next poem by Auvray shows a tendency to jump from one image to another also, using the same images to form a contrast with his original theme, and finally destroying their meaning:

Helas! qu'est-ce de l'homme orgueilleux et mutin?
Ce n'est qu'une vapeur qu'un petit vent emporte,
Vapeur, non, une fleur qui eclose au matin,
Vieillit sur le midi, puis au soir elle est morte.

Une fleur, mais plustost un torrent gene-bruit
Qui rencontre bien-tost le gouffre où il se plonge;
Torrent, non, c'est plustost le songe d'une nuit,
Un songe, non vraiment, mais c'est l'ombre d'un songe.

Encor l'ombre demeure un moment arrêté,
L'homme n'arreste rien en sa course legere;
Le songe quelquefois predict la verité,
Nostre vie est toujours trompeuse et mensongere.

Maint torrent s'entretient en son rapide cours,
On ne void point tarir la source de son onde,
Mais un homme estant mort, il est mort pour toujours,
Et ne marche jamais sur le plancher du monde.

Bien que morte est la fleur, la plante ne l'est pas,
En une autre saison d'autres fleurs elle engendre,
Mais l'homme ayant franchy le sueil de son trespas,
Les fleurs qu'il nous produit sont les vers et la cendre.

(1)

This poem seems to be trying to express the movement of his mind as he reflects on transience. Each image is taken up

(1) Auvray: La Fourmenade.

and rejected for a more satisfactory one. The image of the flower at the beginning suggest the passing of time, but in the end the flower acquires a kind of permanence compared with man, and a new contrast is formed between the flower of life, and the worms and ashes of death. His ability to play with images in this way is due to the fact that each one is an accepted symbol of transience, and the irony lies in the fact that for the poet not even the most conventional of images can be accepted without question, but has to be turned inside out and finally rejected.

There is also a certain abruptness of style in the poetry of Loys Saunier, as when he denounces the evil of his times:

Nous sommes tous atteints de lèse-majesté;
Le parvis de l'Eglise est d'erreur empesté: (1)

The term lèse-majesté is a rather surprising but very compact way of expressing man's abandon of God.

Erudition in imagery.

In general the obscurity in Saunier's style comes from his tendency to over-burden his poems with erudite phrases. His lines referring to the Phoenix introduce the subject very obliquely:

Dieu qui veut qu'un bucher d'amas aromatique
Vers l'Aurore allumé soit sercueil & berceau
Et que le jour fée soit natal à l'oiseau
Qu'il garde sous les Cieux en son espece unique. (2)

He deliberately avoid referring to the Phoenix by name, and hence his description is very long-winded. He obviously considers that a more obscure style befits a religious theme,

(1) Saunier, p.60.

(2) Saunier, p.54.

and contributes to the feeling of awe and dignity. For the same reason, no doubt, he fills his poems full of classical allusions:

Voulez-vous entonner de Christ la mort fameuse?
L'on sçait que son faucheur est la fin des serpents,
De Jupin, de Neptun, de Pluton & des Fens
Tyrans du ciel, du globe & de l'onde escumeuse. (1)

The last three lines become even more complicated as he brings in both Biblical and classical allusions:

Catharme de Jacob au saict autel offert,
Pour dernier Hecatombe, ayant pour nous souffert
Les maux prefigurez en la vague Erithree. (2)

One cannot help feeling that he is trying to mystify his readers rather than enlighten them.

This type of deliberate complication is found also in Auvray's poetry, though to a lesser extent, in some rather precious imagery:

Race d'Adam ma parlante peinture
Te feinct, te peint ce sang contagieux, (3)

original sin is the venin du serpent Plutonique. This use of combined biblical and classical mythology is typical of this period and accepted without question. As a general rule obscurity is not deliberate and is rather to be avoided. Only those who are concerned more about the beauty of their poetry than their themes ornament their poetry to the extent that Saunier does in these lines:

Les bergerots voyans que l'estoille diurne
Tiroit des Antichthons l'Aurore, & le soleil
Plus iaune que saffran prencit un beau vermeil,
Tel qu'onques ne sortent de l'orientale urne. (4)

- (1) Saunier, p.48.
(2) Saunier, p.48.
(3) Auvray: Oeuvres Saintes, p.9.
(4) Saunier, p.30.

True complexity arises from the desire to embody in one image as many themes as possible relating to one idea, and to glorify a religious concept through reference to different aspects of life. Less frequently, the complexity is a result of the confusion in the thought of the poet, and his attempts to shed light on very difficult ideas. Finally, on occasions, the complexity is a result of the very abstract nature of the poetry which takes certain images as symbols, having a restricted but not entirely obvious meaning, and clothes ideas in very concise terms.

This period, then, is characterized first by emphasis on vivid images, on seeing the Christian message dramatically in sensuous terms. This seems to be an innovation, a characteristic which differentiates this type of poetry from that written earlier in the century. Secondly there is the use of antithesis and paradox, common stylistic devices but which are especially appropriate to religious themes. Life is seen in terms of opposites, as black and white. Finally, a certain amount of confusion results from the poet's searching for images which will adequately express as much as possible of the mystery and holiness of the Christian faith. Images are needed to provide a strong link between this world and the next, and to elucidate the confusion of life to some extent.

The type of imagery used varies with the individual poet between vividly concrete and sensuous, and the extremely abstract. The later examples show this failure of the image to some extent to embody an abstract ideal, whereas in the first examples the

visual imagination of the poet replaces the rigid discipline of abstract ideas.

However, all these characteristics of the imagery of this period show a desire for truth, and for that truth to be above all convincing. Either the image is intended to demonstrate the truth in pictures, or to make the reader see it in terms of a choice between right and wrong, or to build up a kind of proof from apparently unconnected aspects of experience, making use of any source from the Bible to classical mythology.

Chapter V.

The question now arises of the function of the image within the poem. The image may be central to the poem, or the poem may depend on a succession of linked images. Again, the imagery may be an illustration of the theme, a parallel development following the thought closely. Finally, it may be something added on to the theme to decorate it, to illustrate one point and to make the poem superficially more beautiful.

The relation of the image to the theme is naturally difficult to measure, especially within the loose framework of the long epic poems of d'Aubigné, du Bartas and their imitators, or the long allegorical poems of Gody. Here the narrative is interwoven with description and the images are apt to become lengthy and detailed and form a kind of digression from the movement of the poem itself. It is really only in the shorter poems that it is possible to analyze the importance which the poet places in his imagery.

Imagery as central to the poem.

The type of poetry in which the image plays the most important part is that where the poem is formed around the particular image that the poet has chosen. In the following poem by La Ceppède the deer is a symbol for Christ, and the object of the poem is to relate aspects of this symbol to the events of Christ's life.

Le Cerf que le veneur relance au bois sauvage,
 Void un fleuve, s'y jette, nage, et gagne le bord.
 Christ poursuivy de Juifs, nage aux eaux de la mort,
 Les passe, et vient surgir à l'immortel rivage.

Le Cerf hayt le serpent, l'attaque, le ravage,
 Le mord et l'engloutit: Christ mortellement mord
 Le serpent qui fournit à la mort son breuvage.
 Cete mort engloutit, et destruiect son effort
 Il a (pour ce qu'il est le vivant et la vie)
 Cete mort devorée à son estre asservie,
 Comme l'estomach change en lait son aliment.
 A ce victorieux la trompe prophetique
 Comme au cerf matineux a chanté son Cantique
 Et nous semond fidele au mesme compliment. (1)

The deer carries out on the plane of reality the actions which Jesus carries out on the spiritual plane. There is a very close parallel between the image and its spiritual interpretation, and the poem itself is formed around the possibilities of the image. In this next poem the image is the introduction, and serves to give a form to the narrative which relates part of the action of the Crucifixion. It also establishes a link between different parts of the Bible - Jesus' own metaphor is related to the historical facts of the Crucifixion. The image plays the most important role within the poem, and also has a value in itself of deepening the significance of the Biblical narrative:

Le torrent orageux entraine renversées
 Les maisons, qu'on assied sur le sable mouvant,
 Mais les autres qu'on a sur le rocher dressées
 Ne branslent point au coups, ny des flots, ny du vent.
 Les flots de ces torrens que les Juifs vont pleuvant
 Sur le corps du Sauveur, entraînent dispersées
 Ses dix pauvres brebis: mais les fermes chaussées
 De ce coeur maternel vont leur effort bravant. (2)

To a lesser extent Rambervillet adopts the same technique, using an image which has a more accepted symbolic importance:

Flambeau, qui luis sans-fin, duquel la douce flamme
 La crasse de noz coeurs consume doucement,
 Qui dissipant la nuict de tout aveuglement
 Des rays du pur amour illumines nostre ame. (3)

- (1) La Ceppède, p.107.
- (2) La Ceppède, p.71.
- (3) Rambervillet, p.147.

The flame has abstract attributes, the rays du pur amour, but these only describe the torch which exists as a reality, embodying the two processes of burning and illuminating, giving life to the two ideas of redemption and guidance.

Interlinked visual images.

These are examples of poetry where the abstract ideas to a certain extent are subordinated to a symbolic truth, embodied in a concrete image. More common is poetry where the abstract ideas are replaced by visual images which are in fact more real to the poet. As one would expect, this type of poetry is typical of d'Aubigné: this is a poem from L'Hiver which illustrates his conception of the relationship between the individual and God:

Je porte dans le ciel mes yeux et mes desirs,
Joignant, comme les mains, le coeur à ma requete.
Je ploie mes genoux, atterant mes plaisirs.
Je Te decouvre, ô Dieu, mes pechés et ma tete.

Mes yeux de mes desirs corrupteurs ont cherché
L'horreur, mes mains le sang, et mon coeur les vengeances.
Mes genoux ont ployé au piege du peché,
Et ma tete a bien moins de cheveux que d'offenses.

Si je me deguisais, Tes cleirs yeux sont en moi,
Ces yeux qui percent tout et defont toutes ruses.
Qui pourrait s'excuser, accusé par son roi?
Je m'accuserai donc, afin que Tu m'excuses:

Mais qui cuide tirer un frivole rideau
Pour celer ses pechés se prive de Ta face,
Et qui pense donner à Tes yeux un bandeau,
Est nu, et ne voit plus Ta face ni Ta grace.

Pere plein de douceur, comme aussi juste roi,
Qui de grace et de loi tiens en main les balances,
Comment pourrais-je faire une paix avec Toi,
Qui ne puis seulement faire treve aux offenses?

Je suis comme aux enfers par mes faits vicieux;
Je suis noir et sanglant par mes pechés, si ai-je
Les ailes de la foi pour revoler aux cieux,
Et l'eau de Siloé me blanchit comme neige.

Exauce-moi du ciel, seul fort, bon, sage et beau,
 Qui donne, au jour le clair et le chaud à la flamme,
 L'être à tout ce qui est, au soleil son flambeau,
 Moteur du grand mobile, et ame de toute ame.

Tu le feras, mon Dieu, mon espoir est certain.
 Puisque Tu l'as donne pour arrhe et pour avance,
 Et Ta main bienfaisante est cette seule main
 Qui parfait sans faillir l'oeuvre qu'elle commence.

Ne déploie sur moi ce grand vent consumant.
 Tout ce qui luy resiste et ce qu'il veut atteindre,
 Mais pour donner la vie au lumignon fumant,
 Souffle pour allumer et non pas pour eteindre.

La langue du mechant déchire mon honneur,
 Quand de plume et de voix le Tien j'écris et chante;
 Delivre-moi de honte et ne souffre, Seigneur,
 Au vaisseau de Ta gloire une senteur puante.

Je me sauve chez Toi, les mains et le coeur mis
 Aux cornes de l'autel. Fort des forts, juste juge,
 Ne souffre pas le far des meurtriers ennemis
 Enganglanter Ton sein en brisant Ton refuge.

Cet esprit qui me rend haineux de mon peché
 C'est le Consolateur, qui m'apprend: Abba Fere
 De contraires effets je suis par lui touché,
 Car il fait que je crains et si fait que j'espere.

Tu m'arroses du ciel, ingrat qui ne produis
 Qu'amers chardons au lieu de douces medecines.
 Prends Ta gaule, Seigneur, pour abattre ces fruits
 Et non pas la cognée à couper les racines.

Use de chatiments, non de punition.
 Emonde mes jetons, laisse la branche tendre,
 Ainsi que, pour chasser l'air de l'infection,
 Mettant le feu partout on ne met rien en cendre. (1)

He begins by drawing a parallel between his physical actions and his spiritual ones. He ascribes his sins to the different parts of the body, and is aware above all of God's eyes looking at him. Thus he places himself in a physical rather than a mental relationship with God. Moreover, his sins are visible:

Je suis noir et sanglant par mes pechés
 and later he describes his disgrace as a senteur puante.

(1) D'Aubigné: Oeuvres, Paris 1877. Vol. IV p.301.

This linking of physical actions to spiritual is typical of many Catholic poets, who use tears as symbols of repentance. D'Aubigné experiences his emotions through the senses, and is acutely aware of God's eyes on him. His refuge is in the house of God, in fact God himself is this refuge, which any attacks on the person of d'Aubigné will defile:

Ensanglanter Ton sein en brisant Ton refuge

It is interesting that God is the creator is so far as he gives physical properties to things:

Qui donne au jour le clair et le chaud à la flamme.

For d'Aubigné these physical properties are the essence, without which the world would not exist. The poem itself moves from one image to another following the movement of his thought. His themes are almost always contained in an image, or very vivid language as in

La langue du méchant déchire mon honneur,

where it is the tongue itself which becomes a sword inflicting real wounds on his honour. The images with which he ends convey all the subtlety of his ideas on the purging of sin, as in the ember, or the last two verses where he differentiates the idea of chatiments and punition with his image of pruning trees. All these images point to a destructive force, which is God, but which can destroy the sin and leave the soul untouched. D'Aubigné sees this process as a physical one, which will entail suffering, but his imagery reveals that he feels evil to be connected to the physical side of life.

The development of the poem is carried out more through

the imagery than through the ideas expressed. We see the confrontation of the soul and God, we see the sins with which it is burdened, and the sufferings it undergoes, and the eventual punishment through which the soul will be freed.

The individuality of the image.

Imagery is particularly valuable when used to convey an idea and an emotion at the same time. Sponde expresses his irony through the imagery of the ant-hills which are man's ambition seen through the eyes of God. This image reflects Sponde's scorn for man himself:

Je voy ces vermisseeux bastir dedans leurs plaines
Les monts de leur dessins, dont les cimes humaines
Semblent presque esgaler leurs coeurs ambitieux. (1)

Within the poem the image presents at the same time an illustration of the ideas expressed in the first half - that man rarely imagines his own death:

..dans son oubly tout le monde s'endort. (2)

and a more vivid condemnation of this attitude. This image is the central point of the poem, forming a transition from the philosophical reasoning of the first eight lines to the rhetorical and ironic condemnation of the last three:

Geants, où poussez-vous ces beaux amas de poudre?
Vous les amoncellez? vous les verrez dissoudre:
Ils montent de la Terre? Ils tomberont des Cieux. (3)

The image is the dramatic presentation of man's folly as Sponde sees it.

In contrast with this Hopil uses the image of birds

- (1) Sponde, p.189.
- (2) Sponde, p.189.
- (3) Sponde, p.189.

which illustrates the transformation God can effect in man's soul, and at the same time conveys the feeling of ecstasy in the flight of the bird:

Ternaire glorieux, ô nature éternelle,
 Mon ame est un Corbeau; faites-la Colombelle
 Pour voler dans les Cieux. (1)

This next image evokes also the feeling of security in the relationship between God and man:

Son sein est le doux nid des chastes tourterelles,
 Les trous de la muraille où vont les colombelles
 Fidèlement nicher. (2)

All these images form the focal point of the poem, the condensation of the poet's ideas and emotion, and express thought and emotion concisely. Similarly in this image from Sponde:

Pourquoy tiendray-je roide à ce vent qui saboule
 Le Sablon de mes jours d'un invincible effort? (3)

the expression of doubt and uncertainty is framed in an image which sums up his despair: it is impossible for him to resist the wind, since his days are like sand and will all be blown away eventually. The image he chooses reveals his deepest fears; elsewhere he uses another image to express his feeling of hope:

Reprends coeur, mon Esprit, reprends nouvelle force,
 Toy, mouelle d'un festu, perce à travers l'escorce,
 Et, vivant, fay mourir l'escorce et le festu. (4)

The image is one of violence, the body being destroyed to free the soul. The importance of the soul is that it is the mouelle and the use of the image of a piece of straw again is

- (1) Hupil, p.180.
- (2) Hupil, p.252.
- (3) Sponde, p.196.
- (4) Sponde, p.183.

a very ironic judgement on man's value, and at the same time shows the strength of the soul compared to the body. This is the essence of his philosophy, his attitude to death, which finds adequate expression only through an image, because of its complexity and self-contradiction. In Sponde's poems it is often the image which gives the form, either summing up his thought in a concise phrase, or forming a constant theme through the poem.

Imagery complementing the idea.

In other poems, imagery is used as a kind of explanation.

In this extract from a poem by Loys Godet, already quoted:

Comme on veoit que l'abeille en succeant la rosée
 Sur l'esmail de la fleur qui en est arrosée,
 Change ceste liqueur en un miel doucereux
 La grace de mon Dieu venant sur moy s'espandre,
 Me lavera du tout, & me fera reprendre
 Ma naive couleur, m'eslevant droit aux cieux. (1)

the action of grace is explained through the image of the bee. The transformation of dew into honey is something of a mystery, but an accepted fact, so serves as an illustration, and a proof, of the action of grace. Here the image, the proof, is as important as the concept it expresses, and forms the central point of the poem.

Imagery can thus be used often to explain a situation which may otherwise be difficult to understand. Du Bartas in the next extract explains God's creation. The image is not intended to be decorative, and other poets of his period might have rejected his image as unfitted to illustrate this

(1) Godet, p.22.

particular theme:

Ou bien comme l'oiseau qui tasche rendre vifs
 Et ses oeufs naturels et ses oeufs adoptifs,
 Se tient couché sur eux, et d'une chaleur vive,
 Fait qu'un rond jaune-blanc en un poulet s'avive,
 D'une mesmé façon l'Esprit de l'Eternel
 Sembloit couvrir ce gouffre, et d'un soin paternel
 Verser en chasque part une vertu feconde,
 Pour d'un si lourd amas extraire un si beau monde. (1)

The image is not central to the poem, but illustrates one particular point. Chassignet also uses this type of imagery a great deal, to illustrate an idea which already exists in his mind. For this reason he is fond of using stories from ancient history or legend to provide examples for his themes. His poems develop as philosophical arguments with the images as examples. This image is worked out in detail to prove his point:

Nostre vie est un jet où si le Dé soudain
 Sur le tablier ne roule en favorable chance,
 Et le discret joueur les tablettes n'agence
 Selon l'ordre des poins, il se travaille en vain.
 Or ny l'evenement, ny le sort incertain
 Lu De avantureus, n'est en notre puissance,
 Mais user de la chance, et par meure prudence,
 Obvier a sa perte, et confirmer le gain. (2)

This next poem shows how an image is developed parallel to his thought:

Sçais tu que c'est de vivre? autant comme passer
 Un chemin tortueus; ore le pié te casse,
 Le genou s'afoiblist, le mouvement se lasse
 Et la soif vient le teint de ta levre effacer.
 Tantost il t'y convient un tien amis laisser,
 Tantost enterrer l'autre; ore il faut que tu passe
 Un torrent de douleur, et franchisses l'audace
 D'un rocher de souspirs, fascheus à traverser.

(1) Du Bartas, Vol. II La Première Semaine, p.205.

(2) Chassignet, pp. 83-84.

Farmy tant de destours il faut prendre carriere
 Jusque'au Fort de la mort, et fuyant en arriere
 Nous ne fuyons pourtant le trespas qui nous suit.
 Allons y à regret? L'ETERNEL nous y traine,
 Allons y de bon coeur? son vouloir nous y meine;
 Plustost qu'estre trainé. mieus vaut estre conduit. (1)

The image of the journey stresses the feeling of continual movement towards death, a progression which only leads from one misfortune to another. He moves from image to reality constantly. At first the sufferings are physical ones, then he remembers how in life friendships are bound to end. The difficulties of the journey then become allegorical: torrent de douleur and rocher de sèuspirs and the final Fort de la mort until the moral point, that the journey towards death is inevitable. The image gradually loses its reality and gives way to the moral argument, becoming a mere allegorical device whereas at the beginning it had been more vivid but less close to the theme.

Imagery as unifying element.

As in the preceding poem the image may form the structural unity of the poem, bringing together different elements and relating them loosely to the same central image. This poem by Lazare de Selve is also apparently written around one central image:

Tandis que le torrent des passions mondaines,
 Emporte nos esprits dans la mer des malheurs
 Le Sauveur pour souffrir un torrent de douleurs
 Traverse du torrent les ondes inhumaines.
 Luy-mesme est le torrent des bontez souveraines
 Roulant du grand Olympe en ce vallon de pleurs;

(1) Chassignet, pp.28-29.

Qui pour nous enyvrer d'un Torrent de douceurs
 Nous tire du Torrent des éternelles peines.
 Mais las! c'est le Torrent de nos iniquitez
 Qui fait que pour souffrir toutes ces cruantez
 Il passe le Torrent avecques mille alarmes.
 O vray Torrent d'amour qui es roulé des Cieux,
 Fay sortir de nos coeurs, et rouler de nos yeux
 Des rapides Torrents de sanglots, et de larmes. (1)

This image, however, has very little force, and in fact its meaning is so flexible as to become almost completely overshadowed by the abstract ideas it accompanies. It is only in the last line that it acquires any concrete reality, and this of course is the most important point in the theme of the poem. Here the image is mainly a stylistic device, a means of weaving together more strongly the abstract themes, and leading up to the final important theme of penitence.

Imagery as decoration.

In contrast the imagery of the next poem is very vivid and sensuous:

Mon Ame esiovi toy, tu es la plante aimée
 Qu'a planté de sa main le monarque des Cieux,
 La palme florissante au bord délicieux
 De la source-d'eau vive en son dos enfermée,
 Tu es le beau verger, l'enceinte parsemée
 De roses, d'oeuillets, & de lis gracieux
 Possession choisie agreable à ses yeux
 Qu'il a des saints parfums de sa grace embasmée
 Plus encor, en toy seul il a joint les destins
 Du ciel & de la terre à chaisnons aimantins,
 Tu es le beau lieu qui en un les enlasses.
 Doncq Ame peu-tu moins que d'un sacre retour
 Te vouer, non ingrate, à ce grand Dieu d'amour
 Et doucement languir en milieu de ses graces? (2)

It illustrates his idea of the relationship between God and the human soul, but apart from showing that the soul belongs both

(1) Lazare de Selve, p.46.

(2) Pierre de Croix, p.5.

to heaven and to earth, the actual imagery serves only to create a general feeling of pleasantness and beauty. The poem consists in a series of images which repeat the same idea. Yet it is this imagery which dominates the poem, although its function is mainly decorative. The very beauty of the images however serves to emphasize the uniqueness of this relationship between the soul and God. Many images which would appear to be simply decorative have a more serious function. A great deal of the imagery of this period combines description with symbolism. The poems of Cesar de Nostradame, concentrating on the comparison between Magdalene's tears and pearls, are making use of this as a symbol of penitence, pointing out its value for the Christian. Those poets who describe Christ on the cross as a sight of great beauty are seeking the symbolic beauty which lies behind the physical horror. Even this description by La Ceppède, although horrifying in its entirety, uses comparisons which stress the beauty of Christ's face.

Ces yeux (tantost si beaux) rébatus, r'enfonchez.
 Ressalis, sont hélas! deux Soleils éclipez,
 Le coral de sa bouche est ores jaune-pasle. (1)

The imagery still stresses the beauty of Christ, even though it has been destroyed. Christ's beauty is the image of his spiritual virtues, it is not simply gratuitous decoration.

However, not all imagery is as central to the expression of belief. Much descriptive imagery is intended merely to

(1) La Ceppède, p.59.

create a more beautiful atmosphere. The beauty of the Virgin is a theme on which poets can lavish ornamentation: Loys Saunier, always addicted to long-winded descriptions, elaborates in this way:

Chantez ceste couleur de laquelle l'Aurcre
 Ses iornées embelit, mignardement laceant
 Les roses et les lis près l'oillet pourprissant,
 L'ivoire & le corail de ses bouches encore; (1)

Imagery which says very little, but simply creates a rhetorical effect can be found even in the poetry of La Ceppède.

Le beau Printemps n'a point de feuillages verts,
 L'Hyver tant de glaçons, l'Esté tant de javelles,
 Que durant cette nuict le Roy de l'univers
 Souffre d'indignitez et de peines nouvelles. (2)

This is simply a bringing together of commonplace associations to illustrate a minor point: the sufferings of Christ have very little in themselves to do with the feuillages verts or the glaçons. Here the imagery betrays a taste for exaggeration which is found often in the poetry of this period. Even the most minor points are given exaggerated emphasis and illustrated by ornate images, as in this extract from Malherbe:

Il est bien assuré que l'angoisse qu'il porte
 Ne s'emprisonne pas sous les clefs d'une porte,
 Et que de tous cotés elle suivra ses pas. (3)

Anguish being personified by a person who follows St Peter is perhaps an acceptable image, but the reference to the clefs d'une porte is unnecessary, and irrelevant to the emotion expressed, and contributes nothing to the poem.

(1) Saunier, p.36.

(2) La Ceppède, p.55.

(3) Malherbe, p.50.

Popular images.

Although not all imagery is closely linked to the basic ideas and emotions the poet is trying to express, it is plain that the image in general dominates the poem. Perhaps the religious poet is conscious of providing a variation on a well-worn theme, and his personal attitude is revealed mainly in the imagery he provides as illustration. The truths of Christianity are not new, but each image he discovers throws some new light on these truths. On the other hand, the importance of imagery in the development of religious ideas has been stressed in Chapter II, and the poet may simply follow the tradition of devotional literature. Some images recur over and over in the poetry of this period, as accepted means of expressing certain religious truths. Perhaps the most frequent are those where the ship represents life, or the soul, as for Chassignet:

Lors nous serons ravis, autant que le pilote
 Qui, dormant en la nef quant douteuse elle flotte,
 Se voit au resveiller dans le mole arrivé. (1)

or in a more gloomy passage from Pierre Poupo:

Sur une Mer d'ennuis, de tormens, & de pleurs
 En un basteau pourri, plein de meschant bagage,
 N'ayant pour toute estoille, au milieu de l'orage.
 Que l'ire du Seigneur ardante en mes douleurs. (2)

Another frequent image is that where blood and tears are interwoven:

Qui fera de mes yeux deux ondoyantes fontaines?
 Mais plustost qui fera que le sang de mes veines
 En larmes eschangé i'espuise par les yeux? (3)

- (1) Chassignet, p.42.
 (2) Foupo, p.5.
 (3) Pierre de Croix, p.173.

Christ is the Phoenix and the Pelican. God is the sun, the perfection of the sphere. Poems to the Virgin and Mary. Magdalene use the images of pearls, silver and gold, honey. The same imagery recurs in poetry on the same themes, the Day of Judgement for instance, or the Crucifixion. Blood becomes a symbol of redemption for the latter, but a symbol of punishment for the former.

Aesthetic theory.

These conventional images and symbols become more natural and familiar than abstract ideas. Many of the poets of this period themselves professed to scorn beauties of style; it was important above all that poetry should reveal truth as they saw it, and this truth was closely connected with the realities of the material world.

Most theories agree that art should be both pleasing and beneficial to the reader, but in practice writers are usually more inclined to one of the two extremes. Jean Vauquelin in his Art Poétique puts forward the doctrine that poetry should be pleasing and instructive. This extract shows how he thinks that the poet should ornament his verses:

Tout ainsi le Poète en ses vers ravira
 Par divers passe temps celui qui les lira,
 Émerveillé de voir tant de choses si belles,
 En ses vers repeignant les choses naturelles,
 Et de voir son esprit en ce monde distrait,
 Mirer d'un autre monde un autre beau pourtrait. (1)

This idea of the poet reflecting the beauties of nature in his poems is hardly to be found in the poetry considered here.

(1) Jean Vauquelin de Fresnay: L'Art Poétique, Paris 1885, pp.160-161.

The emphasis on instruction is more marked in the introductions to their poems, where many of them claimed at least to be indifferent to the beauties of style, and to prefer a more unpolished rendering of spiritual truths. Chassignet apologizes for his bad style, and states his aims thus:

il me suffit de sonder, et essayer ce que ma force ne peut
descouvrir, et retastant et petrissant ceste nouvelle
matiere, la remuant, et reschauffant, ouvrir à celuy qui
le voudra traiter à fond de cuve, quelque facilité pour
en jouir plus à son aise, la luy rendant plus souple et
maniable ... (1)

or Nervèze in his introduction:

L'art ne m'a point guidé, mais plustost la nature, (2)

and Abel d'Argent:

Je me contente d'escrire naïvement, & sans fard, car la
Vanité, que j'embrasse, est ennemie des mondaines mign-
ardises: suffit quand on parle intelligiblement, &
vaut bien mieux escrire simplement, que par un traict
de gueule paroistre, ou blasphemateur, ou profane. (3)

Although most of these statements are not to be taken entirely seriously, many poets seemed to have the general aim of convincing the reader of the truth of their statements, to make him reflect on certain subjects, and to draw his attention away from the vain things of life. D'Aubigné's intention is not to please but to horrify:

Ici le sang n'est feint, le meurtre n'y defaut. (4)

The importance of his rôle is such that he must through his poetry awaken the conscience of France, by using a style which shocks rather than pleases, and the imagery of his poetry

- (1) Chassignet, p.11.
- (2) Nervèze, Preface.
- (3) D'Argent, Preface.
- (4) Les Tragiques, p.31.

reflects his intensely propagandist attitude. So the role of imagery in his poetry is the reverse of being decorative, its function is to shock and horrify the reader. One would imagine, therefore, that imagery would be used to develop the ideas in a very functional, rather than decorative way. There are images which are almost purely decorative, but very often a poet like du Bartas or La Ceppède uses imagery to explain problems of religion by analogy. Sponde uses imagery to make his ideas more precise, to bring out the conflict he feels in more definite terms. Other poets use imagery to express their emotional attitudes to religious questions. D'Aubigné is an example of this: his very violent imagery conveys his own attitude towards life. The gentler, prettier imagery of the mystical poets also expresses an emotional attitude to life, a sense of hope and joy, while on the other hand Chassignet's use of imagery reveals his hopelessness. It is mainly in the use of imagery that these different attitudes are revealed.

So the image itself usually plays an important role within the poem. Firstly, images may have a strong symbolic purpose, and the poem itself may be formed around the image: or the poem may be built out of a succession of images, the thought being developed through imagery. On the other hand the image may be the central point of the poem, the culmination of the poet's thought, or the illustration of an idea. The image may also bring together disparate elements uniting them into a whole. Finally, the image may be used to beautify a theme, or simply as a stylistic decoration, although this is rare.

Conclusion

For the religious poet the truth is unchangeable, a fixed framework to which all fragmentary impressions of the world can be related. It is around this one stable central truth that all knowledge of the world revolves, and imagery tries to reflect aspects of it. On the lowest plane the imagery may beautify the Christian religion, on the highest be a symbol linking the world to the framework of true reality.

In this way imagery performs the function defined in the first chapter: that is, the poet illustrates aspects of spiritual experience through metaphors taken from the world around him. Thus he relates the spiritual and terrestrial worlds in his image. Since the particular concern of the poet of this time was to convince the reader of the truth of his statements, and to make him share his religious fervour, imagery is used as an illustration, a clarification of ideas. Imagery, particularly in religion, is a more effective means of persuasion than logical argument. Imagery also brings out the complexities of existence, relating disparate elements in the world and making isolated experiences more significant. In this period images tend to acquire a more symbolic function, referring beyond themselves to a more meaningful reality. The emotional element, however, is very strong during this period in that it presents experience through images which are often dramatic or distorted. Because of the nature of religious belief, imagery can convey the truth of its precepts while still conserving the sense of distance and mystery between man and

God. This is because art, like religion, describes through suggestion, rather than logical explanation. Both theology and art try to present a vision, an explanation of the universe, giving it meaning in its totality, rather than analyzing it scientifically. Imagery forms an integral part of religious practice, both in the written word, the Bible and religious writings, and art. The spiritual and real worlds cannot be separated, but constantly refer back and forward from one to another. The Church teaches through examples taken from everyday life, and individual writers can only express their own personal relationship with God through imagery. In this period certain images were common both in prose and verse writing. Many of these images were taken from the Bible, particularly when the themes were similar to those described in the Bible, or when the poet identified himself strongly with the spirit of the Bible. The other important influence, Petrarchism, is found in all poetry in the sixteenth century and a variation in theme from love poetry to religious poetry brought only a reinterpretation of the conventional images. A certain amount of medieval influence can be seen, and references to classical mythology were frequent, but were bound up less with the central themes of poetry than with its decorative aspect.

Since the object of the imagery is to be persuasive and convincing, sensuous imagery is predominant in this period. Sometimes shocking, to horrify the reader and bring him to repentance, sometimes beautiful and pleasing to persuade him

more gently, sometimes purely descriptive in an attempt to point a moral, poetry always has a dramatic interest which reflects the nature of the religious vision. On the other hand the opposite type of imagery, the abstract antithetical and paradoxical images abound, partly because of the poetic and philosophical convention of the sixteenth century, partly because they expressed the feeling of conflict the poet felt in himself and in the world around him. Imagery is also used in a more medieval sense, the poet attempting to express the mystery of Christian faith in comprehensible terms, yet still preserve a sense of mystery and awe. Here again the imagery reflects the confusion in the poet's mind, and his attempts to find images adequate to explain the nature of God and the meaning behind the universe.

The image is central in importance in this period - images taken from the material world to express the divine reveal some kind of sacred connection between this world and the next. Images are explored to their utmost, to derive the maximum of significance from them. The image also reveals the poet's emotional attitude towards religion - his own personal reaction to the world and relationship with God, and it is through his imagery that the poet reveals the individuality in his vision of the world. The image in the poem is often the focal point, the revelation of truth, or illustration of the central idea, and often a poem will be built out of one image.

In religious poetry, then, the image is often an illustration, an example applying to the same basic truths, and so does not

need to be original. . . In the baroque style all the traditional images of Christian teaching and all the familiar images of artistic tradition are woven together. It is interesting that in the early seventeenth century the same themes and images occurred over and over in different European countries. The Stoic influence is apparent not only in the work of Chassignet, but also in Quevedo, where we find this familiar image:

Antes que sepa andar el pie, se muéve
 cammino de la muerte, donde envío
 mi vida oscura: pobre y turbio río,
 que negro mar con altas ondas bebe. (1)

Andreas Gryphius writing on man's worthlessness uses images reminiscent of Sponde:

Was sind wir Menschen doch? Ein Wohnhaus grimmer Schmerzen,
 ein Ball des falschen Glücks, ein Irrlicht dieser Zeit,
 ein Schauplatz herber Angst, besetzt mit scharfem Leid,
 ein bald verschmelzten Schnee und abgebrannte Kerzen. (2)

The themes of the Counter-Reformation are common in other literatures besides French. I have already mentioned the Italian influence. Crashaw elaborates on the theme of Magdalene weeping:

When sorrow would be seene,
 In her brightest Majestie,
 (For she is a Queene)
 Then is she drest by none but thee,
 Then, and only then, she weares
 Her proudest Pearls, I meane thy teares. (3)

In the poetry of St John of the Cross the mystical, erotic poetry describing union with God is expressed in images of light and darkness, and of fire, the flames of love.

(1) Quevedo: Obras Vol. III, Madrid 1953, p.22.

(2) Andreas Gryphius, in Deutsche Barock Lyrik, ed. Cysarz, Stuttgart 1964, p.109.

(3) Crashaw: The Poems, Oxford 1927, p.309. .

These are all images which are found frequently in European literature of this time. Each poet expresses his own personal experience through the choice he makes among the images of his literary heritage.

Within one period there are many divisions: those between Catholic and Protestant, intellect and emotion, austerity and sensuality. Another division in religious art is its attitude towards the world. Art depicts the real world, material life, and from the religious point of view, the danger is that art may be too strongly committed to the world of the senses, may encourage instincts which are hostile to the aims of one particular religion. Within religious art there are two attitudes, one that the world is a glorious creation of God, the other that it is evil, tempting man away from spiritual perfection. So the image taken from the earthly world may provide an analogy for the world of God, or it may be in conflict with the writer's idea of God, and serve as a contrast.

Some of the Catholic writers were particularly concerned with the beauty and charm of their images, and with the harmony they found in religious faith. Many of the poems to Mary Magdalene are of this type, as those of Cesar de Nostradame, Remi de Beauvais, or Nicholas Le Digne, whose poetry also shows a great deal of influence of Petrarchist style. Other poets with an optimistic attitude towards life are Gabrielle de Coignard and Pierre de Croix, both finding in their material surroundings images which they develop sometimes at length

to bring out their symbolic beauty. Lazare de Selve at times resembles La Ceppède in that he tries to use to the full the abstract associations of his images, and Pierre de Marbeuf who uses images from medieval symbolism and shows traces of the medieval spirit in his attempt to extract the maximum of meaning from one image. These poets wanted to use the natural world as an analogy for the spiritual world.

Some poets used images which were rather banal, being so much under the influence of Petrarchism; poets such as Nerveze, or Favre, wrote very stylized poetry using a great deal of antithesis. The best example of this is Malherbe's Les Larnes de St Pierre where the Italian influence predominates. Gody also wrote in a very precious style, developing his themes through allegory and Petrarchist imagery.

In the work of one poet we can find examples of the abstract and the physical. Auvray varies between a rather abstract type of imagery and a very sensuous one. The world, however, is generally seen as evil. In these lines he presents the abstract conflicts he feels in physical terms:

Mais le monde trompeur, & la chair & le Liable
Sont trois vilains corbeaux qui me crevoient les yeux. (1)

Loys Godet also presents his thought in sometimes very concrete images, and Alphonse de Rambervillet in his poems on penitence has a very physical reaction to religious emotions. Benjamin de la Villate, whose imagery is generally a mixture of classical, Biblical and allegorical, uses very physical description in his account of the Day of Judgement.

(1) Auvray: La Pourmenade, Sonnets sur la Passion III.

The extremely pessimistic attitude is adopted by Sponde and Chassignet and other poets such as Ferrin, Billy and Durant who are always concentrating on pointing a moral through their images. Protestant writers tended to be both more pessimistic, and more inclined to express their pessimism in physical imagery. Du Bartas and those who imitated him, like du Chesne, Michel Quillien, Abel d'Argent, were concerned with presenting the Christian mythology dramatically, and the central events of the Creation, Crucifixion and Day of Judgement are portrayed in vivid imagery. Violent imagery is also found in the work of Adrien de Rocquigny. Other Protestant poets are aware of the vanity of the world and also of the horror of death. Pierre Foupo expresses pessimism also in his physical imagery which reflects the biblical tone of much Protestant poetry:

Les sillons tourmentez assiduellement
Du coutre & de la herbe, aportent le froment. (1)

Some poets have an obvious delight in the physical world, in beautiful objects. On the other hand poets like Chassignet, Sponde and earlier philosophical poets chose their images carefully to illustrate the dichotomy between the world and God, and between life on earth and life after death. They see in the world images of sickness and decay. The ultimate denial of the world is seen in the work of d'Aubigné who is fascinated by the ugliness and brutality of life to such an extent that his imagination creates the most horrifying visual scenes, or distorts what he sees to give an impression of disgust with life and impending disaster. He depicts not so

(1) Foupo, p.12.

much death, as the agony of life and its transition into death, highlighting its dramatic moments. In contrast, for La Ceppède the world provokes a personal and intellectual struggle, and a search for analogies for the ultimate mystery of Christ's life and death.

Imagery, however, whether negative or positive in attitude to the physical world, tends to be striking. Extreme sensuousness, conflicts and erudite images all combine to make of the imagery of this period an impression of extreme emotion, disproportion and total commitment to an ideal beyond that of art. On theme seems to run through all the poetry of this period - that of persuasion. The poet frequently gives the impression of deliberately addressing an audience, and of trying to influence this audience in one particular way. Whether it is in the tone of La Ceppède, who tries to explain what he sees in the Christian faith, or d'Aubigné who encourages his fellow Protestants not to weaken under oppression, or any of the poets who held up Mary Magdalene as an example to encourage repentance, there is always a conviction that the poet has found the truth about life and feels sure that others ought to accept it. Thus the long allegorical poem of Gody, suggestive of Bunyan although the style is in direct contrast, shows the ideal progress of the soul in clear terms. The allegory simplifies the real difficulties of life which the Christian encounters and points out the moral which is clear to him. The experience of the individual is transformed into an objective narrative. It is in this way that expression of

personal emotions is subordinated to a strong didactic purpose. For the poet of this period all artistic ideals are of minor importance compared with the desire to express the divine. One has the impression that any kind of poetry is of value provided that it contains the requisite amount of religious fervour. Poets at this time seemed to think that the value of the work of art was related to their own piety and the worthiness of the theme they used. Their devotion to God gave them a kind of artistic invulnerability, so that they were less concerned with the harmony and beauty of the poem than with the adequate expression of their feelings, which led naturally to the writing of a large amount of inferior poetry.

Imagery may be decorative or violent, depending on the temperament of the poet, but it is through images that the poet tries to convince above all, since a truth that is seen as a vision is always more convincing than that reached by rational argument. This is perhaps why so much of the imagery of this period has an air of distortion. The poet is willing to exaggerate in order to convince, to twist material reality slightly to conform to spiritual reality, to make the reader see visions and to go beyond the bounds of his belief. The image is the form towards which the poet strives and the framework into which his thought fits. Where imagery is a convention it makes a solid framework into which the poem settles. Otherwise a picture is what poets try to achieve, the dramatic vision unfolding a story, or a symbol. The poet is searching for an image which will resolve the complexity of life and man's place in the world.

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